

Sacred Geography of Goddesses in South Asia

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SACRED GEOGRAPHY OF GODDESSES IN SOUTH ASIA

Essays in memory of David Kinsley

Editor

Rana P. B. Singh

Banaras Hindu University, India

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Cover image: Kali in the folk wall painting of Mithila
Photograph © Rana P.B. Singh



VIEWS ON THE BOOK

“In the 1990s, David Kinsley was a gracious, quiet, behind-the-scenes mentor to a number of young Ph.D.s in Indology and the comparative study of religion, including myself, who aspired to write like him, to think comparatively like him, above all, to put things together in ways that no one had thought of putting together. Kali and Krishna, Tantric goddesses and ecology, shamanism and pilgrimage — they all seemed to come together in his prose in beautiful and always provocative ways. In short, he *taught* us. What a pleasure it is to see a volume coming together, ten years after his passing, that focuses on these same themes with a renewed vigour and a renewed concern”.

—*Prof. Jeffrey J. Kripal,*

J. Newton Rayzor Professor and Chair of Religious Studies
Rice University, Houston, TA, USA

“In the frame of ‘sacred geography’ this anthology presents the multidisciplinary studies of goddesses that deal with links between ecology and shamanism, landscape and nature spirit, emphasising web of meanings imbued in the cultural tradition of ritualsapes, sacred time and territory as archetypal representation of the cosmos. The contents illustrated with 34 tables and 69 figures present a wide variety of topics related to sacred geography of goddesses, and I’m sure it will be a very valid and useful contribution to the field”.

—*Prof. Alex Passi,*

Linguistics and Oriental Studies, Bologna University, Italy.

“The book has rightly selected the theme of *Sacred Geography of Goddesses in South Asia*, the basic outline of which was paved by David Kinsley. Covering themes like sacred places, mental journey, cultural landscape, mandalic frame, locality to universality, symbolic ordering, pilgrimage and sacred sites, this anthology opens a new vision of understanding the impinging spirit of feminine divine in South Asia. I’m sure this will further inspire scholars from diverse fields to come closely in sharing thoughts for better service to the Mother Nature”.

—*Prof. Masaaki Fukunaga,*

Centre of South Asian Studies, Gifu Women’s University, Japan

“David Kinsley’s impact on his students at McMaster University in Canada was extraordinary and his contribution worldwide to scholarly knowledge about and genuine interest in Hindu ways of religious life was impressive indeed. His premature departure from us was a palpable loss that we still feel a decade later. It is heartening none the less to realize that his impact carries on and is by no means confined to his home university and adopted country. The present volume, *Sacred Geography of Goddesses: Essays in Memory of David Kinsley*, edited by Rana P.B. Singh of Banaras Hindu University in Kashi, the city of light that David Kinsley knew so well, is fitting testimony to not only the respect in which he is held by scholars around the globe, but to the ongoing scholarship in fields where he himself began to sow”.

—*Emeritus Prof. Joseph T. O’Connell*,
Study of Religion, University of Toronto, Canada.

“Despite the eminent contributions of David Kinsley, the study of the feminine aspect of the divine in Hindu tradition has long been lacking behind the study of its male counterparts, and still does not justify the immense importance that this phenomenon carries in the lives of many Hindus. It is indeed comforting to see that so many scholars of various aspects of the cult of goddesses, covering several regions of Western, Northern and Eastern India, as well as Nepal, and various disciplines such as religious studies, anthropology, geography and cultural studies, in this collection of essays join forces in correcting this serious lack. This book makes a ground-breaking path and shows the way to move upon.”

—*Prof. Erik R. Sand*,
Religious Studies, Copenhagen University, Denmark

“David Kinsley has left a legacy of research that will lead scholars and students into the next millennium. His love of India is reflected in his many works, not the least of which deal with Indian goddess figures and sacred geography. His work has enabled not only Indologists but academics dealing with Women and Religion to build new theory and rhetoric. It is fitting that a Festschrift on just those topics is composed in his honour, focusing sacred geography of goddesses. These essays will lead us moving in wider horizon of feminine divine and their universal importance.”

—*Prof. Phyllis K. Herman*,
Religious Studies, California State University, Northridge, USA

“I suspect that David Kinsley would be “intrigued” by the prospect of a volume of essays on the theme of goddesses and sacred geography since the goddesses of Hindu traditions and the impact of religion on the environment were favoured areas for his “musings,” as he would so often say. On the tenth anniversary of David’s premature departure from us, it is gratifying to see this concrete expression of his enduring legacy as a scholar and a teacher”.

