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SACRED SPACE AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of the interconnectedness between religion, identity and attachment to sacred spaces. This is done in three parts. First, we provide a general understanding of attachment to sacred spaces, settings and objects and create a typology of attachment to different sacred spaces, from macro to micro, from natural to human-made, based on a brief comparison of several religions. Second, focusing on one part of this typology (attachment to homes), we illustrate the creation, content and meaning of sacred space through a detailed analysis of the Hindu house. Third, we examine the emergence of place attachment and identity, the ways religion through ritual connects people to places, and how places as settings for sacred behavior and socialization connects people to religion. Finally, by including personal history and auto-ethnography we attempt to 'personalize' environmental psychology.

Introduction

In recent years emotional connections to places and symbolic qualities of objects and places have received increased attention (Rapoport, 1970, 1976, 1982*a,b*; Relph, 1976; Duncan, 1985; Altman & Low, 1992; Cooper Marcus, 1992; Low, 1992; Mazumdar, 1992*b*; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, in press *a*). For some the physical environment is 'seen as a context in which fundamental human values can be cultivated and the human spirit can be enriched' (Stokols, 1990, p. 642). Through this paper we bring attention to the 'sacred' component in people-place attachment and the religious component of the emotional and spiritual connections to place. We examine the creation, content and meaning of sacred space in the lives of people and we argue that emotional connectedness is forged through the creation and sacralization of settings and through the use of such space for religious initiation and learning.¹ It is in sacred space that the religious self is nurtured and religious identity expressed and developed.

Place Attachment and Identity

The concepts of place attachment and identity have received much attention in the last 15 years. According to Relph (1976, p. 43) 'there is for virtually everyone a deep association with and

consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security...'. That 'self identity is inextricably tied to the people and settings of our past' is also expressed by Cooper Marcus (1992, p. 109). The focus of her study is the attachment and emotional connectedness to childhood homes (see also Chawla, 1992). 'Emotion and place' according to Cooper Marcus (1992, p. 111) 'are inexplicably connected not in a causal relationship but in a transactional exchange, unique to each person'. Rowles (1983, p. 300) explored old people's attachment to place and how such attachment is 'intimately linked to preservation of a sense of personal identity' (see also Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992). To Proshansky *et al.* (1983, p. 62) place identity goes beyond 'emotional attachment and belonging to particular places'. It is 'a complex cognitive structure which is characterized by a host of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings and behavior tendencies' (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983, p. 63). Intertwined with the cognitive structure are the 'social definitions of physical settings 'which consist of the norms, behaviors, rules and regulations that are inherent in the use of these places and spaces' (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983, pp. 63-64). They add that 'the development of place identity begins in the earliest process of child socialization' (Proshansky

et al., 1983, p. 6). The role of place in childhood socialization is also addressed by Hummon (1989, p. 225). He says: 'as cultural settings for childhood socialization they are models for the future selves of their younger inhabitants'. Houses and objects then, not only express identity (Laumann & House, 1972; Duncan & Duncan, 1976; Pratt, 1981; Rapoport, 1982c; Duncan, 1985) but can also help shape individual identity (Rowles, 1983; Dovey, 1985; Hummon, 1989). Spaces within the home are 'appropriated' and 'personalized' (Korosec-Serfaty, 1985; Werner *et al.*, 1985; Cooper Marcus, 1992), objects are invested with symbolic meaning connected with past experiences and memories (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). They then act as 'psychic anchor[s], reminding us of where we came from, of what we once were, ...' (Cooper Marcus, 1992, p. 89) and 'providing a symbolic lifeline to a continuous sense of identity' (Hummon, 1989, p. 219). To Low (1992, p. 165) 'place attachment is more than an emotional and cognitive experience...'. It is a 'symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land...' forged through linkages of genealogy, cosmology, pilgrimage, narrative and economics (Low, 1992, pp. 165-166). Finally, Low and Altman (1992), in their seminal piece provide a detailed and comprehensive framework for understanding place attachment. Three conceptual issues discussed by them are relevant to our study. They are the affective ties between people and places, the processes through which these ties are forged, and the role of places in the development of identity. We wish to understand how these issues are mediated by religion, and address them in the final section of the paper.

Attachment to Sacred Spaces: A Typology

The literature reviewed above (with the exception of Low, 1992) has focused primarily on secular settings. Following the tradition of Eliade (1959), Tuan (1974), Sopher (1967), Eck (1982) and Rapoport (1982b), we wish to refocus attention on the sacred, on religion, on place ties mediated by religion, religious identity and on the meaning of the sacred in the lives of people (Figure 1). Conceptually, attachment to sacred spaces can be seen as having several categories based on the kind of space.

- (i) Attachment to natural landscapes
- (ii) Attachment to sacred cities
- (iii) Attachment to architecture
 - This has two components:
 - (a) Attachment to religious architecture
 - (b) Attachment to homes

(i) Attachment to natural landscapes

This includes rivers, lakes, trees, mountains and other natural elements that are sacralized and revered. High mountain peaks have been venerated as the abode of Gods and ancestors (see also Sopher, 1967): Himalayas for the the Hindus in India, Mount Fuji for the Japanese (Shinto, Buddhists), Mount Agung for Hindu Balinese. Water has been used for ritual purification across cultures. The most striking example of the sacrality of water is the attachment of Hindus to the Ganges. Putman (1978) who visited India to trace the 'flow of faith along the Ganges' (1978, p. 53) writes:

Since long before the birth of Christ, they [Hindus] have come to worship it, bathe in it, drink and cast into it the ashes of their dead. A few drops on a man's tongue at the moment of death cleanses his soul of sin. The river is the heart of India and Hinduism.

