

Kanako Nakagawa. 2016. *Nepārude Kāsutowo Ikinuku: Kugito Niku-uriwo Ninau Hitobitono Minzokushi (Living the 'Caste' in Contemporary Nepal: Ethnography on the People Engaged in Animal Sacrifice and Meat Selling)*. Kyoto: Sekaisisosya.

“There is a hunk of a meat on a big table under a rooftop of a house, or at a bazaar....The owner chops the meat, put them on the scale to check the amount and shove them into a plastic bag” (p. i). Nakagawa starts this book with the illustration of a scene of a meat shop in Kathmandu. Nakagawa was fascinated by the scene because it seemed that “traditional and local” (not hiding the slaughter scene) and “modern and universal” (trading consumer goods through money) existed simultaneously in meat shops in Kathmandu (p. i). This impression drove Nakagawa to do an ethnographic study of meat

shop owners. She learned that they are Khadgis, one of the “low caste” groups of Newars. Khadgis have had a role in ritual sacrifices and meat sales. They had been discriminated as an untouchable caste from whom other castes should not accept water.

How are the people who have been suffering from discrimination, being defined by the ruler as “low caste,” living in the time of the changing of regimes and rapid globalization of markets? What kinds of meanings do they find in their caste as a category? These are research questions of Nakagawa. She tries to answer these questions through descriptions of Khadgis. Increase of demands for meat in Kathmandu has lifted up their economic situation. In other words, caste gives them discrimination which threatens their dignity and rights, but at the same time, it gives them a privilege to trade meat. Nakagawa argues that the contemporary caste system is a dynamic process which is changing with commercialization and reinterpretation of self-identification. Following Searle-Chatterjee and Sharma (1994), Nakagawa discusses this change by the complementary notions of “being caste” and “doing caste,” where “being” refers to ascribed aspects of caste and “doing” to caste as a collection of flexible and mutable modes of action (p. 32).

In Section 1, Nakagawa reveals roles of Khadgis as a “being caste” by describing trades of goods and services among caste groups. After the democratization of Nepal in 1990, demands for meat in Kathmandu have increased constantly and Khadgis became a specialist group of meat sellers. At the same time, Khadgi’s caste roles as a “being caste” are re-acknowledged and reproduced among both inter and inner castes. Thus, even though many aspects of Khadgi’s “being caste” appear to be ascribed to them, Khadgis themselves interpret their own roles and attribute new meanings to them.

Chapter 1 shows how the caste system of Newars had been institutionalized. “Inside of the caste system of Newars, the division of roles on worldliness is sparse while on ritual it is dense....Nowadays, trades of goods and services among caste groups are multi-dimensional and intricate. They involve principles of diadem, hierarchy based on purity and the market” (p. 62). In Chapter 2, Nakagawa describes interrelationships, communality and lifestyles of Khadgis by focusing on their *twāh* (residential area) and *phuki* (a paternal kinship community). Their kinship relations support their lives and jobs directly. Until the 1990s, they were engaged in other jobs such as carrying palanquins, carrying bricks and selling milk. But after 1990, Khadgis became more exclusively tied to the meat business.

Chapter 3 describes Khadgi's caste roles on ritual and their own religious practices. On the one hand, Khadgis have ritual caste roles to sacrifice livestock, to play drums called *nāykhī bājā* and to purify other castes during birth and death rituals. On the other hand, Khadgis have their own religion. Religious rituals of Khadgis are seemingly same as king-centered rituals of Newars in annual festivals. In these festivals, there is a clear hierarchy which put priests on the top. But in actual practices, "Khadgis treat all gods equally...and never felt contradiction to worship varieties of gods" (p. 97). Khadgis accept all gods equally in their daily religious practices.

In Section 2, the author focuses on the commercialization process of meat in Kathmandu to describe how Khadgis "do" their caste through their everyday practices. Chapter 4 shows complicated and tangled processes of globalization and commercialization that caused the transformations of everyday lives of Khadgis. According to Nakagawa, Khadgis are continuously relocating their caste through practices in their daily lives.

