

Book Review

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Caplan, A. Patricia (1972). Priests and Cobblers: A Study of Social Change in a Hindu Village in Western Nepal. San Francisco: Chandler publishing company. (PP 103); Seven chapters, figure, illustrations, maps, tables, bibliography, Index

Particia Caplon tried to analysis unequal relationship between so called high caste and lower caste in the western isolated geographical area of Nepal. She has analyzed the book into eight sub-headings entitled – the problem, the setting of study area, population, history, Belaspur Bazar, Duari village, population according to caste and clan, legends or origin and structural division. In the problem section, she has analyzed the relation between "high caste" (Brahmin) and "low caste" relation in a Hindu village in the hills of western Nepal in terms of political and economic links between them. Though the untouchables belong to act against the high caste because of their socio-economic dependence, their interplay among various factors of change has been examined. In introduction chapter, she has analyzed the study area and Belaspur (pseudonym) district with detail characteristics including geographical feature, relationship, location, climate, nature of production system, land distribution pattern, cultivation, and infrastructural development of the study area. According to author different caste group reside in the area which was a part of Malla kingdom during 12th -14th century and then followed by Thakuri, Mougali, and then the Shah dynasty (after then unification of Nepal). It has undergone all the political activities from the starting after the unification by P.N. Shah to date. Thus, people have a direct say to the government only at the low level from the political point of view but not ruling high caste group. In the "Belaspur Bazar" section, the author has described about the existence of that small town and its various infrastructural settlement with quasi/governmental office. Along with this, she

has discussed about the price of goods and wages of labor during different seasons. She has also described about the structure and pattern of houses and uses of land in various forms. According to author, the place has no shops, temples, schools with few communal facilities. Hence, villagers gather at the house of rich or influential (people) person or they gather in Belaspur Bazar. The section "Population: caste and clan" describes about the population of the Duari village with number of people existing castes including high caste and untouchables. In this chapter, she also describes about various pattern of discrimination by higher caste people to the lower caste. Author also discusses on marital ceremony of untouchables and higher caste people. Three legends of origin used by villagers are discussed in the topic, "legends of origin and structural division". Among them the first legend is about the cobbler and the king which says that the cobblers are the first inhabitants of that place being tax collectors for that area. Later on two Brahmin clans the Adhikaris and the Bhurtels arrived there and soon after they were joined by Giris. The second legend talks about the initiation of worship of Mahadeva (Shiva) and the role played by Adhikaris for that initiation. In the 3rd legend, discussed about how the Ramas won the king's favour in being custodians of the temples, yet being the latest immigrants of that area. Thus, this chapter discusses about the spatial divisions between groups and the population breakdown according to caste and clan and between the clans of high castes.

The second chapter entitled "Village Economy: Resources" discussion about various resources which provide village economic situation. Among them agricultural and household patterns are classified on economic basis. Most of the cobblers face the grain deficit and they need for cash for the purpose of fulfillment of daily need. Various types of crops and agricultural technology are discussed in this chapter. According to author wheat is a main crop but it is not sufficient for them so they are seasonally migrated for management food. The household are separated along with division of land and different process and reasons for separation of household are discussed in the household section. In the section "Economic Classification of Household" three categories of household are discussed on the basis of crop production-surplus, sufficient and deficient. Thus, there is large disparity in the amount

of crop production by different household. In “The Grain Deficient” section, the author discusses about the various reasons for the grain deficient for the population of study area among which increasing population is the most influencing factor. In the section “need for cash” different types of activities are discussed for which direct cash is necessary or required. It reveals that the importance of cash and wide range of expenditure done by the villagers/caste wise.

In the third chapter entitled, “The Earning a Living” the author has discussed about various activities from which they earn money for their livelihood. There is a *Jajamani* type relationship in different caste group for example plough service and unskilled labour, which are done mostly by untouchables and in some extent, by poorer Jaisis. Along with this, other activities include loans, land and credit reforms, migration process and services like case writer and astrologers.

In the fourth chapter “The Village Economy: Recent Changes”. The author talks about occupational mobility. High caste people were more benefited from these opportunities because of more literate than untouchables. Those opportunities include government employment, the shop keeping. After the expansion of Belaspur Bazar and Lakandra area in the south most of the elite high caste people are purchasing land. Unskilled work and trading in rice are the new forms of opportunities for the poor Brahmins and untouchables. Thus, the economic situation has taken its speed by the growth of Belaspur Bazar and opening up of lakendra valley in the study area. “Pandits” are the only qualified people to perform ‘*Saptah*’ and ‘*Nowaha*’ reading cobblers have no chance to read because of religious belief.

In the fifth chapter entitled “Village Politics: Factions” The author has discussed about the struggle for power in the village between two rich high caste groups (The Ramas group and alliance of Adhikaris, Burtels, Giris and supported by Naules). Their conflict was held for the earning of power, prestige, and property during the pre-revolutionary period (before 1950s). During post-revolutionary politics period (1951-1961), the personal antagonism between Ramas and Burtel turned into the groupings in the later date. There are several disputes. Among them two disputes are

“wife stealing” and “an attempt to open a school”. Such incidents happened because they both were in power and played active roles in politics, and it continued during the land reform act 1964 was passed. Then the powers of senior/headman were given to village council and opportunities for senior headman to seek office in Panchayat system. In 1966 Bali Burtel became the village council chairperson defeating Ganga Rama with the support of Adhikaris, Giris and untouchables. The two disputes “The Thakuri’s land” and “settling on grazing land” led the chairman (Bali Burtel) as a factional leader and an attempt was made to expel the chairman by collecting signature of the villagers and main reason for this was a dispute on “priest and client disagree”. But the attempt was failed though he (Bali Burtel) had lost some authorities.

Chapter six entitled, “Village Politics: the Growth of Caste Conflict” the author has analyzed about the increasing caste conflicting between the villagers. In the section “the 1969 election” the author has discussed about the candidanship between Bali Burtel and Daya Ram and defeat of Bali Burtel with different reasons for his defeat. In the next section “Analysis of the Election” supports of Burtels and untouchables for each other is justified by the help of a legend. In this chapter she also argues about being superior in terms of caste and religions among various so-called high caste people with very little benefit to the untouchables. In the last section “The After Election” the realization of untouchables as a group having certain amount of political power mentioned various petitions to the discrimination they were facing in the village. Two disputes: a. The Jaisi and the Goldsmith girl, b. The Jaisi and the cobbler girl that concern caste offences are discussed which shows the weakening relation among the caste. Since the high caste are weakening and untouchables are rising of untouchables in terms of law, politics and economic sphere, it is now the time to redefine the high caste status and the position of untouchables ritually.

In the last chapter entitled, ‘Conclusion’ the author has made comparison with data from South Asia and identifies crucial variables to understand the social change in rural area. Also he has analysed the relation between high caste and the untouchables in terms of economic and political fields.