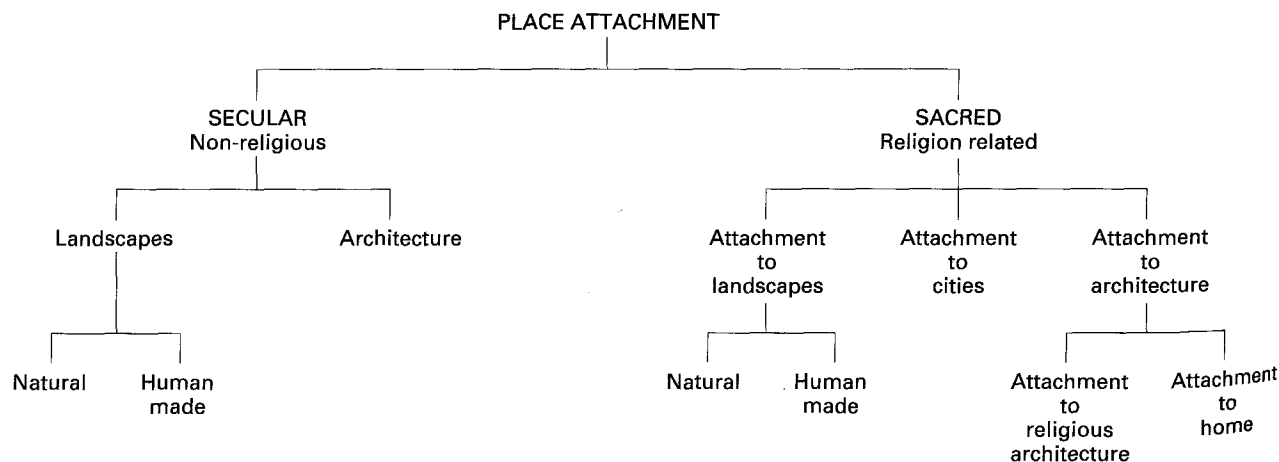


FIGURE 1. A typology of place attachment.

The Ganges is popularly referred to as Ma Ganga or Mother Ganges, symbolically expressing a maternal bond, a mother-child relationship between the river and the believer. Natural settings are also sanctified by hierophany (Eliade, 1959) such as the occurrence of a miracle, a vision, or events in the life of a religious teacher, prophet or saint. The *pipal* tree under which Siddhartha Gautama meditated and received enlightenment in Gaya, the small hill on the plains of Arafat where Prophet Muhammad preached his sermon on his last pilgrimage to Mecca, are all imbued with sacred meaning. In such places believers experience a sense of continuity with the past and renew their commitment to the future.

(ii) *Attachment to sacred cities*

According to Peters (1986, p. 3):

Every urban settlement has its holy places-shrines, temples, churches or the tombs of the holy, the learned, or the martyred. . . . What constitutes a holy city is not then the mere existence of such holy places, but rather the presence in the city of a *sacrum*, or perhaps several of such an order of importance or allure that the cultus connected with it exercises an attraction not merely on the city's immediate hinterland but over an extended network.

Cities are sacred because of their cumulative immersion with sacrality in events, prayers, spaces, landscapes, structures, divine or mythical heroes, all contributing to an 'intense sanctity of place' (Sopher, 1967, p. 51). They evoke a strong sense of place belonging, history and identity. Jerusalem is one such city, symbolizing both intense place attachment and place strife for three of the world's great monotheistic religions. 'The air over Jerusalem is saturated with prayers' (Yehuda Amichai, 1967, cited in Elon, 1989, p. 62). 'In Jerusalem', says Wiesel (1978, p. 191) 'the Jew in me feels at home not geographically, but more important historically. At home in his history'. Elon (1989) gives a striking example of how Jews expressed their connectedness with Jerusalem:

Jerusalem was there everyday of the week, every Sabbath, and every holiday, in every religious rite and prayer, morning, noon and night (Elon, 1989, p. 60).

Passover and Yom Kippur service ended with the exhortation 'Next Year in Jerusalem'. For centuries, Jews turned in prayer toward Jerusalem three times a day (Elon, 1989, p. 34).

Similarly, for Muslims all over the world, the ritual of turning towards Mecca, their sacred center in life (through prayers five times a day) and in death, cemented their connectedness to sacred space.

Benares is another sacral center:

This is the dwelling place of Shiva, who is also known by his ancient name of Rudra. Here the supreme God has taken up permanent residence. . . . Shiva dwells not only in the city's great temples, but in the very ground and substance of the place itself (Eck, 1982, p. 31)

To the believer, then, sacred cities such as Jerusalem, Benares, Mecca constitute the sacred centers of the earth (Eliade, 1959; Eck, 1982) the centers of creation; they are the centers of intense sacral power, loved, revered, experienced and held in awe.

