RITUALIZING NAVARATRI:
THE POWER OF CHOICE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY IN GAINESVILLE,
FLORIDA

By

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To Anu,
for always laughing at my Sanskrit jokes

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Hinduism in the United States has often been studied by scholars in terms of the institutionalized temples in urban areas like Atlanta, Georgia and New York City. However, very little research has been produced regarding the way people living in non-urban centers recreate Hinduism in the American context. In Gainesville, Florida, this research is especially important for the higher than average concentration of people of South Asian descent in the area.

This thesis argues that the way festivals are celebrated among South Asian groups in Gainesville demonstrates the active choice of hosts and participants in events in regards to identity. During the Navaratri festival, people create a special time and place in which to perform different facets of their identities. Though participants may view their actions to be traditional or part of a historically continuous tradition they share with their families from India, the way events are constructed by hosts and participants actually involve a great deal of agency and choice in choosing what constitutes tradition. In using elements from a shared cultural repertoire, community members are able to host and take part in a multitude of events that satisfy the multiplicity inherent in identity.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: ETHNICITY, GENDER AND RELIGION

Beginnings

On a cool September evening, I arrive at an apartment complex lit dimly by the gray halogen light of lampposts along a driveway. Tonight I am attending a "*prarthana*" group composed of South Asian women who get together once a week to sing devotional music. I am dressed in a *salwar kameez*, with *dupatta* draped around my neck, its wispy tails trailing down my back. Although I have arrived on time, I appear to be early since no one else has exited their car or walked to the apartment door. I ring the doorbell. A woman answers and ushers me inside. I am the only one there and I take off my shoes inside the door, another concept I would only later understand. The apartment is sparsely decorated; family portraits and a US Marines emblem dot the otherwise bare and white walls. The kitchen to my left and the living room straight ahead are austere and clean. A small picture frame is propped up in the corner of the kitchen counter surrounded by garlands of pink and white flowers. Small *diyas* are lit in a semicircle in front of the picture. I cannot make out the subject of the picture. My glasses are still in the car along with a notebook and a tape recorder I was too embarrassed to bring in with me.

I ask the host where I should sit and explain that I have never attended an event such as this in someone's home and I thank her for inviting me. I sit near the brown leather couch on the floor, which is covered in comforters and bed sheets. I make mental notes of the room's shape and the brief conversation I have with the host. I note the soft white and pink georgette *sari* she wears and the way she hastily moves my shoes from where I removed them to closer to the closet so they remain out of the way of guests. I adjust my *kameez* and sit cross legged on the floor.

And then I wait for someone else to arrive and break the awkward silence of a young student's first ethnographic encounter.

In five minutes' time, other women arrive that seem to range in age from mid-twenties to seventy or older. Some wear *salwar kameez* of varying fabrics and colors while some wear *saris* and still others wear regular Western clothes. Most speak in snippets of a language I do not understand, though English falls from the lips of some. After ten minutes of chitchat and much fussing about who will sit where, sixteen women sit in a circle in the living room, their own notebooks of devotional songs spread before them, tape recorders plugged in and ready. The leader of the group attempts to quiet the conversations that seem to end in giggles so that they may begin. She turns on a small machine that pumps out a drone of notes to keep in tune when singing. She makes a few brief announcements that the following week is the beginning of Navaratri and that this is the last time they will practice as a group before singing together next week so they all ought to sing loudly and confidently. Finally, nearly half an hour past the time scheduled to meet, the women sing a song to Hanuman[1] and begin their weekly practice of devotional music.

The vocal leader suggests they begin with the "Saundarya Lahari", a poem attributed to Shankara in praise of Devi, the divine feminine, so that they can finish the poem at the next meeting during the holiday. The women take out their own copies of the poem. Some of the copies are printed in books, others are printed copies from the internet. Some versions are written in English transliteration while others are penned in the script of the owner's native language. The group sings about twenty verses from the middle of the collection of verses

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[1] Hanuman is a member of the pantheon of gods and goddesses associated with Hinduism. Many pictures and icons of Hanuman are scenes from his role in the *Ramayana*, one of the classical epic Sanskrit texts of Hinduism. He is part monkey, part man and has many special powers such as the ability to fly and the ability to make his body drastically increase or decrease in size.

before stopping to practice other songs to be sung the following week. The leader begins with a

song that has not been sung by the group before and she finds that the others are reluctant to

begin with such a difficult song, so she changes her tack and asks for a suggestion of a song they

all know to build up courage before singing something new. Someone suggests a song called

"Janani". The women collectively nod in approval. Some flip through their personal binders full

of songs to find the words, while others close their eyes and wait for the song to begin. The

leader begins and the whole group joins in, following the crescendos and decrescendos of the

song. Everyone seems to know the words. I sit and I listen, watching some women sing and

stare off into the distance while others close their eyes and emote over the mood of the song. As

the song ends, the group seems to come back from the distance or emotion of the song, ready to

move on to the next song.

Introduction to the Aims of this Study

Throughout the United States, Hinduism has become a part of the American landscape.

People from all around the world have imported this religion to the US through public festivals,

the building of temples, recognition by governments of Hindu holidays, and various other means

beginning in the nineteenth century but truly flourishing after 1965 due to a change in the laws

regarding immigration. Within the last two decades, a great deal of scholarship has been

produced that examines the various ways in which Hinduism exists and will continue to exist in

the United States. Academia seems to focus on chronicling the ways in which communities form

themselves around an institution and how they utilize that institution in the construction of their

identities as simultaneously Indians and Americans. The majority of this scholarship has

identified larger and more urban populations of South Asians around the US in locations such as

New York City; the Silicon Valley of California; and Atlanta, Georgia (Eck 2001; Fenton 1988;

Joshi 2006; Khandelwal 2002; Leonard 1997; Rayaprol 1997; et al.). The late 1980s and early

1990s saw an effusion of scholarship that focused on the immigrant experiences of South Asians (few discussing religion specifically), the majority of which included the quantitative methods most closely associated with the field of sociology (Dasgupta 1989; Eames and Saran 1980; Fenton 1988; Leonard 1997). More recently in the last decade, studies concerned with "second generation" South Asians have come into favor and have further addressed gender inequality, religiosity and the dissonance between generations of immigrants and their children, among other topics (Joshi 2006; Melomo 2005; Mruthinthi 2006; Rayaprol 2005).

Despite this wealth of information regarding the various ways people have kept and discarded elements of Hinduism in the United States, scholarship has yet to substantially tap into the ways in which communities maintain their sense of "Hindu-ness" when there is no temple for the community. Though other studies have identified the typical track that many South Asian communities follow in the creation of a temple or religio-cultural centers (Dempsey 2006; Fenton 1988; Kurien 1998; Linda 1997; Waghorne 1999 and 2004), few have examined a community at length prior to the building of a temple. What kind of Hinduism exists when there is no South Asian-specific temple or other central location as a place of worship? How are identities created, performed, (re)imagined and maintained? In what ways do the categories of religion, gender and ethnicity mix together among a minority community? What is it that people actually do with these identities? How has ritual changed as it is imported from a South Asian context and how do people deal with the regional diversity of their own geopolitical boundaries, in India and the United States? These questions are important questions to ask since much of the modern and popular scholarship regarding South Asians and Hinduism in America fails to answer them, much less ask them at all.

This thesis will explore these questions and attempt to see how a selected group of people live out their identities during Navaratri in Gainesville, Florida. Ultimately, it is my theory that the assortment of ritual events that take place for this festival, both in homes and in large public places, allow different spaces to serve as the grounds to perform different aspects of a person's identity and incorporate other identities into their repertoire of Indian-ness or Hindu-ness. This is also the locus of people who teach each other different ways of being Indian and Hindu. I contend that while Navaratri is pan-Indian in scope in an Indian context and continues to be so in the American context (in that it is observed by Indians from many ethnic-and sometimes religious-backgrounds), the religiousness of the holiday is not the primary concern of those who celebrate it. Navaratri is a time out of time and a space out of space where one can create and reinforce the social networks that provide further opportunities to assert other facets of the identities of network members, particularly in terms of ethnicity and gender. The structure and form of the rituals, regardless of location and ethnic or gender composition, are similar enough to create meaning among all of the performers. While religious identity is important, religious devotion may not be the motivation for participating in a "religious" ritual in the small slice of life that I studied. The commonality of time and space during Navaratri act as the catalyst, the common thread, which allows for an increasingly diverse group of people to understand one another as well as themselves. The ritualization of Navaratri allows for a dialectic to occur between performers of different identities in several different locations, all the while maintaining meaning.

A Brief Word about "Hinduism/Hindu"

The terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism" have become something of reified entities similar to the monolithic and increasingly imprecise catch-all categories of religion like Christianity or Islam. The naming of "Hinduism" and the definition of the term are concepts embroiled in what

seems to be perpetual academic debate. Arguments abound and differ, usually in regard to who invented the term and what agency is either given or taken from the parties involved. John S. Hawley claims that "Hinduism" is a term born from the British colonial rule in India during the 19th century. This term, created to help missionaries influence and therefore convert the heathen natives to the cause of Christianity, helped put the "natives" into a box for categorization and domination. He goes on to note that while the term "Hindu" is a much older term, it was a rarely used term, "certainly never in Sanskrit or any other vaguely scriptural document and when it was, its range was such that it would have embraced Buddhists and Jains as well as the people we today would call Hindus" (1991: 23). David Lorenzen argues that "Hindu" as a religio-cultural term is not a British construction. Many factors and actors were complicit in the creation of the term "Hindu," which one could argue was created well before the advent of the British Raj. Islamic influence was a factor, geography and language indigenous to that area were clearly factors, and recent religious assertion in the Indian context (viz. Hindutva) clearly continues to be a factor. These influences in combination produced a loaded term that was not simply an appellation for the "other" by the colonialist British rule of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries (1999). Other suggestions of the origin and creators of the terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism," as well as their proper academic employment exist in the pages of many journals, though none have provided a concrete definition of either term upon which scholars can agree. Indeed, Douglas Brooks has identified this lack of definition as a problem within the academic study of "Hindus" and "Hinduism." He rightly notes that many scholars shy away from concrete definitions to avoid the debates briefly mentioned above, but also to avoid having to separate the religion of the term from the culture or politics or social considerations of the term (1994: 1113-1115).

With this in mind, and the knowledge that page upon page has discussed this debate from a multitude of perspectives, what then are we to make of such disputed terms?

For the purposes of this research, the term "Hindu" describes a person who utilizes the term to signify a religion that encompasses a great deal of regional, doctrinal, practical and cultural variation originating from a South Asian context. "Hinduism" is the term that describes this "religion" which is typically connected historically and geographically to South Asia, and more specifically the geopolitical nation of India. There is no definitive text, language, set of rituals or festivals which uniformly dictate what is and is not "Hinduism." These definitions are intentionally brief and nondescript. On principle, concrete definitions are precisely the antithesis of what one needs to analyze the information in this thesis.

To classify Navaratri among the participants in my research as exclusively the realm of "Hinduism" would be false, since others who do not identify as "Hindus" or as part of any sect of "Hinduism" actively participate and find meaning in the events they attend. To say what is and is not "Hindu" undermines my attempt to show the self(sub)conscious conflation of terms that encompass multiple identities, some that conflict and some that mesh together. Separating the religiousness of "Hinduism" from the culture, politics, geography, and social structures affiliated with it not only *seems* impossible, but perhaps truly *is* impossible and quite unnecessary in many ways. There is little to be gained from trying to separate out what exactly is religious or cultural when the performers themselves see no reason to create such categories.

What is Navaratri?

Navaratri (alternatively spelled Navratri or Navarathri depending on regional language transliteration) literally means "nine nights" and is the appellation for a pan-Indian festival popularly associated with Hinduism. These nine nights occur according to a lunar calendar, so it is an annual festival that changes its dates slightly from year to year on a Western calendar.

Technically, there are two Navaratris, one in September-October and one in March-April, though the most popularly and universally celebrated nine nights occur during the autumnal phase of the moon. According to Fuller and Logan, this phase occurs during the month called Asvin (1985), though Erndl names this same lunar time as occurring in the month of Kartik (1993: 119). Regardless of the name of the month, both sources note that the autumnal Navaratri occurs during the bright fortnight of the moon. This section of the month, when the moon increases in brightness, is considered to be an auspicious time and therefore ripe for worshiping the divine (Sanford 2004: 125). This commonality of auspicious time is one factor that allows people from all different regions of India to come together to celebrate this festival; a unifying feature especially salient in an American diasporic context.

Devi Mahatmya

Though Hinduism possesses a multitude of texts that worshipers can turn to, one text, the *Devi Mahatmya*, is especially important to the worship of Devi in all her forms. Belonging to the larger *Markandeya Purana*, the *Devi Mahatmya* is twelve chapters long and covers three stories which revolve around different forms of Devi. In each story, the only one who can save the world or slay particularly evil forces is Devi, to whom the other gods pray or beseech her for help. In popular art and images of the gods and goddesses of Hinduism, masculine gods are often shown with the feminine counterparts: Vishnu with Lakshmi, Shiva with Parvati and so on. However, the *Devi Mahatmya'*s three stories showcase the power of the Goddess and the necessity of feminine power or *shakti*, even by great gods like Vishnu and Shiva. As Erndl notes, "the major purpose of the text is not to associate her with any particular male god but to show her as the ultimate reality who is both immanent and transcendent, who is the grantor of both material pleasures and liberation" (1993: 28).

The three main story lines of the *Devi Mahatmya* describe three different times when the gods needed the help of the Goddess in order to save the world. In the first episode, Devi is described as the goddess of sleep, "Yoganidra," or as the goddess of sloth, "Tamasi." She possessed Vishnu, who slept upon his snake, Shesha, in the middle of the eternal sea. When two demons assaulted Brahma, who grew out of Vishnu's navel, he prayed to Yoganidra to separate herself from Vishnu so he would wake up and vanquish the demons. In this first chapter and first story of the *Devi Mahatmya*, Brahma noted that Vishnu had come under the power of the Goddess, just as the Goddess was the creator of illusion (Coburn 1991: 35). Shortly after Brahma's own words, a sage in the story continued, saying that Brahma "praised the blessed sleep of Vishnu, the incomparable queen of all, supportress of the world, who causes its maintenance and destruction" (Coburn 1991: 36). This first story exemplifies Erndl's suggestion above that Devi is the source of both "material pleasures and liberation."

The second story portrays the Goddess as the killer of the buffalo demon Mahishasura. Here, Mahishasura takes over all divine power so that none of the gods are able to kill him. The gods then band together and combine their powers, from which the Goddess in the form of Durga emerges. Armed with the various weapons of the gods in her multiple-armed form, Durga kills Mahishasura by spearing and decapitating the demon. Kinsley notes here that:

> There is no attempt made, either, to 'soften' this aspect of the Goddess. She is extraordinarily beautiful, to be sure, but she obviously delights in the din and bloodlust of battle. She does not best her enemies through cunning, deceit, or feminine wiles. She is, quite simply, invincibly powerful and accomplished in the martial arts and is clearly at home, perhaps most at home, when pulverizing powerful demons (1978:493).

This powerful and victorious image of "Mahishasura Mardini" or the Goddess as the "Slayer of the Buffalo Demon" is a popular way to depict Durga, who mounts a lion or a tiger and whose eight arms bearing the weapons of the gods attack the half man, half buffalo demon. This epithet was particularly relevant to my research since at every South Indian Navaratri event I attended,

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the *Mahishasura Mardini Stotram*[2], which can be translated as "The Prayer of the Killer of the

Buffalo Demon," was sung by all the participants. The twenty verses each ended with the

following lines:

Jaya jaya he, Mahishasura Mardini
Ramya kapardini, Shaila sute

These lines may be translated as, "Victory, Victory to the killer of the Buffalo Demon, she who

has beautiful braided hair, the daughter of the mountain." This song's popularity demonstrates

the importance of this second story to the larger holiday of Navaratri (though the first and third

stories are mentioned as well within the span of the prayer), particularly among South Indians.

The third story, also about the slaying of demons, demonstrates how the Goddess may take

several forms but all of them are truly facets of one divine feminine. In the span of the fifth to

tenth chapters of the Devi Mahatmya, two demons named Shumbha and Nishumbha, have taken

all the fruits of sacrifice in the world from the gods, rendering them powerless. The gods went to

the Himalaya mountain to sing the praises of the Goddess and asked her for help in dispatching

these demons. Hearing these praises, a form of the Goddess named Ambika sprung from the

sheath of Parvati (a form of the Goddess associated with Shiva and the Himalaya Mountains).

Ambika waged war against the armies of Shumbha and Nishumbha, while seven other forms of

the Goddess came to fight as well, having emerged from the bodies of the observing and non-

participating male gods. In the end, the armies of these brother-demons are slain. Nishumbha is

killed by Ambika herself, but all of the emergent forms of the Goddess combine to form one

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[2] The *Mahishasura Mardini Stotram* is an interesting prayer. At events and during interviews, participants were
unable to recall who had written the prayer itself. Some attributed the text to Adi Shankara, while others claimed
that a person named Ramakrishna Kavi or Telani Ramalinga composed it. However, reliable information on these
suggested authors in regards to this prayer does not yet exist. After an intense search through the resources at my
disposal, I found absolutely no scholarly analysis or even mention of this song, its author or from where and whence
it came into use. The words to the prayer are, however, available with various transliterations on the internet, and
printed copies are available to be purchased along with a CD from http://www.amazon.com.

massive, powerful Goddess which then defeated Shumbha (Coburn 1991: 52-73; Erndl 1993: 25-27). Other variants of this story exist in the classical epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, as well as other texts (Erndl 1993: 27). However, the theme of the powerful Goddess who returns order to the troubled world pervades these variants as well as in the Devi Mahatmya.

Though this text is cited by Coburn (1991) and Erndl (1993) to be an important source for recitation in honor of the Goddess, especially during the autumnal Navaratri, Devi Mahatmya itself was not recited at any of the events I attended. The stories, however, were displayed through dances, songs, and images of the Goddess. One might rightly deduce from these suggestions that although the text provides some of the basis for the mythology involved in Navaratri, it does not give liturgical or ritual advice or guidelines. In addition to the commonality of time, the standardized story lines and lack of standardized liturgical structures (though not from any textual source) also allow for Navaratri to encompass a great deal of regional diversity in observances.

Ethnic Diversity in Practice

Navaratri is celebrated in a multitude of ways which often differ among regional and ethnic groups within India. In general, Navaratri is a time to celebrate the multifaceted nature of Devi. Ritual elements, such as songs, offerings of food and gifts, and dance come from a shared cultural repertoire and are combined in diverse and yet meaningful ways. In Bengal, and continuing in the United States among groups of South Asians with Bengali heritage, Durga Puja, or worshiping Durga exclusively, is the emphasis during Navaratri. In Punjab in North India, Navaratri focuses on the victory of Rama over Ravana in the classical epic the Ramayana. In South India, the nine nights of Navaratri are celebrated by setting up a *kolu* or *golu* in the central room of the home. This is an elaborate set of steps, covered in bright colored *saris*, on which all kinds of icons, pictures and statuettes of the gods and goddesses, along with other dolls

and small collectibles, are placed. There are indeed many more ways that Navaratri is celebrated around India, and even more of an admixture of these regional varieties in a diasporic context such as the United States. Chapter two identifies four regionally specific observations of Navaratri. Chapter three then analyzes how these ways of celebrating are found to be meaningful for Indians who celebrate Navaratri differently because of their own regional heritage. Throughout this work, I hope to identify some of the ethnic or regional ways of celebrating Navaratri as part of a lived religion.

