

READING ‘MARGINS’—‘ENVIRONMENT’ AND WOMEN— IN THE COSMOPOLITAN “REPRESENTATIONAL SPACE” MAPPED IN VARANASI AND THE POISON OF LOVE

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the failure of neoliberal globalisation (where capital takes the centre stage) to bring autonomy to ‘margins,’ there is a conspicuous presence of religion on the world stage in the twenty-first century. For marginalised women, a return to religion is seen as solace from their existential crises. So, what is needed today for the spiritual well being of the world is a hybrid space which is cosmopolitan and indigenous at the same time, and also religious and secular. The present paper maps the “spatial practices,” “representation of space” and “representational space” (spatial triad) of Henry Lefebvre (1974, 1991) within the real and imagined spaces of Varanasi and Vrindavan. With reference to the selected Malayalam novels, *Varanasi* and *The Poison of Love*. These places, with their traditional ritualistic space and eco-feminist futuristic space, could serve as cosmopolitan places of hope for the disenfranchised. This paper, while focusing on space, margins and religion, argues for the necessity of reconfiguring the postmodern religious places for the construction of new “representational spaces” and thereby to make religion relevant in a post-secular world.

Keywords: Margins, Environment, Women, Representational Space, Religion.

Marginality is becoming universal” (De Certeau, 1984, p. xvii) in an increasingly cosmopolitan world today as global power structures are unequally distributing the benefits of neoliberal globalisation while pushing many of the local societies into distress. In the past, the exclusions were, to a larger extent, restricted to peripheral geographies keeping the privileged at the centre. Whereas, today “even majorities feel like uprooted aliens in their own land” (Beck, 2006, p. 19). According to Walter D Mignolo (2011), “The ‘mar-

gins' are places, histories, and people who [. . .] were forced to deal with the encroachment of their [own] modernity" (p. 285) by the western colonial modernity. The drastic transformation of places that followed modernity resulting from enlightenment created unprecedented spatiality (the dialectics between space and society) and more unpleasant marginality in a cosmopolitan world. The philosophy of cosmopolitanism that was propagated by Kant in the post-enlightenment had hospitality and perpetual peace as its bedrock. But it has taken a multitude of forms, positive and negative in the later periods. The worst form of cosmopolitanism – neoliberal globalisation, in its mission of homogenising places and promoting consumerism ended up polluting (spatially and cognitively) the sacred places as well. In the aftermath of the failure of neoliberal globalisation to bring autonomy to 'margins,' particularly 'environment' and women, there is a conspicuous presence of religion on the world stage in the twenty-first century. "Throughout history religion itself has often been a globalising force. [It] has frequently been at the centre of resistance to imperialism, either through maintenance of cultural traditions in the face of colonial domination or through various revolutionary hybrid forms, which Lanternari identified as the 'religions of the oppressed'" (Beyer & Beaman, 2007, p. 338).

For marginalised women, becoming a woman is possible in a sacred place. "All becoming takes place in a space of affinity and in symbiosis with positive forces and dynamic relations of proximity . . . minorities can undergo the process of becoming only by disengaging themselves from a unitary identity as others (Braidotti, 2011, p. 30). So, marginalised women's return to Varanasi and Vrindavan – the religious places that harbour a symbiotic relationship between nature and culture – is seen as a homecoming for poor widows as well as educated cosmopolitan women. Understanding the role of religious space in the betterment of 'margins' would necessitate the preservation of its pristine environment.

The novels, *Varanasi* by M T Vasudevan Nair and *The Poison of Love* by K R Meera, which are based on the real religious places, Varanasi and Vrindavan have been brought into the analytical framework of this paper to contextualise the spatiality of 'margins' within the 'adjustable frame' of religion. Magdalena Mączyńska's idea about post-secular texts, which are to "be defined as narratives that openly question or destabilise the religious/secular dichotomy" (Lackey, 2019, p. 151) comes meaningful in these novels. As *terra* (material condition) embedded in the 'environment' of religious spaces contributes towards its sacrality, the ramification of the environmental degradation that has beset the planet can be addressed effectively within the purview of local religious places. The very fact of exploring the materiality of place will expose

it as a contested terrain with inclusion and exclusions. Thus, the analysis of place can uncover it as a world of promise and also a world of marginality. It can simultaneously re-imagine the place from a site of oppression into a site of resistance and hope. This paper puts forth the urgent need to preserve the 'environment,' particularly within the religious places to assist in the possible attenuation of pain that the space of faith can bring about in the distraught women.