(iii) *Attachment to architecture*

(a) *Attachment to religious architecture*. This includes sacred structures such as temples mosques, churches and other such built places where believers gather to pray collectively or individually.

Sacred structure, according to Eliade (1959, p. 58) 'is not only an *imago mundi*; it is also interpreted as the earthly reproduction of a transcendent model'. Smith (1978, p. 18) provides one such example:

The central, towering pyramid of the temple at Cambodia's Angkor Wat was conceived as a magic mountain that ran through both heaven and earth and as-cosmic axis-held the world stable and in place. Its design repeated heaven: . . .

Sacred structure, as Eliade (1959, p. 59) writes, 'continually resanctifies the world. . .'. The sanctity of temples is reinforced through the collective prayers and rituals of its believers. For congregational religions, such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Sikhism, sacred structures provide the setting for the learning and expression of their religious identity, a place where a believer feels spiritually and spatially close to God and fellow believers (Elon, 1989). For a Sikh praying in the Golden Temple at Amritsar is a reaffirmation of his faith. By participating in Friday prayers at the Friday mosque (*Masjid-e-Jami*) a Muslim renews his commitment to his god, and to the religious collective the '*umma*' (the 'brotherhood of Islam').

(b) *Attachment to homes*. According to Eliade (1959, p. 43):

Religious man sought to live as near as possible to the center of the world. He knew that his country

lay at the midpoint of the earth; he knew too that his city constituted the navel of the universe, and, above all, that the temple or the palace were veritably Centers of the World. But he also wanted his own house to be at the Center and to be an *imago mundi*. And, in fact . . . houses are held to be at the Center of the World, and on the microcosmic scale, to reproduce the universe.

The cosmological significance of the house has been pointed out in Littlejohn's (1960) Temne house, Bourdieu's (1971) Berber house, Cunningham's (1972) Atoni house and Hardie's (1985) study of the Tswana. Thus, as Bachelard (1964, p. 4) points out:

For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.

Home is sacred also because it is here that gods, spirits, ancestors and divine beings are worshipped (Raglan, 1964). It is also the repository of sacred objects and spaces such as prayer rooms, altars, statues, and sacred icons (see also Pavlides & Hesser, 1989). The sacrality of the home is created and periodically renewed through rituals (Saile, 1985; Werner *et al.*, 1985). In this sacralized setting an individual or family can engage in his/her/their private spiritual discourse.

The preceding typology indicates that:

(a) There are several categories of sacred place attachment based on the kind of space (natural vs built), the scale of spaces, macro (cities) versus micro (homes) (see also Low & Altman, 1992).

(b) Sacred place attachment can be manifested at the collective level (attachment to natural settings, cities and structures). The last (attachment to homes) represents attachment at the individual and or familial level to sacred spaces and focuses on the private dimension of sacrality (see also Low & Altman, 1992).

(c) Finally unlike the first three, the individual and or the family (in attachment to homes) actively engages in sacred place making. This involvement in the creation and consecration of space makes the individual attachment to micro sacred spaces qualitatively different from collective place attachment.

We wish to understand attachment to homes as sacred space, through a detailed analysis of the Hindu House.² How is home made sacred? What is the role of religion in sacred place making? How are affective links forged between people and the sacred? What is the role played by sacred space in the development of self? These are some of the issues we wish to understand.

The Hindu House

For a Hindu, the ideal environment is one in which he/she can live in communion with the divine world, made up of gods, goddesses, saints, ancestors, and the world of nature with its trees, plants, flowers and animals. It is as though 'plants, animals, stones and all forms of nature are seen as being messengers for spiritual images and information from a world beyond this one' (Swan, 1988, p. 22). Deities from the Hindu pantheon govern the day-to-day existence of a Hindu and help shape religious identity. There is a deity associated with most important aspects of life: fertility, birth, marriage, home building, prosperity, knowledge, good health and so on. Each deity is the patron of a particular animal and flower and is associated with a specific day of the week. For example, Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth and Good Fortune is worshipped in Bengal on Thursdays, Lotus is her flower, and the owl is her bird and these are also treated as sacred.

To the Hindu, home is sacred space, the setting for sacred events, sacred rituals, the home of the household deities and ancestors. To a Hindu there is a connection between his religion, sacrality of the home and place identity, between creating sacred space and place attachment.³

Sacred Place Making

For a Hindu, sacred place making is mediated by religion. It is a series of personal acts involving the following:

- (1) Purification of the Outside
- (2) Sacralization of the Inside
- (3) Sacred Learning in Space

(1) Purification of the outside

'Appropriation, attachment, and identity', according to Werner *et al.* (1985, p. 5) 'refer collectively to the idea that people invest places with meaning and significance and act in ways that reflect their bonding and linkage with places'. This is exemplified in the case of the Hindus. Like the *Zuni* (Werner *et al.*, 1985), Hindus consider home to have a life of its own, it is conceived, born and nurtured (Daniel, 1984). Homebuilding is a religious act. The Hindu homebuilding manuals, the *Vastu Shastra*, provide detailed prescriptions of where, when and how to build. The entire construction process with its series of sacred rites serves as an affirmation and

expression of the occupants' religious identity. An important element in all Hindu rituals is the juxtaposition of sacred time and sacred space. The centrality of sacred time is made explicit in the Hindu building texts *Samarangana Sutradhara* which specifies the months and dates for commencing home construction (Shukla, 1961, p. 325). On an auspicious day and time, the selected site is prepared for purification. In Bengal, this involves the performance of the *Shanti Yajna* to purify and invoke peace (*shanti*):

Shanti Yajna is performed also to ward off evil spirits. The site is considered 'Ashuddha' [impure] until pooja [worship] is performed to make it 'Shuddha' [pure]. The priest ties a string around little poles marking the entire site. (12Jan1992:1200-1300:VV:1).

