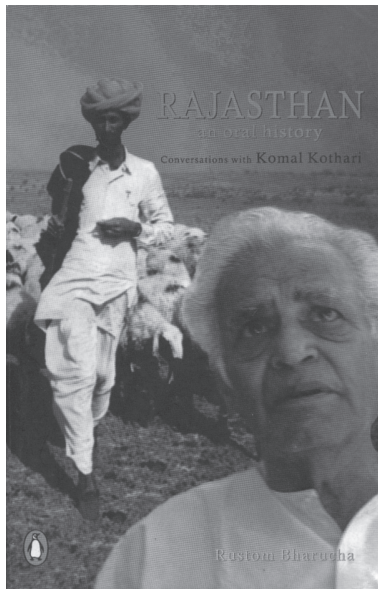


Rajasthan: An Oral History: Conversations with Komal Kothari
by **Rustom Bharucha**, Penguin Books, New Delhi 2003

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Oral history is not something we often encounter in the form of a book; its very designation contradicts the medium of written language. Yet, oral medium is the form in which Komal Kothari was most keen on sharing his knowledge.

Komal Kothari needs no introduction. His figure has become almost legendary not only in India but also abroad, due to his immense efforts and contribution to the research and promotion of traditional culture. He was not fond of writing, though. Instead, he was ever prepared to give talks and converse on the topic. Rustom Bharucha's book is the outcome of his long hours of conversation with Kothari over a period of two years.

Bharucha is a multi-faceted personality. Apart from being a writer, theatre director, and culture critic, he is also one of the leading theorists of sensitive contemporary issues like interculturalism and the impact of globalization on local and indigenous cultures. Inspired by Kothari's deep understanding of the people of rural Rajasthan, as well as by his

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'magical' mode of thinking, he undertook to present a different genre of imparting knowledge: a more intimate and more vivid one, in the form of 'oral history'.

The conversations weave around a vast array of concepts related to the land and people of Rajasthan, their lifestyle, habits, attitudes, and way of thinking. A welcome and rather innovative concept in Kothari's approach is the detailed attention he pays to the geographical features of the land and their immense role in influencing not only the way of life, but also the whole culture of the people. Among other topics, the book brings up the geography of musical instruments too, which has mostly been ignored so far.

Chapters on folk gods and goddesses and the phenomenon of sati as perceived in Rajasthan present a necessary background to the discussion of the various genres of folklore. Detailed attention is paid to music throughout the book, with references to musical practices and concepts woven into almost every chapter. Oral epics, women's songs, and their *terātāli* dance form, puppetry and other genres are discussed with a deep insight and understanding of the interrelatedness of each and every manifestation of the peoples' tradition.

Musician communities of Rajasthan, especially the Langas and the Manganiyars, are discussed by Kothari in thorough detail. At the same time, he brings up sensitive problems which have not received enough attention so far. With 'marketing' the folk culture and Rajasthani musicians performing on a global stage, intellectual property rights are among the urgent issues requiring immediate solution.

Bharucha's detailed endnotes contain valuable additional information and reference points on the topic. However, his comments in the form of preludes, interludes and conclusion to the chapters appear at times superfluous and redundant, breaking the lively, unconventional pattern of Kothari's thoughts.

The book represents a fresh approach to the topic and due to its lively, 'oral' character, it is an enjoyable reading not only for specialists in the field of folklore and related disciplines, but for everyone interested in grasping the culture of Rajasthan.

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