
South Asia: An Environmental History is the eleventh volume in ABC-CLIO’s Nature and Human Societies series, which addresses the environmental histories of various regions around the globe. Author Christopher Hill’s focus is South Asia, which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The Indian subcontinent is a geographically diverse area and throughout time its people have had to adapt to their land with changes brought on by colonization, industrialization, and independence. This comprehensive and chronological book explains the reciprocal relationship between the inhabitants of South Asia and their surroundings from the Indus Civilization through modern times.

The volume consists of 10 chapters each containing black-and-white photographs. Two special features worth highlighting are the “Case Studies” and the “Bibliographic Essay” sections, both of which illustrate Hill’s expertise in this subject matter. Users may also find the “Important People, Events, and Concepts” and “Chronology” additions useful for fact checking and quick references.

One common theme throughout this work is commodification, or as Hill explains, when “nature is seen only for its value as a commodity” (xxi). South Asia has largely been shaped by foreign dependence on these commodities, such as opium, spices, and timber, which are discussed in “The Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire” and “Company Rule” chapters.

Historically, this area of the world has had a significant number of natural disasters, with the most recent events being the Kashmir earthquake in 2005 and the tsunami in 2004. Hill refers to these in the final chapter, “South Asia Since 1947.”

Although Stanley Wolpert’s Encyclopedia of India (Scribner, 2006) does include information on deforestation, environmental consciousness, environmental protection, and the green revolution, there does not appear to be another resource like South Asia: An Environmental History that explores this region’s environmental history with such detail. Hill is a talented writer who can take complex information and make it comprehensible and interesting for those who are not experts in the field. South Asia: An Environmental History would be an excellent addition to all academic libraries, especially those with strong Asian Studies or environmental collections. Those libraries that already own the other titles within ABC-CLIO’s Nature and Human Societies series should also consider adding this reference book to their holdings.—Megan Coder, Senior Assistant Librarian, State University of New York, New Paltz


Designed with the general audience in mind, this accessible, readable work by Laurie C. Hillstrom is divided into three sections: essays (without footnotes), recipes, and primary sources. The first section contains two lengthy essays. The first essay helps users understand the history of Thanksgiving celebrations and how they have changed over the years. Interestingly, although in the first paragraph the author states, “Thanksgiving means many things to many people,” (1) she doesn’t mention the fact that some Native Americans object to the celebration until almost forty pages later. The second essay conveys information about the food associated with Thanksgiving from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries and how tastes have changed.