"Maps"

By Dr. Anita Patil-Deshmukh

KEY TERMS IN MATERIAL RELIGION

Edited by
S. Brent Plate

Material religion is a rapidly growing field, and this volume offers an accessible, critical entry into these new areas of research. Each "key term" uses case studies and is accompanied by a color image – an object, practice, space, or site. The entries cut across geographies, histories and traditions, offering a versatile and engaging text for the classroom.

Key topics covered include:

- Icon, ritual, magic, gender, race
- Sacred, spirit, technology
- Space, belief, body, brain
- Taste, touch, smell, sound, vision

Each entry demonstrates in clear and jargon-free prose how the key term figures prominently in understanding the materiality of religion. Written by leading international scholars, all entries are linked by the ways materiality stands at the forefront of the understanding of religion, whether that comes from humanistic, social scientific, artistic, curatorial, or other perspectives. Brent Plate brings his expertise and extensive teaching experience to the comprehensive introduction which introduces students to the themes and methods of the material cultural study of religion.

Key Terms in Material Religion provides a much-needed resource for courses on theory and method in religious studies, the anthropology of religion, and the ever-increasing number of courses focused on material religion.

S. Brent Plate is Visiting Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Hamilton College, USA. He is a writer, public lecturer, and co-founder and managing editor of *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*. His books include *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects*, *Religion and Film*, and *Blasphemy: Art that Offends*.

B L O O M S B U R Y
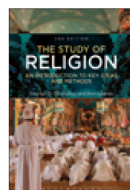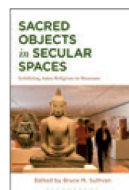
KEY TERMS IN MATERIAL RELIGION

Edited by S. Brent Plate

16 Maps
Anita Patil-Deshmukh
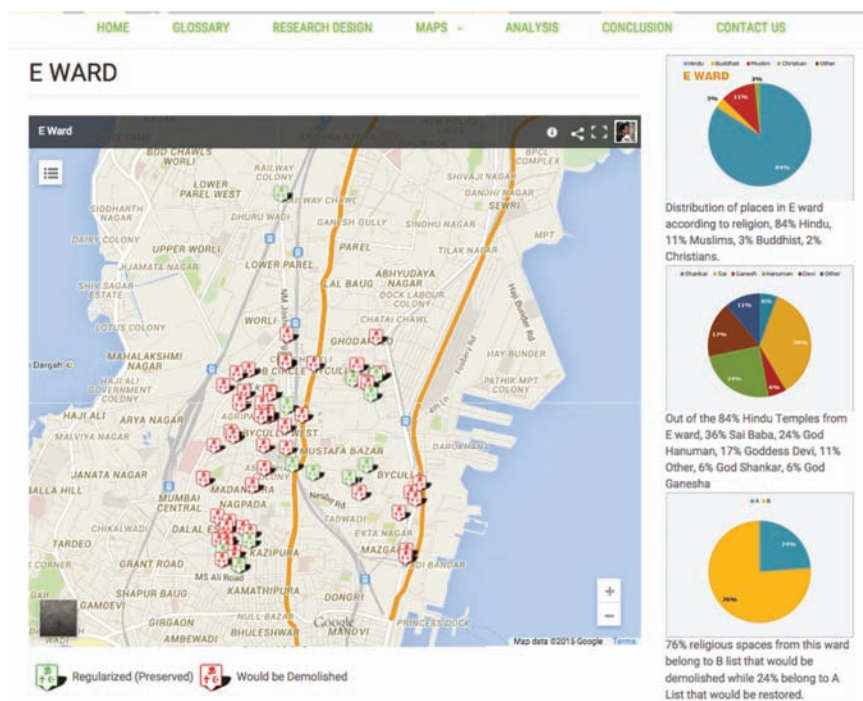
Figure 17 Map of Ward E, Mumbai. Charted by PUKAR. http://www.mapworship.pukar.org.in/e.html.

