Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India

Veena Das

This book identifies critical moments in contemporary Indian history, such as the Partition of India. Enter your mobile number or email address below and we'll send you a link to download the free Kindle App. Then you can start reading Kindle books on your smartphone, tablet, or computer - no Kindle device required. Apple. Android. Anthropological perspectives on pain can help us gain understandings of the political and social dimensions of the body. In her anthropological perspective on contemporary India, 253. Veena Das (1995) focuses particularly on the body becoming a site of both criticism and remembrance through pain. She argues that, by carrying the signs of mutilation, bodies become testimonials of injustice done to individuals and, drawing on Kleinman and Kleinman (1991), states that bodies can thus offer a critique of historical wrongs where speech cannot or may not do so. An interesting observation in this con...


Critical events, without doubt, offers exciting reading. There are extremely absorbing ethnographic details, analysis and insights, as might be expected from the work of a scholar of Veena Das’ stature. She has a knack of being forceful in her presentation. In attempting to re-direct anthropological concerns, Veena Das replaces the earlier emphasis of the colonialist metaphor of ‘locality’ with a (benign) medical metaphor. In changing the metaphor, Veena Das has sought to transform social anthropology into a therapeutically active enterprise responding to events that produce much bodily pain in order to offer relief.
Critical Events recasts the anthropological understanding of individual bodies and social bodies, as well as the creation of community by looking at moments of rupture and their implications for redefining social life in contemporary India. Ranging from the Partition of India to the industrial disaster in Bhopal, the events examined in the book illuminate and transform the way anthropology generates its concepts.

About the author. Veena Das is Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of anthropology, Johns Hopkins University, USA. Veena Das. Identifying key events in the history of contemporary India - Partition, sati, minority rights, the Bhopal industrial disaster, the nature of the Indian state - Veena Das describes the implications of these occurrences within the framework of anthropological knowledge. Her attempt here is to produce an ethnography of contemporary India which is sensitive to both world historical processes and the inner life of individuals. The critical events that Professor Das analyzes have all instituted new sorts of action which have, in turn, redefined traditional categories such as codes of pur.