



Inside-Outside: Two Views of Social Change in Rural India

B S Baviskar, D W Attwood

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Poverty in rural India: Is this a permanent condition? Are villagers immobilized by a rigid caste system, limited resources and economic exploitation? This book is about villagers who have done remarkable things with their lives—people who have broken the constraints of poverty and inequality to become innovative and mobile. It is written partly by one villager who found a career doing research on social change.

Inside–Outside narrates stories of grassroots change and innovation. These stories are discussed from the combined view of an insider (Baviskar), who grew up in a village in western India, and an outsider (Attwood), who came to study social change in the same region. Telling life stories from people who taught and surprised them, they challenge common stereotypes about Indian villagers—stereotypes of passivity, fatalism, and stagnation.

Baviskar's life and experience of change in his home village exemplify grassroots initiative and innovation. He was born as the son of an impoverished farmer in a drought-stricken village in western Maharashtra. Ability, hard work, and some dramatic twists of fate enabled him to attend college and then complete a doctorate in India's premier sociology department. In contrast to Baviskar, Attwood is a complete outsider, having grown up in a suburb near Chicago, in the US heartland. He stumbled into anthropology and spent several years in India, doing fieldwork in the region where Baviskar grew up. The two met in 1969; they became friends and began four decades of collaborative research.

Here they tell the stories of villagers who changed their own lives and who also, in many cases, changed the lives of others. These stories describe rapid innovation and institution-building in the countryside, challenging an array of common stereotypes about village life in India. Seeking explanations for change, it helps to look at village life from many angles. Inside and outside views are complementary and provide a more complete picture.

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