

★ **The Dream Builders****Oindrila Mukherjee**

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In Oindrila Mukherjee's novel *The Dream Builders*, the inhabitants of a developing Indian city seek happiness and prosperity in all the wrong places.

Despite everything she has accomplished since high school—a PhD, a professorship in the US—Maneka never got over her jealousy toward the “beautiful girls” she went to school with. Girls like Ramona, now a glamorous wife, whose wealth and busy social life hide the pain of a recent loss and her own insecurities. After her mother's death brings her back to India, Maneka spends the summer relearning her country's rhythms and realizing just how little she knows about her fellow countrymen.

Though Maneka is centered, the narrative also gives voice to others from varying backgrounds and walks of life, including snobbish, vulnerable Ramona; Pinky, an impoverished masseuse whose wealthy clients confide in her without thought or reservation; and Jessica, a single mother whose relationship with a powerful man allows her to provide for her shunned adopted daughter. Each character's story is a single thread in the multilayered novel, which reveals the devastating gulf between rich and poor people, and between those who are either happy or unhappy. Trump Towers, under construction in burgeoning Hrishipur, serves as a backdrop to their drama. It represents different ideas to different people—it's a beacon of hope, a barrier to success, and an unattainable dream. But through the Towers, the dangers of putting all of one's hope or hate into one object is revealed: objects can be taken away by single, unexpected events. Each person's reaction to the tragedy defines who they are and how they will go on.

The Dream Builders is a sweeping novel in which people go to great lengths to quell their feelings of loneliness and inadequacy.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2023)

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