The land is thus differentiated from the surrounding unconsecrated spaces, after which the priest sprinkles *Shanti Jal* (holy consecrated water) throughout the site thereby purifying it. Once the land is thus purified, it has to be consecrated through Bhoomi Pooja (literally worship of the soil).

In Bengali households this usually takes the form of *Satya Narayan pooja* invoking Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the Universe:

The gods are invited to participate in this sacred occasion and their blessings sought for the health and prosperity of the home occupants. Also, at this time, the permission of the family deity (*kuladeva*) is sought before commencing home construction. Under the main room (where the principal inhabitants are to live) a hole is dug. A brass jar filled with five auspicious grains (*pancha sharsha*: paddy or unhusked rice, barley, maize, wheat, semolina), five sacred metals (gold, silver, copper, iron), five sacred food items (*panchamrita*: milk, honey, sugar, clarified butter, yogurt), is covered with a piece of new cloth and buried. (19Jan1992:1700-1800:EP:1).

Appropriation of space also includes harmonizing with the natural environment and the planting of ritually significant plants. Sacred trees, such as coconut, are not cut down for clearing the site. Instead, attempt is made to accommodate them (Aiyar, 1982; see also Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1992). Of particular ritual significance is the *Tulsi* (*Ocymum Sanctum*). This is often the first plant nurtured in the new home and is given to the householder by a close family member:

My mother-in-law always said that it is inauspicious not to plant the tulsi plant. If the occupant does not plant it, the home becomes a cremation ground. (19Jan1992:1550-1630:VJ:1).

The *tulsi* plant is located in a pot in the family courtyard adjacent to the kitchen or back verandah

(Pandurang, 1972; Fruzzetti, 1982, p. 92; see also Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1992). On sacred occasions such as home occupancy, the front entrance is sacralized by the presence of auspicious plants:

Banana trees are planted, green coconuts on jars filled with holy water from the sacred river Ganges, are placed at the door, and mango leaves are strung on the doorway. (19Jan1992:1700-1800:EP:1).

(2) Sacralization of the inside

Following the purification and consecration of land, the structure is built. On completion, the structure is sacralized through home occupancy rituals (*griha praves*). On this occasion in Bengal, *Satya Narayan Pooja* is conducted again. This is followed by *Vastu pooja* (i.e. prayers to the Lord of all homes) after which the priest (purohit) conducts readings from the holy texts. This series of *poojas* is culminated by the lighting of the sacred fire (*homam*) and the anointing (*tilak*) of all participants with ashes from the fire. After *pooja*, *Shanti Jal* (holy water) is sprinkled in all the rooms of the new home and over all the participants and the *shanti mantra* is recited for peace. This is the first step in the sacralization process. In parts of South India, a cow is walked through all the rooms, before people can inhabit the house. Next, the home is sacralized with sacred pictures, objects and artifacts.

Pandurang in her article 'Our Family Gods' (1972, p. 45) writes:

There are pictures of Lord Venkateshwara in all the rooms of the house. It is a holy thing to see him the first thing upon waking from the night's sleep, so we have his picture in all the bedrooms and the guest room.

Also in some Tamil Brahman families, the threshold to the front entrance is decorated every day with ritualized decorative patterns: in Bengal, this is done primarily on sacred occasions (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, in press a).

Most important is the creation of an intensely sacral niche, the *pooja* area. It is here that the family shrine is kept, where family members gather to pray individually and/or collectively (Sommer, 1969). Here are two descriptions of the *pooja* room:

The *pooja room* in our house was located at half a floor level above the roof of the two storied house. It was a small room, approximately 6'-6" by 5'-0". It had only one entrance door, and was accessible only by the one set of stairs. It had two windows on the two sides. Neither the wall with the door nor the opposite wall had any windows. This opposite or front wall had the images of the deities, and of

ancestors. On the wall to the right was a place for keeping the items used in prayer. This room and the things in it, particularly the images, and pictures, were cleaned every day (22Jul1992: SM).

The *pooja room* in my maternal grandparents' house was secluded on the third floor, quite separate from the rest of the house. It was the only room on that floor. Here arranged on the top of a multi-tiered shelf were pictures and statues of gods and goddesses. On the lower shelf were stored holy texts and ritual objects such as *shankha* (conch shell) incense sticks, camphor, vessels for offering food and water to the deities and so on. Next to the shelf was a little table on which was set the brass lamp and the incense holder . . . (23Jul1992:SHM) (see also Mazumdar, 1977).

The *pooja* area is decorated with elaborate ritualized patterns known in different geographical regions as *alpona*, *kolum* or *rangoli*. These patterns executed by women using rice flour, are believed to have the power of attracting the deity invoked and retaining his/her continued presence and blessings during the performance of sacred ritual activities (Untracht, 1968). The patterns involve the drawing of sacred symbols such as *padma* (lotus, a sacred flower), *shankha*, *Sri Charana* (Gods footprints) and so on, each family having its own unique patterns. In some orthodox families, *alpona* is drawn every day, a different pattern each day. Other Hindu households draw *alpona* only on special occasions.

