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Nobody's People

Hierarchy as Hope in a Society of Thieves

ANASTASIA PILIAVSKY

Series: South Asia in Motion

What if we could imagine hierarchy not as a social ill, but as a source of social hope? Taking us into a "caste of thieves" in northern India, *Nobody's People* depicts hierarchy as a normative idiom through which people imagine better lives and pursue social ambitions. Failing to find a place inside hierarchic relations, the book's heroes are "nobody's people": perceived as worthless, disposable and so open to being murdered with no regret or remorse. Following their journey between death and hope, we learn to perceive vertical, non-equal relations as a social good, not only in rural Rajasthan, but also in much of the world—including settings stridently committed to equality. Challenging egalo-normative commitments, Anastasia Piliavsky asks scholars across the disciplines to recognize hierarchy as a major intellectual resource.

Anastasia Piliavsky is Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and Politics at the India Institute at King's College London. She is the editor of *Patronage as Politics in South Asia* (2014).

Reviews

"It's difficult to overemphasize the effect of this narrative: the brio with which it is written, the verve of its characters, the author's intellectual panache. This scintillating re-reading of hierarchy, most poignant where it has supposedly been banished, picks apart one of anthropology's greatest conundrums and poses profound questions for evaluations based on social equivalence."

–Marilyn Strathern, University of Cambridge

"An extraordinary work. A major rethinking of the social productivity of hierarchical relations, this is ethnographically grounded anthropological theorizing at its best. It should fundamentally transform contemporary conversations about the nature of social life."

–Joel Robbins, University of Cambridge

"Moving away from the ideas of ineffability and stasis that attach to understandings of caste, Piliavsky puts forward a courageous, refreshingly original position on hierarchy."

–Dilip Menon, University of Witwatersrand

"Anastasia Piliavsky's compelling study of a 'caste of thieves' in Rajasthan addresses one of the most important debates in the sociology of South Asia, the significance of hierarchical values in social life. By exploring everyday politics of patronage, she argues that social hierarchy expresses a relational logic based on a 'non-egalitarian ethos' of mutual obligations and care for others. Whether one agrees or not with ascribing ontological status to normative inequality, this book will rekindle discussions on the foundation of sociality in contemporary South Asia and beyond."

**–Filippo Osella, Professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies,
Sussex University**