Why Gainesville, Florida?

Gainesville, Florida is an interesting and unique location in which to conduct research regarding Hinduism and identity among South Asian populations. But what, exactly, is so unique? Gainesville possesses several characteristics that place it beyond the pale of the majority of research that has already been conducted. As mentioned before, most of the scholarship regarding Hinduism in the United States has dealt with large, urban, populations of South Asians and the kinds of institutionalized Hinduism that has been created by these communities. Gainesville does not have such a centralized religious institution specifically for and by people of South Asian descent. This is perhaps one of the most important points in my research: religious, ethnic and gendered networks exist in Gainesville without the institutions characteristic of larger urban areas.

Though the city of Gainesville is home to one of the country's largest universities, the non-student population is unlike the population of larger cities like New York City, Atlanta and the others previously mentioned. Gainesville's percentage of Indians and Indian American is higher than that of the rest of the nation. Indians account for 1.24 % of the total population, well above the .4 % average for the country as a whole. This population consists mainly of people between the ages of 25 and 65, many possessing a bachelor's degree or higher. Additionally, this

population statistically makes more money and owns homes with higher value than the rest of the city's population. While these are statistics and averages that qualitatively leave out the high and low ends that generate such median numbers, the group of people involved in my research reflects these general statistics. (A figure of numbers and full analysis of these statistics gathered from the US Census Bureau's American Factfinder website can be found in Appendix A.)

Many of the people in my research fit into the demographics mentioned above. There are other characteristics of Gainesville aside from this larger than average, highly educated and high income-earning population of Indians that make it an interesting place in which to study public and domestic rituals.

ISKCON

Near Gainesville, in Alachua, Florida, there is a temple community of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) who are also identified as members of the Hare Krishna movement. This temple complex is located about twenty minutes away from Gainesville by car. The complex is located on 127 acres of land which includes the temple itself, a cow sanctuary, two schools, a storefront, a warehouse, a Tulsi house in which a sacred kind of basil called "tulsi" is grown, privately owned homes, administrative offices, the home of the *Back to Godhead* magazine, and other buildings ("New Raman Reti"). The temple architecture blends in with the suburban surrounding landscape, as it looks more like a house in comparison to other Hindu and ISKCON temples around the country. This community of ISKCON members is present daily on the University of Florida campus providing "Krishna Lunch," a completely vegetarian and ISKCON-compliant lunch that is available on every UF scheduled day of classes, for a small donation. Some accounts figure this community to be the largest concentration of ISKCON communities in the country (Davis 2006).

The proximity of the temple to Gainesville and the prominence and conspicuous presence of devotees of ISKCON on campus and the larger community were noted by several interviewees. One Indian man, who arrived in the United States in the 1970s and moved to Gainesville in the 1980s, noted that the presence of the ISKCON temple made it "easier to observe some rituals and festivals" because it was closer than the Hindu temples located in Jacksonville, Orlando or Tampa. However, he and his family did not attend the temple with any regularity. He further noted that he admired the devotees and the ISKCON community for being so devoted and a "healthy face for one kind of Hinduism," yet he added that he would not personally become a member of that community because exclusive devotion to only one aspect of the divine was too narrow a perspective for him. While asking questions regarding the ISKCON temple were not part of the scheduled interview questions, off-the-cuff remarks such as these, and other similar remarks in other interviews, briefly highlight the interesting relationship between the South Asian Hindu communities of Gainesville with the local ISKCON community.

ISKCON as a group has had a fairly recent yet turbulent history in the United States, beginning in the 1960s and continuing today. This group is not typically comprised of South Asian Americans and usually consists of first generation converts from the 1960s and 1970s and their second generation ISKCON-raised children. Some scholars have noted that the early waves of South Asian immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s found the preexisting ISKCON temples in urban American centers to be valid centers for worship. These immigrants may not have previously identified themselves as belonging to ISKCON but continued to worship with the group because of the similarity of practices and concepts. In the 1970s and 1980s, South Asians made up a large part of ISKCON membership since many non-Indian adherents turned away from the group due to scandal and criminal allegations (Zaidman 2000: 207-210). Currently in

Gainesville, however, varied responses exist and are by no means uniform among those of the Indian Hindu community at large. For this reason, I have been specific in noting Gainesville's lack of a South Asian-specific or a South Asian funded temple.

University of Florida

Another unique quality of Gainesville, Florida is the location of the University of Florida (henceforth UF). Beginning in 1853 with the East Florida Seminary in Ocala, Florida and solidifying in Gainesville in 1905 with the Buckman Act, UF has had a long history in north central Florida ("University of Florida History" 2008). The largest university in the state of Florida and one of the five largest universities in the country, UF has upwards of 50,000 students ("About the University of Florida" 2009). Many of these students and faculty are of Asian origin or ancestry. Because of the size of the university and the way it supports the local economy, Gainesville is quite unlike other urban centers in which Asian Indians have previously been studied.

UF provides its own statistics[3] of the makeup of enrolled students and employed faculty. While these statistics neither show the breakdown nor the criteria for classification of faculty or students as "Asian," the number of "Asians" on campus has been steadily growing in the past decade.[4] Between the first semesters of 1998 and 2008, the percentage of Asians in UF's total faculty has risen from 6.6 % to 16 %. Likewise, between 1998 and 2008, the total percentage of UF's Asian student population has risen from 5.9 % to 7.7 %. Within the web of these statistics,

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[3] Much of the statistical information provided is incredibly general. Faculty composition is broken down into categories like "White, African American, Asian, Hispanic and Minority," categories that are meant to encompass the entire university's 4,000 plus faculty. Just as the 2000 US Census Bureau statistics are to be taken with a grain of salt, so might UF's own statistics. I include them because, despite their essentialist and generalizing faults, they none the less shed light on the importance of the Asian population of Gainesville, and how UF has increasingly attracted people of Asian descent to the area for the purpose of faculty employment.

[4] The majority of people observed and interviewed in my research arrived in the Gainesville area prior to the records provided by the Office of Institutional Planning and Research, which date back as far as 1995. See Appendix B for more information.

one can also note that since 1998, Asians have accounted for increasingly high percentages of faculty in the schools of Medicine and Engineering (see Appendix B). As many authors have noted, the diaspora of Asian Indians in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States was highly educated. Khandelwal identifies this as a "brain drain" from India, as many who immigrated were "doctors, scientists and engineers" whose skills were critical to India's development (1995: 179). Again, to tie these observations together would be largely speculative since finer detailed information regarding UF's Asian faculty is not currently available. However, the participants in my research reflect the trends I have suggested: nearly every single husband of the women in my study hold or have held a position of professor or higher in the various engineering schools at UF. I attribute this predominance of connections with UF to the snowball-like sample in my research. Since I was invited into one context through an academic connection, the subsequent events I attended were held by members of this academically connected community. As a result, my research reflects only a small slice of life within the Gainesville Indian community and is certainly not representative of all Indians or Indian Americans in a university setting.

It is truly unfortunate that statistics (and more detailed statistics at that) are not available prior to 1998 regarding the Asian population at UF. Considering the influx of Asians in general, and Asian Indians in particular, after a change in immigration quotas in 1965, one might assume a large boom in Asian faculty and student populations at UF. Viewing the trends within the last decade, such a boom and steady increase in the 1960s, 1970s and onward is not difficult to envision.

India Cultural and Education Center

In the southwest side of Gainesville directly west of the University of Florida, a 15,000 square foot building houses the India Cultural and Education Center (ICEC). In an effort to support the surrounding community of residents and incoming students at the undergraduate and

graduate levels in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the ICEC was formed. This organization has provided a location and the means for many cultural/religious events in the Gainesville area, and has maintained a relationship with UF's Indian Student Association (ISA) and the Hindu Students Council (HSC) in order to financially and socially support members of the Gainesville student community ("India Cultural & Education Center").

Several interviewees mentioned the ICEC as a useful resource for Indian members of the community, and others assured it was a much better space than a temple because it allows a wide range of people to use the building for a wide range of activities. For example, the HSC Diwali celebration took place in an upstairs room at the ICEC. As I left the event, someone mentioned that the Swadhyay Parivar organization on campus was also conducting a Diwali celebration, although none of the HSC participants I asked knew of this simultaneous observance. Other events, such as the local Bengali Association's Durga Puja celebration and the HSC *garba/raas* dance took place at the ICEC, though not simultaneously. Groups based on international religious organizations, language or ethnic affiliation and UF student organizations and others all utilize the center for different purposes.

In many ways, Gainesville, Florida fits outside the mold of the scholarship regarding Indian immigration and Hinduism in America. The combination of the ISKCON temple and the pull of UF's opportunities for professional employment have created a noteworthy intersection for the study of Hinduism in America.

Methodology and Sample

Initially, my interest in this festival hinged upon the very public and very domestic events for Navaratri in which one could participate. Throughout the course of my research, many people stressed to me that the events going on here in Gainesville would likely be carried out in similar ways in India. For instance, the *garba* and *raas* dances, I was told, would be held in the

streets of the local neighborhood in India. Since such practices are not feasible in Gainesville

due to the distance between apartments and subdivisions where Indian families live that are

scattered around Gainesville and the surrounding towns, central locations such as the O'Connell

Center and the Martin Luther King Center were suitable substitutions. Similarly, several

informants noted that some of their Navaratri observances, as will be described below, would

take place at home in India and therefore conducting them at home in Gainesville was also

appropriate.

Yet, in light of these assurances, I wondered at the predominant scholarly literature which

spoke mainly about the Protestantization of Hindu temples in the United States (Eck 2001).

With cultural centers and Sunday schools (also called *bala vihar*s) and large festival observances

at many urban Hindu temples (Kurien 1998: 37), I questioned how people created a community

amongst themselves in a place that had not yet followed the typical progression of temple

creation found in other urban centers. In order to address this question, I chose to focus on

Navaratri, due to its status a festival that is widely celebrated throughout India albeit in various

regionally-specific ways. I attended as many events in relation to this festival as possible, as

well as other subsequent events that further demonstrated the dynamics of the larger community.

The bulk of my research includes a "thick description" of the events that unfolded, supplemented

by interviews which were conducted anywhere from two weeks to five months after the actual

events.

Intra- and Extradomestic

The events I attended in the homes of people were not publicly advertised and were

relatively small scale events. As an outsider to these traditions, I would not have known about

them without the help of an active participant who, in addition to inviting me to her own home

also secured invitations to the homes of others. While I would not characterize these events

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within a private/public dichotomy, I would instead suggest that utilizing a vocabulary of "intradomestic" and "extradomestic" loci. It is clear that the previously existing networks of relationships within the South Asian community facilitated attendance at these events, although the location of the event influenced and was influenced by the involved networks, as well as the sense of "intra" or "extra" domesticity. The networks contained within an intradomestic locus seem to consist of family, friends, and other acquaintances from the same regions of India and are constantly being created, recreated and cultivated throughout the year. Since intradomestic events were organized by the members of intradomestic networks of South Asian people, they fly under the radar of those not familiar with the traditions or those outside of the networks.

The larger events, in contrast, were more publicly advertised. Knowledge of these events was not as contingent upon membership in a network of insiders and the events themselves were located in extradomestic contexts. The Gujarati Samaj of Gatorland (GSG) sponsored a *garba/raas* (an event associated with Navaratri, particularly amongst Gujaratis) at the Martin Luther King Recreational Center which is owned and operated by the City of Gainesville. The Indian Student Association (ISA) at the University of Florida (UF) sponsored a similar event at the O'Connell Center on the UF campus, which was also partially sponsored by the GSG. Both of these events were advertised through email, on websites and in the form of fliers at locations like a local Indian grocery store called the India Bazaar and other local South Asian stores and restaurants around Gainesville. I characterize these events as extradomestic events created by extradomestic social networks. Extradomestic networks and events seem to include considerations of ethnicity and language and gender, but seem motivated to encompass more of a pan-Indian mentality. Extradomestic networks perform "Pan-Indian-ness" whereas intradomestic networks perform "this-Indian-ness." In making the distinction between intra- and

extradomesticity, I do not intend to create mutually exclusive categories of classification. Rather, these two concepts are related to one another and are certainly encountering each other such that extradomestic situations involve intradomestic relationships and vice versa.

In addition to attending these events, I interviewed seven participants and hosts of these events. All of the interviewees were women. Other members of the household often listened in on the interview and offered their own information. In one case, an interview was conducted at the same time with a mother and a daughter. Aside from this daughter who was in her early twenties, the other interviewees were all women in their 50s. The homes in which all interviews were conducted contained several rooms, ornate furnishings, and were located in well-kept cul de sacs. While this information is largely subjective and is my own interpretation in comparison to the surrounding Gainesville area, all of the homes of the interviewees reflected the previously mentioned census information on the location of Indians in a high income bracket. In all but one home, at least one member of the family was employed in some sort of faculty capacity by the University of Florida.

Intradomestic situations and social networks are concepts in which groups of people, who form based on the household level, maintain their intradomesticity by locating themselves within the homes of the members. By this I mean that groups, like the *bhajan* groups I attended, form by word of mouth (perhaps from employment or other religious opportunities) into groups that move from home to home during the year. Navaratri is particularly expressive of this notion since the events I attended in a domestic setting moved from house to house, only once occurring at the same house within the course of nine days. The Latin prefix "intra" suggests something internal, or occurring within an already established location. By affixing "intra" to "domestic" I hope to suggest that a sense of exclusivity or boundedness predicates the actual creation of such

networks. By this I mean that notions of what it means to be North or South Indian, or female or Punjabi or Gujarati are implicit and preexisting when creating networks in an intradomestic context. One's ability to even join intradomestic networks is based upon these exclusive givens. However, I do not mean to say that exclusivity is neces*sari*ly a negative thing. As many participants in my study noted, the sense of exclusivity allowed the participants to feel more connected because of a shared experience or a shared repertoire of significant actions. This does not mean that new understandings of what these notions mean cannot be created in an intradomestic situation. On the contrary, new identities and roles within the intradomestic network are constantly being created and maintained. However, the sense of "Punjabi-ness" or "North Indian-ness" exists in some way (real or imagined) prior to the creation of an intradomestic (or extradomestic for that matter) social network.

Extradomestic networks and locations can include intradomestic networks within the ranks, though extradomestic situations attempt to include much more broad categories of identity. The Latin prefix "extra," the opposite of "intra," signifies a sense of being outside or beyond. In contrast with "intradomestic" situations, extradomesticity implies a moving beyond those *a priori* notions of inclusivity. These extradomestic groups seek out fewer categorical qualifications for membership in the network and participation in performance of such a network. In the case of the ISA *garba* at the O'Connell Center, the extradomestic setting and network of people who participated in this event were not joined by gender, ethnicity or religion specifically. Rather, the network is comprised of people performing their own "pan-Indian-ness." While some people continued to seek out members of intradomestic networks to which they belonged, they were participating in a larger extradomestic performance which was self-consciously less exclusive than other intradomestic networks.

Locating Myself

Emic and etic, insider and outsider: two dichotomies that have been used to describe the different approaches to scholarship with regard to studies of culture, especially within the study of religion. Whether one or the other is better suited to academically study religion is not to be argued decisively in this thesis, but is a topic relevant to my location in my own research. I have found that my position as an outsider to the traditions and people involved with my research both benefited and detracted from my research in varied ways.

This thesis has been a research project not only in content but also in my own personal understanding of the methodology within the study of religion. The insider/outsider dichotomy has been a subject of a great deal of scholarship which argues both for and against the inside or outside identity of the academic within his or her own scholarship. Robert Orsi has outlined this issue in his *Between Heaven and Earth* (2005) in which he examines the intersection of his own life as an insider and outsider within his own research on American Catholicism. Reading this book before conducting some of my research was a great advantage as it contained an interesting mix of information about different facets of American Catholicism as Orsi had understood it during years of fieldwork in this area, but also offered gems of advice about the relationship that is created through the exercise of research. Relationships between the scholar and the people involved in a study always exist on some level. Perhaps one of the most salient chapters is the fifth, in which Orsi truly struggles with a question put to him by one of his interviewees. He, a child of Italian American Catholic parents whose own parents had emigrated from rural Italy, is asked by a female interviewee if he has ever actually prayed to St. Jude for help. He replies that he has not prayed to St. Jude, but seems to realize that the liminal position respective to the insider/outsider dichotomy in his research is a difficult place to be. At once he wants to maintain his insider position, to be accepted by those he researches and to give them a voice in turn, and

yet he is constantly made aware of his outsider-ness with his scholarly vocabulary and repertoire of categories with which to understand Catholicism (2005: 146-176). Although I am in no way suggesting I share a similar insider/outsider position as Orsi in my own research, I do feel compelled to note the personal difficulty I have faced in mitigating my own identity in the face of research and to suggest some of the ramifications that have resulted from that struggle.

During the process of ethnographic research and interviews, I became keenly aware of my own identity as a white, non-Hindu female. As the only non-Indian participant at many of the events I observed, I experienced a difficult negotiation of identity within myself in deciding how I would act as a participant-observer. At nearly every event, several other female participants of a range of ages encouraged me to participate more, either by singing along with the songs sung by the group, waving the lamp for the deities during *arati,* or eating more food. I often found myself standing toward the back or out of the larger group during events so as to avoid others encouraging me to participate in the rituals. This benefited me as I was able to observe the larger dynamics of the group but also it prevented me from seeing the smaller details closer to the hubs of activity. In the realistic pursuit of ethnographic research, one must be aware of and avoid the kind of "god-trick" as described by Donna Haraway (1988: 584). As a researcher, one cannot be everywhere at once. In this way, placing myself self(sub)consciously outside the group has produced a different set of data than had I been closer to other performers of events. Though, I sometimes perceived this physical and metaphorical "outside" location to be a place of loss of data, I often had to remind myself of Haraway's suggestion:

> The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another... There is no way to 'be' simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (i.e. subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation and class (1988: 586; emphasis in original).

Further, Haraway's "god-trick" also reminds the researcher that he or she influences the surrounding location during research. One cannot ignore that the mere presence of a researcher (whether having declared or guarded this identity from others) can affect what occurs during the actual research itself (1988: 585). One might invoke the relationship of vision in the concept of darshan. Just as a devotee (or researcher in this case) goes to view the divine (or those participating in the research), the latter also goes to view the former, creating an inherently connected view between the two. While I cannot calculate the affects I had on the people I observed and interviewed, I think it is a valuable ethical issue that every ethnologist must acknowledge and at least attempt to reconcile within his or her own work. As Karen McCarthy Brown notes in her famous tome, *Mama Lola*, "ethnographic research, whatever else it is, is a form of human relationship" (1991: 12). One cannot remove the humanity inherent in ethnographic research, though one ought to struggle with the ethical dimensions of it.

