



In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism, and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India

Alpa Shah

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In the Shadows of the State suggests that well-meaning indigenous rights and development claims and interventions may misrepresent and hurt the very people they intend to help. It is a powerful critique based on extensive ethnographic research in Jharkhand, a state in eastern India officially created in 2000. While the realization of an independent Jharkhand was the culmination of many years of local, regional, and transnational activism for the rights of the region's culturally autonomous indigenous people, Alpa Shah argues that the activism unintentionally further marginalized the region's poorest people. Drawing on a decade of ethnographic research in Jharkhand, she follows the everyday lives of some of the poorest villagers as they chase away protected wild elephants, try to cut down the forests they allegedly live in harmony with, maintain a healthy skepticism about the revival of the indigenous governance system, and seek to avoid the initial spread of an armed revolution of Maoist guerrillas who claim to represent them. Juxtaposing these experiences with the accounts of the village elites and the rhetoric of the urban indigenous-rights activists, Shah reveals a class dimension to the indigenous-rights movement, one easily lost in the cultural-based identity politics that the movement produces. *In the Shadows of the State* brings together ethnographic and theoretical analyses to show that the local use of global discourses of indigeneity often reinforces a class system that harms the poorest people.



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