Accumulation and arrangement of ritual objects further sacralizes the setting. Ritual objects include brass and silver lamps. Pandurang (1972, p. 45) writes:

The two hanging silver lamps in the altar are kept burning almost all the time. We fill them with *ghee* made from butter as it burns without smoke.

Also important is water from the *Ganga* (Ganges), the river considered most sacred in India, used in *pooja* for sanctification and benediction. *Ganga Jal* is stored in the *pooja* room. Mazumdar (1977, pp. 32–33) writes:

Water from the Ganges was stored in a huge brass jar. . . . Loved and revered throughout India, the Ganga is spoken of as a goddess in Indian epics and her waters are considered very holy (see also Pandurang, 1972, p. 46).

Other sacred objects include sacred texts, *dhoop* (incense sticks), incense stick holders, camphor, wicker baskets for keeping fresh flowers to be used in daily *pooja*, silver and brass vessels for offering food and water to the deities, and in Bengali households, a *shankha*.

The location of the *pooja* area in a quiet secluded area (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, in press a), the

placement of the family altar, the pictures of gods and goddesses, some tarnished by the passage of time, the burning of incense, the ritualized decorative patterns all help create a spiritual sense of place. Within this sacralized microcosm, a Hindu, can express his/her spiritual identity and practice his/her religious ideals and beliefs.

(3) Sacred learning in space

The *pooja* area provides the setting for the socialization of children into their sacred identity thus ensuring the continuity of sacred space in their adult lives. It is also through socialization that the emotional connectedness to sacred space is forged in early childhood.

In Hindu households, children especially female ones, accompany adults during the morning and evening ritual acts in the *pooja* area. These ritual acts help to structure and promote sacralized behavior and in doing so, as Geertz (1971, p. 100) points out, 'work to create and sustain belief'.

We have identified three types of ritual acts specifically related to the *pooja* area (see Mazumdar & Mazumdar, in press a). They are (a) purificatory rituals (such as bathing, wearing clean clothes), (b) preparatory rituals (picking flowers from the garden, cleaning the floor of the *pooja* area, drawing ritualized patterns) and (c) *pooja* rituals (offering flowers and fruits to the deities, lighting incense and lamps, singing hymns, chanting prayers).

Here is one description:

My grandmother would, on waking at a predawn time, do her bathroom activities, have a bath, put on fresh washed clothes. She would then take a basket and go down to the garden and pick flowers from the plants in the garden (not the ones that had fallen to the ground) and collect these in the basket. This was done barefeet (I remember this vividly because on occasion when I collected the flowers, walking barefeet on the path of *murram* [stone-chips] which poked, was painful for me). Then she would go up to the roof of the house and collect some *tulsi* leaves from a potted *tulsi* plant there. All the flowers, including the basket, and her feet, were then washed at the roof-top. Effort was made to avoid touching anyone or anything during this time. Next she cleaned the *pooja* room and swabbed it with a wet cloth. The small brass plates with the previous day's ashes, offerings of flowers and at times food, and the little brass glasses were taken back to the roof-top tap [faucet] and washed. After this cleansing, she brought in fresh flowers and laid them out along with *batasha* [candy] and sometimes fruits on the clean plates, filled the little glasses full of water, lit *dhoop*, and offered them to the gods by placing them in front of the deities. She then sat cross-legged in yoga posture on the middle of the

floor, on a little *aashan* [mat] and quietly prayed for a period of time which varied from 20 minutes to 40 minutes (but what seemed to me for eternity). She did not use *ganga jal*, which was kept in a bottle.

Once her prayers were completed, she would do *pronaam* and come out and close the door of the *pooja* room and go downstairs. While bells were sometimes used during offering stage, it was essentially a very quiet place and very quiet, personal ceremony. To end, she or one of my aunts would blow the *shankha*. If I and the other children were around at this time, she would bless us and give us some *batasha*. She would then go down to her room, clean it, light a lamp, and pray and meditate there for close to an hour, sometimes more. (22Jul1992:SM).

Children are taught the meaning of different spatial domains, the separation of sacred from profane and the notion of purity and pollution. Additionally, children through observation and participation learn the rules of entry into sacred environments, such as purificatory baths, wearing of clean clothes, leaving leather footwear outside, and so on. Mazumdar (1977, p. 31) reminisces:

First, there is the visit to the toilet followed by a bath. Then, dressed in clean clothes, comes prayers on meditation and only after this is it possible to eat. This then became my morning routine at the age of eight and I have never deviated from it.

Children are also taught the norms of appropriate behavior (such as correct body language and posture) and the correct sequence of events involved in ritual acts (such as the cleaning of ritual objects, the arrangements of flowers, the execution of ritualized drawings):

While more care was taken to teach the girls these activities, as they were expected to take over if my grandmother could not, I learnt these procedures well. I would often go up to the *pooja* room and try to sit (cross legged) the way my grandmother sat, which for me was a difficult posture as on the hard cement floor the knuckles hurt. While in the beginning sitting quietly even for a few minutes was difficult, I slowly learnt to sit quietly for an hour by the time I was seven or eight. (22Jul1992:SM).

