

Introduction

Movements of Navarātri

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The Navarātri festival, alternatively called Navarātra, Mahānavamī, Durgā Pūjā, Dasarā, and /or Dassain, is celebrated throughout South Asia, often with great fervor and massive public participation. The festival lasts for nine nights and ends with a celebration called Vijayadaśamī (tenth day of victory). Navarātri celebrations take place worldwide, wherever South Asians settle. While in some traditions several Navarātris are celebrated at different times of the year, the most widely known and publicly celebrated Navarātri festival takes place in the autumn month of Āśvina (September–October).

There exist many descriptions and historical accounts of different local celebrations of Navarātri, and there are also detailed analyses of individual texts or text groups pertaining to this festival. There is great diversity wherever one looks. Accordingly, the festival has been interpreted as a “counterpart of Holi,” “autumnal equinox,” “harvest festival,” “prime festival of the kings, rulers, and warriors,” “the celebration of the victory of good over evil,” “the temporary return of the married daughter to her paternal home,” “the start of the season for warfare,” and/or “the celebration of the female divine power,” depending on what aspect the investigator chose to look at (e.g., the classical Sanskrit sources, local enactments, historical accounts, or interpretations of the diverse celebrants).

While it seems that there are many recurring elements (goddess, royal power, weapons, the killing of demons, worship of young girls and married women, a *samī* tree, communal dancing, etc.), the arrangement and performance and the interpretation of these elements and the

festival as a whole varies greatly. Most likely this has always been the case with innumerable local, regional, and non-Brahminical versions of the festival and its narratives, although the Brahminical prescriptive texts suggest uniformity.¹

This book brings together a variety of scholars who employ diverse methodologies to investigate Navarātri in its many manifestations throughout different historical periods. This book addresses the festival as a broader socioreligious phenomenon, which shares broad themes, without neglecting the particularities of each festival event or its representation in textual and literary accounts. The authors, who individually draw upon contextual and specific expertise, collectively demonstrate how Navarātri functions as a festival that negotiates different spaces linking the public (be it the palace, the temple, or contemporary public space) with the domestic by moving the context of the festival back and forth. Navarātri is then a “prime festival” for those interested in the categories of space as it demonstrates the movement between the internal and external worlds of festival and religious practice, a theme that runs throughout the book.

In this brief introduction to this volume, we set the stage for the individual chapters, beginning with a brief historical overview of the festival drawing upon the Sanskrit literary tradition. This is in no way meant to privilege the Sanskrit textual material as somehow more authentic or to suggest (implicitly or explicitly) that all celebrations of the festival are rooted in these texts. Certainly, there have always been manifold iterations of the festival throughout South (and Southeast) Asia with as much (if not more) diversity in practice and belief as exists today. Instead, we intend to demonstrate how some of the oldest extant sources about Navarātri and its attendant rituals and regulations viewed the festival, even if from a limited perspective. This introduction will conclude with a reflection on the contemporary debates that have arisen in the past decade concerning the practice of Navarātri as a form of cultural and caste hegemony over Dalit groups (including what the government of India defines as “Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes”) by “Brahminical society,” especially regarding the observation of Mahiṣāsura Commemoration Day. Through this brief discussion, we hope to demonstrate the continued relevance of Navarātri within contemporary politics as veneration of the state is intertwined with veneration of Durgā. In the next section, we will discuss how the spaces of Navarātri are negotiated through the movement of people and deities to provide a broader theoretical lens through which the many different celebrations of Navarātri discussed within this volume can be understood. We are primarily concerned with problematizing the binary construction of space as “domestic” or “public” by demonstrating the ubiquity of Navarātri throughout South Asian life. We will conclude our introduction with a general overview of the book’s sections and each of the chapters.

Navarātri, Its Textual History and Its Controversies

Since the chapters in this volume examine Navarātri from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives and from a broad chronology, we have decided to provide this brief survey of the textual history of the festival to ground the individual chapters in a more “classical” study. This is in no way meant to be comprehensive; rather, it serves to provide a starting point for those interested in the festival’s textual sources. While we believe that this textual background is important, it is only one part of the history of Navarātri. Indeed, many groups within South Asia and beyond have practiced and continue to practice the festival in ways that are not reflected in or even sometimes contradict the textual injunctions and/or descriptions. The following will briefly examine both the textual history of Navarātri and some of the claims against it.

The Early Sanskrit Textual History of Navarātri

The most accessible archive to trace the history of a popular festival like Navarātri is contained in references to the nine nights of the Goddess in the Sanskrit corpus. Indeed, it is within the *ślokas* (common Sanskrit verse) of many of these elite, priestly, and royal texts that we find the earliest references to the worship of the Goddess during the festival of the autumn equinox. Though this can at best give a vague and penumbral view of Navarātri’s past, we think it will be of interest to many if we connect the chapters in this volume to a broad chronology of Navarātri as curated in Sanskrit texts.