Ecofeminists claim that environmental issues are feminist issues because it is always the women and children who disproportionately suffer the consequences of injustice emanating from environmental destruction. Mary Mellor in the essay "Gender and Environment" states that "the environmental consequences of modernising global structures as being disproportionately inflicted on women, indigenous communities...natural world [environment] and its non-human inhabitants" (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003, p. 20). The textual content in *Ecofeminism & Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context and Religion* by Eaton & Lorentzen ascertains the potential of ecofeminism to expose and challenge the injustice inherent in the corporate mechanism of globalization. Socialist ecofeminists like Carolene Merchant (1992) and Vandana Shiva (2014) are of the opinion that it is not only environmental degradation but also the sexual division of labour that add to the impoverishment of women. To contain the spatiality of margins within ecofeminism, this study adopts Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's coinage, 'environment' rather than environment as generally used in ecofeminism. The word 'environment' acquires a multiplicity of meanings in a postcolonial world which "is the site of an intensified exploitation (and as ever, struggle against this exploitation) by a globalised ruling class" (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 6). In a postcolonial (neo-colonial) world the influence of capital has percolated into the cultural, material, political, and ecological realms. Therefore for Mukherjee "it is precisely this network of politics, culture, ecology, *physical space* and *non-human matter* that we should understand as 'environment'" (p. 13) (italics mine).

Space is considered as the fundamental aspect of the notion of lived reality. Henry Lefebvre's landmark book, *The Production of Space* (1974) puts forth the idea that it produces itself and is produced by an array of social processes and relations. This socio-spatial dialectics is what Edward Soja calls spatiality (1996, p.2). More often than not marginality focuses on the 'sociality' (society) and 'historicality' (time) and leaves out space where the real action takes place (ibid). The coming of spatiality into the discourses on marginality will no doubt expand the epistemic and ontological knowledge on the process of *social spatialization* (Rob Shields) associated with 'margins'. Lefebvre's contribution of 'spatial triad' in *The Production of Space*, explains how so-

cial space is formed from absolute space. The spatial triad is the three ways of thinking about a space that acts together back-and-forth to produce that space. Absolute space is made up of fragments of nature located at sites that are chosen for their intrinsic qualities such as rivers, mountains, caves etc. These are the spaces where rites and ceremonies are performed as in the case of religious places which are the officially “conceived space” or “representation of space” (second space in a spatial triad). This is the space conceived by planners and map makers who are concerned with the physical properties of a location. But in social production and reproduction, these spaces lose their uniqueness. Not that absolute space disappears in the process; rather it survives as the bedrock of historical space and the basis of representational spaces (religious, magical and political symbolism) (p. 48). Neoliberal capitalism has turned absolute space into abstract space - space for commodity, as seen in the new “spatial practices” or “perceived space” (first space of spatial triad). The “spatial practice” of a society secretes that space (p. 38). The “perceived space” is presented before an individual through visual images that influence their perception. The inevitability of imagining a new differential space, a “representational space” (third space in the triad) or a “lived space” (along with perceived and conceived space) arises, as a certain section of the population uses the conventional spaces for different purposes. A city space carries different meanings for different people. Religious places are not exempted from this. Thus space within a religious place is also contested like a city space.

The cosmopolitan religious place in the present post-secular times (secular and religious at the same time) contains “representational space” where diverse pilgrims use the space differently. Therefore what is needed today for the spiritual wellbeing of the world is a hybrid space – cosmopolitan and indigenous at the same time and also religious and secular simultaneously. As Michael Kaufmann says:

[s]ince the secular and religious depend on each other for meaning, they must always be present at the same time... each concept is meaningless in isolation... What we term conclusively secular might in another moment or another context suddenly appear religiously significant. In other words, our sense of religion is an adjustable frame. (Lackey, 2019, p.152)

Realizing the inefficacy of, firstly the traditional religion and later neoliberal globalization as a panacea for the ills of the world, this study brings attention back to religion within the matrix of ‘environment’ which embody eco-spirituality and feminism to chart out maps to make religious places relevant more than ever before. Aruna Gnanadason’s proposition is relevant here. She says that women call for religion with “a wholistic eco-spiritual vision based on

care and nurture of the earth and of all those people who have been denied the right to personhood and human dignity” (Parsons, 2002, p. 37).