—*Prof. Patricia Dold,*
Religious Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada

“This volume is a beautiful tribute to the work and spirit of David Kinsley, whose sacred persistence in tracking down goddesses to get us thinking about the Goddess illumined so much for all of us. His work has a strong hold on us even ten years after his sad passing, and this book will make that hold even more secure. This fine work of the contributors and the editor may be said to map David Kinsley’s project onto ongoing theological and ecological concerns of the 21st century”.

—*Prof. Alf Hiltebeitel,*
Dept. of Religion, George Washington University, USA

“The multiple forms and the immanence of the great goddess in Hindu India can be located in her sacred sites, primal landscapes, temples, and pilgrimage networks. The fifteen essays in this volume examine varied models and metaphors of the goddess through the lens of sacred geography of India. The book is a wonderful blend of interdisciplinary and contextual research. It will serve as a reliable guide to the newly emergent field of Goddess Studies”.

—*Prof. Madhu Khanna,*
Comparative Religion and Civilizations, J.M. Islamia University, India

“David R. Kinsley, in whose honour this wonderful book has been compiled, loved India and her goddesses. Indeed, many topics dear to Kinsley’s heart are featured here: sacred sites of the Goddess, with their pilgrimages, theology, and temple worship; Tāntric ritual and conception; the ten Mahāvidyās; Varanasi as a field site; and the relationship between religion and the environment. Everyone who knew Kinsley bemoans his premature death. But a *book* like this keeps alive his memory and fine scholarship, and he would be delighted to read it”.

—*Prof. Rachel Fell McDermott,*
Barnard College, Columbia University, NY, USA

“David Kinsley was a gentleman and a scholar, and when I say gentleman I mean gentle man. I will never forget how, in the spring of 1985, he invited the small community of American scholars living in Banaras (I was a grad student at the time) to his home for a Seder, a celebration of the Jewish festival of Purim. Neither I nor half of the other people attending (nor David, as far as I know) were Jewish, but that evening of fellowship, sparked by David’s natural warmth and charm, was deeply moving. That’s how David was. That’s who David was. On these lines of thought and reflections this festschrift is a testimony to David’s contributions to study of goddesses and sacred geography”.

—*Prof. David Gordon White,*
Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

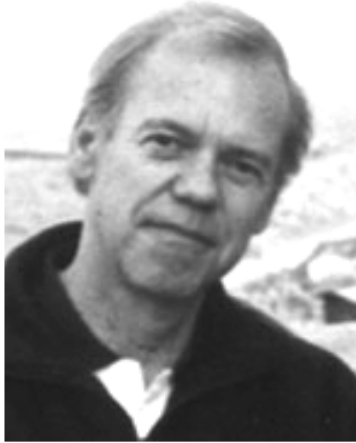
“David Kinsley’s corpus of works on India has influenced generations of scholars and laypersons alike in the Western world. His sensitive appreciation of nuanced social structures interwoven with a sympathetic and wide-ranging knowledge of Indian Goddesses has done more to make this complex subject available to Westerners than any other work on the subject. This volume in honour of his legacy is a rich extension of his efforts in a direction that adds a focus on place, the Goddess as we find her in the cultural and geographic landscape of India. It is a much appreciated tribute to his work”.

—*Prof. Loriliai Biernacki,*
Religious Studies, University of Colorado, Boulder, USA

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## Dedicated to



### **David R. Kinsley**

(born 25 April 1939, died 25 April 2000),

Known as “*the Father of Goddess Studies*”, a grand master and professor of Hindus’ religious traditions, left this mortal world due to lung cancer on the day he completed his 61st birthday, and thought as usual to have a birthday party, which the destiny could not allowed. Kinsley had taught at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, since 1969. He has written eight books on goddesses, ecology and religion, healing and religion, and Hinduism — all paved the path of *sacred geography* on which we’re marching with remembrance and guidance from David.

“I have always taken pride in being a teacher and feel privileged to have been able to provide intellectual and academic leadership to my students, and privileged also to belong to an intellectual environment in which I have learned so much from my students.”

— David R. Kinsley



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**NOTE: In all the essays diacritical marks have been kept only for long ‘a’ as ā, and not used for other words.**

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Richard Mann (Carleton University, Canada) has accepted our request to prepare an essay appraising and critically examining the works and contributions of David Kinsley, and also revising it several times. This was a hard task and was a challenge to maintain balance over emotionality, rationality and criticality while also evaluating their relevance in the contemporary academic arena.