Even young children are assigned active participatory roles such as picking flowers, helping in arranging and cleaning the *pooja* area. At a later age they are initiated to perform their own rituals. Mazumdar (1977, pp. 31–33) writes about her initiation:

So on the 14th of April (New Year's Day in Bengal) Mother made me undertake my first *brata*,⁴ the *Shiva puja*.⁵ I was then eight years old and learned to perform the little ritual every morning before I went to school. For this, the first *niyama* [rules of procedure] was observed; that is I had to have a

good bath and wear a crimson silk *cheli*⁶ sari, the correct dress for the occasion, and not allow a single morsel of food or drink of any kind to touch my lips before the conclusion of the ceremony.

Rising early in the morning, I first bathed and changed and then I ran to the garden to pick some flowers and fresh young blades of *durva*⁷ grass with which to perform my *puja*. . . .

In the *puja* room, mother taught me how to make the necessary arrangements for the ritual with a set of small copper utensils I had been given. In the little water vessel I poured out some Ganges water and first washed the flowers, the *durva* grass, the leaves from the *bael*⁸ tree so loved by Shiva and *aconda* which was difficult to obtain in town . . .

Older children take on a more independent role; they set up their own sacred space, sacralize it with their own shrine and ritual objects, adopt a deity and perform their own sacred acts on a daily basis. Scindia (1985, p. 23) writes in her autobiography:

I set up my own shrine in a room next to my bedroom and harried my maids to bring fresh flowers for my *poojas*. I had mastered ritual long before I learned the alphabet. Every so often I would grandly announce that I was going to join my grandmother in observing some holy festival as a day of fasting . . .

Children are thus introduced to what Moore and Meyerhoff (1977) call the 'stylized' 'repetitive' nature of sacred rituals. Through ritual acts in sacred space a child is socialized into being a good Hindu and establishes his/her religious identity. The performance of sacred acts in the *pooja* area continually resanctify the *pooja* area and the home.

Attachment to Sacred Space: Some Conceptual Issues

What general understanding of place attachment does our study of the Hindu House provide? Here we wish to discuss three issues.

- (i) Religion and emotional connectedness to space
- (ii) Religion and the emergence of sacred place attachment
- (iii) Religion, sacred space and self-identity

(i) Religion and emotional connectedness to space

Home as sacred space evokes strong affective ties of emotional commitment and connectedness, of a sense of history, belonging and rootedness. Many sacred objects are handed down from generation to generation taking on the characteristics of invaluable family heirloom; they act as 'psychic anchor[s]' (Cooper Marcus, 1992) connecting us with past

experiences and memories (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) and family members feel a strong sense of identity and attachment with them.

Particularly significant is the emotional bonding to the *pooja* area, the space where religion is learned, expressed and experienced:

Whenever I visit by childhood home, I always make it a point to go up to the *pooja* room and spend a little time there. There is a certain sense of peace, tranquility and connectedness to place, and connectedness to the here and now to something beyond and unknown, and at the same time a certain feeling of rootedness which connects the vast unknown through me to the concrete world I sit on, I feel when I am there. While many things in the house have changed, the sparse *pooja* room seems to be more or less the same. It constitutes not only a personal connection, it is a family heirloom. Perhaps, this is how it ties me, an individual, to place, to family, and family to place and to family. All this through the space and activities. (22Jul1992: SM).

Feelings of profound loss, grief and mourning accompany the dismantling of sacred space and yet memories of what it once was, and represented continue to shape identity and provide comfort:

Many years later I went back to visit my maternal grandparent's house; the house had been sold to a commercial realtor; the grounds were overgrown with weeds; the trees that we had planted together were no more. Only memories remained particularly those of my grandmother's *pooja* room. Standing desolate in the garden, my mind's eye transported me to another setting, to another time and I could once again smell the incense, hear the bells, and the blowing of the conch shell; I could feel the warmth of the sun streaming through the open window of the *pooja* room, bathing it in ethereal light. I was surrounded by my deities again, and once again I felt spiritual comfort, and a deep sense of security . . . I know some day soon the realtor will tear down the space so sacred to me for so many years and build high rise apartments. Silently, in my heart and in my soul, I will mourn that loss. (23Jul1992:SHM).

We have also identified a hierarchy of attachments. The strongest emotional commitment is to the most sacred area of the house, the *pooja area* followed by other ritually pure spaces such as kitchen and thresholds (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, in press a), followed by attachment to land and the ritually significant trees, flowers and plants.

(ii) Religion and the emergence of sacred place attachment

How is emotional connectedness with sacred space created and sustained? First, emotional ties are

forged through sacred place making. By differentiating 'our' land, invoking 'our' family deity and 'our' ancestors, by arranging 'our' sacred objects a sacred microcosm is created that is uniquely 'ours'. This creational process is mediated by religion and involves a series of personal/familial acts: purification of land, sacralization of the home, creation, arrangement and decoration of a sacred niche. It is through the process of creation that places and objects become part of our self identity (Sartre, 1943 cited in Belk, 1992; Cooper Marcus, 1992).

