

Living Class in Urban India. By Sara Dickey. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2016. 282 pp., \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-8135-8391-4).

India is a country well-known for her inequalities, which are commonly assumed to be the consequences of the traditional caste system. However, since the beginning of liberalization in 1991 and the nation's partaking into globalization new forms of inequality have forged their way, so social class has become a more prominent fact. The Indian middle class have recently brought the attention of many scholars, including Sara Dickey. A professor of anthropology at Bowdoin College, Dickey has focused most of her research on South India. This is also the case of *Living Class in Urban India*, where she updates part of her previous publications. Her research on the middle class in Madurai (Tamil Nadu) was carried out in over fifteen years, and it is primarily based on the life experiences of interviewees, thus analyzing how class is performed and reproduced at a local level.

In the first two chapters, the author explains the nature of her work and offers a concise account of the changes in society that the period of liberalization supposed. Next, Dickey introduces the reader to the stories of Kannan, an auto rickshaw driver who put one of his daughter's health ahead of the other's dowry; Anjali, a girl whose determination (together with her family's support) to get a university degree provided her the possibility to start her own business; Jeyamani, a domestic worker whose hopes for a better life seemed to vanish despite her efforts to ascend in the social scale; and Usha, a woman who had to give up her studies in order to marry and adopt her designed role as a wife. These four people go through different experiences based not only on their social class but also on their caste; and because the former is not static, they are involved in a continuous struggle for upward social mobility.

Henceforth, these interviewees' stories reveal the complexity of belonging to the middle class via the caste system in India. Educa-

tion plays a fundamental role in shaping their prospects, although only those with enough economic capital can afford to study. Marriage here is a unique element when it comes to reproduce class: parents seek someone to match (or even surpass) their own status, so marriages reassure the safety net between two families—and weddings are an occasion to display symbolic power. The semantics of lending has changed with liberalization: loans and debts are considered either dishonorable or a trait of social success, depending on who is the borrower and who is the lender. Bank loans are given to economically viable people whereas local moneylenders are resorted to by the poor. Besides, Dickey says social connections facilitate further success for the “haves” by providing fast-track access to information and advantages. Quite like Mark Liechty's Nepal's middle class in *Suitably Modern* (2003), Madurai's middle groups aspire to be safely placed between the two social poles, and that explains why they face a constant need to prove their status by any means, either by purchasing the right consumer goods or by adopting a behavior based on moderation. They therefore deal with class anxiety to keep their position and be recognized by others.

In addition to the four interviewees, the research is completed by two more stories that focus on different kinds of gift-giving as well as on the uncomfortable coexistence of modernity and tradition.

It cannot go unnoticed that one of the distinctive features of Dickey's book is the extensive use of Tamil words. As she incorporates more native terms to her analysis, it becomes harder for the non-initiated to sometimes follow the text—and the reading might be hampered. This notwithstanding *Living Class in Urban India* compiles an exhaustive research on Madurai's middle class and leaves little room to understand how liberalization is currently shaping social structure in India.

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