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# IF RAIN DOESN'T COME

An Anthropological Study  
of Drought and Human Ecology  
in Western Rajasthan

R.J. FISHER

SYDNEY STUDIES



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# Preface

This book is a revised version of my PhD thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney in 1988. It deals with the human ecology of western Rajasthan, emphasising the strategies by which people adapt to the ever-present threat of drought. The focus is on the village of Hinganiya (and, to a lesser extent, on three nearby villages). The strategies adopted in these villages differ somewhat from each other and from the strategies adopted elsewhere in the region. Indeed, it is a major theme of this book that adaptive strategies are individual responses to specific conditions existing at a particular place at a particular point of time. However, the local processes occur in the context of social and economic forces which are, to some extent, common to the wider region, and the insights gained from the case study throw light on the processes occurring more widely in western Rajasthan and even, perhaps, outside the region. I believe that the value of ethnographic research is that it generates insights (rather than laws), which assist in understanding social phenomena.

In recent years, while again living in Australia, I have been struck by some parallels between the effects of drought on Australian farmers and the situation in Rajasthan during my fieldwork. The drought of the first half of the 1990s has had devastating effects in Australia. Unlike drought in Rajasthan, drought in Australia does not directly threaten human life. But there are similarities in other respects. Drought in both regions is both unpredictable and frequent. While it is uncertain when it will occur, it is certain that it will occur. Farmers and pastoralists, whether Rajasthani or Australian, must cope with both the certainty and the uncertainty.

My fieldwork began in 1983, continuing into early 1984. I spent a further six months in the field in 1985 and 1986 and made a brief visit in 1987. The thesis was revised and a manuscript for this book was prepared in 1990 and 1991. Due largely to institutional changes within the University of Sydney, the publication has been delayed since that time. Although I have incorporated relevant literature published since 1987 and added an Afterword which describes the situation during a further brief visit to Rajasthan in 1994, the book deals almost exclusively with data collected during my PhD fieldwork.

## *Preface*

Researching for and writing my thesis (and, more recently, this book) lead to deep obligations to many people who assisted in one way or another.

My first obligation is to the villagers who fed me, entertained me and endured my endless questions. I am especially grateful to Prem Singh Bhati, who was my friend, informant and sometimes research assistant, and to Udai Singh Bhati and his family, who were courteous and generous hosts in Hinganiya. The people from Hinganiya, Kur, Kukunda and Khokhariya, who helped and befriended me are too many to mention, but my gratitude is profound.

Kailash Rakhecha accompanied me on several field trips and responded to many requests for information after I left India. The late Professor S.K. Lal, Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Jodhpur, welcomed me professionally and was always helpful. I also wish to thank the following for continuing advice and assistance: Anirudh Krishna, Nahar Singh Jasol, Ganpat Singh Rakhecha and Birendra Singh Tanwar. Rajendra Mehta, J.P. Trivedi, Brigadier and Mrs N.S. Surrey and John and Jan Wilson and their families gave friendship and support to myself and my family in Jodhpur and Delhi. Dr L.P. Bharara of the Central Arid Zone Research Institute in Jodhpur was extremely supportive during my 1994 visit.

Professor Michael Allen, my thesis supervisor, encouraged my work from the beginning and, without his enthusiasm and constructive criticism, it is not likely that the thesis would ever have been completed.

Roger Sandall had the unrewarding job of acting as my supervisor when I was in the field at a time when my project was troubled by problems with research visas and permits. Chris Gregory (Department of Anthropology and Prehistory, Australian National University) visited me in the field and I learned a great deal from him. He provided timely and useful comments on a draft of the thesis and recommended changes as I revised it for this book.

For useful comments and discussion at various stages in the processes of researching and thesis writing I wish to thank Doug Miles, Paul Alexander, Philip Carl Salzman, Max Harcourt, N.S. Jodha, Neil Maclean, Dundi Mitchell, Ana Marko, Kim Paul, Gaye Macdonald, Vivienne Kondos and the late Ed Roper.

My colleagues at the Nepal Australia Forestry Project in Kathmandu (where I worked from 1987 to 1989) provided encouragement and assistance as I worked on thesis drafts. I am particularly grateful to Don and Helen Gilmour for encouraging me to get on with it and for giving me a place to work in Kathmandu. Don also made very useful comments. I would also like to thank Archana Thapa, Andrew Ingles, R.B. Maharjan,

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Gary King, Yam Malla, Bill Jackson, Sabita Thapalia and Samasti Bhattachan for help in a variety of ways.

Thanks are due to Professor S.N. Mukerjee, who encouraged the transformation of the thesis into a book and Robyn Wood who applied her skills and artistry to prepare the final copy.