Second, according to Geertz (1966, p. 100):

For the overwhelming majority of the religious in any population, . . . engagement in some form of ritualized traffic with sacred symbols is the major mechanism by means of which they come not only to encounter a world view but actually to adopt it, to internalize it as part of their personality.

Prescribed sacred acts involving sacred symbols not only promote the emergence of a religious identity, they also play an important role in linking people to places. In our case study this is exemplified through the purification acts which link people to the land (site), the home occupancy acts that link people to the built structure (home) and the *pooja* or prayer acts that link people to 'the temple of the house' (Raglan, 1964) namely the *pooja* area.

Third, through repeated contact, familiarity and shared experiences a person bonds with place (see also Belk, 1992). In such settings, he/she can touch, feel and otherwise personally experience the sacred and his/her religious past. The morning and evening prayers in the prayer room, in front of the deities worshipped by generations, the picking and arranging of flowers, the lighting of incense, the blowing of the *Shankha*, the cleaning of the floor and the ritual objects all led to 'object bonding', and or deep sense of caring for place (Belk, 1992). As Relph (1976 p. 38) writes:

The places to which we are most attached are literally fields of care, settings in which we have had a multiplicity of experiences and which call forth an entire complex of affections and responses. But to care for a place involves more than having a concern for it that is based on certain past experiences and future expectations—there is also a real responsibility and respect for that place both for itself and for what it is to yourself and to others. There is, in fact, a complete commitment to that place, a commitment that is as profound as any that a person can make . . .

This is the kind of emotional commitment made to the *pooja* area.

Participating in collective prayers, caring for sacred icons, cleaning the sacred setting not only

links people to places, it also links people to religion and to family. Particularly significant are the emotional ties forged between grandmother–grandchild and mother–daughter.

Fourth, learning in space leads to identification with, and attachment to space (Pellow, 1992). Children are initiated into their religious roles, the sacred rites, the holy days of the Hindu calendar, the holy scriptures. They are also taught the norms of behavior, the meaning of purity and pollution. This last point is particularly important for girls since menstruating females are considered ritually impure and not allowed into the sacred area during this period (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, in press *a*). Girls are taught not to enter, touch, or participate in any sacred ritual at that time. While both boys and girls learn in sacred space, girls are encouraged to more actively participate in its ritual activities. They are taught to draw intricate *alponas*, the correct procedures for making sandalwood paste, or rolling the freshly made wicks for the lamps. This is in preparation for their future roles as wives and daughters-in-law, and primary caretakers of the *pooja* area in their husband's family. On arrival at her husband's house after marriage, the new bride is formally introduced to the *pooja* area, the *Kuladeva* (family deity) and the ancestors. The duty of ritual continuity are now hers.

(iii) Religion, sacred space and self-identity

According to Proshansky (1978, p. 155) place identity is an important part of the individual's self identity and reflects his or her unique socialization experience in the physical world...'. In our view self-identity is composed of a 'spiritual self' and a 'religious self'. The two may be intimately linked in some people while distinct in some others. The spiritual self transcends the boundaries of religion and religious dogma and practices. It involves arriving at a personal understanding of a situatedness in this world and a connection of the here and now of existence to the beyond, the unknown and the unknowable. It involves understanding and communicating with one's 'inner self' and contemplating about the reason for one's existence, and the existence of other beings, about the known and the unknown and one's purpose and role, about communion with nature (see also Swan, 1988). The spiritual self evolves through contemplation and is aided by 'transpersonal experiences' (Swan, 1988). The spiritual identity and self can be developed and nurtured through the provision of spaces which are conducive to meditation and aid in achieving the

connectedness and communion mentioned above. Settings at particular locations (such as rooftop location), special sights (pictures of gods and goddesses), sounds (of *shankha* and bells), smells (of incense burning) and feelings can be provided or evoked by the design of the setting. Admittedly, though we do not know much about these settings to know what characteristics or design features would be important [see examples of spiritual experiences by the wailing wall of Jerusalem (Stokols & Jacobi, 1984), Stonehenge, Taj Mahal (Mazumdar, 1991)]. Calling such places sacred places, Swan (1988, p. 22) points out that 'when they visit sacred places many people report entering a mind space where this realization becomes crystal clear'. Concentrating on transpersonal and spiritual experiences, he cites examples such as mountain top, river bank, temple or family altar.

For a Hindu, spiritual self and identity are intimately connected to religious self and identity. As mentioned earlier, for a Hindu, individual personal, unaided or aided by priests and other intermediaries, communion with God is most important, and each person has to strive for that communion. For a Hindu, spiritual identity is fostered through meditation, contemplation, thought and discourse with ones inner self (*atma*) and through respect for, and seeking of harmony with, nature, including all creatures, and natural phenomena. Children are encouraged to be in the *pooja area*, sitting with legs crossed in yoga posture, and immersing oneself for a few minutes in quiet contemplation.

