

River of Love is a lucid and comprehensive account of the river Yamuna's 'theology' in relation to her physical state and observations by the practitioners of the Hindu way of life. However, one would have hoped for more on the link between love and death and not the overwhelming oppositional posturing of the two, but the book refuses to cross any liberal propriety.

Hindu College
University of Delhi

RAVI NANDAN SINGH

Christiane Brosius. 2010. *India's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity*. New Delhi: Routledge. xvii + 381 pp. Plates, glossary, bibliography. ₹795 (hardback).

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This book examines several aspects of India's post-liberalisation cultural transformation, particularly the highly visible modes of consumption that have come to symbolise the growing and increasingly assertive 'middle class'. Based on fieldwork carried out mainly in Delhi between 1997 and 2007, the study reflects Christiane Brosius's earlier interests in visual representations by documenting, through photographs as well as text, some of the new practices and forms of religion, retail, urban public culture, housing, sociality and self-cultivation that have transformed metro cities such as Delhi and Bangalore so dramatically since the 1990s.

The book is organised into three sections, each focusing on different dimensions of contemporary upper middle-class culture: the restructuring of urban spaces to cater to the new elites, especially the advent of gated communities and new housing styles; the Akshardham Cultural Complex (ACC), which, by blending elements of an entertainment theme park within a religious institution, symbolises what may be termed a kind of transnational Indian postmodernism; and the new consumer culture that has emerged around the wedding and beauty industries. Brosius provides detailed descriptions, drawing on ethnographic observations and interviews as well as visuals of the circulating representations and public rituals and cultures of each domain.

In her analysis of class practices in Delhi, Brosius follows Bourdieu's approach by focusing on the creation of distinction and regimes of

pleasure and preference. Recognising the complexity and fuzziness of the middle class in India, she argues that it is precisely this intangibility that makes the performance of 'taste' so important. Elite groups engage in spatial as well as cultural strategies to assert and maintain difference and social status, such as carving out exclusive living spaces and following lifestyles that are inaccessible to the lower classes. Similarly, acquiring a middle-class habitus depends on gaining the knowledge and powers of discernment to engage appropriately with the middle-class consumption culture, as well as learning new rituals for the care and cultivation of the body and self. Above all, consumption practices enacted during weddings or displayed through fashion or lifestyles are crucial because they send messages to class others. As Brosius writes, 'the new middle classes in India depend on visibility, visuality and performativity, as well as on a culture of circulation and a competence...to manage and decode them' (p. 24). A theme that runs through these diverse practices of consumption is the desire to become 'world-class'—a key modality of distinction in globalising India (pp. 14–15).

In the first section dealing with urban space, the fantasies of making Delhi a 'world-class city', and representations of gated communities that are supposed to enable one to 'live abroad in India', are delineated through real estate advertisements and interviews with developers and residents of luxury enclaves. However, Brosius's analysis of the 'Dubaisation' of Delhi views these processes mainly through the lens of new middle-class imaginaries and the activities of middle-class organisations such as Residents Welfare Associations, in contrast to the substantial body of work on urban restructuring which points to the complex agendas of the state and capital in driving these 'worlding' projects. However, Brosius's focus on the real estate market, advertising (which enables 'social control over the imagination', p. 140) and the role of NRI investments are important angles that have not been pursued in detail in the urban studies literature on India.

The second section on the ACC, 'A Spiritual Mega-experience', is the most ethnographic and detailed of the three case studies, drawing on extended visits, conversations with officials, volunteers and visitors, and detailed observations of the material culture of the complex and its displays as well as ritual and sightseeing performances. It also includes an account of the unique history and organisational structure of BAPS

(the *Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha*), a transnational religious movement that originated as an offshoot of the original Swaminarayan sect of Gujarat. Brosius argues that BAPS seeks to construct a moral community around devotion to a guru and collective ritual practices, but what it actually does is to produce ‘modern selves’ by providing the means for the regulation of life conduct, imparting an accessible form of religious practice and producing a packaged and easily digestible version of national cultural heritage—all of which cater to the cultural needs of the city’s cosmopolitan residents. Although her analysis of the visual culture and rituals of the ACC is insightful and detailed, in this section, Brosius surprisingly loses her focus on the question of class. She suggests that there is something quintessentially urban, modern and cosmopolitan about ACC as an ‘ambitious heterotopia...a statement of national pride a la India Shining and international recognition of being “world-class”’ (p. 257)—a characterisation that presumably links this phenomenon to the rise of the new middle class. However, she does not unpack in detail the social diversity of ACC’s constituencies or visitors, nor does she draw on her ethnography to really explore how middle-class identity is being reconstituted by such organisations. This analysis stands in contrast to Srivastava’s (2009) work on the ACC where he connects the restructuring of the middle class (including the emergence of a vernacular lower middle-class fraction) and the fashioning of a ‘moral middle class’ to the ‘beautification’ drive in Delhi.

The final section on ‘Managing Love, Romance, and Beauty’ is the thinnest of the three, drawing mainly on advertisements and a few interviews with people such as wedding planners and owners of weight loss clinics. As in the earlier discussion of urban space, shopping malls and gated communities, the description does not provide much to surprise anyone familiar with contemporary urban India. One wishes that Brosius had given us either more ethnographic details on these sites or a theoretical analysis that goes beyond a rather predictable sociological account of the connections between class, consumption and lifestyle. Moreover, although the three themes are broadly related, they are not well integrated into an overall argument and so appear to be three separate studies collected into a single book. Nonetheless, *India’s Middle Class* is an important contribution to the growing literature on this subject, especially by showing how consumption and leisure practices produce and reproduce class privilege—insights that are particularly significant

in view of India's rapid but highly contested urban redevelopment programmes.

REFERENCE

Srivastava, Sanjay. 2009. 'Urban Spaces, Disney-Divinity and Moral Middle Classes in Delhi.' *Economic and Political Weekly* 44 (26-27): 338-45.

School of Social Sciences

CAROL UPADHYA

National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore

Margaret Trawick. 2007. *Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood, and Play in Batticaloa*. Berkeley: University of California Press. xii + 307 pp. Notes, references, indices. £15.99 (paperback).

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This is the only account I know of which offers a glimpse into everyday life behind 'enemy lines' during a volatile period in the history of the Batticaloa district in eastern Sri Lanka. Margaret Trawick spent seven months, from late 1997 to mid 1998, as well as briefer stints in 1996 and 2002, living under the jurisdiction of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Tamil militant group warring with the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to wrest a separate state or Tamil Eelam. Her frequent forays into GoSL-controlled territory, just across the lagoon, to shop, visit the hospital and meet with other interviewees, heightened her awareness of the marked difference between what was commonly referred to as 'cleared' (GoSL-controlled) and 'uncleared' (LTTE-controlled) areas. Differences, she notes, '...in appearance, way of life, and shared and sharable knowledge between the two sides was striking' (p. 2). Less distinctive divides between childhood and adulthood, warfare and play, are what Trawick seeks to comprehend. These are crucial areas of inquiry and I salute her determination to explore them under insecure and trying circumstances. However, I was disappointed with Trawick's atheoretical and ahistorical stance, her political naiveté and lack of preparation prior to fieldwork, her cavalier attitude towards contextualisation and depth, and her disregard of the extensive scholarship on the conflict in Sri Lanka and Tamil society and culture in particular.

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