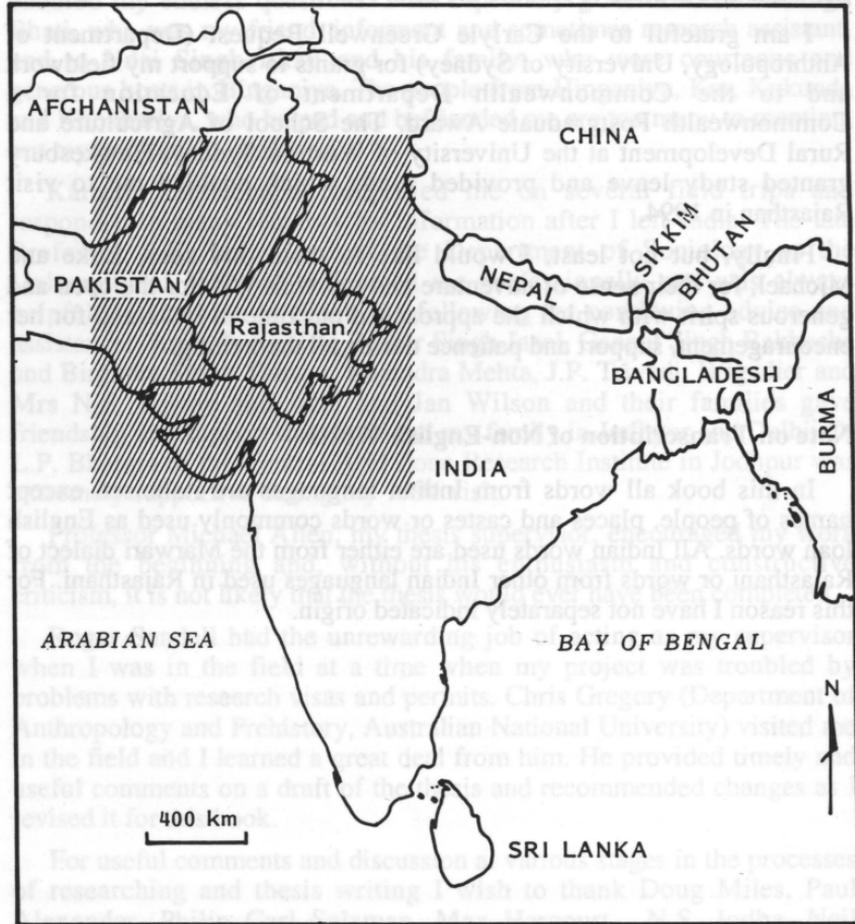
I am grateful to the Carlyle Greenwell Bequest (Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney) for grants to support my fieldwork and to the Commonwealth Department of Education for a Commonwealth Postgraduate Award. The School of Agriculture and Rural Development at the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury granted study leave and provided funds which enabled me to visit Rajasthan in 1994.

Finally, but not least, I would like to thank my sons, Luke and Michael, for their sense of adventure and my wife Wil, for the open and generous spirit with which she approached our time in India and for her encouragement, support and patience during all the writing.

### **Note on Transcription of Non-English Words**

In this book all words from Indian languages are italicised except names of people, places and castes or words commonly used as English loan words. All Indian words used are either from the Marwari dialect of Rajasthani or words from other Indian languages used in Rajasthani. For this reason I have not separately indicated origin.

