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The cultural practices in India, associated with supernatural and secular forces inherent within agricultural harvest festival rituals, reveal the importance of the creative natural forces of nature to this community. In David Kinsely's "The Worship of Durga," the author explains the cultural and religious practice of devotional worship to goddesses embodying generative and destructive aspects of nature's lifecycle, and their convergence with agricultural harvest celebrations that emphasize the importance of food, plants, and animals in dynamic rituals. In Diana Eck's "Sacred Circle of All the Gods: The Goddesses," the author emphasizes Durga's mythological origins, and key goddesses associated with the destructive and generative aspects of Durga's persona. The author also presents the Pre-Vedic worldview of the sun as the embodiment of the divine through discourse on Sun-cult temples, while also implicitly portraying the importance of nature to this culture by describing the Sun-cult temples immersion in nature.

In David Kinsely's "The Worship of Durga", the author examines three aspects of the goddess Durga: the warrior goddess who brings balance to the universe, the agricultural fertility goddess, and Durga as the householder. Through the Navaratra and Dasara festivals, the worship of Durga fulfills three tasks: to ensure triumphant battlefield excursions, the ritual enactment of the return of the married daughter to her family of origin, and honoring the essence of Durga in nature, as manifested within food and plants, through the harvest festival.

The Northern Indian autumnal festival, Navaratra, observes Durga Puja to honor the warrior goddess version of Durga, and provides worshippers with the opportunity "to petition for military success in the coming year" (106). The Dasara festival, following Navaratra, has been

described by Abbe Dubois as a “soldier’s feast,” complete with the *ayuda-puja* ritual that offers animal sacrifice and venerates weapons employed for use in combat (106). In addition to the martial purposes of Durga Puja, the worship of the warrior goddess during the Navaratra and Dasara festivals concurs with the autumn harvest, therefore lending to Durga’s associations with agricultural fertility and her role as “she who appeases the hunger of the world” (112). The divine (spiritual) and natural (secular) forces within agricultural crops symbolically relate to the warrior goddess through the “bundle of nine plants” used in the ritual for Durga Puja (111). The specialist performing the actual Durga Puja anoints the warrior goddess with distinctive water and plant materials, then places plants, fruit, dough and grains into a pot, and relays a summoning prayer to Durga for the sake of increasing agricultural fertility and assisting in the attainment of immortality: “Om you are rice [wheat, barley, etc.], om you are life, you are the life of the gods, you are our life, you are internal life, you are long life, you give life, om the Sun with his rays give you the milk of life and Varuna nourishes you with water” (111-112).

The worshippers make offerings to Durga by sacrificing animals to fulfill her martial “thirst for blood,” which is depicted in the story of the warrior goddess reinstating stability in the universe by killing Mahisa, the buffalo demon (112). A second aspect of the animal sacrifice is to fulfill an implicit concern “to replenish [Durga’s] powers, to reinvigorate her...Having harvested the crops, having literally reaped the life-giving benefits of Durga’s potency, it is appropriate (perhaps necessary) to return strength and power to her in the form of the blood of sacrificial victims” (112-113). The author emphasizes that the practice of animal sacrifice within religious traditions appears as “a typical ceremonial scenario in many cultures, and it seems likely that at one time it was important in the celebration of Durga Puja” (113).

The depiction of Durga during the Navaratra and Dasara harvest festivals differs in Northern India and Southern India. During the harvest festival in Northern India, the householder aspects of Durga mirrors the lives of young Bengali brides who enter into marriage, leave their family home, return to visit their family during the celebration of Durga Puja, and then return to their husband's home (113-114). The Southern Indian depiction of Durga reveals different aspects of the warrior goddess, such as "determined, fierce independence," as compared with the Northern Indian depiction of the "submissive" daughter living in stressful circumstances with a difficult husband (114-115).

In Diana Eck's article "Sacred Circle of All the Gods: The Goddesses," the author presents the Navaratra festival, and goddesses worshipped over the festival's nine days. In southern Banaras, temples devoted to Durga have received prolific attendance from practitioners who offer "sacrifices" that are made with "sweets, cloth, coconuts, and flower garlands," even though a place for an animal sacrifice remains at the temple in the form of "a forked sacrificial stake, designed especially to hold the neck of the goats slaughtered here on great ritual occasions" (165-168).