During the nine days and nights of festivities, *bhajan* groups and other religio-cultural performances I attended, I was increasingly aware that my textbook knowledge of the category of "Hinduism" was not always relevant to that which I witnessed. The practical side of intra- and extradomestic performances of religion and culture cannot as easily be learned in a book. As Robert Orsi notes:

> Fieldwork forces an acknowledgment of and engagement with something messier than the controlled marshalling of letters on a page, something less predictable, and demands a different kind of attentiveness. The world of the text is really not the world (Orsi 2005: 164).

The kind of lived religion, of which Orsi is so fond of describing, is difficult to pin down in a text because it renders the "lived" part of religion as a static and solidified moment. Printed words cannot change and are completely unable to nuance the dynamism inherent in every day religion in every day life. I have found very little information regarding the topics involved in

my research, and I acknowledge that once this thesis ends, the people within the religion continue to innovate, create, (re)imagine and maintain themselves in ways this thesis cannot predict or describe. However, I hope that it adds to the increasing body of research regarding Hinduism in the United States and provides a starting point for continuing research to be conducted on this topic.

With so many papers and books produced discussing urban centers as the hubs of ritual innovation for America's own brand of Hinduism, I wonder what will happen to the traditions that remain at home. I want to give a voice to the ways in which people construct and perform different ways of being Indian and/or Hindu in order to give a richer picture of Hinduism in America. I hope that what I have produced in the following pages not only provides an interesting academic analysis of lived religion, but also an accurate representation of that lived religion by those who live it on a daily basis.

Theory and the Approach to Lived Religion

It is one thing to observe what others are doing and recant these observations for posterity's sake. It is quite another to take these observations and view them as a coherent set of data for analysis within a theoretical framework. There are numerous ways to approach the study of ritual, its contextual considerations and its functional outcomes. However, few other theorists are so relevant to the study of Hindu and(/or) Indian ritual as Catherine Bell's emphasis on performance.

Bell is perhaps most known for her theoretical approach to ritual that privileges the meaning of rituals to the actual performers. In several articles and books, she examined the traditional dichotomy of ritual as action on one hand and belief as thought on the other. This kind of division, Bell notes, demotes ritual to "particularly *thoughtless* action-routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic-and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical

expression of logically prior ideas" (1992: 19; emphasis in original). Bell attempts to move away from these mutually exclusive categories by using the word "practice" in her earlier work, while later using "performance" with her own nuance in a critique of other "performance" theorists. For Bell, "performance" signifies different things in different contexts, though the multivalence of the word functions to the benefit of the scholar. In some cases, performance refers to the execution of a command in an obligatory sense. In others, it is the word used to describe the acting out of a preset script as in a play. More recently, Bell claims performance has come to signify the kind of actions that take place without expectation of a conclusion (1998: 205). Using such a multivalent term allows one to "imply a tradition-oriented execution of established codes of behavior, an action-oriented perspective focused on the doing itself, or both" (1998: 206). Performance attempts to get away from the thought/action dichotomy by showing how ritual is a performance that requires both action and thought.

"Ritual," like "Hinduism," is another term that defies succinct definition. It is used not only in the context of religion, but also in contexts one might deem more secular. For instance, Gregory Goethals has described how ritual functions both in the televised blessing of Pope John Paul II, the presidential elections and inaugurations of the 1970s and 1980s, football's season-culminating Superbowl Sunday, and the formalities and ceremonies surrounding the death of Senator Hubert Humphrey (1995: 257-268). The ritualized action of these events and the utilization of media in the form of television allowed people around the United States and the world to participate in different ways at different levels and locations. This emphasizes the fuzzy boundary between ritual belonging to either religious or secular/other activities. For Bell, this is a strength particular to performance approaches because:

> it does not start out assuming what religion and ritual are; it attempts to let the activities
> under scrutiny have ontological and analytic priority, while the scholar deploys tools to

untangle those activities in ways that can inform and modify his or her notions of religion and ritual and not simply attest to them (1998: 211).

Employing performance theory does not begin with a priori notions of what constitutes religious ritual and what does not. To take it for granted that a ritual is religious can ignore the inherent dynamism of ritualized action as well as the dynamism of the performers of the actions themselves. Approaching "ritual" as performance:

> is better at conveying the multiple ways in which such activities are meant and experienced, as well as how such multiplicity is integral to the efficacy of ritual performances. This approach can, therefore, actually undermine reliance on concepts like ritual, especially the notion of ritual as a universal phenomenon with a persistent, coherent structure that makes it tend to work roughly the same way everywhere (Bell 1998: 218).

This performative multiplicity is exactly the framework with which I analyze the observations of lived religion in my research. Without this possibility of the multiple ways Navaratri is celebrated, one might be content to categorize Navaratri as simply a religious ritual event that utilizes and perpetuates traditional structure and materials to continue a preexisting, static tradition. Such an analysis misses the richness of how and why Navaratri is celebrated.

Indeed, to say the events in my research were "religious rituals" would be mostly false. Looking at the events I attended through a singular lens of "religious ritual" provides a very limited view of how the events are actually perceived by the participants themselves. On the other hand, seeing these events as performances of multiplicity provides a much more nuanced understanding of how and why this ritual is performed the way it is in an American context.

Three key elements will be examined throughout the following chapters that exemplify Navaratri events as performances. First, ethnicity or regional background plays a major part in the way Navaratri is celebrated and with whom it is celebrated. In the second chapter, the events are described in terms of what I saw taking place as well as what elements contributed to its particular ethnic composition. For example, a *havan* or fire sacrifice is an event that is not

unique to the state of Gujarat in India. However, certain elements that the host chose to emphasize at the ritual made it Gujarati and specific to the family of the host.

Second, gender is another category that one must take into consideration when analyzing these events. Navaratri is celebrated by many as a time to recognize the ultimate power of the divine feminine and it is difficult to ignore the predominance of female participation in the events for Navaratri. However, one cannot so quickly assume that because this is a festival for the Goddess that it implies only performance by females. On the contrary, males participated in events at various times, and grouped themselves together as well, though in very different ways and contexts than the females of my study. I can only speculate about the many factors to take into consideration when examining these data based on gender including immigration, religious rules regarding gender, changes in ritual roles based on gender and a number of other concerns. In the end, one can initially say that gender is an obvious and important piece of the puzzle of Navaratri in America.

Religious identity is the third important factor to take into account. It may be assumed that because I investigate a holiday associated with a specific religious tradition category (i.e. Hinduism) that the actual participants universally claim adherence to that tradition. However, at nearly every event, at least one person fit outside the mold of what one might consider "Hindu" or identified themselves as self-consciously *not* Hindu. It is difficult, then, to think of Navaratri as merely a holiday celebrated exclusively by Hindus. Without the lens of multiplicity of performance of Bell's theoretical approach, one might lose these nuanced elements of diversity in the many ways Navaratri is celebrated.

In the following chapters, I hope to highlight these three concerns through a "thick description" of five events that I attended during the fall Navaratri festival in 2008. In the

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second chapter, I will describe these five events, highlighting these concerns for ethnicity, gender and religion, to show the lived religion of the lives of a small selection of Indians in Gainesville, Florida. In the third chapter, I will make suggestions for how one can synchronically view the examples I provided in the previous chapter in order to emphasize how these three elements demonstrate the multiplicity of identities that can be displayed by understanding rituals as performances. I posit that each event for Navaratri is a performance both acted out by hosts and participants, each making a self-conscious effort to display different parts of their own identities in different spaces. Domestic and public spaces and the kinds of rituals that take place within them possess similar structure so that people may participate at different levels based on their own sense of ethnic, gendered, or religious requirements for participation. Navaratri is the special time and the special space for these identities to be performed. Its universal time and structure create meaning for many while allowing for diverse ways of being. As Venkatachari says, "Universality demands diversity of practice" (1992:182).

CHAPTER 2
RITUALS AND PRACTICES

Introduction

After briefly discussing what I am studying in this thesis, this chapter will describe the nuts

and bolts of the events I attended and the interviews I conducted for this project. As we have

already seen, Gainesville is unique in many ways. With its university-centered population, its

proximity to an ISKCON temple, the relationship of the Indian population with that temple, as

well as Gainesville's above average population of Indians and Indian-Americans, the area itself is

ripe for scholarly investigation.

In the following pages, I will explain five events I attended during Navaratri in 2008.

During this festival of nine nights, I attended several other events that helped to fill in and

nuance the events I will describe below. I have chosen to highlight these events in terms of their

hosts because the influence of the hosts was so inherently deep and important to the event itself.

Originally, I titled the sections according to the ethnicity of the host, but in looking at the events

themselves I found that the sense of ethnicity was much more subtle and may belie the content of

the subsections. Group *bhajan* meetings, Navaratri celebrations in homes and *havans* are not

endemic to any geopolitical region of India exclusively especially in the American context.

Regionally identifying these events as North, South or Pan-Indian events was more accurate in

terms of describing the composition of participants at events, though these regional

generalizations were not hard and fast descriptions either. Participants from different

intradomestic social networks sometimes participated in other social networks that were different

from the individual's familial ethnicity. How then could I label these events with such diversity

among participants as well as in performance of rituals? In the end, I decided to identify the

events with the individuals or groups that sponsored them. For reasons that will hopefully

become evident as each event is described, I find the relationship of the event with the host is the most logical way to present these events.

Keeping in mind the three elements of ethnicity, gender and religion outlined at the conclusion of the first chapter, I discuss the way my ethnographic research presented and reinforced these themes. I have chosen the following five events because they incorporate these three key themes in addition to offering their own unique dimensions that augment the larger discussion of these events as performances.

Swapna's *Bhajan* Meeting

On the first day of Navaratri, September 30th in the year 2008[1], a regular monthly meeting was held in the home of a Punjabi family in Gainesville. The first day of Navaratri for this family was celebrated in which Durga, the Goddess in a fierce and powerful form, was the centerpiece, though her image was one of many present at the altar. When I arrived, there were only two other guests present. The house, with several dens and living rooms which were decorated with an assortment of metal sculptures in the style of Thai art and other kinds of art in many South Asian styles, was located in a well-kept part of town and included its own pool, large patio and tennis courts. Inside the house, where the event took place, bed sheets covered the floor in a living room adjacent to the connecting kitchen. Several white chairs taken from the eat-in kitchen table were brought in to the living room and placed on the floor where there were no bed sheets at the back of the space, furthest away from the altar which was located at the center of the fireplace. Large sectional couches formed an L shape at the far side of the room and many of the female participants who had ailments or difficulty that prevented them from

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[1] Navaratri dates are determined according to a lunar calendar which is corrected by the solar calendar. For this reason, the dates of Navaratri change from year to year, though they generally occur in late September and early October. In 2008, Navaratri began September 30th and ended on October 8th. However, the tenth day not directly included in the "nine nights" is celebrated with other regional observances and is called Vijaya Dashami and/or Dusshera depending on the cultural context (Flood 1996: 211-212).

sitting on the space on the floor sat on these couches. The delineation of special space through covering the floor with clean sheets was a common facet of many of the events I attended, though the materials used to signify this kind of space differed in different contexts. If we understand Navaratri as a time out of time and a space out of space, it seems logical that there should be a delineation of space for rituals to take place.

Fifteen minutes past the scheduled time of 2:30pm, more participants arrived, though the total number of participants did not arrive until as late as 3:15pm. Throughout the two hours of singing and *arati,* people arrived and left as their schedules allowed. Twenty-five people attended until the conclusion of the ritual and the serving of a late lunch. Towards the end, three or four young children and a young male adult entered the kitchen, though these people did not participate in the rituals in the living room and were, in fact, only present for the last ten minutes of the *arati* and presentation of *prasad*.

Nearly every participant wore a *salwar kameez*, also called a Punjabi suit because of its predominance among Punjabi people, though two participants wore *saris*. Later, others pointed out that most women wearing *salwar kameez* were North Indian though they noted that one South Indian woman wore a *salwar kameez* regularly to North Indian hosted events. I saw this same woman in a *sari* while at other South Indian events. This is one of many instances where clothing is used to self-consciously inscribe the body with meaning in order to outwardly perform identity. When the woman's sense of identity changed, so did her clothing, to represent the way in which she fit into that specific intradomestic context.

The fireplace in the living room was covered with a shimmery white piece of fabric; the ledge of the fireplace was covered in a bright red cloth. *Murti*s or icons of Shiva, Ganesha, Lakshmi, Krishna, and Guru Nanak were placed to the left of a large picture of Durga riding a

tiger which was at the center of the red cloth. This picture was larger than the other icons and

was placed at the center presumably because of the Navaratri season. To the right of Durga were

murtis of Lakshmana, Rama, Sita and Hanuman. All of these icons, except for the picture,

seemed to be made in the same manner since the base of each was an identical gray pedestal.

Directly in front of the picture of Durga, which was draped in a red square cloth with gold

borders and gold stripes and dots, was a small ghee lamp upon a six inch tall silver holder. There

was also a silver platter on which flowers and small metal containers of powder and water were

placed. Two small, silver stools in front of the fireplace were topped with a tray of apples and

bananas, a brass colored *kalash* or pot with brass leaves sticking out of the top and a brass

coconut upon the leaves (a form of the goddess found in several other events in my research,

regardless of regional background and participation), and a burning stick of incense.

As other guests began to arrive, the area on the floor covered in sheets was equipped with

speakers and a microphone in the center. With about fifteen participants in attendance, the host

of the home, Swapna[2], hooked up the speakers to a CD player and began playing a CD of a

woman singing a prayer called "Amritvani." Swapna chose to begin with this prayer, as she may

begin with the same prayer for other get-togethers, with a dual purpose. First, the prayer is in

glorification of the name of Lord Ram, of whom she is a devotee, but also to get others in the

mood to sing. Swapna said, "you want everybody involved. Now, if I hadn't played the CD,

nobody's voice is going to come out loud enough to sing it. But along with that, everybody had

the prayer book and you kind of read along." This was a prayer created and promulgated by an

organization called the Sri Ram Sharnam whose headquarters are located in Delhi, India.

Swapna grew up not far from this organization in Delhi amongst a family and community of

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[2] All names have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

people from Punjab. While this prayer is not particularly Punjabi by virtue of its origin or its language (it is composed in simple Hindi), it is demonstrative of the way in which hosts of intradromestic events assert their own ethnic and religious identities amongst the larger social network. While some of my observations and conclusions from this event are more speculative, I suggest that here, as in further examples explained below, the host's use of the prayer allowed her to exert a sense of religious dominance or power over the rest of the group. I do not suggest that Navaratri ought to be construed as an arena for silent power politics in a Foucauldean way, but would like to point out that these events are not without their considerations of hierarchy, power and dominance on the religious and ethnic scale.

Swapna later noted that this prayer is not specific to Navaratri, but rather was a prayer that she used at the beginning of *any* get-together involving group *kirtan* or *bhajans*. She also mentioned that others within her social group have requested copies of the words to this prayer, though she is one of a few who have purchased the CD and use it regularly at group events. It is most often used only by her in this intradomestic context and only within her own home. All this is to say that Swapna is the only person who uses this organization-specific prayer, indicating she is using her hierarchical position as host of the event to exert her religious sensibilities on the rest of the group. Because this prayer is sung and falls within the larger, preexisting cultural repertoire of singing at such group meetings, the "Amritvani" fits within scope of the participants' sense of acceptable behavior.

When the CD was finished (a half hour of reciting the prayer's more than 100 verses) , the participants resituated themselves so that a central singer sat in the middle of the bed sheet covered floor with an accompanying *dholak* player beside her. The leading singer, wearing a bright pink *salwar kameez* began singing a slow song, the ornate pink *dupatta* draped over her

head and covering her shoulders. Eventually, picking up the tempo so that the *dholak* player could play the beat of the song, she began to sing a bit more emphatically through the succession of songs, the *dupatta* eventually falling from her head and settling at her shoulders. She sang more than fifteen *bhajans* from memory as others sitting around the room sang along with the aid of folders containing the songs in Hindi and a few in Punjabi. After about another half hour of singing songs led by this woman, some of which had a call and response segment in which the leader sang a part of a song and the rest of the participants shouted the response with gusto, other members of the group were asked to select and lead a song. A microphone was passed to each woman who chose and led the song. Though the exact ages of all the participants were not possible to obtain at the time, the general order in which women were chosen to sing songs began with the older participants and ended with the younger ones.[3] In general, Swapna or some of the more vocal participants would ask another participant to sing or choose a song, at which point that chosen person would politely decline and seemed to put up her hands as if to say "no, no, I cannot sing." However, nearly every person who was called upon and made a show of declination actually sang the song eventually, once she was reassured by the others that she ought to sing. Some of these individually chosen songs were located in the folders of lyrics passed out previously, and some were from the memory of the leader. Some were sung with a similar call and response style that previous songs had taken. At this time, the *dholak* did not generally accompany the singer.

When all those who wanted to lead a song had had their turn, the group then stood up, except for the main singer and the *dholak* player. *Arati* was then performed. At this time, a song sung to the Goddess was performed from memory by all participants. At other events, the same

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[3]This observation is one of comparison made based on my own field notes of the estimation of ages of participants at this event.

song was performed during *arati* though the lyrics varied by event. The majority of women, with one or two exceptions, took the *dupattas* of their *salwar kameezs* and draped them over their heads. The few women who wore *saris* also fixed the end of the *sari* over their heads in a similar fashion. The small ghee lamp from the silver holder was then added to the platter that had been located in front of Durga on the fireplace altar. Swapna, as the host of the ritual, was the first to wave the lamp in front of the altar, making several clockwise passes with the platter before handing it off to other participants who had made a makeshift line behind her. The women continued to sing as other participants took their turn with the lamp, though not all of the women present took a turn. One woman, who identified herself as a Jain, did not participate in this part of the event, citing that because she was Jain, she did not "do this thing." At one point, the main singer and *dholak* player moved mid-song to have their own turn. Another woman took over on the *dholak* but had a difficult time keeping with the beat and as soon as the two women had their turn for the *arati* they took up the singing and the *dholak* again, since the song and the beat had been somewhat lost in their absence. At this time, a few children and a young adult male entered the kitchen to check on the food that was being prepared and was wafting its spicy scent through the home. A few women who performed their turn for the *arati* first then went to the adjoining kitchen to help set up the late lunch outside on the patio.

At the end of the *arati,* the singing seemed to fade away into silence as a decorative sheet about a yard and a half square of bright magenta fabric lined with a gold garlanded border was held up by two other participants. At this time, Swapna took the platter of fruit and flowers and offered it to the altar. Swapna explained that the sheet:

> [is] for when you're offering. You want to make it private, not a public affair. So that sheet is held up and you go behind it and make the offering. And again that is a very

Punjabi tradition. That's the way *bhog*[4] is offered to God and with a special song, inviting him to come.

