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WHEN PERCEIVING AND THINKING ABOUT REALITY AS RELATIONAL

MOTIVATES RITUAL BEHAVIOR: A STUDY OF HOW BENGALI HINDUS IN THE U.S.

AND IN INDIA (COME TO) COGNIZE GODS AS MATERIAL

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Dedication

For Sonja, whom I never knew-

And for CB, whom I knew too briefly.

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Contents

List of Figures

Abstract

Making use of fieldwork and interviews with two generations of Bengali Hindus in Kolkata and the New York area, and through making use of literature in developmental and cognitive psychology, this study attempts to address, engage with, and unite two persistent problems in theoretical discourse. First, originating in psychological anthropology, is the problem of how to account for what onlookers might perceive as "irrationality" among those they observe. Second, originating in ritual studies, is the issue of the thought/action (or behavior) divide, which also engages the problem of an observer and which preemptively bifurcates thought from action. These two problems are significantly interwoven: observed irrationality is observed as such through witnessing the execution of demonstrable behavior. Addressing both of these problems necessitates the complicated task of taking thought and action as merged and iterative from the beginning and holistically examining the process by which they are often separated and, consequently, examined separately.

Using psychological literature on how humans make sense of the world around them and on anthropomorphism, I argue that Bengali Hindus possess underlying understandings of reality as relational with respect to a physical god, and that part and parcel of this relationality are the ways in which one should engage with the deity both in thought and demonstrative behavior. In other words, an early developmental internalization of this particular relationality-based schema supports and leads to an understanding of reality as a place wherein god can be physical. It is under circumstances when the relational purview— which can exist in multiple and varied forms— fails to be internalized to any motivating extent that differences between groups and individuals become evident. Moreover, partial and/or unacknowledged internalization leads to

themes of questioning and perceived contradiction with regard to how people behave with a

material god and whether they understand that material god to be a *person*. The first half of this

dissertation addresses the establishment of a cognitive relational schema, while the second half

discusses circumstances under which that schema fails to be established and on what grounds

and to what effect.

Introduction

Bengalis stay up late or wake up early to hear the recitation of the *Mahiṣāsuramardinī* at daybreak on Mahālaya, the day the goddess Durgā arrives for Durgā Pūjā, her annual festival. This program, first performed in 1932 and now played as a recording, is broadcast every year on All India Radio (Mukerjee 2017). The melodious voice of narrator Birendra Krishna Bhadra recites a combination of Bengali devotional songs and Sanskrit verses from the *Devīmāhātmya*, also called the *Caṇḍīpāṭh* or the *Durgā Saptaśatī*, the text recited by *purohits*[1] during the festival. For the past few Durgā Pūjās, a joke has floated through social media and WhatsApp messages, often signed by wishing for an auspicious Mahālaya.

The joke goes like this:

Mā Durgā: May I come in?
Birendra Krishna Bhadra: *Yā devī*!

Hidden within this joke there is an anxiety regarding the frame with which one should approach the deity as well as any understanding of her. The most obvious source of humor is the connotation attached to "*Yā devī*!" which sounds like "yeah, Devi!" and which is also the beginning of many Sanskrit verses that Birendra Krishna Bhadra recites during the *Mahiṣāsuramardinī,* verses which are recognized by almost all Bengalis. For example:

Yā devī sarvabhūteṣu mātṛrupeṇa saṃsthitā |
Namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namaḥ ||

या देवी सर्वभूतेषु मातृरूपेण संस्थिता ।
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नम: ||[2]

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[1] Hindu brahmin priests
[2] *Devīmāhātmya,* chapter 5, verse 71 in Swami Jagadiswarananda's translation; translation here is my own.

Honor to the goddess, who is present as a mother within all creatures![3]

Because these two words— *yā devī*— in combination with Birendra Krishna Bhadra's name—

signal that this joke is about Durgā Pūjā, and because "*yā devī*" means something different in

Sanskrit (literally "this goddess") than it does in English ("yes, goddess!"), the joke serves as a

pun, or as *śleṣa[4]*: Birendra Krishna Bhadra tells the goddess yes, *devī*, of course you can come

in! The humor is implicit: of course she can come in— this is her holiday, and the presence of

the goddess on the occasion of her own celebration is a given. Quite clearly, she is present. From

the moment of Mahālaya, she is enlivened, or at least on her way to town.

So, is the goddess there? Did she come in? Can she? The answer is based on shifting

frames of reference. In Sanskrit, and within Bengali Hinduism, yes, she certainly is; without ever

making an overt assertion of this fact within the joke, the verses invoked though truncated

mention state quite clearly that the goddess is not only *a priori* present, but she is in all beings, in

physical forms. In many ways, she was already there, and never needed to ask permission.

However, in English, she asks; it's not a given that she would be present. In fact, it is a point of

consideration, mediated by Bengalis with Birendra Krishna Bhadra acting as spokesperson and

arbiter. To this end, something that is quite obvious in one instantiation of understanding the

goddess is not so obvious in another. Depending on perspective, on how one reads the joke, on

what one assumes to begin with, and on the way interpretation is ultimately created,

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[3] The Sanskrit here is unambiguous: she is *in* all creatures, and this is how the verse is always translated. However, one might wonder if there is some flexibility in interpretation (as there sometimes in with nominal declensions), allowing for her to be the mother *for* all creatures as well. Such an interpretation, which could apply to similar verses, highlights the duality of the goddess as both within and external.

[4] *Śleṣa* is a rhetorical device commonly used in Sanskrit, occurring because one or more words has one or more meanings, allowing the sentence or clause to be read in more than one way.

contemplated, and deployed, she is already there or not there at all, or, perhaps even more compelling yet confusing, though likely most accurate, she is both.

Much is said in few words. What is said, however, goes a long way towards understanding how Bengali Hindus conceptualize the goddess and her physical instantiations and, moreover, how implicit or explicit those understandings may or may not be. Even further, this joke allows its listeners to step back and contemplate, in short form, what it means to even consider the location of the goddess and the requisite permissions associated with that location, illustrating that there are in fact different perspectives on this issue.

Thus, this joke elucidates the contrast between understanding a god as necessarily physical and the alternate perspective of having difficulty understanding a god as physical. As someone who falls into the latter category, and who does not intuitively understand how the former is possible, I was initially struck by this difference and sought to explore how someone might come to comprehend god as physical. Though this question privileges my own perspective, and though I begin there, it has been my goal, rather, to go beyond making sense of difference and instead to use comprehension of this difference, to explore how worldviews can juxtapose and how we can take all points of view seriously. In other words, how it is possible for different groups or even different individuals to comprehend the world so differently? How can one come to realize that these differences exist and what is at stake in acknowledging or failing to acknowledge these alternative worldviews? What circumstances make it possible for someone to "get" the joke?

Honoring the Deity

3

One of the defining characteristics of most Hindu groups is the performance of *pūjā:* a ritual in which devotees pay homage to a deity, most often in the form of a *mūrti*, an image of the god. This is the case on Durgā Pūjā, when the goddess is worshiped in the form of a *mūrti*. A *mūrti* can take many forms, and the word indeed means form; it can be a statue, a picture (mass-printed or handmade), or even a non-representational object. Though *pūjā* is routinely performed to any number of gods, the format, derived from Vedic ritual, has similar components: purifying oneself and the area surrounding the *mūrti*, inviting the deity to reside in the *mūrti* as a guest, making (food and other) offerings to the deity, bidding the deity farewell, and consuming the now-blessed offerings, all with appropriate and accompanying chants in Sanskrit. More specific steps within this process vary according to the god being worshipped, the time of year, time restraints, etc., but, notably, all *pūjās* contain a moment of connection, *darśan*, literally *seeing*, between the devotee and the god, wherein the devotee is meant to identify with, and in some capacity, mentally *become* the god (Eck 1981; Waghorne 1985).

While it is not unheard of to perform *pūjā* to practically anything or anyone, given that many Hindus see India as a world where deities and men are on the same plane (Fuller 1992), whether the *pūjā* is *nitya* (daily, and often at home), or *naimittika* (occasional, and within a temple or during a festival), on most occasions, Hindus worship a *mūrti*. In the United States, immigrant and second-generation Hindus alike consistently come up against the fact that they worship images, icons, in a predominantly iconoclastic and monotheistic society. Moreover, in a quickly globalizing world, Hindus in India, similarly, must contend with the non-Hindu bias against imagery as representing or constituting a god. When in contact with Judeo-Christian ideals, both groups must account for this bias against "idolaters" and the often taken for granted implication that to worship an image is animistic and indicative of possessing a lower level of

conceptual thought (e.g. Tylor 1889; Müller 1899; Smith 1912; Piaget 1954, 2007[1929]). Even contemporary scholarly research is often laced with anxiety about idolatry. This is despite the documented tendency among many groups of humans to see nonhuman agents as animated and/or humanlike (Darwin 2002 [1872]; Freud 1989 [1930]; Hume 1956 [1757]) including understandings of god (Barrett and Keil 1996) as well as geometric shapes (Heider and Simmel 1944). Treating these agents as human, moreover, contributes to treating them as moral agents and as worthy of respect and concern (Epley et al. 2007, 864). It is worth keeping in mind that one significant reason why "idolatry" comes to be of interest at all, in scholarship, in pop culture, and/or as an object of prejudice, is likely that it is a display of difference (Appadurai 2006)— one that non-Hindu individuals or groups are less likely to understand.

While this study focuses on the societal and psychological implications of accepting a material god or not accepting one, it is additionally a study about *pūjā,* the primary means through which Hindus interact with *mūrtis*, images or statues of gods. Devotees do indeed interact with *mūrtis* outside of *pūjā*, but, particularly for American Hindus, *pūjā* accounts for most of the instances in which Hindus engage with a god as material. It is important to remember, however, that *pūjā* can be incredibly complex and facilitated by a priest, or it can consist of simply putting one's hands together and making eye contact, *darśan*, with the god. Anything in between, as well, is also fair game.

Though *pūjā* has long been a topic of scholarly consideration, most studies have avoided actually asking people performing *pūjā* about the reasoning behind their actions in the ritual. Though a necessarily limited method of information gathering, such an effort is still valuable both for context and to understand how individuals narrate their own expressions of Hindu performance, itself a worthy object of analysis. A myriad of studies examines the links between

politics and (public) *pūjā*, particularly in West Bengal, while other studies analyze the specifics

of performance itself (Oster 1982; Bühnemann 1988) or how the *mūrtis* are made (Preston 1985).

There are also *pūjā* manuals in every Indian language for every different god. Rarely, however,

do studies examine the dynamics of performing *pūjā* at home, which are necessarily less public

and less societally scripted, as well as the family dynamics therein. Even daily rites at a temple

or small public shrine, as opposed to rites of passage or special occasions, are less well

documented. An analysis of *pūjā* requires interviews to accompany observation, particularly in

the diaspora. Moreover, few scholars have taken *pūjā* and its practitioners as a unit of analysis

itself instead of looking at *pūjā* as the manifestation of something socially constructed and with

primarily societal, rather than psychological, implications and origins.

Traditionally, early scholars of religious studies have found the embodiment of divinity,

which is a "central feature in Hinduism," (Waghorne 1985, 7) to be juvenile or underdeveloped

(e.g. Müller 1899; Tylor 1889), and assumed that religiosity followed a historical progression,

ultimately leading to monotheism. Even Durkheim (1965), who posited that animism relates to

totems, animals to which humans assign sacredness through their community activities, and

Freud (1918), who discussed totems as a means to minimize incest, couldn't recognize the

possibility that "devoted Hindus, themselves, ever actually thought that god had an embodied

reality." Rather, as the British missionaries did, "it was assumed that in making an icon of god,

the Hindu was simply making meaning," rather than understanding meaning as being inseparable

from and ultimately motivating the act itself (Waghorne 1985, 5).

In contrast to this view, many, and perhaps most, Hindus do posit that a god really does

reside in a *mūrti*— at least to some extent. This doesn't mean, however, that the god always

resides there: there are ritual practices to bring the deity into the *mūrti* and, later, to dismiss the

deity (Waghorne 1985). These rituals can take place within a single *pūjā*, a single festival, or can enliven a deity for years. Regardless of whether a deity is currently in a *mūrti*, however, *mūrtis* are supposed to be treated in certain ways and with an eye to one's purity, due to the fact that *mūrtis* are likely receptacles for deities. For example, one should always take one's shoes off in front of a *mūrti*, should not keep a *mūrti* in the bedroom (where sex could occur), and should bathe prior to coming before the *mūrti*. Though one should be purified and clean in front of a *mūrti*, *pūjā* additionally purifies objects, words, actions, people, etc., such that there is no clear cleavage between gods and human beings, reinforcing the physicality of divinity in Hinduism (Ostor 1982).

Analyzing the power structures that perpetuate and are perpetuated by ritual is certainly important. However, this study makes use of person-centered ethnography not to understand ritual itself, but to understand ritual as a function of the people who perform it. Rather than separating ritual into action and thought, which Bell (1992) cautions against, I take the two together (as will be discussed more later), though not as necessarily occurring simultaneously or through considering either one to be something in itself rather than part of a greater whole. As mentioned above, instead of looking at *pūjā* as action alone, I am more concerned with the specifics of ritual in so far as individuals interact with *mūrtis* and each other and, moreover, how these interactions relate to what they have to say about their actions. Thus, I take into account the formation and application of an ethics of divinity rooted in particular stipulations of ritual (e.g. purity in front of a *mūrti*) and the reasons behind those actions (e.g. requesting a boon, mere presence of the deity, etc.). Shweder et al. (2003) have found that ethics of divinity, in which one conceives of oneself as a spiritual entity connected to a sacred or natural order of things, is prevalent in India. In addition to seeing oneself as divine, in this rubric, Hindus tend to conceive

of all matter as (potentially) divine, such that they understand there to be a "sacred world" in which people communicate with the divine through specific actions in that world (e.g. bathing before *pūjā*). By examining an ethics of divinity in relation to *pūjā*, I examine *people* who *perform* ritual holistically in order to better understand the ritual and the circumstances under which it is performed, thus avoiding the dichotomy of action and thought without neglecting the subject matter of either and without necessarily separating the two to begin with. This is a method that I have not seen employed in ritual studies,[5] but is one which will shed light on the people performing rituals rather than separating the ritual as performed from the person performing.

By examining first, how Hindus in the U.S. and India conceive of and treat a material god when acting as a minority and majority group respectively, and how they form schemas related to this, I touch on larger questions of how immigrants negotiate their traditions in foreign cultural landscapes and how people more generally attempt to form and integrate potentially diverse and contradictory schemas. This project is informed by contemporary research on Hindu diaspora, such as that of Vertovec (1999, 2000) and Williams (1988, 1992), as well as a significant body of anthropological research on Durgā Pūjā in Bengal and *pūjā* more generally, which examines *pūjā* as primarily public and societal with little discussion of the individual. Through conducting interviews and person-centered ethnography with an older generation of Bengali Hindus in the New York area (average age: 53.2) and their children (21.7), as well as with an older generation of Bengali Hindus in Kolkata (58.7) and their children (25.6), this dissertation shifts focus to the individual and explores two specific areas. First, I examine and compare how Hindus in the U.S.

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[5] There have been many studies of performance, of course (c.f. the work of Richard Schechner), but I take the performer as object, not only examining this person *as a performer*, but *as a person* who happens to perform.

and their extended family members in India conceptualize and regard god as located in a physical object, such as a *mūrti*, in their specific socio-cultural context(s). Moreover, how does the content and strength of this conceptualization relate to and/or impact how that divine object should be (and is) treated and revered, and what is the directionality of any potential correlation? How a deity should be treated is certainly stipulated in ritual manuals and passed-down traditions, and includes several prescriptions (e.g. related to purity in front of a deity). To what extent, then, do Hindus in India and in the U.S. find these prescriptions important and perform them, and how does the degree of that relate to how strongly they posit that a god is truly within a physical object? Using a Gestalt approach, I examine these two issues simultaneously.

Second, I am interested in what experiences lead to or do not lead to the formation of schemas involved in conceptualizing a material god, such as a schema for what god is or a schema for how one should behave with one's family. A schema, in this case, is scaffolding of understandings about intrapersonal assumptions and extrapersonal world structures that is relatively stable across time, though adaptive (Strauss and Quinn 1997). To what extent is schema formation the result of individual experiences (such as how a child learned to worship from his mother) that interact with individual differences (e.g. being more obedient to one's parents in general), and how much is it the result of the society in which one lives or was born? Moreover, is there some pattern in the ways these formed schemas persist or change throughout one's life, and to what extent is this related to personal experiences generated through immigration, raising children, going to school in America, etc.? By asking very specific questions about how one interacts with and feels about *mūrtis*, and by understanding this process through the life courses of participants, this study will touch upon these issues.

The specific goals of this project are 1) to compare routine *pūjā* (at home and in temples) in the U.S. with *pūjā* in Kolkata, India as well as to compare other relevant interactions with *mūrtis,* 2) to examine the roles of different family members in performing *pūjā*, and 3) to extract personal narratives about interactions with and feelings towards *mūrtis*. More broadly, I discuss how Hindus in different contexts mediate between traditional and contemporary, religious and secular, societal and individual with regard to positing a material god, and how these negotiations play out in their lives as Hindus more generally. By talking to and observing Bengali Hindus in India, those who have moved to the U.S., and those who were born here, I obtained a full spectrum of this mediation.

Finally, this study attempts to address and engage with two persistent problems in theoretical discourse. First, originating in psychological anthropology, is the problem of how to account for what observers might perceive as "irrationality" among those they observe. Even in proposing the question of why and how Bengali Hindus engage with a physical god, I assume a level of difference and/or potential irrationality. The following pages attempt to interrogate this tendency as much as they interrogate the question itself, as it seems one cannot be fully explored without at least some understanding of the other. This question becomes all the more important when considering that particular segments of Bengali Hindus also highlight these particular differences. Second, originating in ritual studies, is the issue of the thought/action divide, which also engages the problem of an observer and which preemptively bifurcates thought from action. As will be shown, these two problems are significantly interwoven: observed irrationality is observed as such through witnessing the execution of demonstrable action, even if that action is a verbal discussion of an inner state. Addressing both of these problems necessitates the complicated task of taking thought and action as merged and iterative from the beginning and

10

holistically examining the process by which they are often separated and, consequently, examined separately.

Overall, I argue that Bengali Hindus possess underlying understandings of reality as relational, even with respect to a physical god. By relational, I mean that there is potential to form a relationship with anything or anyone a person might encounter. The character of that relationship might differ and might vary along a spectrum of hierarchy, for example, or in other ways. However, the salient point is that relationships with objects do not differ from relationships with other humans in potentiality for characterization. For example, just as a person might be above me in a hierarchy, an object can too, if that is the type of relationship I've co-created with that object. To that end, though some types of relationships might be more likely to form than others, there exists the potential to form the relationships one might formulate with another person, but rather to formulate them with an object.

Part and parcel of this relationality are the ways in which one should engage with the deity both in thought and demonstrative action; though the two must practically be separated due to the language necessitated to discuss them, I take them together conceptually. In these circumstances, this relational schema carries moral and motivational weights, even under circumstances when the extent and character of that weight is not explicitly communicated. In other words, an internalization of this particular relationality-based schema supports and leads to an understanding of reality as a place wherein god can be physical. More broadly, the character of a given internalized schema has the ability to affect and shape the equally valid interpretations of the reality of which people conceive. It is under circumstances when the relational purview— which can exist in multiple and varied forms— fails to be internalized to any motivating extent that there arise differences among groups and individuals. Moreover, partial and/or

11

unacknowledged internalization leads to themes of questioning and perceived contradiction with regard to how people act in terms of cultural material. Finally, my data provide evidence that in so far as this motivating relational schema is entrenched in childhood— and may result more from societal immersion than solely familial reinforcement— though the combination thereof is more likely to instill these understandings. In some ways, this also serves as an argument for the importance of religious communities to instill communo-cultural ways of living if they hope to impart shared worldviews. Therefore, while certain groups— such as young Bengali Hindu Americans— trend toward adopting certain paradigms, the true indication of these trends is the weight and extent of an internalized relational schema and the ways in which that does or does not encompass a physical god. The first half of this dissertation addresses the establishment of the relational schema, while the second half discusses circumstances under which that schema fails to be established and on what grounds and to what effect.

Turning toward the theoretical, what is at stake is less a difference in how groups perceive whether or not particular objects exist in physical space; Bengali Hindus know that an object *mūrti* is made of clay or stone. However, what Bengali Hindus understand a *mūrti* to be is quite different than what a non-Hindu might understand a *mūrti* to be. The character, abilities, and interconnection of physical objects in space does indeed vary. For example, while Bengali Hindus would acknowledge that a *mūrti* is not a human, in so far as that connotes flesh and anatomy, they would still be likely to say that a *mūrti* is a person. This brings us to a well-known understanding within cultural psychology and psychological anthropology: though certain constructs might exist cross-culturally, their character varies. In India, for example, being a person connotes the existence of a particular relationship; to that extent, to be a person is to be such in relation to someone. Less examined is how this takes our understanding of what a person

is somewhat further; the confines of the construct itself change, as does the applicability of that term to occurrences and objects in what one could perceive as the "real" world: the one with the humans underlying personhood. Questioning the boundaries and character of this term as it is applied aligns with the idea that schemas, such as the conceptualization of what a person is, are interconnected with other schemas in complex ways and with differing strengths of connection.

At first glance, this analysis appears to imply that a concept as understood by a cultural group lies atop the physical world, that the concept of a person, for example, can be pasted atop the concept of a human. The other necessary variable to consider is the extent to which this is the case: what is the distance between these two layers? I contend that, in addition to the varying shape of personhood itself, this measure of distance similarly varies, such that each individual and each group come to possess mountainous plots of concept and physical world throughout the expanse of their own schematic networks, with the understanding that, for many, much terrain is at sea level, or, in other words, significantly internalized; they do not, and perhaps cannot, differentiate the world as they understand it from the world as it might otherwise exist. This means that some particularity about that world might be internalized to the extent that the conceptual and the physical are themselves understood as one and the same for that particular individual. Understanding that this is the case has significant implications for what is deemed to be "real," but also what might be deemed to be rational within those realities. Moreover, the location and character of affect associated with these schemas differs, as do the ways in which these affects are or are not associated with motivation, adding additional variables that contribute to the potential for resulting actions. All of these variables must be taken into account in order to begin to understand the ways in which thought and action exist to various degrees of *a priori* alignment within individuals, such that thought and action are not actually different except in

13

observable execution, observed by another individual whose alignment may differ from that of the person observed, or to the extent that the individual can observe his own internalized understandings.

Hindu Metaphysical Traditions

The six traditional Hindu philosophical schools, or *darśanas*, all postulate that there is an undifferentiated substance called *brahman* which makes up the universe. Brahman is infinite and timeless; it was never created nor destroyed, and everything is comprised of it. All six schools, in one way or another attempt to reconcile the existence of *brahman* with the existence of the manifest and physical world in front of us. How can *brahman* make up all of physical space and all of metaphysical space? These six schools are known as *āstika*, or orthodox, and hold the Vedas, the most ancient Hindu texts, as authoritative.[6] Moreover, these are highly esoteric traditions of the elite— only those who knew Sanskrit. It is highly unlikely that your average Hindu was significantly familiar with these traditions when they were formulated or is today.

The first school, called Samkhya, juxtaposes *puruṣa*, the metaphysical, with *prakṛti*, the physical world. In Samkhya, these two components are fused with one another in varied ways, such as through senses and feelings. The physical world, however, is seen to be an illusion, or *māyā*. This school does not really address the role of godliness in this formation, but does stipulate that *brahman* is the ultimate reality and that the physical world is purely a conduit.

Vedanta, detailed in the Upaniṣads, is probably the most well-known of the six Hindu philosophical schools, and the one which is most visible in popular Hinduism today. It draws on Samkhya, but also elaborates in several ways. Within *vedānta*, there are three notable sub-traditions: *dvaita*, *vaśiṣṭādvaita*, and *advaita*. In *dvaita*, dualism, the soul, *ātman*, is entirely separate from *brahman*,

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[6] There are several traditions that are considered *nāstika*, or not taking the Vedas as authoritative, such as Buddhism and Jainism, and a few streams of Hindu tradition.

which is the divine substance making up everything that is not *ātman* and which can be encapsulated in the form of a god. *Vaśiṣṭādvaita*, qualified non-dualism, postulates a distinction between *ātman* and *brahman*, but also states that the *ātman* can be liberated and can become synonymous with *brahman*. In *vaśiṣṭādvaita*, the physical world is not considered illusive, but, rather, it is considered *saguṇa brahman*. *Saguṇa* means having particularities or qualities, such as one would note of a physical object, and *nirguṇa* means lacking qualities which would manifest in physical existence. To this end, both ātman and *brahman* can be either *nirguṇa* or *saguṇa*.

Advaita vedānta is likely the most popular of these three forms of *vedānta*, and is almost always the one espoused today whenever *vedānta* is being espoused. This is particularly true in America, where Swami Vivekananda, a Bengali, spoke about *advaita vedānta* at the 1893 Parliament on World's Religions, equating *advaita vedānta* with Hinduism writ large for an audience who had had little if any contact with Hinduism before listening to him talk. In *advaita vedānta*, also called non-dualism or monism, *ātman* and *brahman* are one and are identical. *Ātman* is a particular manifestation of *brahman*, and all manifestations, including the physical world, are considered illusory. Liberation occurs when one understands oneself, one's *ātman*, to be the same as the *ātman* all others possess and the same as *nirguṇa brahman*. To that end, *nirguṇa brahman* rather than *saguṇa brahman* is the highest *brahman* in *advaita vedānta*.

The premise that is either implicit in these systems or which has been applied from outside retroactively is that worshiping a *mūrti*, recognizing the *saguṇa brahman* in some conduit, assists in making the jump to understand oneself as the same as *nirguṇa brahman*. It is difficult to say whether the esoteric philosophical system above was drawn from the premises of worshipping a *mūrti* (or vice versa), whether some movement in history melded the indigenous trend of *mūrti* worship with the separate upper-caste understanding of philosophy, or whether the two coevolved.

Hindu metaphysical traditions concern themselves more with how to understand the nature and power of the universe as they pertain to the physical world than they do with the nature of god as god

pertains to the physical world. This is not the case for Western metaphysical systems, which attempt to make sense of where god resides in relation to humans. First, one might attempt to understand whether god exists and could espouse atheism (there is no god), deism (there is a god who is not active in our daily lives), or agnosticism (we can't know if god exists). Once it's decided that god exists, it's time to determine whether there is one god (monotheism) or whether there are many gods (polytheism). If there are many, are they all expressions of the same god (monolatry), is one among the many supreme (henotheism), or, as Müller posited is the case in Hinduism, is each god supreme in turn as he/she is worshiped (kathenotheism)? By and large, these points of view take for granted that god is a supreme power, often who has created the universe, to acknowledge or not acknowledge. Some of these elements arise in some Hindu traditions, such as bhakti, or devotional, movements in South India. However, even if a person prefers to worship Siva, given broader Hindu underpinnings, it's unlikely that he went through a process of, first, determining whether he believed that Siva existed and, second, he might not consider Siva supreme in quite the way that is emphasized in these Western systems. For example, my father once had a Hindu coworker who explained to him: "We have a creator god… but he's no big deal."

There are, however, groups which have adopted these Western mantles or otherwise objected to Hindu understandings of reality. These rejections of Hindu metaphysics are often related to issues of caste or hierarchy. For example, both Buddhism and Jainism are considered in this category, since both rejected Hindu ideologies largely because they benefitted those in higher castes. Mahinga Dharma, a group in Orissa formed by lower caste individuals in the 1800s, advocates for a single powerful and formless god. Brahmo Samaj, which espouses monotheism and aniconism, was founded by Ram Mohan Roy in Kolkata in the early 1800s and Arya Samaj, which espouses much of the same, was founded the late 1800s by Dayananda Saraswati. These last two groups weren't necessarily responding to issues of caste, but were likely responding to the presence of the British, who were perpetually attempting— with varying levels of success— to understand Hinduism and make it comprehensible from their own point of view. These movements have certainly had significant impact, but they are not entirely mainstream today.

Pantheism, which states that everything in the universe is a part of god or that all things are just different manifestations of god, is a closer approximation to the idea of *advaita vedānta*, but also doesn't entirely hit the mark. For a Hindu who follows *advaita vedānta*, to recognize everything as god would mean said person is liberated; this is not simply the standard state of affairs. Moreover, no one I interviewed discussed liberation as a reason to perform *pūjā* or at all for that matter; for your average Hindu, actively comprehending the whole world as god isn't generally the goal.

Rather, for my interviewees, the whole physical world has the *potential* to be god*ly*. This does not mean there is one overall supreme god, but, rather, that there is a quality of godliness: an *ātman* or some other instantiation of *brahman* that is high up in the overall hierarchy of the universe and which may or may not have physical qualities. Moreover, designating something or someone as godly is preceded by an understanding of the world as a place where people and objects have the potential to be godly as well as the potential to simultaneously be *like me*, to have personhood, and to be situated in some hierarchical position. This view of objects in the world as having potentiality for hierarchical personhood as determined on an individual basis is what I refer to when I discuss a Bengali Hindu relational schema. The relational element of the schema is imperative to determine what or whom, exactly, becomes perceived as godly. To this end, I seek to delineate a metaphysical understanding from the ground up, but also, to further explain what makes that metaphysical understanding plausible.

Background about the Indian Population in America

Though Hindus have certainly left India throughout history, the current post-1965 migration to the United States has created unique circumstances. Not only are many Hindus encountering a foreign scope of religiosity which serves as the majority culture, but they are having children and attempting to determine how best to educate their children. These circumstances make the ways in which Hindus integrate a material divinity ripe for inquiry.

Hindu advocacy groups in the U.S. are continually attempting and struggling to "educate the youth" as they put it, and to determine how to pass down their traditions. Such emphasis alone indicates that Hinduism in America is in a state of flux and is largely being circumscribed by a new generation. We can divide Indian immigration to the U.S. into two phases: the first between 1899 and 1914 (around 7,000 people), and the second after 1965, which itself had two waves. The first wave consisted mostly of well-educated and urban individuals who came to the U.S. either for education or for employment opportunities unavailable in India. This exodus is what many have deemed "brain drain." The second wave immigrants, many of whom came to the U.S., and particularly to California, under provisions for family reunification, were by and large, significantly less educated and less prosperous than their predecessors (Kurien 2001, 266).

Assimilation, which was for many years the predominant understanding of how people adapt to a new cultural context, has recently given way to transnationalism, which designates a longing for and continual connection with a homeland (Glick Schiller 2003). In assimilation, theorists proposed a straight line theory or a bumpy line theory— the former indicating that people continually and consistently traded their own cultural underpinnings for their new setting's over time (Berry 1997), and then later indicating that this process might occur in starts and stops (Gans 1992). The goal was the ultimate dissolution of cultural particularities not indigenous to America. Of course, this is over simplified; even defining mainstream American culture is a daunting task. However, it is undeniable that living in America likely has some effects on immigrants, such that they aren't entirely transnational— focused entirely on a place they do not live. Thus, it makes more sense to interpret assimilation and transnationalism not as antithetical, but, rather, as interconnected (Kivisto 2003). Moreover, to the extent that both cultural traditions are "continually co-produced," that co-production is subject to "'friction': the

18

awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference," (Tsing 2005, 6).

In another effort to maintain contact with and to protect its (former) citizens, the Indian government has established the Ministry of Overseas Indian affairs (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, website). This organization established a day designated to celebrate the ways in which overseas Indians have developed India, offers many programs for tracing one's roots and for overseas Indian youth to learn about India, and provides information for NRIs (Non-Resident Indians), PIOs (Persons of Indian Origin), and OCIs (Overseas Citizens of India). These three groups overlap and their legal distinctions are complicated, but what can be gleaned from the existence of these groups is that despite living abroad for a significant amount of time, many Indian "immigrants" maintain Indian citizenship, can own land in India, and must pay taxes in India (The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, website). Such a situation lends credence to a criticism many have made of using immigration as an analytic: in a globalized and globalizing world, an immigrant is not necessarily someone who makes a unidirectional and permanent journey to a new nation, but rather, can be someone who maintains significant ties to a "home."

Since Indian American immigrants are particularly likely to turn to religious practices when raising their children (Saran 1985), it makes sense that, as Raymond B. Williams puts it, "Immigrants are religious— by all counts more religious than they were before they left home" (Williams 1988, 29). That said, Williams notes elsewhere that Indians who came to the U.S. post-1965 were not necessarily the most religious of Indians, given their focus on education abroad and given their willingness to leave India (Williams 1992). In order to reconcile these statements, one must assume that it was in the U.S. that these immigrants came to appreciate religious practice, and, as such, this lends credence to the claim that Hinduism in the U.S. takes

on a different character than Hinduism in India: In India, Hindus often worship a vast pantheon, but in the U.S., Hindus tend to argue that all gods are truly one, and to claim that they are monotheists. While I did not observe this as frequently among Bengali Hindu Americans as I have among Hindu Americans from other regions, the following discussion should be understood as one describing a broader American Hindu milieu rather than circumstances which are particularly applicable to my interviewees.

Part of the reason for this (monistic) reframing is likely because "For Hindus living in the United States, for example, the challenge of being part of the public sphere is that Hinduism is already framed as unequal to the Abrahamic religions... As a result, many Hindus — particularly those who were born and raised here — are reluctant to self-identify as such in order to be able to gain access to the public sphere. In other words, in order for Hindus to be accepted in a pluralistic discourse, they have to 'play down' their Hinduism," (Balaji 2014). This quote comes from a blog in the Huffington Post for the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), an organization founded to lobby in Washington and more generally to protect Hindu rights. This group has come up against a fair amount of controversy for advocating plights such as the Take Back Yoga movement and for railing against Wendy Doniger's publications on Hindus. HAF also participated in the California textbook controversy of 2005 in which Hindus claimed that Hinduism was inaccurately represented in text books, partially because it was designated as having multiple and unrelated gods. Michael Witzel of Harvard and 150 other scholars vehemently fought some of the corrections the Hindus hoped to make, and HAF ultimately sued the school board in reaction to some specifics of Hinduism as represented in the textbooks.

While HAF has taken on some causes unpopular with non-Hindu Americans, they cosponsor dozens of events a year with the myriad of other Hindu advocacy and teaching organizations that have arisen in the United States. At one such event, they passed out laminated index cards with ways to answer potentially offensive questions that non-Hindus tend to ask about Hinduism. These questions, HAF understands, are not the result of overt malice, but rather of misunderstanding or an implicit xenophobia. By and large, HAF and other Hindu advocacy groups most frequently take on two projects: educating and retaining Hindu youth and educating the broader American public.

Educating the public, it seems, is necessary, and is likely one cause of perpetuating an ecumenical Hinduism rather than a more complicated one with many gods and variants. While it is difficult to assess the overall attitude of the American public towards Hinduism, one case study will hopefully suffice to illustrate the potential negative bias against Hinduism. In 2007, Rajan Zed, a priest at a temple in Reno, NV, gave a prayer to open a session of the senate, which is their custom. Two women and a man began to shout from the gallery: "This is an abomination," and "We are Christians and patriots." These people were members of the American Family Association, an Evangelical group, responding to an "Action Alert" sent by the organization to boycott Zed's prayer because Zed was "seeking the invocation of a non-monotheistic god," (The Washington Post 2007). Hindus have gone to great lengths to make Hinduism appear monotheistic, but if it is perceived as non-monotheistic by the public, it will potentially continue to draw ire. The Action Alert additionally noted: "Since Hindus worship multiple gods, the prayer will be completely outside the American paradigm, flying in the face of the American motto *One Nation Under God*." To the people of this organization, Hindus, by virtue of being Hindu, were not American and, additionally, America is necessarily a

monotheistic nation. It is notable that the primary objection this group has toward Hindus is the fact that they worship multiple gods. Again, it did not appear that this type of animosity had any causal effect on the majority of my interviewees and their understandings of divinity— in fact, ingrained schemas appeared to be significantly more influential— but they are certainly aware of this troubling environment in America today.

Polytheism & Materiality

Worshipping multiple gods, in material form or otherwise, indicates that the worshipers are "polytheists," or, most simply defined, that they revere multiple gods. The term polytheism, however, is rarely theorized though frequently employed. Moreover, polytheism is often connected with idolatry, the worship of material gods specifically. Given textual precedent in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, "monotheistic" traditions, classical scholars of religion and adherents of these traditions largely consider polytheism specifically, but also idolatry, to be original, primitive, immature, inferior, or, when looking upon polytheism favorably, as a mere precursor for monotheism (Paper 2005, 4; Assmann 2008, 54).

Hindus in particular very much object to this label, and have even taken steps to alter perception of Hinduism through a move to monism, reviving a more intellectual, though perhaps not originally mainstream, strain of Hinduism; at various points, they have been particularly aided by the British (Nicholson 2013; Paper 2005). However, polytheism, with its negative connotations, is in fact a useful analytic to understand how majority non-Hindu cultures might make sense of Hinduism. While there are many gods in Hinduism, there are shades of meaning about the nature of these gods, and Hindus range from worshipping all gods indiscriminately to worshipping nature to worshipping one god while accepting others, called henotheism, to what Müller (1899) described as kathenotheism: worshipping one god at a time. As a result, there are

certainly many gods in Hinduism, but it's debatable and variable to what degree they are distinct, or even to what degree they are distinct from the worshipper and everyday life.

Due to this history and these controversies, Hindus, labeled polytheists even by the Encyclopedia Britannica (Smart accessed online 2014), have had to endure others thinking of their religion as morally objectionable and/or unsatisfactory. Undoubtedly, this rhetoric has had significant implications for the extent to which Hindus rely on and accept traditionally Hindu tenets of a material divine while they are living as a minority in a pluralistic society.

Given these observations, it appears that American Hindus contend with a material god in varying ways, and it remains important to speak to Hindus individually in order to connect what they say about their experiences with a material god to what they actually do. Questions surrounding these issues have begun to arise in the scholarly community. Laurie Patton, a well-known scholar of Hinduism, went so far as to call for specific research on Hindus in America and the material divine at a recent AAR in a panel titled "Mapping Hindu-Jewish Encounters: From Embodied Communities to the Problem of Idolatry." The panel compared the iconoclasm and monotheism of Judaism with iconophilia of Hindus, and as Patton said: "We finally went there." Patton was clear to indicate that no one has explored how Hindus reconcile worshipping many material gods when they are confronted with religious groups for whom this is anathema. This study intends to begin to fill that gap.

Methodology

This study employed participant observation[7] and in-depth semi-structured interviews in an effort to understand first, the ways in which Hindus regard and treat *mūrtis* in differing societal situations, the

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[7] Goffman (1989, 126) explains: "By participant observation, I mean a technique that wouldn't be the only technique a study would employ, it wouldn't be a technique that would be useful for any study, but

U.S. and India, and second, how people form schemas related to and about *mūrtis* and *pūjā*. I place

particular emphasis on the particularities of how one engages with a *mūrti* (e.g. taking one's shoes off)

and the extent to which these are particularities are important in differing contexts. I observed the extent

to which performing *pūjā* stipulates these particularities, but also how these particularities are enacted in

pūjā.

In conducting this research, I used person-centered ethnography, a term coined by Robert LeVine

(1982), which develops ways of "describing and analyzing human behavior, subjective experience, and

psychological processes." It has as its focus the individual and "how the individual's psychology and

subjective experience both shape and are shaped by social and cultural processes" (Hollan 1997, 219).

This method views a subject's actions, feelings, and experience from the point of view of the subject

himself in order to explore the motivational force of cultural understandings and symbols and to "avoid

unnecessary reliance on overly abstract, experience-distant constructs" (220). This approach includes

looking at what people do that reveals their subjective experience, but also, looking at what people say

about their subjective experience as well as about what they do (224), corresponding roughly with the

techniques of participant-observation and interviews.

