Crime Fiction:

Ian Rankin’s latest Edinburgh police procedural, *The Complaints*

Steig Larsson’s Millenium Trilogy

Paul Theroux’s debut attempt at crime fiction is *a Dead Hand*

Partha Basu unearths the *Secret Notebooks of John H. Watson, MD*

Tabish Khair reflects on the legitimacy of violence

Three books look at the fallout of the War on Terror

*A Global History of Modern Historiography* by George Iggers and others

Jaithirth Rao reviews Meghnad Desai’s *Rediscovery of India*

Agha Shahid Ali’s *Collected Poems* explore exile and reconciliation

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *Way to Go*

Christiane Brosius and Santosh Desai analyse India’s new Middle Class
Sociology:

From middle class to 'world class'

India's Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity
By Christiane Brosius
Routledge, New Delhi, 2010, 381 pp., Rs 795 (HB)

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These hybrids of global and local, East and West, elite and popular challenge not only the very concept of modernity, but also "ethnocentric and colonial stereotypes of the world order". With extravagant wedding celebrations featuring DJs imported from the UK, belly-dancers from the Middle East and bartenders from Russia, the 'new India' ruptures the expectation that knowledge, goods and power will always flow from a (Western) centre to a (non-Western) periphery, or that Indians will always flock to the West. As Brosius notes, the new middle classes are far more committed to living in India than their more genteel counterparts of pre-liberalisation times.
India's new middle classes have embraced and reproduced selective Orientalist notions about the country, such that it was an enchanted land inhabited by luxuriant Maharajas. Such notions are at the core of a new form of nationalism that refutes the country's 'Third World' reputation. The endeavour, however, is not to reinvent India as a carbon copy of the West, but through the manufactured nostalgia of a glorious, opulent, Hindu past. In part belligerent capitalist and in part 'auto-Orientalist,' these new nationalists are 'modern Maharajas' who see themselves as "promoting economic growth by spending money" and as "custodians of Indian culture, tradition and moral values" (p. 79).

Brosius skillfully navigates these complex and interlocking changes, weaving in insights from hundreds of scholars across dozens of disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, gender studies, art history and critical geography. There is a wide-eyed intensity to her somewhat cluttered writing that renders it fresh and engaging. This is a person who knows and loves India well, and writes without a hint of condescension. Nonetheless, Brosius is sensitive to the darker side of the relentless desire to be 'world class.' Struggling to be competent consumers, the status-conscious pleasure-seekers we meet in her book submit to an oppressive regime of impression managers, lifestyle experts, vaastu consultants and psychotherapists. Beauty and wellness become a moral duty, especially for women, generating a "suble machinery of self-surveillance" that reveals "the nearly threatening idea of permanent wellness" (p. 349).

The political implications are even more disconcerting. While most, ethnocentric views about India's positioning in the global order may have been shaken off, elite-cum-transnational aspirations of being 'world class Indians' have translated into exclusionary notions of citizenship, and of what should be preserved as 'national heritage.' Central to the creation of these new hierarchies is the sort of ahistorical Hindu nationalism one encounters at the A.C.C. Indeed, Brosius's book is a powerful indictment of the anti-intellectualism of the Hindu Right, and its rhetoric of 'India Shining.'

Also key to new processes of marginalisation, however, are contestations over public space. Urban middle classes, in particular, have used "discourses such as safety and threat, cleanliness and dirt, purity and pollution" (p. 49) to project themselves as the 'noblest citizens' of the city. As Brosius points out, such conflicts are relatively new, since leisure and solitude, as lifestyle-forms, have come to be valued and linked to public spaces only recently. The results, in any case, are palpable. Metropoles such as Delhi and Mumbai are being carved into exclusive enclaves for their managerial and technocratic elites, with the surrounding spaces deemed "allegorical no-go-zones" (p. 92), populated by "undeserving" social groups like slumdwellers and beggars. The city, as Brosius suggests, is increasingly "following the patterns of a multi-national corporation" rather than a state government (p. 140).

Of course, this subject is new. Brosius complements studies by scholars such as Amita Baviskar, Leela Fernandes and Partha Chatterjee, who have examined the bourgeois turn in India's cities, the rise of politically aggressive middle 'citizen groups,' and the associated privatisation and securitisation of public space. The book is also a significant addition to the broader, global literature on the 'neo-bourgeois city' and its driving thesis that, across the world, the attitude of public authorities vis-à-vis the urban poor is shifting from one of developmental/welfarist paternalism to one of outright rejection. Sparred on by globally connected but locally disconnected middle class groups that demand the beautification and gentrification of their cities, local governments seem more committed than ever to the purging of marginalised groups, such as squatters, hawkers, sex workers, pan handlers. Erasing political graffiti from public spaces is another pet hobby, particularly in rich cities such as Berlin, Los Angeles and Toronto.

Indeed, given the depth of such transformations in other parts of the world, Brosius may be fairly accused of exaggerating the extent to which middle-class aspirations in India have been transformed into tangible reality. While she acknowledges that tenants of luxury residential complexes often find that "pools are not filled with water" and "tennis courts and children's playgrounds never built" (p. 141), her rather frenetic inventory of new developments submerges the fact that these changes are actually quite fragile. There is a large gap between ferocious desire and tenuous reality that is not adequately captured in the book.

Furthermore, while Brosius devastatingly exposes the mechanisms through which marginalisation occurs, there is insufficient focus on how middle-class tenacity is being countered. After all, India's urban poor are numerically in the majority. Also, they comprise families, communities and social networks, and are not the isolated, abandoned individuals one sees in the Global North. It is unlikely that India's poor will shrug off without a good fight. A little more light on the moment of resistance that has fractured the desire to be 'world class' would have made this immensely rich book all the more vibrant.