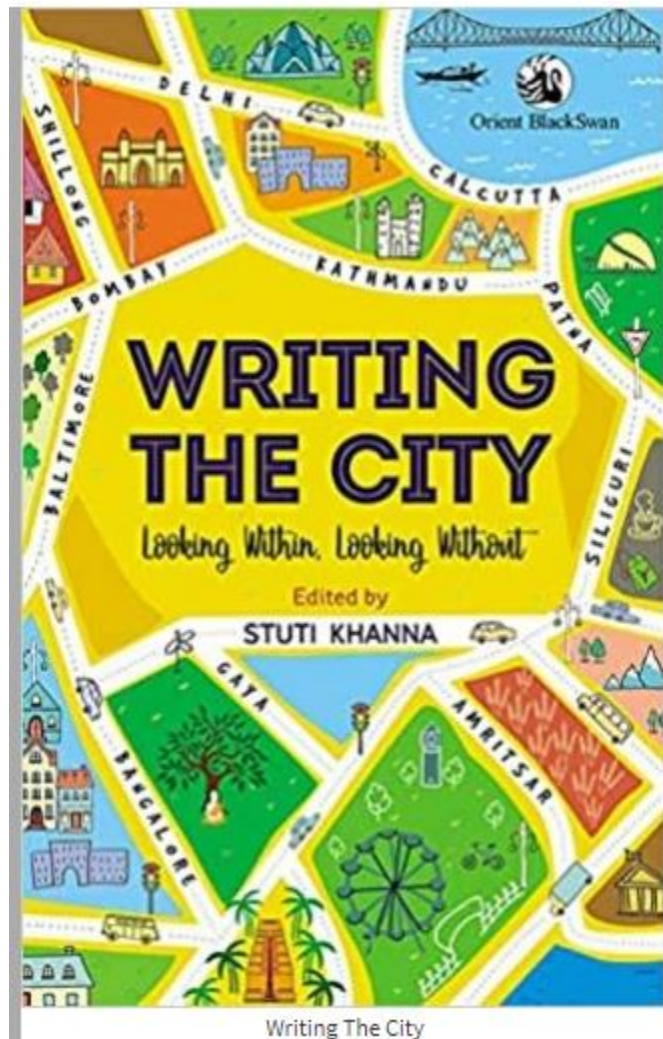


Cityscapes that resonate

This slim volume is a perfect mix of personal memoir and travel writing.



Sheila Kumar, JUN 20 2021, 01:04 IST | UPDATED: JUN 20 2021, 01:43 IST



The selected cities range from the capital of the country to Kolkata, Patna, Shillong, Mumbai, Gaya, Bengaluru, Amritsar, Siliguri, a short leap away to Kathmandu, then a longer leap all the way to Baltimore. These are intensely personal and unabashedly subjective depictions, and need to be read as such; the nuggets contained therein are mined from the essayist's lived or imagined experiences.

Editor Stuti Khanna talks of Georg Simmel, Dickens, Marquez, Rushdie, Aravind Adiga, Ratika Kapur and their ilk, writers who have settled their stories of much poignancy/joy/sorrow/wit, in cities that sometimes, though not always, took on a life of their own under the pen of these gifted flaneurs; how the cities imbue the writing with a certain richness and vitality, a slow coil of energy that lies dormant when it must, springs to startling life when it must.

Journeys in imagination

All the pieces are resonant pieces of writing, but some just happen to resonate more than the others and leave the reader with things to muse on. And so you have Chandradas Choudhury providing an interesting perspective on Delhi and Mumbai, opining that he fed off the distance and perspective on Mumbai provided by Delhi, seeing both cities as stable poles in his world. Mumbai, he says, is the presiding deity of his imagination, a place where he hears the hidden notes of life. Delhi, for its part, lets him experience the charm and propulsive force of another set of values.

Manju Kapur's canvas is a broader one, but her point is that no matter where she travelled abroad, she was always the outsider; within the country, however, she is immersed in it in a way that goes down to her bones. If writers have to perfect the art of persuasion, they need to convince themselves before they can convince anybody else, and India, does that for her.

Anita Nair's piece takes the reader to one of Bengaluru's most colourful areas, the Ramzan night market in Shivajinagar, and a work trip for her next novel opens up a world soaked in colour, sound and smell for us.

Cyrus Mistry keeps referencing his famous brother Rohinton in his piece, where he writes of the political city. He makes an ironical point when he says that several of Rohinton's works are all set in a Bombay of long ago, not in Canada, where the author has lived for many decades now. Zac O'Yeah casts a sardonically witty eye on his city of residence, Bengaluru, stating firmly that every self-respecting metropolis needs its own detective novel series.

The writer, who gave Beantown its own home-grown gumshoe, Hari Majestic, tells us how he wandered the streets of the Majestic area, taking in sights, sounds, smells and of course the people too, all of which became eventual grist to his creative mill. O'Yeah ends on a note of pure whimsy when he avers that writing books is a little similar to staying alive in Bengaluru, basically a chaotic activity.

Heading to what is known as a B town, Siddharth Chowdhury declares that his aim is to write Patna stories that are accessible everywhere, provincial in setting, but never in tone, realistic in flight, but majestic in their dying fall. Sumana Roy takes us to Siliguri and writes about her home there, giving us a clear picture of a house, a neighbourhood, a state of being, a remembrance of things past and present.

As for Anees Salim, it took him years of escaping to the cities to turn his gaze inwards, homewards. He duly takes us on an evocative walk through his hometown, an unnamed town in Kerala. In short, this book is an interesting look at the inner and outer landscape of a writer.

<https://www.deccanherald.com/sunday-herald/sunday-herald-books/cityscapes-that-resonate-998920.html>