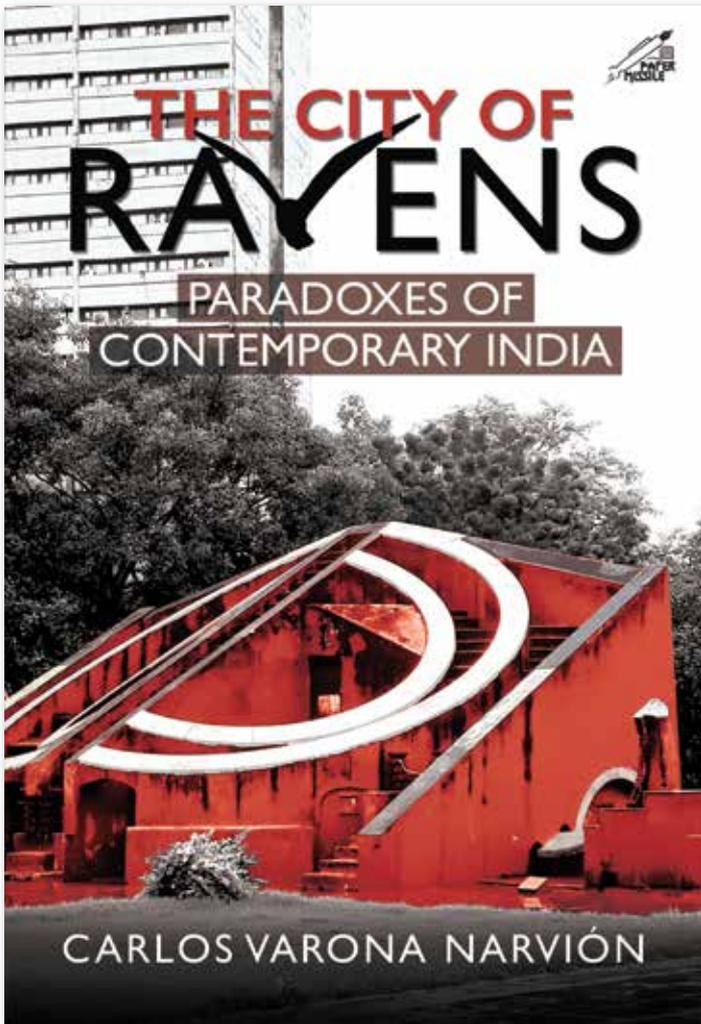


Descriptive yet thought provoking.

Delves deep into the history of nook and corner of the city that meets the eye but escapes attention.

A 3rd person's perspective on India and its struggle in the 21st century.



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The City of Ravens

Paradoxes of Contemporary India

Carlos Varona Narvi3n

When will India ever hit the middle ground?

The plot of *The City of Ravens: Paradoxes of Contemporary India* begins with a Spanish architect's trip to Delhi to build the mansion of a wealthy businessman there. During his four-year long stay in the capital, he will have the opportunity to travel throughout the country and reflect on its music, its mythology, its architecture, history, mysticism, that is, all the aspects that make this country unique. The difficult balance between ancestral traditions and modernity; between the excessive and the minuscule; between elegance and kitsch; this is the great challenge of India that the gaze of this observer, devoted to what he sees, discerns.

Carlos Varona Narvi3n (Madrid, 1956) did a Masters in Philosophy and Art. His doctoral research was in Arabic Philology and Islamic Culture, with a thesis on Architecture and Water in Cairo city. He was professor of Spanish Language and Literature in Jordan, and director of Instituto Cervantes (Spanish Cultural Centre) in several places of the Middle East: Damascus, Amman, Tunisia, and also in New Delhi, where he lived for six years. His publications are primarily essays on mysticism, art, and philosophy. He has also published a novel on lucid dreams. Currently he lives in Marrakech (Morocco).

Sonya Surabhi Gupta is professor in the Centre for Spanish and Latin American Studies at Jamia MilliaIslamia, New Delhi. She translates from Spanish, and has to her credit translations of the works of Gabriel Garc3a M3rquez, Jos3 Ortega y Gasset, Rodolfo Walsh, Camilo Jos3 Cela, and Carlos Fuentes, among others. She also coedited an anthology of stories by Indian women writers translated into Spanish, titled *Lihaf: Cuentos de mujeres de la India* (Madrid, 2001).



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Observing through an outsider's eyes...

Although I had had three short stays in India previously, in what one could classify as tourist visits, I realized that I had not noticed many things then which now became obvious very early on. Like the tiny size of the vegetables. This was to happen to me repeatedly in the early days, to my surprise! It once more demonstrated the sidereal distance between a mere visit, and actually living in a place. I wondered how it was possible—how in such an immense country, with a land so fertile and ancient, between the Himalayas in the north and the tropics of the south, with their palm groves and forests with huge trees, such tiny fruits were produced. Tomatoes were like eggs, and lemons, without any exaggeration, little more than large olives! With a few exceptions, in all the stalls I found that the vegetables, even potatoes, garlic and onions, seemed “abridged” by a capricious bonsai reduction. How was it possible? Only carrots and watermelons seemed to have been saved! And those fruits, like oranges and apples that were of a standard size, were imported!

India had always meant for me, the finding of that mid-point between the extreme options that life offers, however difficult it may be. It was the Middle Way that Buddhism had advocated. That, along with analyzing suffering and the means to avoid it, was among the greatest contributions to humanity. But that was something I could not see anywhere at that point of time. Maybe, things are not so easy! That ideal of the middle path, between asceticism and desire, between illusion and reality, between the material and the spiritual... It was not a given already there, but something that could be achieved only after a journey of search. It was a journey I was prepared to undertake!