

# Smart City in India

Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?

Binti Singh and Manoj Parmar



“The volume titled *Smart City in India: Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?* authored by Dr Binti Singh and Prof Manoj Parmar is a comprehensive and persuasive presentation of the smart city narrative currently operational in India. It is empirically rich in primary data from second tier smart cities like Lucknow, Jaipur and Varanasi, compiles secondary research from several sources and presents updated data up to the Ease of Living city rankings of 2018. The authors explain that planning and designing of smart cities in India necessitates an inclusive collaboration among residents, designers, and policy-makers. This volume opens new discussions, highlights human and sociological dimensions, and reimaginings in urban design and planning while offering workable solutions and views the smart city mission in India as an opportunity for every selected city to chart its own destiny based on its context.”

– **Chetan Vaidya**, *Former Director, School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), and National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), New Delhi, India*

“*Smart City in India: Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?* is a timely book reflecting on key opportunities in Indian cities. Innovation, sustainability and inclusiveness will have to be major drivers for cities. The authors Dr Binti Singh and Prof Manoj Parmar have compiled this volume based on extensive literature study and empirical cases which I am sure would help academicians and practitioners and people interested in urban affairs in India.”

– **Sameer Unhale**, *Chief Executive Officer, Thane Smart City Ltd. Thane, Maharashtra, India*

“The book is a unique synthesis of a detailed documentation on the concept of smart cities as imagined by the State juxtaposed against the reality and aspirations of its citizens, and an incisive analysis of the ‘smart city mission’. The authors have used robust tools for critiquing the project including conversations with stakeholders and multilayered field studies of communities and cities of Lucknow, Varanasi and Jaipur carried out by their students. The book suggests more nuanced ways to reimagine the smart city project. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the current state-of-art in smart city development in India.”

– **Alpa Sheth**, *Managing Director at VMS Consultants Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai, India*

“I am writing to endorse the upcoming book. In the current scenario of confusion and elusion on the idea of a ‘Smart City’, *Smart City in India: Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?* by Dr Binti Singh and Manoj Parmar will be able to shed some light on the key aspects of this concept and the various approaches that have been undertaken to implement it in the Indian context. The book illustrates how these approaches to the Smart City idea have been dealt with in the cities of Varanasi, Lucknow and Jaipur. These cities present a complex historic context which makes it interesting to examine how a rather futuristic notion of a ‘Smart City’ engages with the existing vibrant layer of historicity. To

add to this complexity are the realities of life and lifestyles in these cities. It will be therefore interesting to read the critical analysis and challenges of the smart city narrative in the context of urban realities.”

– **Navin Piplani**, *Principal Director, INTACH Heritage Academy, New Delhi, India*

“The collaborated effort of Dr Binti Singh and Prof Manoj Parmar in bringing out this book titled *Smart City in India: Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?* touches upon various issues of smartness itself in the context of Indian cities. Our cities are multi-cultural, multi-aspirational and to bring them into one fold of mono-culture with digito-technological governance will be uncalled for. The book also brings forth the fact that the Special Purpose Vehicle that is to implement the Smart City Plan is not planned or approved or implemented by democratically elected persons but by a set of bureaucrats and international firms determining the destinies of our (smart) cities. This is demeaning [to the] democratic processes of governance. While giving case studies of Lucknow and Varanasi [the] authors have emphasised that ‘one-size-fits-all’ should not be followed; each city has to formulate its own concept, vision, mission and plan (Smart City Plan/SCP) for a Smart City that is appropriate to its local context, resources and levels of ambition.”

– **Sudhir Badami**, *Structural Engineering graduate from IIT Bombay, India; he has been carrying out his own to limited extent Research, Advocacy, Planning and Integrated Design (RAPID) related to urban issues with emphasis on transportation and air pollution*

“In their timely book *Smart City in India: Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?* Manoj Parmar and Binti Singh deliver a first reality check of Narendra Modi’s 2015 Smart Cities policy. After a first euphoria for the potential of smart devices in urban planning and management, Parmar and Singh’s case studies of recently developed Smart Cities projects in India present a range of challenges, which resonate with the growing public concerns, regarding smart technologies’ role in impeding personal privacy, spreading hate speech, manipulating political elections, etc. Parmar and Singh’s studies show also how the outsourcing of urban planning and management to international technology giants has weakened democratic planning processes and public accountability, while often failing to deliver robust solutions. In addition, they present how the fixation on Smart City projects contributed to peri-urban development, regional fragmentation and social exclusion. Thus, Parmar and Singh’s book reveals three main layers of problems in the implementation of India’s Smart Cities Mission and their entanglement with the broader problem of our growing dependency on smart technologies.”

– **Hendrik Tieben**, *Associate Professor, School of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong*

“The book titled *Smart City in India: Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?* by Dr Binti Singh and Prof Manoj Parmar comes at an opportune time when 100 cities in India have embarked on the road to Smartness and many more are going to join in. The authors have painstakingly collated data on smart city projects and plans across India, undertaken in-depth case studies of Lucknow, Varanasi, Jaipur and one slum community in Mumbai to highlight important issues and challenges in the current narrative. The book is a useful guide for diverse stakeholders and urban managers to engage with the smart city mission with fresh ideas and perspective.”