Gay King, Yarn Mella, Bill Jackson, Sebina Thangalis and Samant  
Dharmaraj for help in a variety of ways or providing me with  
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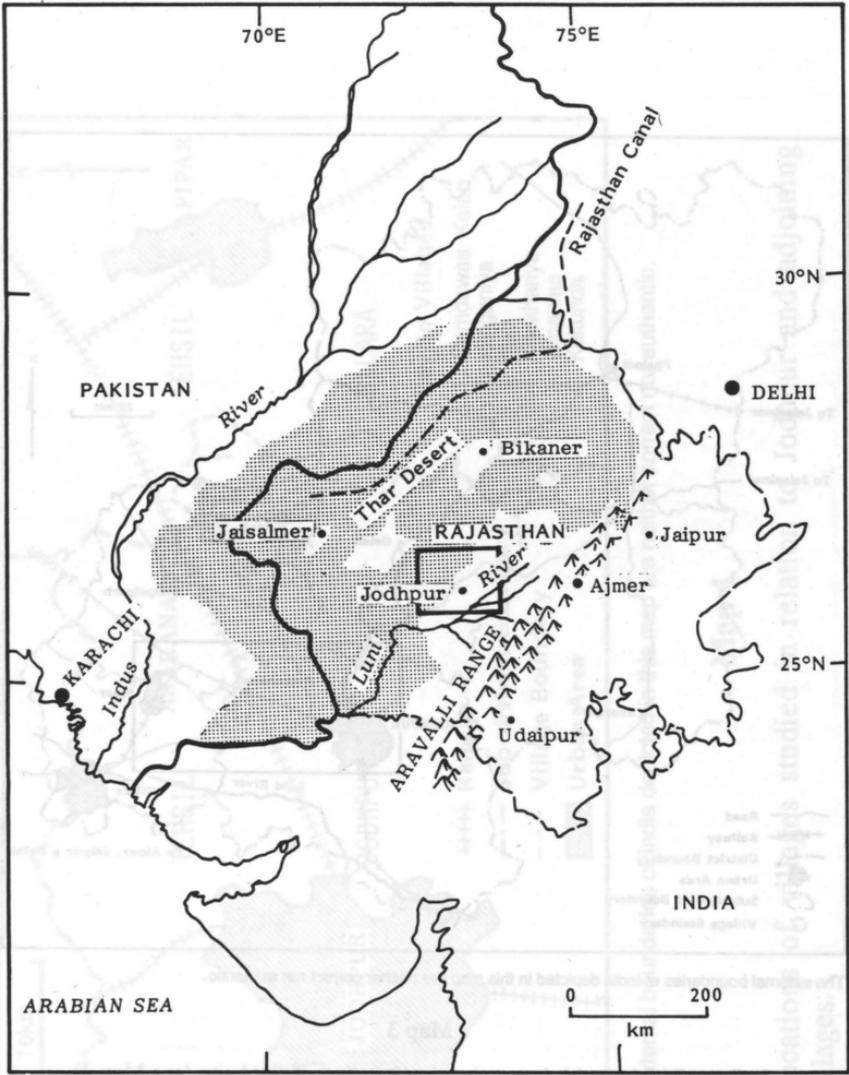


The external boundaries of India depicted in this map are neither correct nor authentic.

### Map 1

India, indicating location of Rajasthan

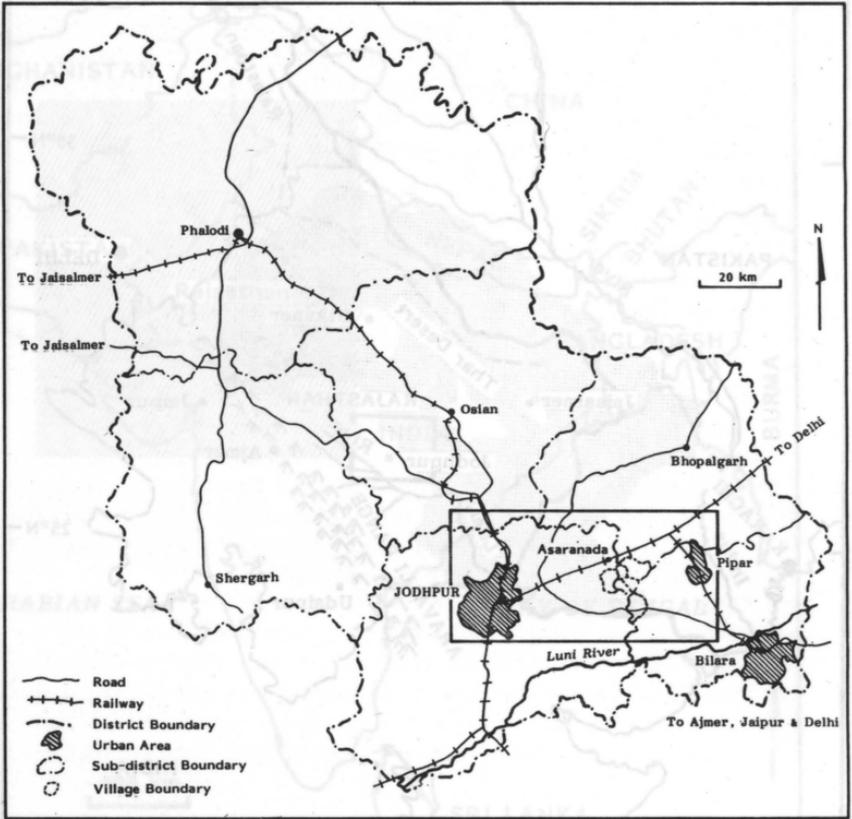
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**Map 2**