Within the structure of person-centered ethnography, I focused on life narratives regarding how,

when, and why in one's life one has regarded a material god and the stipulations therein. I made use of

McAdams' life story model, which states that "people living in modern societies provide their lives with

unity and purpose by constructing internalized and evolving narratives of the self" (McAdams 2001, 100).

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it's a technique that you *can* feature in some studies. It's one of getting data, it seems to me, but subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation, or whatever. So that you are close to them while they are responding to what life dose to them. I feel that the way this is done is to not, of course, just listen to what they talk about, but to pick up on their minor grunts and groans as they respond to their situation. When you do that, it seems to me, the standard technique is to try to subject yourself, hopefully, to their life circumstances, which means that although, in fact, you can leave at any time, you act as if you can't and you try to accept all of the desirable and undesirable things that are a feature of their life."

Life stories, which McAdams claims are only intelligible within a specific cultural frame, serve to reflect cultural values and assumptions, but are simultaneously narratives co-authored by the person him or herself and by the cultural context which gives that person's life meaning (101). This line of inquiry helped me to understand individual people within their respective cultural milieus.

I employed a person-centered ethnography, but, moreover, analyzed the family dynamics that result in the experiences of the individual within society, both in terms of the microcosm of family and the greater macrocosm of the place in which the individual lives. Whenever possible, I examined relationships between family members with regard to *pūjā* and *mūrtis* to the same extent that examined the individual experience. Additionally, I asked family members to report on each other's habits (regardless of whether I was interviewing all family members) surrounding and attitudes toward *mūrtis*, *pūjā*, and the larger societal conflict resulting from the "problem" of idolatry and of polytheism. Following along these lines, I sought to explore the "holistic studies of families" by "looking at interactions, dynamics, contexts, rather than variables that isolate particular fragments of family experience like an attitude or a behavior," thus providing "windows on family processes through which we can observe patterns of interaction and the ongoing negotiations of family roles and relationships," (Gilgun et al. 1992, 4). To this extent, I view families as units of interaction (Burgess 1926), and as Geertz (1957, 52) notes, a ritual, such as *pūjā*, "is not just a pattern of meaning; it is also a form of social interaction." In addition, I took extensive photos of and field notes about *pūjā* and the treatment of *mūrtis*. All of these steps gave me a better understanding of how individuals interact with *mūrtis*, but also with each other.

Finally, it is worth considering some of the implications of conducting a multi-sited ethnography. This trend crystallized with George Marcus' 1995 article which urged anthropologists to move beyond the dichotomy of global versus local and instead to produce a study that is in and of the world system (Kurotani 2004). Aiding his argument, Marcus makes use of the work of Deleuze and Guittari (1987) who discuss culture as rhizomatic and that of Appadurai (1996), who notes global flow, such that there is a

constant flux of people, ideas, etc. among world communities. As such, Marcus cites life histories as a way to transcend the separation of two separate sites and two temporalities— then and now— [8] and Fitzgerald (2006) opines that such a method is the "best means to untangle the dynamics of ethnic genesis, retention, and dissolution." Further, "different source and destination localities can be selected precisely because they are linked by migrant networks, while still shaping migrants' experiences differently" (Fitzgerald 2006). This is precisely what I intended to accomplish by selecting two field sites linked by migration, and many scholars have claimed that this type of multi-sited ethnography is ideal for the study of transnationalism, immigration, and diaspora (Marcus 1995; Kurotani 2004; Fitzgerald 2006).

Research Settings and Participants

My research had three phases from June 2014 through November 2015: one in the New York area, a second in Kolkata, India, conducting interviews, and a third in Kolkata in order to observe and celebrate Durgā Pūjā. During my time in the United States, I first began by finding families to interview. I recruited these families, first, through established connections from previous research, but, additionally by spending time at local temples, Hindu Sunday schools, and Hindu summer camps, and making use of their listserves to reach participants. When I could, I interviewed each family member in order to have a wide representation of different ages and dates of immigration to the United States and to assess generational differences. I visited many families' homes and saw their *pūjā* rooms and occasionally their prayers.

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[8] McAdams (2001, 110) elaborates: "Life histories reveal juxtapositions of social contexts through a succession of narrated individual experiences that may be obscured in the structural study of processes as such. hey are potential guides to the delineation of ethnographic spaces within systems shaped by categorical distinctions that may make these spaces otherwise invisible. These spaces are not necessarily subaltern spaces (although they may be most clearly revealed in subaltern life histories), but they are shaped by unexpected or novel associations among sites and social contexts suggested by life history accounts."

In order to further narrow the scope of my project, I only interviewed Bengali families in northern New Jersey and New York City suburbs. This is a group of highly educated and often wealthy individuals who travel back and forth to India frequently. By limiting my research to this region, I minimized variability in any United States regional differences. Additionally, this area is one of the main loci of Indians in America. This means that there are significant and established Indian communities in this area, such as those in Edison and Iselin, NJ and in Flushing, Queens. There is a significant Bengali population in this area and I began this research already having many contacts within this population, though the choice to focus on Bengalis additionally pertains to the fact that there is a significant amount of prior research on Durgā Pūjā which, as previously mentioned, is very important in Bengal. This is, first of all, because Bengal was one of the first and primary areas subject to the British, and also because the British influence created circumstances which specifically altered the performance and importance of Durgā Pūjā as a festival, which occurs in the fall, making Durgā Pūjā a subject rich for analysis. Shweder et al. (2003) also did their research in Bhubaneshwar, Orissa, and, though I did not have contact with enough Oriyas in the U.S. to sustain this study, the cultural milieu described in Shweder's research is likely similar to that of Bengalis; the two regions are adjacent, and are known to have many cultural similarities.

In several circumstances, I was able to ask families in the U.S. if I could interview their relatives in India. It is important to mention that this group of people is elite both socio-economically and socially. Many have traveled outside of India and have even lived abroad. These families were sprawling and sometimes included many distant relatives living in one house together. In many circumstances, I was able to interview each member of a given immediate family in the U.S., whether that family member lives in the house or not (for example,

27

an adult child or one in college), and to follow up with relatives or connections in India. In order to supplement, I also interviewed several families in Kolkata whom I found by word of mouth; in order to maintain consistency, however, I made sure that each family I interviewed had relatives— often a sibling or a cousin— living in the U.S.

By interviewing direct relations of Bengali American families, and by supplementing with Bengali-Indian families who had relatives in the U.S., I minimized variation between the two groups and, additionally, was be able to separate some societal influence from familial influence. What I term the older generation of Bengali Hindus is a group who were all born in India, often in Kolkata, though half of my sample then moved to the U.S. around the age of 20. Thus, in the group I term the younger generation, half are Bengali-Indian Hindus who were born in India and half are Bengali American Hindus who were born in the U.S. In total, I conducted 83 interviews, with relatively equal representation in all of these groups. Interviews lasted from half an hour to three hours, and I often spent significant time with interviewees beyond and after the interview concluded. Questions asked are included in an appendix.

This sample was relatively high in socio-economic status, and the conclusions I draw cannot be extended to Bengali Hindus who are less affluent or who live in villages. As a result, the vast majority of interviews were in English, which was often the preferred language for this group. A couple interviews were conducted at least partially in Hindi, and, in some circumstances, a family member interpreted any Bengali that remained opaque. Though many were brahmins, caste was rarely mentioned, likely indicating that these people were high caste and thus caste was not at the forefront of their minds, since they were coping with minimal discrimination. Again, this is likely specific to this particularly affluent sample.

I do, however, find this group to be instructive, however: they are a group at the margins, negotiating and living within and between multiple schemas, including those they ingest and interact with from across the world. Though I do not have data for less affluent Bengali Hindus, I would suspect that the schemas they form are similar, but are likely less flexible. In other words, the Bengali Hindus I interviewed are likely somewhere in between adapting to schematic understandings wherein a god is not necessarily relational or not necessearily physical and ones where the opposite is the case. As a result, my interviewees had often thought about these differences, often correlating with place, and were particularly well-situated to deeply answer the questions I asked.

While in New Jersey, I lived at my parents' house, which is centrally located in northern New Jersey. From there, it was easy to visit temples and family homes which I did with some frequency. In India, I lived with a Marwari Indian family whom I met through AirBnB. They were incredibly well-connected in Kolkata, and adopted me for a time. Through them, I came to know an extensive amount about the city and its inhabitants.

Through conducting research across the life course and in India as well as America, I am able to compare how results from adults relate to those of teenagers and children, how results from people of similar ages relate in India and the U.S., and how results of immigrants relate to those who stayed in India and those born in the U.S. Such a study has not previously been conducted within this population, at least to my knowledge. My analysis is additionally valuable in understanding how Hindus regularly regard *mūrtis* and to determine the processes through which these views are formed in differing contexts. Additionally, by examining extended families, I was often able to delineate which of these actions stem from experience as a member of society, as a member of a family, and as an individual, or some combination thereof. Looking at families in the U.S. and their relatives in India provides a control for how family members were raised; many likely lived in the same households for years.

29

Demographics of Indians in America

After 1965, Indians (mostly Hindus) flocked to the United States, reaching a population 3,049,201 in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012a), one percent of all Americans, and experiencing a growth rate from 2000-2010 of 69.8% (U.S. Census Bureau 2012b). Fifty-one percent of these Indians are Hindus, and of those, 19% attend worship services once a week, 78% have a shrine in his or her home, and 48% pray daily. Twenty-seven percent see themselves as average Americans (the least of any religious group), while 59% see themselves as very different, though they seem to have adapted to America in terms of socio-economic status and education: 48% of adults live in a household with an income over $100,000— the highest percentage of any group. Additionally, 85% of Asian-American Hindus have a bachelor's degree and 57% have some type of post-graduate education, 23 percentage points higher than Jews, the second-ranking religious group in terms of post-graduate education. These statistics obviously correlate with each other and are the result of selective immigration, but the point here is clear: this is a highly educated and relatively wealthy group (Pew Research Center 2012).

While it is difficult to find this type of data for Bengalis specifically, there is no reason to believe that the Bengali population in the U.S. would differ significantly from the Asian-American Hindu population overall. In fact, Bengalis have the stereotype of being intelligent, devout, pushy, and excellent writers. The story goes that these skills were developed through eating an excess of fish.

Similarly, it is difficult to find statistics about Bengalis in India. Notably, Kolkata was the home of Vivekananda, who first brought Hinduism to the U.S., and of his teacher, Ramakrishna. Both advocated Advaita Vedanta, a type of monism, the remnants of which will likely be present in both Bengali populations in the U.S. and in India. Calcutta (now Kolkata) was seat to the British Raj from

1772 until over a hundred years later, and as a result, the area is cosmopolitan in places, but there is also a stark distinction between those with wealth and those without.

Analysis

I coded my transcribed interviews using Quinn's (2005) approach, which focuses on identifying key words and ideas that come up again and again with regard to a specific topic. I identified such key words and ideas and read through my transcribed interviews and notes numerous times to make sure I was accounting for all data. At this point, I began to synthesize what is of concern to different groups (e.g. Hindus in America, Hindus in India, Hindu youth, etc.) to determine patterns overall and patterns for groups more specifically. In this way, I was also able to discern whether certain life events or times are integral to the formation and negotiation of these schemas. Additionally, I investigated what one individual said about others and thus I have self-report as well as independently reported data for each participant. Finally, I attempted to correlate what I observed through fieldwork with what I learned through interviews. Though I began with these stark categories and means of looking at the data, it ultimately coalesced and provided a holistic picture for what schemas were underlying how Bengali Hindus interact with and conceptualize *mūrtis*.

Before We Begin

It is necessary to elucidate a few points before discussing the contents of each chapter. First, all names have been changed in order to protect the identities of interviewees. Second, on some occasions, I have quoted dialogue between an interviewee and myself. In these cases, my words are denoted with "R" and the interviewee's are denoted with "S," standing for "subject." Third, all translations are my own. Fourth, throughout this dissertation, I've chosen not to capitalize the word "god" so as not to privilege a Judeo-Christian understanding of what this word and concept mean, especially given the fact that the

31

ways in which my interviewees tend to talk about god is as one of many, as a form of divinity, rather than as one overarching figurehead.

Finally, I've attempted to appropriately delineate American vs. Indian vs. Hindu thoughout my writing, but this is difficult in part because Indian and Hindu are often conflated with one another and are likely experienced as more closely linked than might be Christian and American, for example; this is something which will be teased out in pages to come. When I call someone American, what I mean is that said person has spent a significant amount of time living in America — at least ten yars— and intends to continue to call America his or her primary home, spending most of his or her time in America. Someone Indian lives in India. I consider Hindu if someone defines him or herself that way, but when I say non-Hindu, I mean someone who does not possess an internalized Hindu relational schema for a deity and who also does not define him or herself as Hindu. Thus, whenever I speak about an onlooker or observer to Hindu traditions and religiosity, I mean someone who does not possess an internalized Hindu relational schema. There is the temptation to juxtapose Hindu and American or Indian and American. I've attempted to talk instead of Hindus and non-Hindus, such that I do not privilege and pre-emptively define any particular comparison group as normative. To that end, however, this is a juxtaposition between Bengalis in America and Bengalis in India, and, as such, American serves as the relevant illustration of the non-Hindu when attempting to elucidate something which is Hindu versus its counterpoint comprised by a non-Hindu worldview. I have also attempted to qualify comments about American culture, recognizing that it is diverse and constituted by the viewpoints of many disparate groups.

This dissertation is split into two parts: in the first part, I discuss what it means to form a Hindu relational schema, the character of that schema, and how this is observable (or not) in different contexts. Chapter 1, a comparison of Durgā Pūjā in New Jersey and in Kolkata, sets up several topics of consideration for the remaining chapters. It additionally discusses how relationships with the goddess— and each other— are codified through sending back and forth digital Durgās, photos of the goddess. Chapter 2 delves into how each group under consideration actually performs *pūjā* at home and why.

32

Topics discussed include the role and function of prayer in *pūjā*, as well as which devotees might prefer to find themselves in front of a *mūrti* and under what circumstances. This chapter illuminates the notion that the obligation to do *pūjā* is primarily a relational one, and that there only needs to be one *pūjā*-doer in a family. If one has a relationship with the deity, one performs *pūjā*. Otherwise, one need not do so. Chapter 3 explores what exactly it means to have a relationship with a deity, and how this relationship is different than previously theorized; the deity is not like a parent (for example), but the deity is effectively another parent, and thus needs to be treated that way. A narrative at the end of this chapter explains this relationality as motivating, in so far as there are expectations and obligations for how people treat each other (and gods) in social contexts. In Chapter 4, I investigate the extent to which Bengali Hindus feel as if a god is in a statue. I conclude that the god is physically present when one conceives the god to be physically present, or when one chooses to see the god. To that end, most Bengali Hindus do not perceive there to be god in all *mūrtis* at all times, thus explaining differing behavior with regard to differing *mūrtis*; it is the connection one has with a particular god and/or *mūrti* which instantiates life and thus propels or fails to propel action. This analysis has implications not only for how Hindus perceive *mūrtis*, but also for how a Hindu relational schema affects the perception of and actions with regard to *all objects* in the physical world.

In the second part of this dissertation, I take into account that there are significant differences with regard to the internalization of what I term a Hindu relational schema; what this means is that some Bengali Hindus understand the god or goddess as a relation in differing ways, or not at all. Moreover, it is characteristic of young Bengali Hindu-Americans to barely understand the deity as a relation, and, thus, they are often less motivated to participate in actions in relation to the deity. If they do perform these actions, they likely do so for different reasons, often illustrating a differently structured relational schema. In Chapter 5, I explain how this group (and sometimes others) put together scripts of and rules for what they are supposed to do in front of a deity, privileging these actions as the basis of Hinduism, but not feeling the need to perform these actions, nor to posit a physical god. This chapter begins by explaining

when and why Bengali Hindus perform certain ritual actions, such as taking off shoes, fasting, etc. Chapter 6 explains what happens for each group of Bengali Hindus when they inevitably ask questions about their traditions, and the extent to which possessing an underlying relational schema relates to how these questions are posed as well as to how answers are interpreted, if there are answers. Within this rubric of attempted sense-making, what ultimately makes sense? In Chapter 7, I delineate a model for how to understand contradictions with regard to what one espouses and what one does: why might one abstain from *pūjā* while menstruating, even if she fundamentally disagrees with this abstention? I posit that understanding the extent to which a Hindu relational schema is implicit, internalized, and acknowledged as such explains behavior that might appear contradictory to an observer. Chapter 8 explores the notion of Hinduism as individual, espoused by many interviewees, the implications of that, and the extent to which individual difference, change throughout one's life, and socio-cultural change affect manifestations in action of an internalized or uninternalized Hindu relational schema..

Part 1: A Bengali Hindu Relational Schema, or How to Treat Your *Mūrti*

The first half of this dissertation seeks to detail first, what constitutes a Hindu relational schema, and second, how it can be constructed. Prior to jumping into these specifics, we will first explore some details about schemas more broadly.

Why Schemas are Relevant

Societal circumstances in combination with individual experience lead to the formation of schemas for how to approach others and the external world. According to Strauss & Quinn (1997), each individual has a set of schemas that are constantly interacting with one another. For example, a young Hindu in America might have a "*mūrti*" schema, detailing what he should do in front of a *mūrti*, but might also have a "God" schema from what he knows about Christianity. To what extent he accepts or endows each schema is variable and based upon his own proclivities, and it is possible that two seemingly contradictory schemas will not conflict for a given individual. Moreover, while these schemas may indeed be in conflict, and in that case a person would likely veer one way or another, they could also combine to create an altered, though not likely completely new, schema, based on experiences and that individual's constant interaction with his environment(s). An individual's schemas, therefore, are highly adaptive; they can change over time, as can the ways in which they interact, and their application can vary across differing circumstances.

Strauss and Quinn (1997) call for research on a variety of points: why cultural meanings are sometimes enduring or not, how people appropriate experience and act on it, what learners internalize at different points in life through experiences, and, finally, "What are the diverse experiences from which people gain their interpretive frameworks? Do some experiences create schemas that challenge the schemas gained from other experiences? On which schemas do

people act in a given situation and why?" (38). These are the questions I hope to touch upon by investigating the ways in which Hindus form and execute schemas with regard to *mūrtis*, the material divine, in diverse societal circumstances. Such inquiries address a problem, as Briggs (1992) would describe it: "I see culture now as a bag of ingredients that are available for selection, that is, available for being invested with affect, hence meaning. And I think I see one of those processes through which this emotional investment may occur: the creation of a sense of problem, a personally relevant and even dangerous problem, that focuses, first, attention and then efforts to solve or cope with the problem" (47). The problem at hand is how Hindus may or may not reconcile societal, familial, and personal expectations regarding upholding multiple potentially mutually exclusive schemas.

Contained within the cultural rubric of Hinduism as it is understood in schemas, what are experiences that are likely to create one outcome for a relational schema versus another? What experiences would mean that a schema endorsing physical and multiple gods is advocated over other societally prevalent schemas?

Understanding How Schemas Work

Mandler (1984) traces the idea of schemas back to Kant, who explained schemas as mental patterns, and, in the style of Plato, understood them further as ideals based on particular characteristics, e.g. a four-legged animal. Mandler himself defines a schema as a "bounded, distinct, and unitary representation," (55-56) that is built up throughout interactions with one's environment, and Piaget (1952) understood schemas as cognitive structures with reference to well-defined action sequences. Casson (1983, 430) describes schemas as "conceptual abstractions that mediate between stimuli received by the sense organs and behavioral

36

responses." Even with regard to these few definitions of schemas, theorists began to postulate

different categories. Taylor and Crocker (1981) have defined different types of schemas: person

schemas, self schemas, role schemas, event schemas, and content-free schemas (consisting of

processing rules). Turner (1994) postulates procedural schemas, contextual schemas, and

strategic schemas. D'Andrade (1995) offers his own comprehensive definition of a schema, and

ultimately understands schemas as hierarchical in relation to one another rather than as being

differentiable into categories existing on the same plane:

> To say that something is a "schema is a shorthand way of saying that a distinct and
> strongly interconnected pattern of interpretive elements can be activated by minimal
> inputs. A schema is an interpretation which is frequent, well organized, memorable,
> which can be made from minimal cues, contains one or more prototypic instantiations, is
> resistant to change, etc. While it would be more accurate to speak always of
> *interpretations with such and such a degree of schematicity*, the convention of calling
> highly schematic interpretations "schemas" remains in effect in the cognitive literature
> (142). (Emphasis in original.)

Strauss and Quinn (1997) describe schemas in a connectivist way; for a given individual,

and within the broader cultural rubric, schemas are not bounded objects, but are rather connected

at varying points and with varying strengths. Perhaps it is best to visualize this as two webs,

individual and societal, superimposed on top of one another themselves connected at various

points and to various degrees. Deleuze and Guittari (1987) theorize these connections as

rhizomatic, consisting of a web of interconnected roots, stipulating that "any point of a rhizome

can be connected to any other, and must be," (7). Within these rhizomes, there are nodes of

stronger connections- one, for example, is what I might call a schema for a *mūrti-* but this does

not mean that these connections do not change and interweave; in contrast, they certainly do. To

this end, each "person is a junction point for an infinite number of partially overlapping

cultures," (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 7). Thus, inner states aren't necessarily fixed, nor are they

innate (32); rather, each individual, informed by culturally stipulated standards, constitutes a differing level and/or interpretations of what is inner, what is outer, and the extent to which those coalesce. It is difficult- in a practical sense- to discuss schemas as unbounded, but one must conceptualize them as such in order to understand their strength and their use as a construct.

Part and parcel of schemas existing as interconnected is the extent to which they can inform guesses about a situation or context when presented with incomplete information (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 66); this is facilitated by the fact that ideas will be cognitively linked if they are associated within prior experiences (230). Though each time a schema is invoked is different, and the schema is to some extent altered (Norman 1986) and the more that particular network of interconnected links becomes activated through experience, the more durable- and easy to access- it becomes. This might also create new links between often activated nodes and new experiences or contexts, thus altering and/or re-weighting links in older schemas, though perhaps only slightly (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 98).

Moreover, these are loosely organized clusters of thoughts and ideas, such that just having the connection does not necessitate an individual endorsement. For example, an individual might have the notion that marriages should last, but he or she may not put much weight on that connection, or might directly disavow it; still, the connection is there. On the other hand, some connections are so widely shared that they seem incorporeal: obvious. In order for an entity- such as marriage, or an understanding of *mūrti*-as-god- to be created and widely understood, there must be social agreement that said entity is indeed an entity; this "involves the adherence of a group of people to a constitutive rule and to the entailments incurred by the application of the rule," (D'Andrade 1984, 91). It is important to acknowledge, too, that some groups, such as different genders, families, socio-economic classes, or generations, share

38

schemas that other groups do not. Sharing membership in multiple subgroups could induce

potential conflict (Westen 2001, 40).

As Shweder (1993, 2003; cf. Shweder et al. 2003) notes, "cognized reality is incomplete

if described from any one point of view and incoherent if described from all points of view at

once." However, given individual experience qua experience, it may not be feasible for any

particular individual to recognize the necessarily multiple and varyingly influential points of

view from which he or she is cognizing, thus allowing for conflict, and, potentially, internal

incoherence— or, less intuitively, internal coherence that, to an onlooker, appears incoherent or

even irrational. How can we reconcile all of these distinct points of view while avoiding

bounding first, schemas, and second, cultures (e.g. Indian culture)? I would advocate seeking

families of resemblance within schematic and rhizomatic understandings, since each given

schema has as its base one common component: that which is human.

A Collapsing of Person and Schema

This collapsing of understanding simultaneously applies to the idea of a schema as a lens.

Strauss and Quinn (1997, 164) take schemas to be "mediating structures for performing

reasoning tasks," and critics of schemas-as-motivating also point to schemas, rather, as

mediating. This is misleading because schemas are just as much parts of how we see the world as

they are parts of it; without being actual *things* they are still embedded, by individuals, into each

object before that object is perceived based on previous similar experience. In other words,

experientially, they are embedded in us and are inseparable except through means of analysis. In

the same way that it is difficult to discuss schemas without implying their boundaries, it is these

unintentionally implied boundaries that separate schemas from the act of world-interpreting in

the first place. Neglecting this Gestalt and collapsed approach becomes problematic because, since schemas are always already part and parcel of who we are, we need to interrogate schemas as object while simultaneously interrogating as an object our assumption of their position as such.

Despite adopting this necessary analytic of "always already," I condone Strauss and Quinn's (1997, 211) understanding that "The way understandings are acquired and cognitively represented has consequences for how they come to be expressed," and my findings lend credence to the possibility that schemas learned early in life are more durable and successively formative and informative. Similarly, in what Dreyfus terms a neo-Vygotskian developmental approach, thoughts, feelings and motivation are formed as an individual develops and, moreover, internalized cultural "devices" become part of that person's higher mental functioning (Holland 1992, 63). This understanding correlates with Lorenz's (1965) work on imprinting as well as with the notion of a critical period, often discussed in language learning. Thinking of schemas in terms of a network, the experiences one has when young are relatively fewer than the quantity of experiences one gathers with age cumulatively throughout the years; thus, the initial center of the network, the links most frequently activated for the longest period, is likely established in childhood. This center could certainly shift with the addition of stronger weights (i.e. additional and potentially more salient experiences) activating other links, but, due to the proclivity to and ease regarding activating pre-existing links, or the tendency to understand new experiences within the contexts we've already established, even such a shift must be interpreted within the context of the pre-existing network whose first establishments occurred in childhood-establishing the extent to which these networks are "always already"; they are as old as an individual's existence. The allowances of this system and its tolerance for alteration and change

likely relate to its character as well as the particular confines under which it was established in the first place. Thus, all future experiences are understood from a specific and initial point of view which is itself relatively durable. Given these tendencies, it is possible for schemas to be relatively durable societally and historically as well (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 85). Allowing the person to be a priori schematic allows us to potentially fuse thought and action, to take them together, and to ultimately understand the potential for the same reality to be differently experienced.

Therefore, it would seem that any perspective that is extremely objectivist or extremely subjectivist necessarily excludes the other (Gudykunst et al. 2005) and fails to accurately make sense of what reality might look like, since reality in this case is necessarily conditioned by either point of view. To be an objectivist, an onlooker attempting to discern reality, is, in fact, a cultural position in and of itself; it is the theorist who outlines the confines of the schema (Norman 1986) as opposed to experiencing it. Moreover, since schemas are "context-dependent interpretive devices" used to make sense of reality, an actor might experience subtle differentiation in context that an onlooker wouldn't (D'Andrade 1992a, 33). Thus, should this objectivist be an anthropologist, an advisable goal would be to seek implicit meaning beyond (or in a priori concert with) actions (Asad 1993, 194), and, moreover, as situated within individuals who share societally constituted schemas.

If one dwells within positivism, assuming that only that which is experienced is what is necessarily real, and is the only thing that is real, and if schemas, which differ cross-culturally, are built up through experiences, pre-existing schemas condition interpretations of future experiences as well. In other words, cumulative experiencing sets the stage to experience similarly, and might make it difficult to even comprehend that reality as it is perceived is

conditioned by one's past and past interpretations of reality, or, if that is acknowledged, to

understand this fully and to intuitively *feel* the world as someone else might.

Chapter 1: Discerning *Darśan*: Comparing Durgā Pūjās in the U.S. and Kolkata

In this chapter, I show that understanding how Bengalis in India and the U.S. conceptualize Durgā, the goddess, as physical is tied up with how they conceptualize her as a relation. In the U.S., Durgā Pūjā reveals a tension between devotional versus social relationships with the goddess and with each other, often discouraging sharing pictures taken with the goddess, which cement closeness with her and, when shared, indicate this closeness to onlookers. In India, devotional and social are rarely separated, and the observance of the ritual pūjā *as well as the social component of visiting with the goddess are seamless and simultaneous. Ultimately, it is this relationality, this emphasis on the goddess as a friend and relative, and this sociality among Bengalis and the goddess which are prerequisites for understanding the goddess as physical.*

When Indra was the king of the devas and Mahiṣāsur was the king of the *asuras*, the demons, there was a hundred-year war, which the *asuras* won, and Mahiṣāsur became the king of heaven. The devas, led by Brahma, went to tell Śiva and Viṣṇu what had happened: that the devas had been expelled from heaven. Viṣṇu became angry, and then Brahma, then Śiva, then Indra, and then all of the devas. A blazing light sprung forth from within them, joining together combining into a female form, the luster from each god forming a different part of the goddess Durgā's body. And the devas rejoiced.

Each of the devas gave Durgā a weapon. Delighted, the goddess roared and the sky reverberated, all worlds shook, the seas trembled, the earth quaked, and the mountains rocked. The goddess mobilized all of the devas' armies and lifted up her weapons. Mahiṣāsur saw her, bending the earth with her footstep, scraping the sky with her crown. The goddess, atop her lion, who shook its mane in rage, killed hundreds of prominent *asuras*. The battleground was strewn with bodies, weapons, elephants, horses, chariots, and rivers of blood. The devas showered flowers down on the battlefield.

One by one, Mahiṣāsur's generals attempted to take on the goddess, but they, similarly were no match for her. While she fought these generals, her lion vanquished a general's elephant. Seeing no option, Mahiṣāsur took the form of a buffalo and charged at Durgā's army and, after that, attacked the goddess' lion, which enraged her. Mahiṣāsur pounded the earth with his hooves, piercing the clouds and causing mountains to crumble. As Mahiṣāsur and the goddess battled, he turned into a lion, a man, an elephant, and finally resumed his form as a buffalo, shaking the three worlds. Durgā leaped onto Mahiṣāsur, with her foot on his neck, and struck him with a spear. Mahiṣāsur's human form emerged from his buffalo mouth and the goddess cut off his head with her sword. With this, the *asura* army perished and the devas exulted, lavishing praise on the goddess.[9]

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[9] Summarized from the second and third chapters of the *Devīmāhātmya*. Also worth noting is that the name Durgā is not necessarily used in the text, but Bengalis take the goddess to be Durgā.

"So the Durgā Pūjā, the story is very simply there was a lot of evil in the world and all the gods got together, they created goddess Durgā, and they endowed her with lot of different weapons and strength and all that. So the whole symbolic thing that happens is that she actually fetches out the evil and puts an end to it. So this was a basic story, it has its own versions and connotations and all that all over, but the whole idea was that, you know, the gods were getting tired of the devil and wanted to do something that would go seek out the demon or that is, you know, not letting them be the righteous and do the right things and all that. So, things are going out, getting out of hand from the perspective of the evil winning over the truth and all this. So, that is where the whole story was formed and created and everything."
—Debashish, 54, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

This narrative of Durgā Pūjā, of Durgā vanquishing the evil Mahiṣāsur, a demon, pervades Kolkata, the city where Durgā Pūjā is most prominently celebrated. Even if one cannot necessarily describe the specifics of the story, one almost always comes back to the fact that Durgā, equipped with weapons from the gods, defeated the demon when no one else could. However, alongside this narrative lies another: that Durgā makes a journey for the ten days of Durgā Pūjā to visit her parents' house, her ancestral home. After marriage, Bengali women move into the households of their husbands and, thus, it is an important and joyous occasion when a woman comes back to the place where she was born, often with her children in tow, as Durgā does. When Durgā arrives from Shiva's abode in the Himalayas, on ṣaṣṭhī, the sixth day, the public celebration of Durgā Pūjā begins.

In interviews, I often heard that this narrative of Durgā's homecoming runs "parallel" to that of Durgā slaying a demon. The two stories do not intertwine and are not related; rather, they co-exist within the scope of worshipping the goddess, generating two meanings, two purposes for the celebration itself. Such parallel epistemologies pervade contemporary Durgā Pūjā: one is

44

a story of righteousness and ritual, while the other is a story of homecoming and community. As I observed Durgā Pūjā in New Jersey in 2014 and in Kolkata in 2015, I began to glean the importance of these separate narratives and, additionally, how they reflect the differing attitudes of Bengali Hindus with regard to Durgā Pūjā, perhaps exemplifying the potential for parallel and coexisting iterations of one familiar event. Similarly, Durgā Pūjā celebrations in NJ and in Kolkata run parallel, with a similar end- to celebrate Durgā- but also to illustrate significant differences, both in the way the festival is performed as well as comprehended.

Variations on a single story within Hinduism are far from uncommon; Paula Richman's book titled Many Ramayanas (1991) explains the various ways in which this well-worn epic is written and understood in different circumstances, and the same can be said for the story of Durgā. The characters tend to stay the same, but the narrative is tweaked. The secondary narrative of Durgā Pūjā, however, that of Durgā's journey, becomes particularly relevant in the duty of homecoming. Individuals in the U.S. were somewhat more likely to mention this story, perhaps reflecting on their own separation from the physical place of Durgā Pūjā. However, more broadly, the narrative itself reflects a preoccupation with familial ties and relationships that goes beyond the nuts and bolts of what actually occurs during Durgā Pūjā. This theme pervades much of my research: the way in which relationality to others— be they relatives, fellow Bengalis, etc. — is communicated and expressed via the goddess (or, without her, might fail to be transmitted), and particularly through visual instantiations of the goddess. Such a notion upends the traditional understanding of *darśan*— the moment of individual connection with the deity, when one is simultaneously seen by and seeing the god or goddess (Eck 1981); rather, in this particular case, what becomes important as well as communicative is the act of being seen by relevant others alongside the goddess, particularly in digital imagery, and, moreover, the

extent to which one sees and conceptualizes oneself alongside the goddess. "Who she is" and "who we are" are defined by relational proximities.

In this reformulation, one is still seeing and seen simultaneously; however, in so far as this instantiation is reflexive, what becomes operative, rather than connection with the deity, is the self-perception and representation of one's connection, as well as recognition of the ways in which others see oneself and one's interaction with the goddess. The way one understands oneself and one's place in the festivities ultimately affects how a participant individually construes these festivities, as well as the goddess and one's connection to her. This reflexive, self-seeing *darśan* is not only important in the U.S., but also in India, and, additionally, lays the foundation for communication between and integration of the two localities during these festivities, bolstering familial relationships and upholding Durgā as a family member herself. Moreover, this examination of two Durgā Pūjās illustrates how relationships with Durgā play out *in situ*, thus taking a step further towards understanding what it means to have a relationship with the goddess and how this plays into her physicality or lack thereof.

Durgā Pūjā Background

Bengalis hail Durgā Pūjā as the most important time of the year (Nicholas 2013), and a significant amount of academic literature is devoted to Durgā Pūjā. Historically, *zamindars*, village kings of sorts under Muslim rule, would put on these *pūjās* as a kind token to their constituents and would spend significant amounts of money on this spectacle. To this extent, Durgā Pūjā had religious valence, but was also a tool to both reinforce hierarchical order and to demonstrate wealth. This trend continued into the eighteenth century when wealthy families would sponsor the building of *pandals*, platforms on which the goddess would stand. Members

46

of the British East India Company regularly criticized the extravagance of this festival (McDermott 2008).

Later, though, as opposition to colonial rule grew, the goddess came to represent resistance and an autonomous nation rather than wealth, given that Durgā Pūjā was an outward and public celebration of Hindu solidarity (McDermott 2008, 2011; Nicholas 2013). This nationalism wasn't so secret: in the 1890s, many pamphlets were published in Bengali with the goal of "explaining, justifying, and implicitly or explicitly arguing for the importance of Pūjās as a national religious festival" (McDermott 2008). This line of thought went against the prominent strain of resistance thinking at the time: that of liberalism and reform. In contrast, here we see a community that perceives itself as having been wronged and as demanding retribution. This process, in some way, was a secularization of Hinduism as well as a means of constructing boundaries of Hindus as a community which was previously unestablished (Bhattacharya 2007). Post-independence, Durgā Pūjā has become significantly less politicized (McDermott 2008).

The ways in which Durgā Pūjā is celebrated in a community context have changed over time. It was in the seventeenth century that unfired clay images became an important part of this festival, and in the eighteenth century, it was mostly a family affair. However, as early as 1823, there was a hint of anxiety regarding whether the festival was a spectacle or a site of religious observance. It was in the nineteenth century that groups of people began pooling funds to host *pūjās*, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, these small groups evolved into neighborhood *pūjās*, where not everyone involved necessarily knew the others, ultimately giving way to *sarbojanin*— for all the people— *pūjās*, particularly displaying nationalist undertones. In these instances, Durgā was commonly displayed as mother India and other content entered the scene: for example, around the time of WWII, a European soldier was portrayed as the demon and a

figure of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was present to save the day. Today, separate Durgā Pūjā celebrations might occur in private homes, office complexes, apartment complexes, or public spaces, such as parks (Bean 2009).

Durgā Pūjā mirrors the ways in which neighborhoods and public life in Kolkata change, and function on their own sociological principles of inclusion and exclusion varying by location. Those multiple *pūjā* sites serve as new types of ritual sites whose primary purpose is to be visited and toured. Guha-Thakurta (2009) contends that the primary contemporary identity of Durgā Pūjā is as an art exhibit, while Bose (2008) construes Durgā Pūjā by way of Foucault's heterotropia, characterizing the event as both real and unreal, where the everyday is unrecognizable, and where time and history collapse. While these arguments certainly have merit, and from a certain perspective ring utterly true, there is also something decidedly mundane about Durgā Pūjā, particularly to the extent that it serves as an extension of communal and familial structures already in place.

The understanding of Durgā as a mother and as a daughter also formulated around the eighteenth century. With the fall of Islamic influence and the rise of colonialism in India, Brahmanic power came into play, ultimately construing Durgā as *saparivāra*, with her family, as opposed to representing her as fearsome and powerful. Poets of the time contributed, writing ballads extolling the goddess and her children, who began to be depicted alongside her as she fought the buffalo demon— an odd occasion to take a child along. Such a domestic construal provoked love for Durgā among the Bengali populace, as the emphasis on family mirrored their own lives and the way society was established. Longing for a married and, thus, departed daughter or female family member was commonplace for many if not all, and here she was, returned. To that end, only in Bengal, where these occurrences took place, is Durgā's arrival

48

understood as a homecoming (Bean 2009).

Ultimately, Durgā Pūjā was always somewhat of a spectacle as well as a tool used by those in power to demonstrate and disseminate a particular ideology. If one examines Durgā Pūjā without this history and without its festival components, as one might in America, it becomes a solely "religious" occasion, emphasizing the worship of the goddess without her societal accouterment. In the past, religiosity as it pertains to Durgā was used to motivate the event, as were relevant familial structures, demonstrating that while Durgā Pūjā contains religious content, this has not historically or traditionally been the primary thrust of the event itself, in production or perpetuation, though perhaps in presentation. In a place, such as America, where these specific power structures did not originate and never existed in quite this way, Durgā Pūjā runs the danger of disconnection from its origins and, thus, from its original relevance.

Articles cited here and others clearly focus on Durgā Pūjā as a sociological phenomenon with implications for a community as a whole, and for the nation more broadly, as they should: as a public festival, Durgā Pūjā lends itself to these analyses. Due to the importance of Durgā Pūjā in Bengal, though, a more psychological perspective of how an individual within this larger political and social macrocosm perceives and interacts with a deity is underrepresented in literature on the subject. Though Durgā Pūjā has a political and communal history, most contemporary Bengali Hindus do not consistently recall this when they think of Durgā Pūjā. Rather, for them, it is a festival with overtly Hindu connotations, as well as a time of merriment. To this end, Durgā Pūjā, a festival making use of a Hindu ritual for primarily political purposes, has taken on significant social connotations, but also serves to demonstrate that the ways in which people engage with each other during this festival stipulate and are stipulated by the ways they think about and regard the goddess more broadly. In other words, the execution of

celebration and the ways that individuals choose to celebrate and interact with each other supersede the political connotations of the festival's past. Rather, Bengalis enact particular modes of thinking about and conceptualizing the goddess and her visit— as opposed to solely regarding the occasion— and, specifically, in relation to each other and themselves.

