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Environmentalism: A Global History

By Ramachandra Guha


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A new entry in the *Longman World History Series*, *Environmentalism: A Global History* is perfect for professors who want to assign short topical paperbacks which explore global issues and movements in their world history classes. This volume will fit into the second half of World History courses which typically cover the period from 1500 to the present century.

Environmentalism: A Global History is the first genuinely global history of environmentalism. Written by one of the foremost thinkers on ecological issues relating to South Africa, Guha has become one of the more provocative and perceptive commentators on environmentalism in its cross-cultural and global dimensions. Students will find this new text to be a lively and engaging study of ideas and debates that are central to our lives in the twentieth-first century.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

Author's Preface

The roots of this book go back to two gloriously happy years I spent working at Yale University in the mid 1980s. On the basis of my own work in India I had imagined environmentalism to be principally a question of social justice, of allowing the poor to have as much claim on the fruits of nature as the powerful. But living and teaching in the United States I was to come face-to-face with a rather different kind of environmentalism, which shifted attention away from humans towards the rights of plants, animals and wild habitats. I have ever since been fascinated by the diversity within the global environmental movement. This book explores the part played by different cultural and national traditions in the making and shaping of that diversity.

I returned to India from the USA in 1987, but have gone back several times since, to renew acquaintance with and deepen my understanding of American environmentalism. More recently, I spent the academic year 1994-95 in Germany, a country that is unquestionably the leader within Europe in matters environmental, and is home also to the German Greens, the protest movement which became a political party. Briefer trips to Latin America in 1994, to Russia in 1996, and to Southern Africa in 1997, allowed a glimpse of the problems and possibilities of environmentalism in those territories.

These forays, short and long, have been paid for by hospitable universities and indulgent foundations who have helped me challenge one of the unacknowledged taboos of international scholarship. For the way that the world is structured, Brazilians may write about Brazil, Nigerians about Nigeria, Bangladeshis about Bangladesh. But broader works of contrast and comparison, books that are not restricted to one country but which take the world as their oyster, are written from the comfortable citadels of a great and prosperous university in Europe or the United States. This prejudice is not cultural or racial, but merely geographical. Global histories, be they of environmentalism, feminism, liberalism or fundamentalism, are generally the handiwork of people working and teaching in the northern half of the globe. It is as difficult for a scholar of British origin to write a global history living in Bogota as it is easy for an Indian while based in Indianapolis. My thanks then, first of all, to the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale University. Two colleagues at Yale, Bill Burch and Joe Miller, and two students, Mike Bell and Joel Seton, encouraged me to move beyond what had been; until then, a near-obsessive concern with the history and politics of my own country. Next in chronological order comes the University of California at Santa Barbara, whose invitation in 1989 to deliver the Ninth Steven Manley Memorial Lecture forced me to think more seriously about the comparative aspects of the environmental question. The arguments of that lecture were given a firmer empirical basis in the year I spent at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, whose magnificently efficient library staff chased and procured dozens of obscure references and out-of-print books. Other institutions that have helped materially include the University of California at Berkeley; the Harry and Frank Guggenheim Foundation, New York; the Social Science Research Council, New York; and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi: my thanks to all of them.

The themes and arguments of this book have been shaped by numerous conversations across the continents. I have learnt much from three scholars whose interests exemplify the cross-cultural character of the environmental movement: from Juan Martinez-Alier, a Spaniard most at home in Ecuador and Cuba; from Mike Bell, a Rhode Islander who happily mixes with Little Englanders; and from Wolfgang Sachs, a Bavarian radical with a keenly developed insight into the practice of the Gujarati Mahatma, Gandhi. There

are other friends in Europe and American with whom I have argued fiercely or gently but always (to me, at any rate) productively, and yet others who have passed on valuable tips and sources. I thank here William Beinart, David Brokensha, J. Peter Brosius, Louise Fortmann, Andrew Hurrell, Arne Kalland, Margit Mayer, Arne Naess, Paul Richards, David Rothenberg, Katherine Snyder, Carol Warren and Donald Worster. I owe a particular debt to K. Sivaramakrishnan (of Yale, again), the source of a steady stream of books and articles impossible to get hold of in India.

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From the Back Cover

Environmentalism: A Global History is an addition to the popular *Longman World History Series*, edited by Michael Adas. Written by one of the foremost thinkers on ecological issues relating to South Africa, this new text offers a cross-cultural and global survey of environmental thinking and the movements it has spawned.

In this brief text, Ramachandra Guha identifies commonalities and differences in environmental thinking and activism through case studies. The experiences of areas as diverse as the United States, the former Soviet Union, China, India, Africa, and Brazil provide an excellent overview of each country's strengths and contributions.

Students will find **Environmentalism: A Global History** to be a lively and engaging study of ideas and debates on a topic that is central to our lives in the twenty-first century.

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