It is interesting to note the gender specific articles in Swapna's response. In this interview, Swapna identified herself as a devotee of Ram. The term "Ram" itself has several connotations. Ram may refer to the general idea of god, a sort of god without qualities as it is used by the nirguna poets like Kabir and Ravidas. Ram may also refer to the masculine divine avatara of Vishnu found in the Ramayana, the same Ram that was present that day on Swapna's altar along with Sita, Laksmana and Hanuman (other Ramayana characters). Swapna did not specify what she meant by Ram (a lacuna in my interviewing techniques) but made it a point to describe that she offered the *bhog* that day to Ram and not Durga or Devi. While this may appear to be a minor issue, I cannot help but wonder how other participants understood this offering. Did they know Swapna had offered the *bhog* to Ram and not the form of the Goddess who was at the center of the altar? Did this matter to them since the event took place during Navaratri? Due to the constraints of my research, I was not able to interview other participants of this event. This is significant because the event was held at the time of celebration of the Goddess, with Durga herself located at the center of attention on the altar, adorned in a way that no other icons were decorated. Yet the host understood her actions to be for Ram, not Durga. Again, we can see the way in which the host uses her position to conduct rituals that maintain individual and communal meaning, though these meanings may be simultaneously different.

At this time, others sitting around me explained that this was a very North Indian tradition to offer the fruit and flowers behind a sheet. The sheet was held up very close to the altar so that few people, save the two or three standing directly to the side, could see what was going on as

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[4] *Bhog* or *bhoga* is the term for the offering of flowers or fruit or other materials that is presented to the divinity at the center of the ritual. Once the materials have been placed in the presence of the divine, the *bhog* turns into *prasad* or *prashad*, which is then offered to the participants in the ritual as the blessing of God.

Swapna knelt on the ground and offered the fruit, completely obscured by the sheet. Once the food had been offered, the sheet was dropped and set to the side. Swapna then stood up among the already standing women and offered some announcements about lunch. When the brief announcements were completed, the standing crowd bubbled into hugs and greetings and various conversations. Those who had covered their heads before returned their *dupattas* to their original positions, either draped around the shoulders or sitting on the right shoulder. As the crowd remained standing and talking, the main female singer took the platter with the ghee lamp and brought it around for the other participants to wave their hands over the flame and either wash their faces with the heat or wave their hands over the flame and touch their foreheads one or three times. While this took place, the women who had moved to the kitchen began placing different dishes on a table outside and lunch was served. At this time, all of the women encouraged me to eat, and take some tea. Outside, the women scattered themselves on the patio, bringing chairs around the white plastic tables and sitting down to chat with friends. Seemingly from nowhere, multiple photo albums containing pictures of several different weddings appeared and the women flipped through them as they ate the vegetarian fare.

It was not until much later that I found out this whole event was part of a regular group that meets once a month to sing *bhajans* and *kirtan*. Though the meeting was a special occasion since it was the beginning of Navaratri, it seemed to be more of a coincidence than to have been held expressly for the holiday itself. To emphasize this point and this observation, Swapna noted that this particular celebration on the first day of Navaratri was not a yearly tradition. "I'd like to have it," she said, "but it's not a strict tradition. If I'm able and capable and energetic enough then yes, I would like to have it. It's a celebration of ... a good sort." Whereas other events I attended were very self-consciously noted as traditional events, whether traditions brought from

India or traditions started in America, Swapna seemed to view Navaratri as one holiday that was neither more nor less important than any other festival or day in general. She often expressed during the interview that the kinds of prayers and disciplines that people undertake during Navaratri ought to be observed year round since all days are equal. She did note that there were traditional ways of observing Navaratri that she experienced in her childhood. However these events were very different from the event that transpired in her home in September 2008. Swapna said that her family has always celebrated Navaratri:

> There are many ways of doing it. Generally in [India], it is also done at night and it is called *jagran*. *Jagran* means to stay awake. It starts after dinner and it goes on all night, and it is finished or culminated in the morning around 5:00 or 4:30 in the morning with a big *arati*. So it's an all night thing. And that was very common when I was a kid. But nowadays those are quite over.

The practice of *jagran* has been documented by Kathleen Erndl's *Victory to the Mother* (1993). In her study of a goddess cult in Punjab dedicated to various locally specific forms of the goddess, Erndl notes that a *jagran*, also called a *jagrata*, is a night long performance for Devi where the performers invite the Goddess into their homes as opposed to visiting her in a temple (1993: 85). Throughout the evening, the Goddess is entertained with singing and playing musical instruments, like the *dholak* which was also played at Swapna's afternoon meeting (1993: 89). Erndl claims that *jagran* is a practice with hundreds of years of history, though in Swapna's case we can see how it has been adapted to a modern American context (1993: 85). No longer occurring in the evening, and much less for seven, eight or more hours in a row, Swapna's afternoon event was held at a time that could accommodate greater numbers of participants. The event was also much smaller compared to what Swapna noted would typically take place. This *jagran* did not involve staying up all night for the Goddess, and nor did it only involve the Goddess. Swapna likened her event to the *jagran* despite these differences. The perception of

tradition for Swapna was strong enough to tie the event to "tradition" though the actual execution of the event seemed quite non-traditional.

Swapna also relayed other ways she celebrated Navaratri that had been traditionally observed by her family. She said that some of these observances, such as planting a certain kind of grass and allowing it to grow throughout the nine days, were never done by her personally but by other senior female members of her family during her childhood in India. One other event, in which an odd number of young prepubescent girls are worshiped for an evening as a form of the Goddess, typically on the eighth night of Navaratri, was previously a grand event for Swapna. She would host this event in her own home or go to the home of another Indian family where she knew such a number of girls would be all in one place. However, this is no longer a part of Swapna's traditional Navaratri schedule. "But nowadays, I don't do that," she said. "And generally, I don't even end up inviting them home because their parents have to bring them and they all have to be there at the same time which is not going to quite work out. So I go to their house with the *prasad* and hand it to them." Again, in this case also, the sense of tradition and ritual for Swapna seems to be flexible enough to allow for substitutions while maintaining its authenticity as tradition.

As mentioned before, participation is a key element of Swapna's hosting of the event and this get together, part of a monthly group routine, allowed the participants to congregate in the name of religion, but also to create a network of social contacts that fulfilled social relationships absent in the American context. Swapna notes:

> Well, living in a small town, we all cling on to each other for our emotional needs. And also your need to connect with your own kind. Basically [it's] because you speak the same language, you have the same cultural background. It's very easy to connect. For the most part, people like to connect with their own kind so we're all well connected socially. [The group] fulfill[s] the need for the family that we don't...the immediate family we do not have in this country. Your larger social network is also your extended family.

This larger social network is created and cultivated for this particular group on a monthly basis.

At Swapna's home in September, the group that met was solely comprised of women. In this way, the structure of the event, with its timing, location and participants became an arena for participants to not only be Indian, or North Indian, and not only be Hindu (since not all participants were Hindu), but also to be female or an Indian woman at the same time. Swapna mentioned that if she wanted more of a mixed group of male and female participants, she may schedule the event for a Saturday. This event was scheduled on a Tuesday afternoon because:

> Most of the women that come for that get together are not working outside the house. So that's a very convenient time for us to do it. Also...it is a good religious and a good spiritual time to get together. We hold it only for an hour and a half. But after that, it is also our social time... God doesn't say that you can't socialize after your done with this... We've done our share and it's okay to now have a cup of tea together and sit and talk or whatever... Everybody kind of live[s] a little way out and nobody likes to meet like this in the afternoons. So when you do meet, it is okay to socialize after your done.

After the "religious" purposes of the gathering had been completed, the group shared in a meal and socialized by speaking to one another in a similar language and looking through wedding albums that women had brought with them. Commensality and language sharing were two key components of this event. While the event looked as if it belonged to a specific religious tradition, participants claiming other religious identities also took part in the ritual and its subsequent meal and socializing. Because of the religious and ethnic diversity of participants, one cannot simply say that this Hindu ritual was performed as a holiday celebration specific to Punjabi people in Gainesville. In reality, while the ritual itself may have been influenced by the host's own Punjabi heritage and her own sense of North Indian Hindu-ness, the aggregate of participants' ethnicities and religious backgrounds suggests that this ritual serves as a location for multiple identities to simultaneously be performed.

Tejal's *Havan*

In the home of Tejal at 11 a.m. on the ninth and last day of Navaratri, a unique ritual took place. A fire sacrifice called a *havan* was performed by Tejal and her mother on the back porch of their grandiose Gainesville home. Several chair cushions were placed on the wooden deck for participants to sit upon and observe the proceedings. The weather, still quite hot in Gainesville for the first week of October, was sunny and bright though slightly windy.

When I arrived at the home, a sign printed on a piece of paper instructed visitors to come around the back of the house because that morning a tile floor was being installed and no one could walk through the house. As I rounded the corner at five minutes to 11, the ritual had already started though only Tejal, her mother and two men were present. In the following half an hour, fourteen additional participants arrived at various times. The women sat on the cushions or the nearby chairs, while the five male participants all sat in the back near the metal table at the back of the porch. All present ranged in age between 50 and 70 years of age and no children attended at any time, in contrast to the event at Swapna's home.

The altar to which the *havan* was performed, I was told, was slightly different from past years. In previous years, the *havan* was constructed and performed on the concrete deck near the pool in the backyard. This was not possible this year because of the new floor installation that required all furniture to be removed and placed in the space where the *havan* would have taken place. Further adaptations to the ritual were necessary because of this. Tejal explained that typically the image of the Goddess she identified as Ambaji (a term for the Goddess as a Mother) would be at the center of the altar on the ground, surrounded by specific regional designs in chalk or powder with a *sloka* also written in the same material. Because this ritual took place on a wooden deck, it was not possible to create these specific decorations that required a stone surface. Instead, the *sloka* was written in red marker at the top of two pieces of white poster

board paper nearly three feet square. Below this *sloka*, brown paper covered the rest of the poster board and the "traditional designs" were inscribed in chalk in very geometric and angular patterns. This cardboard substitution occasionally caught the slight wind and fell over during the ritual, but no one seemed to mind except when it knocked other materials off the altar, as it did once knocking the coconut off the pot that served as a manifestation of Ambaji.

The altar was covered in a red velvet cloth with gold tissue lame stripes. Only a few inches higher than the porch, the altar held two pots containing sprouts which had been planted on the first day of Navaratri, the coconut/pot form of Ambaji that Tejal's family had traditionally used, and two small crystal glasses with pink flowers picked from the nearby bushes. When people arrived for the ritual, many also brought bouquets of flowers and fruit which were offered at the end of the ritual. The fire itself, made of charcoal briquettes, was placed in a square copper container and had a tendency to fizzle into smoke when too much ghee was drizzled onto it. Another form of the Goddess was present on the wooden deck itself: a small clay pot with holes in its sides through which one could see a small votive candle burning inside. Other materials surrounding the altar were several plastic and metal containers of materials needed during the sacrifice like ghee, kumkum powder, rice and other things.

In addition to these materials, there was a metal, painted rooster in front of the altar that was about ten inches tall and set to the left of the holed pot on the deck. There was no description of this rooster at the event, and its presence was not acknowledged or described at any time during the event itself. When I asked about this during an interview, Tejal said the rooster was present:

> because Ambaji can come in many forms. You know she rides a tiger in some, she rides a lion in some, she's on a buffalo in some. So on one of the nights she comes riding a giant rooster. And one of our songs says, 'Oh you came riding on [a rooster]' so I keep a rooster [there].

She later identified this form of the Goddess as Bahuchar Ma, a form which rides on a rooster. Other names identifying the same form of the Goddess might include Bahucharji or Bahuchara Mata. This form of the Goddess has been worshiped by Tejal's family for generations and comes from the part of Gujarat from which Tejal's family originated. Information on Bahuchar Ma generally describes her in relation to the *hijra* communities around India. Devdutt Pattanaik's collection of mythological stories provides two narratives of the story of Bahuchar Ma in the chapter entitled "Castrated Men and Women" (2002:95-112). In the first tale, Bahuchara is a married woman whose husband leaves her in the night and avoids his duties as a husband to help beget children. Each night, the husband rides into the forest on a horse. Bahuchara decides to follow him one evening, but has no horse and thus cannot follow him. A "jungle fowl" offers itself for Bahuchara to ride after her husband. She finds her husband in the forest "behaving like a woman" so she curses him. "Bahuchara declared, 'Men like you should castrate themselves, dress as women, and worship me as a goddess,'" (2002:100). Pattanaik notes that this story is a "folk story from the state of Gujarat" but does not provide any information for the second Bahuchara story (2002:99). In the second tale, Bahuchara and her sisters were attacked by a man named Bapiya. The sisters killed themselves while Bahuchara cut off her own breasts, thereby removing her womanhood and preventing Bapiya from raping her. She was no longer a woman without her breasts (2002:101). The first story, with its mention of a fowl mount, seems to be more closely related to the description of Bahuchar Ma provided by Tejal, though she did not offer greater detail about how her family came to worship this form of the Goddess. Other sources note the local quality of Bahuchar Ma more closely related to the second story. Serena Nanda describes Bahuchara as a young maiden who cut off her own breasts to avoid rape and later died in a forest in Gujarat. She was deified for this action. When King Baria of Gujarat

wanted a son, he prayed to Bahucharaji whose divine grace allowed the king to have a male heir. However, his heir, Jetho, could not produce children and was given to the Goddess's service (1986:39). Further inquiry into the way in which Bahuchar Ma fits into the life of Tejal and her family is required to more fully understand Bahuchar Ma's presence at Tejal's Navaratri *havan*, though these stories suggest how the local ethnicity of tradition is infused by hosts into holiday celebrations.

Throughout the hour long event the observers were rarely doing more than watching Tejal and her mother. The mother, named ZZZ, read Sanskrit verses from a book which cued Tejal to add various substances to the fire such as ghee, red, pink and white powders and rice. Sometimes when Tejal did not recognize the proper cues in the Sanskrit, ZZZ would speak to her in Gujarati to make sure she offered the correct materials and would not continue until Tejal had made the proper action. Near the end of the ritual, guests were invited to chant "Om hreem kleem shreem," a string of *bhija* mantras, or seed mantras, which are short syllables used for chanting. Once this section of chanting was completed, school folders full of printed songs in the Nagari script used commonly for the Hindi language were passed around so that participants could sing together for the Goddess. As Tejal explained to me, "She's here as a guest and we do what we can to entertain her."

Difficulty in choosing a song ensued as the participants were from such geographically diverse locations that not all participants could read the language printed in the folders of music. Singing songs, an integral part of nearly every event I attended, was addressed in diverse ways depending on the specific composition of the participants and in this case, since many participants were also participants of a South Indian social network, the folders full of Nagari script were not as easily read. In the end, one song was chosen that I had not heard sung during

other events in the previous nine days. The final song for the *arati* was a familiar tune sung

during *arati* though it employed different words at this occasion in comparison to the event at

Swapna's home. A song book was not needed for this song because the many participants

memorized the various versions of the song by heart. For the *arati* itself, Tejal placed the small

ghee lamp on a gray metal tray and waved it in a clockwise circle several times before passing

the tray on to other participants. Flowers had been passed around to everyone before the *arati*

and during the singing of the *arati* song and each person went to the altar and placed the flowers

on the velvet cloth in front of the central coconut/pot representing Ambaji.

When everyone had their turn waving the lamp for the Goddess, the ritual was completed.

At this point, Tejal thanked everyone for coming and went around to each person, bowing down

and asking for their blessing. Then the host and her mother went to the kitchen to prepare to

serve lunch. While preparations were taking place, the five men present rearranged the table and

chairs, returned the seat cushions to their seats and then sat down. Some other female

participants went to kneel at the altar after the official ritual had been completed and added

additional flowers. Others went to the kitchen to help prepare for lunch.

In the interim between the *havan* and lunch, people milled around, passing around plates

made out of dried leaves. Tejal noted in an interview, as had other participants at the event, that

these plates were like the ones she had eaten off of at home in Gujarat and were a nostalgic detail

she liked to incorporate at Navaratri. The foods served for lunch were in keeping with a

traditional fast that Tejal and her mother kept during Navaratri. The majority of the food

involved dairy products like milk and yogurt, as well as nuts and certain legumes. Tejal's

description of the dietary restrictions she observed was similar to those described by Swapna at a

subsequent interview, though Swapna noted she did not observe such restrictions. Here, Tejal's

choice to provide a lunch in keeping with fasting requirements can be seen as a technique

employed by the host to use hierarchical power to introduce certain ethnic and religious

considerations for Navaratri in a culturally acceptable way. The lunch was yet another way for

others to observe and participate in diverse ways of being Indian and Hindu through

commensality and consumption.

At several times during an interview with her, Tejal noted that much of how she observed

Navaratri, including the *havan*, was based on the practices of her mother and grandmother.

Typically, however, Tejal noted that traditions regarding Navaratri were passed down through a

patrilineal progression through sons. Tejal's family was different because the *havan* tradition

had passed down through the females of the family. She explains:

> I was very close to my grandmother and I'm very close to my mother, so I decided that I
> wanted to do it because it connected me to her. My grandmother has [since] passed away...
> It's interesting because when I first came here, Navaratri was not... part of the main festival
> that will pop into people's mind[s]. They'll say Divali, or something, or Holi. And to me
> too...but as I grew older, especially as my grandmother's health started deteriorating, I
> became much more interested in doing the Navaratri, and now it's just wonderful. I just
> love it.

Tejal also noted that when she first came to the United States in 1970 to join her husband who

had migrated before her, Navaratri was not one of the holidays she chose to observe and

celebrate with her family. Divali had been the major holiday celebrated by her new family in the

United States. As Tejal's children grew older and her grandmother passed away, she decided to

make a commitment to observe Navaratri in the way that her past female family lineage had.

Once this promise was made, her mother mailed her a book from India of the necessary Sanskrit

liturgy she should follow to authentically perform this event. Tejal's mother later moved to the

United States and now the two perform the event together annually. In other interviews, many

women noted that these kinds of events where nostalgic performances in regards to family

lineage or India in general became more important as the women grew older or as their children

grew older. While transmission of traditions to children was not a grave concern of this community, one might surmise that the drive and motivation for maintenance of tradition and ritual are not static or progressive concerns. Feelings towards maintenance can change over time, and do not increase or decrease uniformly or in a linear fashion from less to more important. For Tejal, carrying on the tradition after her children left home was important to her, though she did not seem too concerned that her sons would not likely continue the tradition in their own homes. Her children, now in their 30s, had grown up with Navaratri and Tejal felt it was up to them to decide whether or not to continue the tradition. Whether this has to do with the fact that her children are male, and for her family such traditions pass through daughters was not a subject I broached during the interview, though it would have provided an interesting insight into the generational importance of transmission of tradition and culture among Indian communities in the United States.

