Advance Praise

This ethnographically rich book offers at once an insightful analysis of the crucial role of an elite of rich farmers from among Jat Sikhs in the social and economic crisis of Punjab and a shrewd critical commentary on key ideas in the political sociology of India. It is illuminating on the functioning of democratic decentralization and on the ways in which elections may be manipulated, all in the interests of the elite, and at the expense of others and of the economy of the state. A tour de force.

John Harriss, Simon Fraser University

Grounded in rich ethnographic work, the book offers a fresh perspective on the emerging structure of rural power. While Green Revolution technology transformed nearly everything in the agrarian landscape of Punjab and enabled the erstwhile landed elite to move to the city and the urban economy, it did not radically democratize the rural power structure. Nicolas Martin thus goes on to show how the power of the landed rich from the dominant caste continues to persist, within and beyond the village. At a more general level, the study provides rich empirical evidence with a valuable comparative perspective on how inequalities of caste, class, and spatial formations are sustained even while India's economy and polity undergo processes of structural transformation.

Surinder S. Jodhka, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Nicolas Martin's book is an excellent work at the crossroads of agrarian relations, caste, inequality, and politics in Punjab, India. Both historical and contemporary in its approach, the book's chapters tell us how caste is linked to land distribution and rural power structures, and how those at the top of the rural power hierarchy control local political institutions like *panchayat*s and shape public policies in their favour. Martin's argument is that the nexus of agrarian dominance, caste hierarchy, and unequal governance sustains systemic inequality and limits broader and equitable development in Punjab. He also leaves us with some hope of a rupture in this stalemate *via* rural protest movements. The book is a must-read for everyone interested in developmental issues in India from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Ram Ramakumar, Tata Institute of Social Sciences

This gripping and meticulous ethnography of rural Punjab takes readers from rigged elections to corrupt land deals, from drug busts to acts of political violence, from Dalit struggles to the frustrations of downwardly mobile middle caste families, revealing how dominant castes today deploy democratic institutions,

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new links with urban capital, and lucrative criminal enterprises to decisively subordinate Dalits and smallholders. Debunking both culturalist explanations for India's "democratic deficits" and claims that rural caste domination is on the wane, Nicolas Martin's masterly analysis forces a profound reappraisal of Indian democracy.

Rupa Viswanath, University of Göttingen

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DEMOCRACY AGAINST EQUALITY

This book traces the shifting contours of caste and agrarian inequality, revealing how older hierarchies are being reconfigured in new forms and how they impact democracy. It offers a compelling ethnographic account of how democratic mechanisms—including political participation, elections, and protest movements—actually function in rural India. Focusing on Indian Punjab, it reveals the often stark disconnect between formal democratic ideals and ground-level realities. Engaging with major debates on clientelism, identity politics, and the criminalization of politics, the book sheds light on the complexities of political representation and accountability. The book also fills a critical gap in the political anthropology of Indian Punjab, offering valuable insights into the region's current political discontent.

Nicolas Martin is Associate Professor of Modern Indology/South Asian Studies at the University of Zurich. His work revolves around questions of inequality and citizenship in rural South Asia, based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in both Pakistani and Indian Punjab.

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DEMOCRACY AGAINST EQUALITY

Caste, Institutions, and Power in Postcolonial Punjab

NICOLAS MARTIN

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