Durgā Pūjā in New Jersey

In October 2014, I attended Durgā Pūjā at the Ananda Mandir in Somerset, NJ. Ananda Mandir was established in 1995 and is one of the first specifically Bengali temples in NJ.[10] Like most of the Durgā Pūjā attendees, the priest at Ananda Mandir was born in West Bengal. He took up residence as priest in 2004. Ananda Mandir is tucked away in a small alcove off of a busy street— a busy street which, notably, is home to a Jewish synagogue, a mosque, a Korean church, three Hindu temples, and a Jain temple: a bastion of religious diversity.

Soma, who came to the United States in the mid 1980s, invited me to attend Durgā Pūjā. Before we left from her house on the evening of the sixth day of the *pūjā*, we took to Soma's garden with scissors, clipping orange and yellow zinnias to offer to the goddess. No bugs, she implored me, and only the big ones! We stuffed the flowers into a Ziploc bag and headed off. On the drive, Soma explained to me: "First five days there are no... there's one thing called Mahālaya. That day they do praying and everything for first day of Durgā coming. That day they pray and everything, they do big *pūjā*,[11] early in the morning, and that's where the... the story is that ... Durgā is coming to the parents' house for ten days. Taking vacation, ten days, and coming to parents' house with all her family. Right? So when she starts from her husband's house, that

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[10] I've been told that Durgā temples do not actually exist in Kolkata, or at least are not common. One might conjecture that they exist in the U.S. primarily to facilitate the celebration of Durgā Pūjā.
[11] What Soma means here is that the *pūjā* is very elaborate with many steps.

day is called Mahālaya, that day the praying starts. And then first four days, there's a little bit *pūjā* going on, but from the last five days, because she's going to go away, so last five days is lots of get together, and *pūjā*, people come because that's when, because last five days it's just worship because she's gonna go away again for another year. So that's the story, you know."

Different renderings of this story betray some ambiguity: does Durgā set out on Mahālaya (an occasion on which the most popular public celebration is the radio broadcast of the other Durgā narrative)[12], or is it the day she arrives? Does she arrive on the sixth day— is that why we begin to celebrate then? Regardless of which version of this story might be best documented in text, the point is this: from *ṣaṣṭhī*, the sixth day, until *daśamī*, the tenth day, this is the time in which one can visit with the goddess, when she is physically present and receiving company. Portraying Durgā as a long-lost family member, as a daughter come home, is what elevates the importance of the event. Certainly, Durgā slays a demon, but her homecoming provides additional, and perhaps primary, reason for rejoicing.

When we arrive, the *pūjā* is already underway, but we stop to chat with one of the temple officials prior to entering the main prayer room. We slip our shoes off and head to the front of the room, settling to the side of the goddess. The *mūrti*[13] of Durgā, as well as those of the rest of

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[12]In this broadcast, briefly mentioned in the introduction, a recording is played in which Birendra Krishna Bhadra reads selections from the *Devīmāhātmya*, the text recited during *pūjā* on Durgā Pūjā. Some verses have become particularly canonical as a result of his rendering. The *Devīmāhātmya* and is part of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, which was composed 5th or 6th century. It tells of three episodes: 1. The goddess wakes up Vishnu in order for him to fight demons, and does so by emerging from his various body parts, where she's been residing. 2. The gods are all imprisoned by the buffalo demon Mahiṣāsur, and *tejas*, liquid and light emitting power, leaks from their bodies, through their rage, forming into Durgā who then defeats the demon. 3. The male gods are once again vanquished by demonic *asuras,* and Durgā emerges from Pārvatī, and, through battle, generates into Kālī who emerges from her forehead (c.f. Larson 2009). Notably, the text itself does not mention the narrative of Durgā's homecoming.

[13] *Mūrti* literally means image. It is used to refer to a statue of a god or goddess. While some might use the word idol, I've found that many Hindus are offended by this classification, and thus, prefer to use the word *mūrti*.

her family, are ones that have been reused. Ordered from India some years ago, the goddess is packaged away at the end of the festival; she sits in a compartment against the wall, in a receptacle built specifically for her. While in India the Durgā *mūrti* is almost always thrown into the water after Durgā Pūjā, in America, it's not feasible to order a new one every year, and so she lies dormant for most of her time.[14]

This isn't the main day of celebrations, so we are among only around fifteen people, mostly older women. The priest is chanting, addressing the goddess and her companions, engaging her and ringing his bell. People keep bringing *prasād*[15]— apples, pomegranates, *cham cham, ladoos*,[16] rice, fruits of all kinds—including a cantaloupe. The *prasād* sits there for a few minutes, and then a woman who appears to be in charge takes it away and puts it on a bench. Before they sit down, many people come in and pay homage to the permanent gods in the *mandir*, who are off to the side: Gaṇeśa, wrapped in pink, Kālī, Rādhākriṣṇa, many *lingas*. The priest is sitting in front of Durgā, surrounded by painted white patterns all over the floor, and encircled by tins with numerous offerings. As the chapter he is reciting finishes, women blow vociferously on conch shells, drums sound, and Soma calls out to him that she has left flowers in the kitchen, flowers to be given to the goddess.

The priest's book is utterly tattered; pages have coloring from incense on the edges, the spine is missing, and parts of the commentary have been torn out. Behind him sits a *rasgullā*[17] can filled with ghee, which spills on the book as he brings the spoon of it to the *havan*.[18] When the next chapter begins, Soma hums along, reciting the words she knows. She points out all of

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[14] See Figure 1.
[15] Offerings to the goddess (usually edible)
[16] Sweets
[17] A very common Bengali sweet.
[18] A ritual fire.

the *mūrtis* directly surrounding Durgā: Saraswatī, Lakṣmi, Gaṇeśa, Kārtik, *oshur* (the demon),[19] and Shiv on top. A little boy sits and asks his father questions— what is this, why are we doing this? Soma tells me about how her son used to ask these questions — Why are there three eyes?— and how she would tell him stories. Despite the priest's continual pleading for silence, babies are crying, ladies are gossiping, and friends are meeting. At a particularly shrill scream, the priest is briefly distracted and then carries on, slightly perturbed. At intervals he proclaims "*Jai Devi Durgā Mata ki*!"[20] and the crowd responds "*Jai*!" During the *pūjā*, a teenager is playing a game on his phone with the volume on. Soma turns around and gives him a stern look.

The priest takes the *dīpa*,[21] moving it in circles in front of the goddess and then bringing it around so each person can pull a bit of smoke towards herself. A tin of flowers gets passed around and people grab them, holding them up, offering them to the goddess, chanting after the priest, listening to the drums, and then eventually putting them back into the tin to be deposited at the goddess's feet. This, called the *puṣpāñjali*, or flower offering, is the most salient moment of the *pūjā*: the participation required demands attention and focus. The verses recited during *puṣpāñjali* are quite famous:

ॐ सर्व मङ्गल माङ्गल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थ साधिके।
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरी नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते॥१॥

Oh, auspiciousness among all auspiciousness, wife of Shiva, fulfiller of all goals |
Three-eyed Gaurī, a refuge, Nārāyanī— homage to you! ||

Soma asks me whether I liked the *pūjā* and explains that she likes to go early in the morning, as we will do tomorrow, otherwise one can't see the *pūjā* and there is "too many noise,

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[19] This reflects Soma's Bengali-tinged pronunciation.
[20] "Honor to the mother goddess Durgā!"
[21] A lamp with candles.

53

socialization." Indeed, as we make our way out of the room toward a dinner of *prasād*,[22] I see there are now around one hundred people in attendance, all chatting and greeting each other. Streaming out, we can hear the priest repeating the *puspāñjali*, for the latecomers, as Soma tells me.[23]

Early the next morning, we file in and sit with around fifty others. Though I'd noticed it before, this time we were directly in front of a sign that states "No phones, no pictures!" As if recognizing my interest in the sign, Soma turns to me, saying:

> **S:** Take the picture. Because they were saying no, no, no, but I thought ok, I'll take one. Before they never used to say. I don't know why now...
> **R:** Yeah, I see it says no phones.
> **S:** But everybody wants to. Did you hear the phone ringing?
> **R:** There was a teenager behind us who was playing games on his phone yesterday.
> **S:** He was playing games and I looked a very mean way. And he stopped. Nobody was telling him to stop.

At no point had I indicated to Soma that I wanted to take pictures; rather, it was her assumption that either I wanted to, or should want to. This highlighted a fundamental problem that would continue for the remainder of the festivities: the tension between paying attention, and thus, not using one's phone or distracting others, but also the need and urge to represent the goddess, and often oneself with the goddess, in the form of digital images. Both instances actually dictate different types of attention to the goddess: the former to her exultation and the latter to her as a visitor, as a friend. It is these differing notions of attention to the goddess— in differing ways— that often motivate and inform how Hinduism is practiced in India and in the U.S. and which elucidate the differences between generations. Ultimately, one must have the "correct" context and scope in order to fully pay attention to the goddess.

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[22] Food blessed by the deity with his or her gaze and then consumed by devotees.
[23] The priest actually performs *puspāñjali* three times as part of the ritual, but many people, particularly in the U.S., are under the impression that the repetition serves this more practical purpose.

The priest and his attendants shuffled around attending to the primary *pūjā*, to the goddess, as well as to ancillary sponsored *pūjās* on the side, where separate coconuts were set up to represent each god or goddess in Durgā's party.[24] *Prasād* poured in and out. Finally, the *puṣpāñjali* occurred and this time, we were left with the flowers. I asked Soma what to do with the flowers and she said, "Oh, you don't want it?" and quickly took it from my hand, with the intention of sending it to one of her children. The remainder of the flowers were taken outside and poured into a designated pile. The rest of *saptamī*, the seventh day, and most of *aṣṭamī* and *navamī*, the combined eighth and ninth days, continued in this fashion: *prasād* and chanting, *āratī*, *puṣpāñjali*, and a meal.[25] Hundreds of people filed in and out, chatting, and the priest continually attempted to quell the din.

During interstitial moments, Soma would introduce me to anyone she happened to know, mentioning my research and continually concluding with "She knows Sanskrit!" a trope which in many cases served as a form of cultural currency. At these times and later in interviews, each person, no matter how old or how learned, ultimately conveyed to me that he or she really didn't know much about Hinduism, about *pūjā*, about anything related. This illustrates two points: first, a possible residual insecurity many American Hindus have regarding leaving India early in life and not maintaining a Hindu way of life enough to really know specific details of ritual. Second, the mere mention of potential ignorance betrays a notion that knowledge is capital where these matters are concerned, and that it is important to understand exactly what is going on in the *pūjā* order to be a learned Hindu. Soma confirmed: "Even though the older people from India, they know a lot, but they will pretend like they... not pretend, they feel like they don't know enough,

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[24] These ancillary *pūjās* are sponsored; temple members pay additional fees for their own private *pūjā* alongside the main one.
[25] *Āratī* is the offering of fire; *puṣpāñjali* is the offering of flowers.

so they will say. The last man you talk to, he is a big writer. But you see how he downplay, he say oh, I don't know much." Such proclamations highlight the importance of knowing the particular steps of the ritual in order to be learned, rather than solely practicing as a Hindu in one's own way. To this end, Hinduism in America often serves as a construct reified by knowing, and, at that, by what is deemed esoteric knowledge of the inner workings of the meanings behind *pūjā*, the required actions, and of Sanskrit.

On *daśamī*, the last day, we run into a high school friend of Soma's. At this point, the married women douse each other with vermillion and I'm appointed to take pictures. Though I'm unmarried, I, too, was anointed. While the premise is that after this event some dance should occur, instead, sweets were passed and the women posed with the goddess. They asked me to take shot after shot in several iterations with different people and family members. I, too, posed with the goddess. For hours, different people took turns standing with the *mūrti* to be immortalized in digital ink. Soma assured her friend Sneha, oh, we'll send these to you; we'll post them on Facebook. All around was chatter about last year's pictures, how this year's would be, whom to send them to, and what was the best method. At one point Soma pulled out her phone and showed me all the pictures she saw last year; friends in India had tagged her. There was even a picture of Soma's daughter and me from Durgā Pūjā in Chicago in 2013. Each picture included families and friends with the goddess and joyful greetings. To this end, people in India were able to solidify relationships with those in the U.S. and vice versa; through the exchange of digital Durgās, friendships themselves were codified.

This tale of an American Durgā Pūjā relays many themes which will be addressed in later pages: retention of flowers and other physical symbols of divinity, the role of having knowledge and asking questions, where and how the goddess can reside when not immediately present (or is

she?), and the ultimate conclusion that it is one's attention and focus that provokes the goddesses' presence in the *mūrti*. However, underlying these considerations are the salient tensions provoking vacillation between ritual and social, traditional and contemporary, split as such. This can be seen specifically in the case of Soma: she toggles back and forth in her initial discussion of the days of Durgā Pūjā, noting that the last five days are when the main *pūjās* happen, but also when the socialization happens. Ultimately, she is unsure which to advocate as the primary point or purpose of the *pūjā*, bifurcating these two ends largely on her own, rather than considering each as melded components of the same festival. This is an answer I heard again and again in interviews: Durgā Pūjā is about socialization, is about new clothes, is about seeing your friends. At certain points, some interviewees (mostly in America) even expressed discomfort with the fact that the festival isn't so much about the goddess and her worship; rather it's about seeing other Bengalis. This notion usurps the traditional Durgā narrative of killing the demon and (often) replaces it with an understanding of Durgā as transitive, as a means to a relational end, but still, as inherently necessary given that she is like another Bengali, a family member. When she is perceived as such, the socialization has integrated her as its end. The American context, however, whose Christian overtones often insinuate a separation from a deity, can often intermingle with notions of how one should regard the goddess, making the role of socialization less clear and even potentially confusing for participants who are equally steeped in both paradigms.

Though Soma asserts that there is too much noise and socialization during Durgā Pūjā, it is notable that she herself goes to Durgā Pūjā largely for this purpose. Not unlike any other *pūjā*, people chat while the ritual occurs, including Soma whispering to me about different people she sees arriving. What is surprising here is the fact that these whispers are illicit. The balance

57

between attention and inattention spans the gamut of the *pūjā*, but also serves to indicate which portions are perhaps the most important in the eyes of the particular devotee. For the priest, addressing Durgā is massively important, and, hence, he becomes agitated when full attention to his actions is not supplied. However, for devotees, it is the moment when they engage with the goddess (whether during *āratī* and *puṣpāñjali* or through taking pictures), rather than just being in her presence, which becomes relevant. In some cases, this is an example of the well-documented importance of *darśan*, being seen by the goddess and seeing her. To be seen with, however, and to see oneself with, are variants on *darśan* and are instantiations of creating societal cohesion through attention to and reverence of the deity. Ultimately, when one should fully engage with the goddess depends on that person's choice to do so according to his own understanding of his relationship with her.

Soma's conflicted feelings regarding inattention arise again when she and I discuss the taking of pictures. First, she notes that I should take photos, as if this is a very important part of Durgā Pūjā itself, despite the proclamations of the temple's sign. She even asserts that everyone really wants to take pictures, thus framing the taking of photos (usually on phones) as itself an important action. Juxtaposed to this assertion, however, is her condemnation of the phones ringing during *pūjā*. When is the phone, the digital, an instrument of distraction and when is it an instrument of devotion? When is inattention sanctioned and when not and why? Taking a picture is appropriate, in so far as one engages with the goddess, presumably for a purpose, but phones ringing and playing games on phones are both inappropriate uses of technology during *pūjā* because they draw attention away from the two main functions of the event itself: either attention to the ritual, or attention to the socialization and relationality that the ritual breeds.

58

Through taking pictures, documenting, the devotee can reify Durgā and the way of life surrounding her. By focusing attention on those images, one creates the life and the relationships that one initially might be intending to preserve. After taking these pictures, the devotee can look back on that curation and resonate with the goddess and the community. To create this relationality with Durgā is to produce connections to a particular life including Durgā, thus encapsulating this life *as* relational.

Durgā Pūjā in India

Kumortuli, the streets in northern Kolkata where Durgā (and other) *mūrtis* are made, is never so abuzz as it is directly before Durgā Pūjā. I went there three times: once in the middle of April, with no festival in sight. There were still *mūrtis* to craft, but I was the sole onlooker. I went again after Durgā Pūjā and directly before Kālī Pūjā, another important Bengali Hindu holiday. Though there were certainly people crowding around to see Kālī, the point was more perfunctory: the purchase of a *mūrti* and accoutrement for individual celebrations. And, of course, I went before Durgā Pūjā. Directly before Durgā Pūjā, the narrow lanes were packed and almost impassable. Massive carts rolled by with similarly massive Durgās, being transported all over Kolkata for the festival.[26] In addition to buyers, there were groups of teenagers, adults, and foreigners, all strolling the streets and photographing the goddess. Most Kolkatans I know, even those who are less demonstrative, shared some type of image of the goddess on Facebook or through WhatsApp;[27] one opted for a photojournalistic article showcasing Kumortuli.

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[26] See Figure 2.

[27] WhatsApp is a text messaging platform that uses data rather than SMS capabilities. As a result, it is cheaper for most Indians and is also free internationally; otherwise, people would be charged per text message instead of by data usage. Additionally, it is easier to create large (even 100+ people) message groups.

Christopher Pinney (2004) writes about the ways in which, in India, there isn't so much a history of images as there is a history made by images. To this extent, Kolkatans are commemorating a current moment via the images they share.

Much like Kumortuli, the rest of northern Kolkata, the older part of town, is filled with people at this time of year. A ten-minute drive can take an hour due to the myriad *paṇḍāls* (elevated platforms), housing the goddess, that exist on each block. Some are more well-known (and better funded) than others, with their lavish facades bringing in more people and more traffic. Anywhere you go in Kolkata during Durgā Pūjā, you are in the presence of the goddess and the strings of lights that take up any space where she is not. The city, which normally becomes sleepy around 10 PM, is active all night, with crowds only diminishing as the sun rises.

I made my way north with Jalahasini and her daughter Joydita, two of my interviewees. We went to the home where Jalahasini grew up, a version of her ancestral home (her family had moved from a village a few generations ago). The *pūjā* there has been occurring for the past 74 years, and every year the *mūrtis* are made by the same family from the same village in the exact same fashion. Jalahasini's brother and male cousin are the heads of this household and preside over the ceremony, making sure everything is carried out properly and that the family jewelry, which has adorned Durgā for the better half of a century, is well kept. When we arrived, three priests were at work preparing for various parts of the *pūjā* in the courtyard as two or three older women helped, tying bundles of grass together. Due to traffic, we arrived slightly late, coming in just as the priest finished chanting a chapter. A woman stood at the side blowing a conch, her purple lipstick staining the white shell.

After this instance, the small crowd dispersed and only the older women were left. Joydita had as her goal to show me the house, complete with its colonial era furniture and decor,

60

presumably transported from the village. Her phone was out immediately; we needed to take pictures of her in each room of the house, me in each room of the house, her with the goddess, me with the goddess, both of us with the goddess, the goddess alone, and so on. We sat in a living room sipping chai as she showed me the hundreds of images she was getting from her medical school friends on WhatsApp as well as all the photos being shared on Facebook. We flipped through them and Joydita added more and more to her groups and chats. At one point, she became frustrated with her reception and frantically ran off to find out the WiFi password at her uncle's house, alleviating the woes of slow downloads. Though Joydita's behavior might sound extreme, her cousins were engaged in similar fits of technological expression. They debated whose phone camera was better and together snapped a continual array of photos.[28]

In March, I had seen an ad leftover from the previous Durgā Pūjā, offering a deal on a DSLR camera in time for the festival. I now understood that photography was more than a minor pastime when Durgā was concerned. Even Jalahasini wasn't immune; she sat with her siblings and cousins, but also took some pictures to share on Facebook. What should also be emphasized is that for most of the time that the *pūjā* itself was going on, most people were holed up in various rooms, chatting with each other, and not necessarily sitting for the *pūjā*. People would wander in and out of the ceremony itself, but there was no expectation that anyone other than the women helping needed to sit and watch. Of course, everyone would arrive for *āratī* and *puṣpāñjali*, but even during those moments they were taking pictures.

Jalahasini brought up the picture-taking with me after one of the *āratīs*; she said it hadn't always been like this, and that before, people would visit with each other more. Now, however, they want to put up pictures to share with relatives abroad. Once, Joydita had pointed out to

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[28] See Figures 3 & 4.

Jalahasini that a similarly-aged cousin had many pictures posted and Jalahasini had none. After this, Jalahasini began posting pictures. She mentioned this as a point of competition, but, indeed it is still a denotation of the importance of relationships; because her cousin shares photos, strengthening bonds with those abroad and those at home, Jalahasini must do so also, reciprocally. In fact, when I first met Jalahasini in April, she was compelled to immediately send me an artistic rendering of the goddess. I asked Jalahasini why it was so important to take pictures with the goddess, to which she replied: "She is the essence of everything; she's the reason we're all here." In other words, Durgā is a means to bring them all together as well as an end in and of herself. Though she is important, it is also the way in which she is operationalized— in pictures— which creates a familial bond. Perhaps succinctly put: "each photo reflects not just the present of a moment frozen, but the past and future as well— the past and present are inseparable components of the future," particularly dictating the scope of a given relationship and where it will go (Weiser 1988; 246). Analogous to her journey home, Durgā travels in images across thousands of miles, serving as an excuse for and means towards strengthening bonds and for relationship—building. Despite distance, everyone is spending quality time with the same friend and family member: Durgā. Thus, it's as if they are spending time together.

While Appadurai and Breckenridge (1989) argue that transmission of media can create disjuncture in diaspora communities— in so far as the images of one's "home" compete with one's imagination of that home— and though Spivak claims that "microelectronic transnationalism" highlights difference (1989), it is my contention that these images of Durgā do exactly the opposite. Instead of bifurcating these two frequently amalgamated communities— those in the U.S. and those in India— images of Durgā serve as a reminder that the goddess is

with all of them and that everyone is celebrating at the same time. The celebrations might be different, but they are linked, and, in the process, articulate individuals to each other. With more frequent trips to India and the increased ease of communication, it is possible to create the perception that there is less and less of a stark distinction between Bengali Hindus in Kolkata and their relatives abroad; instead, these images contend that they are all merely Hindus, some of whom are away from their birthplaces. One does not necessarily need to construct a Hindu identity via message boards online (Rai 1995), but one can now communicate with one's relatives, separating less to begin with. In fact, these communications may be constructive of and contribute to community building requisite to sustain what I will later expound as a Hindu way of life.

To this extent, while migrants do maintain a dual frame of reference, continually comparing "home" to where they currently reside (Guarnizo 1997; Vertovec 2004), and though pictures of Durgā emphasize differences, perhaps, the emphasis of sending these images is less on comparison than it is on connection. One sends in order to show relatives what he or she is experiencing and not solely to receive pictures in kind. This emphasis arcs back to alternative understandings of *darśan*; the goal is to be seen, not to do the seeing, and by sending photos to be seen, one sees oneself in the same manner— as connecting with the goddess. As such, this constitutes transnationalism from below: everyday people are the agents of connecting two separate territories (Guarnizo and Smith 1998), rather than some overarching global organization, such as a financial institution. This intention to connect themselves labels Bengali Hindus in America as transnational: a group that neither intends to return home, nor wishes to sever connections with relatives (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Glick Schiller 2003). This identity— as a transmigrant, rather than an "Indian" or an "American," can be situated as a mode of

63

consciousness (Vertovec 1999); one's self is no longer bounded by a nation-state, but, rather, is substantiated by the movement itself. To this extent, South Asians in America are often seen to constitute a cosmopolitanism, occupying "in-between spaces of identity, culture, and communication" (Rajan and Sharma 2006, 3). However, the efficacy of maintaining these in-between spaces motivates interrogation of what it really means to be in-between, and how much on one side one must fall in order to reside squarely in the middle; such issues are often brought into focus by the second generation, as will be highlighted in following chapters.

Anthropological research on migration has frequently focused on networks and how the people a migrant knows in a new location might affect his or her decisions about whether to make the journey, to stay, or to leave (Brettell 2008; Wilson 2009), but the structure of these familial networks has significantly changed, largely due to technological advancements and newfound ease of communication. Family and kinship ties have moved from a local level to a global one, and, moreover, that which is "home," broadly linked to family or community (Al-Ali and Koser, 2001), has become fuzzier. When Durgā travels home, when Bengalis celebrate her homecoming, some are celebrating her homecoming to a place like New Jersey. In so far as Durgā is there, and in so far as she is family, New Jersey can be reified as home. Durgā is neither Indian nor American; she herself is global and even universal.

Luhrmann (2012) describes how Christians in northern California attempt to cultivate a relationship with God in order for God to be present in their lives; such cultivation is hard work. For Hindus in the U.S. and in Kolkata, the goddess Durgā is present because she is physically present, but, more specifically, because Hindus consider her to be physically present. In other words, she is there because she is cognized to be present, in all locations celebrating Durgā Pūjā simultaneously; this notion of attention as dictating the presence of the god or goddess is a theme

64

that runs throughout this dissertation. A relationship with the goddess exists in so far as one is aware of the goddess' presence; while one must work at that, the relationship itself is automatic, as it would be with a family member.[29] Pictures with the goddess denote and document her presence, like thought discussions with God denote God's presence for Luhrmann's Christians. However, Durgā leaves physical (or digital) remnants of her journey, such that all who see these images may continue to rejoice in the goddesses' visit and to reignite the relationship at will. The relationship is built into Durgā herself.

Days at Jalahasini's *pūjā* melded together more than they did in NJ; though the same acts were performed, the emphasis was on familiality.[30] On *saptamī* in particular, friends of Joydita's and Jalahasini's arrived just in time for the *prasād* lunch, saying a *praṇām* to the goddess and snapping a few photos, but otherwise disengaged from the *pūjā* itself. The family would always come down when they heard the drum beats signaling *āratī* and *puṣpāñjali*, but otherwise, they visited with each other and with their guests.

On the last day, a combination of *navamī* and *daśamī*, Arundhati, Mira (my hosts), and I arrived attired in saris, awaiting the application of the vermillion. Here, too, each woman was smeared with vermillion, and so were the little girls. Afterwards, however, each woman of the house was allowed to offer her own *pūjā* to the goddess and her companions. Notably, this is a point at which the goddess has technically departed; she is no longer in the *mūrti*, and the priest is gone. However, so long as the women perceived Durgā to be there, she was; a visual

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[29] At least, this automation is the expectation in India. Perhaps such an understanding is not the same for Christians in California, possibly illustrating the ways in which relationships with a god might mirror relationships with those close to us, building upon cultural dictates.

[30] This is not to say that Jalahasini's family did not know what was going on each day of Durgā Pūjā. Quite to the contrary, they were each incredibly informed about the ritual and what was going to take place when and how it would occur.

documentation of their relationships with her. We sat in chairs in the courtyard for hours as children ran around and as each woman of the household made offerings to the goddess departed, perhaps wishing her safe travels.

Durgā Pūjā at Night

Early one morning as I was leaving for Jalahasini's, Mira's cousin asked where I was headed and I replied that I was going to a *pūjā*. He asked me, wait, why are you going right now? Confused, I explained that this was the astrological time for the *pūjā* to occur, in the morning. Seemingly satisfied, he let me leave. This was the first instance in which I began to understand that what I thought of as *pūjā* was not what most Kolkatans think of as *pūjā*, at least not at this particular time of year. When I referred to *pūjā*, I meant the particular ritual to the goddess. When they said *pūjā*, what they meant was *paṇḍāl* hopping.

Paṇḍāl hopping is what occurs late at night during Durgā Pūjā, when young and old roam around the city to see the goddess in her many forms, where she sits atop erected *paṇḍāls*, platforms, all over the city. It is a spectacle to behold, displaying incredible craftsmanship and precision. On the three or four nights that I went *paṇḍāl* hopping, the emphasis was, again, on taking pictures with the goddess, later sharing the images in our group WhatsApp chat.[31] Some of this photo taking can be attributed to appreciation of the artistry that went into these *paṇḍāls*, but additionally, there is still an emphasis on taking pictures with the goddess and sharing them.

Because *paṇḍāl* hopping takes place late at night and the more traditional *pūjā* takes place early in the morning, not everyone attends both in one day or at all. Indeed, many of my friends and interviewees saw *paṇḍāl* hopping as a must, but didn't see it as necessary to attend

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[31] See Figures 5, 6, and 7.

the specific ritual of the festival. This echoes a conclusion from many of my interviews in India: the *pūjā* ritual itself needs to be performed by someone, but not necessarily by everyone. To this end, celebration of the festival often became equated with taking pictures at *paṇḍāls*, or as many people I knew would call them, "*pūjās*."

While this is not technically incorrect— each *paṇḍāl* did have its own *pūjā* in the mornings and evenings— there is a confluence here of the ritual with the social act of communing with the goddess and each other. Similar to the two stories outlined above, in this instance, there are two parallel tracks not only for the narrative of Durgā Pūjā, but also for the requisite actions to be taken at this particular time. While there is significant tension at play in the American celebration of Durgā Pūjā as people subtly and subconsciously attempt to figure out which competing narrative is more important, in India, the two meld seamlessly, to the point of being referred to by the same word. In other words, being in the presence of the goddess can be seen to stand in for the performance of the ritual itself, so long as someone, somewhere was performing the ritual. Though there are separate actions taken by different groups of people, the actions and the celebration are not seen as separate, but rather, are simply interpreted as ways to celebrate the goddess and each other, constructing and maintaining relationships with the goddess and each other where appropriate. In India, *pūjā* is something to be completed, and individuals focus on the ritual and the goddess when they see fit; attention is not necessarily required, but is attributed by each person individually. In this case, taking the goddess as relative, venerating her, and sharing her image substantiate a connection to her.

There are obviously geographical limits to the American celebration of Durgā Pūjā: there are no *paṇḍāls*, and, thus, all celebration of the goddess must occur at once and is significantly focused on the part which must be performed: the *pūjā* honoring the goddess for killing the

demon Mahiṣāsur. The main days of the *pūjā* are also often celebrated on the weekend, when people can actually attend. Without a majority community and an inundating atmosphere full of Durgās, it is difficult to accomplish both ritual action and social interaction in a way such that the two do not potentially compete, and, unlike in India, the goddess is present so rarely that it seems imperative to give her your full attention. However, merely the fact that there is a narrative of competition at all— perhaps as evidenced by signs in the temple prohibiting phones— indicates a more widespread uneasiness regarding what exactly is important during Durgā Pūjā: engaging with the goddess as vanquisher of evil, as someone to be directly worshipped, or as a daughter come home whose presence allows one to connect with flesh and blood relatives. Such anxieties might belie feelings of living in a foreign place, not necessarily celebrating the festival as it is traditionally celebrated, but also, the distinct need to connect with a homeland and with people in that homeland.

In India, these tensions are far removed. For many, the *pūjā* itself is perhaps something to be accomplished rather than something which must command one's concentration. It is visiting with family and visiting with the goddess through imagery that propels the festival. The economy of images, which Joydita exemplifies, and wherein demand is never satiated nor supply diminished, perhaps opposes Durgā's eventual resting place under water. Though the *mūrti* is temporary, though Durgā's visit is only for a short while before she is immersed, digital images of Durgā as family member and cause for celebration can live on in phones and on the internet. Memories and relationships are instantiated because of the goddess, but also with the goddess. It is this distinction that differentiates sharing of photos of events for some other reason: to share photos of Durgā is to illustrate who exactly is important to you as determined by who you are standing with, but also by whom you choose to share with. To whom do you illustrate your

position as a relation of the goddess? Joydita, for example, had just begun medical school and was sharing photos with her friends as a means of building bonds— something she explicitly stated and which was verified by the number of her medical school friends who arrived to visit. The pictures themselves are important, but it is the sending of the pictures, the traveling of Durgā, which connects sender and recipient; it's as if illustrating that they have a mutual friend. As if to emphasize this point more broadly, nearly every person I interviewed in India took a picture with me, "so that we can remember this moment," thus creating a bond beyond the duration of our chat.

Through the sending of digital pictures, Bengali Hindus in America and in India can be connected in ways never previously possible. Relationships are more easily solidified and more permanent due to visual and retrievable evidence of their existence. This is not unlike the moment in which I met Soma's family in India and she asked her niece to send pictures of all of us to their family WhatsApp chat. When Soma visited Kolkata, shortly after I had left, I received picture after picture of all of them together from the same niece. Certainly a great deal of this goes on overall, but there is no question that the volume of images of Durgā is simply massive, and that the goddess, the "reason we're all here," as Jalahasini noted, is the inspiration for this particular instance of collapsing space and joining together; like Soma, she is a daughter journeyed home. Durgā, who was previously impermanent, finding herself immersed each year, now lives on as another member of the family, found in family photos, a person in common among all. Something similar could be said of those who have come to America: though they have left, Durgā is a means to and excuse for their digital homecoming.

Figure 1: Durgā Pūjā in NJ
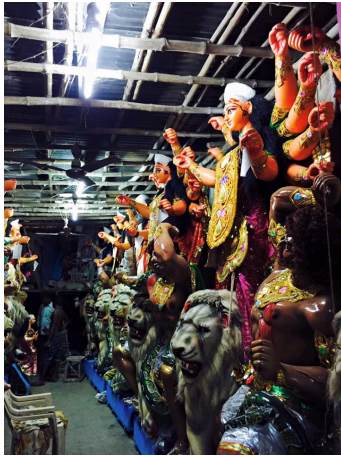
Figure 2: Several Durgās at Kumortuli waiting to be sold

Figure 3: One woman photographing another woman performing *pūjā* at Jalahasini's house on the last day of the festival

Figure 4: Photographing Durgā at Jalahasini's house
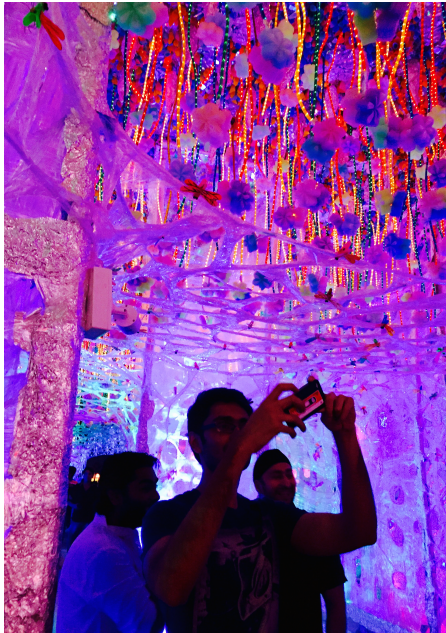
Figure 5: One friend photographing another at a *paṇḍāl* in Kolkata

Figure 6: Friends posing with Durgā in the background at a *paṇḍāl* in Kolkata

Figure 7: A friend insisted taking a photo of me posing with Durgā at a *paṇḍāl* in Kolkata

Chapter 2: How to do *Pūjā* and Home Hierophanies— Or Not

The first chapter of this dissertation emphasized the ways in which Bengalis in India and in the U.S. contend with understanding the deity as relation and friend, as well as the tension potentially present within this understanding. This chapter attempts to show that the relationship with the deity, demonstrated above, is a mundane one and is, more broadly, built into the ways that individuals engage with others. To this end, the deity is not some unknown great power, but, often, is someone hierarchically above, but not different from, humans; another family member. Thus, this chapter begins to tease out how something an observer might see as irrational— a physical deity— is actually ingrained in daily life and instantiated within a previously established hierarchical structure. In doing so, by looking at how individuals engage with pūjā *on a daily basis, I examine how and to what extent this relational schema is ingrained for each subgroup and how it came to be so.*

To study what occurs in the home is to emblazon the everyday, and is also to recognize that, to some extent, each moment is constitutive of one's ultimate experience and perception thereof. Moreover, such everyday occurrences serve to demonstrate and explain how an individual may perform religiosity when no one is looking— outside of a social gaze. Examining *pūjā* at home allows one to isolate the relationship between the individual and the deity rather than seeing this relationship alongside broader social obligations and connections as was the case during Durgā Pūjā, and in service of later understanding the individual's particular relationship with a god through the context of other relationships.

There has been a multitude of research on public *pūjās* and festivals like those described in the previous chapter; indeed, this work constitutes most of the anthropological literature on Hindu ritual. Scholars of Hindu home ritual have made the argument that this is likely because of researchers' Euro-American bias to document the public and the visible as a result of the congregational nature of religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2003, 144; Michaelson 1987, 48). However, I would argue that many adherents of

these traditions have equally rich religious home lives as do Hindus, and, moreover, individual

prayer is often emphasized within these traditions, insinuating a more private complement to

match the public one— though the two are, notably, separate. Why, then, has study of the home

in Hinduism been neglected?

In this case, the simplest answer is likely the accurate one: it's very difficult to enter

someone's home and to get a full view of his or her religious life. Moreover, the trend of

research related to ritual has often been focused on the social and outer rather than on the

personal and inner, unnecessarily bifurcating those two, assuming that both are not perpetually

present on a merged continuum and in different manifestations. Literature on the subject has

thrived on examining power and on watching religious officials as they mediate religiosity as

practiced without noting how less obviously mediated religious attitudes manifest and portend.

Home *pūjā* is largely unmediated by an additional human agent, but is also socializing, as

children learn from parents and develop inner lives (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2003, 144). To

this end, the devotees within a familial group all become mediators and familial cultures are

established, bringing the unit of analysis to the individual within a family rather than to the

individual as part of the community, or rather, than the community *en masse*. As Ganapathy-

Coleman (2014, 128) states while explaining how important the domestic space is for young

Hindus in their Hindu education:

> Socialisation into Hinduism occurs mostly at home and in informal social settings in the predominantly Hindu religious context of India. The domestic setting loses none of its significance as the locus for religious socialisation in the U.S.A. In fact, I would argue that the domestic space gains strength as a deeply private sacred space in a Western ethos, a sanctuary where religion is inculcated through routine, ritual and direct teaching.

Ganapathy-Coleman goes on to note that Hindu parents in the diaspora intentionally make their

homes into explicitly Hindu spaces so as to promote the social learning of Hinduism.

Ultimately, however, to separate the public from the private (and familial) is to some extent a false dichotomy, and one which the course of research on this topic has played into; though the circumstances change, the person in each circumstance, while she might behave differently in a specific instance, likely maintains similar attitudes and predispositions, or schemas, throughout,[32] including the way in which she mentally constructs a relationship with a deity, or the extent to which a relationship with a deity is already implicit. As Michaelson states, in the Hindu context, the conceptual (rather than practical) distinction between public and private worship does not entirely apply (1987, 48). The Hindu home, much like the rest of the world, is the abode of god (Michaelson 1987, 40), wherever god chooses to reside, and, to that extent, god is equally sacred and mundane, and is equally likely to be in one place as in another. Durgā Pūjā, as described in the previous chapter, elucidates particular nuances of behavior, and uncovers the societal and cultural tensions resulting from the ways in which people think about, conceptualize, and construct the performance of Hinduism. However, it is a deep dive into the ways in which people actually practice at home that puts those tensions into additional perspective, allowing for an explanation of what is important to a particular devotee when left to his own devices, and further informing the actions of that devotee within the scope of more easily observable ritual. To this end, the prior examination of Durgā Pūjā is contiguous with this examination of private and familial *pūjā*.