The two goddesses, Sankata-ji Devi, Shitala, have associations to Durga due to similarities in their personas, specifically their embodiment of the destructive and generative forces inherent in the lifecycles of the natural world. The "Goddess of Dangers," Sankata-ji Devi, embodies the dual aspects of life and death, like Durga, yet in the realm of children (168). Sankata-ji embodies the dual aspects of the Southern Indian depiction of Durga as warrior and the Northern Indian Pavarti as the wife of Siva and mother, although Sankata-ji remains unattached to a husband and possesses "generative power all [her] own" (168-169). The "Cool

Goddess,” Shitala, embodies the destructive and generative powers of divine deities through her associations with causing and curing illness (171).

The worship of the aforementioned goddesses occurs during the Navaratra and Dasara festivals during the autumnal harvest and another Navaratra festival held during the spring (174). The autumnal Navaratra festival occurs over nine days, which includes worship of one of the “nine Durgas” for different days of the festival, and concludes on the tenth day with the Durga Puja, or Dasara festival (174). The characteristics of Durga as the “wielder of death” and “giver of life,” appears in the temperament of the nine goddesses celebrated during these festivals (174).

The second portion of Eck’s article on goddesses transitions into the *adityas* from the Pre-Vedic Sun-cults. The author presents the myth that explains the formation of the twelve *adityas* of the Sun, in order to set up the context for specific sun cult worship sites. The myth portraying the dividing of the Sun into twelve parts transitions into the article’s explanation of three specific parts of the Sun, specifically Lolarka “The Trembling Sun,” Uttararka “Northern Sun,” and Surya Kund “Sun Pool” (177-179).

The site for Lolarka resides in Varanasi, close to “the ‘confluence’ of the Asi River and the River Ganges,” which possibly remains the “oldest of all sacred sites in Kashi” (177). During the Lolarka Shashthi holy day, some practitioners travel to the Sun temple and perform rituals to assist in conceiving a son; specifically, the bathing of the couple with “her sari tied to his dhoti,” and the act of enhancing fertility through the “release [of] some vegetables into the water when [the wife] bathes, usually the round variety of squash, signifying, perhaps, the fertility for which she hopes” (179). The Uttararka “Northern Sun” temple resides in Barkaria Kund within Varanasi, and the Surya Kund “Sun Pool” dwells near Godaulia (179-180). The Uttararka temple, located on “a small lake,” contains Vaishnava artifact evidence of Krishna’s presence in

the temple as well as “a Sun-disc...with relief carvings of Suns and other lotiform shapes” (179). The Surya Kund temple, residing near the Godaulia pond, once a “glorious temple of the Sun” that still contains Sun-disc artifacts (180).

The Sun cults of India can be traced to “Pre-Vedic India,” but the “classical age of Sun-worship” lasted for one thousand years between the “fourth to the thirteenth centuries” (180). There remains support, from mythological sources and artistic renderings of “Sun-symbols,” that the Sun was the supreme deity; Siva, who later became the supreme deity, was instructed and cleansed by the Sun (180). In modern times, the “twelve Suns are said to be protectors of Kashi, circling the city with their light,” and greatly influential in “the Vaishnava and the Buddhist traditions” (181). For devotees, the Sun deity embodies healing powers, and considered “the Divine, of many names and forms, here physically manifest, present in warmth and light” (182).

The two articles summarized in this paper explain the cultural practices in India associated with agricultural harvest festivals that worship the dual aspects of creative forces through rituals using food as offerings. The Navaratra harvest festival honors the martial, agricultural, and domestic aspects of the goddess Durga, as well as the goddesses who embody the destructive and generative forces of the natural world. The articles’ observations of ritual practices display the deep connections practitioners have with the divine and secular worlds through supernatural forces, as seen in the Sun-cults of Pre-Vedic civilization and Navarata. The chosen locations of the Sun-cult temples (in forests, near old trees, surrounding ponds, and adjacent to significant rivers) implicitly suggests the important role nature plays in daily life and ritual worship of this culture.

