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By: Mitu Sengupta **Category: Sociology**

In a book of extraordinary depth and range, Christiane Brosius explores a decade's worth of shifts in the social, cultural and political identity of India's burgeoning middle class. At first, the project seems overly ambitious, if not impossible, given that the category 'middle class' is notoriously difficult to define, and there is only limited consensus on how many middle classers there are in contemporary India (300 million is an often-quoted figure). However, Brosius masterfully evades this definitional quagmire by focusing not on numbers, but on the desires of those who aspire to be middle class, and the expressions these desires take.

Brosius, a professor of Visual and Media Anthropology at the University of Heidelberg, sifts through real estate brochures, lifestyle magazines, webpages, and advertisements, collected onwards from the mid-1990s, to provide an energetic and intimate account of the longing, by a rather heterogeneous group of people both inside and outside the country, to be 'world class' Indians (Brosius sees overseas or non-resident Indians— 'NRIs'—as important interlocutors in this process). Broadly speaking, Brosius's subjects are the material beneficiaries and ideological proponents of India's market reforms, but it is evident that what they really have in common is the desire to be part of an "imagined cosmopolitan elite" (p. 37), one that is only loosely connected to India, and then too, to its idealisation as an affluent and globally influential entity.