To map something, as per a dictionary definition, means to describe, chart, delineate, or represent as if on a map; to sketch or plan. In the contemporary activities of data visualization, mapping also includes metaphorical extensions of conventional geographic charts and innovative ways of visualizing data not clearly related to the geographical archetype. While mapping involves spatial and infrastructural relationships, it can also help create a *mental landscape* of an area. This includes the places of worship associated with the religious identities of the citizens in a specific neighborhood, which is deeply connected with their feeling of religious security, or lack thereof. "The idea of mental landscape is associated with a spatial understanding of modernity that has long been central to the scholarship on cities and to urban ethnography" (Rashmi 2010: 77). In this entry I will elaborate on how mapping is gradually becoming an important tool in relation to topics in religion, urbanization, gentrification, identity, right to the city, and land grabbing, with the help of a case study from Mumbai. Maps allow identity to be recast by revealing new structures, and new commonalities and differences in and across geographic space.

Rapid urbanization in India, and across the world, has created an exceptional conglomeration of talents, wealth, and creativity. At the same time it has also given rise to unprecedented disparities and the marginalization of many. Continuous migration of the poor to urban centers, coupled with their lack of rights to the city, and gentrification as the predominant form of redevelopment has led to the dispossession of poor communities. All of this has played a significant role in poor people's increased feelings of insecurity. As a result, they try to claim and use public spaces, especially religious spaces, for community gathering. Citing the plight of Latino migrants in Southern California, Clara Irazábal and Grace R. Dyrness have written,

> While the everyday living conditions of many immigrants, particularly the unauthorized Latino immigrants, force unto them an embodied disciplinarity that maintains spatialities of restricted citizenship, the public appropriations of space for and through religious practices allow for them—even if only

momentarily—to express an embodied transgression. This practice in public space helps realize spaces of freedom and hope, however ephemerally. (Irazábal and Dyrness 2010: 356)

On a similar empowering note, we can see how mapping has been used extensively as a comprehensive tool for documentation by the undocumented (citizens of informal settlements) across the global south. These geospatial tools have helped them to avoid forced evictions, upgrade their settlements, demand basic services, and make other citizens aware of their contribution to urban environments and their "Right to the City" (Patel and Baptist 2010). Thus mapping helps to make visible the invisible and puts on the map those who have been left off the map.

The 2001 Census of India revealed the astonishing statistic that there were 2.4 million places of worship in the country (exceeding the number of schools, at 2.1 million). A large number of them are unauthorized, built by encroaching on public land. In the city of Mumbai, a microcosm of India, a similar predicament has existed for the urban planners and city officials. Mumbai has been in the process of being built for over 200 years through the efforts of migrants from all parts of the country. Mumbai's citizens have brought with them their traditions, cultures, and faiths. Therefore, it is not surprising that almost every street has a religious structure like a temple, mosque, church, etc. While some have legal sanction, others are makeshift and have little or no sanction from the authorities. With the increase in population; vehicular traffic, leading to increasingly congested roads; and the demand for improved infrastructure by those using private transport, these worship places, specifically the illegal ones, have come under greater scrutiny.

In 2012, the Supreme Court of India banned the *fresh encroachment* of roads, pavements, and sidewalks by the construction of religious structures or installation of statues of public figures. According to a petition to the court by the government, "criminals, the land mafia and anti-social elements exploit religious sentiments of the people to grab public land through the construction of such places of worship." Regarding existing unauthorized religious structures on the roads, the bench took a more nuanced position, recognizing that the removal of such constructions was not an easy task for either the municipal authorities or the police.

Taking a cue from the Supreme Court mandate, in December 2012, the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) announced a policy related to religious structures by circulating a list of structures. The first list ("List A") comprised all those old structures that had been established before 1964,

and the MCGM stipulated that they would be legalized and maintained, while those religious structures constructed *after* 1964 would be deemed illegal and demolished ("List B"). How did the MCGM decide upon that particular year? There may have been some rationale behind it, but it was never expressed in the notice sent to stakeholders, nor was it clear what criteria were used as demolition factors, other than spaces that caused traffic jams.