Though Eliade (1987), himself discussing Hinduism, posited the idea of a hierophany— a breakthrough of the sacred into the world of the profane— for the Hindu Bengalis I interviewed, the sharp distinction between sacred and profane is mollified. Like the distinction between public and private, which implies two starkly different modes of existing and behaving, the distinction

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[32] Given that personality structures are relatively stable, and attitudes might vary over time.

of sacred and profane proves to be blurred in order to allow for the relationality of the deity— or

the other way around— and for the ways in which devotees would like to engage him or her. In

other words, it is this relationship which transcends immediate context, ultimately specifying a

particular way of viewing and engaging with the world at large.[33]

This chapter begins with a discussion of what exactly *pūjā* is, how it is theorized, and

how that theorization plays out contemporarily. Thus, it will be possible to discern the ways in

which home *pūjā* germinates from the same concepts as were discussed in the previous chapter

with regard to a public *pūjā*. Following that, this chapter analyses and attempts to make sense of

the ways in which each particular demographic group interviewed envisages what they do in

relation to the deity. Though the analyses in the two chapters following this one are relevant

primarily for those who perform *pūjā* regularly, it is necessary to first familiarize the reader with

the particular differences between groups.

What is *Pūjā*?

In her exhaustive study of *pūjā*, Gudrun Bühnemann (1988) details exactly what a *pūjā*

should include, drawing on Sanskrit texts which she specifies as follows: First, normative texts,

largely drawn from the *purānas*[34] which are drawing on *dharmaśāstra*[35] literature; second, a

different set of normative texts which consist of manuals compiled for practical use; and third,

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[33] In a private communication, Richard Shweder posed the question of whether sacred or profane reigns when the distinction is mollified. Does all become somewhat sacred or does all become somewhat profane? In this circumstance, I would argue that the mollification of this distinction leads to a world infused with sacredness, and wherein public performance is influenced profoundly by private devotion, though these connections might be difficult to observe in public contexts due to other situational influences.
[34] *Purāna* literally means old, but *purānas* are mythological texts written in Sanskrit which are often considered to be historical.
[35] *Dharmaśastra* is a genre of Sanskrit literature detailing matters of righteousness and ethics.

literary texts and historical documents describing *pūjās*. While many texts discuss *pūjā* to specific gods or goddesses, there are many elements, described below, which are or can be common to most *pūjās* regardless of the deity. Moreover, it should be noted that Bühnemann details something which might be closer to a strictly textually-based public village or temple *pūjā*, given that there are no hard and fast requirements or guidelines for a home *pūjā*, though there are certain normative particulars which circulate in communities (Sinha 2011, 99). Given this, home *pūjās* do largely follow the script of what Bühnemann describes, though with variation, as discussed below.

Bühnemann explains that *pūjā* is traditionally divided into three kinds: daily and regular (*nitya*), occasional (*naimittika*), and optional (*kāmya*). Traditionally, daily *pūjā* should be performed three times a day: in the morning, at noon, and at night. If one does not have time for three full *pūjās,* the morning should be more elaborate because this is a suitable time for rites to the gods.

Only men in the upper three castes are authorized to use mantras from the Vedas, but women and other men may perform *pūjā* by reciting mantras from the *purāṇas* or may do so silently. According to common practice, usually the most senior member of a joint family[36] performs *pūjā* for everyone and other family members only bow down and offer flowers, and thus, home *pūjā* is traditionally a family rite and not necessarily a personal rite. Other sources state that *pūjā* should be performed separately by everyone. On many occasions, a priest will be welcomed into the house to supervise and help perform the *pūjā,* and, in a temple, a priest is always present.

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[36] A joint family is two or more nuclear families joined patrilineally (Shah 1973, 109). These families may live together, but might also be joint by property, worship, or other activities (O'Malley 1975, 121-126).

One should fast prior to morning *pūjā* with the exception of fruits, betel, and chai. Next, the devotee takes a bath and puts on clean clothes which are reserved for *pūjā* and not worn outside and which have to be washed by oneself or by a brahmin each time they have been worn (if they are cotton; silk is exempt). This clothing must be folded a certain way. Women wear a nose ring and a sari.

The area for *pūjā* must be purified by cleaning the ground and the worshipper's seat is set up such that it faces east or north. The *mūrti* and *pūjā* utensils are never placed directly on the ground. The worshipper then affixes a *tilak* on his forehead, indicating his caste and sect, and bows to any elder family members present.

First, the devotee takes a sip of water in order to purify himself and then he practices breathing and chants various mantras. Then he chants prayers to designate which deity he hopes to invoke and then he declares the place, time, and aim of the ritual, a process which is called *saṃkalpa*. While this formula for daily and occasional *pūjās* is set, and is generally a wish for wellbeing, the formula for optional *pūjās* is different because they are performed in order to achieve a specific aim. Next, the devotee recites prayers associated with taking a seat and sanctifies the utensils he will use. He purifies and rings the bell with a prayer, uses a flower or grass to sprinkle water on the utensils and himself, and then offers flowers. Following this are a number of *upacāras*, services.

Different *pūjās* have different numbers of *upacāras*, but *pūjās* usually include five or sixteen *upacāras*. Though the number stays the same, which *upacāras* and in which order is always varied and sources rarely agree; the differences largely revolve around the *upacāras* after bathing the deity. I will now detail some common *upacāras*, each of which is accompanied by a mantra. First, the deity is invoked into the *mūrti*. In some cases, one does not invoke the god

78

because the god has been in the *mūrti* since its creation. The deity is then offered a seat and its

feet are washed. The devotee then offers the deity water mixed with sandalwood paste and other

ingredients and then pours it out. After this, the devotee sips the water. The deity is bathed in

water, milk, curd, ghee, honey and sugar, and sandalwood paste. After each bath, the *mūrti* is

washed with water. Next, the deity is offered sandalwood paste, broken rice, flowers, leaves,

incense, a lamp, and food. This often concludes the portion of the *pūjā* which is completed daily.

On special occasions or when one has more time, one resumes by giving the deity another

bath. Upper and lower garments are offered to the deity. While in some cases one offers a piece

of fabric or a sari, in other cases one dresses the deity. The devotee puts the sacred thread worn

by brahmins on the male deity. To female deities, the devotee offers turmeric, collyrium,

vermillion, etc. Perfumes are offered to the deity, as is sandalwood paste. One then offers

unbroken rice, followed by fresh flowers. The devotee then waves incense in front of the deity

and moves a lamp clockwise in front of the *mūrti* accompanied by a ringing bell. The devotee

offers food, betel, and fruit, such as a coconut. Sometimes one gives money to the deity. The

lamp is again waved clockwise in front of the deity. The devotee prostrates himself or herself.

The devotee circumambulates the *mūrti*. The devotee offers unbroken rice and flowers.

At the end of every *pūjā*, one recites a prayer for forgiveness for any offenses

unknowingly committed during the *pūjā*, often listing the offenses themselves. Most revolve

around purity, and a few examples are: going near the icon without having cleaned one's teeth,

touching the icon after sex and prior to bathing, worshipping after touching a dead body,

touching the icon after touching a menstruating woman, adding irrelevant mantras or talking

during worship, wearing blue, black, or red while near the icon, wearing an unwashed garment

during worship, going near the icon after eating various types of meat, going near an icon after

drinking alcohol, and going near the icon while wearing shoes. Punishments include being

reborn as an animal or spending time in hell. After the *pūjā*, the worshipper takes the flowers,

food, and water blessed by the god and consumes them or adorns himself or herself with them.

It is important to emphasize that *pūjās* may or may not include all or most of these

elements and that it is common to adjust what one does given one's resources, so long as the

number of *upacāras* remains auspicious. Moreover, even if a devotee does not perform an entire

pūjā, he or she will often stop by a temple or roadside shrine to salute a god or goddess.

A Typical Home Pūjā

To reiterate, norms for what a home *pūjā* should look like, or even exactly how a home

shrine should be set up, are far from codified (Sinha 2011, 99, 76). The initial texts stipulating

regulations are the *Gṛha Sūtras*, dating to 600 BCE, but these are largely esoteric documents and

are not referred to by your average practitioner. The *bhakti*, or devotional, movement, which has

its origins in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* and which came to maturity in the fifth or sixth

centuries, marks the beginning of conceptualizing god in personal terms, as is a hallmark of *pūjā*,

rather than in more impersonal terms, as was standard in *yajña*, ancient Vedic fire rituals (Sinha

2011, 74-76). This shift was an emotional one, and the resulting ritual made use of individuals'

feelings (von Stietencron 2007, 56). The construction of *mūrtis* and processes for installing them

are detailed in the *Śilpa Sutras*, but there is a significant amount of creativity involved in their

creation beyond certain standard components (Sinha 2011, 110).[37] Which deities are represented

is also a matter of personal preference and familial lineage; some families have particular deities

they deem to be important or will pass down *mūrtis* through generations. Often, a home *pūjā* area

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[37] More will be said about *mūrtis* in the fourth chapter.

will be comprised of a family deity (*kuladevatā*) which is passed down patrilineally, a caste or village deity, and one or more personal deity (*iṣṭadevatā*) (Flueckiger 2015, 36).

Though there are stipulations for where the *pūjā* site should be in a home— such as that it should not be near a bathroom, a non-veg kitchen, garbage, or any heavily trafficked hallway— there are significant adaptations (Sinha 2011, 76; Jhala 2000, 118-20), and devotees don't always know all of these restrictions. Sometime particular restrictions become emphasized because of a *pūjā*-doer's individual preference; some stipulations are more salient than others (Fluekiger 2015). By and large, Hindus do what their parents have done, or what they have space for, meaning that one's deities could reside in a bedroom, on a shelf, or even in a separate room devoted specifically to them. What is consistent is that the *pūjā* space is set off from the main area, so as to minimize pollution (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2003, 147; Sahey 2010, 43).[38] One other consistent element is that a *pūjā* space is customized, housing what a particular family or individual deems sacred (e.g. texts, lamps, bells); the *maṇḍap*, the platform, is kept incredibly clean; and utensils used in *pūjā* (e.g. cleaning cloths, incense, plates, candles) are stored separately and used expressly for *pūjā*. Despite variation, Sinha (2011, 27) notes that worship at a family altar remains the core of Hindu religiosity in the diaspora. As Prorok asserts, "home is where the gods live," (2015, 1942).

In practice at home, Hindus tend to perform some version of what Bühnemann has detailed, though likely a significantly simplified version. Bühnemann speaks of an ideal and without ethnographic evidence; in fact, most home *pūjās* are significantly less involved due to

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[38] Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1994) explain the hierarchy of sacred spaces in the Hindu home, with each categories' items in descending order from more sacred to less sacred: 1. sacred: *pūjā* room, kitchen, threshold; 2. semi-sacred: pantry, hallway near the *pūjā* room; 3. neutral spaces: reception rooms, front verandah, bedrooms; 4. profane: bathing area (separate from toilet), birthing room, menstruation room, latrine (toilet), garbage-holding areas.

lack of time and purity or work restrictions (Michaelson 1987, 40), also affecting who exactly

tends to the *pūjā* space, and often, *pūjā* is reduced to a small *āratī* and lighting incense (Sinha

2011, 101-2). Fuller (1992, 68), even states that the *āratī*, using a camphor flame, is synecdoche

for *pūjā* as a whole thus explaining why these components might be emphasized. Traditionally,

the household *pūjā* has been the woman's domain, taking on and then passing down these

customs to her daughter(s)-in-law (Fruzetti 1992, 9), praying primarily for women's issues, such

as fertility and marriage (Davis 1997, 49; Lopez 1995), and learning about what each god

particularly likes, forming relationships (Ghosh et al. 1995). Building on this, Naryanan (1996)

asserts that, due to templeization in the diaspora, in which temples become important sites for

rituals previously held at home and for festivals, there is a shift in authority from women and

mothers to men and priests.

While these assertions and Bühnemann's description both illustrate a particular type of

pūjā, perhaps an idealized one, my fieldwork shows that such stipulations are not always

practiced as such. For example, among my interviewees, women were slightly more likely to

take responsibility for the family *pūjā,* but a significant subset of men also did so. This is, of

course, more prominent in the diaspora where women often have jobs and thus, *pūjā*-doing must

become more egalitarian (Lorenço and Cachado 2012). Moreover, chanting of mantras was not

at all consistent, nor was the number or extent of the *upacāras* conducted. A better model of

what was observed is portrayed by Jhala's (2000) ethnography of home *pūjā* in Bengal. Jhala

puts forward four modes of *pūjā*, in which the *upacāras* are all contained: first is *sevā*, giving

service to the god, such as anointing or feeding him or her. This mode is also characterized by

bantering with the deity, talking about one's family, and affectionately teasing the deity, "similar

to banter between the worshipper being mother and the deities being children." Second is *darśan*,

seeing the deity and being seen, as has been discussed. Third is *smāraṇ*, contemplating and venerating the deity, and fourth is *dhyān samādhi*, in which "the individual seeks identification and unity with the deity addressed," (118-120). Most of what interviewees discussed fits into one or more of these four categories, with some interviewees executing only one, and some executing all four.

The more someone extols the deity, the more that person emphasizes the deity as above him or her, denoting a given hierarchy, as Fuller describes (1992, 82). Fuller additionally notes eating *prasād* as ingesting something godly, and, thus, becoming imbued with divinity while recognizing the god's authority (74). Similarly, Babb (1981) describes *darśan* as an opportunity for self-transformation in so far as the individual feels powerful in the presence of the deity. To this end, this is an opportunity for the individual to reflect on him or herself (388). While these interpretations are undoubtedly relevant during household *pūjā*, they underestimate and/or obfuscate the extent to which devotees might perceive the deity as friend and relative in a practical and conceptual as well as executional way, and perhaps as a friend and relative situated within that hierarchy. Prorok (2015) notes that one's home, where one also removes shoes, is like another form of a temple and, to that extent, there is a conflation of the two, in addition to a conflation of the deity as person who resides in the home, or as a family member for all intents and purposes. Indeed, the deities have a home within a home: the *maṇḍap*, within the *pūjā* area, is shaped like a house, with a roof, and often with a light that is perpetually on so that the god can see (Lorenço and Cachado 2012, 41-2). Therefore, to offer *prasād* and only then to consume food oneself is more akin to feeding a child or a respected elder first than it is to necessarily

ingesting divinity.[39] To this end, it is possible that previous research has interpreted broadly

Indian hierarchical structures as pertaining primarily to divinity when, in fact, these structures

are applied to the god secondarily or iteratively, relating the god to mundane, though

hierarchical, familial relationships instead of highlighting individuals as striving for divinity.

Employing this different lens does not alter what is occurring, but, instead, could have significant

repercussions for how we make sense of those occurrences.

Though scholars have long recognized that Hindus characterize deities as family

members, the implications of this go unacknowledged: for many devotees, the deity is less sacred

and more mundane (while still "above"), to the extent that this division is even applicable. As

Eck (1981, 69) notes, *pūjā* is more about human ideas of what gods need rather than a response

to the god's necessity, a statement which corresponds to the frame of reference with which

devotees approach the god: as a person, the most frequently executed way we know. To this

extent, "pūjā makes the worshipper more aware of the networks of interdependence, to

appreciate the relativity of relationships and to acquire appropriate conduct required to maintain

these realizations," (Jhala 2000, 122) letting the worshipper engage with the deity in a relational

way, through a relational means, and, potentially, with a relational end. Thus, as Courtright

(1985, 33) suggests, performing *pūjā* is an embodiment and establishment of a particular reality

and relationship with a deity, but, as I would add, said reality is not necessarily so distinct or set

apart in the way that it has been previously theorized.

Bengali Hindu Adults in Kolkata

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[39] A speculative point: Catholicism is certainly prominent in India; one might wonder to what extent
eating *prasād* was intentionally construed as something like eating a communion wafer in order to
contextualize the practice for foreigners.

Obligation

While Hindu adults in Kolkata certainly mentioned praying as a direct conversation with the god, *pūjā* itself, the act of coming in contact with a *mūrti*, took precedence. Unlike in America, or among younger Indian Hindus, adults in Kolkata insisted that *pūjā* needs to be performed daily if not twice a day: "We believe god is there. There's no doubt about it. And that's it, it should be done. We know god is there. Otherwise, we won't do it. And since god is there, you have to do it." This notion pervades: that if a household keeps *mūrtis*, someone should be performing *pūjā*, and that *pūjā* should be done in front of the deity twice a day, once in morning and once later:

> "First I clean all the images, because dust creates every day, basically the dusting has to be done, so I wipe the photos, and I clean the surrounding areas... I do the beautification of the god and goddesses with flowers. Basically, after bathing the beautification comes. And now the whole *pūjā* room is clean and tidy with fresh water. And I have to sprinkle the holy water of Ganges. Then I cut all the fruit and offer the pieces to the gods. In our *pūjā* room, the god sleeps twice a day. Once, after the offering, our ritual is to shut the *pūjā* room in the morning. The reason behind shutting the door, you have to understand this, after we're offering the fruits and sweets to the gods and goddesses, we have to shut the door. The reason behind that is that when the gods and goddesses have their visual effect, have their impact on the food, nobody can see, so the doors have to be shut. In temples also. So, while the gods and goddesses take the food, we human beings can't see. It's not in our ritual.[40] You shut the door of the temple and here also we shut the door of the *pūjā* room, and maybe after five, ten minutes we open it. After opening it, now at twelve, the god has to sleep. So, we switch off all the light and the god takes rest. So actually at 3 PM in the afternoon, I open the curtain and the god is visible to all of us. And in the evening again, like 6 PM, again I show the candle and incense sticks and I do the *pūjā* and later, half an hour later, we shut the door for the night."

Though this is a particularly elaborate process of daily *pūjā*, most families will do a more formal offering in the morning and will at least light incense in the evening, saying a few mantras as well.

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[40] This is similar to when the women of the family eat separately from the men, because the men are perceived as hierarchically higher. Though this practice is less prevalent in cities today, its ethos is still seen in this interaction with the deity. See Mandelbaum (1991) for a full discussion of these familial roles.

However, it is not the case that everyone has to perform *pūjā*, nor is it the case that anyone can just do it when he or she pleases; at times, the gods are asleep. Rather, it is necessary to regularly perform *pūjā*, usually on a daily basis, and one person is usually responsible for making sure this occurs. In some cases, an older woman will perform *pūjā* for the entire joint family, but, in others, each nuclear family has a *pūjā* performer. Within this group, these *pūjā* performers are often women, likely because, traditionally, they kept the home. Men, indeed, feel less of an obligation to perform daily *pūjā* themselves, though most often do feel as if it should be performed.

Though the tacitly accepted rule is that women do *pūjā*, deviations from this norm offer insight into how these gender roles interact with the obligation to perform the *pūjā*. Jalahasini's grandfather was president of the Theosophical Society[41] in Calcutta, indicating that she perhaps grew up in a family less inclined towards ritual. Accordingly, though her family hosts Durgā Pūjā annually, she sees no reason to perform *pūjā* on a daily basis.[42] Instead, she prays on her own, without a *mūrti*. Jalahasini is certainly the exception among Bengali Hindu adults; nearly everyone I spoke to was highly inclined to do *pūjā* in front of a *mūrti* if he or she were performing *pūjā* at all. When she was young, Jalahasini had an arranged marriage, and her husband-to-be assumed she was particularly inclined to do *pūjā* because of the fact that her family hosts Durgā Pūjā. Once they married, he was sorely disappointed, resulting in significant marital discord: he wanted Jalahasini to perform *pūjā* on a daily basis and she was disinclined to do so. Despite the fact that Jalahasini's husband's relatives were continually performing *pūjā*

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[41]The Theosophical Society is an organization which emphasizes philosophical renderings of religions over any type of action.

[42] Hosting Durgā Pūjā might be more a sign of a familial history as *zamindars* rather than of any predilection towards performance.

upstairs, he felt the need to have a *pūjā* room particularly for their nuclear family, but also had no urge to tend to it. Since Jalahasini refused to do *pūjā*, someone had to, and so he became the primary *pūjā*-doer in the family, going through the actions every day when he couldn't foist the responsibility onto their daughter, Joydita, which, as it turned out, was the vast majority of days since she spent long hours in school and at tutoring sessions. As one interviewee stated, "Every house should have a *pūjā*-doer, and it's that you have to have some kind of worship... to give them some *prasād* and offering, basically. It's not the elaborate thing it was with a lot of mantras and this and that, nothing like that." However, when members of the family are otherwise preoccupied, it sometimes becomes difficult to designate such a person.

Sometimes, though, this designation is easy: the obligation of *pūjā* is often passed down along matrilineal lines, as attested by this daughter-in-law:

> Like when I was very young, I never used to do anything, frankly speaking, but ok, once you grow old, it is likely, maybe you feel there is some spiritual thing where, you know, you should kind of continue, and then my mother-in-law... was into *pūjās* and all of that, so there was a lot of *mūrtis* and idols, so you feel that ok, she used to give some time to them, so I should also, so it's more of a duty and, you give something to the fact that ok, some time of day you should thank god for something... It started off as a duty, but now it's become more of a regular habit like brushing your teeth, like something that you do in the morning before you leave. After your bath and all you just do a little *pūjā* and then start your day.

Pūjā is just a necessary part of life for at least one member of the family and the responsibility is passed down through generations. This passing down ties into the obligation of families to have sons, such that a new daughter will come into the house. However, as times are changing and as younger Indians are living on their own, these structures are altering and in many cases, there isn't an obvious person who should take responsibility for *pūjā* performance, but the family still houses *mūrtis* it has had for years.

87

This notion that someone should perform *pūjā* extends even further, such that if no family member can reasonably be present to perform the *pūjā*, "You have *pūjā* room, somebody should pray. You don't have time, so you have a brahmin,[43] pay him monthly salary, and he'll do it for you." Many people do in fact hire brahmins to perform their *pūjās* on a daily basis, sometimes because they don't have time, but sometimes because they feel as if the brahmin will do a better job, since he is well-educated in this area. It's not uncommon to perform one's own daily *pūjā* and also hire a brahmin to perform another.

Upon recognizing the obligation of performing *pūjā* for adults in India, one might ask why, exactly, it is so important to do so. There is, of course, the argument, made partially above, that it becomes a habit. Another interviewee noted: "I think we are part of and parcel of this *pūjā*. That it is part of our life, like we eat, we sleep. Same way we should do *pūjā* this way. It's not that if you don't do *pūjā* it will be one way, but it has become part and parcel of our life each and every day." There are two notable emphases in this statement: The first is that this person implies that the *pūjā* is part of oneself. To be human is to need to eat and sleep, while to be Hindu is to need to do *pūjā*. There is an urge, a necessity, that is simply a part of being who they are. To this end, performing *pūjā* becomes part of an identity construction if one is aware of how *pūjā* is part and parcel of self, and in South Asia, the self is often constructed based upon relationships with others. However, it is not one's own performance that is important, but rather the conception that it should be performed. In this instance, one should caution against the inclination to discern the action itself as an identity component, but rather, should examine the way of life propelling *pūjā* performance as constitutive of that identity. In other words, this action, motivated by deeply entrenched schemas, often remains undifferentiated from other acts necessarily performed in

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[43] A Hindu priest, and also a designation for the highest caste.

order to exist in the world. Borrowing from the mountain metaphor introduced in the introduction, the terrain is flat and the person is difficult to separate from the schema. The second point of emphasis here is that if *pūjā* were not performed, nothing in particular would occur.[44] This was a theme that persisted among my interviewees in all groups: nothing exactly would happen if *pūjā* were not performed, but *pūjā* still needed to be done. Perhaps, one might discern, to not do *pūjā*, or to not advocate the necessary performance of *pūjā*, would be to opt out of part of this society, this culture.

To this end, not performing *pūjā* could lead to particular psychological effects, including a nagging dissatisfaction. As one woman noted, if she didn't do *pūjā*, "I'd feel very frustrated... I would feel restless. I would feel as if I haven't done something." Another interviewee added: "Mind is distracted. Otherwise that's it. Mind is not happy. In the other way, if I do it, my mind is good. Every time." Whereas one might expect that this population would feel as if something disastrous would occur if they did not perform *pūjā*, that is not necessarily the case; ultimately, there is a nagging psychological effect that requires the performance of *pūjā*.

In discussing compulsion, Freud (1995 [1907], 431) explains the "qualms of conscience" that result from failing to perform a religious act. These qualms seem to result not from fear of consequences, but from some inner mechanism relevant to completion of a required act. Such patterns become more comprehensible when examined in relation to the self. Carl Rogers stipulates that the ideal self is the self-concept an individual would most like to possess. Though Rogers seems to postulate that an individual theorizes her self by attributing certain

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[44] Though this was my finding, the reader should take it with some caution. First, the people I talked with were often educated in the West and might have been reluctant to discuss what they really thought would occur if they did not perform *pūjā*. Second, the *pūjā* I'm discussing is regular *pūjā*. This does not include *pūjā* which someone might perform, for example, when he feels as if someone has cursed him. Finally, declaring that nothing would happen could fall into the category of contradictory declarations and behavior which is discussed in chapter seven.

characteristics or experiences, in this instance, in so far as one is part and parcel of *pūjā*, mandating performance thereof becomes part of what an individual might construe as self-concept. Any type of discrepancy regarding this could result in "tension and internal confusion," as the individual attempts to reconcile the ideal with the actual. Such tension also results in vulnerability and anxiety (Rogers, 200-204). This analysis lends itself to understanding *pūjā* not as a separate act, but as one that is itself related to the orientation of self for these interviewees: *pūjā* is not something outer, but is inner, and serves to help define the self as relational, and as having a relationship – with obligations – with the deity, even if implicitly. It is a component of an internalized and goal-oriented schema.

Even for those who do not perform daily *pūjā* themselves, the *pūjā* feels important, and, if not necessary, certainly beneficial:

> My mother, she does that every evening. She does her thing, her incense sticks and her chanting. That she does religiously and I just feel very comforted to know that she's doing it in the next room. I can hear that, I can hear her saying, and it kind of... I don't want to use the word purify, but I think it gives me a calming effect.

Hence, rather than placing emphasis on the performance of an act, or emphasis necessarily on mandating that someone should perform that act, what is rather at play is the notion that the act, in itself, simply is and occurs, and that the individual herself is complicit in that occurrence through occupation of the same conceptual (and, in this case, physical) space.

Sitting by the Power of the Deity

In addition to the fact that there is an obligation to perform *pūjā*, Bengali Hindu adults in India emphasized another element that other interviewees did not: the benefits, or necessity, of being in the presence of power. In all cases, they were talking specifically about being in the

presence of the *mūrti*. As one interviewee said: "But in morning I take bath and sit near the supreme power. You feel elated, you feel... renewed and refreshed." It is being in the presence of power that is the benefit of performing *pūjā*. This statement reflects a larger sentiment of awe directed towards the deity. There is an element of praise lavished on the deity for this group that is unlike the sentiments of any other group interviewed, and this praise also often takes the form of thanks. Most people feel that the deity is "a power. She gives me strength. She's a supreme power. She can do anything."

Asking the deity for their own wellbeing as well as for the wellbeing of their families was not the first thing that anyone mentioned and, in fact, most of the times it was mentioned only because of prompting. It certainly occurs, but might not be at the forefront of the devotee's mind. One interviewee explained to me how her father-in-law interacts with gods: "Basically whenever he goes to god, he tries to address the superiority of the god or goddess he is addressing. I asked if he thinks of wellness of his family, he says no. He is trying to focus, to think about god or goddess, not to think about our family." Most people in this group agreed: *pūjā* is about the deity and the obligation, not necessarily about what the deity can do for you. Still, this superiority of the deity is normalized: it is part of life, as caring for an elder would be, and in many ways, this structure of care mirrors how one would engage with an elder in India. As Mandelbaum (1991) notes, "The ideal of deference to parents is rarely questioned, and in practice it endows the elders with an authority that is not lightly ignored by their children," (39).

For someone who doesn't perform *pūjā* regularly, this can even be the sole purpose of *pūjā*: to acknowledge the power of the deity. This acknowledgement is what is important; not to acknowledge could bother or distress an individual. One interviewee remarked: "For me, doing *pūjā* is something like if I'm going out or if I'm going for a trip, like there's somebody there who

is more powerful than I am. Somebody's there, somebody more powerful than me. So, my attitude is hi, I'm here, just coming to say hello to you, I'm going on this trip, I'll come back, and I'll see you." In so far as this is the case, this person not only maintains an acknowledgement of power, but also a relationship with that power, as one might maintain a relationship with a parent, letting your mother know where you are. The premise is not that the goddess would actually do anything to benefit this interviewee, but, rather, that it is important for him to recognize that she is powerful, and to acknowledge her. She is a character in his life, much as eating is an activity in which we must partake.

This narrative follows the form of *pūjā* that Fuller (1992) discusses, and which, indeed, has been well-documented. This is an acknowledgement of power as well as hierarchy, but, perhaps more relevant, it is important to note that said acknowledgement mirrors Indian hierarchical structures more generally, and does not, in fact, diminish the deity-as-relation model. As emphasized in this last quote, the devotee acknowledges the authority of the deity, but still converses with her, in the same way one might with one's parents. The deity is a force to guide life rather than an interjection into life, as Eliade's hierophanies are.

Whether or not they overtly pray, Hindu Bengali adults emphasize obligation to perform *pūjā*, to take care of the god, and they also mention the prominence of the deity. In this instance, the *mūrti* is the most important facet: the physical manifestation of the god. To this end, one's interlocutor is a power to be near. While other members of the family might pray or perform *pūjā* from time to time, as they wish, in each family there is a designated *pūjā*-doer, and that person might feel as if something remains undone should *pūjā* not be performed.

Bengali Hindu American Adults in the U.S.

First generation Bengali Hindus in America, by and large, perform *pūjā* every day, and perform *pūjā* significantly more frequently than their children do.[45] What differentiates them from their counterparts in India, however, is the way that they choose to emphasize what exactly is important about the *pūjā*:

> "I daily have a ritual. In the morning I just get up, our deities all in our bedroom, so get up, kind of have a prayer, which my grandmother taught me in Bengali, so I internally pray, close my eyes, pray, and that's my day. And then I do ritual, I light an incense stick in the kitchen. That's something which I used to see my dad do. I don't know why he did it, but kind of, the smell gets me into a good mood... So, and then, I won't say I meditate, but I kinda just sit down and reflect and, you know, my dad always said, start the day with happy thoughts, so, that's what I do ...**There's no ritual except a thought**." (emphasis added)

Although there are obvious traditional ritual components of what Risu describes here—standing in front of the deities, lighting the incense— it is the thought, the prayer, that becomes the more significant part of that ritual for him. The thought itself is the ritual; the way in which one engages with the divine internally rather than externally. This is not to say that individuals in this demographic group do not perform more traditional components of *pūjā*— they certainly do— but rather that they choose to discuss their prayer and its contents as if that is what is the relevant and necessary part of the entire performance. This is a significant divergence from the ways in which adults in India discuss how they perform *pūjā*.

One interviewee explained that "a *pūjā* for me is more like a spiritual connection with god," while another explained that "Well, actually we do less of *pūjā* and more of meditation... Well we light the lamps and incense and everything and then we pray, chant some mantras, and then we do a meditation, and then we sing devotional songs. And then we do *āratī* and then we

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[45] The two-tailed P value is less than 0.0001; t = 5.9100; df = 38; standard error of difference = 0.120

finish." Again, these quotes emphasize that *pūjā* is about connection, about internal mental

processes, and while there is a physical process to *pūjā*, that process is secondary. Indeed,

Bengalis in the U.S. were more likely to mention prayer than were Indian Bengalis.[46] This is

additionally evident in the fact that this group of Bengali Hindus in America rarely performs

pūjā twice a day (morning and night), as their counterparts in India do. While many feel as if

they should perform *pūjā* every day, and while they do in fact want to, they don't usually speak

of obligation to perform *pūjā* and to care for the gods.[47] Rather, performing *pūjā* is a personal

act, an individual moment of connection, illustrating those times that they choose to see

themselves as connecting with the deity, receiving *darśan*. The relationship is not obligatory, but

is more based on affection for the deity, and on thoughts communicated.

While for this group the goal of *pūjā* is to pray, that prayer still, almost always, takes

place in front of the *mūrtis*, in the prayer room.[48] Except for one family, everyone I interviewed

had a prayer room or shelf or closet of some sort. Though there is acknowledgement that prayer

does not have to be in front of the deities, every person who prays did so in a prayer room. One

interviewee noted: "So then, if there is something, go there. That doesn't have to be going there

in front, but you can also... So that somehow... I don't know how, came into me. So, I now have

that kind of a thing. Like if I have to say something. You know like I'm going in to my parents to

tell something. I do it like that." Such an action likely isn't so different from calling one's

parents to speak with them, which is the relationship that Bengali Hindu Americans likely have

with their parents in India. Rather than showing care through feeding and taking care of their

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[46] The two-tailed P value equals 0.0330; t = 2.1698; df = 81; standard error of difference = 0.107

[47] Part of the reasoning for this is certainly related to work schedules in the U.S.; first of all, people tend to leave early for work in the morning and not return until relatively late, and, second, women also tend to work in the U.S.

[48] Michaelson also make note of this in their survey of Lohanas in the U.S. (48).

parents, they emphasize showing care through communication. Moreover, from what this devotee says, it doesn't seem as if she is telling her parents something in order to be dutiful, but, rather, that the primary point is solely to communicate. Still, there is a compulsion to *physically* commune with the god, to speak or think in front of the *mūrti*. Familial structures in America are often based more on parents providing warmth and limits for their children and are less focused on hierarchy (Van Campen and Russell 2010), and this type of warmth and guidance is what the *mūrti* seems to provide for this group.

The content of the prayer itself almost always takes one of two forms for this group: asking for wellbeing (of one's family, oneself, the world) and/or asking for something more tangible, though the former is much more likely among adults in America and the latter among children in America. While, in India, prayer often contains a significant emphasis on praising the god, for Bengali Hindus in the U.S., this is rarely the aim of prayer. Instead, asking and hoping for the god to support wellbeing is what becomes important:

> "I mean, to be really, really honest and truthful, when I am holding my hands I always want happiness and peace for everybody. It's just a general request; I don't think it's more directed towards a god, but that's the time that I do it. When I'm in front of it. In front of some kind of a god, or the *mūrti*. But as far as the what is *pūjā*, it's basically a ritual... to ask for all the things that you want in life— success, fame, money, love, peace, all these things— and then thanking the god for what you have."

Again, the emphasis here is not on the particular steps of *pūjā*, but is rather on what one asks for during *pūjā* and why. While some interviewees eschewed the idea of asking for something specific, most did indeed ask for some sort of wellbeing. When asked what the process of *pūjā* was, this is almost unequivocally what I was told. Though, through prompting, I was able to discern the process of *pūjā* through actions, it is the prayer component that shone through as being the most important part of the ritual for this group.

95

Though adult Hindus in India and in the U.S. tend to perform *pūjā* in much the same ways, while the practice and power of the goddess are emphasized in India, the component of prayer and one's individual connection with the god are emphasized in the U.S. There is no reason to think that the actual occurrence of the practice is significantly different; the actions are the same. However, the way one conceives of interacting with the goddess differs by context.

Bengali Hindu American Younger Generation

Perhaps unsurprisingly, only two second generation Hindu Bengali Americans whom I interviewed told me that they performed *pūjā* or prayed with any regularity. Almost all, however, did acknowledge that they prayed on occasion. While, for their parents, this prayer has to necessarily happen in the prayer room, for this generation, almost all prayer occurred outside of the prayer room and at particular moments of discomfort or need. The younger generation in the U.S. was significantly more likely to pray without a *mūrti* than were adults in the U.S.,[49] but were also significantly more likely to pray without a *mūrti* than were their peers in India.[50]

The content of the prayers often regarded specific wants or needs, and particularly emphasized the importance of performing in school:

> "**S:** This is going to sound so conceited, but I pray to Saraswatī, like if I have a huge test I'll be like please let me get an A on this test. Or if I want something, I'll normally be like hey, I really want this, but could you do something, like if I get straight As, could you do this.
> **R:** So how often do you think you do that, you just sort of pray in your head?
> **S:** Uh, Christmas, before tests, big tests, especially math tests, before finals and then after PSATs. And before like any big thing in life.
> **R:** So, Christmas, is that the first thing you said?
> **S:** Yeah, like oh, god, I hope I get this thing for Christmas!"[51]

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[49] The two-tailed P value is less than 0.0001; t = 7.6692; df = 38; standard error of difference = 0.099
[50] The two-tailed P value is less than 0.0001; t = 6.9581; df = 29; standard error of difference = 0.112
[51] C.f. Ganapathy-Coleman 2014.

In this instance, there isn't a specific prayer for wellbeing that applies to any time, but, instead, Shruti prays at specific points in time when she is compelled to, even while waiting for a test to be passed out. *Pūjā*, then, if one would call this *pūjā*, becomes a repository for hopes rather than any type of connection with a *mūrti*; in fact, *pūjā* here becomes more transactional. This pattern emerged among all school-aged interviewees in the U.S.; though they could often tell me at least some ritual steps of *pūjā*, and though they participated in yearly *pūjās* with their families, they did not adhere to regularly performing these steps, nor did they find these steps relevant to their lives and to the ways in which they engaged with a deity. Madhumita, for example, sometimes needed to fill in for her mother and to feed Gopāl, a *mūrti* of a baby who must be cared for every day. Her mother expressed dismay because Madhumita wouldn't clean the gods, but, instead, would just pour some milk into the bowl. Madhumita replied, referring not only to cleaning Gopāl, but to the entire process: "I don't find it at all important."

Among older interviewees, those who were in college or beyond, some did pray for wellbeing, but, in general, the prayer still often consisted of a running monologue about oneself, reporting areas of need. For example: "So you do that and then talk to the god when it's kind of quiet and just kind of say hi, how's it going, I know you do this, I'm comfortable in this sphere right now, I don't really need your help for anything, or if I need some help, like if you could give me some guidance." To this extent, worship or prayer is even less about praising a god or asking a god for general wellbeing, but, instead, god becomes the type of interlocutor whose primary function is to help you along. This is in contrast to the way that older adults address god as a family member who provides warmth and general health rather than solely specific services. God becomes a receptacle for the internal, for one's innermost needs, for the fears and hopes that one might not admit to others. Though this is not necessarily an unusual paradigm, it is a

significant departure from the intent that most first generation Bengali Hindu Americans have in their prayer.

Bengali Hindu Indian Younger Generation

The younger generation in India performs significantly less *pūjā* than their parents do,[52] but, unlike any other group mentioned, young adults in India expressed divided sentiments regarding *pūjā*. Perhaps the most striking trend is that nearly half did not participate in any kind of *pūjā* or prayer aside from occasionally filling in for a relative who was not present. *Pūjā* is performed in each of the homes where these young adults live, but they are largely uninvolved unless specifically asked. Though several young adults were completely uninvolved in *pūjā*, this does not mean they were ignorant of what *pūjā* entails. One young man, a brahmin, provided me with an incredibly full explanation of how one would perform *pūjā*:

> "Well, for that, I need to give you a description of a concept called *upacāra*. *Upacāra* is basically what we call the procedure and the number of offerings we do to the god. Because we believe god as a human being, so we have three concepts: the five offerings, the ten offerings, and the sixteen offerings. The five offerings known as *panchopat prachat*, *dasaprachat* is ten, and *shoroshat* is sixteen offerings. Generally, the daily *pūjās* or obviously the five offerings. Because that's the regular thing that we do. What do we offer? We offer the food, *prasād*, what we call *noi viddho*, if you have come across this word. That's the little bit of a *prasād*, it's not those typical of rice, and the *kitchri*, food that you have, it's basically made of fruits and a little bit of sweets, and all those things, that's what we offer. We offer the *dup*, or the incense stick, we offer the *deep*, or the lamp, and we have, we also offer *gondo pushpo, gondo* means smell, *pushpo* means flower, so taking the small of the *chan*, sandalwood smell with the flower, so that is four offerings, and last is the water. So this is the kind of offering that we generally do, and for that, the general procedure is you have lots of images and photographs and different gods in a place, people keep giving, things keep coming, we keep them all together in a place, and the regular procedure is to wash it all over again. Ok, we have those Shiva *lingas* as you know. The procedure is to pour milk on them, so bathing and all these things are done, and then this *pūjā* is the five offerings that I told, basically, the

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[52] The two-tailed P value equals 0.0117 t = 2.6379 df = 41 standard error of difference = 0.148

sandalwood mixed flower, the lamp, the incense stick, the *prasād* and the water is basically offered, generally by a brahmin, or even the mothers of a family, the senior people."