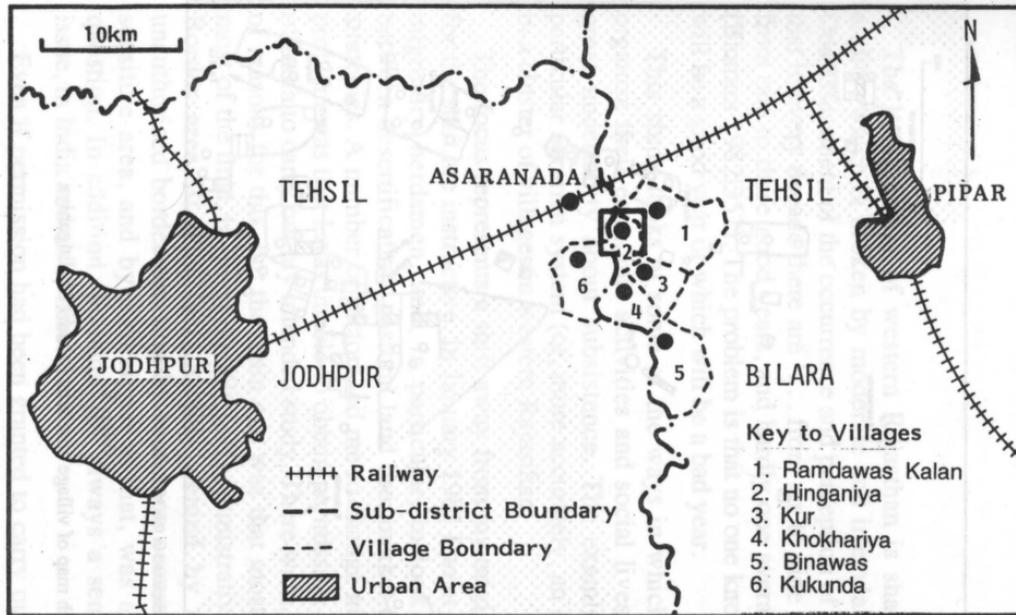
Rajasthan and adjacent regions, indicating main geographical features. Insert (see Map 3) shows location of Jodhpur District.



The external boundaries of India depicted in this map are neither correct nor authentic.

**Map 3**

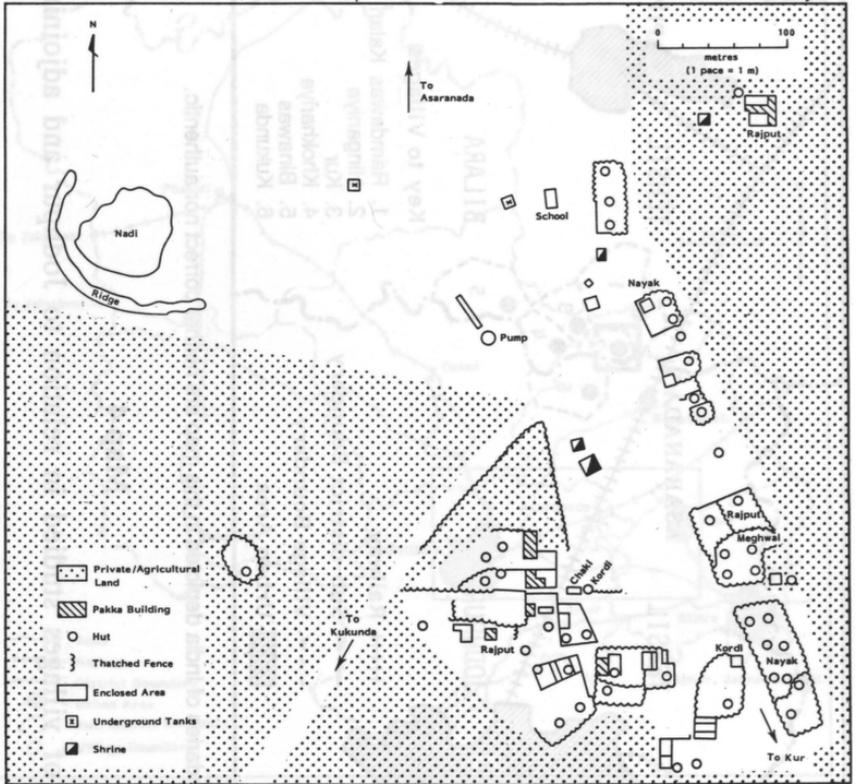
Jodhpur District, with insert showing location of field site (see Map 4).  
Based on district map in Census of India 1981a.



The external boundaries of India depicted in this map are neither correct nor authentic.

### Map 4

Locations of villages studied in relation to Jodhpur and adjoining villages.



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Map 5

Sketch map of village core area (*abadi*) of Hinganiya