My friend and David's student Hillary Rodrigues (University of Lethbridge, Canada) has been always supportive through contribution and other ways whenever I knocked him. I acknowledge with appreciation the contributions and supports received from Kelly D. Alley (Auburn, USA), Laura K. Amazzone (San Francisco, USA), Georgana Foster (Amherst), Amita Sinha (Urbana-Champaign, USA), Claudia Ramasso (Torino, Italy), Robert Stoddard (Lincoln, USA), Annette Wilke (Münster, Germany), and Xenia Zeiler (Bremen, Germany). Similarly thanks are due to friends from India who contributed their essays and updated several times whenever I requested, viz. Ravi S. Singh, Pravin S. Rana, and Jyoti Rohilla. All the contributors have revised and updated their respective essays and also gone through their essays prepared for the final setting.

Many of the distinguished and established professors of religious studies and theology from different countries have been kind enough in going through substantive parts of this anthology and have encouraged and supported this project by sending their views. With appreciation and thanks I personally acknowledge their kindness, viz. Jeffrey J. Kripal (Rice University, Houston, USA), Alex Passi (Bologna University, Italy), Joseph T. O'Connell (University of Toronto, Canada), Masaaki Fukunaga (Gifu's Women University, Japan), Erik R. Sand (Copenhagen University,

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—RĀNĀ P.B. SINGH

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David Kinsley's 71st **birth** anniversary & 10th **death** anniversary.



# VISIONING SACRED GEOGRAPHY: REMEMBERING DAVID KINSLEY

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## 1. Memorial tribute to David Kinsley

As far as my memories go, it was perhaps evening of 15th December 1999 when I was sitting in the balcony of the Hotel Ganges View (Assi Ghat, Varanasi) together with David Robert Kinsley (1939-2000) and his wife Carolyn ('Cary'), and we were discussing about the *ghostscape*, demigods and defiled spirits those exist in the rural area and serve the role of healers and nurturers of nature, especially with reference to David's recent field studies and first-hand experiences. He was not very enthusiastic like earlier days, and was feeling tired and while watching the flow of the Ganga he was looking sky and emphasising the place, role and function of death in the rhythm of cosmic cycle and Hindus' perception and image of death and afterwards. Continuing that discourse at one point he felt chest pain and uneasiness. He was examined by the doctor who suggested thorough medical investigations. Without loosing time here David and Carolyn flew to New Delhi and where David was examined and suggested to return back to Hamilton (Canada), his home town, and to be admitted for better care. He followed the suggestion. But ultimately the day he planned to celebrate, as in the past, his 61st birthday, he left this mortal world on 25th April 2000.

We received the sad message on 9th May 2000, and immediately we conveyed this to all his friends in Banaras and called upon for a condolence. This meet passed on a message, later on sent to Carolyn and his colleagues at McMaster:

"Scholars and friends of David Kinsley expressed their weeps at his sad demise in this get together. We all felt that it was a great loss to Indian scholarship and also at passing away of a very dear friend, companion and co-pilgrim. May the Almighty grants the departed soul peace and courage to the family to bear this loss. Special condolence is extended to Mrs Carolyn Kinsley, his co-partner and wife. Carolyn – by sending this

condolence, we all express our joining with you the moment of grief, suffering and isolation.

We all feel that David's great contributions on the goddesses of India and other religious cultures will constantly show us a shining path to march, and through his contributions he would be remembered forever. Carolyn – your invisible contributions and insights in making David such a great scholar would also be equally remembered”.

One of his students, Alan Mendelson, narrated the story of David's last journey in ‘*obituary*’:

“In January of this year, David was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. Instead of trying to hide his condition, he began to tell his innumerable friends. What ensued was a remarkable outpouring of affection and love which, David acknowledged, buoyed him up. He talked with remarkable candour about his disease and its prognosis. He admitted that he was afraid. He also admitted that when he could not sleep at night, he would sometimes weep. We understood that he cried not because he felt sorry for himself, but because he so loved life in all its infinite variety.

Visiting David in his last illness was a strangely exhilarating experience. One would leave him filled with awe for the drama of human courage unfolding before one's eyes. David disliked complaining, and even in his terrible illness he found much for which to be grateful, especially the gift of time: time to remember his wonderful life, time to express his love for family and friends, time to write a poem inspired by the Navaho Beautyway Chant:

On a beautiful trail  
I have wandered  
With beauty behind me,  
Beside me, below me,  
Above me, and before me —  
Beauty all around me.  
At the end of my life,  
Filled with gratitude,  
I wander in beauty.