Those who took part in some type of *pūjā* often felt as if it were an obligation, like their parents had previously described, though did often mention praying for some type of wellbeing when prompted. Again, in this instance, the emphasis is on the ritual itself rather than on personal prayer. However, there is one exception: those interviewees who were still in school did in fact pray for success in their studies or asked for other things. For example, Joydita explains:

 "Mostly I go and I show my desperation. I'm always wanting upward rank, upward college, my mom not coming with me, and good marks in the board exam I just did, and sometimes I pray for my close friends also because we're all going through the same hell, some a little more, some a little less. And I'm just praying that everything goes fine. I pray for my health. I pray that all my dreams that I've ever had come true... Sometimes I pray about any small things that come up, any trouble I'm into, which is very often, and anything I really want, anybody who needs anything. If things are going all right with me, I'll pray for someone else."

Although Joydita is essentially praying for wellbeing for herself, her peers, and her family, she specifically asks god for particular things. Though, to some extent, the way this group performs *pūjā* (if they do) resembles the way that their parents do— with less emphasis on prayer and more emphasis on doing, particularly in front of a *mūrti*— they also resemble their peers in America: when they do pray, they ask for specific things rather than for general wellness. Moreover, like their peers in America, most Bengali Hindu young adults I interviewed in Kolkata are not particularly interested in *pūjā* (or other forms of prayer).[53]

Conclusion

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[53] As will be shown in later, this group might go in front of a deity and pray to some extent more than they initially explained. Sometimes they don't feel as if this is actually *pūjā,* despite my prodding, so didn't mention it. These data are inconclusive and I didn't realize this soon enough to ask during interviews. Other conclusions made, however, still hold.

None of the above analysis is to say that any Hindus aren't performing *pūjā* properly; rather, the goal of this examination is to show execution in relation to the textually-stated rule, and how each group contends with and actualizes *pūjā*. Each of these four groups has a different way of conceptualizing, and sometimes performing, *pūjā*. For those in the U.S., the focus is more on prayer and on conversing with the deity, while in India, the focus is more on doing. Those who are young are more likely to ask for something specific from the god, taking the god as omnipotent and distant rather than powerful due to proximity; a more thorough understanding of these inclinations and intentions will take place in later chapters. Those in India feel the obligation to care for someone greater than themselves, and those in the U.S. generally feel closer to deity on a conversational level, or, at least, each group emphasizes these different elements of *pūjā*. What is abundantly clear, however, is that those who perform *pūjā* daily feel as if, first, the deity is a regular presence and, second, that this presence is, to some extent, mundane and almost given within everyday life, as is one's relationship with that presence as family member.

This chapter has set up the ways in which Hindu Bengalis perform *pūjā* in order to next examine the character and content of the relationships enacted through *pūjā*. While this chapter looked primarily at what people do, now we turn to how the character of underlying schemas is motivating those actions— we go from the observable to the implicit. The following two chapters apply primarily to those who perform *pūjā* and, thus, are skewed towards representing the older generation of Hindu Bengalis. Hopefully, this chapter is a step in combatting Smith's assertion that "Much of what is vital to the everyday devotional Hinduism of the masses remains a mystery to all but those who themselves practice it," (1997, 37). Indeed, I continue on in

attempts to uncover what makes this process "vital" to practitioners, as well as what, exactly,

endows *mūrtis* with their own particular vitality.

Chapter 3: Are you my mother? Yes.

The previous two chapters have served to indicate that the relationships Bengalis have with deities mirror and support relationships they have with each other, illustrating a particular relational schema: the way in which one relates to another person, and the assumption that, as part of that schema, the mūrti *is also a person. This schema is what one might understand from observing public and private* pūjā. *However, less explored up until this point is the nature of the relationship one has with the deity beyond what one does in* pūjā— *how is it characterized and instantiated? What type of relationship engenders personhood? This chapter posits that the emotional and schematic mechanism facilitating the performance of* pūjā *is the relationality established with the god or goddess, often as a family member. To this extent, it is necessary to know more about the Indian family itself, and, thus, about the context of this relational schema, which ultimately motivates the performance of* pūjā, *carrying moral and motivational weights— reminiscent of thought and action— simultaneously. It is this foundational schema which is a prerequisite for constructing a reality in which a god can be physical, a topic delved into more comprehensively in the next chapter.*

Though God hears all our prayers. He does not always respond. Our situation is like that of a child who calls for his mother, but the mother does not think it necessary to come. She sends him a plaything to keep him quiet. But when the child refuses to be comforted by anything except the mother's presence, she comes. If you want to know God, you must be like the naughty baby who cries til the mother comes. — Sri Sri Pramahansa Yogananda "How You Can Talk With God"
    Texted to me by an interviewee in India

Freud postulated that one type of relationship can manifest as transferred onto another relationship. For example, there is evidence that a child might superimpose patterns of his relationship with his mother onto his relationship, later in life, with is wife. It's easy to assume that this is what is occurring when a Bengali Hindu asserts that a *mūrti* is like his mother. However, this chapter seeks to bring this analogy into question, instead contending that, though some elements and patterns of a parent-child relationship, for example, might be transferred from one's relationship with his biological mother to his relationship with a *mūrti*, more strikingly, one's relationship with a *mūrti* is something in itself. A relationship with a *mūrti* is not a superimposition or a projection, and is not mirroring some other relationship, but is

understood— by those exhibiting a Bengali Hindu relational schema— as its own relationship. Though the manifestation of these relationships mirrors patterns within broader Indian familial norms, the relationship itself is unique. The extent to which people resonate with and instantiate relationships with murtis indicates the porous boundries between humans and gods. These frequently familial relationships with the *mūrti* engender personhood and provoke performance of *pūjā*.

The Indian Family

As previously mentioned, the typical Indian family, in both cities and villages is joint: one matriarch and patriarch living together with their sons and their sons' families. Family, thus, becomes increasingly important and prevalent; one is never alone, parenting responsibilities are shared, and cousins are referred to as brothers and sisters. One's everyday life is inundated with relatives, close and more distant, and celebrations such as weddings require inviting hundreds of additional extended family members.

Though many studies have examined the Indian family in terms of hierarchy, caste, and gender,[54] Uberoi (1994) notes that documentation of the interpersonal relations in the Indian family is more likely found in the writing of psychologists or psychoanalysts and in popular media. Particularly as times change and, at least in cities, children who might have otherwise stayed home are now relocating to follow various career paths, determining how exactly members of a family interact with each other has become increasingly difficult. Additionally, as discussed, technology changes the facilitation of these relationships if not their character, particularly as it becomes more and more common for the younger generation to go abroad, most

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[54] C.f. Roy (1992).

often for graduate studies. However, Lamb (2010, 99) points out that these changes are not only occurring among Indians and Indians in the diaspora, but, rather, these forms of familial relations are developing globally, particularly in cities, and are "characterized broadly by features such as urban and transnational migration, ideologies of gendered and aged egalitarianism, nuclear families, 24 × 7 work lives, individual self-sufficiency, dependence (when necessary) on private institutions and on the state rather than on kin, and a consumerism that stresses the pursuit of personal value through commodities and modern technologies."

It is clear that the execution of familial relationships is indeed changing, but this discourse of change is far from new in India. Shah (1973, 107) traces the origin of this line of thinking to the end of colonialism, and, in his ethnography, he observed that even in villages, and even in the 1970s, families are not consistently joint; rather, there is some combination of nuclear and joint families (58). However, Indian elites (Shah 1973, 159) and non-Indian scholars perpetuated this discourse, including Cohen's (1998) assertion that, in the 80s and 90s, joint families were breaking down due to the four "zations": modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and Westernization. Lamb (2010, 83- 4) also recognizes this discourse, further noting its attribution to the fact that women are marrying later and are more educated than in previous generations. While in America, families are becoming more and more diverse (Angier 2013), it is unclear whether the structure of the typical Indian family is significantly different than it was previously, or whether these pre-existing differences are simply subjected to further recognition and are, additionally, more frequently and more publicly bemoaned.

Therefore, the traditional Indian family— which is often synonymous with the joint family— is less reality and more social imaginary, as per Steger and James (2013, 23): "Imaginaries are patterned convocations of the social whole. These deep-seated modes of

104

understanding provide largely pre-reflexive parameters within which people imagine their social existence." Not only does this imaginary dictate the ways in which Indians understand families, but it moreover speaks to how they idealize these families; it affects how they feel the world "should" be. Lamb (2010, 83) agrees that the Indian family is often idealized and Agarwal (2000, 55) notes that "The ideal Indian family... is more imagined than real." Just as imagined, however, is the notion that the family is changing in unusual ways, propelling the analysis that there are two relevant imaginaries at play: one of the Indian family as it should be and the ways in which it shapes society, and another of the Indian family as devolving and collapsing. The former is glorified while the latter is dreaded, but the latter is often viewed as unavoidable. Neither is necessarily reminiscent of reality, which likely lies somewhere simultaneously in between and outside.

Similar to how the Indian family is mythologized and upheld as the paragon of social interaction, the deities are thought to mirror these patterns. Flueckiger (2015) notes that the deities on an altar represent a devotional family and also "can be interpreted as visual, non-linear life stories and reflections of networks of relationships of the families who create and maintain the shrines," (36). The deities represent an ideal family themselves, but each is also an ideal family member. Flueckiger (2015) also analogizes one who is first analyzing a family's altar to being a bride who just married into a large extended family: she quickly learns who she will see every day, how to relate to each person, how everyone is connected to everyone else (18). When one marries into an Indian Hindu family, her relations are as much human parents, aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters as they are the family gods. This family of gods is meant to embody the ideals of the imagined Indian family and when one's flesh and blood family fails to do just that, the gods often serve that purpose. What then becomes relevant is not how one's actual family is

configured, but rather the idea of how it should be configured, of family's presumed importance, and, moreover, of what it means to be part of that family.

While god as family member is the primary focus of this chapter and, indeed, is the primary form of relationality that Bengali Hindus tend to posit with regard to gods, it is the importance of this particular relationality that makes it salient. The familiar analogy of a god as a guest in a *mūrti* also falls into this pattern: a guest is someone an individual has to cater to, as he might his mother. It is the particular relevant relationship, often summarized as familial, which establishes a devotee's connection with the god— and often a particular *mūrti*— and which transforms the *mūrti* into a relatable and prominent character in an individual's life. This transformation is at the crux of the emphasis on god as family; it is the precious relationship one might have with a *mūrti* that enlivens it and brings importance not only to the divine, but to the divine as necessarily physical.

Fiske (1992; Fiske and Aslam 2005) details a relational models theory in which he describes four ways that individuals relate to one another, explaining the world in relational social terms. He indicates that these four means of relationality vary cross-culturally, and are thus prioritized differently cross-culturally. Of these four means of relationality, authority ranking is the one that plays out with regard to a *mūrti*. In authority ranking, there is a specific hierarchy to respect and one member gives freely to a higher up member with the specific understanding that said person is higher up. In this model, *mūrtis* are considered people with whom one can actually have hierarchical relationships, and specific relationships at that. To that end, an instantiation— of the god as physical— that an unfamiliar observer might perceive to be irrational, is, in fact, rationally constituted by its place within a pre-existing relational structure.

How God Became Part of the Family

God as a family member is a tired trope; especially in the West, god is often portrayed as a father figure, watching over us, potentially influencing our lives. Hindus propound a similar rhetoric, particularly emphasizing god as a protective force. However, the difference lies in the fact that, for my interviewees, the *mūrti*, a physical representation of god, can be equated to a relative, and not just someone who acts as a relative, but a specific type of relative: e.g. parent, child. One interviewee noted: "It's like my son. If I imagine he's my son, he's my husband, he's my friend. Just like that." In this instance, this woman imagines that the *mūrti* of Śiva, Gaṇeśa, etc., is her actual relative rather than some unspecified relation. Just as many young Bengalis away from home are required to call their parents once or twice a day, just to check in, one is expected to do *pūjā* to the *mūrti* once or twice a day, establishing and maintaining a relationship. In the quote that opens this chapter, there is the implication that if one prays hard enough, he can evoke a motherly presence, presumably in a *mūrti*. To this end, when Hindus talk about god as relative, they do not do so in an abstract sense; instead, god as relative inhabits the physical world. A *mūrti* does not only represent a relative, but a *mūrti* is a relative, and one who needs to be cared for and acknowledged. This isn't how non-Indian scholarship has typically understood *mūrti*s and how Hindus interact with them; American and British scholarship has emphasized the notion that *mūrti*s are analogous to relatives. Though Hindus themselves might speak as if this is an analogy, the ways in which they engage with a *mūrti* emphasize that there is something very real— rather than analogous— about this relationship. God as family is not a lens, but rather, is a component of an intrinsic way that many Hindus see reality. This is part of what Fiske (1992; Fiske and Haslam, 2005) might call a Bengali Hindu conformation— the relational structure that everyone knows about and adheres to.

As might be expected, the notion of god as family member was more prevalent among groups who posited that god could exist in a *mūrti*,[55] meaning primarily the older generation in both the U.S. and India. Under these circumstances, god was more physical. When asked why it would be problematic to throw out a *mūrti* or image of god, one interviewee asked me to imagine a scenario in which my mother had died and I only had one remaining picture of her. If someone were to tear up that picture, would I not be upset? Over and over again I was confronted with this position: that a *mūrti*, or an image of god, is like a photo of a parent, grandparent, sibling, child. To throw out or tear up such an image would be to disregard care for a particular and important relevant individual in one's life.

As I traveled from home to home, I noticed that may *pūjā* rooms included a photo of a departed relative who was worshipped in the same way that the *mūrti*s were.[56] This is something I had seen before, and something which appears important to communities attempting to commemorate the departed; this also occurs in death ceremonies and in ancestor worship. By putting a photo of the deceased among the gods, that person's presence maintained. While god is a family member, under these circumstances, a family member can also be interpreted as a god. The idea of family member is, thus, iterative: gods are family, family members are gods, and the two, in some ways, are exchangeable.

While the *mūrti* or image is important, notably, the ways in which one interacts with one's relatives should be indicative of how one interacts with a *mūrti*. As one interviewee explained this:

> "If I hold your hand, and I feel better, I would say that yes, you are my god. Still now, when my mom come to me, when I see and drink some water, and I see, it's just totally

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[55] More on this in the next chapter.
[56] This is additionally corroborated by Flueckiger (2015), 39.

out in the middle of the night, and she brings some good coffee for me, I think, 'Oh, she's the god.' If I'm ill, and my father comes to me, he's the god."

This quote initially seems to imply a familiar edict: that god is in other people. However, the reverse is likely more so the case: that other people are god. This lack of distinction between person and divinity, between family member as present in one's life and deity, presumed to exist in a *mūrti* or otherwise, again emphasizes the relevance of god in the physical world for these particular interviewees. God is a relevant character in day to day life, and, equally important, god is relatable. Finally, god is not necessarily someone different from anyone else except, perhaps, in hierarchical position.

This element of physicality is important to focus on: these particular groups see god as present in the physical world, in a *mūrti*, but they also see the physical world, including people, as divinity. Something or someone physically relevant— in so far as an individual designates that person or thing as relevant— can take on divine connotations. The idea that the divine is located in the physical world in India is not new, and is attested to in most literature on Hindu practice. What is unusual is the particular likelihood with which family members embody the divine, perhaps more so than other people or other elements of the physical world. To that end, it isn't the physical world that encapsulates divinity, but it is emotionally and personally relevant elements of the physical world that are perhaps godlier than the rest. Particular schemas linking elements of the physical world— such as relatives and *mūrti*s— and the affect that comes with that— likely exist for Bengali Hindus in ways they likely do not for others. There isn't some unequivocal indication that god could show up anytime, anywhere, but rather that god is present in that which one is focused on and emotionally connected to under certain circumstances. Reflexively, the individual reifies and interacts with his own manifestations of divinity within a physical scope. Though these reifications are societally patterned— family members, *mūrti*s—

the importance is still determined by the individual and by the schemas he or she activates—knowingly or unknowingly.

The opposite implication of the connection between the god and the physical world is that the experience of god is a phenomenological one in these contexts; if the interviewee cannot find god in the physical world for him or herself, what evidence is there that god exists? As one interviewee says: "I was not believing in the existence of god, because which I can't see with my eyes, which I can't feel it, why should I believe in its existence? Because you need to believe in it where you feel some existence." This interviewee seems convinced: if god is not physical and not perceivable, is not overtly in the world, there is no god. If god is not observable, documentable, why should one think god would be anything else? This positivistic attitude—that god needs to be observable, physical, tangible— seems untenable when standing up to contemporary Judeo-Christian reasoning about god; unlike in ancient texts, there are no unanimously agreed upon events demonstrating god's existence in the physical world. However, this interviewee, as many Hindus, focuses on physicality, and, accordingly, finds physical— and relational— evidence to combat the need for consensus-driven evidence of god in the world: "But you have to believe in your parents. This is the source from where you have come from. You might never see your grandpa, you might never see your grandma, But, logically, you should accept it and know that from grandparents, my parents have come to exist." This interviewee doesn't experience god first hand, but does experience her parents first hand, and while this might not be enough evidence for someone who does not have a pre-existing schema linking relatives to godliness, for her, it makes sense.

There are two relevant analyses to be made regarding this quote: first, that the existence of god can be inferred by recognizing important others in the physical world; the same way you

110

can infer that your grandfather existed even though you've never met him, you can infer that god exists, and existed, in the world. Such an inference has a particular character in India, where gods are linked to relatives. Second, again, and more obviously, god is akin to a relative. Even if this interviewee does not directly equate god with a family member, she acknowledges the family's role in facilitating recognition of the godly part of one's environment. To make note of one's family, of one's lineage, provides evidence for the existence of god, regardless of any particular physical manifestation; the god is like her family members. Instead, this interviewee takes the logic of relationality as evidence of godliness in the world and subjectively determines which elements of her life are relevant for her own understanding of the divine. She makes use of a pre-existing schema to make judgements about her environment. Again, though this devotee's reasoning follows sociological patterns of seeing family as god, she utilizes this understanding to, independently, come to her own conclusions about divinity in the world, making the question an inherently personal one.

To the extent that this is true, that loved ones comprise evidence for god's existence, and, to that end, can encapsulate god, it makes sense that those in India, who often advocate this view, are more likely to simply revere god rather than to specifically ask god for the family's wellbeing. God, if god exists within or as a family member, need not be asked for god's own wellbeing. Accordingly, in India, some interviewees specifically visualized relatives and loved ones when praying rather than taking the *mūrti* as an additional relative:

> "So I can visualize anyone, maybe I visualize my dad, I respect my dad very well. So whenever, it's just I worship to god, whoever comes in my mind."

> "God is in you, in him, everyone. So, I concentrate on him and I also concentrate on my loved ones, so that I know god is there also. So I think of them and try to concentrate."

These quotes exemplify the difference between focusing on one's relatives' wellbeing and instead, focusing on one's relatives themselves during prayer. In this circumstance, again, one's relatives are equated with god rather than merely mentioned as important. Such an understanding makes the idea of Durgā as family member, as explained previously, more comprehensible. Reflexively, family is god, and god is family, and the particular aspects of each embodied by the other are subject to individual emotional emphases and proclivities; in other words, conceptually, the mapping of each blurs into the other, and is immediately informed by pre-existing relationships in the "real" world.

It is difficult to emphasize the subtle difference at play here, particularly because words obfuscate it and partially because, though I have learned to think of god this way, it is not my native perspective. What non-Hindus might perceive as analogous, Hindus perceive as given, as already the case— thus characterizing the schema of god as relative. Any articulation of such is often for others' benefit and is, necessarily, imperfect. What can be emphasized is that there is never a question of whether god is physical, because physicality is built into this schema of god, connected with a schema of family in an overlapping way— already.

God as a Parent

Given the above analyses, one can see how the hierarchical and respect-laden stipulations with which one interacts in a family are transferred to the *mūrti*. It is not solely that a *mūrti* (or parent) deserves respect, but rather that a *mūrti* deserves respect as a parent, including all of the particular prohibitions one might adhere to in front of one's elders. Jalahasini, who, of all of my older interviewees in India was least likely to adhere to ritual prohibitions or to pray to a *mūrti*, explained respect for a *mūrti* to me as follows: "So... if you put a picture of your dead father,

would you spit on it? Or would you treat it with disrespect? Because your father is gone, but his picture is your memory of your love. So it is a sacred rule, so I will definitely not wear my shoes." Jalahasini notes that because an image of one's father is like a deity, and because one would not disrespect one's father in any way (such as showing one's feet to him), it therefore follows that this same respect is due to an image of god. As one reveres her father, so should she revere a *mūrti*. In India, there is a hierarchy within familial contexts and the presumption is that any interaction is between a superior and a subordinate.[57] Within this scope, children must be permanently deferential to parents, and parental authority is "unceasing as an ideal," (Mandelbaum 1991, 38-9). To this end, the actions one might take with respect to a *mūrti* are part of a larger socio-relational fabric, which, iteratively, dictates the ritual at hand.

Such means of respect do not only refer to particular ritual steps one must take in relation to a parent/god. Rather, the ways in which one would care for a parent are often transferred to the *mūrti*: "So a lot of people would think that goddess is like mother and they would approach or respect or love or whatever like they would do to their own parents, so they would dress modest, sing for mother, pray for her, love her, take care of her." This interviewee not only respects the *mūrti* in typical ways, such as removing her shoes, but in other ways that a flesh and blood mother might appreciate, such as dressing modestly. This takes the idea of the *mūrti* beyond something which is like a parent to something which really is a parent. In other words, one does not merely treat a *mūrti* with respect in certain ways that a god might like, but one treats a *mūrti* with respect in all the ways a parent might like, inclusive of societally sanctioned prohibitions; these are part and parcel of the relevant schema connecting parents and

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[57] It's widely acknowledged that appropriate parental authority varies significantly by culture (Cox and Harter 2003, 196). This is one particular instantiation which appears to inform this discussion.

god to begin with. This could explain some variation in the ways in which people treat *mūrti*s; if

one's particular parents didn't mind exposing one's shoulders, it might not occur to a devotee to

cover her shoulders in front of the god. An understanding of how one interacts with one's own

parents is then transferred to how to act with a physical god, superimposing a schema of respect

onto the deity. To that end, an individual's schema in relation to the god is individually

determined within the societal context.

To not listen to what the god wants, however, whether that is dictated by society or by

one's own inclinations, can potentially be a challenge to the god him or herself:

> "It's like, going back to treating the god like your parents, it's, if your parents tell you to
> do something and you directly ignore that, consciously ignore that, that's... doesn't matter
> what the results of that are, but it's a sign of disrespect and it's a sign of challenge and
> that's something you shouldn't do to something that you respect."

Just as one devotee might feel the need to cover her shoulders in front of a *mūrti* while another

might not, this quote implies that there is individuality in how one interacts with a *mūrti*.

Whatever one's parents say, though it might not be what someone else's parents say, one needs

to follow it; there are no particular consequences, but, rather, disobedience in the context of

revering a *mūrti* carries all the resonances of disobeying one's parents. So while there are certain

specifications that most parents make, such as "do not kill," or, for a *mūrti*, "take your shoes

off," there are additional rules a child must follow particular to his or her parents. Just like during

Kālī *pūjā* one eats meat, and while during Durgā *pūjā* one does not, it is less the action and more

the stipulation by the given authority figure which becomes important in this circumstance: Kālī,

perpetually antinomian, is all for eating meat, while Durgā's inclinations are more *satvik*, pure.

In this instance, Hinduism goes beyond being individually-centric for the devotee, but is also

differently stipulated according to which god, or which parent, is in question. What the

individual wants is less at issue than is the individual's perception of him or herself in relation to a relevant other.

Aspects of the parent/child relationship can also be shifted to the *mūrti* under certain situational circumstances. For example, Shimantini was incredibly close to her father. Though her father was not particularly interested in Hinduism, after he passed away, Shimantini began to feel the need to go to a Kālī temple every week. Losing her father as an interlocutor, she found a substitute in Kālī. She notes: "I'm not sure if she's even listening to me, but it just makes it easier for me to say it... Previously I think I would do all that with my dad... He was also a hugely wise man. So it's very comforting to me to have my complaint sessions." Beyond simply positing that life is within a *mūrti*, Shimantini's example shows that there is a particular relationship that can be created between an individual and a *mūrti*, substituting or supplementing the relationship between a parent and child.

As evidenced above, a *mūrti* can take on parental roles as disciplinarian, interlocutor, and confidante. Such roles do not necessarily demonstrate the degree of discontent that can exist within a parent/child relationship, but, as one interviewee pointed out, a *mūrti* can even take on this role: "When I'm praying, I feel that the particular god or goddess is always with me, struggling, and then that feeling is there, like don't I argue, don't I fight with my mother? So it's the same thing. If I haven't done [*pūjā*] with you, it's ok, I know you won't forget me." First, when praying about something particularly difficult, or perhaps when angry with god regarding the way life is playing out, this interviewee remembers that she bickers with her mother as well. Fighting is standard protocol in a parent/child relationship, generally related to disagreements about the ways in which one should live one's life. To maintain a relationship with a *mūrti* might

115

be just as difficult as maintaining a contentious relationship with a parent, but, as one must tend to and care for a relative, one must do the same with a *mūrti*.

Years ago, a devout Hindu friend told me that he would go in front of the *mūrti* and could not stop cursing at him or her. Puzzled, I kept asking him to explain why this was the case and he told me that things in his life just weren't working out as he'd expected. This serves as another example: not only does a *mūrti* represent and constitute an additional parent/child relationship, but perhaps an idealized one. One might want to curse at one's parents, to blame them for one's upbringing, to express bitterness with regard to one's place in the world, but this is not usually reasonable. However, a *mūrti*, significantly more forgiving than your average parent, can become a receptacle for the relationship that the child wants or needs to have with his elders rather than the relationship as stipulated by a flesh and blood parent. If one wants to fight, one can fight. If one wants to struggle, one can struggle. However, all of this occurs without the strain on and consequences related to overt conflict in a relationship with the people who created you.

Second, like a parent will (hopefully) not hold a grudge against a child for disobeying, this interviewee indicates that since she has this parental relationship with the deity, if she doesn't perform *pūjā* one day ("if I haven't done with you"), that is alright. Just as her mother might be frustrated if a daughter failed to call home, but would not hold this against her for too long, the deity won't either. Harkening back to what would happen if one fails to perform *pūjā*, for most interviewees, there isn't necessarily a cosmic consequence. Rather, there is a consequence for the relationship this person has with the *mūrti*, but, additionally, that relationship is hopefully a forgiving one, mirroring an ideal relationship between parent and child. As mentioned above, as someone might feel guilty for not doing *pūjā*, this is similar to the feeling of guilt one might experience when failing to do something requested by a parent. Thus,

obligation becomes part of Shweder et al.'s (2003) ethics of community as a component of an ethics of divinity; in this case, the two are interchangeable, given that the former informs the latter.

In these described instances, the interviewees understand their relationships with *mūrti*s by connecting them to their relationships with parents, or, potentially, vice versa. In other words, the parent/child relationship is a part of the relationship of devotee with *mūrti*, and the two might meld and melt into each other. However, we must consider an instance in which— often with the influence of a *paṇḍit*, or priest— a particular moment of relating to a *mūrti* does not necessarily map on to the parent/child relationship. One interviewee described the following scenario: he is having some kind of trouble in his life, and a priest says that he needs to go to see a *mūrti* 500 miles away in the mountains in order for the trouble to abate. The interviewee continues:

> "I don't think my dad would say, 'Okay, go to that house in the mountains and tell me what you want.' It doesn't make sense, so I started thinking about what that means. If you're telling me that god is my dad, I don't think my dad would tell me to go to a house in the mountains and repeat what I said. That's how I started thinking about it. Then I decided that I don't actually need a religion to go talk to god. I could just say it."

This particular situation, in which what the interviewee refers to as "religion"[58] steps in, shows how a particular trope related to a *mūrti*— that some have different capabilities than others and, thus, that one must sometimes go on a pilgrimage— does not pertain to how this interviewee sees his relationship with a father figure, and, that he does conceptualize god, within a *mūrti*, as a father figure. His father would not inconvenience him to this extent, so why would god? This story illuminates the limitations of the god-as-parent model; in circumstances where the pairing

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[58] Such a gloss resonates with Kant's (2009 [1973]) definition of religion as a mediating and sociological factor rather than as representative of the particular devotee's direct connection with divinity.

of parent and *mūrti* does not match up, there is the potential to jettison the *mūrti* altogether,

opting for a relationship-based interaction with god, devoid of any particular physical presence.

God as Child

> "When you have a child, I have a child, and I have grown him up, what happens? My child imbibes all the love and caring I have channeled into him, and my child grows up happy and robust, doesn't he? As opposed to if I reject my child, abuse my child. Is my child going to grow up the same? No. So if you have an object that you have focused on and desired, and some people take care of their *mūrti*. What happens? Your energy, your love, your pureness of thought goes into that object. And it becomes different now. That *mūrti*, and I have seen that in temples."

Similar to cultivating a parent/child relationship with a *mūrti* wherein the devotee is the

child, the devotee often cultivates a relationship in which he or she is the parent. There doesn't

seem to be any particular point in life during which formulating either of these types of

relationship is more likely; a devotee can even experience both relationships, likely with

different *mūrti*es/deities, at the same time. As this interviewee points out, the affection of the

relationship to some extent invigorates the *mūrti* itself, enlivening it through its role as object.

This can also often be the case when someone finds a *mūrti* and adopts it: the *mūrti* serves as

vehicle for some particular relationship that is emotionally mapped onto it through the adoption.

Accordingly, if one treats a *mūrti* as a child, it is important to feed the *mūrti* before oneself, as

well as to tend to the *mūrti* as one would tend to one's own child. Under these circumstances, it

is more likely that devotees will tend to the *mūrti* every day and will ask someone to fill in if

they cannot perform the requisite actions. Discussing her relationship with Gopāl, one devotee

explained: "Because he's not taking his food, why I will take the food? Because I am a mother

and Gopāl is my child. And how I will take the food if Gopāl is not taking it?"

Gopāl is, indeed, the deity most likely to be treated as a child. He is a child form of Kriṣṇa, fond of sweets and milk. Many families I interviewed, in the U.S. and in India, had small Gopāl *mūrti*s that they had to feed and bathe every single day. There is an entire cottage industry of accessories for Gopāl, including miniature flutes, characteristic of Kriṣṇa. Children are often asked to fill in by caring for Gopāl, but as one interviewee noted, she kept irreverently telling her mother that Gopāl just never grows up— they are waiting and waiting. Because of the need to care for Gopāl every day, even when going on vacation, most families take Gopāl with them. Just as one would not leave his or her child behind without care, these families could not leave Gopāl behind. Most families, it seemed, were likely to have Gopāl, sometimes as a means to teach a child how to perform *pūjā,* but also, for a mother to have a reminder of how she should care for her flesh and blood children. Her identity as a mother was maintained through caring for a perpetual child, thus preserving the ideal self she had formulated as a result of a parent/child relationship.

Just as the relationship between parent and child can be replicated with a *mūrti*, and has its own set of stipulations, here, too, the relationship is enacted. Unlike with an adult *mūrti*, who can be ignored for a day and survive, Gopāl needs to be fed every day. Like having children, keeping Gopāl is a commitment. Thus, different relationships with different *mūrti*s demand different levels of care and specificity, both determined by, societally, how a child should be treated, but also by how one wants to treat his or her child. The relationship itself as individually determined lends support to the idea that particular relationality, and the extent to which an individual feels and adheres to that relationality with regard to a *mūrti,* can determine and affect how an individual regards and treats that *mūrti*. Going back to Fiske's work (1992; Fiske and Aslam 2005), an individual thinks differently about his individual actions than about his relations

with others. In this instance, a *mūrti* serves as a person with whom an individual can have a relationship, which is a unique attribute of a Bengali Hindu relationality schema.

In many works, Freud postulated transference, which is, simply rendered, the positing of the feelings and modes of one particular relationship as manifesting within another relationship. This would often occur in the context of therapy when the patient would interact with the therapist as if he or she were some seminal figure in the patient's life, such as a parent. When this occurred within the context of therapy, this attribution could be productive, such that the therapist, while actively listening, could begin to discern the dynamics of the relevant relationship being illustrated. In this context, we have seen that there is a significant transference of important relationships in a devotee's life onto a *mūrti*, perhaps indicating an indigenous form of psychotherapy with the *mūrti* as interlocutor. The difference here is that while Freud talks about the placement of feelings in one relationship onto another, for Bengali Hindus, they are already co-occurring instantiations of the same relationships, working in concert, and, also, experienced as working quite naturally for the devotee. While the relationships most often mirrored by a *mūrti* are the salient relationships one might expect— parent, child— it is the establishment of any relationship at all which invigorates this particular transference. What has been discussed until now is an ethics of family within an ethics of community, but, more broadly speaking, any emotionally laden relational connection can be mapped onto a *mūrti*.

Relationality Transcends Family

One interviewee detailed an experience his grandmother had while commissioning a drawing of a god. She had commissioned a small drawing, but the artist kept sketching "as if someone has taken over his senses" and kept having to add paper; the drawing became larger and

larger. Even throughout his creation in the physical world, the god was communicating back and forth with his devotees. Finally, the eyes were nearly impossible to finish, but once they were done, after a year and a half, the god gave *darśan* to his devotees. This deity is so connected to his devotees that just before an earthquake occurred, the pupils in his eyes disappeared, signaling that something was about to happen, just as a family member might try to warn his loved ones if he could. These instances of interaction with this particular image solidify the ways in which gods can affect and be affected by individuals' daily lives. There isn't some *mūrti* far away, somewhere, that is exacting power, nor is there necessarily some power above. This deity communicates with his devotees through an image in their living room. They attend to him, but do not ask for these communications. Rather, devotees perceive these communications to occur, thus establishing the connection with this particular deity. As the interviewee explained, this god "has a story with us, with our family."

In this particular instance, the story, the narrative of connection, is as important as the deity himself. It is the history of past interactions— suggesting that more communication could come at any moment— that insinuates the ways in which the stories of these individuals' lives are intertwined with those of the gods. To some extent, the god has grown up with them, serving as a family member; someone who lives with them, who is present, and who knows how they feel and their secrets. This god, the interviewee noted, has moods; you can tell when he's upset. The same way in which one would interpret the emotions of a family member or friend, one becomes accustomed to and able to interpret exactly how the god is feeling. Through the attribution of emotions, the image becomes alive; he is a family member, albeit one who has certain abilities that one's other family members normally do not have. Thus, in perceiving the

god as family, the people one sees every day, the god can become just as mundane, but also just as relevant to the vicissitudes of daily life.

To this end, it is the relationship that is relevant; the ways in which the god relates to one's own particular comprehension of phenomenology. In this circumstance, though the god is often thought of as a particular family member, the god can represent a significant, though non-familial, relation. One of the most compelling stories I heard pertained to Shanu's affinity for the Dakshineshwar Kali Temple. The construction of Dakshineshwar began in 1847 at the very north-most point of Kolkata, and was popularized as the home *mandir* of Ramakrishna, a great Hindu mystic and Kālī devotee (Dakshineshwar Kali Temple, accessed 2017). In the evening, lines queue up and people wait for hours to catch a glimpse of the goddess, somehow spreading chaos and calm simultaneously. Significantly popular with both old and young, Dakshineshwar is a pilgrimage point for anyone serious about temples— and Kālī— in Kolkata, with its appeal often outpacing and eclipsing that of Kalighat, the centrally located Kālī temple where disorder — and elbowing, as Shanu kept pointing out— reigns supreme. Throughout our interview, Shanu, despite lower than average interest in *pūjā* overall, kept discussing how important Dakshineshwar was for him. Speaking of the temple, but also speaking of Ramakrishna, he began: "It has a history which is alive. A man performed miracles, a man who has had shielding of Kālī being there, it's history, you know, people have seen him, there are evidences, there are photographs. So that is of today, you know, our generation. You relate to that. Thus my attraction to Dakshineshwar." Here Shanu discusses how he relates to the *mandir*, how Ramakrishna is close enough to us in history that the miracles feel real. Even if Shanu doesn't experience miracles in his daily life, he has heard tell of miracles nearby. The goddess, the temple, is relevant and relatable in his own life. Regardless of whether he has a particular

122

relationship with Kālī (which he does, anyway), this temple and its location are prominent in his life.

At that point, still not fully understanding exactly why Shanu was so fixated on Dakshineshwar, I moved on with the interview. Why, exactly, would Shanu relate to this particular history and not some other element of recent history pertaining to a *mandir*? *Mandirs* are created on the street all the time; they're almost unavoidable. Why wouldn't Shanu be partial to the *mandir* in front of his office, which he has seen sprout overnight, because it has a history that particularly pertains to his life as well? Only after I'd finished all of my other questions did Shanu, bursting to tell me, explain the full story of Dakshineshwar as he saw it:

> "Dakshineshwar story is, the queen of Calcutta, Rani Rashmoni, her house is in central Calcutta. Has Arundhati taken you to the club called the swimming club? The Calcutta Swimming Club, history of the Calcutta Swimming Club is huge. That used to be because [Rani Rashmoni] would not go to the river to have a bath; that used to be the tank that would fill up with the high tide and she would go and have a bath there. So that's how one knows it. So that's how swimming club came to be. So she got a dream saying that... so she was apparently told that save me, I have been thrown to this point. So get me out. So she went down to the river where is this point, and apparently, after two or three trips she got this point, and if you go to the temple, and you're facing the main entrance of the temple, from the inside looking out, and front steps there is a door on your right and you see a point. Apparently, that area, where the temple is, was the original place for the idol since eons. Now, a fairly rich temple, you know, was uprooted. When they uprooted, they didn't know what to do with the idol, so they threw it into this pond, and it went away. So she got a dream that I'm here, please save me. So the temple was reconstructed, and that is today's temple, and she was put there. Kālī was put there. That is how Dakshineshwar started...There are lots of stories. So that's, as I said, the beginning. It has a history, it has a story, it has something which is a real life. So that's the attraction to Dakshineshwar."

At first, I was baffled. I had, indeed, been to the Calcutta Swimming Club, which is a full hour's drive (in average traffic) from Dakshineshwar. The likelihood of this history seemed suspect to me; how had the Calcutta Swimming Club, as it exists today or previously, been part of Rani Rashmoni's life? Perhaps it is worth mentioning that there is a significant country club scene in Kolkata. Different clubs have different themes: swimming pools, cheap beer, all veg

123

food. These clubs are not easy to join; unless one inherits membership, there are often waiting lists and fees and time spent to find yourself among Kolkata's elite, most of whom took these clubs over from the British after colonization ended. These clubs define social lives and, as a result, many families belong to more than one, each constituting a different group of friends. The Calcutta Swimming Club was a major part of Shanu's life, and most of his close friends— with whom he had dinner parties, went on vacations, watched movies— were members. By this point in my fieldwork, I'd met many of them.