Outside of the narratives that tell the deeds of the Goddess, Navarātri is perhaps most connected with the story of Rāma within the popular imagination of its celebrants. As the epic story goes, Rāma, the erstwhile prince of Ayodhyā, was engaged in a long and difficult battle with Rāvaṇa, the demon-king of Laṅkā who had abducted his wife, Sītā, and held her captive. Finding his adversary not easily vanquished, Rāma performed *pūjā* to the goddess Durgā. The Goddess, pleased with his worship since it was Navarātri, appeared and granted him victory over his foe. With the boon from the Goddess, Rāma was able to defeat Rāvaṇa on Vijayadaśamī. While many attribute this narrative to the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, it does not appear in that text. Instead in Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma worshipped Sūrya, the Sun, at the behest of the sage Agastya. The praises used, however, are very similar to later Goddess-oriented (Śākta) narratives with the deity praised as the giver of victory (*namaḥ jayāya namaḥ jayabhadrāya*) (*Rāmāyaṇa* “Yuddha Kanda” 105.17). The narrative of Rāma’s Durgā Pūjā, however, appears in later texts, including many from the vernacular traditions. For example, in the Bengali *Kṛttivāsa Rāmāyaṇa* (c. fifteenth century), Rāma conducts

Durgā Pūjā, offering the Goddess his eye to show the extent of his devotion.

In the Hindu ritual calendars, however, Navarātri and the Rāmāyaṇa narrative are intimately linked since the Vijayadaśamī (in some cases Navamī, the ninth day) is believed to be the day that Rāma killed Rāvaṇa and the Goddess killed Mahiṣāsura. In Benares, the first days of the bright fortnight of the Hindu month of Āśvin are full of pomp and pageantry as the famous performance of Tulsīdās's *Rāmcaritmanas*, the Rām Līlā, unfolds, along with the celebration of Navarātri (see Einarsen). This association has been in place for centuries and is rooted in the *Gautamacandrikā* (c. 1624), a biography of Tulsīdās, by Kṛṣṇadatt Mīśra, who writes that the first *Rām Līlā* performance was consecrated after the poet finished his Navarātri and Vijayadaśamī observations (Lutgendorf 1991, 255–56).

Many of the rituals associated with the royal celebration of Navarātri are also said to derive from the actions of the five Pāṇḍava brothers from the epic *Mahābhārata*. In the sixth book of the Virāṭa Parva, the brothers enter the thirteenth year of their exile, in which they must travel without being recognized lest they have to start another twelve-year cycle. To remain incognito, the Pāṇḍavas chose to take up residence in the court of king Virāṭa, each assuming a different guise. Before they could enter his kingdom, however, the brothers needed to hide their weapons. They found a *śamī* tree large enough to store their weapons and hung their battle accouterments and a corpse (so no one would bother the tree) among its limbs and branches. After this strange ritual at the *śamī* tree, Yudhiṣṭhira began praising the goddess Durgā, who appeared before him and offered him a boon of victory over his Kaurava cousins. While not exactly the same ritual of the *śamī* tree that is part of the royal celebration of the Navarātri and Vijayadaśamī festivals in medieval, modern, and contemporary India, there is clearly resonance between the Pāṇḍava story and the ritual of the Day of Victory.

Later (Bhīṣma Parva 23), we find another narrative that references Navarātri rituals and Durgā Pūjā. Just before the start of the great Kurukṣetra War, the text tells us that Arjuna praised Durgā as the giver of victory so she could likewise grant him the promise of victory. Like the narrative from the Virāṭa Parva and the narrative of Rāma in Laṅkā, the praise of Arjuna and his subsequent blessings are remarkably similar in style and tone to narratives from the later Goddess Purāṇas. Indeed, there is general scholarly consensus that both of these Goddess-oriented praise/boon narratives were redactions into the *Mahābhārata* that reflected later developments in Goddess devotion that included the increasing popularity of Navarātri in all levels of society (Mazumdar 1906, 356; Van Buitenen 1978, 5, 19–20).

Within the Purāṇic tradition, references to Navarātri and its attendant rituals steadily increase over time. One of the earliest discussions of the

great autumn festival to the goddess comes from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (discussed in much greater detail in Balkaran's chapter). Within the text is a smaller thirteen-chapter section commonly known as the *Devī Māhātmya* (also known as *Durgāsaptasati* and *Caṇḍīpāṭha*, c. sixth-century CE) that tells of the exploits of the Goddess as she embodies to fight demons for the sake of the gods and the maintenance of the cosmos. In the second of three episodes, the text relates the story of the manifestation of the Goddess from the brilliance of the gods and her subsequent defeat of the buffalo-demon Mahiṣa. It is, however, in the last episode that Navarātri is specifically mentioned. In this portion of the text the Goddess has just defeated the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha, which prompts praise and adulation from the rest of the pantheon, specifically exalting her role as the giver of boons. Beginning in chapter 11, the Goddess replies to their praise with a monologue in which she prescribes the most efficacious forms of worship for those seeking boons. In chapter 12, she transitions to a discussion of the *Devī Māhātmya* itself and proclaims that anyone who hears it recited during the great *pūjā* of autumn (*Saratkāle mahāpūjā*) will be healthy and wealthy with grain and with children (*Devī Māhātmya* 12.12). The text continues to be important for Navarātri not only for its narration of the deeds of the Goddess, but just as the text prescribes it continues to be chanted throughout the nine nights of the Goddess.

