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## Letters

Ramachandra Guha, Laxman D. Satya

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## Letters

DEAR SIR,

In his generally sympathetic review of my book *Environmentalism: A Global History*, Laxman Satya makes the astonishing and unfounded charge that I have omitted certain topics for fear of offending the editor of the series in which the book appears. To clear the record, the series editor imposed no conditions or restraint whatsoever. Indeed, he showed a complete trust in me—to begin with, by recruiting an Indian to write a global history (to my mind, the first such commission by an American or European historian), and then, by giving me a totally free hand. Satya asks why my book does not talk about the environmental destruction caused by Western capitalism. In fact it does, though perhaps not at the length he would like. But this is only because I wrote a book on environmentalism, which had obviously to focus on the positive or creative responses to environmental destruction, rather than on the destruction itself.

Two other points in Satya's review need correction. He claims that I am completely silent on "eco-racism"; in fact, it is discussed at several places in the book. (See index entries under "racism.") Then again, he chastises me for my "uncritical celebration of Western and American democracy." I do indeed celebrate democracy—but regardless of its cultural or ethnic provenance. Thus I interpret the vigor of Indian environmentalism in the context of India being a functioning democracy, and I show how Brazilian environmentalism was an integral part of the democratic opposition to military rule. By the same token, I show how the firing at Tiananmen Square and the subsequent clamp-down destroyed an incipient Chinese environmental movement.

Living in America, Satya is free to sneer at "Western democracy"; living in India, I can only be grateful that it has not yet gone the way of Pakistan.

Sincerely yours,  
RAMACHANDRA GUHA  
Bangalore, India

#### LAXMAN SATYA RESPONDS:

Guha criticizes Rachel Carson for being ahistorical by not acknowledging the environmentalism that preceded the appearance of *Silent Spring* in the early 1960s. On the same token he himself covertly and overtly skirts the issue of Euro-American imperialism, colonialism, militarism, and its full impact on global environment. While this kind of oversight is not acceptable even of Euro-American historians, it is in fact shameful when it comes from a scholar the caliber of Guha. However, it raises yet another profound question as to why a Euro-American historian would ask an Indian to write such a history. Is it to set the record of Euro-American environmental destruction straight or is it to cover up the white man's crime against global environment? On the same account, while Guha's kneel-down praise for Euro-American democracy puts a damper on his critical analysis of the impact of Western capitalism, his chest thumping for Indian democracy vis-à-vis military dictatorship in Pakistan needs to be revised in the light of innumerable instances of state-sponsored terrorism of the so-called Indian democratic government over the past half-century, the latest of which is the pogrom of Muslims in Gujarat and Kashmir. While the heroic struggle of the Narmada Bachao Andolan agitators is praiseworthy, Guha needs to get some mud on his boots to know the kind of persecution the people involved in the movement face day in and day out at the hands of the "democratic" Indian politicians, bureaucracy, police, and military forces. It is one thing for society elites such as Guha to be sitting in the comfort of big urban centers like Bangalore or Delhi, raise their hands, and thump their chests in praise of Euro-American-Indian bourgeoisie democracy, but it is quite another to face the brunt of state oppression and repression, whether it is in the Narmada Valley or Seattle.