



Leprosy and a Life in South India: Journeys with a Tamil Brahmin

James Staples

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Drawing on solid ethnographic fieldwork as well as many hours of interviews, *Leprosy and a Life in South India: Journeys with a Tamil Brahmin* tells the life story of Das, a Tamil Brahmin born in the newly post-colonial India of the early 1950s. After being diagnosed with leprosy, Das spent over a decade on the streets of Bombay and Madras, learning to survive as an unofficial station porter, hotel bellhop, and sometimes tourist guide. He won and lost fortunes on horses, he gambled, and he learned firsthand of the pleasures to be had in Bombay's red light district. But for all the joy that comes through so vividly in his account, Das's story unfolds against a backdrop of everyday violence and hardship. Re-investigated through the prism of an individual life, what are often presented as the rigid social categories of caste, religion and kinship come to be seen in fresh new ways. Through this life history account, *Leprosy in South India* captures all this in ways conventional accounts do not, offering a unique take on what it is to be an Indian in contemporary India.

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