The *Devī Purāṇa* is perhaps the earliest of the Śākta (Goddess-oriented) Purāṇas, dating between the sixth and ninth centuries (Hazra 1963, 71–77). This text, unlike the *Devī Māhātmya*, explicitly connects the slaying of Mahiṣāsura and Navarātri and describes the proper celebration of the festival. The story of Mahiṣāsura, however, diverges from the story with which most are familiar. In the text's second *pada*, it narrates the rise of the demon named Ghora. After Ghora is deluded by his wife because of her conversion to a Digambara sect of Jainism, the demon devolves into sinful acts and in the twentieth chapter assumes the form of a buffalo (Mahiṣa). In the subsequent chapter, Ghora-as-Mahiṣa is slain by the Goddess, after which Navarātri is established. The following chapters (chapters 22–23) discuss the proper timing and performance of the rituals during the nine nights of Mahānavamī. Later in chapter 28, the text returns to the Navarātri rites and enumerates their benefits to the practitioner.

The *Kālikā Purāṇa* (c. tenth to twelfth centuries) reserves an entire chapter (chapter 60) to the proper celebration of the autumnal festival of Navarātri. In addition to describing the proper *mantra* and Tantras, the text also explicitly connects the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative and the story of Mahiṣa with Navarātri. According to the text, the Goddess watched the first seven days of the battle between the armies of Rāma and Rāvaṇa, eating the flesh of the fallen at night. On the ninth day of the battle, Rāma conducted a special *pūjā* to Durgā after which she caused Rāvaṇa to be slain.² The text uses this narration to solicit kings to conduct the same

pūjā to strengthen their armies (*Kālikā Purāṇa* 60.43). Later in the same chapter, the *Kālikā Purāṇa* narrates the Mahiṣa story but adds another portion in which Mahiṣāsura converts and takes refuge in the Goddess before she kills him (*Kālikā Purāṇa* 60.101–02). Going even further, the text equates Mahiṣa to an incarnation of the deity Śiva due to a curse from the sage Kātyāyana (*Kālikā Purāṇa* 60.151–53). Despite or perhaps due to its strong Śākta message, the *Kālikā Purāṇa* has remained an influential ritual text and is even the ritual *śāstra* used to determine issues of practice for pandits of the Mysore court (see Simmons).

The *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (c. eleventh to twelfth centuries) is roughly contemporaneous with the *Kālikā Purāṇa* and likewise places the celebration of Navarātri within both ritual and narrative contexts throughout the twenty-sixth to thirtieth chapters of its third book. In the narrative descriptions, however, the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* places Navarātri in a broader mythic context in which the *pūjā* to the Goddess not only gave Rāma his victory over Rāvaṇa but was also enacted by other deities ensuring victories for Indra over the demon Vṛtra, Śiva over Tripura, and Viṣṇu over Madhu, truly expanding the cosmic scope and efficacy of the festival (*Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 3.30.25–26). Further, in the seventh book (chapters 31–40) of the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, a philosophical treatise called the *Devī Gītā* expounds upon Śākta thought in a style that mimics the famous *Bhāgavad Gītā*. In the *Devī Gītā*, the Goddess tells the mountain Himālāya the secrets of her worship, among which she lists both the spring and autumn Navarātris among the most effective celebrations of her power (*Devī Gītā* 8.42; Brown 1998, 251). In addition to the narrative and philosophical developments, *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* expands the ritual prescriptions for Navarātri, especially in regard to the austerities of the festival's *vrata* (fast), which has become a major element of many celebrations of the festival (Hazra 1987, 242; see Shankar).³

Just as the Purāṇic tradition has maintained portions of the Navarātri tradition, the Navarātri tradition has preserved otherwise lost Purāṇic knowledge. The only remaining portions of the lost Śākta Purāṇa *Bṛhannandikeśvara Purāṇa* is known to us through twenty-five lines that were quoted in Raghunandana's text on the practice of Durgā Pūja, the *Durgāpūjātattova* (also known as *Durgotsavatattova*, c. sixteenth century) (Hazra 1963, 466–69). In the passage quoted by Raghunandana, it is said that the Goddess should be worshipped in earthen images and in the form of nine plants (*nava patrikā*) and should be bathed (*mahāsnāna*) with various ritual elements. He also describes ritual sacrifice of he-goats and buffaloes and the performance of fire rituals (*homa*). He concludes that the ninth day is to be celebrated with sacrifices, music, and general merry-making.

Beyond these texts, there are many more Sanskrit narrative texts that reference Navarātri and ritual treatises that discuss the proper celebration of the festival (e.g., *Durgotsavaviveka* of Śūlapāṇi, *Durgāpūjāprayogatattova*

of Raghunandana, *Durgābhaktitarāṅginī* of Vidyāpati, *Navarātrapradīpa* of Vināyaka, and *Durgotsavapaddhati* of Udayasiṃha; see Hazra 1963, 155). In addition to these, there are innumerable traditional narratives, prescriptions, and ritual treatises in vernacular languages throughout South Asia, not to mention the emerging visual media (film and television) and social media that are constantly recording and recreating the tradition today.