In Chapter 5, Nakagawa describes a mixture of ethnic and caste values and norms in the contemporary meat market in Kathmandu. The meat market ties people who have never been in direct contact before. Varied norms have been reconstructed in this situation. For example, Khadgis united as a caste association called Nepal Khadgi Sewa Samiti (NKSS) to obtain power to negotiate with the Muslim buyers who transport buffalos from India to Nepal. The meat market in Kathmandu has emerged through negotiations of individuals and groups which have different cultures, religions and norms of values.

Chapter 6 shows the change of behavior of customers and Khadgi's practices to meet new demands. In Kathmandu, customers have come to learn globalized concepts of sanitation and health. Therefore, trade systems are changing to meet these customer's demands. Khadgis succeed to adjust their commercial practices and keep their importance in the meat market. In Chapter 7, the author discusses the change of values caused by commercialization. How do new values function with local values? On the one hand Khadgis are willing to keep their roles to sacrifice animals in national festivals, such as *Taleju pūjā*. On the other hand, they are no longer willing to perform sacrifice in upper castes' rites of passage. Thus they don't like to play *nāykhī bājā* to lead the funeral but there is a revival movement of *nāykhī bājā* for festivals. Khadgis attempt to rearrange their ritual roles. This development appears to involve partial continuation of their traditional

caste roles. But actually, it chips away at communal caste images among various caste groups. They are combining social values and economic values.

Section 3 is about reinterpretations and recreations of caste. Especially Nakagawa focuses on political movements of the Khadgis. In Chapter 8, Khadgis' politics of identification are examined. Recently Khadgis claimed that they are not Dalits but a part of Newars, an "indigenous people" of the Kathmandu Valley. In Chapter 9, Khadgis' political movements in the political turbulence of the recent decades are examined. Between 1951 and 1990, Khadgis had cooperated with other "low castes" or "untouchables" to protest discriminations. Between 1990 and 2006, because of rapid commercialization, Khadgis' political movements as NKSS had been less active than their pursuit of individual self-interest. After 2006, they started to present themselves not as "low caste" but as a group belonging to the "indigenous" Newars. They have proceeded to change their names and they as a group were deleted from the governmental list of Dalits. NKSS's movements reinterpret and recreate the caste group by sometimes emphasizing the caste-framework and at other times utilizing the framework that is not primarily caste-related such as "indigenous rights."

This book does not show a simple success story of Khadgis as part of the commercialization of Nepali society. Instead, it describes "the recreation of caste" through the complementarily of "being" and "doing" caste. The "recreation of caste" is not simply a response of a discriminated community to global human-rights movements. The recreation emerges through the practical operations in real situations. The operations function as an arena for Khadgis to affirm their lives and to shake the society from inside. Khadgis utilize the gap between social systems of interrelationships and cultural systems of meanings to construct a new arena. This is not just a "politics of representation." Nakagawa says that Khadgis show us a way in which one can struggle with negative stigma and arrive at a situation where the very stigma contributes to the creation of a robust and affirmative basis for their lives.

This book shows the vivid daily lives of Khadgis. Because there had been few studies focused on Khadgis previously, this book makes an important contribution to Nepal Studies and Newar Studies. It succeeds to reveal contemporary Nepal which is changing rapidly with globalization and commercialization. The most noteworthy achievement Nakagawa accomplishes is to reveal a way of people to construct "an arena which

affirms lives” (p. 275) through descriptions of practices done between local caste systems and the global market economy.

### **Reference**

Searle-Chatterjee, Mary and Ursula Sharma. 1994. Introduction. In *Contextualising Caste: Post-Dumontian Approaches*. Mary Searle-Chatterjee and Ursula Sharma, eds., pp. 1–24. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

**Sanae Ito**  
Kyoto University