For ages, the “representation of space” pertaining to the city of Varanasi (also known as Banaras or Kashi) has been projected through the Viswanatha temple, many other temples and ritual sites that are situated on the bank of the Ganga river. “There were places assigned to the nine planets and to Ganapathi, Parvathi, Radha and Krishna” (p. 22), writes M T Vasudevan Nair (2017). The ritual geography of “Kashi Kshetra” (sacred space) was anchored on the ‘linga’ of the Hindu deity, Shiva. Shivalinga is a sacred symbol in the Hindu religion. Nair (2017) mentions this in the text, “The Jyotirlinga is a shaft of light that pierces the earth and reaches beyond the sky. The universe and nature are immanent in it. It is not just a sexual symbol” (p.154). The ritualistic landscape of the eternal Kashi consists of a number of ghats such as Dashashwamedh Ghat, Manikarnika Ghat, Tulsi Ghat and Panchananghat. “The spatial practices” imagined and represented by M T in the course of narration, take the readers through these ghats in a realistic manner. A few excerpts from the text will prove it right:

Look, that is Asi and this side is Varuna. The place between Varuna and Asi is Varanasi. Here the Ganga flows from the South to the North. He went up the steps and walked along the lane. The lane would take him to the top of Manikarnika Ghat. If he walked a little more he would reach the Viswanath temple...At Manikarnika, he saw three bodies being cremated. A fourth one had just arrived and preparations were on. They carried the body on a bamboo stretcher and dipped it in the holy water. They brought it to the shore and placed it on the ground. There were four people participating in the rights. Must be sons of the dead man. Some workers had started stacking the firewood for the pyre. (pp. 48-50).

Vrindavan (or Brindavan) is another spiritual capital of contemporary India that is located on the bank of the river, Yamuna. The meaning of Vrindavan is the forest of Vrinda (Tulsi or Basil). This is the place where Lord Krishna, the Hindu god is believed to have spent his younger days. Vrindavan has, for a long time, been associated with women as well, particularly widows. Like Varanasi, Vrindavan also has Ghats and many temples. K R Meera (2018) marks her fictional space mainly with the spatiality of Maighar where the widows are housed. The representation of its urban religious landscape traverses through Govind Dev temple, SevaKunj, Ranganath temple and Rangji temple. A pattern of the spatial practice at Vrindavan is shown here:

The bells at Rangji temple rang out then, snapping me out of my reverie, and ushering in the three o'clock rituals. I went to the Yamuna to wash the soiled cloths. A sanyasi dozed on the rocks, dazed with marijuana...I stepped into the waters. The

black waves slithered and coiled sinuously around my feet. (p. 40)

The words – ‘black waves’ and ‘coiled sinuously’ in the last line signal the Anthropocene in which we are trapped where the number of margins is skyrocketing.

There is a sea change in the real and imagined geography and historiography of these places available in various discourses. The religious urban environments of these places raise many questions on their significance in cosmopolitan India today. In the twenty-first century, the represented historiography of Varanasi rests on the Ganga purification project (Nirmal Ganga) and of Vrindavan on the ‘save our heritage Ghats’ campaign, that have aimed at rejuvenating the spiritual and spatial experience in these places for which they have known for ages. However, that is not enough, since these places are also the destinations for many of the cosmopolitan women who are in search of a space where they can belong. Therefore, an attempt has been made to read the selected fictional narratives based on Varanasi and Vrindavan through the prism of spatiality and gender. Contextualising this paper within the post-secular religion is done with the pure and clear purpose of subverting the conventional idea attached to these religious places is no longer tenable. The alternative imagination of religious places as social space helps in reconfiguring them as secular places. Henri Lefebvre’s “representational space” which is identical to Edward Soja’s “Thirdspace” or “real-and-imagined space” is ideal for conceiving religious spaces as radical spaces for performing eco-politics and gender politics. This reconstruction of floating signifiers to choose from, when it comes to places like Varanasi and Vrindavan, could be called “a symbolic revolution” (borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu’s book’s title, *Manet: A symbolic revolution*) especially when it comes to the empowerment of women and preservation of the environment.

The novel, *Varanasi* originally written in Malayalam and translated into English by N Gopalakrishnan is a non-linear narrative delineating the lived reality of Varanasi, the oldest living city in the world, which is also an iconic Hindu religious centre. It is known for its heterogeneity where death meets rebirth; sacred meets profane; love meets lust. The protagonist, Sudhakaran comes to the home of lord Bhaironath who is believed “to wipe out all fears and anxieties of the material world. The sins of several births are cleansed by a single vision of the deity” (Nair, 2003, p. 22). He leads a promiscuous life before coming finally to Kashi which is considered as the space of salvation with respect to the Hindu religion. He gets into a transient relationship with many women including a foreigner out of his burning lust. Among them, Sumita Nagpal is the woman whom he meets in Varanasi but she leaves him

after a short period. The novel ends when the wayward modern man returns to tradition while agreeing to perform *atmapindom* as he does not have any progeny to conduct the posthumous rites.

