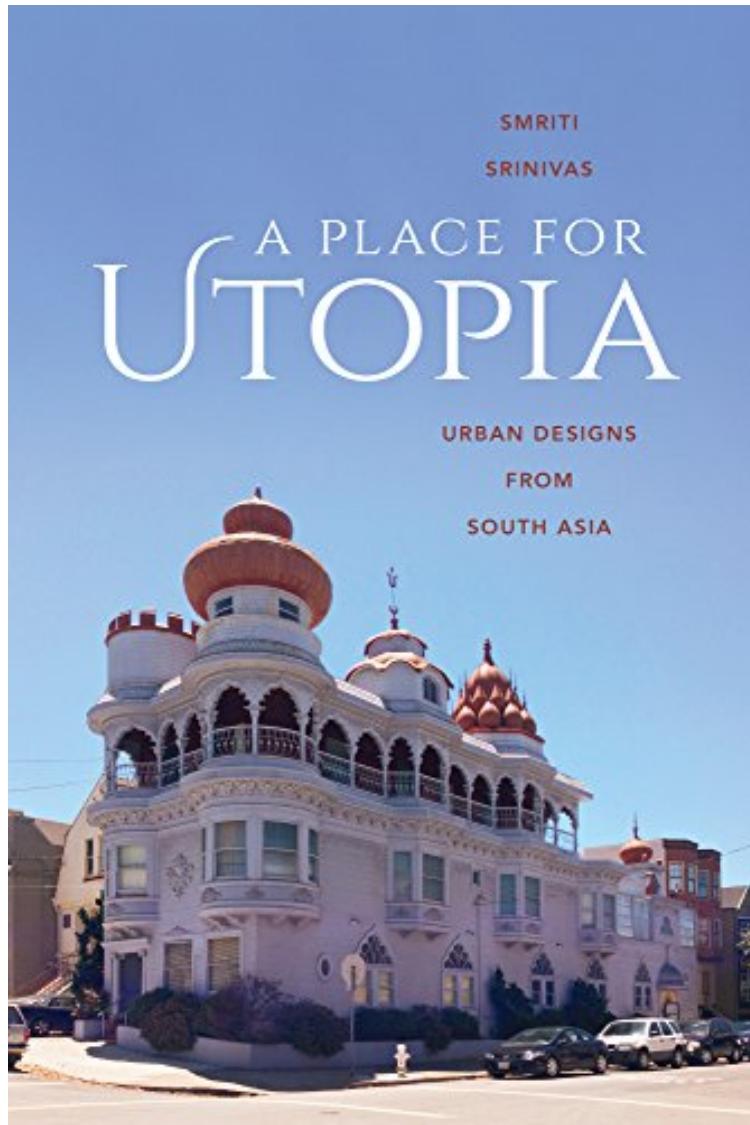


(Download ebook) A Place for Utopia: Urban Designs from South Asia (Global South Asia)

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Smriti Srinivas
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Smriti Srinivas : A Place for Utopia: Urban Designs from South Asia (Global South Asia) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Place for Utopia: Urban Designs from South Asia (Global South Asia):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Geddes holistic view of reality caused him to understand that sewage and waste could be used in gardens and zoos rather than ...By cpmiller15I appreciate Smriti Srinivas's work for several reasons. First, she shows a deep concern for the body and its relation to the environment throughout. In doing so, she

