

Yamini Narayanan, *Religion, Heritage and the Sustainable City: Hinduism and Urbanization in Jaipur*

London and New York: Routledge, 2015. xx + 236 pages. 8 illustrations, list of illustrations, foreword, acknowledgements, prologue, list of abbreviations, glossary, index. Hardcover, \$148.00; Paperback, \$52.95; eBook, \$52.95. ISBN 9780415844666 (hardback); 9781138056947 (paperback); 9780203750797 (eBook).

Opening the series *Routledge Research in Religion and Development*, Yamini Narayanan attempts to “reconceptualiz[e] policies on sustainable urban development” by “establish[ing] that religion forms an important element of place in Indian cities” (7, 8). She advances an inclusive conception of sustainability, encompassing not only ecological issues but also social ones, such as gender equity and inter-religious harmony, and she advocates for a participatory, rather than a technocratic, approach to urban planning. Furthermore, Narayanan even desires to complement the “planner’s gaze” with the “anthropologist’s gaze” (7). Given these orientations, it is then striking how this work is narrowly focused upon the Hindu aspects of Jaipur’s religious life and how its ethnography is relatively thin and is relegated to the book’s second half.

Narayanan’s work, overall, is largely intended for those scholars and practitioners of urban-planning and development who fail to notice religion. For more humanistically-oriented scholars who already perceive religion’s significance within cities, this work is

of less interest. However, for those social scientists studying heritage-rich urban settings without any background in urban policy, it does offer broad historical overviews of colonial and postcolonial urban planning as well as thoughtful and very helpful treatments of tangible and intangible forms of heritage. While many, especially anthropologists, may desire to learn more about Jaipur from this book, it must be stressed that if Narayanan's representation of urban-planning is accurate, then this is a work that may be invaluable for convincing its practitioners to take notice of religion, and to adopt, even if only briefly, a more anthropological perspective toward the lives of a city's residents.

Turning to the text, it has—including the introduction and conclusion—nine chapters, a foreword by Clara Greed, and a vivid prologue that fleetingly sets the reader in the middle of Jaipur. The book can be roughly divided into two parts with the introduction and subsequent three chapters constituting a foundation for the work in the second half that engages Jaipur more directly, including three longer ethnographically-oriented chapters that address issues of identity, gender, and environment. Each chapter has a clear and thoughtful set of headings and subheadings, thereby facilitating easy use as a reference, and endnotes and bibliographic references appear at each chapter's end.

In the first part, Narayanan slowly builds up a theoretical position and sense of context by which to consider Jaipur's walled-city and the significance of religion there. The introductory chapter effectively lays out the groundwork for the book and ends with a clear description of the following chapters. Chapter 2 broadly presents the history of urban planning in colonial and postcolonial South Asia, the conception of heritage in India, and an orientation to the author's engagement with religion. The next chapter more narrowly addresses India's older cities and how they have been neglected by a regime of postcolonial development more focused upon creating new, modern urban spaces. Chapter 4 addresses Hinduism and Hindu ideas of urban planning, and it may be the most problematic for some readers as it revisits the debate about Indian secularism and attempts to salvage, with too little development, a classical tradition of urban planning, the "Vaastu Shastras" [sic], as a form of secular Hinduism. While Jaipur is sometimes mentioned in these early chapters, they broadly address India's older cities.

The second half of the book is rather different due to its more ethnographic focus. In Chapter 5, Narayanan presents an overview of Jaipur and its history, particularly engaging with its "sacred and secular religious heritage" and its "inadequately considered experimentations with modern development" (103). Over several sections, she describes Jaipur's demography, its classical precolonial development, and its postcolonial development as Rajasthan's capital and a site of heritage tourism. While a very helpful overview of Jaipur's history, this chapter continues the insufficiently rigorous engagement with classical planning.

The sixth chapter is the best chapter in the book, and in it Narayanan addresses the issue of communal relations within Old Jaipur understood as a masculine, public space, or *mardana*. Her focus extends to include both a long-standing tradition of inter-religious harmony and the social integration of various caste groups, as well the growth of communal tension since 1992. While the chapter's narrower policy-oriented argument is relatively tautological, Narayanan seriously engages with how some in Old Jaipur think about communal relations, particularly as largely upper-caste men deploy the discourse of "*Ganga-Jamni tehzib*," or a culture of Hindu-Muslim relations which run together like the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. The consideration both of this

discourse and of its rejection by some Hindus enables a partial sense of the complexity of communal relations in this dense, urban setting. However, it is striking, given the author's expressed theoretical and methodological orientations, that she does not engage more with Muslims and their discourses about either the state of communal relations or the local composite culture that Narayanan is interested in highlighting and supporting.

In Chapter 7, Narayanan shifts from the city as *mardana* to the city's female residents. This chapter offers a less pointed argument about urban planning than the previous chapter and it instead highlights how patriarchal beliefs and practices, including aspects of Hindu tradition, may undermine the ability of women to access their "right to the city." This chapter is unfortunately less robust in its presentation of and its engagement with gendered reflections on the city than the previous chapter with issues of religious division. Ultimately, it offers a rather general discussion of religion as an ambivalent social institution which largely facilitates patriarchy but which may also enable female emancipation, particularly for upper-caste and broadly middle-class women.

Narayanan in Chapter 8 addresses the significance of "ecological senses of place" and the potential in Jaipur for religion to negatively contribute to or to potentially address various ecological issues. Setting out from a very general perspective on broadly Hindu ideas of caring for the environment, the author addresses several major ecological challenges. She addresses how these issues are related to religious outlooks and practices, and in the conclusion to the chapter Narayanan shows less interest in understanding the relations of religion and ecology in the minds and lives of Jaipur's resident than in uncovering the lost knowledge of the India's classical planning tradition and suggesting that contemporary religion be reformed "such that active and reflective ecological care may be foregrounded more sharply in religious practice, in ways appropriate to the needs of the contemporary city" (207).

In the concluding chapter, Narayanan clearly summarizes her arguments about the significances of religion for India's historic cities and their spirit of place and then briefly touches upon the issues addressed in the previous three chapters.

While it clearly presents her strong affection for Jaipur and deep empathy for its residents, Narayanan's work does not provide a very ethnographically rich view of Jaipur. It at times presents a clear and strong case for the religion's significance in urban life, a contention that many outside of urban-planning may not question, but the spirit, or spirits, of Jaipur fail to materialize before the reader as the voices of residents are neither as representative nor as thoroughly engaged as they could have been. Fundamentally, this work likely appears to those outside of urban planning as belonging to that field as Narayanan describes it, highly abstract with a top-down perspective and less than fully attentive to the lives of residents. However, given the author's representation of that field, this work may be a very necessary and accessible intervention for her primary audience of policy-oriented scholars and planning practitioners.

Finally, it is unfortunately necessary to note that this volume has been undermined by serious editorial shortcomings. The clearest is in the text's glossary, where several Hindi terms are missing final letters or syllables. Relatedly, the text neither uses a standard transliteration system to denote long vowels nor completely ignores vowel length, thereby resulting in odd transliterations, such as "*Vāstu Śāstra*" as "*Vaastu Shastra*." Furthermore, the text itself required greater editing for clarity. A striking example of this is evident in the text's three divergent presentations of the confluence

of the sacred Yamuna and Ganga rivers. While potentially minor issues, their accumulation results either in confusion for those unfamiliar with India or in doubts about the work's accuracy for those who are.

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