

# Book Review

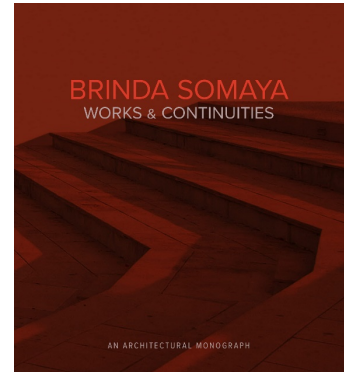
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## Brinda Somaya - Works & Continuities: An Architectural Monograph

Curated by Raturaj Parikh  
Edited by Nandini Somaya Sampat  
Mapin Publishing in association with The HECAR Foundation



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All over the world, but especially in South Asia, women's contributions and achievements have been ignored in the canonical histories of architecture. Women architects' careers nearly parallel the development of modernism in colonial and postcolonial India. An examination of contemporary practices at the national level demonstrates the ways in which modernism was shaped by them in diverse regional settings and in a myriad of stylistic approaches. Therefore, the publication of the first monograph on the works of a woman architect – Brinda Somaya of Mumbai – holds great significance. It has come at a particularly vital moment, challenging the gender neutrality of the architectural profession, which needs to work hard towards creating greater diversity and inclusivity. The sheer quantity and quality of Somaya's journey of 40 years through her firm Somaya and Kalappa (SNK), places her in a leadership position in the field, unmatched by any other woman architect of the country.

The monograph is produced very well with excellent drawings and colour photographs. Its visual narrative includes master planning to exhibition designs, institutional and corporate commissions to campus designs and community to urban projects. Curated by Raturaj Parikh and edited/introduced by Nandini Somaya Sampat, the main text is by Brinda Somaya herself, who is the winner of highly acclaimed national and international awards and many other accolades. This volume of her multi-project practice represents the shattering of the proverbial glass ceiling of the profession!

Fortunately, the monograph is not packed with all architectural projects undertaken by SNK but has a sensitive selection of non-chronological, key projects that represent the varied work of the firm. The monotony is broken by three background interviews with leaders in politics, architecture, and the arts as well as four essays by well-known scholars. The essays locate Somaya's work in the broader social, cultural and academic context of the country. Belonging to the second generation of women

architects in India, Somaya's work offers a variety of expressions embedded in the post-Independence modernism of India.

As a single woman heading a prolific practice, Somaya has also collaborated with prestigious international firms and spear-headed two very important international conferences on women in architecture. Her projects represent diversity within a modernist framework while pluralizing various concepts of design. Rather than directly copying Western solutions, she attempts to arrive at an Indian consciousness of design. Her priority is context, strong concepts, climatic responses, and local landscapes. She is versatile and open in her approach, often using vernacular references and local craftsmanship. Besides doing conservation projects and *pro bono* community work, she is at the forefront of urban issues and challenges in a megapolis like Mumbai.

As a reviewer and a feminist, I do have a couple of suggestions. A rigorous architectural analysis of Somaya's practice would have added a critical angle to the publication. Also, this was a unique opportunity to include a brief gendered point of view of Somaya and her experience as a successful professional woman located in patriarchal Indian society. Nevertheless, it is extremely valuable to have Somaya's path-breaking publication of historical significance made available in the twenty first century