When I was first made aware that the *havan* would be taking place during Navaratri, I had assumed, based on my textbook erudition of Hindu traditions, that some kind of male priest would be performing it. These kinds of rituals are described as part of the ritual realm of upper class Brahmin men because they are considered to be ritual specialists. However, this was clearly not the case. The whole ritual was performed by Tejal and her mother. The only men in attendance remained at the back of the group, a location where I often found the men in reference to Navaratri rituals and events. In fact, when asked about the position of the religious professional within this particular ritual, Tejal explained that while her family had a priest who would come and perform some rituals in their home, the Navaratri *havan* did not require the services of a priest. Tejal said "It's not like you must have a priest, but if you're lucky enough to have a priest, then they will do [the *havan* rituals]."

For Tejal, the *havan* serves as a way of connecting herself to past generations of relatives through the repeated performance of rituals. In addition to the rituals, observing other dietary restrictions and demonstrating these restrictions through a luncheon for those who attended the *havan* allowed the host to perform her own sense of Gujarati-ness for those participants who may or may not have been Gujarati or familiar with that tradition. Along with the feeling of community generated through the commensality of lunch and the subsequent social hour, the ethnic and fast-observant dishes acted as a way to educate others about how Tejal performs her Gujarati-ness and Hindu-ness simultaneously during Navaratri. While this particular combination of ritual and food is locally specific, its meaning to Tejal was expressed to and received by a diverse array of regional identities.   In this intradomestic context, Tejal's "this-Indian-ness" utilized familiar actions, language (in the form of Sanskrit liturgy), and structures to both create a meaningful and authentic religio-cultural experience for all of those present.

This is another prime example of the dialectic relationship between the hosts and participants during the a special time and place during Navaratri. This *havan* is unique in a number of ways, yet demonstrates similar themes described in Swapna's group meeting in her home. First, it is performed by females, observed largely by females, with limited participation by males.   This event was conducted completely by Tejal and her mother and was attended by more women than men. The men helped briefly with setting up for lunch, but were more or less waited upon by the other women who helped serve lunch. Second, it is accompanied with ethnically specific representations of the Goddess in the form of the *kalash*, *bandhani* cloth and coconut. Bahuchar Ma's *vahana* or vehicle in the form of the rooster at a central and obvious place amongst the other ritual materials is another example of how an event is held for a festival and sprinkled with details that suggest ethnic specificity while creating meaning for a wide range

of people.   Lastly, the food offered at the conclusion of the ritual was specific to the kinds of

dietary restrictions traditionally observed by Tejal and past generations of her family. Again, the

host's choices influenced the way other people participated in an intradomestic event. Despite

these inflections of ethnically specific additions to the ritual, other participants noted the ritual's

efficacy, suggesting that these rituals are not so hard and fast as to exclude the possibility for

flexibility in execution.

<div align="center">

Usha's Living Room *Kolu*

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In the home of the Gopalaraos, a celebration in the middle of Navaratri was held, which

differed in a number of ways from the previous two examples I have provided in this chapter.[5]

This sixth day of Navaratri event was held in a similarly upscale and large home in a nice area of

Gainesville, like the other intradomestic locations in my research. Cars lined the street near

Usha's home as nearby neighbors walked dogs and played in the yards before the early autumn

sunset. As I parked my car on the street at around 4pm, four or five other cars had also parked,

their occupants exiting and walking towards the Usha home. The women wore beautiful *saris* in

bright, shining colors typical of Kanchipuram style silk *saris*, and the men typically wore polo or

button down shirts with slacks, though one or two wore a more traditional pyjama style outfit. I

removed my shoes outside and added them to the melee of footwear near the front door and

entered with a larger group of arriving guests

The entrance of the home led to a dining room table to the right and a living room in front

to the left with couches and a coffee table. In these two rooms, particularly around the dining

room table, a group of about ten men sat and talked, directing me toward the back of the house. I

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[5] As a preface to this description, I attended four other events in which a specific core group of women gathered to
sing *bhajans* and celebrate Navaratri. I have chosen to highlight this event to demonstrate the dynamic between
genders which was more pronounced at the home of Usha than the other events.

entered a room that was part living room-part kitchen, full of people already engaged in singing *bhajans*. Similar to the other ways people separated spaces for other events, the living room section was covered in bed sheets and comforters and individual chairs from other rooms of the house lined the back of the room near the kitchen. Some of the women present had moved the chairs to the less crowded kitchen, where trays of food simmered and spluttered steam on the counter tops, filling the house with the smell of spices and vegetables. The living room was packed with participants, some with small children on their laps, and some propped up against the walls or doorways, but all orienting themselves towards the center of the room.

A *kolu* or *golu* in traditional South Indian style had been elaborately set up as the centerpiece of the room. In general, a *kolu* is a display of dolls upon richly decorated steps during Navaratri traditionally by South Indians. This *kolu* in the Gopalarao home cascaded from nearly five feet high, each successive step draped with ornate pink and red *saris* (presumably those colors in honor of the Goddess) and lighted with strings of colored and white lights one might find on a Christmas tree. Framed pictures of Durga and Laksmi sat at the top step, flanked by flowers and other statues of other gods and goddesses. Five steps total, each about four to five feet wide and a foot deep, were completely covered with not only images of gods and goddess most often associated with the large Hindu pantheon, but also various other items such as carved elephants made of various kinds of stone or wood, other carved renderings of animals, Barbies decked out in *saris* and other ethnic Indian attire, other handmade dolls and small kitsch. This particular *kolu* was smaller than some of the other displays at the other events I attended. In some homes, the *kolu* was not relegated to the set of steps, but spilled over onto other pieces of furniture that were typically located in the room such as desks or other benches. It is interesting to note that these *kolus* included all kinds of statues, pictures, dolls and general kitsch that one

would not neces*sari*ly associate with a Hindu ritual by a South Indian family. At one home, the *kolu* display included a smaller set of steps to the side of the main steps and included things like three stuffed pillows with the eyes of Jagannatha (a form of Krishna from Orissa). Also for this particular display, several sets of Matryoshka dolls (the Russian style of dolls that nest inside one another) were placed in order based on size upon a nearby roll top desk. In general, the number of steps varied at the different houses and the amount of ornamentation and materials placed on the steps varied also. Each home decorated its *kolu* depending on the possessions of the family, and while each included similar elements of representations of deities, the focal points and highlighted deities place in locations of prominence also differed depending on the family. The reason for five steps was attributed in one interview with Sumathi that an odd number of steps was the norm, whether it was five, seven, nine and so on. "Everything... we want it to multiply. By giving it an odd number we are saying it will grow. [It is] something that will grow on," said Sumathi.

At the bottom level on the floor, vases of gladiolas in bright pinks and purples and potted mums sat at both ends of the steps, an arrangement of flowers that seemed to increase with every new guest that arrived. In the center on the floor was a silver plate about a foot or so in diameter, with a small ghee lamp and flower petals strewn about it which remained at that place until the *arati* performance.

I took a seat in one of the chairs at the back, next to a group of women who were already sitting and singing. Behind me, four men sat in chairs, their knees pressed against the backs of the chairs in front of them. The area set apart by bed sheets and comforters in the living room was brimming with people, yet somehow as new guests arrived the group seemed to condense further toward the front of the room. Looking around at the group sitting on the floor, I

recognized several women who attended other events, both North and South Indian. While

clothing is not neces*sari*ly the best marker of presumed ethnicity, nearly all the women wore

saris, with the exception of a few women who had previously identified themselves as North

Indian at Swapna's house wearing *salwar kameez*s.

Nearest the *kolu* and on the side with the drone emitting its monotone sounds, the leader of

the group I had seen a week ago at a practice meeting for Navaratri singing sat in a beautiful blue

silk *sari*, her books and notes in front of her, leading the core group in the songs they had

practiced in their last few weekly meetings. At this event, like three other events I attended that

were hosted by the core members of this group of mainly South Indian women, songs were sung

by this weekly meeting "*prarthana*" group. This group was started by Sumathi and was inspired

to do so by her mother. Sumathi said the group was small at the beginning and she only intended

to teach her close friends some of the music and *slokas* she knew. "Surprisingly a few people

first started coming. [They said] 'Yes I want to learn, I want to learn!' and they told their friends.

You wouldn't believe in this group, people speaking different languages have come. It's amazing

how a common thread has just tied us together. Something links us together." In this group,

comprised of such a diverse group of women from all different areas of South India, many

different languages are represented that use different scripts and alphabets. Because of this,

Sumathi provides the words to the *slokas* in both Tamil and English, or advises the participants

to view certain websites so they can transcribe the words into their own language and script.

During the practice session I attended earlier in September mentioned at the beginning of the

first chapter of this thesis, several people passed around songs to others who spoke a similar

language and did not have the lyrics and others copied songs by hand into their own language

from the English transliteration in order to participate as a group. Despite these linguistic

differences, Sumathi says "It's amazing. And at least the feedback that I have received from them is very good. They say, 'Oh every Monday I look forward to those classes. That is time for myself. I get away from my work all the tension and stress. I come and sit there and relax and get out of the [house].'" In this group, with its weekly meetings and Navaratri performances, the meetings also serve a second purpose, like many of these events, of providing a special place and time to be many things at once, a simultaneity impossible during day to day life.

Once this group had performed its repertoire of songs, others were invited to sing, including the children and young adults in attendance. Here, as at other events, a few children sat next to their music teacher, Sita, who was also a part of the *prarthana* group and a frequent attendant of other South Asian performing arts events put on by UF. During an interview with Sumathi's daughter, Jaya, she noted that as a child she had always been asked to sing at these events.

> I always wondered why do they do this when you're little because you're really shy. They'll be like, 'Sing a song! Sing a song!' and I'm like, 'Why do I have to sing a song? What is going to come from me singing a song?' Girls are just expected to sing a song. So... you have to, even if you don't know [any songs], you're expected to know and so you're expected to sing. And that's why girls are also put in these classes for singing when they're little and dance [classes too].

Once the children had sung with the guidance of Sita, a box of purple, yellow and green folders was brought by a man sitting in the other room and the contents were distributed around the room. There were not enough folders for every participant, so many people shared with their neighbors. At this time, more men from the other room joined the group in the kitchen/living room and sang along with the songs from the folders. The songs in these folders were typed completely in English transliteration and were part of a larger Gainesville *bhajan* group that included both men and women. I note this to show the contrast in contents of the folder, not only linguistically but also organizationally. The other folders provided at the homes of Swapna and

Tejal contained a mixture of typed songs and handwritten songs, often in multiple languages depending on the group who compiled the folders. Here, one can surmise from the typed, organized, and Sanskritized contents that the co-ed Gainesville *bhajan* group was aiming to reach a larger, more general audience. In the smaller, gender specific groups, more specific ethnic identities were displayed through the choice of songs and languages employed, although not all participants were familiar with all the songs and languages. Here, in this intradomestic context, a more gender-inclusive event took place, though women comprised an overwhelming majority of participants as opposed to men.

After about an hour of singing by the *prarthana* group and children and another half hour of singing from the Gainesville *bhajan* group folders, the host of the event and her husband began the *arati* that concluded every ritual event. *Arati* seemed to serve as the temporal break between the religious entertainment for the gods and goddesses and the more social entertainment for the human participants in the events. In this event, like the other three events I attended with a majority of South Indians in attendance, the husband of the host moved from the back of the venue to the front when the *arati* began. The husband and wife hosts were the first to offer the flame to the deities on the *kolu* while the rest of the participants sang the now familiar song associated with *arati*. After the hosts completed their turn, the other participants who had risen at the beginning of the *arati* pressed towards the front of the room to have their own turn. Again, several women who recognized me from the other events encouraged me to participate, especially the woman in the seat next to me. Once the men and women had sifted through one another to the front of the room and sang the *arati* song for the duration of the event, the *arati* was concluded and again there was one who brought the flame on the plate around to all the participants who were now scattered throughout the house. The very end of the "religious" part

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of the gathering was a bit chaotic, with people milling around, hugging friends, flitting from the kitchen to the porch outside the side living room to set up tables of food. Many retired to the dining room to escape the heat and the push of the crowd in the kitchen/living room.

People began to leave once they had eaten food and made the rounds of greeting and speaking with friends and acquaintances, some bringing small plastic containers of food home to children or other family members who could not attend. Overwhelmed by the nearly 50 people in attendance, I made my way to the door to speak with a young woman who was offering a plate with red kumkum powder and yellow turmeric powder to the female guests who were leaving. I asked her if she was related to the hosts as a daughter or niece. She replied that she was not related, but that she had known the family growing up and they asked her to offer these materials to the guests because such an act was auspicious. The accumulation of these auspicious acts, she said, was supposed to bring her a good husband in the future. She noted that she was an undergraduate student in the sciences, a fact she claimed was stereotypical of young Indian-American women her age. She wondered if she could find a husband at her young age of 20 and if such a marriage could last these days at such a young age, a concern she voice after she divulged the auspicious reasons for her post at the door. This UF student, also involved in the ISA, HSC and other Indian-style dance teams at the university, was introduced to this community by way of UF and other academic connections. Her relationship with the Gopalaraos shows that the social networks I observed in Gainesville were not neces*sari*ly exclusive to 50 year old women whose families were associated with UF. While this demographic was certainly more pronounced than younger generations of females, the intradomestic network included students of Indian American and Indian origin as well.

As I stood near the door, a woman named Kamal, who had previously identified herself as North Indian and a local teacher of Hindi to some of the area's children, came over with Usha as the former was preparing to leave the event. Usha, taking the plate of kumkum and turmeric from Arti, the young woman at the door, turned to Kamal and went to apply some of the red powder to Kamal's forehead. At this time, Kamal said "Do you mind if I do this? This is how we do it where I come from." Usha smiled and nodded at the request. Kamal then applied the powders in various ways to Usha's forehead, quietly mouthing some words I did not hear or understand. Once this was completed, the two bid each other goodbye, and Usha turned her attention to me. She asked how I had enjoyed the evening while handing me a paper bag containing a tangerine, two chocolates and a mini Snickers bar.[6] Then, reiterating the young girl's purpose for offering the kumkum and turmeric powder as an auspicious honor, she touched her ring finger to the kumkum powder and impressed it on my forehead, telling me that she hoped I also found a good husband soon. I smiled at her as Arti suppressed a giggle, then left to put on my shoes outside and leave. This anecdote further exhibits a situation where participants of events use these intradomestic contexts as places to teach each other different ways of being. The practice of offering kumkum and turmeric powder was described by Sumathi and Jaya as a typical South Indian practice. At this event, these same materials were offered to a woman who identified herself as North Indian. At the juncture of two regional identities, Kamal and Usha performed and played audience to different ways of being. Tension did not seem to result from this dialectic situation. Here, as I noted in the first chapter, distinctions between the cultural and

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[6] This small parting gift was similarly given in the other three events I attended of South Indian style. At one event, I received a small plastic container with autumn leaves on the outside and a banana and a dual packet of turmeric and kumkum powders inside. At another event, I received a Halloween orange bag containing a mini Milky Way bar and an apple. At all three events, I was told that this was *prasad* that had been previously offered to the goddess and that I must take some home with me before leaving the event. Acquisition and consumption of prasad was an emphasis at several events, especially at the Gujarati Samaj *Garba* event that will be described in the following pages.

religious dimensions of this situation seem ambiguous at best. Neither Kamal nor Usha stopped to dissect the religious ramifications of either's actions, nor did the women examine how Kamal's request fit within what was regionally practiced by Usha's family. Participating in the mutually educating situation seemed to be the focus of many of these events. Because of situations like these, suggesting that events such as those during Navaratri are either religious or cultural leaves out a very important point: religion and culture are not mutually exclusive to the participants of the events. Religion and culture are not a binary pair in which one can dominate the other at a given event. As demonstrated in the case of Kamal and Usha, an exchange of both religion and culture took place simultaneously, or, to riff on Catherine Bell, multiply at the same time. What is religious and what is cultural about an event are elusive categories not even articulated by participants themselves and create problematic pitfalls for academic analysis. One might better ask Kamal and Usha, what is South Indian or North Indian about what they do or perhaps frame the question in terms of gender. These categories of identity and understanding are much more prevalent and visually expressed than any sense of "religion" or "culture" during Navaratri.

Throughout this event, an interesting dynamic between genders was present that was not as well highlighted at the other events I attended. My research showed in nearly every event that participation by males in an intradomestic context was rare or less populous than participation by women. When men were present, they rarely, if ever, sat on the floor or near the front of the group. They almost always sat at the back of the group or in an entirely different room. Men mostly participated in events during the *arati* or by leading prayers or *slokas* in certain homes. Very few young adult men attended the events I observed, and when one was present it was only at the time when food was served. One young boy participated as a singer in two events,

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accompanied by his teacher Sita, though once his singing was completed he left the room or moved to the back to play with the other children in another part of the house.

While my research self-consciously concerns women's roles and expressions of ethnic, gendered and religious identities, it does so not only as a decontextualized abstraction of "woman" but also partially as a comparison. Admittedly, I did not interview any men for this research and focused my attention during events on what I perceived to be the locations of action. However, certain trends arose and several interviews verbalized these trends as specific to men's participation in social and religious events. Generally, the men did not participate during this festival of nine nights.

In interviews, the women provided several reasons for this. Jaya said, "I feel like men are...more...inwardly pious. They say everything to themselves but they'll still go about their business. But I feel like women like do [the] singing and sharing. It's a community thing and they like to do it together." Swapna claimed that these kinds of events with a mix of religiosity and socializing were "more of a woman's thing... Most men might not have the tendency to want to sit through that kind of chanting and *bhajan* and *kirtan*. Their attention span is less. [They are] a lot more fidgety." Tejal noted a few times during her interview that her husband did not participate in many events and noted he was not fond of the ritualistic nature of the events. From this, and observations in my research, it would not be incorrect to note the perceived role of men within Navaratri in Gainesville as passive participants, if they participate at all. Several women noted that the weekly meetings and group get-togethers for Navaratri were a "women's thing" though none mentioned any connection between women's participation and the Goddess-central worship of Navaratri's nine nights. Women also noted that Navaratri in general was a female-centered holiday in India in which women invite other women in their own name, rather than in

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the name of the family or their husbands. The women are the ones who hold parties and perform

ceremonies or sing songs for the Goddess. Therefore, the interplay between genders at Usha's

home is an observation worth noting. The conspicuous participation of women in Gainesville,

intra- and extradomestically, may be seen to be somewhat continuous with the practices in India.

The male participation, on the other hand, seems to be a diasporic ritual innovation. While men

were not ubiquitously present at these events, their periodic participation in *arati* and occasional

participation in singing *bhajans* amongst a co-ed group suggests that men are occupying a

relatively new space within Navaratri. Unfortunately, the relationship of gender to Navaratri, in

India or the United States, remains to be published although these brief observations suggest

further research would prove fruitful in understanding male participation in Navaratri as well as

providing more nuance for female participation.