With this background, Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research (PUKAR), with support from the Max Planck Institute of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Gottingen, Germany, mapped religious places in the city of Mumbai, thus exploring the public land utilization in relation to the issue of redevelopment and land grabbing. Taking the two MCGM lists as a point of departure, PUKAR's Barefoot Researchers identified and mapped seventy-eight illegal structures that would be legalized and 193 illegal structures that would be demolished. All these have been plotted in a mapping website, along with photographic documentation and information that was sought from the stakeholders of each of the religious structures (www.mapworship.pukar.org.in). We believed that mapping—that is, creating visual documentation—would help people understand the politics of redevelopment initiatives.

This pilot study led to larger questions and ideas for research on urban space, encroachment, land grabbing under religious pretenses, and contested spaces between the private and the public domains. The research method used included photographic documentation, GIS mapping, collection of Government Resolutions, and discussions with residents and managers of the religious spaces in question. The points for data gathering included histories of the particular temple, mosque, or other religious structure, the age and structural elements, affiliation with specific families or political parties, popularity, access or lack thereof by devotees of all faiths, and the various festivals and gatherings that have been celebrated in that space. The findings that emerged through data collection and conversations illuminated certain trends about religious places and the communities around them.

Religious spaces have traditionally played a significant role in community life. This is true with traditions around the world. They are important physical spaces for communities to gather, socialize, and seek comfort. Temples, mosques, dargahs (Sufi shrines), derasars (Jain temples), agiaries (Zoroastrian fire temples), and synagogues all accommodate various acts of worship and, to a certain degree, demonstrate communal identity. Amidst a secure space, informal community gatherings, festivities, celebrations, and sharing take place. All this is particularly important in a rapidly gentrifying city like Mumbai where space is at a premium and public space is shrinking every day (there are

1.1 square meters per capita in Mumbai as opposed to twenty-six in New York City). In many instances religious worship spaces double as prayers rooms, schools for children from the slums in the afternoon, and spaces for women to conduct their self-help group activities and for elders to connect with each other. The social significance of these spaces is manifested in the ways they create, anchor, and sustain cultural citizenship that confronts the daily living conditions of the urban poor in a rapidly shrinking world.

The central part of Mumbai, which is dotted with chawls, is now undergoing rapid gentrification. Chawls, one- or two-storied single-room dwellings with a common corridor and common toilet blocks at the end of the corridor, were built in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for the famous textile industry workers of Mumbai. Many contained worship places inside or on the outer walls of the dwellings. These chawls are currently being replaced with upscale apartment buildings and the original owners who are unable to afford these pricy residences are systematically being dispossessed of their neighborhoods, being shunted miles away. Through mapping techniques, researchers observed that many religious places around these chawls were being guarded with great gusto under the pretext of worship, but underpinning the safeguarding was the desire for preservation of a sense of place in their own neighborhoods. In many places, local owners, religious devotees, and other citizens have conducted campaigns and have been able to protect these worship spaces, and the chawls as well.

Places of worship become projections of religious identities, identities that are becoming increasingly complex and threatened due to global flows and the breaking down of what has been for centuries a traditional syncretic ethos existing in India. Researchers have pointed out that "when the attributes of identity, such as religion or caste, are mapped on those of geography and language, we get a matrix of sub-cultures constituting various overlapping circles of commonalities, allowing for distinctiveness as well as assimilation; this process, in turn, provides locations for syncretism, which blurs boundaries" (Dalvi and Dalvi 2014).

Since the opening up of India's economy in 1991, the practice of syncretism has taken a beating everywhere in the country, creating discontent, and a fear of small numbers. A feeling of fear and insecurity can make people, especially poor people, vulnerable, gullible, suspicious, and/or violent. And what makes poor people gullible and vulnerable? It is their lack of security, extremely poor living conditions, deprivations of opportunities and resources leading to an unpredictable future, and constant manipulations by politics, policies, and practices. As Amartya Sen argues, "Violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people championed by proficient artisans of terror" (Sen 2006: 2). This reality of life has, indeed,

led to people redefining and asserting a non-mutable religious identity through built structures.