– **Siddharth Dhende (MD)**, *Deputy Mayor, Pune, India*

“Manoj Parmar and Binti Singh provide a timely critical appraisal of ‘Smart City’ narratives, identifying realities that are suppressed by political rhetoric but also opportunities that may be unlocked. By situating ‘Smart Cities’ in [a] historical context, but, importantly, also within their own extensive empirical research, the authors offer a much needed scholarly study that will be of interest to academics across the social sciences, urban studies and planning, critical geography and cognate disciplines, but also to the political and societal actors within the multi-layered, multi-player scenarios of India’s rapid urbanisation.”

– **Christoph Lueder**, *Associate Professor, Architecture and Urbanism, Kingston School of Art, Department of Architecture and Landscape, London, UK*

“Dr Binti Singh and Prof Manoj Parmar’s book on smart cities in India presents an interesting analysis of contemporary urban planning in India. The book, articulated in several chapters covering various aspects and necessities of the Indian development, dives deep in the examination of a vast literature, providing a thorough orientation in the interpretation of the significant changes occurring in recent years. The book is an interesting tool to interpret challenges and urban endeavors in the Subcontinent, in the perspective of a globalizing world.”

– **Andrea Bertassi**, *Assistant Professor of Practice, University of Arizona, USA; Associate Architect, XCOOP, The Netherlands*

“The idea of the ‘smart city’ and the Smart City Mission have grabbed a lot of attention in India in recent years among scholars, activists, bureaucrats and citizens. However very little is actually known about the details of this mission, and still less about their desirability and outcomes. This book is a welcome contribution offering a comprehensive overview and nuanced critique of the smart city concept, mission, and implementation focusing on some of the keystone projects in selected cities. The book makes it evident that the mission undermines key objectives of democratic decentralization and devolution, while ignoring indigenous capabilities and designs, and needs of Indian urban settlements. The book goes beyond the rhetoric and publicity to focus on the

details, their implications, and their potential impacts on urban planning and management in India.”

– **D. Parthasarathy**, *India Value Fund Chair, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT Bombay), Mumbai, India; Convener, Interdisciplinary Program in Climate Studies, IIT Bombay, Mumbai, India*

“The idea of Smart Cities has taken on a mythical status which is not very helpful in thinking about the relationship between technology and urban planning. Through marshalling a range of empirical material on second-tier cities and exploring relationships between residents, private corporations, official bodies and planning ecosystems, this book provides an important overview of actually existing urbanism. It also asks us to remember that Indian cities are sites of great inequalities and urban planning must address this rather than sweep [it] under the carpet.”

– **Sanjay Srivastava**, *Professor of Sociology, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi University Enclave, Delhi, India*

“*Smart City in India: Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?* is a very timely analytical effort. It raises essential questions beyond conventional and rapidly changing terminologies examining what kind of focus, approaches and actions Indian cities need to achieve better livability, economic prosperity, social inclusiveness and sustainability. It rightly brings the discourse to the critical importance of local context tailored development with support of new technologies. I sincerely recommend this book to any urban stakeholder striving to make a difference in their city.”

– **Olga Chepelienskaia**, *Founder and Director, UNICITI; Program Manager, Sustainable Cities through Heritage Revival (SEHER Asia)*

“With India on a rapid path to urbanization, the country’s Smart City Mission is an important paradigm to understand, given its important role in shaping national urban policy and practice. Smart Cities have been controversial globally, being hailed for their role in improving efficiency and resilience, and critiqued for their impact on social justice and equity. Yet there has been limited scrutiny of this approach in the Indian context. *Smart City in India: Urban Laboratory, Paradigm or Trajectory?* fills an important gap, evaluating the Smart City Mission across the country, and providing an in-depth study in selected cities. Such research is urgently needed to better inform urban policy and practice, towards approaches that are context-specific, inclusive, and people-centric.”

– **Harini Nagendra**, *Professor of Sustainability at Azim Premji University, Bangalore, India*

“The Smart City in India confronts the oft-repeated and grandiose stories of how technology is changing urban environments. Combining research from

Lucknow, Varanasi, and Jaipur, along with an analysis of a slum in Mumbai, the book shows the more complicated picture that emerges from close and critical research. The spatial relationships emerging from the insertion of new digital infrastructures into existing urban realities, powered by large-scale government spending and orchestrated to increase further private investment, exacerbate existing social problems. Parmar and Singh bring an important focus to a topic that will elucidate not only the challenges facing India, but facing cities worldwide under the new regimes of neoliberal smartness.”

– **Sara Stevens**, *Assistant Professor and Chair of Urban Design, University of British Columbia's School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture in Vancouver, Canada*



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# SMART CITY IN INDIA

This book is a critical reflection on the Smart City Mission in India. Drawing on ethnographic data from across Indian cities, this volume assesses the transformative possibilities and limitations of the program. It examines the ten core infrastructural elements that make up a city, including water, electricity, waste, mobility, housing, environment, health, and education, and lays down the basic tenets of urban policy in India. The volume underlines the need to recognize liminal spaces and the plans to make the 'smart city' an inclusive one. The authors also look at maintaining a link between the older heritage of a city and the emerging urban space.

This volume will be of great interest to planners, urbanists, and policymakers, as well as scholars and researchers of urban studies and planning, architecture, and sociology and social anthropology.

**Binti Singh**, Associate Editor, Oxford Urbanists and Faculty, Master's Program in Urban Design and Conservation, KRVIA, Mumbai, India.

**Manoj Parmar**, Practicing Architect and Dean, Master's Program in Urban Design and Conservation, KRVIA, Mumbai, India.



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**This book is dedicated to all stakeholders who are working both individually and collectively to build the urban future of India.**



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