GSG and ISA *Garba*

Garbha or *garbhi* means "womb" in Sanskrit, representative of the association of the

feminine with *shakti* or power. In the first chapter, I discussed some of the textual precedent for

the stories of the Goddess performed and displayed during Navaratri in which the power of the

Goddess is essential for saving the world. The gods cannot complete the tasks that Devi does in

her manifold forms. The *garba* dance is centered around a powerful and creative image of the

Goddess in the form of a *garbha* or *garbhi*: a pot with holes in it so that the light inside can

shine and be seen. This vessel form of the Goddess present may be thought of as a sort of *axis*

mundi for participants in the *garba* because it is the central image to which all the dancers orient

themselves. The form is perhaps both iconic and aniconic. If Devi is the embodiment of power

and creative force within the universe (among her infinite other qualities), the representation of

the Goddess as a vessel or a womb is iconic in the sense that it represents Devi's power and

function. At the same time, other forms of the divine feminine are used during Navaratri, such as

Durga as Mahishasura Mardini, which some might characterize as the iconic image of Devi rather than her form as a pot. Both of these forms were used at the two different *garbas* I attended. The sense of each form's status as either iconic or aniconic played a part in its use by the group sponsoring the *garba*.

Garba is the general term for the dance that takes place during the nights of Navaratri, though a *garba* might take place for other auspicious events such as a wedding or some other holiday. In the Indian context, as Tejal explained, *garba* "is a Gujarati thing." Described as a Gujarati women's folk dance, *garba* is a dance dedicated to the Goddess in which women dance around the form of Devi to the rhythm of devotional music. As Mio notes, this dance began as a locally specific performance to a locally specific representation of the Goddess. As a village dance, songs, dance steps and function of the *garba* was transmitted on a local scale. Later, as *garba*s became more popular in India and other groups began to sponsor them (and thus influence the practice of them), the devotional music in praise to the Goddess gave way to popular music from Bollywood movies and popular, non-devotional sources (Mio 2008:1-3).

Despite the regionally specific origin of the community-style dance, many Indians and Indian-Americans from all different regions participate in *garba*s during Navaratri in the United States. Many Indian and Indian American high school and college students in Gainesville participate in *garba*s as far away as Jacksonville or Orlando during the weekends surrounding the time of Navaratri. Many people I talked to made it a point to tell me which *garba* was the best based on size of the venue, the music played, and the ability of the participants to collectively dance. The larger the venue, the more people are able to participate, though more participants may lead to more confusion on the dance floor.

The dance itself typically takes place in a large venue to accommodate the large number of participants who dance in various degrees of complexity around an image of the Goddess in some form in the center of the venue. The HSC *garba*, for instance, took place at the ICEC and participants noted that about 50 people participated in 2008. The ISA *garba*, on the other hand, took place at the O'Connell Center, home to UF's basketball team among other sporting events, and likely had more than 500 participants at any one time. The central form of the Goddess as a pot or as Durga or a general picture of Devi, depending on the location of the *garba* and the group that sponsors it, may have an *arati* performed before it. After *arati* or a short break in dancing, the *dandiya raas* takes place which is also a regional kind of dance involving two rows of participants facing each other, wielding wooden or metal sticks and specific dance steps. In the American context and in the case of the ISA, after an hour (or more) of *raas*, the *bhangra* or Punjabi style music and dance may take place. *Bhangra* is not typically a part of a *garba* in the Indian context. *Bhangra* is a kind of fusion music with roots in classical Indian music styles especially in Punjab in what is now India and Pakistan. At the ISA *garba* I attended, *bhangra* involves a leader of sorts who sings slow sections of a song and speaks to the crowd as they sit on the floor. At irregular intervals of slow singing and pauses, the leader then breaks into quick paced music at which point the crowd jumps up and dances by jumping in the air or employing various Bollywood dance moves in time with the music. This lively music then slows down again and the leader asks the crowd to sit, often not continuing until everyone is seated on the floor. This kind of *bhangra* is not necessarily representative of all forms of *bhangra* (e.g. *bhangra* is at once a style of music as well as dance, it has regional variations as well as diasporic variations, it is utilized by varied ethnic groups and is not limited to Punjabi people, etc), though many participants noted that the music was *bhangra* though the way people danced,

with the slow singing and pauses, was not a part of all kinds of *bhangra*. Truly an event that is difficult to describe with words, *garba* in America is in general a dance where many kinds of Indians get together for various purposes, some social and some religious.

I attended two local *garba*s, one sponsored solely by the Gujarati Samaj of Gatorland (henceforth GSG) and another partially sponsored by this group and hosted by the ISA at UF. I was unable to obtain any information regarding the GSG as they organize through email groups, word of mouth and do not have a public website. Contact information was not readily available. The ISA of UF, on the other hand, is a university-funded group in which foreign and domestic Indian and Indian-American students participate. The *garba* sponsored by ISA is one of three major events that the group presents during the academic year. The other two, also associated with Hindu yet Pan-Indian religious holidays, are a talent show for the holiday of Divali which is held shortly after Navaratri and a spring festival for Holi. The two *garba*s were sponsored in part by the same group and were held at equally large, extradomestic venues and thus were very similar. However, the structure of the events differed in a few key ways. Because of this, I will describe the two events at the same time, noting the comparative differences between them.

The GSG *garba* took place at the Martin Luther King Community Center in the northeastern part of Gainesville on the Friday and Saturday nights during Navaratri. At the Friday night event, I estimated there were upwards of three hundred people in attendance, though more in total could have attended since people could come and go as they pleased. There were clearly more female than male participants in the actual dancing, though many men sat in the plastic chairs and bleachers that were set up in the MLK Center gym where the *garba* took place. The event was free for all participants. No one counted the people who entered so exact numbers of participants were unavailable. This group, as participants of the GSG and ISA *garba*s told

me, was in communication with other Indian and Hindu groups on the UF campus so that each group could schedule its own *garba* and prevent an overlap in scheduling. I attended this *garba* with a close friend named Aditi and her high school aged sister. There were very few non-Indian participants at this event in comparison to the ISA *garba*. I speculate that this is due to the ethnic sponsorship and self-conscious religiosity of the event as well as its lack of public advertising.

The ISA *garba* was held at the O'Connell Center on the UF campus, where other public events such as sporting events and concerts took place. This event took place two weeks later than the GSG *garba* and not within the nine night period of Navaratri. My estimates suggest that this event was twice the size of the GSG event. I also attended this *garba* with Aditi and her sister, as well as another friend named Razia. Razia and several other people I met at these events made it a point to tell me that they were not Hindu. Razia identified herself as Isma'ili, a kind of Shi'a Islam, though she did not see her attendance at the *garba* to conflict with her religious identity. She noted it was a social event and way for her to hang out with her other Indian and Indian-American friends. The relationship between *garba* and Isma'ilis is not, however, without historical precedent. Songs sung during the *garba* were originally called *garbi*s, the same term that was described earlier as the form of the Goddess as a pot with holes in it. The work of Tazim Kassam (1994) describes the convergence of the *garbis* sung during Navaratri with a narrative by Pir Shams, a Satpanth Isma'ili preacher from sometime between the 12th and 14th centuries. The Isma'ili *garbis* of Pir Shams are folk songs that concern conversion from Hinduism to the Satpanth or "true path" (Kassam 1994: 106). During Pir Shams travels, he stops at a town that is celebrating Navaratri. During the course of the festival, Pir Shams sings his own *garbis* in an attempt to convert the Hindu festival revelers around him.

Utilizing similar musical tones and tropes, Pir Shams' *garbis* convince the Brahmins who chant the Vedas at the event that Pir Shams is a saint. News of Pir Shams' songs of wisdom travel far and wide, converting kings and kingdoms to the Isma'ili doctrines set forth in the *garbis* (Kassam 1994: 106-107). This is not necessarily the reason why an Isma'ili woman in Gainesville might considerer a *garba* as religiously acceptable, it does demonstrate how utilizing similar elements of a common cultural milieu can be used to make meaning and achieve certain goals. Because the *garba* was not portrayed to be specifically religious and it still involved a great deal of language, clothing and other cultural elements relevant to Razia's identity, this *garba*, like the *garbis* of Pir Shams, were perceived by many to be acceptable and meaningful, despite the popular association of *garba* or *garbis* specifically with Hinduism.

Another participant who was also a friend of Aditi, named Dinesh, repeatedly told me that he attended *garba* for fun and that it had absolutely nothing to do with religion. He declared himself an atheist, and when I asked him if I could later interview him, he said, "Why would you want to ask me anything? I'm an atheist. I don't think I can help with your research, really." While it was not possible for me to discern numbers of people who viewed ISA *garba* as a religious event and who did not, these examples show that there are many ways of interpreting the purpose of *garba* and utilize it as a space to take part in and create for themselves facets of their own identities. Because of the extradomestic context of these events, larger "pan-Indian-ness" becomes emphasized over ethnically or religiously specific identities.

As identified in the context of other events, clothing serves as a marker for the public display of identities that can include gender and ethnicity. *Garba* is no exception. Clothing inscribes the body in a very visual way, and many participants view *garba* as a chance to inscribe their bodies with multiple meanings: gender, social status, ethnicity, religiosity and more. At

this event, most female participants wear a *chaniya choli*, which consists of a half-shirt blouse, a floor length and large belled skirt with a matching scarf that is draped in a certain way from front to back across the right shoulder. This scarf is draped in a way that is similar to the way *saris* are draped by many women in Gujarat. This outfit is often less a marker of regional identity than social status, since females with very diverse regional heritages wear these outfits. The materials and ornamentation of the *chaniya choli* are often times indicative of the wealth or status of the wearer. Some participants wore highly bejeweled and brightly colored *chaniya choli* that seemed to represent the current height of fashion for *garba*. I asked some participants whose dress seemed to be more ornate why they had chosen that particular outfit. Many of them noted that they were wearing something they had purchased on their most recent trip to India. The opulence of these outfits seemed to convey economic and social status in suggesting the wearer could afford both the expense of the glamorous dress as well as the trip to India required to obtain it. Other participants wore a less expensive cotton or viscose version in the *bandhani* style (a kind of tie-dye) typical of Gujarat or Rajasthan. Some of the women who attended the North Indian event earlier in the week wore *salwar kameez* suits or georgette *saris* rather than the *chaniya choli,* though the choice of clothing was not only separated by ethnic lines. I noticed that the younger female participants, high school and college age, wore a *chaniya choli*, while older participants, mothers and other observers wore *saris* or *salwar kameez*. Though there were always exceptions to this rough rule, generational differences seemed to mark the major differences in clothing rather than ethnic in this extradomestic context as opposed to intradomestic contexts.

Male participants displayed the greatest amount of diversity of clothing, some wearing a long *kurta* over a pair of jeans or matching pyjama pants. The *kurtas* were in all colors of cotton

and silk, some ornately embroidered and some plain. Some men wore jeans and button down shirts. The majority of older, non-college age male participants, especially the men who sat in chairs on the side lines of the dancing or who congregated in an anteroom to the main dancing room, wore polo shirts or button down shirts and slacks. Most of these men did not participate in the *garba* portion of the event, with slightly more taking part in the *raas*. Men's participation was low and many stood on the sidelines, arms folded, and engaged in conversation with other non-dancing men. Similar to other events, males and females seemed to mostly segregate themselves along gendered lines, though *garba*'s sheer numbers and diversity of extradomestic networks made it difficult to ascertain the ratio of female to male participation. Further statistical investigation may shed light on whether *garba* is a location of greater gender diversity in comparison to the intradomestic events I attended.

The events began in the evening, after 7pm, and lasted until midnight or 1am. When I arrived at both of these events, the *garba* dancing portions of the evening had begun. Partial circles of mostly young women had formed around the centers of the floors, dancing counter-clockwise. As the nights continued, more and more dancers joined, filling in the spaces and creating progressively larger circles around the center. The GSG event possessed fewer participants since the MLK Center is significantly smaller than the O'Connell Center, though the crush of participants in the dancing seemed equally as intense. Aditi told me that she preferred the ISA *garba* music to the GSG event because the former had a live band brought directly from India, who sang live versions of some of her favorite Bollywood songs. She also noted that the GSG's set of music did not follow the pattern she remembered from previous *garba*s. "Usually they play one song in Hindi and then one song in Gujarati and keep alternating like that. But this guy is just playing whatever." Again, we can see in this statement the imprint of importance of

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language and structure on an event through the performance of music and language in order for it to make meaning and tradition.

The most striking difference in structure between these two events occurred when the *garba* section was completed. Like other events described previously in the chapter, *arati* serves as a temporal break between entertainment for the object of worship and the more social aspects of events. One might also say that *arati* serves a similar function during *garba* where the initial dancing is oriented towards the Goddess in the center of the dance floor and the *raas* has a much more social feel as it is spatially oriented in two lines which wind around and break apart at random in on the dance floor. The *raas* is not oriented toward any deity, but rather at the co-ed lines of dancers. The GSG *garba* had a table in the center of its dance floor, where *arati* took place in a similar manner to the *arati*s previously described. A picture of Durga as Mahishasura Mardini was placed on one side of the table facing the DJ and a large brass icon of Durga stood on the other side. All kinds of sweets that had been made by various members of the GSG were set in front of the icon that would eventually be served in an outer room as *prasad* from the Goddess. A man with a microphone gave some instructions in Gujarati and then led a prayer. I moved with the crowd towards the side of the table with the icon of Durga as the larger group recited the prayer together. Then, the man took up the silver platter of lighted ghee lamps and signaled the larger group to sing the familiar song sung during *arati*. Some members of the crowd pushed through the congestion of onlookers to have their own turn waving the lamp. Others went to the table to place offerings of money in front of Durga. When the song ended, the crowd dispersed, the money was collected and counted, and the *prasad* was moved to an outer room for participants to take. A line quickly formed outside this room as volunteers fixed

up small plastic bowls of grapes, raisins, M&Ms and Hershey kisses that were white, strawberry and milk chocolate along with other homemade sweets.

The ISA *garba* was indeed much different at the end of the initial *garba* dance. The president and vice president of ISA made announcements and the live band was introduced. Then the band took a break and some Bollywood music was piped through the speakers from an iPod. After a ten-minute break, the *raas* section began and then was almost immediately followed by the *bhangra* section. Strikingly absent was the *arati*. When I asked former ISA president Suniti why there was no *arati* at this *garba* she responded:

> We have to keep our [events] non-religious, so [the executive board] decided to completely take the religion out of them… We're student government funded. It's a money issue is what it is. It's not that we don't embrace our religion or want to express it, but it's that we can't because of the way we get our funding.

She went on to say that in previous years, the ISA attempted to collaborate with other cultural groups in Gainesville, like the GSG, so that they could pool resources to rent the O'Connell Center for two nights instead of one. However, the GSG chose not to pursue this. Suniti said this was because:

> There was no religious aspect [at the ISA *garba*], [the GSG] doesn't technically view what we do as substantial enough to count, so they wanted to do their own. It wouldn't have flown with the community to just have done two ISA *garba*s at the [O'Connell Center] without any kind of religious affiliation. They're like, 'That's not what this holiday is about.'

She said that some people wanted to keep the *arati*, but because ISA is a cultural association and not a religious one, catering to one religious tradition defeats the purpose of ISA's existence and mission. Such an observance would be unfair to the other Indian students whose religious identity was Muslim or Christian.

In another interview, Tejal noted that she did not attend the ISA *garba* because of its lack of *arati*:

I heard about that and I said, 'Well what's the point? If we're in Navaratri, then you have to do *arati*. To me, it makes no sense to do *garba* and then no *arati*. I mean even when we do *garba* for somebody's wedding and all, we still do *arati* because it's so linked with Ambaji. So I didn't want to go and do just *garba*. I wanted to do the *arati*, so I went to this other one [at the ICEC put on by the HSC].

It is clearest from these quotes that the difference in events and the contents of the events suggests intra- and extradomestic events provide spaces for the fulfillment of different niches of an individual's identity. For the former ISA president and many ISA members at UF, the importance of *garba* is to include as many Indians and Indian-Americans as possible. For Tejal, the emphasis of the *garba* is to perform religious identities and duties for the Goddess.

As a side note to the ISA's lack of *arati*, located at the center of the floor at this *garba* was an interesting centerpiece. Despite the self-conscious effort to remove all religious aspects of the ISA *garba*, an aniconic image of the Goddess was part of this celebration. Like the Punjabi and Gujarati Navaratri events described earlier, the Goddess was present at ISA in the form of a pot upon a holder with a metal coconut on top. This was cordoned off as a special space in the middle of the floor. This was the object to which the dancers oriented themselves. When I asked participants what they thought of the centerpiece, most replied "What centerpiece? There wasn't an icon in there. That's not allowed." I was not able to find out further information about this curious location of the Goddess, but we can see here, too, how the host(s) of an event can use culturally significant themes to circumvent normative protocol, in this case required by UF for financial reasons, in order to generate meaning for those "in the know." Outsiders without this special knowledge or understanding of the preexisting cultural repertoire would likely not find fault with the (an)iconic image of the divine feminine.

The rest of the two evenings proceeded in similar fashion after the *arati/*non-*arati* break, with weaving lines of *raas* dancers shifting partners, hitting their sticks together in time with the music. Since a live band at the ISA *garba* played the music, the tempo of the *raas* dances

increased over time, each song slightly faster than the last. Towards the end of the ISA *raas*

section of dance, many couples had dropped out of the lines because they could not keep up with

the ever-quickening pace. The GSG *raas* remained at largely the same tempo since its music

was generated by a DJ and a computer full of Bollywood music. I was not able to stay until the

end of the GSG *garba* because Aditi, who drove me to the event, had to leave. I was able to stay

at the ISA *garba*, which included an ending section of *bhangra* music and dance. Once this was

completed, the participants found their friends and family members, collected their shoes and the

sticks they had used during the *raas* and left the building. Some participants, mostly members of

ISA, remained behind to help clean up, break down the chairs and tables that had been set up at

the sides of the gym, and help pick up the pieces of broken glass bracelets that littered the dance

floor. A few participants remained on the bleachers that had been pulled out on the west side of

the room, nursing their feet which were wounded from tiny pieces of broken bracelets and

blisters from the intense four hours of dancing.

Conclusion

These five events described in this chapter only scrape the surface of the diversity of ways

that the Indians in Gainesville celebrate Navaratri. One might initially assume that events such

as these follow certain ritual or traditional lines that promote and sustain a previously determined

ritual pattern. However, we can see a great deal of individual choice bearing its weight on the

performance of these rituals as well as a great deal of ritual innovation. Bell's understanding of

the fluid nature of ritualized performance helps us reconcile the complex interactions of ritual

action and identities that weigh in during Navaratri among diverse groups of people. The

Punjabi *bhajan* group demonstrates the way in which the ethnic and religious identities of the

host provide the group with a different religious dimension. It followed what is typically done in

a North Indian and specifically Punjabi worship context, and yet incorporated the individual

religiosity of the host through the CD-led prayer and her self-conscious offering of food to Ram instead of Durga. The Gujarati *havan* is an interesting intersection of ethnic and familial-specific observance and material culture with gender-norm iconoclasm.   The South Indian group showed how gendered participation differed within intradomestic networks not only through composition of the event but the way in which participation was promoted through singing *bhajans* rendered with an English alphabet. *Garba* illustrated how extradomestic contexts can take ethnically specific practices and transform them into more encompassing activities in which it is more important to be "pan-Indian" than "this-Indian." It also was a striking display of how clothing and adornment of the body are used to inscribe meaning for the self and for others. The immense diversity of practices and concepts during these five events will be examined in the next chapter where I will make theoretical suggestions for ways to interpret this complex set of data.