In his last weeks, David Kinsley seems to have set certain dates which he hoped to reach. First, he aimed for the mid-winter break so that he would not leave his students in the lurch. Then, that achieved, he aimed for the end of the semester. This too he managed. Ironically his last class was in one of the courses he had pioneered — *Health, Healing and Religion*. Ever the teacher, David prepared a final lecture on the patient as learner. The last date David set was his 61st birthday, 25 April 2000 at

2:00 a.m. on that very day, he passed away; he had always loved to celebrate his birthday”.

David wished that the following prayer to the ‘Sublime spirit of Mother Mature’ from the *Upanishad* be read at his funeral: “From the falseness lead me to the truth/ From darkness lead me to light/ and From death lead me to immortality; *Om* (the universal sound of God) Let there be Peace, Peace and only Peace” [*Asato mā sad gamāyā/ Tamaso mā jyotir gamāyā, Mrityur mā amritam gamāyā; Om Shānti Shānti Shāntih*] (as in the *Bṛihadāranyak Upanishad*, 1.3.27-28). This was done. There was no need for a formal eulogy, for a life of virtue creates its own eulogy. Let us keep the spirit always awakened and pray the Mother to always direct us on the right path, what David Kinsley wished. The present anthology is one of such memorial attempts.

In the condolence meeting, 9th May 2000, it was sentimentally resolved to have a memorial volume in honour of David Kinsley, and the sole responsibility was entrusted upon me. The first letter of request for this noble task was sent to several scholars and David’s students on 25 July 2000 asking for submitting title and abstract of paper/s by 31 December 2000. It was a difficult task to have a thematic symmetry and corresponding similarities. The focal theme chosen has been ‘Sacred Geography of Goddesses’, the theme introduced by David in his book on *Hindu Goddesses* (1986).

Being a cultural geographer and a friend of David for last sixteen years, I personally learnt several concepts and frames that constitute the web of sacrality imbued in and reflected with respect to space, time, functions, functionaries, images, ritualsapes and the faithscapes. I first met David in January 1984 and since then every year we shared and co-shared our common experiences concerning deeper understanding of *spirit of place (genus loci)*. This discourse continued till our last meeting on 15th December 1999.

## 2. Towards the Hindu Goddesses

The idea of sacrality is one of the earliest forms of perceived realities when human beings attempted to understand the power and spirit of place and to satisfy his quest in search of his embeddedness with the Nature. As the time passed the human consciousness grown and horizon of perception expanded, resulting to the formation of varieties of divinities and their association that make the cosmic whole. The Vedic quest refers to the first principle of understanding that “Who am I?, and From where I come?” (*Ko aham? Kut āyātah?*), referring the feminine spirit and creation force

regulating the cosmic rhythm. Here comes the notion of *purusha* (masculine-force), *prakriti* (feminine-force), which together converges into *prāna* (life-force) where the feminine spirit always predominates.

The mention of goddess — the divine feminine in Indian tradition is traceable not only in philosophical and epic writings, it goes back to the Vedic period. The goddess has been called *Shakti* (“energy/force”), *Prakriti* (“nature spirit”) and *Māyā* (“illusion”). Contemporary studies indicate sufficiently that these three different names are actually patterns of the goddess appearing at various places in different forms of manifestation. According to the Indian tradition *Shakti* is the inherent and inseparable creative power or force. She impels creation. *Prakriti*, separated from the Nirguna Brāhman and as an independent entity, is identified as material principle of creation. Together with male power (*purusha*) She (*prakriti*) transforms matter into spirit leading to creation. The *Māyā* encompasses both capacities — the creative and delusive qualities of Brahma. However, it does not mean that there are only these three forms of goddess. In fact, every matter has got its own *shakti*. Thus, resulting into innumerable forms of *shakti*, i.e. goddess, called by similar number of names. That is how the goddess has been manifested at various places; in different contexts and known by different names.

The history of Hindu mythologies starts with intimate interaction with nature and the force behind that keep nature alive, productive and continue. The earliest conception of that spirit is projected as *Gāyatri* and She has been prayed by a sacred verse, composed by the great sage Vishvāmitra, refers to the most commonly used sacred verse in honour of Sun god as the “Nature Energy” (‘mother’) from the *Rig Veda* (3.62.10), called *Gāyatri Mantra*:

*Om bhur bhuvah, sva tat savitur varenyam,  
bhargo devasyo dhiyo yo na prachodayāt.*

“Let us obtain the adorable splendour of the Sun;  
May the spirit inherent (Gāyatri) arouse our minds.”