Contemporary Debates about Navarātri and Hegemonic Culture

In India, a country with a large majority of Hindus (79 percent according to the 2011 census), the symbolic nature of the nationwide celebration of Navarātri is contentious from the perspective of minority religious groups—Dalits (lit. “suppressed,” “Scheduled Castes” in the Indian Constitution) and Ādivāsīs (“Scheduled Tribes” in the Indian Constitution). Contestations over Navarātri and the observation of Maḥiṣāsura Commemoration Day became a matter of national interest at the time of editing this volume. Since at least 2010, the demon Maḥiṣāsura has been worshipped and commemorated publicly in villages and cities in India (Roy 2015). This commemoration of the demon-king reflects a perspective that runs parallel and counter to the hegemonic celebration of the nine nights of the Goddess. While the term *asura* means “demon” in most Indian vernacular languages, and Maḥiṣāsura is the villain of the narrative for most Indians, Asuras are also members of an indigenous community (Scheduled Tribe) in different districts of eastern India. The members of this community believe that Maḥiṣāsura, their hero, king, and venerable ancestor, was tricked and murdered by the fair-skinned, bejewelled goddess of the Aryan Brahmins. Maḥiṣāsura Pūjā or Maḥiṣāsura Smaraṇ Divas (Commemoration Day) is a provocative and proliferating religiopolitical festival where minority groups in metropolitan universities and villages (in Eastern and Central India) publicly worship Maḥiṣāsura instead of the goddess Durgā. Under the current political regime led by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Maḥiṣāsura Pūjā has been labelled “blasphemy” in the public sphere and in the Indian parliament because it contrasts the desired metanarrative of a homogenous Hindu tradition central to their political agenda (DNA 2016).⁴

One particular observation of Maḥiṣāsura Commemoration Day on the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 2016 became the center of legal actions, political controversy, and multiple blasphemy accusations in the Indian parliament. The controversy was ignited when three students were arrested from the JNU campus on charges of sedition, beef-eating, and Maḥiṣāsura worship.⁵ Following their arrest and the ensuing debates, the Minister of Human Resources Development (de facto education minister) of India and member of the BJP, Smriti Irani, made an impassioned speech in the Indian parliament on February 24,

2016, denouncing the observance of Mahiṣāsura Commemoration Day. For the Hindu nationalist ideologues, the political contestation over the narrative of Durgā and Mahiṣa (and thereby Navarātri) is amplified by the equation of the goddess Durgā and the religiopolitical embodiment of the nation as Bhārat Mātā (Mother India) (Kovacs 2004, Guha-Thakurta 2006). In her speech, there was a clear line drawn that connects the violated honor of the vulnerable female deity and the security of the nation-state. Therefore, in a broad rhetorical sweep, she connected “blasphemy” against the goddess to treason against the nation.⁶ At one point in her speech, she read aloud excerpts from a pamphlet circulated on campus by Dalit activists (DNA 2016):

Durga Puja is the most controversial racial festival, where a fair-skinned beautiful goddess Durga is depicted brutally killing a dark-skinned native called Mahishasur. Mahishasur, a brave self-respecting leader, [was] tricked into marriage by Aryans. They hired a sex worker called Durga, who enticed Mahishasur into marriage and killed him after nine nights of honeymooning during sleep.

From exclamations of “shame . . . shame . . . shame” that were heard in Parliament as Irani read, it was evident that the comparison between the goddess and a prostitute garnered the strongest protest (Ranjan 2016).⁷ Given the relationship between Durgā and the nation-goddess, the sexualisation of Durgā is a particularly contentious topic.⁸ From the perspective of Irani and her political allies, Durgā’s honor must be protected because it reflects the honor that is afforded to the sovereign state of India. The honor politics that are often applied to women’s bodies are extended to that of the goddess’s and the nation’s as vulnerable, coveted entities to be protected militantly by her men. Therefore, creating a homogenous single narrative of Durgā and Mahiṣāsura and the enactment of Navarātri are deeply entrenched in discourses around Hindu nationalism and nation building.

Against the rise of such attempts to homogenize the tradition, the chapters in this book seek to display the multiplicities and dynamism within the Navarātri tradition. Indeed, it is through the divergent ways of enacting the festival that it finds ubiquity in the subcontinent and gives meaning for the variety of peoples who observe the nine nights of Navarātri.

Movements of Navarātri, Public and Domestic

Perhaps one reason for the ubiquity of the Navarātri festival within Indian and Hindu life is its presence in both the public and domestic spheres. As

will be evidenced in this book, Navarātri exists in a variety of forms that manifest in both public and domestic ritual spaces, producing a myriad of overlapping and complementary, yet disparate performances and celebrations. Therefore, it is necessary to place the varieties of Navarātris and Navarātri spaces within a broader theoretical context regarding ritual practice in the domestic and public spheres.