2. David Kinsley's "The Worship of Durga": Even though the author presents ancient sources, the article has a scholarly emotional tone that compliments the structure of the article. The article flows smoothly through each paragraph transition as the author moves deeper into the significant details of the harvest festival and Durga; specifically, the structure of the article follows a pattern of introducing the subject, explaining the historical and current contexts of the subject, key points and details of the subject, some analysis of the subject, and differences in the practice of the same subject matter in other geographical regions (113-115). The author does make a few assumptions when explaining the placement of hymns to Durga in Virata-parva, and the assumption that the harvest festivals "probably were understood to be one continuous festival" (108, 111). I really had to dig into the article to find these two assumptions, whereas the author later explicitly states the suggestion that "underlying blood sacrifices to Durga is the perception...that this great goddess who nourishes the crops is identified with the power underlying all life needs to be reinvigorated from time to time" (112-1123). Also, the author explicitly states a theme of Durga Puga, which is "to promote the fertility of the plants incorporated into the sacred bundle and to promote the fertility of crops in general" (111). Like Pollan, the author uses skilled writing that *shows* the audience the key points, rather than explicitly *telling* the audience the themes, claims, or argument except for the few moments previously mentioned. However, I think that Kinsley's article on Durga appears to share similar structure to Peter Brown's *The Desert Fathers* in regards to the scholarly tone of the article, and the focus on the historical context of the subject and the discussion of mythological sources influencing the culture being presented.

Diane Eck's "Sacred Circle of All the Gods: The Goddesses": The scholarly tone and structure of the Sun-cult portion of the article resembles that of Finsley's article, specifically the

explanation of the historical and modern contexts of the subject, the mythological sources influencing the culture, key points and details of the subject intermingled with few analytical moments, and differences in the same subject matter in other geographical regions. I found the article to be written in a similar style to Finsley's in the Sun-cult section, yet the goddess section intermingles the historical and mythological context with ritual details in a complex way, as compared with the succinct chronology of the structure from Finsley's article, and the Sun-cult section of Eck's article. The section of the article on the goddesses follows a matter of fact tone which summarizes the historical and mythological context of the goddesses, characteristics of their personas, and ritual details involved in worship to the goddesses. After digging into the article for allusions to assumptions, I couldn't find anything except the soundness of objective view of the author. The author does continually emphasize the importance of the similarities in the goddesses associated with Durga's dual persona, which threads the stories of each goddess together before ending with a summary of Navaratra.

3. The wider relevance of the contributions that the Vedic/Pre-Vedic culture can lend to the issue of sustainability in modern times centers on the worldview that agriculture and spirituality are intertwined through nature. I think that the examples from the two articles describing the cultural and religious practice of Navaratra and Dasara embody Wendell Berry's philosophy that "We can have agriculture only within nature and culture only within agriculture" (Gould 47). The deep connections between the divine and humanity that agriculture facilitates occurs in the celebration of the "interdependent" reciprocal relationships inherent nature (Gould 47).

There are similarities in the dual aspects of the lifecycle of agriculture depicted in AVM and Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, specifically "the rhythm of the seasons, of scarcity

followed by abundance,” and the goddess Durga’s embodiment of the destructive and generative forces within nature (Bynum39).

The contrasts between AVM, Bynum, Durga, and the present food culture in America reveal a suppression of the winter/death aspects of the natural lifecycle in the current American food culture. The current food culture works very hard to prevent scarcity from occurring, resulting in the consumption of out of season foods and destructive agricultural practices. The current suppression/destruction ideology of industrial agricultural practices could greatly benefit from observing the acceptance/allowance of the natural lifecycle inherent in healthy agriculture, as seen in the Pre-Vedic/Vedic harvest festival rites and the homesteading philosophy “of being available to what nature has to teach” (57).

There are several more aspects of sustainability explored earlier in the semester which align with the contributions Vedic culture can make to sustainability issues. It appears that practitioners of the harvest festivals experience the “affirmation of the values of human life and of the significance of the earth and all of its creatures” described in Scott Nearing’s *Living the Good Life*, particularly the experience of “living ‘in and of the universe, as a glad, responsible, participant in a magnificent enterprise” (23-24). Also, the transformation in Sal’s perception (HIN) parallels the experience of Pre-Vedic practitioners worshipping the sun in regards to seeing the divinity in nature: “Sal speaks more particularly about a change in his way of seeing, from going to nature for something (fulfillment) to going to nature with something (awareness of the inherent divinity in material things)” (57).