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978-0-521-02870-7 - Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200-1991

Sumit Guha

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Environment and Ethnicity in India 1200–1991

Sumit Guha's book draws on a wide range of sources to reconstruct the history of forest communities in India and to explore questions of identity and environment in an ancient agrarian civilisation. He commences by demonstrating that the current ideology of indigenous cultures is rooted in nineteenth-century racial anthropology, and goes on to show how apparently pristine ethnicities have changed and evolved through interaction with larger civilisations. In the process, he also shows how the environment was continually modified by human action from early historic times to the present. Such theories have been debated by scholars of South-east Asia and Africa, but this is the first well-documented study of South Asia. Guha's controversial critique is an important contribution to our understanding of society, politics and the environment in both the medieval and the contemporary world.

SUMIT GUHA is a Professor in the Environment Group of the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta. His publications include *The Agrarian Economy of the Bombay Deccan 1818–1941* (1985).

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This painting from an eighteenth century version of the Ramayana depicts Rama, Lakshmana and Sita in the wilderness clad in garments of leaves but possessing the artefacts of civilisation in the form of gem-studded weapons and ornaments. It reveals an understanding that the woodlands were a base and refuge for kings-in-waiting.

Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum

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Glossary

<i>Adivasi</i>	lit. original inhabitant; commonly used as a synonym for the communities listed in a periodically revised schedule of the Constitution of India – hence termed Scheduled Tribes
<i>Chauth</i>	a tribute, theoretically a quarter of the tax-yield, extracted as a protection rent by either a displaced local chief or a powerful neighbour
<i>Desh</i>	plains; open country of Maharashtra
<i>Deshmukh</i>	hereditary subordinate territorial chief; head of a <i>pargana</i>
<i>Deshpande</i>	hereditary accountant of demarcated territory; usually that controlled by a <i>deshmukh</i>
<i>Giras</i>	payments in cash or kind regularly made to purchase the forbearance of some marauder
<i>Girasia, Grassia</i>	recipient of the above payment
<i>Inam</i>	tax-free grant, usually of land
<i>Jaglia</i>	a night-watchman
<i>Jati</i>	theoretically endogamous community; usually translated as caste
<i>Kulkarni</i>	hereditary village accountant
<i>Mansabdar</i>	Mughal Officer
<i>Mehwasi,</i> <i>Mewasi, Muasi</i>	refractory, turbulent – applied to a persona or locality
<i>Pargana</i>	a subdivision which might typically contain anything from twenty to several hundred villages
<i>Patil</i>	hereditary village headman
<i>Rajput</i>	lit. son of a king; an ethnonym with military connotations used in medieval and modern India by a large number of otherwise distinct communities
<i>Rakhwaddar</i>	guardian
<i>Watan</i>	hereditary estate, patrimony in land, office or both
<i>Watandar</i>	holder of a <i>watan</i>
<i>Zamindar</i>	literally landholder; a term applied to a wide range of gentry, extending from <i>pargana</i> officials to regional rulers.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the notes :

- ALS* *Aitihāsika Lekha Sangraha* – a collection of historical documents with valuable introductions, published by V. V. Khare between 1898 and 1924
- BARD* Bombay Archives, Revenue Department
- BAJD* Bombay Archives, Judicial Department
- BISM* Bharata Itihāsa Samshodhaka Mandala – a learned society of Pune.
- BISMT* *Bharata Itihāsa Samshodhaka Mandala Traimasik* – a journal brought out by the *BISM*, much of it devoted to the publication of original sources. Where the reference is solely to a document, I have omitted the editor's name in order to limit the size of footnotes, and given merely the journal issue and page.
- IS* *Itihāsa Sangraha* – a periodical brought out between 1908 and 1916 by D. B. Parasnis, and largely dedicated to publishing historical sources. Practically all the documents included were selected by him – citations therefore refer to the journal and issue only.
- MIS* Marathyanchya Itihāsanchi Sadhanen – a series of twenty-four volumes of historical sources gathered and published by V. K. Rajvade; two volumes appeared posthumously.
- OIOC* Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library; BRP refers to the Bombay Revenue Proceedings here and BJP to the Bombay Judicial Proceedings.
- PA* Pune Archives; Maharashtra State Archives, Pune.
- SPD* *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar* – a series of 46 volumes edited for the Government of Bombay by G. S. Sardesai
- SRBG* *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bombay* nearly 700 volumes published by the government between 1854 and 1930; divided into the 'Old Series' (O. S.) and 'New Series' (N. S.).
- SSRPD* *Selections from the Satara Raja's and Peshwa Diaries* – a set of nine Selections made by G. C. Vad and published by various associates.