In the religious and material culture of Varanasi, the Ganges imparts the *terra* (material condition) that gives sacredness to Varanasi by purging people of their sins. Whereas this symbol of purity stands more polluted than the deviants who visit there. What Sudhakaran witnesses when he is about to take a dip in the Ganga was alarming. Nair (2003) writes:

He saw the carcass of a cow lying motionless, right on the edges of water. He had heard that half-burnt human bodies were often dumped into the river. Bodies of people who died of smallpox used to be taken to the deep midst of the river and weighted by heavy stones sunk there. (p.24)

Varanasi, the mythical 'city of light' which is known as the place for salvation for Hindus was in the news for the wrong reasons, during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The sight of a large number of dead bodies floating on the river Ganges was received by the people in the country with unease and horror. The postmodern experience of callousness and emptiness will strip Varanasi of its significance and leave the wo/men who are in search of their soul in a state of schizophrenia.

For an individual like Sudhakaran religion is not about God. Nowhere in the novel does Nair mention Sudhakaran praying in front of the deity, Kashi Vishwanath. Religion is considered as "confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries" (Oldmeadow, 2010, p. 54). In *Religion Without God*, Ronald Dworkin (2013) says that "religion is deeper than god. Religion is a deep, distinct, and comprehensive worldview... A belief in a god is only one possible manifestation or consequence of that deeper worldview" (p. 1). He draws on Albert Einstein and Spinoza. Einstein was an atheist but he was a deeply religious man. He says:

To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—[which I would see in panchabhootha] this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I belong in the ranks of devoutly religious men. (p. 3) (italics mine)

And "for Spinoza, God was another name for Nature" (p. 38). The conceptual similarity in the ideas of the aforementioned scholars undergirds the connect-

edness of Nature (environment), religion and human life. Arne Naess' Deep ecology that states the intrinsic value of nature corroborates this reality without a doubt. The presence of Ganges water, fire burning in the pyre and other non-human elements are what make Varanasi inviting for the soul-searchers like Sudhakaran.

The fluidity of the concept of religion is important for eco-spirituality where religious space provides a suitable backdrop to develop this planet-saving consciousness to its fullest. It is also important for another reason. Many of the people (here the focus is on women) who visit these religious places are not keen or not in a physical or mental makeup to follow the rituals in the shrine. Sumita Nagapal, a cosmopolitan woman who is writing a book on Varanasi, visits the place many times. For her, it is a second home after being ditched by her lover. She follows her cosmopolitan lifestyle – drinking, smoking and having casual sex, even in Varanasi. As with Sudhakaran, it is the river of lights that lifts her spirit and not the deity. During her conversation with others, it is understood that she visits the temple to gather data for her upcoming book. Here, Varanasi and the river Ganges partake in the becoming of writer Sumita. "Others" are the integral element of one's successive becoming as put forth by Rose Braidotti in her Nomadic theory. It will work as a tool in the 'becoming' of marginalised Sumita in the 'space of faith'. This is because the minority is the dynamic or intensive principle of change in nomadic theory. The minorities – widows ostracised from their communities, women with failed love or marriage – in the process of becoming, have to disconnect themselves from the identity imposed by patriarchal religion to reassert as political subjects. "It is an act of self-legitimation whereby the "she-self" blends her ontological desire to be, with the conscious willful becoming of a collective political movement... The notion of the community is, therefore, central" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 200). This shows the importance of having to break down the secular/religious binary and nurture hybrid humanist spaces.

Sumita and Sudhakaran become close, though physically, and spend their evenings on the Dashashwamedh, on the bank of the Ganges. Sumita's betrothed groom, Salil who has a doctorate in Astrophysics had left her and married another woman. Her wounded heart was roaring silently in anger. For Sumita, the river is a fellow being, carrying the same emotion as her. "They stood above the Dasaswamedh Ghat listening to the suppressed roar of the river flowing in full flood" (Nair, 2013, p.74). It is the river and the crowded city (where nobody gets noticed) that beckons Sumita back apart from her writing assignment. She is a "rooted cosmopolitan" (Antony Appiah) attached to the fundamental elements at Varanasi while leading a nomad's life. In Nomadic theory, Rose Braidotti says:

The singularity of this nomadic, floating subjectivity rests on the spatiotemporal coordinates that make it possible for him/her to coincide with nothing more than the degrees, levels, expansion, and extension of the head-on rush of the "outside" folding inward. What is mobilised is one's capacity to feel, sense, process, and sustain the impact with the complex materiality of the outside. (p. 152)

The cosmopolitan woman, Sumita is engulfed in grief and shame because of her unrequited love.

