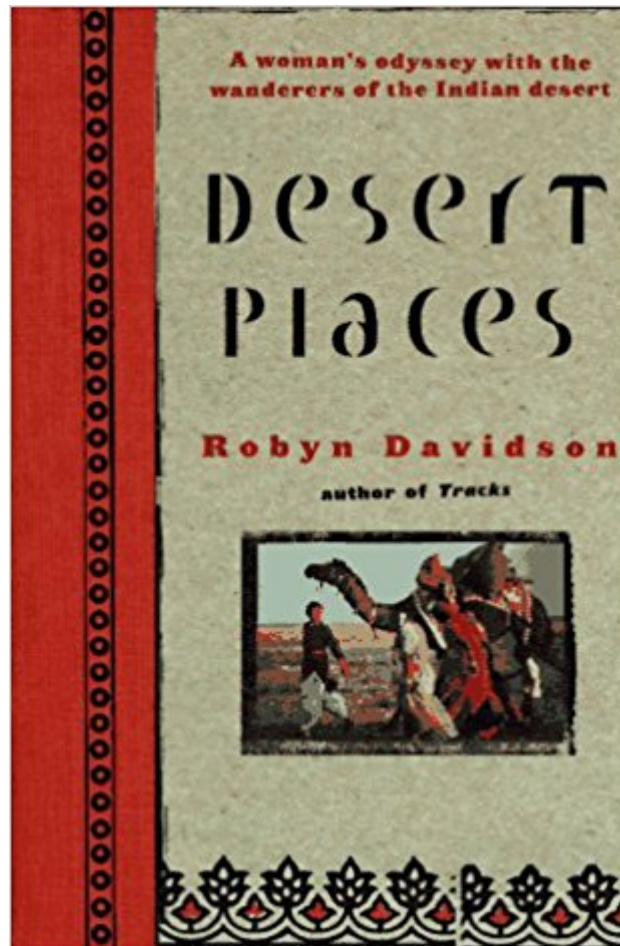




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# Desert Places



## Synopsis

The Rebari are a nomadic tribe in India's Thar Desert. Like nomads everywhere, the Rebari are being forced into accepting a more sedentary life. Their traditional trading and pilgrimage routes have been transected by borders and canals or blocked by atomic bomb testing sites and irrigated farm lands. But once a year, they arrive in Pushkar, partly as a pilgrimage to bathe in the most sacred lake in India, partly to buy and sell their animals, partly to enjoy the biggest annual fair in Asia. Robyn Davidson crossed the pathless Thar Desert with the Rebari. Interwoven with the journey of the Rebari is the story of Minu, a highly spirited upperclass Indian woman, forced into an arranged marriage with the ex-king of Ghanerao, locked up in the women's quarters of the palace and subject both to the strict laws of Purdah and to psychological warfare with her in-laws.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As Robyn Davidson writes in *Desert Places*, the Thar, a 230,000-square-mile expanse of formidably dry country in northwestern India, is a harsh land of "granite outcroppings, naked but for a few gullies of monsoon forest or a single, white-painted elephant stationed on a summit eternally surveying the farmlands below." Among the people who populate the Thar are the Rabari, who are quickly becoming modernized and dispossessed, wanderers on the fringes of urban civilization, people who are at home nowhere. After making a false start as a book of adventure travel, *Desert Places* becomes a work of cultural ecology and of amateur anthropology, reporting on the final days of a traditional nomadic culture once utterly at home in an inhospitable land.