I've never been able to verify Shanu's account that Rani Rashmoni used to swim in anything even close to the Calcutta Swimming Club. Again, the geography of all of this complicates matters. Though it is widely attested that Rani Rashmoni had a dream to build a Kālī *mandir*, there isn't any official documentation that she dreamt she should also save the *mūrti* for that *mandir*. These are likely variations and embellishments which, over time, were added on to what actually occurred— to the point where fact and fiction are inseparable today. What is compelling is the way in which Shanu uses these narratives to relate to himself individually and to his involvement with the Calcutta Swimming Club, a place that is important to him. He might not feel a connection to his office and to the small shrine in front of it, but he certainly feels connected to the Calcutta Swimming Club and, thus, to Rani Rashmoni as a partisan thereof. This might not be so different from following a prominent alumnus of one's university and feeling some amount of pride for that person's accomplishments. However, Shanu uses these feelings of connection to find himself in front of the goddess. If Rani Rashmoni, who feels like a friend by association, found this particular *mūrti* to be so important, then he should take note.

The transitive relationalities at play here— Shanu to Rani Rashmoni to Kālī, for example— show an affinity not only for narrative in relation to divinity, but to autobiographical

narrative. Beyond mere experience, which can also serve as a connection to a deity, inherited experience, an understanding of history and place, can populate an individual's daily actions and, to that end, mind.[59] These shifting relationalities make Kālī at Dakshineshwar feel real to Shanu, and make her important, much in the way that the narrative of Durgā coming home for *pūjā* strikes a chord with so many Bengali Hindus abroad. The story, the ability to relate to it, bring history into a physical and relational presence in the form of a *mūrti*, or potentially, of someone's experiences and the ways in which he or she thinks about the world and location of divinity. It is a particular relationship, even if historically situated, which brings the physical god to the forefront. Not only is this relationship one that an individual has with the god, but it is analogous to the relationships an individual has with family, with place, and with history. The importance of these particularities can be, and often is, transferred onto a god— or maybe it was there from the beginning. To this end, the connection to a physical deity is a relational one, but is also defined by one's relationships with relevant others, translating into transitivity between oneself and how one ultimately behaves in front of, regards, and treats the god. Supporting these occurrences is a broader Indian community which posits that these types of relationships can in fact occur and that god is indeed in the world and available for connection.

What remains somewhat unclear is whether it is societally scripted that one must follow certain rules in front of a *mūrti* as if the *mūrti* were a parent or other important relation, and thus, one acts the same in both circumstances, or, if upon hearing that one should equate a *mūrti* with a parent, one then deems it necessary to follow these edicts of respect. Is the script primarily one

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[59] In recounting *pūjā* narratives, Flueckiger (2015, 42) mentions a devotee whose favorite deity is Shiva since he is lord of the dance, and she dances. This is reminiscent of how one might begin to make a friend or to connect with someone: by discerning similarities. This is another example of finding some similarity with a god so as to make that god relevant in one's life.

for a *mūrti*, which individuals can relate to how they treat their parents, or does the script

primarily pertain to parents and, upon applying this script of "parent" to a *mūrti*, the *mūrti* is

endowed with life? Discerning causality in this respect is perhaps less important than

acknowledging that there are in fact two separate permutations to be cognized. The conclusion I

have come to is that both permutations are part of the same relational schema requisite for

Bengali Hindus to posit a physical god. It is likely that within this schema, these permutations

are mostly identical. Though it is clear that interviewees are able to explain that a *mūrti* is like a

parent without necessarily equating that *mūrti* to a parent, for the older generation of Hindu

Bengalis I interviewed— in so far as they posit god to be within a *mūrti*— these two possibilities

are merged, but for the younger generation, which often fails to attribute god's presence in a

mūrti, these two possibilities remain divergent.

Young adults in the U.S. find respect during *pūjā* just as important as do their parents, but

they are more likely to cite respect for their elders rather than respect for the *mūrti*— for the

adults conducting the *pūjā*. These individuals are separate from *mūrti* itself. However, if they

were to feel as if the *mūrti* was itself another elder, a parent, would their answers change? Would

the locus of respect shift from parent to a parent and *mūrti*-as-parent dyad? To see the *mūrti* as

housing some kind of life— parent, divinity, or somewhere in between— could perhaps alter the

prohibitions they choose to follow as well as the ways in which they understand respect during

pūjā, as is discussed in later chapters. Prior to that examination, however, the next chapter asks:

what allows or causes one to posit that there is god within a *mūrti*? Under what circumstances is

this relational schema activated?

Chapter 4: Where the *Mūrti* Meets Materiality

It has been established that many Bengali Hindus have a particular relationship with a mūrti, *and one which resembles a familial relationship, such that the* mūrti *is treated like and thought of as a relative. What remains unresolved is the role of the physicality of that* mūrti *within this schematic understanding: to what extent and how does the fact that the god is something physical affect the formations and character of these relationships and the performance of* pūjā? *And for whom and when is a god actually within a physical* mūrti? *Accordingly, how should that* mūrti *be treated? How can we make psychological sense of what non-Hindu observers might perceive as irrational? This chapter seeks to examine certain ways that* mūrtis *are treated in relation to their status as god or godly and, thus, to infer some of the confines of what it means to understand god as within an object. What this analysis unveils is first, that the relationship an individual has towards a physical* mūrti *determines its treatment and status as god or godly, second, that this understanding of physical* mūrtis *as residing along a spectrum of required respect, according to relationship, mirrors hierarchical relationships in Indian society more broadly and also signals that Bengali Hindus likely understand the confines of personhood— and even objects— differently than do onlookers who view the god-in-*mūrti *paradigm as irrational.*

Psychological literature has often defined human interactions with objects, such as a *mūrti*, as anthropomorphism: "imbuing the imagined or real behavior of nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, and emotions," (Epley 2007, 864-5). Given my evidence, what appears to be the case for Bengali Hindus is that, tied up within a schema of relationality, many Bengali Hindus have a schematic understanding of the character of objects and their potentiality that is different from that of people who are not Bengali Hindus, or, potentially, who are not Hindus. Such a schematic underpinning, intertwined with motivational force, such as the inclination to perform *pūjā,* indicates thought and action as also necessarily bound.

Through a cluster of relevant questions, I discerned that it is focus which establishes the presence of a god in a *mūrti* and, moreover, that the extent of this focus varies from person to person; understanding that one can have such focus and can establish relationships with non-

human agents is indicative of an alternate way of understanding that which is physical and the ways in which one can interact with it. Moreover, this focus is not pointed; rather it is diffuse, but nonetheless applied with acumen. In other words, one can be schematically engaged in this focus without consciously intending to be. To that end, individualized relational schemas related to the physical world play a significant role in the actions of individual Bengali Hindus, and this perspective is supported by an overall cognitive frame which establishes this type of relationality as a valid option for connection.

Even contemporary non-Indian scholarship on India and Hinduism is laced with fear of anthropomorphism, or its less glamorous epithet: idolatry. It's often oversimplified and synonymized with polytheism, further establishing its supposed inferiority. This is in part because non-Hindu onlookers might find the idea of a god in a physical object to be irrational; they can't make sense of this notion using only their own experiences. Hindu groups (indigenous or originating outside of India) which could be termed apologists— such as Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and the Theosophical Society— also eschew the use of images. Despite what is at worst a denunciation of Hindu anthropomorphism as inferior, or, at best, a failure to better understand Hindu anthropomorphism using contemporary cognitive and motivational models, anthropomorphism is continually burgeoning in its Hindu context.

Hindu Underpinnings of Life within a *Mūrti*

A significant branch of Hindu philosophy, *advaita vedānta*, has delved into exploring the nature of god and to what extent god is physical. Though traces of *advaitic* ideas can be seen as early as the Vedas, this philosophy blossoms within the Upaniṣads, and is brought further to

fruition by Śankāra in the eighth century through his commentaries. The unification of this discourse is thought to have occurred in the medieval period, facilitated and disseminated by the works of Vijñanabikṣu (Nicholson 2010). Today *advaita vedānta* is widely accepted and espoused, likely because it discusses the use of images in Hinduism and, rather than endorsing this completely, denotes *mūrti*s as conduits for a broader form of divinity, thus assuaging anxieties about idolatry brought on by Muslims and the British in their respective historical eras. The basic premise of *advaita vedānta* is that the self— *ātman*— is ultimately the same as the substance underlying all other particulars in physical space— *brahman*. To that end, everything is *brahman* and all physical attributes are illusion— *māyā*. This type of universally construed *brahman* is often described as *nirguṇa*, without worldly qualities, while anything with worldly qualities, such as a particular god, is referred to as *saguṇa*. Here, too, there is an implicit hierarchy: if one can comprehend god as *nirguṇa*, this is superior to comprehending god as *saguṇa*.

This summary is necessarily simplified; to fully analyze the fundamentals of *advaita vedānta* is beyond the scope of this investigation. However, what is outlined here is the level of detail with which most Hindus think about *advaita vedānta*. Many will often explain to me, someone who is not Hindu, that *mūrti*s are only tools to relate to the *brahman* within everything. However, it is possible that this is a simplified explanation representing a much more complex set of ideas. As Fuller (1992) notes, in Hinduism, an image is defined by the power of the deity it contains, and, thus, there is no real distinction between image and deity. While for non-Hindus, we understand that "worship is addressed to a deity whose power is in an image and also to a deity as an image," (Fuller 1992, 61) for most Hindus, these are in fact one in the same and many cease to delineate this distinction at all.

In a more practical sense, *mūrti*s in temples are always installed with a *prāṇapratiṣṭha*

pūjā: *prāṇa* means life force while *pratiṣṭha* means installed, and, thus, *prāṇapratiṣṭha* is the

installation of life into the *mūrti*. This *pūjā* is usually conducted by a *purohit*[60] in a temple, and

may or may not be conducted for home *mūrti*s; in most circumstances, it likely isn't conducted.

While most interviewees mentioned that a *mūrti* is often imbued with life through this *pūjā*, few

seemed to feel as if this is important for their own *mūrti*s. Moreover, many home shrines house a

combination of *mūrti*s and posters of gods. *Mūrti*s do technically require *prāṇpratiṣṭha* to

become viable, but pictures do not (Smith 1995, 37; Sinha 2011, 137). Overall, as will be

elucidated, most devotees are more likely to comprehend *mūrti*s as instantiations of god rather

than as mere images, and this particularly occurs when the *mūrti* in question comes from India

and therefore appears more authentic (Sinha 2011, 116). What is ultimately important is the

connection that a devotee forms with a representation of god, and while most devotees are more

likely to form this connection with a *mūrti*, the possibility of forming a connection with a picture

is in no way excluded or unusual. In temples, when a *mūrti* is no longer in use, a *pūjā* will be

conducted to release the deity from the *mūrti*, but this *pūjā* is rarely conducted for home *mūrti*s

or for posters.

Is God in a *Mūrti*?

When examining how Bengali Hindus conceptualize god, we can see that there is a

divide between the older and younger generations in India: the older generation conceptualizes

god visually significantly more often than does the younger generation.[61] While both groups talk

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[60] Hindu priest

[61] The two-tailed P value equals 0.0032, t = 3.1479, df = 38, standard error of difference = 0.149

about god as a power, the younger group often talks about god solely as such: "I think about a superior power. A lot of people see it as something that exists, like maybe a power, some sort of energy. I mean, that's what I believe, an energy." For this younger generation, god need not be visual and, thus, they are also significantly less likely to think that there is god in a *mūrti* than are their parents.[62] To this end, this group understands god as a primarily mental construction: as a feeling. For example: "That thing is mainly mental, it's nothing like visual. Never got any such visions or visual things like that, but it's… more or less it's mental."

Unlike the younger generation in India, however, the older generation does tend to conceptualize god as visual and often as particular. They do this in two ways (though one person might adhere to both): by designating a specific *mūrti* at a specific temple as housing god and/or by discussing a particular god (e.g. Śiva, Durgā) as primary. For instance, one interviewee immediately thought of the gods and goddesses at particular temples when I asked him how he conceptualized god: "The only, if you really think of god, it's like my memory drive to say Dakshineshwar, that's it. Or if you have been to, to give you an example, you have been to a place, Dhakka or Puri, these are places." While many interviewees just mentioned the names of gods or goddesses when I asked how divinity is conceptualized, some offered more elaborate answers:

> "**S:** God is a supreme power. God is one. There are different faces— maybe Durgā, maybe Kālī, maybe Saraswati, maybe Lakshmi...
> R: So when you think about god, is there a visual component to it?
> **S:** The visual component is there, just to make concentration. Suppose I would like to maybe meditate and there's a candle in front of me. So without the candle, I may be

This was calculated by coding results from a question asking how interviewees conceptualized god. Answers were coded as either abstract or as having visual (and often physical) characteristics if there was any indication that the interviewee conceptualized god this way.

[62] The two-tailed P value is less than 0.0001, t = 5.5630, df = 41, standard error of difference = 0.122 This result might also be a contradiction in espousal vs. behavior which will be addressed in chapter seven.

distracted by different things. So without concentration, maybe god is like a candle to us. So suppose I believe in Kālī, I have Kālī image in front of me, I believe in Durgā, I have Durgā image in front of me, so Durgā is like a candle, so that my focus doesn't get distracted to some other place. So when you start meditation, when you're looking at the candle, normally you look at the candle and you will start meditation. Meditating by more focus... That's the logic behind it I've heard, and for me, this logic really works fine. So I'm worshipping Durgā, so who is Durgā? To me, Durgā is a goddess with ten hands, with ten powers."

This answer alludes to many different understandings of god: god is a power, yes, but a power which can be contained in a visual form. God is also a means of focus, but any other object could be as well. However, for this devotee, if this devotee is worshipping Durgā, Durgā is a goddess with ten arms. Many of these tropes are common and can be found among Hindus in the U.S. and India, particularly including the *mūrti* as a means of focus. Though this person, and several others, posit a mental (as described above) understanding of god, she also notes that this mental conceptualization is contained in something visual, something external, something with particular characteristics. It is unsurprising, then, that the older generation in India, who conceptualize visually, are more likely to think god is in a *mūrti*, and the younger generation, who do not conceptualize god visually, do not tend to think god is in a *mūrti*.

While this notion of focus appears to be applicable in so far as the same substance is within all *mūrti*s, this analysis privileges an interpretation based on *advaita vedānta*, which I've come to believe is not entirely what most devotees intend when they attempt to explain this; the understanding of the physical as merely mediating does not approximate the ways in which most Hindus execute their interactions with gods, and therefore I wonder if they use this rubric as a means to explain, but that the crux of that being explained is lost. This, however, is the understanding most often analyzed and advocated by scholars of Hinduism. Rather, the operative

132

element here is the focus: where god is in the physical world is designated by focus, and that focus is largely individually determined based on proclivities and/or relationships.

Hence, I considered an interviewee to think god was in a *mūrti* if that person said that a god was in a *mūrti* at some point or in some *mūrti*, not necessarily that god was in all *mūrti*s at all times. Of adults in both the U.S. and in India who designated that god was in *mūrti*s, about three-quarters of the time they noted that god was only in a *mūrti* when an individual deemed that the god was there; in other words, it was individual focus which placed the god in the *mūrti* rather than any ritual or other external practice. The remaining interviewees who contended that god was indeed in *mūrti*s felt as if god was always in all *mūrti*s. As one interviewee in the former category in the U.S. eloquently explained:

> "No, only when you pray. When you are physically focusing on the *mūrti*, I see, that's what I'm led to believe, what my grandmother... No, it's when you are actually seeing, the god comes down in that form so you can see that form. That's the way it was explained to me. If we say god is everywhere, then why do we have to pray to a *mūrti*? Why that idol worship? And my grandmother explained it's a focus. And when you get up, sometimes you have trouble focusing or pinpoint... **So if I'm not looking at the god, he's not there**." (emphasis added)

Similar to the need to document and display at Durgā Pūjā, which demands focus from viewers, in this instance, focus is required for the god to exist in material at all. It is the focus which brings the god to life.

In the U.S., like in India, adults were more likely to say there was god in a *mūrti* than was the younger generation.[63] However, in terms of how they conceptualize god, a broader question, the younger generation in the U.S. was about equally likely to say god was visual as were their parents. While adults did often mention god as a power, the younger group was actually unlikely to do this. Instead, they would often mention a particular god they related to. This likely feeds

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[63] The two-tailed P value equals 0.0004, t = 3.9115, df = 35, standard error of difference = 0.141

into a broader trend of younger generation in the U.S. reciting a party line to me, as if they were parroting what they'd been taught rather than necessarily discussing how they felt (which will be discussed more later). Regardless of whether this was the case, what can be inferred from this data is that overall, the older generation was more likely to find god in a *mūrti* than was the younger generation, but the majority of older Bengali Hindus only found god in a *mūrti,* and, at that, under certain circumstances.

Fluekiger (2015, 78) is quick to note that her interviewees in Atlanta will also say that the image is primarily something to concentrate on and that they're not worshipping the actual image, but that devotees still feed the *mūrti*, massage it, etc., which are actions that most non-Hindus would comprehend as positing a god in the *mūrti* itself. Narayanan (1996) echoes this assertion, that we should be weary of understanding a *mūrti* as merely a vessel. Finally, White (2008, 615) mentions that one would be wrong to assume that image worship happens only among less educated villagers and that *bhakti*, revering one high and "monotheistic" *iṣṭadevatā* is for educated city-dwellers; even these more well-off Hindus worship multiple *mūrti*s, such as their *kuladevatās*, or family deities. My research findings corroborate all of these assertions.

Relationships Determine the God's Presence and *Mūrti's* Treatment

Understanding how individuals choose to interact with the physical *mūrti* allows us to better understand what— or whom— they understand the *mūrti* to be, and under what circumstances the *mūrti* is, indeed, a who. Though I've often come across certain stipulations for where a *mūrti* should be placed or shouldn't be placed, these rules are not uniformly upheld. By looking at the different circumstances of their observance, one begins to see that the individual's relationship with the *mūrti* in question is what determines where it should be housed.

When asked where a *mūrti* should not be, most interviewees expressed some acknowledgement that there were certain places that were less than ideal for any kind of divine presence. Unsurprisingly, the most common answer was that a *mūrti* should not be anywhere unclean, such as a bathroom. Secondarily, some interviewees would mention the kitchen, explaining that Bengali households cook meat, so a *mūrti* shouldn't be present to witness that. Older individuals in India would occasionally refer to Vāstuśāstra, scriptural literature which designates the direction a *mūrti* should face, but even if they mentioned this, there was little consensus on which direction was actually preferable.[64] It does seem that in India people are more inclined to know that there *is* a particular place for a *mūrti* to be; one interviewee who is an interior designer in her mid-20s explained that around 90% of her clients want to know where to position a *pūjā* room. However, if one is not hiring an interior designer, it seems as if inertia in a family home is most likely to determine where the *mūrti* actually is.

The question that elicited the most interesting responses, however, was "Is it okay for a *mūrti* to be kept in a closet?" When I asked this question, the intended meaning was: is it alright for a *mūrti* to be stored away, implying that the *mūrti* is not being worshipped. Unfortunately, I did not take into account that many people do have their *pūjā* rooms in closets, so the question was interpreted in varying ways. While I do not have specific demographic data about which participants found storage to be allowed, I was able to discern circumstances under which those who found storage acceptable were able to condone it. In general, across groups, there are two camps: those who feel that if you have a *mūrti*, that *mūrti* needs to be worshipped (rather than stored), and those who feel that one has to endow a *mūrti* with life in order for worshipping to be

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[64] Sahey (2010, 43) also notes that there's discrepancy in what direction the home *mandir* should face, but it is often stated that it should not face south. However, this also depends on where the kitchen is in relation to the *mūrti* and the non-veg status of said kitchen.

necessary. As will become clear shortly, these two groups are actually functioning along the

same spectrum of when to worship a particular *mūrti*, and are basing their conclusions on similar

logical premises.

Suryamukhi, an American graduate student in her mid-20s, provides a full explanation of

the issues at hand. She begins by discussing the circumstances under which it would be okay for

a *mūrti* to be in a closet:

> "Closet is fine. Generally you're supposed to... always supposed to keep the closet door
> open then. You wouldn't close the closet door ever, because that's rude. Like why would
> you put your guest in a closet and shut the door on them kind of thing. Also you're
> supposed to, like some people always have some light lit there at all times."

From this response, it would appear as if Suryamukhi is utterly against putting a *mūrti* in storage;

if one has a *mūrti*, one must make sure the *mūrti*, as a guest, is well taken care of. This is the

principle she attempts to relay. However, thirty seconds later, she launched into this admission:

> "**S:** My *bhagavān's*[65] in my closet, but it's not set up as such. The images are just there.
> I'm not thinking of it as being like a *mūrti*.
> **R:** It's not like there's a guest there; there's more like a receptacle for a potential guest?
> **S:** Yeah. Or like... for me right now it's just like, it's just like if this paper[66] was here.
> Like it's not, I'm not thinking of it right now as being like oh, I'm going to pray. I don't
> feel like god is residing in this image at this exact— it is an image of, like one aspect of
> god."

In other words, any *mūrti* which one views as actually housing a deity, to which anyone actually

prays, should not be left in storage in a closet. However, if one does not currently think there is a

deity in the *mūrti*, if one is not actively praying, that *mūrti* can be in storage with no problem.

Thus, rather than assuming that 1) all *mūrti*s have life in them, or 2) that life must be instilled in

a *mūrti* through traditional mantras that a brahmin recites, the *mūrti* should only be respected as a

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[65] A generic respectful name for a god.
[66] The image of Durgā I had presented earlier on.

god if a person him or herself designates that that is the case. This, perhaps, is another avenue of *darśan*: the important part is not necessarily being in the gaze of the deity, but rather choosing to gaze at the deity oneself, as one also does when taking a picture with the deity. The individual is instilling the power, and it is the relationship with this particular *mūrti* or deity which indicates the extent to which this type of focused *darśan* will occur, temporarily or for years.

This motif is hardly uncommon, particularly in the U.S. where houses have room for storage and where people tend to have many possessions. Soma's daughter used to regale me with childhood stories of how she would go over to another Bengali home, play hide and seek, and open a closet only to find a towering Durgā *mūrti*, left in storage until the next Durgā Pūjā. Vishal, an older Bengali Hindu American, confirmed this: "When we lived in Florida, I used to run the Bengali society in Tampa, so our Durgā idol and everything used to be in a storage all year round. And there's no choice, where do you keep it? Nobody had a big enough garage to keep it in, so it was always in a storage. So I have a biased answer for you there. I have no problems." Moreover, as noted earlier, Ananda Mandir keeps their Durgā *mūrti* sealed up for the majority of the year. There is nowhere to dispose of these *mūrti*s, and, instead, it is possible to adhere to Suryamukhi's logic that if one does not oneself imbue a *mūrti* with power, there is no god there.

Much of this discussion relates to what people choose to do with all of the cards and calendars (with images of deities) that they receive from temples and friends as opposed to *mūrti*s they worship daily. These pieces of paper, which aren't as often worshipped, seem to occupy an intermediary space: they are godly, but they are not god. While there are certainly people who will feel the need to worship all of these images if they happen to possess them, it is more likely that, since many people do not themselves associate life with these pictures, the

pictures do not have to be treated with the utmost respect, but rather just with some respect.

From a non-Hindu perspective, one can think of these images as if they were prayer beads,

menorahs, seder plates, or even a statue of the Virgin Mary. These objects are revered and often

have specific uses, but they are not themselves gods, nor are they necessarily fit for worship.[67]

This is why, indeed, those who allow *mūrti*s in storage and those who don't are thinking along

the same lines: both opine that a *mūrti* one thinks houses a god should be worshipped, but where

they differ is with regard to which *mūrti*s are attributed life. Sutapa confirms this when she tells

me what she does with the images of gods she has around the house: "I thought these are lying

around, and I'm not respecting... And we haven't really established life into these...You know, if I

can put it in a bag where I'm shredding all the mail, at least it will not go into maybe a pile of

soiled garbage, or, you know, meat garbage or something."

The introduction of life to a *mūrti*, *prāṇapratiṣṭha*, certainly indicates that it should be

treated appropriately. However, under what circumstances does one decide to imbue a *mūrti* with

life? Sneha notes: "Like for that piece of paper.[68] If you leave it with me, I will put in the

appropriate place and if I think, okay, I have something to do with that, I will. But if I don't... I

have a clay figure of Durgā from Calcutta. I have that on my prayer place. So, I don't need

another picture. So I'll put it in the recycling. So I don't really relate this to that Durgā,

necessarily." For Sneha, the picture of Durgā I brought with me is not Durgā; her own *mūrti* is.

She does not relate to this picture. In other words, she has not established a relationship with that

particular physical instantiation of god. Whether a relationship comes before or with performing

pūjā to a particular *mūrti* is unclear and likely varies based on the individual, but as one elderly

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[67] Sinha (2011, 101) similarly found that not all objects that draw on religious symbolism are treated, in practice, as being endowed with sacred connotations and thus appropriate for worship.
[68] The image of Durgā I had presented earlier on.

woman in India put it: "Because I am not doing *pūjā* to her. The picture is nothing. No relationship." These statements of the necessity of forming a relationship with a given *mūrti* echo and further instantiate the Indian occupation with the god as a relation, as a family member.

It soon became clear that there was another category of *mūrti* to which one would not necessarily pray: those that are used as art pieces. This confluence of and confusion between aesthetics and worship pervades Bengali Hindu houses in the U.S. and in India. One can count around ten *mūrti*s on the main floor of Soma's house, all outside of her *pūjā* room, and including a small Ganeśa in the kitchen and next to the phone, despite the fact that they regularly cook meat. Since Bengali families often have *mūrti*s in entryways, it became easy for me to find the correct house when I traveled to conduct interviews. Sayantika's home in particular contained a massive metal Śiva Naṭarāja[69] peering out the window next to the front door. Risu's living room boasted a table with dozens of small Ganeśas. In India, too, many homes I visited had *mūrti*s all around. One interviewee in India noted: "We have *mūrti*s, like Ganeśa, this and that, everywhere in the house. Somewhere or other we can make the point of entry, you have a *mūrti* or something like that. It's not that we have *pūjā* to that particular photograph or anything, but it's all over the house anyways."

Ambiguity abounds when one attempts to draw the line between a *mūrti* one worships and *mūrti* as art in any consistent way. While this delineation seems equivocal from the outside, it is equally confusing among Bengali Hindus themselves:

> "I can also have it as a decorative piece. It's just some people have that problem of they mix it up. They're using it for a decorative piece, but because it's a holy item, they can also have that environment of holiness around it. Right, so suppose I buy, suppose I see a Ganeśa idol and I buy it on the street because it's beautiful. I'm buying it for the beauty of it, not for the religious purpose of it. But then I bring it home, and some people say oh, this is Ganesh. I can't keep it inside a closet or next to a shoe box or something, because

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[69] A dancing form of Śiva.

then I am disrespecting the god. I am, just to see it from that concept to me, I will buy it from the... I bought it because it was good luck, I felt good about it, and there isn't religion in it."

To this extent, aesthetics becomes important in addition to worshipping, and it's not always clear, even to those involved, whether it is verboten to keep a *mūrti* as decoration, or if one does, to what extent god is present in that *mūrti*. Sutapa's small apartment in Manhattan, for example, has *mūrti*s covering two entire walls. The ones on the smaller wall are exposed, but those on the longer wall are in a glass case, along with other small statues. Attempting to discern the differences between these *mūrti*s, I asked Sutapa, her husband, and her daughter: which ones do you pray to? They could easily tell me that the exposed ones were prayed to and that the others were decorative. "Is god in all of them, though? Even the decorative ones?" I inquired. Simultaneously, Sutapa and her daughter said no, while the father said yes. Such instances illustrate the significant amount of variation in understanding what *mūrti*s are for and why, even if everyone can agree that some are purely for decoration.

Another instantiation of this tension arises when one person in a household perceives a *mūrti* as decorative and, therefore, it should not be worshipped, while another person feels that every *mūrti* should be worshipped. For example, one younger Indian, coming from a very traditional brahmin family, explains:

"We were told previously, if you buy a *mūrti*, don't buy a *mūrti*, have to worship it... As young children like this, we used to go places, get a *mūrti*... My grandma would come and say you have to do *pūjās* and the practice is that you bring it back, and that is why in our home, there are four Śiva *lingas*. All are worshipped. Then another priest would come, worshipping four Śiva *lingas* is also not right. Somebody would say the boy went out, bought three, four, five statues merely because they were beautiful statues maybe, something interesting, as art pieces. Then brought to the home to start worshipping."

In part the confusion here lies in the fact that whoever buys the *mūrti* as a decorative piece does have some connection with the *mūrti*, as described above; otherwise, why would he purchase it? While to this man's grandmother that means the *mūrti* should be worshipped, to the man, he feels as if his connection with the *mūrti* is more of an aesthetic attraction. To this extent, aesthetics, appreciating the *mūrti* as an object itself, is a relationship that is fraught; the relationship one forms with a *mūrti* to whom he or she does *pūjā* is one of familiarity and closeness, with the *mūrti* as animated. However, the relationship one forms through aesthetics regards the *mūrti* as object and nothing else.

Sudeshna, who lives in a joint family home, has her own space, but shares the compound with her brother and his family. As I sat and chatted with the women of the house, notably beside a very large Ganeśa, Sudeshna's brother was going around offering *āratī* to every *mūrti* in both his space as well as in Sudeshna's. After confirming that this was in fact what he was doing, Sudeshna quipped: "He would come in here if I would let him! He waits until I'm out of the house to go do *pūjā* to that [large Ganeśa]. I have to chase him out. I can tell when he's been in here because of the incense smell and the ash on the floor." Though Sudeshna did have a separate *pūjā* room, whose *mūrti*s her brother also prayed to, this Ganeśa was, to her, decorative. However, her brother, having difficulty accepting this, felt as if he was disrespecting this Ganeśa by not offering *pūjā*. The differing relationships that each had with this particular *mūrti* created tension in their own relationship. To what extent is this *mūrti* Ganeśa, the god, and to what extent is this *mūrti* Ganeśa, cultural staple and image, formed in a particularly aesthetically pleasing way? This wasn't the only time Sudeshna and her brother encountered conflict related to *pūjā:* regularly, when walking on the street together, he wanted to stop at every small shrine to pay homage and she just wanted to keep walking. This dispute as well as the varied ways in which

141

people interact with *mūrti*s relate to the initial point that Suryamukhi made: the extent to which a *mūrti* needs to be worshipped, to be respected as alive, is determined by the individual possessing or residing with the *mūrti*. It is the individual who fashions the god and not necessarily the other way around.

These difficulties have expanded in the recent past as god posters become more and more pervasive in the physical environment in India. Smith (1995) terms this omnipraxy, practicing *pūjā* everywhere to pervasive portable images; this trend is unmediated, casual, and informal. Additionally, these posters are inexpensive and found in mundane settings such as taxis and shops. Though it is likely that these types of small rituals were always part of the South Asian religious scene, the fact that these posters are widely distributed and varied to suit ones needs (so you can get the perfect poster, with the perfect guru) makes it more conspicuous (Smith 1995, 7). To complicate matters further, sometimes these images are prayed to and sometimes they're mere decorations (36), depending on the context and the individual. As manufacturers print images of gods on packaging for rice, temple calendars, t-shirts, etc., a Hindu who might consume these products is effectively surrounded by these images of gods. Additionally, home shrines in the U.S. are often occupied by these pictures since they are easier to move: devotees didn't have to bring a heavy *mūrti* from India and, given significant mobility among new immigrants, posters might make more sense (Sahey 2010, 43). As Karapanagiotis (2013, 74) notes with regard to cyber forms of deities, these posters still "need to evoke adequate sentiment in devotees in order for devotees to see them as God and to worship them as god."[70]

When Objects are Godly but not God: A Bengali Hindu Model of Object Relations

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[70] C.f. Babb (1981, 400).

If a *mūrti* does not evoke enough inclination in an individual to stipulate a relationship, how should one treat that object? Delving into this question reveals a hierarchy of objects, according to relationships with those objects, which indicates that perhaps Bengali Hindus understand objects as a category differently than do other groups. Based on the strength of a relationship with an object, a Bengali Hindu might attribute aspects of personhood to that object, thus illuminating a culturally situated view of the line between person and non-person. To explore these differences, we'll first consider what it would mean to dispose of a *mūrti*, with an eye toward what circumstances it is a god versus a godly object. Ultimately, these two circumstances are likely different points along a spectrum correlating with required reverence and service to the *mūrti* or object in question.

While there were no stark distinctions between the four groups interviewed with regard to throwing out a *mūrti*, Bengali Hindus in India did emphasize somewhat different points than did Bengali Hindus in America. Additionally, while most people interviewed would be uncomfortable with someone else throwing out a *mūrti* or to do so themselves, the second generation was slightly less averse to this proposition, reflecting, to some extent, their disinterest in *mūrti*s. What is surprising is how many of them would in fact be concerned if someone were to throw out a *mūrti*. Although the potential of angering the god was mentioned a few times, by and large, most participants agreed that nothing would happen if one were to throw out a *mūrti*. Rather, one would simply feel uncomfortable, as Shanu illustrates: "Again, that's a belief. Not a belief that if we do it something bad will happen, but if you ask me to tear up that page,[71] I won't do it. Because I won't like it. It's not that something bad will happen, we don't believe in that. If you tear it up, that doesn't mean something bad will happen. But I won't do it myself. That's a

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[71] The image of Durgā I had presented.

belief, that I won't do it. But that doesn't mean I'll feel like it is bad luck, no. I don't think anything bad luck, but I won't do it."

Groups in India mentioned very traditional ways to dispose of *mūrti*s or pictures of gods that they no longer wanted or needed: most likely, the would submerge these in the Ganga, but, if that were not an option, would also leave them under a tulsi or banyan tree, or would store them, likely until a time when they could be disposed of in the Ganga. Another similar response was to place these *mūrti*s in the bins dedicated to used *pūjā* materials, which usually contain flowers. These would likely also end up in the Ganga; this is standard protocol for removing temporary images an accoutrement that are not meant for long term use (Huyler 1999, 549). At this point the ritual efficacy of these images and flowers has been extracted and there is little discomfort in discarding them (Sinha 2011, 184). At my hosts' home in Kolkata, there was almost always a small plastic bag of used flowers sitting on the front table; the priest would come in the morning and evening, perform his *pūjā*, and leave these flowers for some servant to take to the water. These flowers, however, are still considered sacred objects, albeit ones that can be disposed of: I once told Jalahasini and Joydita of a man I saw spitting into a wheelbarrow of spent flowers at Kalighat. Both were horrified.

Though many people in the U.S. mentioned throwing paper images of gods or *mūrti*s into the water, they acknowledged that this wasn't really practical in the U.S., and so they had to come up with alternative strategies. Three options emerged for how one could dispose of *mūrti*s in America: the first option is to recycle. Sometimes this would include shredding before recycling, but the premise is that a *mūrti* in the Ganga goes back to its source, clay, and so paper with an image of a god is reused. However, some people do indeed simply throw out flyers from temples that happen to have a deity on them; in this instance, the primary purpose of the flyer is

seen to be promotional rather than divine, so there is no relationship with the image. Another

option, which was the most popular, would be to keep the *mūrti* or image, storing it in some way:

> "Like when I get these calendars with gods and goddesses, I just fold them. It's been
> piling up because I get the four, five temples here. Yes, it would definitely bother me if
> I throw a *mūrti* or a picture of a god or goddess. I would store it. I would not keep it
> stored visibly, but you know, I'll store it away."

Another interviewee explained that she has a box where she keeps all these calendars of

deities and small *mūrti*s. She keeps the shoebox in her *pūjā* room and, while she doesn't pray to

these images, they are protected. While in India these images and *mūrti*s are often stored until a

time when they can be properly disposed of, in the U.S., they are often stored indefinitely.

Finally, another option is to find a worthwhile recipient for one's *mūrti*s and pictures of

gods. As noted, many temples send out extensive flyers and calendars depicting deities, and this

is the main source from which individuals collect these pictures. Settling onto Sayantika's couch,

I began my interview. When I asked about *pūjā*, Sayantika rushed to show me her *pūjā* room.

When I asked about temples, Sayantika and her husband went back to the *pūjā* room and

produced brochures from every temple in the area, each with contact information and,

predictably, pictures of the temple's *mūrti*s. Though when they produced these pieces of paper it

was clear that they were attempting to help with my research, another reason for gifting these to

me became obvious: it was an attempt to remove these pictures from their houses in a respectful

way. In this circumstance, they were making sure that the pictures would have some use, because

I would have some connection with them; their relationship with these images was over, but

mine was beginning. As Sinha (2011, 6, 19) attests, these images are animated through usage,

and have histories and lives of their own. Throughout fieldwork, I was gifted several additional

*mūrti*s and pictures. These actions deploy a small economy of images, over-supplying the

demand for a commodity that is continually created, but rarely destroyed. Unlike sending pictures via WhatsApp or on Facebook, which can be replicated again and again, giving of physical paper images serves a practical need: to declutter one's space, but to simultaneously respect the deity. However, both actions in some way serve to establish bonds: one offers a foray into family, in so far as they are positioned with the goddess, while the other offers an entrance to a community wherein these physical images are produced and disseminated.

In India, both adults and their children frequently cited one reason for why they needed to treat a piece of paper with an image of a god or a *mūrti* with a significant amount of respect. Speaking about the potential of throwing out a picture of a god, one younger interviewee remarked: "Somehow, I feel bad about doing that and I believe that it's really... I wouldn't do that to my father's photograph also, if it was a really old photograph, I would never, I don't know, I would dispose of it, but I would dispose of it with a little respect. So similarly, I would dispose of this with a little respect. Like I would not throw it in the regular bin, but I would throw it in a bin where all the stuff from the *pūjā* room goes into." This comparison came up again and again in India: god as family member serving as reason not to simply dispose of a picture. To this end, an image of god isn't sacred in and of itself, due to the fact that it is a god; rather it is sacred through comparison to a more mundane relationship, such as that of father and child. One respects one's father, so one should respect an image of god. Instead of explaining that disposing of a picture of god would just make one feel uncomfortable, when described more fully, god becomes more relatable, more of a mirror of one's lived life. Rather than god as separate and powerful in and of godself, god is close, and god is powerful in the way a parent is powerful, and particularly in the context of one's familial life.

146

While talking with an Indian Bengali Hindu friend after my fieldwork, our conversation came around to the questions I had asked in my research. I mentioned the question regarding whether or not god is in a *mūrti*, and he began to dissect the question rather than supplying his own answer. Instead, he posed to me, "Why would you keep a loved one's photo in your wallet?" He was attempting to explain this to me as if our answers would certainly be the same, but I demurred, waiting for him to answer his own question rather than bias him.[72] He went on to explain that one would keep a photo of a loved one in one's wallet or readily available on one's phone in order to protect and take care of that person— to continue the relationship, and in a predictable way. And of course, one might prefer one particular picture to another, since some instantiations of that loved one might be more endearing than others. This is not at all why I keep a photo of my brother in my wallet, nor is it why I believe that most non-Hindu Americans might do so, based on my inquiries of those around me following this conversation. This moment lends additional insight when trying to understand how images can be godly and not god, and how images, above all else, connote and extend relationships: for this friend, an image is still, to some extent, that person, and his caring for the image is effectively caring for that person. Though he would say that the image is not that person, it is in some ways a small part of that person over which he has control.

