

Ian Carlos Fitzpatrick. 2011. *Cardamom and Class: A Limbu Village and its Extensions in East Nepal*. Kathmandu: Vajra Publications.

*Cardamom and Class: A Limbu Village and its Extensions in East Nepal* is a full and informative study of the lives of a Limbu community in Nepal. What makes Ian Carlos Fitzpatrick's approach unique is his use of data on the history and continuation of cardamom farming in this community as a unifying trope for exploring the Limbu culture, a method absent from more recent ethnographies of communities in Nepal. In so doing, Fitzpatrick is able to present the reader with more "traditional" cultural material, such as linguistic practices and kinship structures, as well as useful ecological and demographic data. He then uses this data to explore the appropriateness of the political economy approach and to

trace the formation of class in Mamangkhe village as it relates to the control, or lack thereof, of local means of production.

One is immediately struck by the completeness and thoroughness with which Fitzpatrick collected data. The first three chapters verge on the encyclopedic and will surely be of use to other scholars interested in studying Limbu culture, rural farming techniques in Nepal, and the history of land ownership law and reform. In chapter one, Fitzpatrick explains the major theoretical premises of the work. He argues that the shifts in ownership and control of the means of production—in particular of subsistence farming, cardamom cultivation, and wage labor—have led to economic differentiation within Mamangkhe village eventually resulting in the formation of economic classes. The second chapter, which deals specifically with Nepali history as it relates to the community of study, provides an excellent overview of the effects of Kathmandu-based politics and land reform projects on Eastern Nepal. Fitzpatrick also does a praiseworthy job of making a very long period of history (from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the present) understandable as a coherent whole. While Fitzpatrick does refer back to this history in the remainder of the work, the connections between current circumstances in Mamangkhe village and the longer history could be made even more explicit. For example, it would be interesting to know if the origin stories or the history of the conflict between Prithvi Narayan Shah and the early Limbuwan communities continue to be used in daily discourse as explanations of current conditions as can be observed in other communities. The third chapter presents statistical, survey, and demographic data for Mamangkhe. This chapter is particularly thorough and presents a lot of the quantitative data that Fitzpatrick later draws on to support his larger argument. Unfortunately, this is the only chapter which pays any attention to social divisions or groupings other than class. The diversity in age, gender, religious practices, caste, and education described here could have been re-incorporated more clearly into the life histories so that the dynamics of the community could be more easily understood by the reader.

The remaining three chapters deal with Fitzpatrick's qualitative data. Chapter four describes the history of cardamom farming in Mamangkhe. This chapter is particularly interesting given Fitzpatrick's success in locating and interviewing the farmer who first brought cardamom to the village. In chapter five, Fitzpatrick discusses migration, mobility and emerging migration and settlement networks. This chapter highlights another one of the strengths of the work, namely, Fitzpatrick's rethinking

of the concepts of mobility and migration. By enlarging the idea of migration beyond long term, long distance movements, Fitzpatrick is able to include as field sites locations which are not the site of permanent migration, but which are still important to the individuals living in Mamangkhe. This helps him to represent more accurately, and more meaningfully, the social landscape of Mamangkhe residents. The expansion of this concept allows Fitzpatrick to seamlessly incorporate the dispersed village in Jhapa and workers who have migrated to the gulf countries into the social landscape of Mamangkhe. Doing so highlights the more recent intersections of class and place within this community and points to areas where future research will further enlighten the class formation processes at work here. Chapter six then moves on to a general overview of changes in land use and economics over time. It also contains four brief life histories, which add some ethnographic depth to the analysis. The book ends with a few brief remarks in the conclusion section.

Overall, Fitzpatrick has done an excellent job of demonstrating exactly how the historical shifts in control of the modes of production have led to class differentiation. There are, however, a few points which could be strengthened in this work. While Fitzpatrick is very explicit about the aims of this book, and makes no claims to presenting a fully gender inclusive picture of Mamangkhe, there are points where further exploration of gendered experiences could have made significant contributions to his theoretical points. In particular, the exclusion of the practice of visiting *māitīghar* (a married woman's natal home) in discussions of the importance of temporary, local mobility was surprising. Having not worked in a Limbu village, I must admit to the possibility that this practice does not exist in Mamangkhe, but given its prevalence in so many Nepali communities, even its absence would have been worth noting. Additionally, in my observations these short visits serve as an important channel for loans, labor collaborations, economic alliances, and, sometimes, economic and ownership disputes. This is only one example of how the book could have been strengthened by increased consideration of women's activities.

Finally, the most serious criticism of the work is that the few life histories provided are still not sufficient to give the reader a clear sense of class as an *experience*. Fitzpatrick is correct in pointing out that how an individual or family comes to be part of a particular class is an essential component of how people make sense of class. But the tensions that must be inherent in the further deepening of class divisions in this community

can only be shown by closer attention to the ways in which class continues to affect life decisions and opportunities. It would be particularly interesting to provide the reader with more details about the way class makes itself felt in a variety of everyday situations. In light of the use of cardamom farming as an organizing feature of the book, more descriptions of the interactions of farmers as they negotiate working for and with each other, giving and collecting loans, selling their produce, etc. would be particularly helpful. Additionally, this would provide Fitzpatrick with another opportunity to address other perspectives within the community such as age and gender.

Ultimately, the work is an important contribution to modern studies of communities in Nepal. Fitzpatrick promises the reader that he will show the processes of class formation in Mamangkhe through an examination of who controls the modes of production over time, and in this, he is overwhelmingly successful. Theoretically, the work serves as an valuable examination of the minute economic events which can ultimately restructure the socio-economic landscape of a community, and the data collected by Fitzpatrick will prove to be a compilation of very useful information for any scholar interested in Eastern Nepal.

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