

India's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity. Christiane Brosius. 2010. Routledge. 404 pages, ISBN: 978-0-415-54453-5. Hardback \$125.00.

For many, rather than a birth place of tradition, India stands and shines as “the desire and ability to enjoy and move forward into a new world, a world full of light, comfort and prosperity” (p-1). The book *India's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity* is the result of 10 years of personal exploration of Christiane Brosius. Brosius, who is Professor of Visual and Media Anthropology at the University of Heidelberg, captures the transformation of the social, cultural and political identity of ‘Shining India’s’ new middle class. In this book, Brosius provides an extensive collection of first-hand research; data from visual and textual representational analysis in popular advertisements, brochures and billboards; along with ethnographic observations and interviews with real estate developers, lifestyle experts, public relationship officers, white collar professionals and volunteers at urban spiritual centres. The data collected span more than a decade. Following Bourdieu, Fernades and Liechy, Brosius shows how conspicuous consumption is valued, not only as investment in a better lifestyle, but also a symbol of one caring for oneself.

This book is divided into three main sections: *Belonging to the World City, A Spiritual Mega Experience: The Akshardhan Cultural Complex* and *‘Masti! Masti!’ Managing Love, Romance and Beauty*, with each of the sections containing a number of sub-sections. However, the last section has only two subsections, which feels disproportionate if compared to the depth of the other two sections. Addressing the complexity of a highly heterogeneous middle class, Brosius assembles multifaceted case studies on urban landscapes, religious-leisure sites, beauty and wellness industries. Around these sites, the book traces new middle class dynamics and cosmopolitanism through its practices of distinction and regimes of pleasure.

In the first section of the book, Brosius examines the reshaping of urban landscapes through the global imaginary of ‘world-class city’ and the notion of a global lifestyle. The main feature of this section is to explore how visual representation and real estate advertising are creating an imaginary of the world-class city. Using around 450 advertisements from English-language lifestyle and real estate magazines, newspapers from the years 2004-2007, and 50 fieldtrips to shopping malls, real estate offices and condominiums in New Delhi, Brosius shows how these advertisements have the ability to create the fantasies of making Delhi a world-class city, by creating an ‘enclaved gaze’. According to Brosius, the ‘enclaved gaze’ is the other side of cosmopolitanism. This facilitates the process of social segregation

and legitimises the rights of particular groups to have access to a privatised space, lifestyle and world-view, or a 'privatopia' that is restricted to others. In this chapter, Brosius shows who is qualified to belong to 'world class' living in India, and how the markers for this distinction are placed. There are various lineages of these new identity formations with orientalism and colonialism, along with mimetic appropriation and alteration of foreign taste, present in distinctly Indian belongings.

A Spiritual Mega Experience: The Akshardhan Cultural Complex is the second section of the book. Here, the reader comes across a most fascinating and detailed ethnographic description of India's religious yet modern self. Gathering a wide range of materials from interviewing visitors, volunteers, and *Akshardhan Cultural Complex* (ACC) officials, to several visits to the site, detailed analysis of architecture and performances, this section explores the tension between presences of religion in secular and urban spaces. Based on the new middle classes' desire for distinctiveness, the ACC is the site that can be considered as an expression of the process of blurring the boundaries between religious belief, profane consumption and leisure activities through the promotion of a set of codes of 'aestheticisation', 'monumentalisation', commodification. This site is opened by transnationally well-connected and economically affluent class, the *Bochasanwasi Shri Akshaar Purushottam Swaminarayan Santha* (BAPS) from Gujrat that creates a space of multiple gazes that fuel tensions between classical pilgrims and the modern aspiration of consumption-based world-class living. A respondent claims "religion has fallen prey to commodification too. Spiritual specialist TV gurus Ramdev and Sri Ravi Sankar have been marketing specialists and places like ACC are artificial showpieces of a global city, with no spirituality whatsoever" (p. 326)". Thus, Brosius argues, ritual practices and presences of spiritual personalities help to overshadow conspicuous consumption by creating a sense of moral community which is rather 'world class modern self.'

The last section of this book is *'Masti! Masti!' Managing Love, Romance and Beauty*. It explores the shifting of perspective on the wedding and beauty industry and the significance of ritual and tradition. Based on lifestyle magazines, interviews with experts of bridal, wellness and spiritual marketing, this section examines how the wedding industry shapes the new event culture and creates new space for new specialists such as wedding organiser or event manager. The role of these new specialists is to create a distinction between 'old rich' and 'new rich', 'sophisticated' versus 'low' or 'bad taste' versus 'good taste.' If one's taste doesn't reach up to the standard of 'world class', the specialists have strategies to hide the lack or 'bad' taste to minimise public embarrassment. The burgeoning wedding industry

creates such aestheticism through magazines, TV-shows. Brosius argues this creates a fallacy of 'middle-classness' and an imaginary of a 'good life'.

Indian's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity is a well-written book with excellent visual materials and provides an in-depth ethnographic contribution to a wider disciplines. As a visual anthropologist, Brosius masterfully takes the reader to the exploration of 'new India.' Although the author claims that the book helps to understand difference between 'old India' and 'shining India', an exploration of old India is largely missing. The reader might feel like Brosius could have done better if there is a balanced discussion on 'old India' and 'shining India.' While visual materials are one of the strengths of the book, on many occasions the author loses her focus on the theoretical standpoint of middle class, it becomes mere visual representation of 'world class' aspiration through new urban landscape and popular lifestyle. The book is more about 'culture of consumption' than 'new middle class' construction.

The book is a great resource for anyone who is interested in India's burgeoning middle class. Academic audiences from various disciplines will find this book useful as it gathers a wide range of literature and ethnographic details. Finally, Brosius's insight and lucid writing will also make this book appeal to non-academic audiences; it is a very timely contribution to the field of Indian and South Asian studies.

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