Indeed, much has been written about religion and religious practice/performance within these two spheres of life in South Asia and elsewhere. One such writing that can be a helpful starting point is the essay “Here, There, and Anywhere” by Jonathan Z. Smith (2004, 323–39). In this essay, Smith contrasts the domestic/household or “here” religion with the religion of “there,” which is public or civic religion. He is primarily concerned with location and argues that domestic religion is local. For Smith, domestic religion attempts to ground the family/household (including ancestors) in a network of relations within its community but remains primarily attached to one’s domicile. He suggests that the central component of domestic religions is immediate and symmetrical relations between the ancestors, the living, and the fecundity of nature, often focusing on agricultural and ancestor rituals. He continues by describing public religions as those of which “most of us think first when we imagine ancient religion: the dominant deities and their attendant mythologies and liturgies, the impressive constructions associated with temple, court, and public square. Wherever one’s domicile, these latter locales are someplace else, are ‘over there’ in relation to one’s homeplace” (Smith 2004, 328). In public religion, he continues, relations are based in hierarchies of nested power and specialized knowledge, with kings and priests at their head. Public religion is a religion of unequals. Both domestic and public religions, however, are religions of place. Where “here” religions are interested in situating the family within a locale, “there” religion is about broadening the cosmos to include the earthly powers-that-be “over there” as well as celestial and nether-terrestrial powers that, like earthly overlords, are also not readily present but whose beneficent and maleficent effects can be felt. Last, he observes a third type of religion, religion of “anywhere.” This type is particularly present in diaspora traditions and melds elements of the previous two. In “anywhere” religion, there is a dislocation that creates the need for new ideas of locale and a new and “true” home (often only seen after death), a new cosmology that aims to transcend earthly realms, and a new polity that relies on the king of the gods above and beyond earthly rulers.

Many of Smith’s observations are supported by the descriptions of Navarātri rituals found in this book. Indeed, Navarātri, when celebrated in the home, has elements that ground the practitioner to their locale through symmetrical relations between fertility/virility of the earth, the ancestors, and living—all key components of the “here” religion. Navarātri is often referred to as a harvest festival, and it is celebrated immediately

following the festival of the ancestors. Further, there is an emphasis on ritual use of grains and gifting of foodstuffs in many of the chapters that discuss home rituals (see Rodrigues, Luchesi, Sivakumar, Narayanan). Additionally, we see that part of the function of Navarātri in the home involves the relationship between the members of the family and their community, as they invite their neighbors into their home (see Wilson, Sivakumar, Narayanan), and their neighbors' daughters and sons become part of important domestic rituals (see Sivakumar, Luchesi).

Likewise, many of the chapters describe aspects of Navarātri that reflect the “over there”-ness of Smith’s “there” religions, religions that serve to create and uphold the power of the king and priests. Navarātri is one of the central festivals for South Asia courtly life and served as the yearly affirmation of the king’s power to rule, which was granted from the Goddess (see Balkaran, Zotter, Narayanan, Simmons). The festival is a highly visible performance of the hierarchic relations between various communities and political entities in which these asymmetrical affiliations are created, enacted, and reaffirmed (see Skoda, Einarsen, Sen). The public performance of stratified society is also on display, as ritual specialists from different groups negotiate their roles through their unique ritual apparatuses and their inclusion and exclusion from certain places and rituals (see Ilkama, Hüsken).

Last, Navarātri has many aspects of the “anywhere” religion. Navarātri is not only a religion of terrestrial power and locale, but for many practitioners the physical ritual complex is rooted in greater spiritual truths that transcend mere physicality (see Rodrigues, Shankar), what Smith highlights is “neither here nor there” (2004, 330). Navarātri is also often celebrated in the dislocation of diaspora contexts or even in virtual spaces (see Zeiler).

As we look more closely at Navarātri, however, the helpfulness of these categories begins to dissipate. In this work, we find that domestic rituals that are celebrated in the homes of the practitioners not only serve to ground the family within its locale, but they are also complex negotiations of power and prestige among neighbors, and entire cities are drawn to their very public *kolus* (doll displays) (see Wilson, Sivakumar). We also find that rituals to the young girls-as-goddesses are the same in the large temples and in the home, both containing public displays of means and generosity (see Luchesi). Additionally, even the connection to the fecundity of the earth is not without cosmological significance, creating both symmetrical relationships and a vertical hierarchical relationship between macro- and microcosms (see Balkaran and Rodrigues). In Navarātri, family and home life are often turned inside-out, and domesticity is inverted, becoming public.

The public performances of Navarātri also transgress the domestic/public binary as they intertwine royal and priestly rituals with domes-

tic concerns. The imperial enactments of the festival are inherently tied to the king's family and ancestors as they display their lineage to the public (see Simmons). Furthermore, throughout India, palaces are seats of public religion, but they are also the domicile of the king, wherein domestic rituals are enacted in the living quarters to ensure the virility of the royal line. Further, not only is the temple a site of public worship, but it is transformed into the home of the deities, who themselves partake in rituals during which the space is closed from the public eye (see Hüskén). Thus, many of the spaces of public ritual are simultaneously sites of domesticity.

Navarātri, therefore, is a site through which the gendered boundaries of space can also be contested. Traditionally, domestic spaces were associated with women, and the public sphere, with men, with women being the harbingers of household religious practices and men controlling and performing goddess rituals in temples, courts, and public venues. Within the chapters of this book, there are many examples that uphold or implicitly comply with this gendered ordering of space; however, we invite our readers to pay close attention to the ways that gender dynamics change in the many examples of Navarātri in which spatial binaries are upended or reversed. Thus, as Navarātri blurs the boundaries of religious space, it simultaneously can be and has been a force of social critique and reform.

