

The roots of the periphery: a history of the Gonds of Deccan India

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Abstrak

Exploring the history of the Gonds of Deccan India, the book traces the genealogy of the periphery in the Indian subcontinent. The idea of periphery in India is shaped by narratives of wildness, empire building, insurgency, migration, protectionism, and development. State-making in India involved war, destruction, violence, taxation, subjugation, and caste suppression. In the process many self-governing communities were driven into non-state spaces, in this case the hills and forests. The Gonds Rajas of the Chanda dynasty had maintained their relative autonomy through the ages, keeping many an empire at bay. The British conquered the hill and forest tracts, and initially sought to integrate the Gonds into a wider caste-Hindu society as property-owning peasant farmers by offering zamindari rights to some Gond Rajas as well as by encouraging caste-Hindus to migrate into hill the tracts. This policy failed for a variety of reasons. The adivasis (indigenous peoples) relinquished their lands in protest against colonial revenue and agricultural policies and settled deeper into the forest. This led to resistance and insurgency in this region. In response, the colonial state adopted a policy of protectionism, creating an administrative boundary between mainland plains and hills that served to exoticize and stigmatize the adivasis, who were judged to be primitives undeserving of self-rule. During the last decades of the British rule, the Gonds reimagined their ruling past to challenge the colonial and the princely state. This was crucial to the Gonds to negotiate a place for them within the colonial and postcolonial state establishment.