challenges the hegemony of the Cartesian worldview and asks us to take alternative worldviews more seriously. Her book unveils occluded ways of being in the world that also challenge the hegemony of colonial discourse that still pervades Indian life today. In the end, I get the sense that Srinivas is dreaming of utopia, and I can't help but dream with her. Here is a quick summary: In *A Place for Utopia*, Smriti Srinivas explores the transnational nature of utopias in Europe, America, and South Asia. Though much of the work regarding utopias has been performed around Western notions of utopia, she asserts, South Asia has its own overlooked utopian ideas that are worth our consideration (3). According to Srinivas, the book is "an extended case study of the valency of utopia for understanding designs for alternative, occluded, vernacular, or emergent urbanisms in the last hundred years" (5). Several scholars inform the methods by which she accomplishes her task, as she invokes Amitav Ghosh's fictional anthropology, the mobile methodology of Marc Augé; and Joseph Alter's consideration of the body's semiotic histories and the alternative modernities that arise from such considerations (5). Her self-conscious aim in writing the book is to "write another kind of story of utopias - one of contrapuntal histories, contiguity of lives, and resonances between utopian worlds that is generative of designs for cultural alternatives and futures" (6). Finally, rather than subordinating urban worlds to the forces of the economy and politics, Srinivas seeks to challenge the narrow-sighted "trajectories of the urban" (9). Chapter 1 considers urban planner Patrick Geddes' famous Indore report. As Srinivas points out, Geddes was concerned with the totality of existence, including life and death, all of which could be incorporated within an urban setting (14-16). Geddes was a unique city planner due to the fact that he advanced the idea that eutopia, or "no place," had to be created by citizens themselves (16). Furthermore, despite his European origins, Geddes found it of utmost importance that India's local cultural contexts should be considered in urban design, unlike the many urban planners whom he criticized for not doing so (19-20). Srinivas highlights the fact that despite his innovative approach to urban design, his work in South Asia has not yet received sufficient scholarly treatment (21). By selecting some of the specific aspects of his work, it becomes possible to imagine a "biocentric science of Indian urban futures" (21). As Srinivas points out, Geddes undertook urban planning with several innovative considerations in mind. First, he viewed citizenship as primarily grounded in pilgrimage (22). This leads him to adopt a pedestrian approach to city planning (29). Furthermore, Geddes did not see human and nature as separate, but rather as a united whole which might be recovered through a "synthetic and evolutionary cosmography" (26). Because of the unity between body and urban world (what he referred to as *Nagar-Yoga*), Geddes asserted the need to keep the city's elements clean, something he found as a core concept in "all faiths" (33). In order to create the dynamic through which local citizens might understand this concept, he articulated it in the local vernacular via festival processions in the street linking the city to river crossings (31). Nevertheless, Geddes holistic view of reality caused him to understand that sewage and waste could be used in gardens and zoos rather than merely being disposed as "dead inorganic matter" (35). Finally, city education could be used to focus on the practical needs of the community wherein civic and intellectual life are considered integral rather than isolated phenomena (40). Srinivas compares the work of several other contemporaries with whom Geddes shared close ontological affinities including Edward Carpenter, Gandhi, and Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (42-47). Something all of these individuals share, she concludes, is "the beauty of practice that depends on and engenders form, truth, and knowledge... and the possibility of a sense of plenitude and healing in soil, gardens, and growth and in air, water, fire, earth, or ether" (49). In other words, a sense of urban planning grounded in local ontology rather than that of the colonizers. Moving into chapter 2, Srinivas explores "ecotopias" (a term from Ernest Callenbach's cult classic) by taking us into the gardens of the South Indian city (63). Here, she coins the phrase "spiritualist space design" to refer to forms of place-making that are connected with phenomena such as spiritualism, and most specifically that were found in the spiritualist movement of Theosophy (64). Showcasing a new historical figure, Srinivas then introduces her reader to Jinarajadasa, a modest Theosophist whose writings have been occluded from the history of Theosophy but who, nevertheless, articulated "a refuge for ecotopian potential" in a manner theretofore unmatched (64). According to Srinivas, what makes Jinarajadasa unique is his assertion that "Theosophy is an embodied practice, that every action well done and every act of self-sacrifice releases more Life, a calculus of transmutation and sublimation that is also grounded in place" (67). Jinarajadasa manifested his metaphysical outlook, as Srinivas points out, through the careful and ongoing management of the vast acreage of the Adyar Gardens (74). By combining the South Indian Victorian garden with comparative religion, the Buddhist Sangha, and non-human and human nature using a spiritualist design, Jinarajadasa realized his ecotopian vision (75). A nomad who was very much a product of his time and heavily influenced by the apex of Buddhism in the Theosophical society, Jinarajadasa, similar to Geddes' notion of the city, put forward the idea that the garden could be a spatial location where culture and nature could meet for the benefit of both (82). Ultimately, Srinivas concludes, "...Jinarajadasa's ideas of a forest fraternity, the sangha of trees and men, the flower within the individual, and childhood's association with gardens all speak of a design for a different ethics of interaction between human and nonhuman nature through reincarnation and renunciation" (82). Chapter 3 moves us to North America with the California Vedanta Society, where we find transnational place-making as individuals such as Geddes are interacting with Vivekananda and many others. By recognizing the cross-fertilization that was taking place during this time period around the turn of the twentieth century, Srinivas proposes that we can challenge the monologic that insists that the Ramakrishna Order, via