In the current strategy of so many countries to create "Smart Cities and Global Cities," redevelopment has manifested itself by, among many things, abolishing access of the poor to public spaces. It is here that spatial contestations relate to rights in the city, culture, religion, and livelihoods. Our research revealed that in Mumbai's redevelopment process, a temple built by and used by the mill workers is being demolished to create space for a parking lot. The religious places and hawkers on the footpath, both serving the poor in different ways, are accused of being "illegal occupants" and hence are under threat of demolition or dispossession. On both sides of the same road, cars are parked, turning what was a four-lane road into a two-lane road and causing enormous traffic jams, but the parking of cars is not considered illegal. Finding solutions to vehicular traffic jams always seems to get the preference over solutions to the nightmares of pedestrians, and "Citizenship Rights" seem to be the exclusive domain of those who have voices and power. Meanwhile, the voiceless and powerless walk by silently and continue to struggle, while policy makers decide their fate. James Holston and Arjun Appadurai make an eloquent observation on these kind of citizens "who are for the most part, spectators without active participation in the business of rule, they are citizens whose citizenship is managed by an unelected bureaucracy" (Holston and Appadurai 1998: 5).

Citizens' initiatives in establishing temples, sustaining them, and fighting for them, it is speculated, could be a way for people to assert their rights to land in Mumbai's rapidly shrinking public spaces. In addition, once a space has been appropriated, it is only a matter of time before the surrounding space is usurped as well. Politicians are more hesitant to demolish popular religious spaces for fear of offending the religious sentiments of people within their constituency who form their vote banks. On the other hand, once a space becomes "religious," the negotiating power of the devotees, and the owners, becomes more sustainable. In a fast changing city like Mumbai, such negotiating power is valuable and visual mapping allows and enhances such a power. In the words of Appadurai, mapping and self-enumeration are "active, generative and self-defining practices that become part of the political self-consciousness of these communities, reminding their members that their communities are greater than themselves. This greatness becomes an irreversible force for stronger negotiations with those who still see the urban poor as a burden, a blight or a mere vote bank" (Appadurai 2012: 3).

From our study, it appears that most of the demolitions have had two main roots: one, redevelopment and its fallout, and the other, the expanding

infrastructure for increased vehicular traffic. A future study of how the religious spaces would be used post-redevelopment would give an interesting insight into the effect of redevelopment on the social lives of residents. On the other hand, increased vehicular traffic was not a uniform reason for the demolition of religious spaces: many religious spaces have been allowed to stand because of their popularity. This offers an interesting point of further engagement where the contestation is between the aspirations of the poor and the others.

From an anthropological perspective, the use of religious spaces as tools for asserting rights over land is an important underpinning of the process. Owners of spaces with religious sanction seem to have increased negotiating power. So, in essence, they use religious spaces as urban capital they can barter. Religious spaces play a critical role in creating social spaces in urban communities, helping the urban poor in their assertion of religious identity. Mapping of such spaces can become an essential and significant tool for a collaboration of progressive religious groups, policy makers, urban planners, architects, and local residents. Such collaborative efforts could propagate a new vision of built environments in cities, cities that are equitable, inclusive, and just, thus making them Smart Cities.

Bibliography

Appadurai, Arjun. 2012. "Why Enumeration Counts." *Environment and Urbanization* 24(2): 1–3.

Dalvi, Mustansir and Smita Dalvi. 2014. "Politicizing the Sacred: Religious Architecture in the Konkan." *Take on Art* 4(1). http://lasttraintopanvel.blogspot.com/2014/07/politicizing-sacred-religious.html.

Holston, James and Arjun Appadurai. 1998. "Introduction: Cities and Citizenship." In *Cities and Citizenship*, edited by Holston and Appadurai, 1–18. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Irazábal, Clara and Grace R. Dyrness. 2010. "Promised Land? Immigration, Religiosity, and Space in Southern California." *Space & Culture* 13(4): 356–75.

Patel Sheela and Carrie Baptist, eds. 2012. "Mapping, Enumerating and Surveying Informal Settlements and Cities." Special issue of *Environment and Urbanization* 24(1).

Rashmi, Sadana. 2010. "On the Delhi Metro: An Ethnographic View." *Economic and Political Weekly* (November 13) XLV(46): 77–83.

Sen, Amartya. 2006. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York: Penguin Publications.

Urban Aspirations in Global Cities. www.mapworship.pukar.org.in.