To this end, my friend creates "for himself and from himself a frame of reference" for a point of focus which is internalized, and thus, *darśan,* becomes "a powerful mirror with the potential to transform the viewer," (Babb 1981, 400). He empowers himself through the utilization of the image in so far as he feels that the image is itself a real part of that loved one,

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[72] I hadn't known that keeping photos in one's wallet was even a custom in India, or, otherwise, this question might have been in my interview guide.

the same way he might feel as if an image of god he carries around is a small part of that god. Thus, these arguments about relationships and imagery certainly apply to depictions of god, but just as likely carry implications for images of other people in one's life, to the extent that one maintains a similar character of relationships, at differing levels, with others as one might maintain with gods. Therefore, gods are, to some extent, simply elevated people, and people are in their own way godly.[73]

Returning to this conversation months later as I discussed my arguments with this friend, he brought up another example: the bike he'd had as a child. Trying to understand what I was proposing, he asked me why I would be compelled to clean a bike if it were dusty. I told him that, for me, it would be a matter of cleanliness: I wouldn't want to get dust on myself, I would want to promote cleanliness in my life overall, I would be worried about potential contagions, and also maybe about the long-term usefulness of the bike. Surprised, he told me why he found it imperative to keep his bike clean when he was young: he thought that if he had a bath and he was clean, he should also clean his bike. The bike was like him and, therefore, was in need of the same things that he was. He went on to tell me that, as children do, he'd often fall off his bike. In these circumstances, he was worried about his own cuts and bruises, but was also worried about hurting the bike through scratches and dents. This wasn't a concern regarding the appearance of his bike as property or related to damaging it: his concern was that he would *hurt the bike*, even though he knows, logically, that the bike does not feel pain the same way he does. Beyond establishing relationships with photos, my friend had established a relationship with his bike. Though this example may be extreme, it lends credence to the possibility that this idea of

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[73] There is some textual precedence for this; for example, Yudhiṣṭhira went to heaven in his own body in the Mahābhārata. He is somewhere between god and man, and the delineation is never made clear. Other texts include similar narratives.

relationality, as it is formed in varying contexts, extends not only to human-like objects, but to objects more generally. There is the possibility that, due to possessing a relational schema, Hindus might perceive objects— and requisite relationships and interactions with them— differently overall.

When a Community Forms a Relationship with a *Mūrti*

Walking around Kolkata early in the morning, a barrage of *purohits* join you, wandering every which way, making their daily *pūjā* runs. They stop at one or more of the innumerable roadside shrines in the city or they go to private houses to honor the deities there for individual clients. These small roadside shrines are another indication of how individuals personally connect to deities. Many individuals who cannot take *mūrti*s they'd like to discard to the Ganga instead end up leaving them under certain sacred trees— most likely banyan, peepul, or neem trees. What happens after that, however, is an example of community and deity aligning. Sometimes these *mūrti*s will be picked up by passersby, but another possibility is also viable. When asked whether people abandon *mūrti*s under trees, and what exactly happens next, Shanu responded as follows:

> Yes, yes yes yes yes yes yes... You'll have a banyan tree come in, banyan trees grow four, five feet from the ground and people will come and make a little wall around the tree and then somebody will come and start cleaning it up and somebody will come and put a little Śiva there, the next day you'll have Pārvatī there, you'll have something else there, and it will start growing and becomes a place of worship and people start coming there and will light an incense stick and a candle, not a candle, a *prodeep*, oil lamp. And it becomes a temple. I've watched this in front of my office. There was nothing there! A banyan tree! And suddenly everybody comes there and bows their head and I'm watching this.

For whatever reason, someone chose to leave a *mūrti* under this tree and it escalated into a veritable *mandir*. Sometimes people intentionally leave these *mūrti*s near trees because they are

149

broken or unwanted. In these circumstances, once one *mūrti* resides in a place, people keep adding others and, since it is often part of *pūjā* to leave coins (for deities or priests), money piles up. A priest starts coming by every morning in order to perform *pūjās* for locals and, as payment, takes some of the coins or charges devotees for his services. Sometimes this process happens organically, sometimes it is sponsored (initially or eventually) by a community or group of street vendors, and sometimes it is set up specifically to make a profit. One striking example of using roadside shrines for a particular purpose is that of tiles illustrating deities which were put up in order to deter urination in certain spots. Once a *mūrti* or image is present, once a *mandir* is established, no one can or will dismantle it. This, and the fact that banyan roots tend to destroy roads and walls, is why these trees are often cut down in cities as soon as someone recognizes their presence.

There are numerous examples of this *mandir*-establishing occurring. One striking example, mentioned often, is that of the Lake Kalibari Mandir in Kolkata. A *purohit* decided he felt the presence of Kālī in a certain location and began to worship. Eventually, because of the public's reaction to his devotion, he gathered enough donations to purchase an actual *mūrti*. Now, there is a looming temple situated off from the road and merchants on the street sell *chaat* into the night for hungry devotees. An entire economy and community has cropped up from one person's individual connection with a deity in a particular location. While, in this instance, it doesn't seem that there were any nefarious intentions at play, interviewees explained to me that sometimes a person or group won't like what is going on in a particular location (e.g. construction of a new commercial building) so they will "find" a Śiva *linga* in that location. A shrine is eventually established and any type of construction comes to a halt.

Even strolling through Kalighat, probably the most popular (and crowded) *mandir* in Kolkata, I noticed a calendar on the wall. The calendar was clearly being worshipped— the deities had *tilaks* and there were coins left there and incense burning nearby. Despite the fact that one of the most well-known Kālī *mūrti*s was only feet away, someone also felt the need to pay homage to the deities in this abandoned calendar. It didn't appear that anyone had hung it intentionally, to serve as a calendar. Rather, it was likely abandoned by a temple-goer who felt that Kalighat was a reasonable place to leave an unwanted calendar. Similarly, the day after Diwali, I stumbled upon an abandoned Lakṣmī and an abandoned Ganeśa, the two *mūrti*s used for the celebration who are supposed to be placed within one's home and office until the following year.[74] Abandoned *mūrti*s are ubiquitous, but they are far from unloved.

Aside from circumstances wherein money is the primary objective, these shrines purvey instances in which, on a community level, a group of people connects with a *mūrti* at least in part due to its geography. Though one person might have lost touch with a particular *mūrti* and, thus, abandoned it, others might take on this responsibility. Similarly, if someone is unable to help a family member, another family member steps in. There is a necessity for care in these circumstances; a *mūrti* left abandoned will not remain unnoticed or uncared for. Whether it is picked up and taken home, incorporated into a larger *mandir,* or spawns a community shrine, it is not neglected. With practically infinite (or infinite-feeling) points of potential connection as one roams around the city, it truly is as if one is living among the gods. The community not only supports this circumstance through ensuring the worship of abandoned deities, but also generates the relationship between individual and place; by leaving a *mūrti*, by worshipping a *mūrti* left,

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[74] This is a broadly North Indian rather than Bengali tradition, and Bengalis don't usually participate. However, Kolkata is a city filled with many non-Bengalis.

one establishes roots with a location and connection with a particular deity. This cyclical process

makes sure that divinity, *mūrti*s, are part of one's daily life. In this way, the individual has a

plethora of opportunities to create and connect to sacred geographies, expressing personal

connection to a higher being who is ethereal, but also perpetually present.

Theorizing Anthropomorphism in Psychological Literature

Epley et al. (2007, 866), who wrote an exhaustive review article chronicling,

summarizing, and organizing research on anthropomorphism within psychology, understand

anthropomorphism to have cognitive as well as motivational determinants. Epley et al. explain

what they call elicited agent knowledge as the premise that an individual will apply a pre-

existing cognitive model— that of how oneself and other humans act— to nonhuman objects,

adjusting understanding as evidence becomes available, to the extent that an individual is

motivated and able to do so. Each part of their cognitive inductive process is guided or modified

by the two drive components: effectance and sociality. The first motivational determinant,

effectance, stipulates that an individual will exhibit more anthropomorphism if there is

uncertainty regarding the behavior of the relevant nonhuman agent and in accordance with the

benefits of accurately predicting this behavior (872); the motivation at hand is to interact

effectively with one's environment (White 2008, 1959). Sociality, the second motivational

determinant, attempts to identify a source of social connection, which humans need (Epley et al.

2007, 866). Thus, anthropomorphism increases if a person feels a lack of social connection

(866). To summarize, For Epley et al., the extent to which one will anthropomorphize is

determined by need for control and sociality. What remains under-analyzed is the extent to

which this model accounts for an underlying and relatively stable schema related to

anthropomorphism or rather addresses the observable anthropomorphic action a person might take in relation to particular occurring circumstances.

While it appears that Epley et al.'s analyses hold for a Western, or WEIRD (Henrich et al. 2010), population, the extent to which these assertions hold up in relation to India and Hindus is less certain. Historically, Hindus have contended with a bias against "idolaters" and the implication that to worship an image is animistic and indicative of possessing a lower level of conceptual thought, as was mentioned earlier. In discussing development, Epley et al. do not characterize anthropomorphism as childlike, but do point out its roots in child development. First, they cite Piaget (2007 [1929]), indicating that the first step in cognitive development is to distinguish between oneself and other, and ultimately to discern a self-concept followed by the ability to simulate others' experiences (Epley 2007, 868). The subtle and likely unintended implication here is that one who makes use of anthropomorphic thought is unable to accurately assess what another might actually experience, privileging a non-Hindu, and often broadly American, understanding of objects qua objects as itself accurate rather than as one culturally-situated version of accuracy. Epley et al. posit that children are inundated with human attachments early in life and therefore attribute human characteristics to nearly all stimuli, while adults ultimately acquire alternate representations of these stimuli through experience, and anthropomorphic attribution dwindles with age (868, 870). In these instances, without argumentation to the contrary, it's difficult to understand pertaining-to-children as implying something other than unsophisticated or underdeveloped. Given that Hindus actively impute humanlike characteristics onto nonhuman objects, and given Epley et al.'s thorough analysis, two options remain: 1) something is occurring in Hinduism which is other than solely the anthropomorphism that Epley et al. describe, and/or 2) this particular path of development is

153

mediated by the impact of non-Hindu cultural premises, thus presuming a particular underlying schematic pattern.

While Epley et al. (2007, 877) note that collectivist cultures like India place more value on social relations and affiliation and that the quality of these relations is a central feature of the self (Markus & Kitayama 1991; Shweder & Bourne 1984), Hindus tend to anthropomorphize whether or not they are lacking in social connections. It's entirely possible that they might anthropomorphize more if they are more lonely, but, as will be attested below, differentiation in whether or not one attributes life to a *mūrti* also occurs due to variables other than loneliness. Moreover, using Hofstede's (2001) measure of uncertainty avoidance— "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations"— Epley et al. (2007, 874) postulate that cultures more likely to avoid uncertainty will be higher in anthropomorphism. With a score of 40, India scores mid to low on this scale (Hofstede Insights),[75] yet is certainly high on anthropomorphism. In fact, the U.S. scored higher than India on uncertainty avoidance, but most people would observe that anthropomorphism is more prominent in India. Therefore, the motivational factors that Epley et al. have outlined, drawing on the entire history of research on anthropomorphism, might affect the extent of anthropomorphism observed in Hinduism, but do not account for some other factor which boosts anthropomorphic behavior in the first place. To that end, these findings do not seem to hold true with regard to Hinduism, or at least do not hold true in the same way.

As mentioned, reverence of *mūrti*s perhaps represents a differing mode of cognitive comprehension as it interacts with developmental milestones, and thus, this area proves ripe for

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[75] The U.S. scores 46 and India scores 40. See Figure 8 in chapter appendix. I recognize that this is a single data point rather than a statistical test, but it is one that seems anomolous given Epley's conclusions.

further analysis. While explaining how a child transitions from understanding his caregiver to separating from her, Winnicott (1967) provides a model that offers an understanding of an alternative avenue for anthropomorphism within the (not mutually exclusive) contexts of development and culture. Winnicott proposes a transitional period when a child adopts a transitional object, such as a blanket, ultimately establishing an understanding of objects (2). He terms this time as an intermediate area of experiencing, to which the inner and outer worlds both contribute, and in which the individual attempts to keep the inner and outer separate but interrelated (3). The transitional object is incredibly important to the child, and he takes comfort in it, but over time, this object loses its meaning as the child grows. This intermediate period initiates the relationship between the child and the world, but, additionally, this intermediate area provides relief because "the task of reality-acceptance is never completed" and "no human is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality." In this period, an individual can be "lost in play."

This play space remains throughout one's life as the experience of relating to objects; for example, two people in love fall into this space as they negotiate inner and outer, self and not self, or, in other circumstances, person and not person— self and self-like versus no self at all. Moreover, much cultural experience is located within this potential space between the individual and the environment, and for each individual, the use of this space, how it is operationalized, is determined by early life experiences, which, in my estimation, contribute to the character of a culturally-situated relational schema. Thus, the way an infant relates to a transitional object in this space eventually mirrors how his caregivers and others relate to important objects and others; it is within this interstitial time that the infant learns how to play between inner and outer. In Hindu contexts, where an infant likely observes more anthropomorphic attributions, this

155

affects how he relates to others and to objects; in other words, on a spectrum with inner on the left side and outer on the right, Hindu contexts might fall more to the left, finding more objects to be "like me"— and thus anthropomorphized— than "different from me." This is likely one variable contributing to the relational schema a child might form.

The previously attested necessity of a relationship with a particular *mūrti*, and the currently explored necessity of an individually and socially determined focus on that particular object, stipulates that, like an infant must focus on his blanket for that blanket to be part of him, and when he loses focus, that blanket loses efficacy, a person must maintain focus on a *mūrti* in order for it to remain alive, and Hindus are more likely to follow these patterns as a result of early experiences. The expression of this focus, however, might differ, as it did in relation to different modes of acting while attending Durgā Pūjā celebrations.

Similar to Winnicott (1967), Buber (2002 [1923]) describes an "I" relating to an "it" that has particular characteristics and is separate from the self, and an "I" relating to a "you" which has no characteristics and is, at least temporarily, not separate from the self. Hindus occupy a space between, venerating a "you" which has characteristics, but is to some extent determined by self through relationship construction and intent on that relationship, or focus. Though Buber did not leave open the possibility for this in-between state, the potential for one within his formulation indicates a more divinity-oriented transitional play space as Winnicott describes it, and this provides further explanation for how Hindus think of god as in a *mūrti*.

Connecting Object-Orientation and Cultural Context

For Loewald, drives are forces that motivate relational patterns such that these patterns organize a person's experience; thus, "all the distinctions and boundaries with which we are

familiar are superimposed," (Mitchell 2000, 39) onto a "primal density" each person is born with, and drives propel the action serving this purpose. A "cathexis" is the overall organizing structure of a relational field; in this context, relational refers to how a person makes attributions of inner and outer and, additionally, engages with those attributions. To this end, objects which are the focus of drives and which make up cathexes, are not given; there is a significant number of environmental stimuli required to experience an object as external. Within a cathexis, some boundaries are drawn around what is me, some around what is not-me but the make-up of those boundaries is initially unspecified; the way one has attached and formed relationships with others in addition to one's cultural experiences collaborate to create trends in cathexic fields as informed by cultural norms.

Bolby and Ainsworth have shown that the attachments we make in adulthood mirror the ones we first made in childhood. In these instances, caregiver and child "construct behavioral patterns of interaction involving reciprocal influence," (Mitchell 2000, 59). As Mitchell elaborates, "Primary identifications are so adhesive because there is a boundary between me and my objects only on a conscious, secondary process level of organization," (44) and on a primary level, one is one's objects; there is much less differentiation. This unconscious level, where one is less differentiated from one's objects, is where different and culturally-construed formations are constructed, and it is on these fields where individuals return throughout their lives to engage in Winnicott's transitional play. As Mitchell points out (2000, xii), human minds are primarily social phenomena which are only secondarily elaborated by individuals; in this example, we can see how social constructions of self and other, anthropomorphic or not, and leading to an understanding of what makes a person, play out in a Hindu context as largely influenced by cultural and cognitive precedent before individual elaboration might become operative.

157

Particularly affecting levels and applications of anthropomorphism, as Epley et al. suggest, are the early relationships one forms and mirrors. These relationships are replicated again and again with *mūrti*s and are indeed necessary to posit life in object. Thus, the *mūrti* itself, the physical object, is the receptacle for these early relationships, and the embodiment of a mode of relating that might otherwise be unembodied or made less observable by the patterns of interacting with a regularly responding other. Because of these complexities, as Mitchell notes (2000, xii), it is difficult to clearly discern these relations because we are so deeply imbedded in them: "it is almost impossible to appreciate fully [relationality's] contours and inner workings."

The first part of this dissertation has attempted to unravel the inner workings of relationality for Bengali Hindus with respect to *mūrti*s. A map of this relationality, including the flexibility or object-relations therein, attempts to make comprehensible— to an audience of onlookers— the Bengali Hindu tenet that god is physical. As noted, it is likely in childhood that the confines of self, self-like, and not-self are established, and these constructs affect how a person will understand the confines of a person or an object. The operative area of flexibility is what it means for something to be self-like, and in what ways, since, as mentioned, Bengali Hindus know that *mūrti*s are not in fact humans, but may be people under the right circumstances, and a person is understood as constructed as such through the relationships she maintains or, what she chooses to endow with life through her own focus. By examining the mental spaces of god, person, and *mūrti* within a Bengali Hindu context, one uncovers not only consistency and cohesion, but also the extent to which thought and action are interlinked such that their presumptive separation is unfounded in the first place. For many Bengali Hindus, the system described is synonymous with their perception of reality, such that the system itself is likely invisible to them, as might be any group's presuppositions to that group itself. The

158

remainder of this dissertation attempts to address within-group variations of the relational

schema just outlined, and, to that end, illuminates what it means to engage with a schema more

broadly.

Appendix

COUNTRY COMPARISON
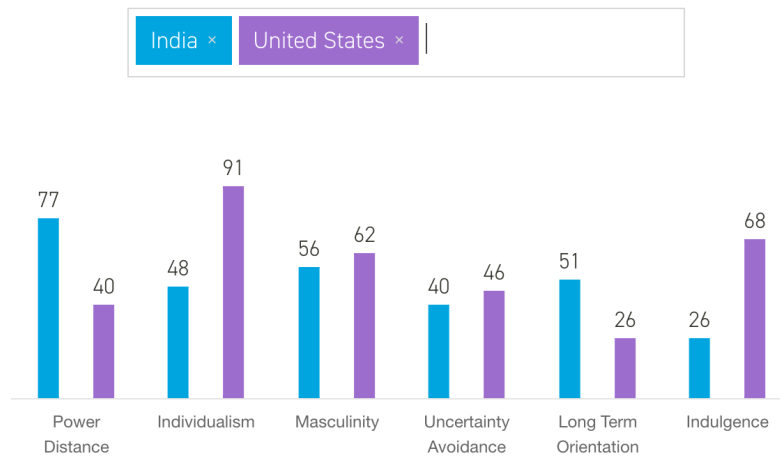
Figure 8: Country comparison of Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance for India and the U.S.

Part 2: In the Absence of a Bengali Hindu Relational Schema, or How to Make Sense of it All

Previous chapters have explored and elucidated the relationships that Bengali Hindus who practice pūjā *form and have with deities and the character of these relationships in so far as they are part and parcel of a particular and early-instantiated schema. First, we looked at Durgā Pūjā, a public festival, followed by examining how different groups execute* pūjā *at home, delving deeper into their motivations for doing so. Next, we explored the extent to which performing pūjā is predicated on forming a specific relationship with a god as per one's predilections and in relation to existing Indian hierarchical structures. Finally, we examined a* mūrti *as receptacle for this type of relationship, ultimately concluding that a* mūrti *is enlivened due to a specific relational focus. The comingling of relationality and a physical divine indicates that the way Bengali Hindus view and interact with objects is informed by the way they understand personhood, self, and relationships. The remainder of this dissertation addresses circumstances in which this schema is not developed or is developed to varying degrees.*

Chapter 5: Uninternalized: Collecting Scripts in the Absence of a Relational Schema

For Bengali Hindus who develop a relationship with a god-as-physical (recognizing variations in degree), this schema is all-encompassing and serves as indicative of a frequently invisible medium for how the rest of the world is understood, ingested, and digested. This chapter, however, and the remainder of this dissertation, address the circumstances under which some Bengali Hindus fail to make salient and use this relational schema in so far as the mūrti *and/or god is a relation. This chapter in particular highlights young American Bengali Hindus, who often formulate scripts and rules for what should be done during* pūjā *without possessing the requisite relational schema needed to motivate the performance to such actions; instead, they have absorbed Hinduism as dos and don'ts, allowing them to bifurcate thought from action and to act, effectively, as observers rather than inhabitors their own inherited traditions. This is in contrast to other Bengali Hindus who have absorbed this relational schema as they grew up in India.*

In unfamiliar settings, most people will look for cues on how to behave, or will draw upon pre-existing schemas that seem relevant. The functional focus in such circumstances is likely on what is appropriate behavior rather than on the reasoning for why that behavior is appropriate. Still, there must be some motivation for one to trend towards acting appropriately, but it is likely the case that this motivation is not the same for all individuals under all circumstances. When many young American Bengali Hindus learn how to behave during *pūjā* as they watch its performance— what to do and not to do- if they do not have a relational schema with regard to a *mūrti*, they often see these behaviors as rules. To that end, the actions they perform are certainly communicative, but to whom? For a Bengali Hindu who has internalized a relational schema with regard to a *mūrti*, these actions are communicative *to* a *mūrti*. However, for a Bengali Hindu who does not have this schema, these actions are still communicative— to relevant others in the community. When a Bengali Hindu grows up in India, he likely has this type of schema, due in part to his lived and immersive experience, but Bengali Hindus who grew up in the U.S. tend not to have internalized this schema, and, thus, what they have learned— but

not internalized— from observation resembles a script motivated by propriety rather than an internally motivated relationship with a deity.

The first section of this chapter looks at certain actions taken or not taken with regard to *pūjā*. Regardless of the specifics, one action can have many motivational antecedents, dependent upon who is taking the action. While those who have internalized a relational schema with regard to a *mūrti* likely take actions as a result of that relationship, Bengali Hindus who have not developed this schema can be understood as uninundated observers who often need to think specifically about what actions they must take, therefore, to some extent, bifurcating thought and action in so far as they do not have an internalized and motivating schema for rules they must follow— beyond the fact that their parents have said these actions should be taken, and it is this schema which motivates action rather than another schema. This chapter seeks, first, to look at certain actions taken with regard to *pūjā* and well-known rules about how to perform *pūjā*, followed by an examination of how these rules became salient for those who follow them— either as a compendium of collated knowledge or as an intuitive impetus resulting from an internalized relational schema. D'Andrade and Strauss (1992) point out that the extent to which these schemas act as goals is dependent upon affective consequences of the conditions in which the schemas were formed, which, they imply, occur early in life (39). A schema for rules during *pūjā* acquired while growing up in the U.S. will function differently than a relational schema acquired while growing up in India.

How important are societal circumstances versus familial (and specifically parental) ones in the formation of a relational schema? If one does not internally comprehend a deity as a relative, one is unlikely to take actions to that end, and one taking these same actions without this motivating schema likely has alternative reasons for doing so. Ultimately, it seems as if an

163

immersive experience in India, where *pūjā* is performed all around, is likely requisite for the formation of a relational schema with regard to a *mūrti*. When not growing up in these conditions, it seems as if an individual will formulate rules for conduct, rather than functioning in line with an internalized schema.

Prohibitions and the Rules of the *Pūjā*: Shoes, Showers, Clothes, Fasting, and Menstruation

The following circumstances address ways that one might typically choose to act in front of a deity and rules that one may choose to follow, as per historical and societal trends in how to perform *pūjā*. Each action is seen as something one should do or not do when in front of the deity. By analyzing these actions in particular groups, this section attempts to understand trends in relating to the deity-as-*mūrti* for each group.

Shoes

There was significant consensus among all interviewees when it comes to shoes: no one felt comfortable wearing shoes during *pūjā*. While there were a few people who said that, if societal circumstances were different, they would wear their shoes in temples, given temples as they are, everyone insisted on taking off their shoes. Of the prohibitions that I asked about, this is by far the most obvious one in so far as it is visual: everyone can see if you're wearing your shoes or not. Though taking off one's shoes may be part of a relational schema, given that it is societally sanctioned and accepted, it's not immediately clear whether the action is motivated primarily by a relationship with a deity or a relationship with others more broadly.

Most people, if not all, cited cleanliness as a reason to take off shoes. Additionally, each group also discussed respect for the god as a reason to remove shoes. Though there was certainly

164

reasoning behind removing shoes, many of the older cohort, the cohort more likely to place god

in a *mūrti*, found the idea of not removing shoes to be utterly unthinkable regardless of any

reasoning:

> **R:** So what would happen if you did wear your shoes?
> **S:** I just can't even think of it because it just won't happen.
> **R:** Ok, so it's unthinkable.
> **S:** It's unthinkable, yeah. Like walking into a temple with your shoes, we can't even think of it. It just won't happen.
> **R:** Would the god not listen to you, the gods, if you did that?
> **S:** I haven't even really thought of it that way because just the thought of wearing my shoes and going is just...
> **R:** Unthinkable.

Ingrained in the fabric of Hindu culture, it's almost an automatic response to take one's shoes

off.

Almost everyone interviewed agreed that, if one were to wear shoes, there would be no

real cosmic consequence. Rather, it would be disrespectful (to the god), but, also, it would cause

a commotion socially. Though there were no cosmic consequences, there were certainly

community-based ones. Strikingly, adults in the U.S. continually answered that if someone were

to wear shoes during *pūjā,* "We would ask them not to because that is a dumb[76] thing. We don't

go near the god with shoes on. So we'll ask to take them off." Despite this interviewee's later

assertion that nothing would happen if someone were to wear shoes, she insists that she or

someone else would ask the wearer to remove his or her shoes. By and large, older adults

situated themselves within a group of people who saw it as their responsibility to monitor shoe-

wearing and other potential infractions. They took on this role of policing, distressed that

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[76] A few times, I encountered interviewees who would tell me something was "dumb" when they perceived it as a foregone conclusion. It was so engrained in the way they were thinking about the world that to suggest anything in contrast completely flew in the face of their prior convictions and understandings.

someone might enter the temple or pray with shoes on, or that someone could even consider that option. However, this monitoring likely arises out of necessity, since children in the U.S. do not necessarily know all of the important protocols of being Hindu.

It appears as if the adults are gently imposing this practice onto the children as they attempt to teach Hindu protocols for temple visits; this type of direct instruction is common. As one interviewee noted, even a child could be admonished for wearing shoes: "For us, we can't even imagine not taking our shoes off. So that always happens. But if somebody, say one of the kids, would not listen, I would probably say you know, it's OK, god understands... But my husband would get really upset. So the child would kind of, you know, be in trouble." To this end, there is a significant subset of adults who necessarily tell others what protocol in a temple should be, whether the goal is to maintain cleanliness, to respect god, or solely because the alternative is unthinkable.

The younger generation in the U.S., on the other hand, never included themselves in the group that would ask someone else to take shoes off. For example, upon asking what would happen if someone wore shoes, one interviewee told me: "Well, I feel like someone would say something. And then probably have you go and take your shoes off." In this instance, though she recognizes that someone would ask for the removal of shoes, it would not be her. This goes along with the running theme that the younger generation in the U.S. largely follows along rather than enforces. For example, another interviewee noted: "There are people that are into that that have very strict rules, so I follow the rules, I don't want to upset anyone. But I would say that's not because I'm fearful of offending the deity." While the older generation, as well as young Indian Bengali Hindus, see taking off one's shoes as a necessity for purity and as indicative of respect for the deity, the younger generation sees taking off one's shoes as necessary largely to

respect their elders. To this end, they are not likely to police their peers: "I feel like it's not great, but it's not like I'm going to call him out and be like you wore you shoes, how dare you! But I don't think that's a great thing to do." The responsibility of making sure elders, and the deities, are treated properly is foisted onto the elders themselves. While taking off one's shoes is obvious for the older generation and young Indian Bengali Hindus, this is not necessarily obvious for young American Bengali Hindus; for them, this is learned and not intuited.

Though many young people did cite respect for the god as a reason to take off one's shoes, it is clear that the larger pull to do so is the reaction of parents as well as the way in which they will be viewed if they were not to take off their shoes. For the older generation, the relationship with the deity is cemented and thus, taking off one's shoes as a sign of respect is necessary, but for the younger generation, the relevant important people are elders.[77] It is easier to go along than to protest, particularly with an action that is unlikely to be problematic in and of itself, such as taking off one's shoes; because, these interviewees know that "If someone did wear shoes, I mean, people would just talk about it." As one particularly astute teenager articulated to me:

> "For that answer, I think — it's not that I don't believe in god, or I don't believe that god is real, I just think the mindset that people have, have had for such a long time now, and just... ok, keeping your shoes on when you're in a *pūjā* room, that's not ok. Things like that, I feel like it doesn't really affect the gods, it just affects the reaction people have. So I don't think — to answer your question, I don't think it affects the gods, I think it just affects your parents, or how the people around you would react... You would feel like how I said I would feel, like uncomfortable about it, feel like apologizing the entire time."

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[77] The role of feet in Hinduism is significant; they are seen as unclean, the lowest part of the body, beginning in Vedic times. When a younger Hindu greets an elder, if he or she wishes to be very respectful, he or she will touch the elder's feet. Thus, feet in Hindu culture have significant connotations related to one person respecting another.

The younger generation in the U.S., by and large, doesn't make the motivating and obvious connection between taking off one's shoes and the god, the *mūrti*, in front of them. Rather, respecting the god, at least in this way, is just another part of respecting one's elders. Even though Bengali American adults cite cleanliness and respect as reasons to take their shoes off, and though the younger Bengali American generation sees taking one's shoes off as a primarily societal obligation, one must wonder where the boundary is between taking off one's shoes to go along, because one always has gone along, and making a choice that is individually determined, potentially backed up with some sort of reasoning (e.g. cleanliness). Or, to what extent this reasoning is back-engineered to make sense of a process that people go through. If the act is part of a Hindu relational schema, it is likely the result of the god's presence; if the act is part of some other relational schema, it might be the result of others' presence; and if the act is the result of reason or logic, or later established to have such reason or logic, it likely isn't part of a fully internalized schema, but, rather, is something one attempts to make sense of through exerting what one deems rational means rather than through schematic intuition.

Such a divide does not exist between the generations in India. While both generations do cite cleanliness and respect as reasons to remove one's shoes, they also note that it's just what they've been doing their whole lives, or, as some said, a habit. Instead, adults in India particularly tended to provide reasoning for why taking one's shoes off is not necessary, even though it is expected:

> "Because you know, there are temples on the roadside. So I have seen many people taking off their shoes and praying. I personally don't do that. Like if I'm passing a temple, I just put on my slippers, like sandals, and I just pray. For me, removing my shoes and praying, it doesn't, I don't care about that. I care that I believe in you, I have you in my mind, I'm joining hands, and praying to you. So it doesn't matter whether I'm wearing my slippers or I'm bare footed."

"Suppose I'm sitting in the car and a beggar is coming. I want to offer a short prayer for the beggar. Do I take my shoes off? God will... more convenience. If I'm in a temple or in a *pūjā* room, I'll take my shoes off. But wearing my shoes will not stop me from praying."

In both of these instances, the interviewees give examples of why it isn't really all that necessary to take off shoes: both examples cite instances in which it is inconvenient to take off one's shoes. As such, since there are societally sanctioned examples of wearing shoes while praying, the shoes aren't the problem: it's the idea of wearing shoes in certain societal or familial circumstances that leads to the unease one might feel with one's shoes on. To this end, cleanliness becomes a stronger argument: one takes off one's shoes, when one can, where it is clean, but if it is not clean, it is perhaps in one's interest to leave shoes on; the ability to take one's shoes off is an ideal. Moreover, the god, in so far as the god is similarly a community member, would understand if a devotee left shoes on in less than sanitary circumstances. It is also conceivable that the concept of cleanliness is itself built into the schema of when to take off shoes in front of a deity— it's automatically understood. This would account for the fact that many Hindus wear slippers— which are only worn indoors— while performing *pūjā*. The extent of the internalization of cleanliness as built in, however, could vary from person to person.

Thus, for adults in India, taking off shoes is part of a broader relationship with the deity, a deity who understands context. For adults in the U.S., taking off one's shoes might become more imperative since there are fewer counterexamples of a circumstance in which one might pray to a *mūrti* with shoes on. In this circumstance, the relationship with the god becomes more absolute as the rules become codified and stringent. For the younger generation in the U.S., the relevant relationship is the one with flesh and blood relatives rather than with a *mūrti*.

Fasting

169

In terms of fasting before *pūjā,* only about half of the older generation does so regularly, and only a few interviewees in the younger generation do so; thus, though only about half of the older generation fasts, they are much more likely to fast than are their children.[78] While there were no statistical differences between answers of those in India and answers of those in the U.S., there were still other differences with regard to fasting. For example, as discussed above, in India each household generally has one designated *pūjā* doer, usually a woman. This person will almost always fast. Additionally, anyone else may fast as well, but in most Indian households, if someone is not the *pūjā* doer, even if he or she does *pūjā* on a daily basis, he or she might not feel compelled to fast. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, in India, some type of *pūjā* is performed twice daily. Though the *pūjā* is different, and though the *pūjā* doer fasts prior to the morning *pūjā*, it is not feasible to fast prior to the evening *pūjā*. This likely goes back to the idea that the reason one fasts is because god, as a guest in one's house, should eat first. Then it is possible for others to eat. Once god has eaten, the *pūjā* doer is also free to eat.

Moreover, in India, one passes temples regularly. As a result, it is possible that one might stop to pray, having not fasted:

> "But there are so many times it has happened that you know, you're going on a regular day basis and when you go to a temple, you offer *pūjā* and all and you haven't fasted. You may just go there because you're passing that temple at that point of time, feel like talking to god, and just, you know, going into that temple. Doesn't really mean that you've fasted the whole day or, you know what, I must have had non-veg and everything that day before going to the temple. So I don't really think that there is going to be anything wrong actually."

As evidenced here, it is common to stop and pray whenever one wants to. This again hearkens back to the idea of a *pūjā* doer: someone is fasting prior to feeding the *mūrti*s in these temples

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[78] The two-tailed P value is less than 0.0001, t = 4.2909, df = 73, standard error of difference = 0.106

(likely a brahmin), so the casual passerby need not do so. Thus, while fasting is an obligation, it is not an absolute one; a person fasts if he or she is designated as responsible for a *mūrti* or if he or she feels the need to do so. Again, the god understands circumstances and takes intentions into consideration. In the U.S., this is not necessarily the case, particularly because, though there might be a specified *pūjā* doer, there isn't always one. One might fast for this reason, but one might also fast because he or she particularly wants to, highlighting the increased autonomy and individualism present in America (Shweder et al. 2003). However, there are similar rates of fasting among adult populations in the India and U.S., so, in fact, many people do feel the need to follow this stipulation at least to some extent,[79] and, particularly in India, those who observe fasting are also likely to eat only vegetarian food on certain festival days.

Showering

In terms of showering, the older generation was much more likely to shower before *pūjā* than was the younger generation,[80] though adults in India are not more likely to shower than were young adults in India. Even when adults did not shower (so are not included in this statistic as having showered), they often had some practice of cleanliness prior to *pūjā*, such as brushing their teeth or washing their hands. While the younger generation in the U.S. was likely to shower before *pūjā*, their showers were incidental: "Usually I do take a shower before. Not because I'm doing the *pūjā*, just cause of how it works out." One confounding factor here is that those in the U.S. in the younger generation almost always went to *pūjās* outside of their homes, and would

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[79] Even Hindus who don't directly fast often choose to try to eat vegetarian food on a particular day. It's not a hard and fast rule, but people have individually determined ideas of how to execute it, and it often relates to specific circumstances in their lives. For example, a woman might eat only vegetarian food on the day of the week that her son was born.
[80] The two-tailed P value equals 0.0014, t = 3.3165, df = 80, standard error of difference = 0.104

thus shower before leaving the house anyway. In these instances, which were common, these

interviewees were omitted from the above calculation. To this extent, the cultural script and

schema of showering every day for the sake of cleanliness and presentation was what took

precedence for the younger generation, particularly in the U.S.; they were not showering for

pūjā, but happened to shower before *pūjā* due to more broad societal views of cleanliness. In this

circumstance, a schema of relationality with the deity as another significant individual, and

therefore cleanliness for the deity, is absent or becomes secondary to the necessity of showering

before going about one's day.

Those who did intentionally shower before every *pūjā* expressed several reasons for

doing so. Many simply wouldn't perform the *pūjā* if they hadn't showered: "If I went without

bathing? Personally, I probably would not take myself seriously in that situation, so like if I am

really serious of giving a *pūjā* and I didn't bathe, I probably would not give the *pūjā*. I'd maybe

just go in, but... I'm not ready for it." Though nearly everyone agreed that nothing would happen

if one didn't shower before *pūjā*, still, showering was a necessary thing to do. Many people cited

seeing their parents showering before *pūjā*, such that it became engrained in them: "it's kind of

in-built in my brain that that might be the best time to give *pūjā*." This, however, was not usually

the only reason cited. Many people also discussed the mindset that being clean brings with it. To

this extent, when one is clean, one feels more comfortable and isn't as distracted:

> So suppose after the day's work, it's all hodge-podge in office, everything happen, this,
> that, something is, everything is in my mind, I go home and I am standing in front of the
> god or goddess, my mental state will not be to meditate. But after office, if I go home,
> take a bath, and then meditate, then I have the mental stage to meditate, the
> concentration. That's why bathing is important before *pūjā* as I see it. To concentrate."

Thus, in many ways, the necessity of cleanliness before *pūjā* relates to an internal feeling;

it facilitates the ability to concentrate, to focus on the deity. Though showering is an external

action, it has an effect on one's mind that is requisite for a concerted performance of *pūjā*. While

this is the internal effect of showering, there is, similarly an external necessity to cleanliness. Just

as young adults cited showering as necessary before they would leave the house, before they

would interact with anyone, older adults who shower before *pūjā* used the same reasoning:

> "I mean. Just like in front of a person like I wouldn't go in front of her into a meeting room without showering. It's just me. Like I want to be clean when I go in front of a group of people."

Because god, the *mūrti*, is a person to this interviewee, the same societal rules apply as

would apply to any other person: it is better to be clean. To this end, the practice of showering

before *pūjā* is more important if one endorses the existence of god in the *mūrti*, thus establishing

a relationship.

Relatedly, some interviewees expressed that it is more important to be clean in front of

god than in front of any other person. Because god is so pure and humans are not pure, anything

other than perfect cleanliness would pollute the *pūjā* room. Again, nothing would happen under

these circumstances, but since the deity holds the highest position within Hindu hierarchy, one

presents oneself to the deity as one would present oneself to a superior, such as a parent. As one

interviewee noted:

> "You're trying to be pure, you're trying to clean yourself before going towards the god, because that is the ultimate divine entity. So when you are face to face with god, you should also shed away all your dirt from your body and go there in a pure form, so that there's the proper contact."

Therefore, god is not taken just as a person, but as a particularly important person. What is

illuminating is the way in which the action of showering, at least initially, appears to correlate

with the understanding of god as anthropomorphic, as human to some extent. Thus, the same

societal rules about interacting with others apply to a *mūrti*, but, perhaps, even more so in so far

as a *mūrti* represents (or is) a particularly important person.

Data regarding whether or not interviewees felt it necessary to wear clean clothes before performing *pūjā* revealed similar results and reasoning. The older generation was indeed more likely to intentionally wear clean clothes before *pūjā* than was the younger generation.[81] Particularly for the younger generation in the U.S., wearing clean clothes was again more related to coincidence than to forethought.