Moreover, the dislocation of the "anywhere" religions described by Smith is lost on Navarātri. In the Goddess-oriented traditions, locality is central. While Navarātri has cosmological significance, it remains rooted in specific sites and materiality. As many of the chapters in this volume demonstrate, though she may be connected with a greater pan-Indian tradition and goddess, many that celebrate Navarātri worship a local goddess, who is simultaneously regal, fierce, and loving. This goddess is the goddess of the locale, but she is also the Goddess. For the practitioner, then, the Goddess is not "over there" somewhere, she is always "here" and "there," simultaneously immanent and transcendent. As Ákos Östör has argued, "specific pūjās celebrate the timeless, limitless dimensions of the goddess . . . In all cases, however, the pūjās relate land, locality, and people to each other in a direct and particular way" (1980, 88). We, therefore, consider a fourth category—"everywhere"—that might help us to better understand the movement, multiplicity, and ubiquity of Navarātri. Instead of "anywhere," which is tied to no particular place, by "everywhere" we are suggesting that Navarātri is *both* domestic *and* public at once. It is firmly grounded in the family, home, ancestors, and earthly fecundity *and* publicly displays hierarchies (both terrestrial and cosmological). The relationships that the performance of Navarātri creates, confirms, and reaffirms are both symmetrical—in that they focus on the reciprocal shifting of power amongst related entities—*and* hierarchic—

in that they produce clear asymmetries within homes, neighborhoods, temples, and palaces and amongst spiritual entities (deities, gurus, etc).

Furthermore, the Goddess to whom the festival and its attendant rites are performed is not simply confined in one form. The same Goddess, who is worshipped in the image of Durgā slaying the demon Mahiṣa, is venerated in the form of prepubescent girls, resides in the clay vessel, and is cultivated within by the practitioners. These different forms are not even relegated to different ritual moments. As Hillary Rodrigues has shown,

The casual observer might be inclined to think that the clay effigy (*mūrti*) is the only image of the Goddess worshipped during the Durgā Pūjā, when in fact, in the very same ritual, the Devī is actually worshipped under a plethora of other forms and names. Although closer observation of the ritual reveals several explicit images of the Goddess, such as an earthen jar and a cluster of plants, there are numerous other names and forms of the Devī not perceived by most votaries. (Rodrigues 2003, 11)

This unity yet variegation of the Goddess perfectly encapsulates the “everywhere”-ness of Navarātri. The festival is uniquely grounded within each city and town through its local goddesses and to individual homes through the power (*śakti*) that is embodied in its women and girls. Yet, it transcends space for those who are away from home connecting them to a broader tradition and with a new community of celebrants wherever they may be. Simultaneously, celebrations construct political and religious ideologies, empowering and disempowering people and communities; yet for many the Goddess and her festival transcend these mundane concerns.

In this way, our theory of Navarātri as an “everywhere” tradition resonates with the theory of space articulated by Kim Knott. Likewise, Knott diverges from Smith by conceptualizing space not as separate spheres but as unbounded and interconnected (2009, 156). Working with theories from postmodern geographers such as Doreen Massey (1992), she argues that space exists relative to many scales—such as the body, objects, locality, community, and global networks—through which the place of religion can be better understood (2015). For Knott, it is within the intersections of these scaled sites that “social relations occur, which may be material or metaphorical and which is necessarily interconnected (with places) and full of power” (2015, 134). Preferring “space” to “place” because of its connotation of openness, Knott’s theory emphasizes the interconnectedness and fluidity of spatial categories such as public/private, local/global, and so on. Indeed, any clear demarcation of spaces into a binary of public and private is problematic for understanding Navarātri and South Asia more generally (Kaviraj, 1997). As will be seen in this book, within the

frame of Navarātri, space is transformed, but its transformation is not from one type of space to another but as multilayered and co-existing spaces imbued with power and embroiled in issues of status.⁹

Therefore, when we consider the multiplicity of Navarātri and the ways that it is enacted and performed in its various contexts, we see a tradition that permeates various levels and scales of South Asian life, simultaneously. It is “everywhere” at once. It is within the simultaneity of the tradition—its “everywhere”-ness—that negotiations of status and power are displayed and worked out.

Form and Layout of the Book

This work is made up of contributions from a range of scholars from various disciplines who lend numerous perspectives to the celebration of Navarātri. The chapters are arranged thematically relative to the spaces in which the Navarātri practices discussed are performed. Through these different iterations of the festival, the similarity, diversity, and difference within each spatial theme will hopefully become evident.

The first section, “Navarātri in the Court,” focuses on the performance of the festival within the context of the royal celebrations. This section begins with an essay by Raj Balkaran. Balkaran discusses Navarātri from a textual perspective by reading the *Devī Māhātmya*, arguably the most influential goddess-centered scripture, as a Navarātri ritual text. He argues that the text’s interpolation into the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* between narratives of the Sun situates the text as an account of the vernal and autumnal equinoxes that was purposefully intended for recitation. The next chapter, by Astrid Zotter, examines the textual sources for the Malla (1200–1768) and Shah (1768–2008) dynasties of Kathmandu through ethno-historical method. In this chapter, Zotter compares the ritual procedures of both courts to reconsider the relationship between the two dynasties. She complicates the received history of Nepal’s royal rituals by showing how the Shahs adopted rites, deities, and specialists of the previous dynasty while advancing their own ritual culture. In the next chapter, Caleb Simmons looks at the representation of Mysore’s Dasara procession in courtly literature and mural paintings from the reign of Kṛṣṇarāja Wodeyar III (1799–1868). He argues that Dasara was the public display of a larger project of king-fashioning in Mysore that sought to (re)establish the newly reinstalled Wodeyar dynasty through genealogical accounts. Simmons suggests that Navarātri and Dasara became the Mysore festival *par excellence* because they enabled the display of a newly formed vision of divine kingship in light of colonial oppression. Uwe Skoda’s chapter focuses on the royal fort-centered rituals of Dasara in the Bonaigarh region of Odisha. He demonstrates how the economic conditions after Indian

