

## **Caste, Class, and Culture: Applying Bourdieu in Rural Nepal**

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Bourdieu's *Distinction* has been hailed by some as the greatest sociological work of the second half of the twentieth century. Yet few have attempted to apply his methods in non-Western contexts. As South Asian societies increasingly adopt the market, including a mass market in Western-style education, and increasingly become class societies, the more salient Bourdieu's questions about the relationship between class, mobility, and culture become. For the comparative sociologist South Asian societies offer one advantage over Western societies: there is a universally understood (even if contested and controversial) status scale, namely caste.

We have tried to adapt and operationalize the concept of cultural capital in ways that are culturally appropriate to Nepal, yet also capable of producing data comparable with work on cultural capital in Euro-American societies. Our overall aim is to investigate whether cultural differences have any role in explaining why Dalits score very poorly on all Human Development Indicators. Our research has focused on a cluster of six villages, and their nearby urban migrants, and records in-depth demographic, education, livelihood, and wealth data for 619 rural households. Taking a stratified 50% sample, we have interviewed every individual over 13 about their skills, tastes, and consumption patterns (1,203 people). In addition we have carried out long-term participant observation and ethnographic work in the concerned villages.

Putting these various forms of data together, we hope to be able to answer key questions about the links between caste, class, migration, education, and cultural consumption. In this presentation, a report on work in progress, we will present some preliminary results.

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