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In the Land of Poverty: Memories of an Indian Family, 1947-97

Siddharth Dube

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On August 15, 1947, the day of India's independence from Britain, Ram Dass and his family were Untouchables--lowest of the low in an apparently unchanging caste system, landless serfs bonded to a feudal village lord in a remote part of Uttar Pradesh deep in the heart of Hindu India. Fifty years later as the country celebrated its half-century of independence, Ram Dass's family still suffered poverty and oppression--this despite their efforts and despite the changes which have transformed the face of independent India. This book is their story, and the story of modern India. Told through the voices of several generations, it takes the reader on a journey into the reality of Asian poverty--the powerlessness, the sickness, the illiteracy and all the other deprivations which enmesh the poor. Gradually we learn to understand not simply the human reality of what it means to be poor, but also the central paradox of modern India: half a century of democracy, economic growth and constitutional commitment to social justice has not lessened the acute, mass poverty of the country. This vivid account draws its readers into an unforgettable understanding not just of the personal experience of poverty but of the intractable reasons for its continuance.

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