The *Rig Veda* (1.164.24) describes the *Gāyatri* as the sound of life on the Earth and the way to know the cosmic order (*rita*) linking the Earth to the universe. The imagination of Father-Sky and the Mother-Earth is a very old idea. This myth serves as model for human behaviour, “That is why human marriage is regarded as an imitation of the cosmic hierogamy. “I am Heaven”, the husband proclaims in the *Brihadāranyak Upanishad* (6.4.20), “Thou art Earth”. As early as in the *Atharva Veda* (12.1.), a 10th century BCE text, the Earth as mother goddess is prayed vividly:

- 1: Truth, greatness, Universal Order (*rita*), strength, consecration, creative fervour (*tapas*), spiritual exaltation (*brahmn*), the sacrifice, support the earth. May this Earth, the mistress of that which was and shall be, prepare for us a broad domain!
- 12: Upon the Earth men give to the gods the sacrifice, the prepared oblation: upon the earth mortal men live pleasantly by food. May this earth give us breath and life, may she cause me to reach old age!
- 63: O mother Earth, kindly set me down upon a well-founded place! With (father) heaven cooperating, O thou wise one, do thou place me into happiness and prosperity!

Kinsley's works (1975, 1986, and 1997) on the goddesses in the Hindu tradition have proved to be of far reaching consequences. In his latest work, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine* (1997), he seeks to dig out the importance of the Ten Mahāvidyās in Tantrism and the Hindu tradition. He adopts two-tier, approach — firstly he talks of the ten Mahāvidyās as a group and then considers them individually. By this he outlines their group's importance and further ably concentrates on individual characteristics, nature, significance and image. In this exercise, besides the literary sources, Kinsley derives his interpretation from lithographs.

In his *Hindu Goddesses* (1986) Kinsley has attempted to carve out female (Hindu) deities' image through the existing belief systems, faithscape, and supported the conclusions drawn with the literary evidences. The chapter 12 'Goddesses and Sacred Geography' (pp. 178-196) of the book needs special reference here; where his main concern is to highlight important aspects of the reverence for the goddesses in Hindu tradition in which sacrality of the land, at greater level the earth itself, is duly conceptualised, realised, experientially reflected and regarded. The Hindu literature, both the classical and modern, is full of reverence for 'Mother India' and 'Mother Earth'. The 'land (and earth)' is personified goddess. This image, as described in literary tradition, is conceptualised by relating all geographical features, viz. mountains, hills, rivers, etc. to the mother earth and in that sense the goddess automatically becomes part of the sacred geography of the country (cf. Eck 1981, 1998). David must be given credit for making his analysis highly relevant by citing beautiful excerpts from even pure regional literature. Reference to the image of *Bhārat Mātā* as conceived by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in the famous novel *Ānanda Matha* is an example of that. In spite of all, the orientation of the exercise remains Indological. Even the sacred geography is not described sufficiently and hence, there lies the scope for making such an attempt. This anthology may be considered as one further step in this direction what David conceptualised. From the perspective of

exploring the diversity of Hindu goddesses and the variety of ways in which they are worshipped, the recent book on Hindu goddesses (Foulston and Abbott 2009) justifiably argued about their ancient origins, but still very much a part of the fabric of religious engagement in India today.

Numerous pieces of works are available on the goddesses (in Hindu traditions) by Indian scholars too. They are mostly literary works confined to Indological orientation describing from perspectives, like history of art, anthropomorphic, symbolism, religious studies, philosophy and even sociology. Similarly, majority of the writings by overseas scholars is Indological. Some noteworthy works need to be discussed here in this connection. Existence of memoirs, travel accounts, and short reports on various pilgrimage places (*tirthas*) at least since the British period can not be denied. However, efforts to understand the goddess image on the basis of some text could easily be termed as comparatively recent approach. Brown (1974) in 'God as Mother' searches the divine feminine through the bi-sexual image of God in Hindu (Vaishnavite) tradition as described in the *Brahmaviavarta Purāna* (BvP). Exploring the ultimate truth as feminine as articulated in *Devi Māhātmya* (DM), a 6th century CE text, is the prime issue of Coburn's (1988) work. In the first part of the book author explains various epithets of the goddess followed by analyses of the myths related to encounters of the Devi with the demons (Madhu and Kaitabha, Mahisha, Shumbha, and Nishumbha and their accounts in *Vāmana Purāna* (VP). Finally, Coburn presents the devotional core of the DM – its hymns (with interpretation). In a successive attempt Coburn (1991) re-looks into the DM and this time comes up with its translation and interpretation. It is a commendable work in Indology. Coburn has taken every care to relate the text with the field, properly substantiated with scholarly interpretations.