national integration shape the religious landscape of the former princely states and the ritual life of its tribal inhabitants for whom the performance of the festival procession has been a site of identity formation. He then compares the decline of the rituals of fort-centered Dasara to the rise of market-centered Durgā Pūjā to show how post-liberalization economics has shifted ritual emphasis from the fort to the market.

The subsequent section, “Navarātri on Display,” examines iterations of Navarātri that take place in the “public” displays of Navarātri and Durgā Pūjā in public exhibitions, performances, and temples. This section begins with two chapters that focus on clubs and committees involved in the planning and preparation of Durgā Pūjā displays. In her chapter, Moumita Sen looks at the organizers of Durgā Pūjā in Calcutta, specifically the patronage of local youth clubs. She examines the increasing political patronage of the festival since the dramatic victory of the Trinamool Congress in 2011. Sen argues that this political upheaval of the secularist position vis-à-vis religious festivals of the erstwhile communist government has been drastically revised. She shows how new alliances between the Goddess and the government in popular politics and popular religiosity have significantly impacted the practice of secularism in West Bengal. Conversely, Xenia Zeiler examines Durgā Pūjā committees through the emerging processes of mediatization. Her chapter analyzes the mediatized activities of the Durgāpūjā committee Mulund in Mumbai as it communicates, organizes, and negotiates the community’s Durgā Pūjā via various forms of social media. She demonstrates Mulund’s and other committees’ ability to adapt to emerging media environments and how their mediatized activities serve as markers for identity as they negotiate community status, prestige, and authority.

In the next chapter, Silje Einarsen uses ethnographic research to illustrate recent changes in Navarātri celebrations in Benares, focusing on two types of cultural performance: the royally-patronized *Rām Līlā* play based on poet Tulsidas’s Hindi rendering of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Durgā Pūjā installations creatively arranged by neighborhood youth clubs. Whereas the former represents tradition and Banarasi identity, the latter is perceived of as new and innovative, which manifests as skepticism and breeds some resistance to the celebrations. Like Skoda’s findings, Einarsen shows us that the popularity of the traditional *Rām Līlā* is decreasing, whereas the Durgā Pūjā is increasing rapidly in both scope and public esteem, highlighting the dynamics of change, creativity, tradition, and innovation in the festival culture of Benares.

The final two chapters of this section examine the celebration of the autumnal festival within the context of the temple. Ina Marie Ilkama examines the ritual enactment of the Goddess’s fight with the demon in the Brahmin Kāmākṣī Ammaṇ temple in Kāñchipuram, Tamil Nadu, and in the popular local non-Brahmin temple of Paṭavēṭṭammaṇ. Ilkama

traces both performances to different local mythologies that inform the reenactments and practices of the festival. Particularly interested in the materiality of the festival, she argues that through their presence, material representations are imbued with agency within the context of Navarātri rituals. In the next chapter, Ute Hüsken also investigates the celebration of Navarātri in Kañcipuram, focusing on the Vaiṣṇava Varadarāja temple and comparing its ritual apparatus with that of the Kāmākṣī goddess temple. Hüsken demonstrates that the Varadarāja temple's enactment of Navarātri is rooted in the Sanskrit ritual texts the Pāñcarātra *saṃhitās*, in which the importance of this festival and the role of the goddess are downplayed. Yet in many oral (re)interpretations and in some of the temple's nontextual rituals, Varadarāja's Navarātri festival resembles the celebrations at the Kāmākṣī goddess temple much more closely. She argues that ultimately the rituals and festival performances of both temples are derived as much from shared local cultural values as they are from normative textual traditions.

The following section, "Navarātri Inside," examines Navarātri as an internal tradition that is embedded with symbolic meanings for the practitioner. In chapter 10, Hillary Rodrigues presents a summary of the main ritual actions of the Bengali Durgā Pūjā and offers interpretations of some of its symbolic features. He illustrates that the primary function of the Durgā Pūjā rituals is to establish the presence of the Goddess by installing her in a wide variety of forms, such as a jar, a cluster of nine plants, a clay image, a cosmograph, and a virgin girl. He argues that Durgā Pūjā in effect enlivens devotees and cleanses their faculties so that the Goddess may be perceived as ubiquitous in creation, thereby revitalizing themselves, their families and communities, and the cosmos itself. Similarly, Jishnu Shankar provides a closer look at the expressions of the spiritual element inherent in the celebration of the Navarātri festival. Shankar examines the teachings delivered by Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Baba Bhagwan Ram ji (a.k.a. Sarkar Baba) of Benares to individual practitioners over the course of the nine-day festival. He demonstrates that within these teachings, Sarkar Baba presented the body as the ultimate vessel of the Goddess and that through the processes of asceticism the practitioner seeks to become one with her. In both chapters in this section, the space of Navarātri is an internal space conceived within the ritualist.