Vivekananda, transmitted the teachings of South Asian religions onto American soil. Rather, she insists that we see the transreligious and transcultural dialogue that was taking place during this time, and how it produced designs for Utopian life for the countless individuals who were wandering around the world and wanted to create "a good place to dwell in" (88). The Sacramento Vedanta Center serves as the locus for Srinivas analysis of the aforementioned cross-cultural exchange. Like other religious movements, she reminds us, the American Vedanta center roots its beliefs into specific media that allows practitioners to reimagine themselves, their homes, and their community across space and time. In the California center, the space conveys a sense of global ecumenicalism using two main features: the three central images of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Sarada Devi and the inclusion of images of other religious icons from other religious traditions (95). She highlights how the western publication "Vedanta and the West" from the 1930s and 1940s was a key means by which this message of ecumenicalism had been broadcast to the world (113). After a discussion regarding the ways in which Ramakrishna's Tantric legacy was adapted into American Vedanta, Srinivas concludes by reasserting that rather than being purely influenced by this tradition, the local South Asian community in urban California has and continues to invigorate American Vedanta on its own terms, creating "the possibility for multiple designs of place-making, body-crafting, and their pasts and futures" (120). Taking us back to South India, we find ourselves in the city of Bangalore in chapter 4. Following the chronological developments of the city's infrastructure, Srinivas splits this chapter into two parts, one looking at the city's newer periphery and the other looking at the city's older neighborhoods. By comparing these two parts of the city, we can get a perspective of different ways that people conceive of what it means to make a good place in the city. She looks here at the specific ways in which political and social identities are produced and lay claim to liberalization's benefits, and how notions of the "Indian New Age" are critical to this process of production (126). In part one, Srinivas looks at the "Homespace" show in Bangalore. Here, she observes how property brochures deceptively promise an independent lifestyle free of the worries of "messy Bangalore" (128). She then moves to discuss the alternative medicine practices that have arisen in the city's periphery, all of which are used in order to make sense of the messy, confusing, and painful world in which citizens find themselves and all of which "destabilize the boundaries between [the religious, the medical, the material, and the scientific] but together produce anomalous and multiple meanings within the Indian New Age" (145). In part two, Srinivas enters Bangalore's older neighborhoods and employs a pedestrian methodology within the space of three different thresholds: a roadside St. Anthony shrine, a Sai Baba shrine (that is really a mannequin stripped of its ritual significance and embedded within consumption patterns [152]), and finally an Ayurveda center that serves the Indian New Age needs of middle-class women (145). Throughout these spaces, Srinivas identifies a recurring theme, that is, "the spatial persistence of the past" wherein "Urban religiosity and the Indian New Age - its performances, somatic practices, symbols, and architectural structures - obviously weave in and out of these multiple histories." "Further," she concludes, "in the process of constructing the urban... older sites and landmarks never truly disappear but materially or through their representations may be recombined with emerging others to produce different designs of urban futures" (158). In conclusion, Srinivas asserts that pedestrian-quotidian living must be taken seriously as a method for studying the urban (161). Borrowing the term *nagar-yoga* from Patrick Geddes, she proposes "somatic citizenship" wherein the mobile sensory body comes to be a means by which we can understand place (161-62). Towards the end of her work, she imagines that utopia is a means for better urban living via a "biocentric urbanism" (165). Her intention in presenting all of these case studies is to show designs for the urban that make it a place for "healing, greening, children, and more life" (165-66). And who would say no to that?

Exploring several utopian imaginaries and practices, *A Place for Utopia* ties different times together from the early twentieth century to the present, the biographical and the anthropological, the cultural and the conjunctural, South Asia, Europe, and North America. It charts the valency of "utopia" for understanding designs for alternative, occluded, vernacular, or emergent urbanisms in the last hundred years. Central to the designs for utopia in this book are the themes of gardens, children, spiritual topographies, death, and hope. From the vitalist urban plans of the Scottish polymath Patrick Geddes in India to the Theosophical Society in Madras and the ways in which it provided a context for a novel South Indian garden design; from the visual, textual, and ritual designs of Californian Vedanta from the 1930s to the present; to the spatial transformations associated with post-1990s highways and rapid transit systems in Bangalore that are shaping an emerging ?Indian New Age? of religious and somatic self-styling, Srinivas tells the story of contrapuntal histories, the contiguity of lives, and resonances between utopian worlds that are generative of designs for cultural alternatives and futures.?

"A Place for Utopia's effort to engage religiosity as a foundational force is significant. And, although there is a vast literature in humanities and social sciences on utopic forms and their realizations, past and present, this book is distinctive in its breadth and in its transcultural scope."?Mary Hancock, author of *Politics of Heritage from Madras to Chennai*"A Place for Utopia digs deep into an archive that details the intricate circuitries of ideas, projects, and institutions affiliated with critical strands of somatic practices and spiritual thought largely centered on and in India. This is a unique book in contemporary urban studies."?AbdouMaliq Simone, author of *Jakarta: Drawing the City*

Near" Srinivas establishes historical and intellectual linkages among an astonishing array of ideas and practices that nevertheless shared a focus in common: the development and furtherance of spiritual capacities amidst the tumult of urban life. This book underscores the breadth and durability of an under-appreciated intellectual tradition within modern urban thought?one that might broadly be called organicism?by placing it within a transnational religious frame. A truly engaging read."?William J. Glover, author of *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City*"A work of deep and prescient intellectual insight, Srinivas focuses on the question of how utopias are produced and experienced in practice and the imagination. She artfully weaves together a set of fascinating questions about the place of the future in the present, challenging us to think critically about how the body, urban environments, and religious experience are at once grounded in the reality of everyday life and how they transform this reality by anticipating the possibility of transcendence."?Joseph Alter, Yale-NUS CollegeAbout the AuthorSmriti Srinivas is professor of anthropology at the University of California, Davis. She is the author of *Landscapes of Urban Memory: The Sacred and the Civic in India's High-Tech City*; *In the Presence of Sai Baba: Body, City, and Memory in a Global Religious Movement*; and *The Mouths of People, The Voice of God: Buddhists and Muslims in the Frontier Community of Ladakh*.