The feminine principle in Hindu scriptures, classical texts, commentaries, etc. has been so vividly described with the help of metaphors and symbolism that scholars unhesitantly find every attempt insufficient, if not unsuccessful to catch the wholesome image of the goddess. Probably due to this reason Pintchman (1994) endeavours to find out the *Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*. In a systematic manner the feminine principles are searched in *Vedas, Samhitās, Brāhmanas* and *Upanishads*. Thereafter the philosophical dimension of the divine feminine in the form of Prakriti, Māyā and Shakti is analysed. Pintchman successfully describes how the feminine principle is treated in the purānic cosmogony and cosmology. The 'Concluding Remarks' (chapter 4) of the work is not the resume only, in stead questions related to four different, nevertheless inter-related issues – contextual, thematic, historical and interpretative – have



also been raised. Moreover, the scholar analyses rather attempts to link the socio-cultural practices, with regard to women (/gender) issue, with the goddess's image as explained in the textual and philosophical tradition. And, finally concludes saying then it may very well be possible for Indian women to appropriate these images in ways that 'are more empowering than the ways in which they have been appropriated in the past' (p. 215). Sunder Rajan (1998) also makes a brief effort to reflect the connections between the Hindu goddess and feminism, between 'religious feminism' and contemporary socio-political standing of women and so on.

Like most of the Asian traditions in Hindu traditions there has been a strong concern for the sacredness, or inherent value, of nature. Remarks Kinsley (1995: 53): "In India, a variety of natural phenomena – rivers, mountains, the wind, fire, and the earth itself – are personified as great deities". He further adds: "The idea of the sacrality of the land.... is also expressed in Hinduism in a variety of stories, myths, and legends. As in many native cultures, many Hindus consider the Indian landscape alive and as having a story that defines and orients all those who dwell within it. For many Hindus, Hindu identity is defined and determined by being born and living in India. In essence, one becomes a Hindu by learning the story of the land, by apprehending the inherent sacredness of the land" (ibid.: 58). He notes, "All over India, shrines and temples are identified with certain parts of Sati's (*Shiva's wife*). In this way, the entire Indian landscape is concretely associated with the physical body of a goddess. The goddess's body symbolises the land upon which people live, and the land is therefore given reverence and respect" (ibid.: 59).

All the places inherently possess the power of spirit; however some have more intense, strong and radiant powers, what may be called as 'intrinsic sacredness' (ibid.: 60). In Hindu belief systems the '*land*' (place) is lived by its vibration, healing quality, aesthetical values, sense of wilderness, and also maintaining the continuity of cultural performances that evolved in the ancient past. These performances predominated by varieties and distinctive rituals from one region to another and on the path of 'space' and through the channel of 'time' possess and convey man's interrelatedness with nature and human conscience of awe, wonder, gratitude, and respect.

### **3. Sacred Geography vs. Sacred Places: Order and Vision**

Among the attributes of sacred geography 'space' serves as the contextual envelop in which all other processes taken turn. Consideration of 'space' together with 'landscape' in social and cultural theory, and

geography has taken a serious concern by the spatial turn and post-modernistic thoughts since 1980s. Also, spatial sense has opened a fresh insight to understand sacrality and religious notions too. Sacred cartography and sacred geometry together provided spatial vision to sacred geography (cf. Knott 2005: 11-20). The 'spatial' is a social construct as many theorists thought, nevertheless it is also a spiritual, visual, contextual and emotional notion that human beings possess inherently. It may be projected metaphorically, metaphysically and mystically, and also all-together what in Greek thought called *cosmos*.

In the frame of sacred geography in Māyā culture such notions are linked to geographic features and associated gods and beliefs (cf. Bassie-Sweet 2008). However in a recent study sacred complex of holy city of Puri is studied on the line of sacred geography, emphasising structure, organisation and its cultural role in the formation of a sacred centre (Patnaik 2006). While another study projects the cosmic geometry and spatial ordering of sacred cities in India (cf. Singh 2009b). Such studies indicate the increasing quest and fascination to understand and experience sacred geography.

