

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910790552503321
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Titolo	Beyond caste : identity and power in South Asia, past and present // by Sumit Guha
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Leiden : , : Brill, , [2013] ©2013
ISBN	90-04-25485-4
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (256 p.)
Collana	Brill's Indological library, , 0925-2916 ; ; volume 44
Disciplina	305.5/1220954
Soggetti	Group identity - South Asia - History Caste - South Asia - History Power (Social sciences) - South Asia - History
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front Matter -- Governing Caste: The Study of State Power and Ethnic Rank in South Asia -- The Birth of Caste -- Territorial Power: The Spatial Dimension of Social Organization -- The Political Economy of Village Life -- A Locus of Sociopolitical Organization: The Household -- Ruling, Identifying, and Counting: Knowledge and Power in Eighteenth-Century India -- Empires, Nations, and the Politics of Ethnic Identity, c. 1800–2000 -- Afterword -- Bibliography -- Index.
Sommario/riassunto	Caste' is today almost universally perceived as an ancient and unchanging Hindu institution preserved solely by a deep-seated religious ideology. Yet the word itself is an importation from sixteenth-century Europe. This book tracks the long history of the practices amalgamated under this label and shows their connection to changing patterns of social and political power down to the present. It frames caste as an involuted and complex form of ethnicity and explains why it persisted under non-Hindu rulers and in non-Hindu communities across South Asia.