A 'religious self' involves the development of a religious identity, such as that of a Hindu, Jew, Christian, Muslim. The religious self evolves through the performance and observation of sacred activities in sacred settings. This is of particular significance in religions where the home and not the church/temple is the focal point of sacralized behavior. Religious learning takes place almost exclusively at home through participation in sacred acts and not necessarily or solely through formalized sermons by ritual specialists at religious schools. Also, in contrast to Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions many eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, do not emphasize congregational prayer for the sustenance of religious identity. While temples are many, temple going is not mandatory for a Hindu. Most life-cycle events, such as initiation rites, marriage and funeral, take place at home. In order to appropriately conduct their religious selves, home has to be made sacred and kept sacred. Family altars are continued generationally connecting again the past with the

present, with the future through space and architecture. Given the above, it is not difficult to see why attachment to home becomes so important and significant to Hindus. For some Hindus, so intense is this connectedness to sacred space that even during travel they seek to create a niche of sacrality. Pictures of deities and ritual objects, such as incense and holy water, are carried to set up a miniature altar in an effort to recreate the feelings of the sacred space of home.

Through this study of the Hindu house we have proposed a framework for understanding the salient dimensions of place attachment related to sacred space, and have thus developed 'substantive grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We have added religion as a factor and sacralization as an element to the psychological conceptions of place attachment, issues that have not been adequately addressed in the literature. We argue that religion, through sacred acts, connects people to places, and places, as settings for the learning and experiencing of religion, connects people to religion (Low & Altman, 1992). Finally, by including personal history and 'auto-ethnography' we have 'personalized' environmental psychology.

Practical Implications

Does modern housing provide a sacred setting (Sommer, 1972)? Are occupants able to develop their religious selves and express their religious and spiritual identity? For Hindus, the quality of their spiritual experiences, and the intensity of their place attachment is to a large extent dependent on the spiritual 'affordances' (Gibson, 1977) of their homes (Mazumdar, 1992a). Unfortunately, however, architects designing 'modern' functional housing today have often ignored the sacred components (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1992, in press b; Mazumdar, 1993). This has affected sacred spaces and place attachments in the following ways. First, the occupant's role in sacred place making is constrained and perhaps minimized. With the development of high rise apartments, purification and consecration of land through *Shanti Yajna* and *Bhoomi Pooja* for each householder is no longer possible. This is sometimes collectively performed for all the apartments. Second, the creation and decoration of the *pooja* area is seriously compromised. Make-do *pooja* areas observable in modern houses are closets, space underneath stairs, niche in a wall, cupboard space in a kitchen, portion of the kitchen, storage space, bedroom or even garage. These are

made to serve as *pooja* area in housing not providing appropriate *pooja* space. The ability to elaborately sacralize the *pooja* area is seriously compromised. This makes it difficult to maintain its ritual purity, arrange all the ritual objects, and execute decorative patterns. Again, occupants resort to adaptive devices to maintain their religious selves. For example, when a space under a stairway is used as *pooja* area, its ritual purity is compromised as people can be walking above and on top of that space, possibly with leather shoes on. Such situations can create stress, and lead to feelings of guilt of not living a 'proper' life. Finally, the lack of distinct space to perform the sacred rituals leads to the contraction or elimination of many sacred acts. Consequently the socialization of children into their religious roles and identities is seriously affected (Mazumdar, 1992a). Insensitive architectural design can unfortunately thus contribute to disattachment, deprivation (Mazumdar, 1992b), 'disidentification' (Maruyama, personal communication), and incomplete development of the religious self. It can eventually lead to the loss of sacred space, sacred identity and attachment to sacred spaces.

The following narrative illustrates some of these points:

Many changes have been made to the house, but none were so troubling to me as the changes to the stairway leading up to the *pooja* room. The *pooja* room had been connected to and was an integral part of the house. The putting of metal grilles and gates for safety, felt almost as if the *pooja* room was locked up and away, and access that much more difficult. It also felt as if the *pooja* room was cut away and apart from the house. I know one of these days all of these will be gone, only memories will remain, only the mental draw and connectedness to something so intensely physical. Yet, it feels good to have been a part of it all—the social and the physical, the socio-physical. Unfortunately and regretfully, I have not been able to provide a similar experience for my son. The design of my house, and the bylaws governing it, do not permit it. What will his experience of the spiritual and religious be? (22Jul1992:SM).

Notes

(1) Pellow (1992), in her study of compound use among the Hausa describes how identification with space is forged through learning in that space.

(2) Data collection techniques included observation and interviews. In addition we conducted a textual analysis of autobiographies and biographies and examined ethnographic works. Personal and autobiographical as well as auto-ethnographic (Jones, 1970; Hayano, 1979) notes from our own participation in activities are included in

the text. In this paper, we have restricted our presentation to the homes of upper caste Hindus of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Interviews were conducted both in India and in U.S.A.

- (3) Here we are influenced by the issues discussed by Cooper Marcus (1992, p. 88). According to her the issues are: 'gaining control over space in order to feel a positive sense of self identity; the issue of manipulating, molding or decorating that space in order to create a setting of psychological comfort, which interconnects with identity or personal well-being; and the issue of continuity with significant places of the past so that a sense of control and identity experienced at an earlier age is supported by reproducing the essence of a significant past environment'.
- (4) *Bratas* are ritual acts. Literal meaning of *brata* is vow (Mazumdar, 1977). For more details on *bratas* see Mazumdar (1977, p. 29) and Fruzzetti (1982).
- (5) Lord Shiva is a very important Hindu God.
- (6) *Cheli sari* is a particular kind of *sari* (Hindu dress) worn on sacred occasions.
- (7) *Durva* grass is the three-bladed grass used in sacred acts.
- (8) *Bael* is a fruit tree in India.

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