Inspired by an enchanting encounter with camel herdsman at a Hindu festival in Pushkar, travel writer Davidson (*Tracks*) took a magazine assignment to accompany the nomads of Rajasthan (a region in western India) on their yearly migration cycle. Arriving in Jodhpur on the eve of the Gulf war under the aegis of her friend Narendra, a prince who equips her with an entourage of servants and an obstreperous camel-keeper named Chutra, Davidson soon discovers that the ancient culture of the nomads (who are known either as Rabari or as Raika) is slowly being eradicated, faced with diminishing grazing lands, new political boundaries and the spread of subsidized agriculture and Western culture. This book, as breathtaking but circuitous as the adventures it chronicles, begins to gather steam when Davidson is finally accepted by a dang (a migratory group) and sets off to follow them across the desert. She spends a few months sharing the shepherds' life of extreme deprivation, traveling 30 miles a day on a diet of little more than fetid water and camel's milk, sleeping two hours a night and battling illness and exhaustion, before deciding to return to Jodhpur on foot, which proves an even more perilous journey that ends when her camels die after eating poisonous weeds. By the book's end, Davidson's romantic vision of the peripatetic life has given way to a bitter account of her own dashed expectations and of the exploitation of India's nomads. Although her understanding of nomadism as an emotional and geographical phenomenon remains only partly digested, this book will nevertheless prove absorbing to even the most sedentary of bookshelf-travelers. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

My favorite adventure authoress ever! What a ride, camel that is and range of fascinating and interesting encounters. After reading her book *Tracks* I wondered if this would be as good and it is definitely a 5 star book too, similar in some ways and very different in others. There is an under current of maturity that she exhibits, being older in this book, but her having to accept totally different cultural differences and deal with ever worsening conditions just amazes me how she dealt with it all. I actually took notes as I was reading both books as she comes up with some very applicable and life changing comments. I'm so grateful to Robyn for sharing these experiences with the public so we can, from the comforts of our homes, ride and walk along with her on her journeys.

Robyn Davidson is one of my favorite writers. She is a gift to the world of women writers. I find in her the same adventurous soulfulness that I have in myself. The contending, exploring, curious nature of an explorer. And a woman, at that! I just love it! I've read *Tracks* and now *Desert Places*. *Desert Places* was much different than *Tracks* as far as storyline is concerned, but it contains Robyn's great writing, indomitable spirit, and off-the-beaten trail thinking and journeying, which is what I'm

after!! I think this book is also another sign post for our times. Human evolution is well underway and in India, a place with so much diversity and crowding, this book provides a very educational glance at some of the problems facing India in relation to people groups, resource use & land management and the survival and thriving of people groups. Again, a very informative look from one of my favorite (female) authors!

She's a great writer and having been to India five times, I could feel it in my bones or rather smell it and feel it around me. Clearly the time of tribal people all over the world has come to an end. We do not have the space or time to accommodate them plus there are too many people in the world currently and the poorest least organized will be the first to go. This point she really brings home strongly. Over populated India is a microcosm of the rest of the world. The rest of us are further down the line but still we are all in the same line....

I learned so much about the people of India and the changing life conditions as they lose their livelihood raising sheep as they travel. How the author was able to live in these conditions I don't understand!

This is the second of Robin Davidson's books I've read and I loved it. She's hilarious, truthful, relateable, and a great storyteller. If you're looking for a, honest and enticing travel book, I would highly recommend *Desert Places*

& tough & real. Robyn Davidson encounters both inside & outside in her journeying. Witty & wise writing. Empathetic and sympathetic and I especially enjoyed her end of the book ruminations about her journey of 3 years in the past. I know that an undertaking like hers takes a long time to process and sort out, emotionally and otherwise. Thank you Robyn Davidson for an incredibly satisfying book.

So inspiring to hear Robyn speak at the Jaipur Literature Festival along with Cheryl Strayed author of *Wild From Lost to Found*. I liked Robyn's first book *Tracks*, but I loved *Desert Places* where her restless woman theme is fully developed into a spiritual pilgrimage and explorer of a new frontier. She skillfully narrates her story without becoming the subject, allowing the voices of the nomads, the land and the culture speak through her. My western mind desires a non-stop flight to the destination, but Robyn's writing lulls me into the power of the journey and I am grateful.

Extremely interesting foray into one of the many aspects of Indian cultures. Colorful descriptions, depictions of different mores and emotions attached to the slice of culture the author immersed herself into. Fascinating to follow her evolving feelings regarding a variety of situations. Would gladly read other books by this author.

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