

## **Epic Bridges and Legendary Cities: Theorizing the Production of Public Space in the Peninsular South**

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### **Abstract**

The building of cities and the construction of bridges is a response to an ontological challenge. The challenge emerges from Space being the inevitable habitus of the social. This social imperative brings with it the possibility of a radical contemporaneity of existence. This possibility is charged with the political when responded to with the desire for history. The desire for history we find is in fact symptomatic of an ontological anxiety. And thus it is that urban spaces are inscribed with a desire for history. This paper will examine the multiple implications and imperatives this desire enlists through the analysis of urban spaces from the south of the Indian peninsula. The paper employ the spatial text of Mahisuru, the city of Mysore in Karnataka and its birth in the legend of Mahisasura and Chamundeshwari; it shall further analyze the Ramsethu bridge debate brought into the public sphere by Indian right wing Hindus in recent years. These two texts have been produced by processes that are deployed in the production of spaces and debates in the public sphere. The possibility of a radical contemporaneity of existence presents challenges that are articulated in such urban projects as the building of bridges and the production of cities. Through the analysis of these texts the paper attempts to examine the processes by which the social possibility is ambushed through the political. This paper claims that the social potential to perform a radical contemporaneity of existence is diminished by the historical turn. It will demonstrate how such a strategic turn was employed by right wing Hinduism, which sought to create a public debate over the Ramsethu Bridge to be built between India and Sri Lanka. The analysis of these urban/modern projects of building bridges and constructing cities will reveal that the historicization of legends and epics invests in an ethical and political positioning as regards the strategic uses of the dimension of Time.

**Key Words:** *Production of Public Spaces, Radical Contemporaneity of Existence, Mahisura Legend, Ramsethu Debate, South Indian Peninsula*

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