In the prime conception of sacred geography it is believed that divinities are also "born of the earth, of space, of the sea, and of the starry sky, they are still here among us, still alive. Among the inspiring ruins of the great temples, the sleeping gods are always ready to be revived" (cf. Richer 1995: xxi). Three broad areas of research emphasised in the study of sacred geography, especially projecting sacred places are: (a) *the ritual-spatial context* of sacred place at various levels of social organisations — individual, family, society and, cultural group — and in different contexts and ways; (b) *the growth of meanings and feelings* attached to sacred places, taking history as a means to elucidate the sequences of their existence, continuity and maintenance; and (c) *a typology of sacred places* in terms of contrasts, similarities and degrees of manifest powers (cf. Singh 2009a: 236-237).

Lane (2001: 15) suggests four axioms associated with the character and layout of sacred places; they are particularly useful in understanding the relationship between human beings and environment — the frame of sacred geography. These four phenomenological axioms are:

1. **Sacred place is not chosen, it chooses.** It is a construction of the imagination that affirms the independence of holy. God chooses to reveal himself only where he wills. It is perceived as a place quietly seeking a person out, whispering beyond all the previous efforts to locate and fix the place of power.

2. **Sacred place is ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary.** The *locum sacrum* is frequently found to be surprisingly unremarkable, esteemed a strong background for ‘place because of neither its sublime setting nor its consciousness’, as reported by Swan (1991: 9-10) in the context of functional importance in the life of the community. It becomes recognised as sacred because of certain ritual acts that are performed there, setting it apart as unique.
3. **Sacred place can be trodden upon without** being entered. Its recognition is existentially, not ontologically discerned identification of sacred place is thus intimately related to states of consciousness.
4. **The impulse of sacred place is both centripetal and centrifugal, local and universal.** One is recurrently driven to a quest for centredness — a focus on the particular place of divine encounter — and then at other times driven out from that centre with awareness that God is never confined to a single locate.

The notion of sacred geography refers to an all-encompassing reality that maintain the *prāna* (ethereal breathe/ life-force) by interactional web of the five gross elements (*mahābhutas*), viz. earth, air, water, fire, and ether/space. The interactional web of network may further be reflected into at least five dimensions (cf. Pogačnik 2007: 5-6):

(i) *Dimension of eternity* — representation of primeval vibration, the divine all-presence, the light of light, e.g. sacred territory like Vindhyāchal Kshetra.

(ii) *Archetypal dimension of reality* — the inherent quality of spatial manifestation that preserves the sense of planetary creation or archetypal patterns behind reality, e.g. representation of other sacred places of India in the sacredscapes of Banaras.

(iii) *Dimension of consciousness* — the operational system of cosmic ideas and archetypes that makes the mindset and covers the range from mental to emotional, and from intuitive to rational — ultimately making the ‘belief systems’, e.g. various myths, folk believes and rituals that make the consciousness always alive, active and expanding.

(iv) *Etheric dimension* — possessing vital-energy or bio-energetic dimensions, symbolised with ether that invisible hold and manifests the rest four elements, e.g. Vital-energy fields, Earth chakras, and channel/or site of vital power or places of healing.

(v) *Material dimension* — the dimension in which embodiment of minerals, plants, animals, human beings, landscape features, stars and the Earth’s crust takes place — the visual world of physical perceptibility.

The knowledge and experience of sacred geography (*geomancy*) ‘can provide travellers with the tools to deepen their contact and interaction with the land and its sacred energy of the culture they visit, and to create an exchange of energy between the visitor and the visited place’ (cf. Pogačnik 2007: 239). At present the unified way to approaching social and cognitive environment is encouraging geography to accept salience of place as a great potentiality – this is the concern of *sacred geography*. These dimensions are exemplified in different ways, for different regions and in various contexts putting feminine spirit as focal reference in the essays presented in this festschrift.

#### 4. Axioms for Reading the Sacredscape

The following basic and self-evident rules (axioms) are posited by Lewis (1979: 15-26) for reading the landscape which in modified (in Indian context) form are useful in reading the sacredscape (cf. Singh, Rana 1995: 102-103):

