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Playing With Fire: Feminist Thought And Activism Through Seven Lives In India

Sangtin Writers, Richa Nagar

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Seven voices contribute to this rare glimpse of the work being done on the front lines of the fight for social change in India. Playing with Fire is written in the collective voice of women employed by a large NGO as activists in their communities and is based on diaries, interviews, and conversations among them. Together their personal stories reveal larger themes and questions of sexism, casteism, and communalism, and a startling picture emerges of how NGOs both nourish and stifle local struggles for solidarity. The Hindi edition of the book, Sangtin Yatra, published in 2004, created controversy that resulted in backlash against the authors by their employer. The publication also drew support for the women and instigated a public conversation about the issues exposed in the book. Here, Richa Nagar addresses the dispute in the context of the politics of NGOs and feminist theory, articulating how development ideology employed by aid organizations serves to reinforce the domination of those it claims to help. The Sangtin Writers, Anupamlata, Ramsheela, Reshma Ansari, Richa Singh, Shashibala, Shashi Vaish, Surbala, and Vibha Bajpayee, are grassroots activists and members of a small organization called Sangtin in Uttar Pradesh, India. Richa Nagar teaches women's studies at the University of Minnesota.

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