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"Local People and the Global Tiger: An Environmental History of the Sundarbans"

Chakrabarti, Ranjan

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The [...] article investigates the significance of the Sundarbans as a natural reserve or buffer area (a resource of yet unknown magnitude) in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial South Asia. In pre-colonial India this region was, by and large, outside the purview of the state and occasionally served as a natural reserve in more ways than one. In British India the vast mangrove swamp of the Sundarbans became an important location where European "Selves" and Indian "Others" started interacting. The Sundarbans jungle became the object of European thoughts and actions. A new systematic endeavour to manage this unknown and unique natural frontier began under the forceful thrust of European enlightenment. This quest for knowledge went on throughout colonial rule and even after Indian independence in 1947. The British colonial government sought to manage an area they had little understanding of, and hence incurred a series of unforeseen problems that posed new challenges to the colonial project in the Sundarbans. In this area, the tiger had always been at the center of people's economic, social, cultural, and religious life. This was the case in the past, and still is today. During the Raj, the colonial drive to maximize revenue forced the inhabitants of the Sundarbans to come face to face with the tigers. In post-colonial India, the introduction of Project Tiger turned the Sundarbans into a local theater of a larger campaign. (Text part of the author's abstract .)

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