The protagonist of the second text, Tulsi's story is also on a similar line. The novella, *The Poison of Love* by K R Meera (2017) is the English translation of her Malayalam work *Meera Sadhu*. The non-linear story follows Tulsi, an IIT graduate, on her journey from domestic space to the public space of Vrindavan after her unsuccessful married life with Madhav, a journalist. In this book, K R Meera shows how religious, domestic and political violence leave deep marks on the body and soul of women. Tulsi, the cuckquean adopts the life of a widow (Meera Sadhu) in Vrindavan to avenge the abusive relationship she had with her husband, within the patriarchal trap called home. She becomes a member of the community of Meeramaais and Radhamaais who are destined to live in the service of God but in a very dismal living condition. In the absence of financial independence (she did not pick up a job at the behest of her husband), Tulsi is devastated when she comes to know about the illicit relationships her hedonistic husband pursued without remorse. Being the financial supporter of the family, he enjoys authority at home. This overvaluation of material production done by men and the undervaluation of reproduction performed by women is criticised by socialist ecofeminists like Carolyn Merchant and Vandana Shiva. When ditched by her husband, she finds her second home in Vrindavan in the hope that 'Lord Krishna's playground would help her reclaim the lost subjectivity. She completely detaches herself from the maternal role that had always tied her down in the domestic space.

Religion is expected to consider a woman in her own right and not as a means of reproduction as propagated by the patriarchal society. Thus sacred spaces can become the vehicle of pleasure for women which Luce Irigaray says is not restricted to the sexual organ. Irigaray uses '*jouissance*' which according to her is the varied forms of pleasure a woman's sensuously responsive body can experience. She says: "The whole of my body is sexuate [sexed]. My sexuality isn't restricted to my sex [sexual organs] and to the sexual act in the narrow sense" (Joy M., 2013, p.11). These women bring joy to themselves and peace in the world by being interconnected with non-human elements such as rivers, trees, fire, sky etc. present in places like Vrindavan. Women

like Tulsican become “divine women” in the sense perpetuated by Irigaray by achieving “perfection of their subjectivity” (p. 25). The women in Vrindavan are of different types: Widows, aged, spinster, wives etc. But all are widowed in the gaze of the outsider as they are in Vrindavan. The presence of non-widowed women in the novel challenges the identification of Vrindavan with widows. Nonetheless, the myth of Vrindavan’s widows is crucial to the saga of Vrindavan.

It is the “sacred rage” experienced by Tulsi that speeds up her homecoming to the cosmic space of Vrindavan. According to Nicole Hemmer, sacred rage is the feminine key to transformation. “Sacred Rage is what will move us out of disillusionment, and birth us into the new Earth that is already existing in the templates of time. It is an awakener” (2017, para.10). A marginalised woman with her sacred rage can become a goddess Kali like entity called “Other goddess.” In the novel, *Varanasi*, Sumita tells Sudhakaran, “You can be a good sacrifice for Kali. Am I myself not Kali?” (Nair, 2003, p. 83). Marcella Althaus Reid defines Other Goddess as “the Goddess who reads *Capital* and understands the need for agrarian reform [who has weapons to fight the machinations of patriarchy]. We need female angels illuminating the paths against the politics of globalisation. We need divinities for our times.” (2005, p.268) Instead of facilitating the process of becoming ‘goddess’ — the ‘goddess’ who can restructure their lives to become an engineer, a writer and a wife again – these women are thrown into a pitiful condition. Vrindavan does not offer the pedestal for them to become ‘divine’. Meera writes:

Old women with shaven heads, hobbling along slowly- walking stick in one hand and tiffin carrier in the other- through gullies reeking of manure and urine...Faces filled with pathos. Skinny bodies. Tarnished eyeglasses. The smell of soiled old clothes and sweat. The sound of broken hearts. (pp. 3-4).

