

Priests and Cobblers: Social Change in a Hindu Village in Western Nepal

By A. Patricia Caplan
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This book is a study of the changing relations between members of the priestly caste (Brahmins) and a group of untouchables (Sarkis or Cobblers) over the period from the 1950s to the 1960s in a Hindu village in the Far Western Hills of Nepal. From a position of almost total economic dependence on the Brahmins, the untouchables became increasingly independent because of the new economic opportunities available in the expanding economy of the area. As a result, they began to oppose the Brahmins politically.

The fieldwork on which this book was based was carried out in the vicinity of Dailekh, the district capital of the area during the calendar year 1969. It was part of a project of research on aspects of social change in Nepal, sponsored by the Social Science Research Council of Great Britain (now the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK). This project was based at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and was associated with the London-Cornell Himalayan Research Project, directed by the late Professor Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf.

Although this work is now more than 30 years old, it does reveal very graphically the levels of social inequality, based largely upon caste, which obtained in the middle hills of Nepal, and indeed the rest of the country. Sadly, the social consequences of this situation in recent years have led to a widespread and violent Maoist-inspired insurgency, during which many people have been killed.

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