CHAPTER 3
ANALYSIS

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I described five events that I classify as both intradomestic and extradomestic situations and locations of social network. This project seeks mainly to show that the rituals that take place for Navaratri are dynamic creations in which a great deal of "tradition" is observed alongside a great deal of ritual innovation. Traditions and rituals are neither uniformly nor universally replicated across time and space. While these ideas may remain static in the imagination of performers, the ritualization of these concepts provides new and different outcomes each time the ritual is performed. Navaratri in Gainesville, Florida, is a prime example of the multiplicity of ways a holiday or festival can be celebrated. There are events where a localized understanding of identity is performed or learned about and other events where a localized kind of performance helps centralize the larger population. Ritualizing these different events creates several places and times where people can participate in various capacities.

Research examining populations of Indian/Indian Americans in a non-urban context like Gainesville is rare. These populations have not followed the rubric of temple creation that many other populations of Indian/Indian Americans have in urban centers in the past. Without the institution, a great deal of creativity and effort on the part of Gainesville's Indian/Indian American population has generated a diverse array of ways to celebrate Navaratri, each one serving as a place for people to perform their identities, but also learn other ways of being as well. Strategic choices on the part of the individual, as well as the community in larger extradomestic contexts, create events that simultaneously create meaning for participants as well as adapting the sense of ritual and tradition so that Navaratri can be appropriately observed in the United States.

In this chapter, I will bring the events described in the second chapter together to compare and contrast the way in which elements of ethnicity, gender and religion are important when studying Navaratri as a ritual time. I suggest that while Gainesville's population is unique for several reasons outlined in the first chapter, the processes and techniques utilized by this community may be found at work elsewhere in the United States and beyond. The people and events are by no means representative of a category of people as a whole (e.g. all Indians or all Hindus in America do this or that), but are demonstrative of the diversity of approaches to Navaratri that arise in a diasporic context like the United States.

Also in this chapter, I will make suggestions for ways in which this body of research can be further augmented and pursued that would shed light on interesting topics mentioned by not examined in detail in this work. As in any project, this body of research is neither complete nor finished, only scratching the surface of what it is that people do.

Bell and Ritualization

In the first chapter, I briefly outlined the way in which Catherine Bell's approach to rituals has informed the way I view the events I observed. However, there is much more that Bell's approach can say to help understand the way people create and use processes (consciously and subconsciously) in the construction of intra- and extradomestic rituals during Navaratri.

The beginning of Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* outlines the history of how "ritual" has been theoretically understood. From the very beginning of "religion" as a category, ritual has been described as the active kind of religion, its perfect expression. She notes that Durkheim's sense of ritual was a collective action where a community makes meaning and understands its beliefs through action (1992: 20). However, the majority of Bell's discourse attempts to remove this focus on the thought/action dichotomy that bleeds into belief/ritual

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associated with religion. Throughout *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice,* Bell repeatedly uses "ritualization" as a term for the active process rather than using "ritual" as a static category. She notes that ritual is an idea, a concept culturally created and maintained based on an almost Geertzian web of meaning. Ritualization, on the other hand, is Bell's way of suggesting how "acting ritually emerges as a particular cultural strategy of differentiation linked to particular social effects and rooted in a distinctive interplay of a socialized body and the environment it structures" (1992: 7-8). Despite her refreshing approach to understanding action and thought as not mutually exclusive concepts to ritual or ritualization, Bell's approach is not devoid of criticism.

Ronald Grimes has critiqued Bell's "ritualization" of action as a reified concept in which people have no agency (2004). Throughout *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell speaks of "ritualization" as a process that can be defined as something that creates distinctions and hierarchies of action to separate a special time from an every day time or situation. It is a process based on culturally relevant notions of hierarchies. Bell discusses "ritualization" as a process which does things in and of itself, acting of its own accord and forcing itself upon people in general. Grimes rightly notes that, "it is strange that someone who emphasizes strategic purpose would eliminate ritual actors-those who strategize-in such a way that actions themselves are imagined as doing the distinguishing" (2004: 127). Indeed it is interesting that the vocabulary Bell uses to explain her take on ritual as a concept and as an action suggests ritualization is a sort of *sui generis* process in which people are completely absent. On the other hand, if one takes into account her article entitled "Performance" (1998), the two sources in tandem provide interesting ways to understand how and why people create and imagine authenticity while exerting their own power over rituals that take place during Navaratri.

Differentiation of Ritualization

Bell notes that ritualized action is differentiated from non-ritual action. Rituals are times and places that are distinctive or set apart from regular everyday life. This view may suggest that ritual is a kind of social behavior, and that consequently all forms of social behavior can be viewed as ritualized actions. This leaves the door wide open for interpretation and creates theoretical dilemmas for the scholar. What does and does not constitute ritual if the above statements are taken as one's basic thesis? Bell claims that such a question may arise, but a slight change of focus makes the approach much more applicable and academically fruitful: instead of finding what is and is not to be considered "ritual action," one should determine the "particular circumstances and cultural strategies that generate and differentiate activities from each other" (Bell 1992: 74). Contextualizing rituals and understanding how it is that people go about the creative ritualization process ought to be the true aim of ritual studies. Understanding how and why Navaratri is celebrated as diversely as it is in Gainesville relies on contextualizing not only what actually happens, but how people as agents differentiate the holiday from every day life and associate it with their sense of how Navaratri is traditionally celebrated.

Ritualizing action creates a "privileged distinction" between mundane, or even Durkheimian "profane," actions and rituals that have an inherent higher status than non-ritual actions (1992: 90). Ritualized actions are not only differentiated themselves, but employ strategies to create differences that are culturally relative (1992: 101). Bell uses the example of the Christian Eucharist as an example. The Eucharist is set apart from the average meal by its less than adequate amount of food, the lack of accessibility to laypersons and the privileged position of the clergy in this action, and the commensality of its performance by a congregation of members create a sense that the Eucharist is a completely different kind of meal altogether. Bell says:

Theoretically, ritualization of the meal could employ a different set of strategies to differentiate it from conventional eating, such as holding the meal only once in a person's lifetime or with too much food for normal nourishment. The choice of strategies would depend in part on which ones could most effectively render the meal symbolically dominant to its conventional counterparts (1992: 90).

The Eucharist is a strategic selection of qualities which move it from the everyday to a more distinct realm by utilizing specific culturally relevant themes and ways of being to produce meaning among those familiar with the cultural context. The food itself, the regularity of its presentation to participants, the manner in which the Eucharist is distributed, who has access to this special meal and other considerations are a part of the ritualized action that mean something to those participating in the Eucharist itself. Without knowledge of these proceedings, participants would lack the "sense of ritual" implied in the Eucharist.

The example of the Eucharist is important for several reasons. As Bell says throughout her book, ritualization creates a hierarchical separation of events. The events as "rituals" themselves are understood to create and be created by a hierarchy of "privileged distinctions." The people involved in the event are also actively creating and being created by similar hierarchies. The roles that people play in the creative process, whether as hosts, participants, observers or otherwise dictate different techniques in mitigating those social hierarchies. Notions of power and hierarchy involve not only the conceptual and material elements of ritualized action, but also among the generators of ritualized action themselves. A key question to this study asks how authenticity is created and meaning understood based on what people do and who is able to do it. From the scholarly perspective, viewing the Navaratri as a set of culturally relevant techniques examines one body of data. But understanding Navaratri as asset of rituals in terms of power makes suggestions not only for these techniques, but perhaps more so for people as active agents in the performance of their identities. I suggest that the events I examined in the second chapter

provide ample situations to examine in terms of the power of ritual and the power inherent in ritualization.

The Indian/Indian American communities of my research engaged in similar techniques of differentiating a special time and space for Navaratri through ritualized action. One could argue that the delineation of space by using fabric sheets or plastic mats to set apart the ritual space from the every-day space is a method of ritualizing action. Setting this space apart at the forefront of a ritual and performing other specific ritualized actions in that space creates meaning among those who participate. The space itself has been ritualized by differentiating it but also becomes a space where further ritualizing actions can take place.

Other techniques used by the hosts of the events I attended can be seen to be acts of differentiation as well. For instance, the regulation of food and the prohibition of certain foods during Navaratri as described by Tejal are similar differentiations of regular every day food and special foods for distinctive times and places. In her role as host of the event, Tejal used her own personal sense of ritual to provide a meaningful situation for other participants. She attributed this to be part of her Gujarati, familial tradition. Her choice to continue this sense of tradition and make it available to the rest of her intradomestic social network is a technique, whether conscious or not, of differentiating the ritual from everyday life, but also differentiating herself from other participants. Restriction of certain foods is not endemic to the town in Gujarat where Tejal grew up; other parts of India are familiar with these practices. Swapna, Sumathi and two other participants at the *havan* described the same dietary restrictions without a prompt to do so on my part during interviews. On the one hand, Tejal's own sense of tradition regarding food ritualized the meal by making it distinctive from other non-Navaratri meals. On the other hand, one can see the food as a technique employed by Tejal to differentiate herself as host of the event

in which she exerted her own power to create and reinforce a food-hierarchy for the other participants. For members of that intradomestic social network, the food was meaningful in ways that regular meals are not. Tejal's familiarity with these rules and her choice to provide them accordingly during Navaratri could be seen as a way of dominating the situation as a host and as a cultural expert at that place and time. Perhaps the *havan* itself was not specifically Gujarati, but is more "Tejal's" *havan* than anything else. Her choice of food, structure, language, materials and the ritual in general was a creative act, and not simply reciting a verbatim ritual vocabulary.

In contrast, Swapna noted that while she was aware of the restrictions described by Tejal, she did not follow them for every day of the festival. The food provided at her lunch did not follow the same guidelines. Rather, Swapna claimed that she followed a fast in accordance with those rules for one day that fit best into her schedule because of the difficulty of following the rules. To Swapna, this did not create a problem. Because Navaratri is a part of day to day life, despite its special time/place qualities as a holiday, one must adapt. Swapna said, "You want to show your devotion and certain discipline in any way. It doesn't have to be those hard and fast rules." Food, for Swapna, is not the most important way to create meaning and privileged distinction. Other differentiation techniques, such as the playing of the "Amritvani" prayer and providing the words to the group provided a more powerful approach for Swapna's establishment of the ritual as authentic in structure and content. The recitation of the prayer was an action set apart from every day action by the formality of the prayer itself and the placement of the song at the beginning of the *bhajan* group meeting. An important prayer to Swapna, she utilized it in a similar way to Tejal's use of food: using personal, meaningful, localized materials

within the larger, centralized understanding of "tradition" to actively *create* a "sense of ritual,"

not robotically replicate past ritualized activities.

Gender and a Ritualized Body

In addition to ritualizing certain actions or structures to produce a "sense of ritual," bodies

themselves are also ritualized by utilizing these techniques and existing in spaces and times

where ritualization occurs. Bell notes that "through a series of physical movements ritual

practices spatially and temporally construct an environment organized according to schemes of

privileged opposition" (1992: 98). Through the very bodily performance of these actions, the

people as participants in these events become ritualized themselves, operating within a ritualized

environment but also creating it anew with their own ritualized bodies. It is here that the concept

of ritual as "performance" is particularly important. As one can easily see, performance is not

simply action but is action in tandem with a collection of strategic choices that influence not only

the performance as an action, but also the performer herself as well as the intended audience.

The body itself is not just a carrier. It is not a passive vessel that is dressed up by cultural

assumptions. The body is implicit in the message it carries. It can tell multiple stories at once,

spinning webs of meaning that rely on one another in complex ways. The multiplicity of

performance approaches augments the notion of a "ritualized body" because the body itself does

many things at once. It can create a "sense of ritual" through various techniques, but also

attempt to subvert or change the "sense of ritual" by employing other techniques.

This is perhaps best demonstrated in the diversity of clothing, in which bodies become

ritualized and in turn ritualize a space through the self-conscious choice of certain inscriptions on

the body via culturally relevant styles of clothing. Participants in every event used clothing as a

way of signifying different things: age, region, ethnicity, nationality, gender and so on. When

participants dressed in certain ways, they were simultaneously working within the understood

structure of how one ought to dress in that specific situation (e.g. a certain kind of silk *sari* at a South Indian event or a *chaniya choli* at the various *garba*s) as well as reinforcing these structures. For participants who did not conform to that specific event's sort of "dress code," they were making choices that demarcated a different identity or a different way of controlling the space. Bell writes that, "a ritualized body is a body invested with a 'sense' of ritual. This sense of ritual exists as an implicit variety of schemes whose deployment works to produce sociocultural situations that the ritualized body can dominate in some way" (1992: 98). I do not take domination in this sense does not mean to wield absolute and infinite power over everyone else. Rather, domination means exerting ritual power over a situation. I take Bell's theory to generally suggest that ritual is not a passive concept. It involves activity and agency of all parties involved. Choosing to attend, what to wear, with whom to attend, in what capacity to participate, what to provide as a host, how to structure the event, what is able to be inserted as a localization of a centralized event and so on are all choices that suggest the agency of individuals. "Ritual is never simply or solely a matter of routine, habit or 'the dead weight of tradition'" (Bell 1992: 92). I would continue that every part of "ritual" involves a choice since a "ritual" is constantly being created, recreated, imagined and reimagined in order to maintain continuity in the dynamic flux of everyday life.

To take *garba* as the example *par excellence*, different participants used clothing as one strategy to dominate the "sociocultural situation" in different ways. For some, it was more important to express a sense of "pan-Indian-ness" at this originally Gujarati event. Some female participants during the ISA *garba* noted how other female participants either wore their *chaniya cholis* in the proper "Guju" style or not. Authentically adorning oneself seemed to be very important to many participants with whom I spoke. On the other hand, some female participants

chose to wear a *salwar kameez*, utilizing other strategies in the form of clothing and adornment to dominate the situation in other ways. Though I was not able to interview the women who chose that style of clothing, I speculate that on some level, their clothing choice was meant to signify a different level of participation than those in other kinds of dress.

Men, on the other hand, seemed to utilize clothing in yet another way, perhaps in a lack of ritualization. When men did participate, it seemed less important to don "traditional" clothing as a ritualizing act. During several interviews, women noted that men do not seem to be interested in dressing up or actively participating in events, aside from *arati*. At many events, men and women spatially separated themselves into different rooms and different levels of participation. Even at the home of Usha where the co-ed Gainesville *bhajan* group assembled and distributed its folders of music, female participation still dominated the scene in many ways.

With Bell's suggestion of a ritualized body in mind, one might conclude that the female body is more ritualized than the male body at Navaratri in Gainesville, Florida. Ritualization as a process of differentiation into privileged binary oppositions provides one way of reconciling the increased participation of women over men. Bell identifies that binary distinctions are not always equal and often one side of the binary comes to dominate the other (1992: 102). The female hosts of intradomestic events made active choices in the way they represented themselves, their sense of tradition, and the ability of that ritual to either incorporate other ways of being or its dominance over other ways of being 'traditional.' If we take the male-female binary gender distinction to be a basic oppositional pair in the context of Navaratri in which the female part is more ritualized and does more ritualizing than the male, it creates a circular logic that Navaratri is a festival in which women more often participate. Without reducing this

argument to a "chicken or the egg" conundrum, I suggest that the gender separation apparent at

Navaratri attests to Bell's suggestion that:

> Whole systems of ritual symbols and actions can be generated by means of a small number of oppositions (male-female, within-without) or reduced to a few pairs that appear fundamental—and they all prove to be based on the movements or postures of the body (1992: 103).

The predominance of women and female participation at Navaratri and the intense and consistent

ritualization of their bodies through clothes, performance, organization and so on suggests to me

that Navaratri is a special time and place for women in this context such that women create

Navaratri performances but concepts of "woman" are also created or recreated in the process.

The female-male oppositional pair is asymmetrical during Navaratri but is also reinforced to be

asymmetrical by the agency afforded to the process of ritualization. Women's bodies, in regards

to Navaratri, are not passive but active parts in creating and transmitting Navaratri to themselves

and to others on many levels, but especially through their performance as ritualized bodies.

Clothing is just one material element of both ritualized action and performance that demonstrates

"human agents as active creators of both cultural continuity and change rather than passive

inheritors of a system who are conditioned from birth to replicate it" (Bell 1998: 209).

Ritualizing and performing Navaratri provides the flexibility and fluidity to create situations

where differentiation and domination via different strategies becomes possible.

Space and Time

Certain patterns of performance arose, although these patterns were general and by no

means universally found in all cases. The majority of patterns relied upon the structuring of

space and time upon a larger cultural repertoire. These patterns, however, are involved in the

circular production of meaning inherent in ritualization and the ritualized body:

> Space and time are redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting organizing schemes on the space-time environment on the one hand while reabsorbing

these schemes as the nature of reality on the other…. Ritualization is the strategic manipulation of 'context' in the very act of reproducing it (Bell 1992:99-100).

I would suggest, however, that as regards my own observations, the "reproduction" of context *provides* the ability for such strategic manipulation. Without the "sense of ritual" created within the "space-time environment" of Navaratri, situations able to be manipulated would not exist. Ritualized bodies as agents in ritual need the spatio-temporal locus in which to act.

Navaratri's universally observed time according to a lunar calendar creates a time in which ritualization can occur according to culturally constructed notions of "tradition." This time is a special and auspicious time in which to worship the divine feminine. Time or schedule as a pattern in Navaratri was also evident in the similar progression of ritualized acts in all but one event: singing and entertaining through *bhajans* or prayer, then *arati,* ending with food and/or social interaction. Similarly, spaces are differentiated physically and conceptually (intra- and extradomestic) where different ritualized actions can take place. The time and space associated with Navaratri are perhaps the most constant pieces of the pattern of observances. People plan their events to take place within the nine nights/days of the festival. People also organize themselves in regards to different spaces set aside for different purposes. These patterns in time and space which appear as constants arise from the ability of ritualization to not only differentiate but also to integrate.

Integration of Ritualization

In the first chapter, I used a vocabulary that I felt demonstrated the domestic versus public qualities of the places of the events in my research. The spaces for events were inherently related to the kinds of social networks created and maintained in those spaces. These two general categories of "within" and "without" the home allowed me to place space as the ultimate category of separation, because all other definitions for this division seemed to crumble when

held up to scrutiny. I was not able to say that gender, ethnicity, nationality, religiosity or generational age could account for the different locations in which the people in my research created their own identities through rituals. Such binary distinctions (a sense of "us" and "them" in all of the categories I just mentioned) were not cut-and-dry and certainly not equal, as Bell predicts. Therefore I felt that any other delineation between these groups and events aside from the actual spatial location of the events themselves would lead the reader astray.