Before being killed by monkeys, while standing on the third storey of the Govind dev temple Tulsi says, “I saw Vrindavan beneath me. Dirty and desolate Vrindavan. Temples like graveyards. Monkeys like ants. The defiled Yamuna” (p. 100). As the Ganges is the *terra* in Varanasi, in Vrindavan it is the river Yamuna. The environmental degradation is vividly represented by K R Meera in the above-mentioned quote. It is not only the sacred space but the body of the helpless women who also bear the sign of wanting, in care and attention. Linda Nicolson’s “coat rack” view of the body where cultural artefacts of gender are hung as mentioned in *White Sarees, Sweet Mangoes* (Lamb, 2000, p. 11) comes alive in Vrindavan. The bodies of the widows have to follow religious dictates rather than their own minds. The bodies of the victims of patriarchy come under the religious codes of the sacred place

while constantly being supervised by the temple priests at Vrindavan who are in charge of the prescribed spatial practices within temple premises. The women have to get used to the newly prescribed bodily performance, most of the time, with utmost disinterest. K R Meera uses the symbol of ant profusely in her delineation of the 'environment' of Vrindavan. For Kristeva, it evokes 'abject' as a monstrous insect of horror (Braidotti, p. 113). Through this exposure of the marginality of religious space and women who dwell there, K R Meera seems to partake in the movement to save our 'environment' and women.

After exploring the marginality of those margins it is very important to re-imagine them simultaneously in an emancipatory framework as they have the potential to reconstruct as spaces of freedom and peace. It is relevant to look at Rob Shield's comments on this:

Alternative geography begins to emerge from the 'margins' which challenges the self-definition of 'centres', deconstructing cultural sovereignty and remapping the universalised and homogeneous spatialisation of Western Modernity to reveal heterogeneous places, cartography of fractures which emphasises the relations between differently valorised sites and spaces sutured together under masks of unity. (2013, p. 278)

The selected novels articulate the alternative imaginations of the *so-called pilgrims* to these cosmopolitan places who are distressed and want sustenance and autonomy in their lives. These cosmopolitan religious places have visitors from various cultures and countries who unconsciously mitigate the ecological crises by partaking in the human-nonhuman dialectics which crystallises the significance of these places. Judith Butler, in "Is Judaism, Zionism?" writes, "very often religion functions as a matrix of subject formation, an embedded framework for valuations, and a mode of belonging and embodied social practice" (J.et al., 2011, p.72) and therefore "we must actively seek to preserve "the non-chosen character of inclusive and plural *co-habitation*" (p. 9) in the "public sphere" (Habermas) of religion.

This study is an attempt to find a tool in the becoming of, not widows, but the other women who are the victims of patriarchy. The cosmopolitan women, the protagonists of these two fictions, embrace the sacred spaces to give root to their drifting existence. As Luce Irigaray explains in *Divine Women*, any kind of becoming to be a subject has to be set in the background of divinity. This study ascribes divinity to women in the sense of being instrumental for the wellbeing of humanity and planet Earth. This idea is similar to cultural ecofeminism where cultural ecofeminists resist patriarchal language, religion and culture for the sake of planetary survival and the empowerment of wom-

en, through an egalitarian transformation of culture, religion, language, idea, spirituality and human consciousness.

Religious places with their hybrid spaces have to offer paraphernalia to the distressed women for their own subject formation, like their own home which they desire to preserve at any cost. Otherwise, women like Sumita Nagpal, a writer and globetrotter who comes back to Varanasi every now and then with her foreign friends and Tulsi, an IIT graduate who migrates to Vrindavan after being ditched by her husband will be forced to lead a schizophrenic floating existence without an appropriate space to enroot themselves. In the essay, “Hinduism, Gurus and Globalization” ShandipSaha articulates the different interpretations of Hinduism – neo-Vedanta. “Hinduism was now presented as a religion that was rational and scientific in nature and could act as the perfect panacea to remedy the ills of a materially rich, but spiritually deprived, [world] (Beyer, P., & Beaman, 2007, p. 490). It is high time that religions should realise their true purpose and not be confined to sacred ritualistic spaces. They cannot shy away from supporting the distressed population while taking into consideration their emotional needs and everyday lived reality—adequate healthy food, clean clothes, and comfortable shelter. Redressal of the problem of degradation of the environment which is a global issue is of enormous significance to religion because only a pure ‘environment’ (space, culture, non-human entities) can provide the material condition needed to uphold the relevance of sacred places in the post-secular world today. These cultural hermeneutics of religion based on fictional narratives combine secular and traditional aspects of religion to invoke its reconfiguration. This research paper anticipates the creation of a new religion in the near future, which will be a ‘true religion’ with “representational spaces” that would empower the margins -‘environment’ and women and also the world at large

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