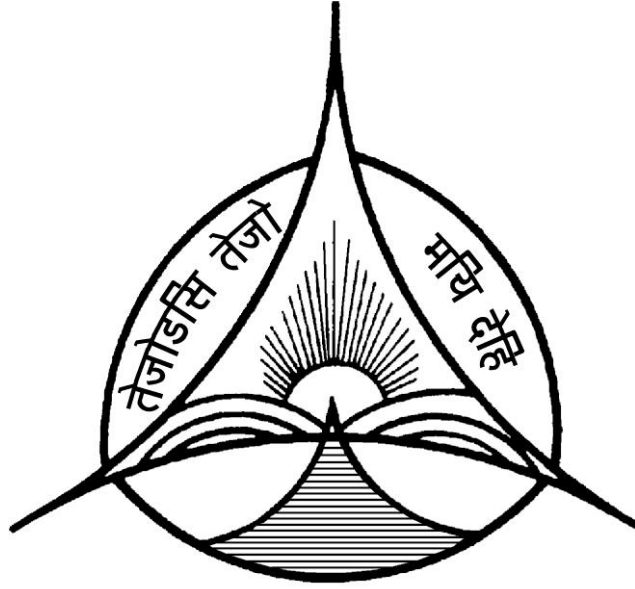


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Entangled Urbanism: Slum, Gated Community and Shopping Mall in Delhi and Gurgaon by Sanjay Srivastava, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015

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This book is a commendable effort in the field of urban anthropology in India that addresses questions of space, state and community formation. By focusing on a variety of field sites, the book reconstructs the politics of space that frames contemporary Delhi. It manages to go beyond its specific setting by offering a theoretically informed and grounded exploration of the relationship between the state, market and community formation, terms that can potentially lose analytical purchase if looked at too closely. But Srivastava's powerful ethnography distills ways and means through which this relationship unfolds in Delhi by connecting life stories of his protagonists with the fuzzy matrix of spatial transformation.

The book is divided into 11 chapters that deal with different modes of urban living—a slum and a resettlement colony, gated communities, a temple complex, malls and a multilevel marketing company. These sites are presented as interconnected spaces that facilitate community formation, negotiations with the state and consumption practices that produce a sense of belonging and citizenship. The first three chapters revolve around Nangla Matchi, a *basti* in Delhi that was demolished by the government in 2006. Srivastava is adept at bringing the place alive by tracing its origins to the work of a *hijra* Pradhan who initiated the setting up of dwellings and provision of electricity. He emphasises the hybrid nature of Nangla that has a complex relationship with adjoining *pucca* localities and the state. Chapter 2 examines arbitrary surveys, fake identity documents and illegal transactions that are part and parcel of *basti* life. The mimicry of the state by the poor, through trickery and forgery, is crucial to the making of convivial community life. This argument is not entirely new, as Srivastava acknowledges in the book, since it has been pointed out earlier by researchers that politics in South Asian cities revolves around contestations and claims around space that are articulated through illegal occupancies and illicit transactions. He successfully demonstrates in Chapter 3 the fragility of these claims on space by poor groups through a meticulous reconstruction of the story of demolition of the *basti*.

The next section, that is Chapters 4 to 7, embarks on more interesting terrains, as they recount the story of the city from the point of view of its more privileged citizens who consolidate their

middle class identity by forming resident welfare associations, by raising protective walls, and by participating in circuits of new consumption practices. Chapter 4 examines the Bhagidari movement that formally included resident welfare associations in urban development. The author points out that ‘urban life is increasingly expressed in the language of the market, where boundaries between civic action, corporate strategy, and state responsibility are increasingly blurred’. In Chapter 5 he moves on to discuss the emergence of gated residential enclaves and attendant real estate development in Gurgaon, a town spatially contiguous to Delhi. Srivastava traces the history of DLF, one of the largest real estate companies in India, and its entanglements with the postcolonial state. The ethnographies of life in gated enclaves in Gurgaon brings to the fore the ‘urban landscapes with conspicuous territories of commerce, leisure and residence’. These glimpses into the lives of the rich are valuable as Srivastava establishes links between their affluence and consumerist modernity in the backdrop of a state that pursues neoliberal economic and social policies. Srivastava’s biographies of middle class residents of the city are perceptive, especially when he engages with the life courses of women who find autonomy and community life in these new urban spaces, be they malls or gated residential enclaves. The reconfiguration of rural and urban around the capital city-spatial tumult, in Srivastava’s words, is rendered visible to the reader as an affective as well as a spatial transformation through the biographies in Chapters 6 and 7.

Perhaps the most exciting chapter for the lay reader is the one on Akshardham temple complex in Delhi (Chapter 8). He documents how the illegal land transactions for the temple were regularised using political might and contrasts this with the plight of residents of Nangla. These unequal illegalities are crucial for sustaining the unevenness of the city and its development. The description of the interiors of the temple complex alerts the reader to the culture of spectacle that contemporary Hindu religion resorts to to consolidate its position in India. Srivastava points out that this culture is not unlike that of other urban spaces of consumption and leisure. This theme is pursued further in the next two chapters as he probes the practices of middle class consumers in malls and shopping districts. He observes that the corporate–state nexus that produced the idealised nuclear family has also produced a narrative of freedom through the spatial discourse of consumerism in these malls. He is attentive to fissures within the middle class in its ability to access this consumer-citizenship. Srivastava’s unfailing and equal sympathy towards his interlocutors, even as he probes into their everyday lives and affective universe, is inspiring. Yet, the reader wishes there were more linkages made between the life experiences and the caste positions of interlocutors bearing surnames like Khanna, Kapoor or Bhargav, as much as he does in the case of his Gounder, Jat or Gujar interlocutors.

In the final chapter, eschewing a conclusion, Srivastava embarks on another theme: that of multilevel marketing and the poor. This chapter helps him to reconnect with some of the people and sites he started the book with. He documents how the poor eagerly participate in commodity and consumption circuits, only to be spurned and cast away. His ethnography of the multilevel marketing company, *Revolution Forever* (an excessively ironical name), provides a tragic closure to this biography of Delhi. Srivastava writes in the final chapter that ‘the city is no whole entity, but a series of connected realms, each of distinct character, linking varied lives and processes into an urban entanglement’. This conclusion feels somewhat blasé given the varied and powerful ethnographies that almost jump off the pages. The connections between these realms remain somewhat underexplored and Srivastava is wrong to assume that it is the wholeness of the city that is in question here. One wishes he was a little less seduced by the spatial turn in social sciences.