

Conflict, negotiation, and coexistence: rethinking human-elephant relations in South Asia

Locke, Piers, author

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Abstrak

The interconnected lives of humans and elephants have shaped landscapes, determined the destinies of empires, and stimulated new kinds of knowledge, skill, and practice. Their encounters have also produced intimate forms of companionship, as well as conflict over space and resources. In South Asia, where many people live in close proximity to elephants, this interspecies relationship resonates with cultural significance. Such diverse, multifaceted, and frequently problematic relations between two kinds of intelligent social mammals have drawn the attention of multiple types of researchers and research. Interpreting this interspecies encounter, however, remains problematic, often producing disparate understandings that resist coherent integration. This volume seeks to remedy the problem of disciplinary commensurability by facilitating conversation across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Bringing together anthropologists, biologists, ecologists, geographers, historians, political scientists, and Sanskrit language specialists, this volume explores the social, historical, and ecological dimensions of human-elephant conflict and coexistence. It engages with both species as world-making subjects acting in ways that profoundly affect each other. This book not only helps us appreciate that we cannot understand elephant habitat and behaviour in isolation from the humans that help configure it, but also makes us realize that we cannot understand human political, economic, and social life without the elephants that shape and share the world with them. Refusing to study animal ecologies and human histories as exclusive phenomena, this book argues for an integrated approach to understanding and responding to the challenges of human-elephant relations.