The final section, "Navarātri at Home," moves the reader into the "domestic" spaces of the festival and into the private world of Navarātri performances. Nicole A. Wilson examines Navarātri as a device of identity construction and communication within a small suburban, middle-class temple and the homes of its middle-class devotees in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. She illustrates how performances of Navarātri rituals are being refashioned according to the changes in local social structure, particularly those relating to social mobility and socioeconomic status in an urban

living environment. She argues that Navarātri ritual performances are moments during which caste-based customs, identities, and practices can be challenged, *class* stereotypes can be reaffirmed, and *class* identities can be constructed. In chapter 13, Deeksha Sivakumar explores the female-centered Brahmin ritual of Pomma Kolu during Navarātri. She shows how homes and possessions function like museums during Pomma Kolu, preserving personal and religious memories through aesthetic arrangement. Sivakumar demonstrates that the entire visual space of the display, the unique objects and dolls housed within it, the participants' organization around that display space, and the reflexivity evoked from their responses to the display all function together to enhance the performance of this festival. The final chapters, by Narayanan and Luchesi, show the overlap between domestic and public Navarātri performance. Narayanan's chapter demonstrates the overlapping aesthetics and concerns of the royal display of the king at the Dasara *darbār* and the arrangement of dolls in the domestic *kolu* by connecting many of the overlapping themes of the affirmation of life and conquest of death. The final chapter, by Bridgett Luchesi, demonstrates how Navarātri transcends the distinctions of public/domestic through a detailed ethnography and analysis of the ritual worship of girls and women both in the homes of practitioners and in the local goddess temples. She keenly demonstrates the ways in which the festival changes given the relationship of the participants, especially regarding the behavior and demeanor of those who are being worshipped.

The collection will then finish with concluding remarks by Hillary Rodrigues in which he brings together the themes of the chapters more closely and looks toward the future of Navarātri studies.

The chapters in this book demonstrate the wide range of practices and performances through which Navarātri is celebrated. They display the dynamic nature of the festival specifically and religious traditions more broadly. They lead the reader through the pomp of the court, public display and performance, and temple rituals, to the domestic and private space of the home, and back again, all the while destroying any such distinctions. Together, they provide a fuller picture of the complex ways that Navarātri is practiced, enacted, and understood by devotees in a variety of places and spaces.

Notes

1. These efforts to harness the heterogeneity of religious practices have important consequences in contemporary politics in India as well. See the discussion of Mahiṣāsura below.

2. This narrative and its connection to Navarātri and Durgā Pūjā are expanded in the Śakta *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*, a later Purāṇa that was influential for eastern India, especially Bengal (Hazra 1963, 270–72, 278).

3. Hazra suggests that the *vrata* portion of the celebration is a blend of Vedic and Tantric rites and that it most likely reflects the traditions of western and southern India (1987, 242; 1963, 357–58). This suggests that the popularity of Navarātri in Brahminical circles had expanded considerably.

4. Other parties have stood up in defense of the observation of Mahiṣāsura Commemoration Day. Sitaram Yechuri, a Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader, defended Mahiṣāsura worship in the lower house of the Indian parliament with two main points. First, Hinduism is marked by a practice of pluralistic traditions; he cites the example of Onam, in which the return of Mahābali, an *asura* who was tricked and killed by Viṣṇu in the form of Vāmana, is celebrated. Second, when BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee compared the erstwhile prime minister, Indira Gandhi, to Abhinav Caṇḍī Durgā, she rejected the comparison on the grounds that Bahujans, Dalits, and Ādivāsis worship Mahiṣāsura (Vincent 2016).

5. The first information report (FIR) lodged with the Delhi police by a BJP minister listed eating beef and the worship of the demon Mahiṣāsura upon university premises as legally punishable offences (Indian Express 2016). Cow slaughter is prohibited legally in most states in India. This makes the practice of Muslims and Dalits of consuming beef contentious (Chigateri 2011).

6. Within the political ideology of the ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, ideas, personalities, symbols, sites, and geopolitical bodies are often sacralized for political mobilization (Freitag 1980; Ramaswamy 2009; Van Der Veer 1992). In this sense, ideas of the sacred, distinct from yet filtered through religion (Lynch 2014), tinge all the following legal charges of offense: sedition, prevention of insults to national honor, defamation of historically important personality, and hate speech.

7. This was not the first time such depictions had raised controversy at JNU. A similar debate over memorializing Mahiṣāsura had arisen over images published in a campus magazine that depicted Durgā having sex with Mahiṣāsura, which several right-wing student bodies deemed blasphemous (Lal 2014).

8. Muslim artist M. F. Hussain was charged under the Insult to National Honour Act for images that were said to depict Durgā having sex with Mahiṣāsura (Simmons 2011; Guha-Thakurta 2010; Chattopadhyay 2008).

9. Yet another way to view the space of Navarātri with its multitude of milling bodies, commerce, and ludic festivities and rituals would be Michel Foucault's theory of "heterotopia" (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986). Tapati Guha-Thakurta has used this Foucauldian concept to show how the everyday neighborhoods of Kolkata are transformed into multilayered and multifunctional spaces during the Durgā Pūjā (Guha-Thakurta 2004).

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