Bell makes similar observations about ritual functioning at the localizing and centralizing levels, which I alluded to in my description of what intra- and extradomestic situations do for the people involved. Intradomestic networks of people and situations attempt to localize while extradomestic networks and situations centralize. In this way, ritualization of action not only differentiates, but can also integrate. Bell writes that:

> the orchestration of rituals in time, some reproducing local communities, others later integrating them or parts of them into larger communities, enables each unit in the system to experience both its own autonomy and its dependent place within a network of relationships with other groups (1992: 125).

As I mentioned in the first chapter, the commonality of time of Navaratri provides opportunities for a "diversity of practice" as Venkatachari said (1992: 182). Bell would likely agree with this based on the statement above, although it is likely that she would emphasize how "units" use this commonality to both empower themselves as well as depend upon a larger network. Ritualizing action in intra- and extradomestic networks or situations, or, to use Bell's language, localizing or centralizing provides different strategies for both differentiation and integration. These two processes may also take place simultaneously. *Garba*, as an extradomestic or centralizing event, creates a sense of "pan-Indian-ness" among its participants by both integrating the ethnic diversity of 'Indians' into a Gujarati mode of being, as well as differentiating itself from non-Indian events by employing such specific clothing, music, dances, language and so on. Bell's

first explanation of differentiation suggests a creation of hierarchies or distinctiveness based on oppositional binaries, and while that is present here as well, the sense of integration utilizes differentiation techniques too. While differentiation/integration may be its own oppositional binary, this does not mean that both processes cannot be simultaneous to greater or lesser degrees. Navaratri as a ritual time and space is a flexible and fluid set of ritualized acts that differentiate and integrate actions and people at different levels. The flexibility and fluidity of ritualization allows for the multiplicity of performance on an individual and communal level.

Conclusions

All of the binary oppositions I encountered-North/South Indian, male/female, young/old, localized/centralized and many more-were not mutually exclusive concepts in which the presence of one signified the absence of the other. If that were so, there would be infinite exceptions to the rule. This is why Bell's sense of multiplicity is so important to my research. Navaratri as a set of rituals allows multiple ways, levels and modes of participation such that gender, ethnicity and religion are important factors that rely on one another for the process of ritualization. Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Christians, and atheists can all choose to participate in Navaratri because the rituals are neither singular, static, nor exclusive. Localized or centralized events provide multiple times, locations and ways to participate or lead. South Indian women do not wear a *chaniya choli* to say that they are Gujarati, but rather to imagine themselves as part of the centralizing integration that ritualization can create. Punjabi, Gujarati, and Tamil women can choose to participate in ways that affirm their own sense of ethnicity or to express their sense of belonging to a larger intradomestic network. Perhaps all of these things can happen at once. The multiplicity inherent in performance of ritual and the different techniques which ritualization can employ help to reconcile the diversity of participants and the diversity of events that take part in creating Navaratri in Gainesville, Florida.

Contributions

This thesis is a beginning step towards understanding more fully the multitude of ways in which gender, ethnicity and religion interact, rely on one another, and reinforce one another in the American context. With the growing population of South Asians in America, and more specifically in Gainesville, it is increasingly important to understand that ritualized holidays like Navaratri are not static regurgitations of what happens in a South Asian context. The American context is a new and different place in which South Asians must construct and reconstruct their identities. Hindu-ness and Indian-ness are not taken for granted as they might be in India. Understanding Navaratri to be a locus for ritualization helps in understanding how in celebrating this holiday, people are making conscious choices about what constitutes tradition, how authenticity is made, and how Navaratri is in a constant state of flux. While tradition is imagined to be continuous, the actual ritualized action of tradition is a result of choices made by hosts and participants in events. Tradition, in every context, is an imagined and flexible concept such that Swapna's afternoon event can be considered continuous with a Punjabi *jagran* or that Tejal's *havan* is in keeping with the *havan* performed by her family priests in Gujarat. Tradition is also able to be used to be subversive as well as it utilizes motifs from a cultural repertoire to create meaning. This is why the centerpiece at the ISA *garba* can include a form of the Goddess and yet maintain its outward perception of secular observance as opposed to a specific religious observance.

With all of these things in mind, one can appreciate the diversity and multiplicity inherent in an event like Navaratri. In combination with further research, this thesis provides an analysis of some of the ways in which ethnicity, gender and religion influence and are influenced by Navaratri within the South Asian community in Gainesville, Florida.

APPENDIX A
STATISTICS AND THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

US Census Bureau

In the United States, a census of the population is taken every ten years, though local state and city governments may attempt to collect census-like information more frequently. Analyzing this kind of information, which reaches an enormous number of people on a quantitative basis, provides limited insight into the makeup of the population. Though these numbers can be useful, one must be careful not to be misled by numbers, nor rely too heavily upon them. However, understanding the numbers and what they mean to one's own study are key parts of the research process.

The US Census Bureau's census information, which was last gathered in 2000 and will again soon be started in 2010, provides an opportunity to see a wide variety of information. Information regarding household size, economic information, racial identity, immigration and citizenship among other categories of information are collected from the entire population and is required to be submitted by citizens under penalty of law. One of the categories of classification on the 2000 census includes identity as an "Asian Indian." This term is a bit problematic in itself (as are many of the other categories under the subset "Asian" in which Taiwanese people are considered Chinese and "other" includes most smaller countries in the Asian continent) in that it may include Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, Nepalis and other South Asians in general who do not receive their own category for distinction on the census. In addition to this issue, some who identify themselves as Indian may do so with a qualifier of Kenyan or Trinidadian because of significant diasporic movement to parts of Africa and the Caribbean by Indian communities at various times in the recent past . To top off this problematic term, it has only been since 1980

that "Asian Indian" has even been a choice of category (US Census Bureau 2002). This further complicates a comparative approach to statistical information.

Also, the census does not ask questions that would acquire religious adherence information due to Public Law 94-521. In the past, information regarding religion was obtained between 1906 and 1936 from "religious organizations" in the "Census of Religious Bodies" and according to the US Census Bureau's website, further information regarding religion may be obtained from other research centers featured on their website (US Census Bureau 2008).

While it would be nearly impossible for the government to collect such detailed and specific information of all its citizens, identifying these problems show the colloquial "grain of salt" with which one must take the following findings from the US Census Bureau.

In the United States, Asian Indians account for less than .6% of the total population, according to the US Census Bureau. While this seems like a small percentage, Asian Indians accounted for nearly 16% of all those who claimed some kind of "Asian" ethnicity for their race (US Census Bureau 2002: 1). The "Asian" choices of race from the census included Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese as well as Other Asian. Asian Indian as a choice on the census encompasses a wide breadth of possible geopolitical nationalities including countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka. Geographically, Asian Indians are found all over the country with the six highest population centers located in California, New York, Hawaii, Texas, New Jersey and Illinois. These populations have been increasing by at least a few percentage points since 1990, and as in the case of Hawaii as much as 8.8% (US Census Bureau 2002: 5). However, the 2000 census questions regarding ethnic or national identity (categories identified as "race" according to the census itself) are not directly relatable to past censuses because 2000 was the first year that participants were instructed to "mark one or

more races," instructions different from past censuses(US Census Bureau 2001). No doubt in combination with other reasons, this small change has made it difficult to provide concrete comparative information regarding changes in Asian Indian populations. If one takes this information with a "grain of salt," however, it is difficult to deny that Asian Indians, and South Asians in general, are increasing in number.

Utilizing the US Census Bureau's "American Fact Finder" one is able to obtain 2000 census information as regards those who claimed Asian Indian alone or in combination with some other race in the Gainesville area of Florida (see Figure A-1). In including these statistics in my research, I hope to show how my ethnographic data reflect or is anomalous to the census information.

From the figure below, one can see that in Gainesville, Asian Indians account for 1.24% of the total population, a percentage that is well above the national .4% for the entire U.S. population. The average age of this group, at 23 years old, is three years younger than the average age of the total population of Gainesville at 26 years old. Few age markers are present when determining the age of the population, though the figures note that 38% of this population is 25 years or older. While it is unclear from census information why only respondents 25 years of age and older were considered when asking questions about education, a staggering 82% possessed a Bachelor's degree or higher. The general population of Gainesville as a whole counts 43% of its total population to have a Bachelor's degree or higher. On average, Asian Indians make a family income that is 9% higher than the average family income of Gainesville. And lastly, the houses in which Asian Indians live (though 74.5% live in "renter-occupied housing units) are worth 7% more than the average resident's house. From these pieces of information, one can statistically assume that adult members of Gainesville's Asian Indian

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population are more highly educated than the rest of the general population, possess higher income and greater valued housing than the rest of Gainesville on average. Again, while these are statistics and averages that qualitatively leave out the high and low ends that generate such median numbers, the group of people involved in my research reflects these general statistics.

Pew Charitable Trusts

The US Census does not include a section concerning religious affiliation and so there are no official government statistics concerning the number of those who claim to be Asian Indians as well as Hindus, or any other race along with Hinduism or other religious group. However, by combining the US Census 2000 information for Asian Indians along with the 2007 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's US Religious Landscape Survey, we can see that these three sets of data provide compelling evidence that the rise of Asian Indian population and the rise of Hinduism are connected.

It would be easy to note that Asians in general and Indians in specific are increasing in number in the United States and consequently are bringing their own religion along for the ride. In this way, immigrants are bringing an exported version of religion to the US. However, quantitatively and qualitatively, this claim is difficult to support. Looking at statistics is one way to support such a claim and provide a foundation for understanding further evidence compiled through qualitative, ethnographic research.

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (henceforth "Pew Forum"),which is a subsection of the larger Pew Charitable Trusts foundation, carried out a phone-based interview project in 2007. In the Pew Forum study, 35,556 adults were interviewed from the continental United States in English and Spanish. These phone numbers were generated randomly, called an RDD sample (random digit dialing), though more than 500 additional contacts were interviewed who initially identified themselves as Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox Christian for the Pew

Research Center's 2007 study of Muslim Americans. These additional interviews are noted to be

necessary because of the low numbers obtained through a random sampling of phone numbers.

In addition to these phone numbers, 500 cell phone specific interviews were conducted of people

who had no landline telephone, and used their cell phones exclusively. Because this sample

showed no difference in percentages of composition from the landline based survey, the authors

discarded this sampling. This is likely due to increasing criticism that surveys do not include the

large number of Americans who do not use landline telephones (Pew Forum on Religion &

Public Life 2008: 113).

As a culmination of statistics from these three locations of data regarding Asian Indians

and religion, the Pew Forum provides statistical data for some of the assumptions generated in

the previous paragraphs. For instance, the report notes that nearly half of Hindus in the U.S.,

one-third of Jews and a quarter of Buddhists have obtained post-graduate education, compared

with only about one-in-ten of the adult population overall. Hindus and Jews are also much more

likely than other groups to report high income levels (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

2008: 9). The report also cites that those who were raised as a Hindu are most likely to continue

to identify as Hindu throughout the course of their lives. In fact, this group of people maintains

more members than any other religious category cited in the study. Six percent who were raised

Hindu no longer identify as Hindu, where as other groups such as Judaism or Catholicism lost as

many as 25 to 32% of those raised in the tradition (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008:

30).

Another interesting note looks at the Pew Forum study in tandem with the 2000 Census.

The Pew Forum study notes that 14% of "Asians" as a whole identify themselves as Hindu (Pew

Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008: 41). According to the 2000 Census, Asian Indians

account for 14% of the total Asian category (US Census Bureau 2002: 9). While this may be a

bit of conjecture, it may not be wrong to suggest that the majority of those who identify as Asian

Indian also identify as Hindu in the United States.[1]

Conclusions

Without being overly simplistic or essentializing those in my study, observations like

these, in combination with the notes on the Asian Indian population of Gainesville as mentioned

earlier, might allow one to cautiously note a few points relevant to this study. First, Asian

Indians account for a greater percentage of the Gainesville, Florida population compared to the

national average. Second, among this higher percentage, it is highly likely that the vast majority

of Asian Indians identify as Hindu. Lastly, the Gainesville population also reflects a higher

income level and educational attainment level than the general population, suggestions supported

by the Pew Forum study.

Though these points may seem obvious or perhaps points to be noted in passing, I think it

is relevant to see the ways in which Gainesville is similar to and different from the national

population trends regarding religion and Asian Indian populations. In nearly every book or

paper regarding Hinduism in the United States among people of South Asian origin, a chapter or

two is devoted solely to the rehashing of immigration history in the United States (Coward,

Hinnells and Williams 2000; Dasgupta 1989; Eck 2001; Fenton 1988; Joshi 2006; Khandelwal

2002; Leonard 1997; Rayaprol 1997). While this information is interesting and certainly

important to this study and other studies like it, an understanding of the statistics and numbers of

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[1] It would be foolish to assume that every single person who identifies as Asian Indian in the United States is Hindu. Within my own research, participation in "Hindu" rituals was not limited to Hindus, but contained material objects of importance to Jainism and Sikhism as well. Actual participants also identified themselves as non-Hindus, identifying themselves as Jains or Ismailis. Therefore, while these numbers show an overwhelming majority of respondents in these surveys to be both Asian and Hindu, my research begs the question "How Hindu is Hindu in this American context?" Are those who participate in Hindu rituals identifying as Hindu since Jain or Sikh was not a spoken option in the survey? These questions are important, though not within the scope of this appendix.

what more currently exists in the United States seems to be a much more fruitful and

enlightening endeavor.

General Characteristics	Selected Population Group	Total Population
Total population	1,074	95,447
Male	623	46,666
Female	451	48,781
Median age (years)	23	26
Under 5 years	19	4,357
18 years and over	996	78,497
65 years and over	26	9,335
Household population	908	83,940
Group quarters population	166	11,507
Average household size	2	2
Average family size	3	3
Occupied housing units	402	37,279
Owner-occupied housing units	92	17,791
Renter-occupied housing units	310	19,488

Social Characteristics - show more >>	Selected Population Group	Total Population
Population 25 years and over	420	50,574
High school graduate or higher	407	44,391
Bachelor's degree or higher	361	21,653
Civilian veterans (civilian population 18 years and over)	0	7,384
Disability status (population 5 years and over)	116	13,988
Foreign born	692	8,320
Male, Now married, except separated (population 15 years and over)	138	14,530
Female, Now married, except separated (population 15 years and over)	113	14,049
Speak a language other than English at home (population 5 years and over)	748	12,507

Economic Characteristics - show more >>	Selected Population Group	Total Population
In labor force (population 16 years and over)	561	49,083
Mean travel time to work in minutes (workers 16 years and over)	20	18
Median household income in 1999 (dollars)	14,550	28,164
Median family income in 1999 (dollars)	49,261	44,263
Per capita income in 1999 (dollars)	14,123	16,779
Families below poverty level	22	2,827
Individuals below poverty level	362	22,559

Housing Characteristics - show more >>	Selected Population Group	Total Population
Single-family owner-occupied homes	118	15,757
Median value (dollars)	96,300	86,300
Median of selected monthly owner costs	(X)	(X)
With a mortgage (dollars)	764	843
Not mortgaged (dollars)	332	298

(X) Not applicable.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Summary File 2 (SF 2) and Summary File 4 (SF 4)

Figure A-1. Table of information from the US Census Bureau's American Factfinder Website Regarding "Asian Indians" in Gainesville, Florida (US Census Bureau "Gainesville city…").

APPENDIX B
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA ETHNICITY STATISTICS

Information regarding the makeup of the student and faculty population at the University

of Florida (UF) is provided by the Office of Institutional Planning and Research (OIPR) at UF.

The office keeps track of several sets of data for the university regarding enrollment, degrees,

retention rates, staffing patterns, physical facilities, fiscal analysis, tuition, admissions and

several other categories of information ("Office of Institutional Planning and Research"). The

website for the OIPR provides several tables and figures to the general public available for

download.

For my project, I utilized the categories of "enrollment" and "staffing patterns" in order to

make brief suggestions about the makeup of the Asian population on campus. As I mentioned in

Appendix A, all statistics ought to be taken with a grain of salt. Hard numbers do not always

accurately represent people. Individuality is often lost in numbers such as these, but they do

provide a glimpse into the increasing importance of the Asian population at the UF campus.

Student Population

Utilizing Table I from the OIRP website, one can estimate that the Asian student

population on campus has been growing over the last decade. Statistics included in the

downloadable file from the OIRP website date back to 1997 in Table I ("UF Factbook:

Enrollment – Table I"). In 1997, the "Asian" population of UF accounted for 5.7% of the total

student population, 6% of the undergraduate student population and 3.4% of the graduate student

population. Since that time, the Asian population has increased on campus. In 2008, Asians

accounted for 7.7% of the total student population, 8.1% of the undergraduate student population

and 4.4% of the graduate population ("UF Factbook: Enrollment – Table I"). From these

statistics, one can see that the Asian population is becoming increasingly important to the University of Florida and the surrounding area.

In addition to student statistics, the OIRP website also provides information regarding the faculty on campus. These numbers also date back nearly a decade to 1998 ("UF Factbook: Staffing Patterns – Table III-2"). In 1998, Asian faculty accounted for 6.6% of the total faculty on campus. In 2008, the percentage grew to 16% of the total faculty members. In addition to these numbers, the OIRP also keeps track of faculty makeup in regards to "ethnicity" within the various colleges. Table III-2 labeled "By College" shows that since 1998, Asians have been most populous within the units of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Science or IFAS (which changed its name to Agricultural and Life Sciences beginning in 2004), Engineering, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Medicine. The percentage of Asian faculty in each of these colleges has grown. In 1998, Asian faculty accounted for 20.6% of the total faculty, rising to 33% in 2008. The Liberal Arts and Sciences Asian faculty has grown from 6.1% in 1998 to 10.5% in 2008, Medicine has grown from 9.6% to 30.6% and the IFAS/Agricultural and Life Sciences school has grown from 4.5% to 12.6% (Ibid.). In showing these numbers, I hope to show that the population of Indians and Indian Americans in my study is not feebly connected to the University of Florida, but is an active and growing part of the UF population and surrounding area.

Problematizing These Numbers

As I have mentioned before, numbers create problems in qualitative studies. Quantitative methodology was not employed by this study and providing these statistics shows some of the problems with such methods. First, these numbers provided by the OIRP may lead the reader astray. The term "Asian" is not defined anywhere on the OIRP website nor the downloadable tables from which these numbers were calculated. "Asian" can cover a whole continent of

nations and people. Further, the term "Asian" is not qualified with residency status in America. As the US Census Bureau allows for identifying oneself as multiple nationalities at once, one wonders if the OIRP statistics represent Americans of Asian origin, foreign Asian students, or some other combination in which "Asian" might be included.

However, my aim in showing these numbers is two-fold. First, they demonstrate the increasing need for study regarding growing populations in locations such as Gainesville, Florida where the University of Florida plays a large part in attracting certain demographics of professionals. Second, I hope to show that while my sample of middle-upper-class Indian/Indian Americans was small at best, it was somewhat characteristic of the larger trends within the Gainesville area. In combination with Appendix A's US Census Bureau information, the demographic of participants in my study were not incongruous with the median population of Gainesville, Florida and the University of Florida.

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