

## Book Review

Velayutham Saravanan. *Environmental History of Modern India: Land, Population, Technology and Development*. New Delhi; London: Bloomsbury Publishing India Pvt. Ltd, 2022. Pp. 276. \$115.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-93-5435328-4.

*Environmental History of Modern India: Land, Population, Technology and Development* by Velayutham Saravanan is a seminal work that meticulously examines India's environmental evolution from the early nineteenth century to the present day. Through a detailed exploration spanning nine comprehensive chapters, Saravanan navigates the intricate intersections of land use, population dynamics, technological advancements, and policy decisions, offering profound insights into the complexities of India's environmental history. The book begins with a methodological overview that underscores Saravanan's rigorous approach to historical research. Drawing on a diverse array of primary sources—including archival records, policy documents, statistical data, and scholarly literature—Saravanan constructs a robust narrative that meticulously traces the trajectory of environmental change in India. His methodological rigor is evident throughout the book, with numerous charts, diagrams, and statistical analyses enriching the narrative while underscoring the depth of his scholarship.

Saravanan initiates his analysis by examining the profound impacts of population growth on land resources. Through detailed historical contextualization, Saravanan illustrates how rapid demographic expansion since Independence has strained agricultural lands and intensified land-use conflicts. He adeptly traces the historical roots of these pressures, from colonial policies that promoted agricultural expansion to contemporary challenges of achieving food security amidst burgeoning populations. Moving forward, Saravanan delves into the pivotal role of technology in shaping India's environmental landscape. Chapters dedicated to irrigation projects, industrialization, and urbanization illuminate how technological interventions have transformed ecosystems, often at the expense of environmental sustainability. He critically assesses

instances where developmental agendas prioritized economic growth over ecological concerns, resulting in water scarcity, pollution, and biodiversity loss.

One of the book's significant strengths lies in Saravanan's nuanced analysis of water management and conflicts. He meticulously documents the historical evolution of water policies, from colonial-era dam constructions to present-day debates over inter-state water disputes. His examination highlights how water resources have been both managed and mismanaged, offering critical insights into the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of water governance in India. Furthermore, Saravanan's exploration of urbanization and industrial growth underscores the uneven distribution of environmental burdens across society. He elucidates how urban centers have emerged as focal points for pollution and resource depletion, exacerbating inequalities and environmental injustices. His analysis challenges readers to confront the broader implications of urbanization on ecological sustainability and social equity in India.

Throughout the book, Saravanan navigates complex historical narratives with clarity and depth. While the wealth of data and detailed analyses may appear daunting at times, they underscore the meticulousness of his research and the robustness of his findings. The inclusion of visual aids such as charts and diagrams not only enhances comprehension but also serves as a testament to Saravanan's commitment to empirical rigor.

As the book concludes, it prompts reflection on future avenues for research in environmental history. Saravanan's work not only illuminates past environmental trajectories but also invites scholars to explore interdisciplinary approaches for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. He advocates for integrating insights from climate science, political ecology, and sustainable development into historical analyses, thereby fostering holistic frameworks for understanding and mitigating environmental issues in India and beyond. Moreover, Saravanan's examination of India's environmental history holds profound relevance amidst the current global climate crisis. By elucidating historical precedents of environmental degradation and resource mismanagement, the book offers crucial lessons for policymakers, environmental practitioners, and civil society. Saravanan's call for informed action and sustainable practices resonates powerfully in an era defined by urgent environmental crises, compelling stakeholders to reconsider and recalibrate approaches to environmental governance and conservation.

In conclusion, Saravanan's scholarship stands as a seminal contribution to both environmental history and the broader discourse on sustainable development. This monograph is a vital contribution to historiography from the Global South, challenging Eurocentric frameworks that often universalize environmental change based on Western industrial experiences by centering India's distinct historical trajectories of land use, population, and development. Scholars of environmental history, development studies, South Asian studies, and postcolonial ecologies will find this book especially

valuable for its nuanced analysis and interdisciplinary relevance. Saravanan's exploration of India's environmental past not only enriches our understanding of historical processes but also offers valuable frameworks for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. As we confront the complexities of a rapidly changing climate and its profound impacts on societies worldwide, Saravanan's work serves as a timely reminder of the importance of historical context in shaping our responses to environmental issues.

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