



INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND NATURE

Insights for Social, Ecological,
and Technological Sustainability

Edited by

Uday Chatterjee

Anil Kashyap

Mark Everard

Gopal Krishna Panda

Dinabandhu Mahata



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Foreword



I am happy to be able to write this foreword for the edited volume, titled *Indigenous People and Nature: Insights for Social, Ecological, and Technological Sustainability*, edited by Dr. Uday Chatterjee, Dr. Anil Kashyap, Dr. Mark Everard, Dr. Gopal Krisna Panda, and Dinabandhu Mahata. The 26 chapters included in the volume are geographically mainly focused on different parts of India, particularly West Bengal, but there are also chapters situated in Sri Lanka, Laos, and Nigeria. The chapters deal with a wide range of topics, with many focusing on human–environment relations, and important issues related to indigenous knowledge systems and nature.

What is particularly interesting to me about this collection is that while the authors presumably all accept that the concept of Indigenous peoples is relevant for the groups they write about, most national governments in Asia and Africa do not yet recognize

the usefulness of applying the concept of indigeneity in their own nation states. In India, for example, the government recognizes the existence of a range of Adivasi or tribal groups, or scheduled tribes, but not the existence of “Indigenous peoples.” India signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007, but following what has become widely known as the “salt-water theory,” which assumes that the concept of Indigenous peoples only applies to places where significant European settler colonialism has occurred. In other words, they only believe that the concept of Indigenous peoples is applicable in places where Europeans crossed oceans or salt-water bodies in large numbers to take over and populate the lands of other peoples. Those who adopt the salt-water theory believe that the concept of Indigenous peoples does apply to the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, but not to most of Asia and Africa, thus allowing them to sign UNDRIP without actually recognizing the relevance of the concept to their own countries. This is also the understanding of the government of Laos; while Nigeria was one of just 13 countries that abstained on the vote initially to adopt UNDRIP.

While the concept of Indigenous peoples remains disputed in much of Asia and Africa, as described above, there is no doubt that it is gaining increasing recognition in various parts of the world. Indeed, over the last few decades, some national governments in Asia have adopted the international