



Surikokura:

Development and social change in a Nepali village

2011
Jane Carter

Line drawings by Akhter Shah

Painting (1990) by Sanu Kaji, Adventure Art Gallery, Patan Durbar Square

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A book available for free download at <http://surikokura.org>

The title of this book literally means “Talk of Suri” – or Tales about Suri. Suri is a village in Dolakha District in the middle hills of Nepal – a district that was a focal area for Swiss development assistance from the 1970s until 2010. For a period of 18 months over 1988 – 1989, the villagers of Suri hosted a temporary resident, Jane Carter, who lived with two different families in the hamlets of Nakpa and Surigaon. Twenty years later, she made a number of return visits to the village. In the intervening period, the lives of the villagers have changed both materially, and at a more profound level. The ten chapters of the book explore these changes, both from the perspective of an outsider, and – more importantly – through the stories of Suri people themselves. The experiences of Suri villagers echo a larger picture of social change in Nepal. Their increasing interaction with the outside world, and the challenges and opportunities that this brings, also reflects in many ways the wider experience of rural citizens in other developing countries.

Jane Carter has a doctorate from the University of Oxford, for which she conducted her field research in Suri. She has worked for Intercooperation, Swiss Foundation for International Cooperation, since 1997, specialising in community-based natural resource management. When this organisation merged with HELVETAS in July 2011, she took up the position of Coordinator, Gender and Social Equity for HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation.

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In my visits to Suri over the period 2007 – 2010, I have always been accompanied by a member of Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project (NSCFP) staff. Sometimes such visits were combined with their work, but more often they demanded personal time over weekends or holidays. My most steadfast, ever-patient companion, and source of much clarification when my Nepali failed me, was Shyam Khadka. Others who have made the trip to Suri with me are Bharat Pokharel, Brahma Dhoj Gurung, Anju Upadhyaya, Anupama Mahat, and (in a consultative capacity) Birkha Chhetry. Mitha Lamichhane helped jog my memory of things past whilst conveying us safely between Kathmandu and Dolakha, whilst Dhruva Pradhan went to great lengths to be supportive – from ensuring the rapid treatment of my swollen leech bites to locating potential artists.

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Thank you, all of you.





Glossary

<i>ban</i>	forest (pronounced "bon")	<i>maita</i>	a woman's natal home
<i>bahini</i>	younger sister	<i>mit</i>	close friend, bound in friendship as a blood tie
<i>bari</i>	un-irrigated (rain-fed) arable land	<i>panchayat</i>	until 1990, the lowest unit of government administration and the one-party political system (as established in 1962). The panchayat was replaced by the Village Development Council (VDC)
<i>buhari</i>	daughter-in-law	<i>pipal</i>	tree belonging to the fig family, <i>Ficus religiosa</i>
<i>chautara</i>	resting place	<i>portuka</i>	long piece of white cloth wrapped around the waist as a waistband
<i>chorten</i>	a small Buddhist shrine (Tibetan word)	<i>puja</i>	an act of worship - usually involving the offering of a gift such as food or flowers to a deity. The word is used by both Hindus and Buddhists.
<i>Dalit</i>	generic term referring to all people of so-called low caste (one termed untouchables)	<i>puri</i>	a fried flat bread served during festivities. Richer households use ghee (clarified butter) to fry the bread; poorer households use oil.
<i>didi</i>	elder sister	<i>pujari</i>	secretary
<i>dhero</i>	form of stiff porridge, eaten as a staple. It is usually by heating water, adding millet or maize flour, and then stirring vigorously whilst it cooks over the fire.	<i>salwar kameeze</i>	matching dress comprising a long tunic worn over trousers, usually set off by a long flowing scarf
<i>gai</i>	cow	<i>shraddha</i>	Hindu ritual performed for dead ancestors - particularly parents
<i>ghar</i>	house	<i>sindur</i>	red powder - vermilion
<i>ghee</i>	clarified - that is, heated and separated - butter. The idea of processing it is to improve its keeping qualities	<i>soldar</i>	"gravy" eaten with a staple when there is nothing else - comprising heated water, salt and pounded chillies
<i>goth</i>	temporary animal shelter (sometimes also occupied by humans), usually made with walls of woven bamboo and roofed with braches and leaves - or plastic sheeting	<i>stupa</i>	Buddhist shrine or memorial, usually rounded in shape
<i>hasiya</i>	sickle	<i>tikka</i>	auspicious, usually red, marking placed on the forehead - it may be simply a finger-print of vermilion powder, or a sticker, or a mass of rice and yoghurt coloured red
<i>jaad</i>	local beer made from mixing water with fermented grain - usually millet. It is cloudy in appearance, and slightly sour in taste.	<i>tol</i>	hamlet
<i>Janajati</i>	generic term for people belonging to the many ethnic groups of Nepal - however, the indigenous people of Kathmandu, the Newars, are often not included within it.		
<i>jhankri</i>	traditional healer		
<i>khet</i>	irrigated arable land, usually cultivated for paddy in summer; in winter a second crop may be grown such as wheat or potatoes if sufficient water is available		
<i>khol</i>	black eye-liner		
<i>kosi</i>	large river		
<i>lungi</i>	piece of cloth normally sewn together to form a cylinder, which is then wrapped around the body as a long skirt		
<i>matwali</i>	term used for those who by their caste or ethnic group drink alcohol; less commonly used today than in the past (could now be perceived to be derogatory)		

Acronyms

CFUG	Community Forestry Users Group
FECONFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal
SLC	School Leaving Certificate (taken at the end of grade 10)
VDC	Village Development Committee (lower administrative unit of Nepal)