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> WEALTH, POWER AND PRESTIGE: Emerging patterns of social inequality in a Sinhalese village in north-central Sri Lanka.

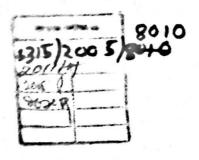
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SUMMARY

This study examines the changing and emerging forms of social inequality in a Sinhalese village in north-central Sri Lanka in line with the process of its transition from a relatively isolated peasant hamlet during the early British period to a diversified agrarian community in the recent times. Though the study is primarily concerned with the present and with the particular village involved, a constant attempt has been made to link the contemporary situation with a wider field in both time and space.

In Chapter Two, I outline the historical background of the region, the village and some of the social institutions among the Sinhalese in general. As for the Sinhalese caste system, following Dumont, I argue that it is fundamentally different from its Hindu counterpart. Having outlined the Sinhalese caste system as it operated in the Kandyan kingdom, I attempt to identify the major implications of the British rule for the peasants in the remote jungle villages such as Niltanne.

Chapter Three is a general introduction to present day Niltanne and its immediate environs. An attempt is made there to document aspects of the changing socio-economic and cultural environment in the locality.

Chapter Four is concerned with the village economy and the social class structure there. Having documented changes in the physical process of production and exchange and the land tenure practices in Parts One and Two, I attempt to analyse the emergent class relations in Niltanne in Part Three.

The fact that power relations are no longer internal village matters is demonstrated in Chapter Five. It is asserted that, despite the introduction of so-called democratic institutions into the village arena,

the close association between economic power and political influence remains unchallenged in the local context.

Social status is a multifaceted phenomenon. It is not simply caste, as many previous writers seem to have asserted with regard to Sinhalese peasant villages. In the face of the decaying Sinhalese caste structure, has emerged a separate system of social ranking which is closer to structural realities. These assertions are elaborated in Chapter Six.

Chapter Seven attempts to answer two important questions. Firstly, how do economic, political and social changes, both planned and unplanned, interact with each other? Secondly, do economic and political power on the one hand and social prestige and honour on the other constitute autonomous systems of social inequality? As elaborated in the text, at both levels, there is a strong tendency for overlapping and interdependency.

The Case Studies in Chapter Eight supplement the discussions in the other Chapters. The individuals portrayed there demonstrate the different ways they lived through the short period of time with which the present study is mainly concerned.

Finally, in the Conclusions, I attempt to bring together the major assertions of the present work. It is emphasized that the present study approaches an old problem with a fresh approach in that social inequality among the rural Sinhalese is viewed as multifaceted and, hence, is examined with the use of a wider range of concepts.

This thesis contains no material previously accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except that to which due reference is made in the text of the present thesis.

S. T. Hettige.

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