1. ***The Sacredscape is clue to culture.*** The human impingement trusted upon and cognized by the devotees provide strong evidence of the kind of human culture we possess in the past, preserving in the present, and would continue in the future. In other words, they refer to our processes of becomingness. How in the historical past for their own sake and imitation human being searched the sacred power of place while mytholising them and making them alive through ritualisation process. These activities later converge into a religious tradition.
2. ***The Sacredscape refers to cultural unity and place equality.*** All the items and aspects in the sacredscape are no more and no less important than other items in terms of their role as clues to cultural tradition. Sacred journey and circumambulation are as equally important a cultural symbol as the territorial extension, and changes in people’s attitudes and behaviours show the process of “existence-maintenance-transformation-and-adaptation.” This finally converges to make a whole — a unity — that is how sacredscapes become holy.
3. ***The common features of Sacredscapes possess the intrinsic meaning.*** Whatever we see by a common eye is only the outside appearance; however there also lies invisible intrinsic meaning which would be understood only through the faith and deeper feelings in the cultural context. At super-shrine like the Hindu centre of Varanasi, Stirrat

(1984: 208) claims that religious activity embraces both worlds, with no distinction drawn between the pragmatic and the transcendent: “religious activities at such shrines are both matters for making merit for the eternal life and means of gaining benefits in this world.”

4. ***For the Sacredscape history matters.*** Says Lewis (1979: 22): “That is, we do what we do, and make what we make because our doings and our makings are inherited from the past.” The sacredscapes are the cultural heritage resource where history matters. The symbolism, mythology, ritualisation process and the ultimate faithscape evolved — all are the subject to the historical process of transformation and human adaptation.
5. ***The Sacredscapes make little sense if out from sacred ecology.*** Human psyche and manifestive power in the sacredscape are the basic elements for making it existent and continue. They have specific location interpreted in a broader context of symbolism and where divine power is perceived by human being in transcendental form of consciousness. They replicate the *macrocosm* on the earth as *mesocosm* which is further revealed at the level of *microcosm* (human mind and faith, or an individual shrine or temple).
6. ***The messages conveyed by Sacredscapes are obscure.*** As the human psyche varies from one to another, local to regional, and the “messages” conveyed are so varied that making broad generalization is not possible. For understanding and analysis several set of questions be put before into the habit of asking them simply by doing so: What does it look like? How does it work? Who designed it? Why? When? What does it tell us about the way our society and culture work? To understand the message, one has to be a part of the pilgrimage itself as a pilgrim, avoiding completely looking like a pilgrim. This requires a deep sense for the cultural tradition and also a feeling of faith in the frame the followers follow. The landscape, especially sacredscape, communicates, but only to those who can read its messages (Faulstich 1994: 12).

## 5. Expressing Sacredscapes as Function

Sacredscapes function as a system of communication, power and embody; this multiplicity of character needs to be recognised in various contexts and concepts. Meinig’s (1979) has proposed the ‘ten versions of the same scene’ which may be taken as important notions expressing sacredscapes (cf. Singh, Rana 1995: 103-104):

- 1) as **Nature**. The sky above, the ground beneath, and the horizon binding the two provide the basic frame as theologically expressed: sky the father, earth the mother, thus we all are brothers and sisters. The sacral power perceived by human being in history was in fact a realisation of nature-spirit.
- 2) as **Habitat**. Every landscape is a piece of the Earth as Home of Mankind. Man constantly works as a viable agent of transformation and change and creator of resources (like heritage). In short, man is domesticating and cosmicising the earth.
- 3) as **Artefact**. Man in the process of transformation and change sets his mark on the landscape. The monuments, shrines, temples and related structure — all are the testimony of human's imprint on the sacred territory — visible as artefact in the sacredscape.
- 4) as **System**. Man and his interaction with the sacredscape form an intricate system of systems — some visible, but many invisible. This system in itself is a part of belief that implies a faith in man as essentially omniscient — after all he is also a part of the cosmos and God. In cosmos one is related to other, and everything is related to die other like a 'Self-regulating system' what is narrated in the Gaia hypothesis.
- 5) as **Problem**. To know more in order to understand better is a notion to achieve the religious merit more perfectly and also to make rituals better for deeper experiences. As human being the performer may incorporate something from all these other views: it evokes a reverence for nature, a deeply felt concern for the earth as habitat, and a conviction that as a child of the divinity we can search our identity in the cosmos.
- 6) as **Wealth**. In a broader view, for everything has or affects value within a market economy. As heritage resource sacredscapes and their associated monuments and functions to be appraised as property for monetary transaction like development of pilgrimage-tourism. This view of sacredscape is future-oriented, for market values are always undergoing change and one must assess their trends and demands in future. Of course, this notion is completely a western idea, rooted in American ideology. However for maintenance and preservation of sacredscapes, market-oriented value system to be promoted, of course with care and cautions, as a viable strategy.