Menstruating

Similar to taking a shower and wearing clean clothes, most interviewees who refrained from performing *pūjā* while menstruating cited cleanliness as a reason. More so, however, they tended to cite routine and precedent as reasons for following the prohibition. Though the older generation was more likely to follow this prohibition than the younger generation was in India,[82] it appears as if there is a significant reason why this was not the case in the U.S. Adults in the U.S. are more likely to ignore this prohibition, in large part because, as Williams (1992) has noted, Hindu temples in the U.S. often take on the role of community centers, but, still, if one goes to a temple for any reason, one almost always performs *pūjā* while there. To omit *pūjā* would be similar to visiting a good friend's far away neighborhood (because most temples are far in America) without dropping in to say hello.[83] If a friend lives nearby (as the gods do in India), though, you might not feel compelled to drop in every time you're in the area, and thus, if there is some circumstance in your life that would discourage visiting (i.e. you are menstruating), an

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[81] The two-tailed P value equals 0.0094, t = 2.6740, df = 67, standard error of difference = 0.112
[82] The two-tailed P value equals 0.0043, t = 3.2366, df = 19, standard error of difference = 0.184
[83] In India, as mentioned previously, there are *mandirs* and *mūrtis* everywhere; thus, coming into contact with a god is not as unusual of an event, and thus, one might not perform *pūjā* to each god one encounters. In Chicago, where I live, I have many close friends who live in Lakeview, but if I go to Lakeview, I won't necessarily stop in to see them. If I were to go to South Korea, I *must* see a more distant friend who lives there because the circumstances are so unusual.

opportunity is not lost, but merely deferred. One interviewee who regularly took her daughters to dance practice at the temple recounts:

> My mom told me not to go to the temple [while menstruating], but then when our children were little, I really discuss among my friends, my generation, that we're not supposed to go to the temple, ok, but I said what can I do, my daughter has a dance program, so I have to come to the temple and that stage was inside the temple, so I said ok, I won't touch anything. But slowly, slowly younger generation doesn't even care.

Thus, the reason why younger women in India are significantly less likely to abstain from *pūjā* while menstruating than are their mothers, though this significant difference is not the case for women in the U.S., is not that the younger generation is more observant in the U.S., but, rather that the older generation is forced to fit into a different societal mold than the one in which they grew up, and must sometimes perform *pūjā* while menstruating. Another potential reason for the discrepancy in abstention among Bengali Hindu generations of women is that young and affluent Bengalis have taken to ideas of feminism quite readily in recent years, and ideas of equality have become deep-seated. Bengalis were ripe for this in some ways; they primarily worship goddesses, one of whom, Kālī, is nearly always depicted as saturated in blood and gore of some sort.[84]

Though some women in the U.S. were perfectly happy to perform *pūjā* when they had their periods, others found ways around participating in the entire *pūjā*. At home, most of these women who perform *pūjā* regularly would have a daughter or son fill in, but for public *pūjās*, which, again, are far more community oriented in the U.S. than in India, there is a certain element of difficulty in abstaining:

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[84] This is somewhat speculative, but is also based upon articles I've seen shared by young Bengali women on Facebook as well as the discourses I've been privy to. Anecdotally, there is a segment of young Bengali women who focus on their careers, live alone and away from home, and generally adopt more American and British norms regarding values, goals, and behavior.

"But in other way I also have done it, you know. Because you know, you are in a room full of people, and you are not coming, and they will keep asking you, why you not coming, oh, what happened, and then the whole world knows. To just, to avoid the embarrassment, I would just go in the back of the room and try not to touch anything, and, you know, yeah."

As such, women might still offer prayers, but will do so from a distance. They will likely make sure they do not offer anything and do not touch the deities. These elements of purity and pollution become important when determining what one can and cannot do while having her period. As a result, many women have given up attempting to uphold this tradition. Moreover, in the U.S., with issues of gender equality particularly prominent in the news and cultural atmosphere, more than one woman cited this prohibition as prejudicial against women. This is not a comment which came up in India, but women in the U.S. seemed particularly concerned with the fact that treatment of men and treatment of women were not equal, hence potentially affecting whether or not they would offer *pūjā* while menstruating.

The younger generation of women in the U.S. almost always mentioned these issues of equality, advocating for an ethics of autonomy (Shweder et al. 2003). A few interviewees had actually never heard of this prohibition against performing *pūjā* while menstruating, and were surprised to hear that it was part the Hindu tradition. As a result of cultural understandings of gender equality, several mothers chose not to share with their daughters that one should not perform *pūjā* while menstruating. When these young women were aware of this prohibition, they often had reactions like those of the two interviewees quoted below:

"I know some of my friends who have used that as an excuse to get out of going to temple, but we don't really go, so I never had that be applicable to me, but I know people who have... made up to their dads like well, I have this, so I can't go, and because it's like their dad, their dad is like oh yeah, um, ok. Because they're just like, let's not talk about this."

"Yeah, you're not supposed to do that, apparently. Which I was like, yes! Awesome, like cool, I got my period!"

As shown in these examples, having one's period, in the eyes of these young women, is not an issue of cleanliness, but rather one which they can leverage to avoid familial obligations. Because one cannot perform *pūjā* while having one's period, this is a valid cultural excuse to free one from something she did not want to do anyway. She negates one social obligation— performing *pūjā*, likely due to dedication to her parents— with another: avoiding *pūjā* while menstruating. In other words, no one can argue with the proclamation of having one's period since no one can verify the veracity of this statement. In this way, young women employ one cultural paradigm on top of another, usurping duty to their families with concerns of purity sanctioned by those families. They use stipulations of the Hindu cultural schema in order to support their own motivations, which germinate from an American cultural schema of individualism which connotes not doing anything one does not want to do, such as going to a *mandir*.

Though many of the women in these examples were quieter about their objections to this particular cultural statute, some women are somewhat more vocal. Suryamukhi tells the story of her sister's wedding:

> Like my sister, when you're getting married, or even during Durgā Pūjā a lot of women will start taking birth control at that time, just the pill to stop it, so that they don't get it during their wedding or during these different prayers. But my sister was like excuse me, that is my personal information, nobody needs to know what is going on in my area, like that is disgusting for anyone else to know that, and I'm gonna do whatever I want to do. If I have it I'm just not going to tell anybody. Like they don't need to know.

In this instance, we can see another important reason why younger women in the U.S. might not be as inclined to follow the prohibition against performing *pūjā* while menstruating: privacy. Suryamukhi's sister, first, does not particularly ascribe to most Hindu tenets. However, the point she makes with regard to her wedding is that it is no one's business whether or not she is

177

menstruating. In India, first, it is commonplace to avoid *pūjā* while menstruating. Second, living in joint families, women likely know a great deal about when each is menstruating. However, in this circumstance, Suryamukhi's sister upholds the American ideal of privacy.

In the U.S., women invoke two important cultural precedents to explain why they are uncomfortable with the prohibition against menstruating during *pūjā*: equality and privacy. This is an instance of American ideals interacting with and negating a specific and requisite action in Hindu culture, at least for these women. Even beyond following stipulations, such as taking off shoes, in order to appease the older generation instead of due to a relationship with the deity, this younger generation of American Hindus actively exploits what they know to be the confines of that particular relationship to their own American-morality-oriented ends. Thus, this group comprehended the rules for how one should behave when menstruating, but did not internalize these rules such that they are necessarily executed, at least in some fashion. These rules are learned, but not felt; they lack requisite affect and/or motivation, and, thus, more affectively tinged and motivational schemas, such as that of American morality (advocating privacy, quality, etc.), come to supersede and motivate eventual action rather than a relationship with a deity.

Summary

In all of these circumstances, regarding each of these sets of rules related to *pūjā*, for the older generation, which is more likely to have a situated schema of god as a relation, and often a particular relation, there is an interpersonal morality at play: the responsibilities to meet the needs of another person (Miller 2010). While the younger generation in America may or may not have similar situated schemas relating to a parent-child or other relevant relationship as does the older generation in the U.S. and as do their counterparts in India, what they lack is the recognition that this interpersonal moral schema also applies to a deity, and, particularly, to a

mūrti. As a result, many of these prohibitions and rules cease to make sense, because they are rules for a particular scenario that the younger American generation does not feel applies.

Additionally, not only does the older generation (and much of the younger generation in India) share the understanding of *mūrti* as relation, but the *mūrti* is also a particular type of relation. As evidenced, many Hindus impute a hierarchical relationship with the deity, and there is variation in the ramifications of transgression that is mediated and determined by closeness (Haidt and Baron 1996), and, additionally, the particular type of closeness. Some evidence suggests that existing close relationships allow for some transgression (Dungham and Young 2012), such as a husband beating his wife, which, within the bounds of their particular hierarchical relationship, is not necessarily ultimately transgressive (Baumard and Sperber 2012, interpreting Shweder et al. 1987). To that end, the character of the relationship itself, and the ways in which one understands relationships broadly and in specific instantiations, can determine what is appropriate and what is negotiable. However, if a particular instantiation of a relationship never forms, such as that with a *mūrti* for the younger American generation, these instructed rules and prohibitions become disconnected from their origin points within Hindu relational schematic contexts.

Thus, the extent to which one follows these rules is much more dependent upon one's perceived relationship with the god and/or *mūrti* than with god as an abstract principle. With each god, someone must execute a close relationship, feeding the god and taking responsibility, but not everyone. Finally, many Indians in both generations, perceiving the god as particularly close, see it as reasonable to occasionally adjust obligations because the relationship itself affords that. The older generation in America, however, which engages in a more distant relationship with the deity, might be more insistent upon certain rules, such as wearing shoes and

179

fasting in *pūjā*-related circumstances. This is mediated by societal circumstances in which one cannot logistically or practically execute certain rules, such as not praying while menstruating. Women in India who have foregone this prohibition do so with conviction, but in America among the older generation, there is significant anxiety related to the necessity of foregoing. The data presented are varied and mitigated by many variables, but, overall, it appears as if for the older generation of Indian Bengali Hindus (and to some extent the younger generation as well), there is more of an obligation to perform *pūjā*, but since this is done with frequency, there is more flexibility in the performance itself. For the older generation of Bengali Hindus in America, *pūjā* is performed less frequently, and only when an individual would particularly would like to, but the stipulations for action therein are more rigid.

How do these stipulations become engrained, and most importantly, how does the relationship with the deity become salient, such that one feels the need to enact the relevant rules in whatever variation he or she sees fit? What circumstances lead to a failure to establish this particular relationship, as is the case for many young Hindu Americans? When does the schema stick, when is it absent, and what are the ramifications of each circumstance?

To Be Imbibed Into

If you ask Bengalis Hindus who grew up in India how they learned about Hinduism, most will tell you they "imbibed" it. Several other variants include: it was inculcated, ingrained, habituated, automatically transmitted, osmosis. Each of these words implies something passive; the person was present and somehow absorbed a requisite understanding of how to live as a Hindu. Shweder and Much (1987) point out that children often distinguish rules and their character through the ways that others in their social environments react to their behaviors.

Accordingly, there was no declaration necessary to assume a Hindu mantle, but, rather, a person, immersed in Hinduness, necessarily takes those criteria in by experimenting through action. The word "imbibe" as it was used— most often a person would state he or she was imbibed into, which presents a fascinating peculiarity of Indian English— implies a drinking in, but also that the drinking in was transitive. In other words, a person, as an object, was imbibed by something, something which itself caused the drinking, as if causing another to internalize some element of cultural precedent while that other remained a passive recipient in the process of internalization. In this circumstance, the one taking in is both active and passive, interacting with his or her environment, but not necessarily acting as the agent of taking in that environment. Passively active in this process, juggling between and/or acting at the crux of imbibing and being imbibed into, the interactivity with which a person both observes and affects the place he lives in some way explains what it means to internalize Hinduism.

What, then, does one imbibe? What is the agent that causes imbibing in? Two interviewees explain what it means to imbibe and what, exactly, does the imbibing:

> **R:** How did you learn about Hinduism growing up?
> **S:** Only through practice. Because we never learned it in school. It's what you imbibe. I learned by imbibing. So what you imbibe from your parents and your family and your friends and society as a whole, so we never really learned, never went to Sunday school or those kind of things.

> **S:** It's a religion that you're born with. You know, once you're born into a family, whether you're a Hindu or a Christian, and then once you start growing it's the people around you in your family who imbibe this religion into you.

The initial imbiber, it seems, is one's family. Watching one's family in India, a child can observe *pūjā*, how a parent behaves at a *mandir*, can follow along and infer guidelines about how he or she should behave. Most, if not all, interviewees cited watching their families— grandparents and parents, mostly— as imperative for their understandings of what Hinduism is and how it

should be enacted. Living in a Hindu family, as discussed above, *pūjā* itself becomes just like anything else a living and breathing human does: "when we are born as children, the first thing we, like, you eat, you bathe, you do this, da da da, you do *pūjā*." It is so ingrained as to be imbibed, possibly passively, without even the effort of the person imbibing. The exact instant of this imbibing is left undermined, or unspecified; rather, in the life of a particular person's conscious understanding, it is what I would term as always already. In other words, there was never a time that it was not present; for the individual, it feels as if there is never a moment pre-imbibing, though one must logically assume that, in truth, there is such a moment, or a build-up of many moments.

In any cultural context, a child takes in what is there, including the peculiarities of that child's family, ultimately affecting elements of an individual's psychology and how he or she views the world. What is unique here is that the context for imbibing has changed; something so seamless in India is now stitched together piecemeal in America, leaving out potentially necessary and underlying explanatory threads. And though the context for imbibing is arguably always changing, it is often difficult to demarcate these changes over time. The shift to America, however, represents a necessary disjuncture in the process and content of what is imbibed, given that imbibing itself is about taking in one's surroundings and in America, surroundings are different. For example, while in the U.S. there is an emphasis on personal freedom, in India there is an emphasis on societal obligation (Miller 2007).

Sneha describes beautifully how her children in the U.S. learned about Hinduism, and how she tries to teach her granddaughter:

> The issue is my children, I didn't do a whole lot, because nobody ever taught me. Because in India you grow up in that culture, so nobody was ever giving me lectures, you just sort of learn. So my children just learned whatever they picked up by conversations, more or less. My granddaughter, she is interested to hear these Kṛṣṇa stories. So I picked

up some books... So me not being that religious, I don't teach them a whole lot, but they know basics, so I didn't teach, really, my children a lot. They just picked up things.

Sneha's granddaughter, whose heritage is half Indian and half Caucasian, has shown an interest in stories. While children in India pick up these stories— similar to the way an American child might pick up stories about George Washington, for example— in the U.S., Sneha has to intentionally read to her granddaughter. How does this means of internalization affect the ultimate outcome of the process itself? Sneha's granddaughter will grow up knowing about Kriṣṇa, but might have no context for that knowledge, given that there simply isn't a continually and predominantly Hindu environment for her to imbibe or to imbibe into her. Instead, she is being taught, specifically, and to that end, Hinduism enters the realm of epistemology— stories, ideas, practices that one can and/or should know, clearly articulated and defined— as opposed to a method for living as a Hindu. Situated practices and ideas, in other words, become unsituated.

Thus, the standard Indian Hindu mantle of not intentionally attempting to teach one's children, which I heard over and over again, in this circumstance portends potential problems for retention and/or replication in America of the easily imbibed Hinduism that immigrant Hindus grew up with. As Risu indicates, "I don't force them because I was never forced growing up, even to go to a temple. It was more like osmosis." Given the fact that he does not force his daughters to attend *pūjās*, it is even less likely that they will imbibe Hinduism the way he did. Hinduism as individual is most relevant when the individual chooses from a set of pre-established practices and incorporates only some of those into his or her life. Young Bengali Hindus in America have only a limited understanding of what is Hindu and what is not; there are certain rules and ideas they've picked up, but those rules and ideas are not ubiquitous within the broader scope of their lives, and they might never have been exposed to the full gamut of Hinduism before picking and choosing. Indeed, those young Bengali American Hindus who had

been to India more often or who had closer ties to the Hindu community seemed more likely to know more about Hinduism and to feel more attached to its practice. They were also more likely to have developed some semblance of a conception of a potential relationship with a physical god.

Acclimation of Hinduism to the American environment, then, could take two different trajectories: first, Hindus could attempt to abandon all that is Hindu and to become entirely American, if that is even possible and whatever that might mean. Second, however, it is possible to alter the rubric of Hinduism, as well as how it is taught and communicated, toward the patterns of Americanized religion, where practices and ideas are primarily taught (rather than imbibed, often in particular schools, such as Hindu summer camps which are increasingly more and more popular, though, admittedly, slightly less so among Bengalis). While this has happened to some extent intentionally, it seems more so to be the case that, by means of only imbibing certain tenets of Hinduism, the latter of these possibilities occurs by default. Recognizing that assimilation, shaping and being shaped by one's country of residence, is only part of the story of immigration, we can look to the idea of transnationalism to attempt to examine how living in a different country might affect the passing down of Hindu traditions. In this context too, there is only so much impact transnationalism can have on the ways in which young Hindus in America understand what Hinduism is, what they exactly imbibe, and how they imbibe it. Their view is necessarily fragmented given that Hinduism doesn't fit into the rubric of Judeo-Christian religions as top down: intentionally learning particular edicts, ascribing to them, and acting as a result of and in line with them. In this case, learning must be to some extent active, but imbibing, as has been discussed, is significantly passive.

Finally, to the extent that one can imbibe Hinduism, but given that one is not in India, but rather, in the U.S., what does one imbibe? As one interviewee put it: "Because times are changing, you imbibe from other religions, and it changes." A child born in the U.S. might not be able to imbibe certain aspects of Hinduism, though he or she may learn them. In the U.S., however, there are other cultural scripts that one imbibes and which interact with what they know about Hinduism. One imbibes elements of Christianity through witnessing how Christians celebrate Christmas or through talking to peers. Each imbibing, each drinking in, has the potential to alter not only what has previously been imbibed, but also the time, location, and depth of future imbibings, as a schema might modify with new information. Such queries bring into focus the ways in which Hinduism is itself synonymous with imbibing and, when it cannot be drunk in, how, exactly it can be consumed and to what end.

As D'Andrade and Strauss (1992, 12) point out, the order of learning, or in this case, imbibing, makes a difference as well, since it sets a precedent for interpreting later experiences. If one has already imbibed an American milieu, as would likely be the case living in American society (even if the particular individual's milieu is Hindu-tinged), explicit teaching of Hinduism is pasted on top of that prior understanding. This imbibed system is what one likely uses to organize one's own feelings, thoughts, and even aspects of oneself (Holland 1992, 83), and contributes to a personal semantic network, or the "idiosyncratic web of meaning" carried by each person (Strauss 1992, 211). What necessarily varies in America is the extent to which this web can and does accommodate established Hindu edicts— such as god as relational— without a significant and pervasive Hindu milieu.

Intentional Passing Down

Due to a child's desire to ensure parents' love and support, discourses directed at children by their parents are powerful in all societies (Strauss & Quinn 1997, 95), since engaging with caretakers is universally human. While there is an underlying rhetoric of imbibing Hinduism, the most likely source interviewees cite for where they learned about Hinduism is, unsurprisingly, their families, whether that includes learning about *pūjā* or just having discussions about religion:

> "All from teachings from my grandmother, little bit from my guru-ji, little bit from my dad, but mainly my grandmother."

> "But my learning of the religion has been discussions with my father. He was also not a religious person. But he was a very learned about religion, because he read the books, he knew what he was talking about, he never practiced it."

> "I didn't learn about Hinduism growing up. It's only by watching my mother and my father. My mother was never one for doing all these rituals. Watching my father, watching people around me."

Such proclamations about learning Hinduism lead to questions regarding the role of imbibing versus the role of familial instruction and the extent to which these overlap and reinforce rather than work as two separate mechanisms. Obviously, one's family is the initial locus of learning in most contexts, given that one usually spends a significant amount of time with one's relatives early in life. That said, are these moments of teaching and imparting what ultimately convey the practices, ideas, and tenets of Hinduism to a child? Certainly, as the interviewees above indicated, one can take a parent as a role model: my father does *pūjā*, so I want to do *pūjā*, or, alternatively, my father doesn't do *pūjā,* so it must not be important, and I won't do it. Though relatives are significant on the level of a microcosm, it is the macrocosm, the space from which one imbibes, that provides the context necessary for individuals to have the scope to even make decisions of what they themselves will do. In other words, the macrocosm provides options

beyond solely what one's parents do, and can serve to reinforce what is communicated in a

family, or to make familial expectations seem less important overall.

For example, Sutapa, who is in the older generation of American Hindus, grew up in a

household that did not do *pūjā* at all. Though she knew that her grandmother was interested in

doing *pūjā*, her family never actually did it on a daily basis:

> **S:** I don't know, for some reason my mother never had *pūjā* at home, never had religious book, or sit down and read — there are people who sit down and read Gita every day...
>
> **R**: So your mom didn't do *pūjā* in the house when you were younger?
>
> **S**: Yeah, actually I started the *pūjā* at home.

Though Sutapa grew up in a household that didn't do *pūjā*, she had seen enough *pūjā* in her life

to know that she would like to do it, and she has continued to perform *pūjā* throughout her entire

adult life in the U.S. If she were not in a situation where she could imbibe, if she were not

exposed to the myriad ways to worship in Hinduism, she might not have had the context to even

recognize the choice to perform *pūjā*. This scenario complicates the idea of family as the sole or

primary locus of learning, but rather promotes family as, perhaps, an influential, but not absolute,

element regarding what actually ends up taking place in one's life.

Similarly, parents and family, while important, can only have so much impact,

particularly in the U.S., where children may or may not remember what parents teach them, or,

perhaps, parents might not be able to impart as much wisdom as they actually have. Radhika,

who is among the older generation of Bengali Hindu Americans, discusses a recent conversation

she had with her husband:

> "I think also our children— that I want them to be in this. Not to lose their religion totally. Like we were discussing today while we were coming in the car. They were our friends through the temple and in the community, and they have passed away. And their children — the funeral was performed very grandly... but there's also another part of the death ceremony that's performed one year later, and almost every year, and the children

don't do that. Either they don't know about it, or they know about it and say we don't believe any of it. That's what we were discussing. Maybe they don't know about it, that's why they don't do it. And I was telling, maybe we should tell our children these things. Whether they do it or not, after that, after knowing that, is up to them, but they should know."

This instance illustrates a disconnect regarding what is obvious to the previous generation, but likely isn't to the younger generation. If something is so obvious as this is to older Hindu adults, they might not think to teach it since it is taken as a given, but when that teaching is absent, broader cultural understandings fill in the gaps for the younger generation. It's incredibly difficult to take into account everything one must teach when attempting to fully pass down a tradition. Though the children of the couple that passed away likely wanted to honor their parents (especially given the grand funeral), it seems to be the case that they didn't entirely know how to do so in a Hindu way. As Radhika notes, perhaps they didn't want to follow through on that part of the tradition, but, given that the children did not grow up in India and did not have the imbibing experience their parents did, it is completely possible that they didn't have the requisite knowledge to perpetuate particular Hindu traditions. In India, it is likely the case that the community would expect the second ritual and, moreover, that the children in question would have broader networks of people who were also Hindu, and, thus, they would have attended such ceremonies themselves. As much as parents attempt to impart in the U.S., communication is imperfect and incomplete, provoking differences in the ways that Hinduism is learned and thus practiced.

Perhaps more pressing than the prospect that the children solely didn't know the tradition is the possibility that they did not want to perform the tradition. One must question to what extent children carry on particular Hindu rituals due to their own intention to do so versus the wishes of their parents and, moreover, where that obligation to family ends. If parents are not

188

alive, they will never see the lack of performance. One interviewee in the U.S. explained how her parents tried to teach her about Hinduism: "I think the parents didn't want us all to be coconuts, so they wanted to keep passing it, but no one was that interested because it was a whole different system." When she says "coconut," she uses a slang term for someone who is brown on the outside, white on the inside. In other words, for someone who appears Indian, but in temperament, ideas, and action, is white, or, more implied in this circumstance, non-Hindu. She refers to what her parents were teaching as a whole different system— one which she would have to actively learn. Possibly, for the children mentioned above, who did not perform the requisite ritual, as well as for this interviewee, learning an entire "system" through concertedly taking note of certain particularities told to you rather than absorbed, is daunting. No one— she says— was interested. Instead of simply learning what is in front of one, in this case, one must be interested in order to maintain knowledge. One needs to have the motivation in addition to the schema. In this case, since it is unclear to what extent the schema has been transmitted initially, the motivational capacity of the schema is also ambiguous. This added hurdle qualifies the ways in which specifics of Hinduism are transmitted in the U.S. Certainly they are communicated by one's family, but perhaps only to a point.

Bourdieu calls this process of learning, "apprenticeship through simple familiarization" (1977, 88), but does not take into consideration that a critical mass of apprenticeship is necessary in order for anything to be truly familiar. Therein lies the challenge of shifting from explicit rules understood by a neophyte to the intuition of an expert, which is not defined by rules, but is rather

defined by building a knowledge base that is not necessarily constituted by rules (Smolensky 1988). [85]

Following Scripts

The first two of Spiro's (1987) four levels of internalization are as follows: first, the person is acquainted with the cultural system without personally connecting to the system. As D'Andrade (1992a, 36) notes, under these circumstances, the system has no directive and/or motivational force and no real influence over the individual. Second, cultural tenets are acquired as clichés: people may pay lip-service to a particular idea, but that concept will not have penetrated the person's thought to the extent that it is significantly and implicitly guiding. This is the level in which these younger American Bengali Hindus reside. Notably, Spiro's scheme does not start with a lens of internalization; rather, he builds up, assuming that the acquirer or the internalizer of the cultural system comes to it cold, with no prior involvement. As opposed to Bengali Hindus from India, who are inundated from birth, young Hindu Americans approach Hindu contexts this way: as observers, at least partially inundated elsewhere and otherwise.

Rather than understanding how to live as Hindus through imbibing or being imbibed into, most young Bengali Hindu Americans instead internalize a particular script related to the most observable parts of Hindu practice:

> I've formulated a list over the years, like don't keep your shoes on when you go into this room, you're allowed to do this, you're not allowed to do this... And it's also based on what my parents have told me, what my grandparents have told me, it's not really anything from within that pushes me to say oh I can't do this, because god won't like this, it's just kind of like what my parents have told me, what my grandparents have said.

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[85] This aligns with Kahneman's (2011) understanding of System 1 thinking as intuitive and obvious and System 2 thinking as intentional reasoning and processing.

Sutapa discusses the "list" that she's formulated. Because Bengali Hindu adults in the U.S., who grew up in India, internalized Hinduism largely from observing and imbibing, rarely is there any formal schooling on Hinduism in the U.S., nor is there an entirely immersive cultural environment in which young adults can learn. Though some interviewees had attended Bengali school, this was largely a pursuit set up by parents to teach their children the Bengali language rather than anything about Hinduism. Thus, this generation was largely left to collect dos and don'ts, putting together a scheme for what is acceptable and what is not. Rather than a cumulative expression of living, for this group, Hinduism amounts to a list of what should be accomplished or avoided.

Instead of imbibing Hinduism, taking it in as their elders describe, this group has had Hindu tenets or practices "drilled into my mind" as one interviewee put it. Instead of a passive act of reception and internalization, under these circumstances, Hinduism transforms into specific items, societal stipulations one must follow, or, as Spiro terms them, clichés. Moreover, while this group knows to take shoes off or not to disrespect a *mūrti*, many of the less observable stipulations that Hindus follow (such as fasting before *pūjā*) become less and less important to the extent that the list Sutapa and her peers accumulate is largely only enforced in social settings. As she notes, it's not something internal that pushes her to practice Hinduism as she knows it; there is nothing in her mind that makes removing her shoes a moral obligation. Rather, to remove one's shoes is a societal obligation, and one that signifies knowledge of custom as a part of belonging. It is important to remember, however, that there is likely variation in Sutapa's and in her peers' adherence to given practices or ideas; while she might not feel internally compelled to remove her shoes, she might be internally compelled by something else under the Hindu umbrella as she knows it. By and large, however, most Hindu content is simply added to her list.

191

In America, there is not much of a means to imbibe Hindu content, nor to establish a relational attitude towards a deity as part of this imbibing. There is no way to take in a significant amount about one's cultural or religious heritage as opposed to one's cultural or religious present and surroundings, which are largely populated by non-Hindus. As one interviewee put it, "everything's going haywire." To this end, for the next generation, the very structure of what Hinduism is and how it can be understood has shifted, at least in part due to residence in a multicultural society that also isn't predominantly Hindu. Though it is the case that "people's schemas do not merely copy the most frequently presented associations in their environment," and that emotions and motivations affect the internal association of specific events for specific individuals (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 133), for most of the young American Bengali Hindus I interviewed, much of Hindu content approximated cliché and hadn't taken hold in the form of an internalized schema.

Levi-Strauss (1981) concisely explains what it's like to be an observer looking in on others' practices when he describes how an alien ethnographer might draw several erroneous conclusions when observing our "ritual" of staying within white lines while driving. As any American will tell you, this rule (at least for most people) is functional rather than emotional, and adherence to said rule actually says little about the emotional and internal states of the people driving. Young Bengali Hindu Americans might feel similarly when observing rituals they don't understand and which they can't put into context: there are stipulations, and they follow these stipulations, but the glue of full internalization, and of a pre-established and emotive relationship with a deity, is not necessarily there as a background to these stipulations. Psychological anthropologists often invoke the schema of a restaurant: everyone knows what to do in a restaurant so no one talks about it. Young Bengali Hindu Americans simply following

192

stipulations set out without internalization are in a restaurant, but have no urge to eat; in fact, they might not realize one is supposed to eat when in a restaurant. In other words, they are missing key components of the understanding requisite to even provide motivation to go to a restaurant. When told to order, they do so, and are presented with food which they never necessarily set out to have. Strauss (1992, 219) discusses two ways in which a schema or component of a schema could come into consciousness: first, it could do so as a set of values, and second, it could do so as implicit and perhaps unacknowledged knowledge of reality. Young American Hindus lack the latter in a restaurant or in a *pūjā* room, and the character of what they enact (e.g. wanting to obey their parents' wishes) is characteristically different from that which the older Hindu generation might enact (e.g. wanting to make contact with the deity).

Due to these differences in motivation, even the parts of Hinduism that are intentionally communicated may or may not stick in the minds of younger American Hindus (Strauss & Quinn 1997, 47), and may stick in unexpected ways. Bloch (2012, 174) describes an unattributed experiment in which subjects were shown a picture of an office wherein there is a large bunch of bananas on a desk. When asked to recall the picture, subjects never forget the bananas. These bananas are like an item that Sutapa might put on her list: they stick out as something unusual and important, which must be remembered, but which does not necessarily belong. Over time, people tend to adjust unfamiliar scenarios to fit in with the schemas they do have (Bartlett 1932), and thus, over time, the younger generation of Hindu Americans might adapt to their own internal lists and adjust behavior or rationalize particularities accordingly. However, as Strauss and Quinn (1997, 38) point out when discussing Richard Fox's idea of a grasshopper bouncing off dominant cultural beliefs, like a grasshopper, this group's motivation to jump and the character of that jump itself — in this case the amalgamation of new Hindu content with

193

previously internalized schemas— will be affected by precisely the schemas one jumps from, or, in other words, already possesses.

Moreover, D'Andrade and Strauss (1992, 11) imply that knowing what information people are exposed to does not necessarily tell us much about the schemas they have formed; rather, we need to additionally understand how this information was internalized. When learning about Hindu content as clichés and formulating intentional lists and scripts, though young American Hindus might understand the same spectrum of ideas that the older generation of Hindus does, they likely understand these ideas differently, and without the same force. Bell summarizes a position of Derrida's, saying that "not only is meaning never arrived at, it is never present in any sense at all," (Bell 1992, 105). If one takes meaning here to be intended meaning in so far as it was intended by explicit teachers of Hindu content, his quote, taken out of context and applied into a foreign one, much like some of the rules Sutapa has discerned, aptly states that, lacking a prior state of internalization, the intended effects of instruction can rarely take hold in this scenario.

Way of Life

Though this trope is not specific to Bengalis, several interviewees, particularly of the older generation, proclaimed that Hinduism is a "way of life." In contrast to religiosity as an indication of belief or as an ethnicity, this group rather identifies Hinduism as the way in which they go through their entire lives, as experiential, as phenomenological. Hinduism is defined, in other words, by living and by the people living it rather than as the set of rules that the younger

generation in America seems to have compiled.[86] Much of this relates to the particularities of the

place in which someone was born:

> "It's just our lives, you know. Like my mother said, you can never not be a Hindu, it's your life. Whatever you grow up, it's your heritage. We are kind of like the product of our surroundings, right? Our religion, our parents, our heritage, our birth, everything comes to that."

In other words, Hinduism is what is passed down. It is the way in which one engages with the

world as well as what one perceives the world to be. However, this is only one way of

understanding what Hindus say when they discuss Hinduism as a way of life. Not only do they

discuss Hinduism as the ways in which one interacts with his or her environment, but they tend

to explain "way of life" as related to how one *should* interact with his or her environment, as

imparted by heritage, but also one's family.

To this end, interviewees viewed Hinduism as a code of conduct rather than as specific

and strict edicts about what one should do in terms of interacting with the physical world, e.g.

performing rituals. Instead, Hinduism as a way of life is constituted by the ways in which people

should interact with and treat each other, indicating a moral code, but also an ethics of divinity in

which the divinity itself is defined by the ethics associated with it. Moreover, this way of life is

steeped in relationality, both with the god and with each other. One interviewee went so far as to

equate Hinduism as a way of life with the following the ten commandments:

> "That's a very good question, because Hindu is, I mean like actually if you think, Hindu is not a religion, it's a philosophy... That philosophy I found when I saw ten commandments. I don't know the whole Christianity, but the ten commandments, what I have heard, that is also core for Hinduism, you know... Always... lead a good life, don't cheat, don't do this, and that will be always there."

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[86] This is not to say that there is not a ubiquity of purity rules and other rule-like structures prevalent in Hinduism; rather, I attempt to indicate that these rules are woven into the fabric of everyday life to the extent that they can often seem invisible to practitioners.

Though Hinduism as a way of life might be framed as a set of moral edicts, rather, it's an underlying feeling, an intuition, about how to treat one another. While this quote initially comes off as an over-simplification, equating religious traditions with significantly different histories and timelines, what it indicates is that for this interviewee, the most quintessentially important part of Hinduism is that of stipulating values. "Don't do this" doesn't mean that one shouldn't sit with one's feet towards the gods— though one shouldn't— but rather, that one should behave respectfully in relation to others— and any rules about feet are part and parcel of that. Specifically, Hinduism "teaches you to respect your elders, not to lie, be good to someone less fortunate than you, try and lead a good life."

What is surprising here is not that interviewees are indicating that a moral code of sorts is a part of Hinduism. Rather, what is interesting is that this moral code is itself constitutive of Hinduism and, moreover, that this code should be enacted as a means of living rather than as a set of rules one should follow. Additionally, just as the physical god is understood from a relational perspective, so is the construct of Hinduism more broadly. This distinction is slight, but important: to follow a set of rules is to use them as guidelines for how to live, referring back to these rules. However, Hinduism as a way of life is living as Hindu, as a Hindu would live, and extrapolating values based on the ways in which one already goes through life. Following Hinduism does not mean that one has to follow certain actions, respect a *mūrti*, or celebrate certain festivals; instead, rather than Hinduism as an ideology imposed from above, it is drawn from below, not indicating how one should behave via actions, but determining values from the ways in which Hindus strive to live. This is likely one of the reasons that Hinduism is so difficult to impart: essentializing something which is vast and amorphous necessarily omits subtleties.

196

To the extent that Hinduism's definition is extrapolated from the ways in which Hindus live, because the ethical guidelines that individuals choose to follow construct the larger whole, there is a significant amount of freedom in being Hindu:

> "For me, it's a way of life. It really is a way of life... It just tells you to be a good person. So for me, Hinduism is that. I consider myself a Hindu, but I also feel like it lets me be who I am. Without any kind of consequences."

To be who one is becomes acceptable in so far as individuals construct Hinduism from the ground up. Obviously, no one is born into a vacuum, and the ways in which individuals act are passed on through generations of habituation (Bourdieu 1977), but this larger idea of not adhering to an ideology, but, rather, letting the ideology adhere to you, re-emphasizes the ways in which Hinduism itself is constructed by living. The daily practices of Hinduism, whether they constitute what individuals deem to be the core of the religious tradition, are, similarly, just how one exists within and interacts with the world. To this extent, "Hinduism is a way of life... Hindu religion just says that whatever you feel and you want, you do that."

Simultaneously, if Hinduism is itself constructed by daily living, at least in the minds if not protocols of these interviewees, why is the second generation in the U.S. so quick to say that Hinduism is constituted by a set of practices? Notably, it was almost always the older generation who described Hinduism as a way of life. In many ways, this understanding of what constitutes Hinduism doesn't translate for the younger generation; if they were to go through their lives in America, without the input of their parents, there would be little or no Hindu content on a daily basis. By and large, Hindus in the U.S. are certainly aware of these issues of transmission:

> "My son... he steps on paper, books. It's all mixed up for us. Yeah, it's very scattered now. We just believe in the way of life... everything's going haywire. We don't know where we are right now. Religion, like we know our generation's not the next. We know there are going to be problems for the family."

This acknowledgement indicates, in some ways, a loss of Hinduism as way of life when one lives

in America. The ways in which it is constructed must change, as well as the ways in which it is

taught.

As Risu described:

"I came here when I was 21, 22 years old, so religion for us was a way of life, we were never taught, all osmosis. We saw my grandmother. We saw being in Calcutta, religion is all around, so nothing has been taught. When I came here, I needed to structure it so that others could understand."

Here Risu makes note of the fact that when not living in India, Hinduism can be difficult to

understand, for non-Hindu Americans, but also for his daughters. How does one structure a way

of life in order to communicate it? How can one communicate something experiential? There is,

potentially, a necessary simplification one must enact to make Hinduism comprehensible,

whether or not what is comprehended is a way of life, or something else entirely.

Couched within Hinduism as a way of life is the idea of relationality, and tied therein, a

connection of directive content to directive force. As Shweder (1992) notes, relationships are

understood with additional content; to be a son isn't just to be a son. In India, to be a son is also

to be the devotee of one's father, who is akin to a god. Moreover, this is a component of reality

as it is understood rather than merely a cliché, a statement. The way one lives Hinduism assumes

this reality. Not to assume this reality is to live Hinduism as something other than a way of life.

What does it mean to be Hindu?

Little overall consistency emerged when inquiring about what, exactly, makes someone

Hindu. By and large, however, two groups contrasted each other in significant ways: adults in

India and the second generation in America. The other two groups interviewed tended to have

more mixed and varied thoughts on the subject. It is widely contended that one is born into

Hinduism, perhaps more so than into other religious traditions. Though this stipulation was mentioned in all groups, adults in India mentioned it frequently and often as the sole explanation for their Hinduness. This construction relates to oral familial history, passed down through generations, and thus asserting this particular identity: "Hinduism is coming to us by heritage. My dad is saying that his dad was Hindu, so he's a Hindu, and that's the reason that I'm Hindu. He says it's in our family, so that's the reason everyone is Hindu." Moreover, for this group in particular, this origin of one's birth, of one's heritage, supersedes the way an individual himself may actually feel or think: "Because I was born into a Hindu family, I would call myself a Hindu, but now I don't have any faith in Hinduism." Where and how one is born is more important, then, than the ways in which one considers oneself.

Notably, only one group stipulated that to be Hindu is to do Hindu things; in other words, to perform the actions traditionally associated with Hinduism. The second generation in the U.S. cited specific things one must do in order to be considered a Hindu: "Being Hindu is... knowing at least a little bit about the religion, and when they have *pūjā*, don't eat meat, make sure you don't show your feet to the god, respect the god, you know like respect the priest. And like celebrate *pūjās*." Interestingly, this group, which is by far the least likely to actually perform a *pūjā*, opines that to be Hindu is to do *pūjās* and act in Hindu ways.

While contemporary ritual theorists often caution against bifurcating action from thought (Bell 1992), that is precisely what this group does, though they also insinuate that both are particularly important when defining what a Hindu is. More than one person cited specific actions, such as performing *pūjā*, as well as a more ambiguous "belief" in certain tenets of Hinduism: "To believe that there are these several gods... and understanding that each of the gods has this certain character that defines them, and by that I don't just mean the personality,

199

but also their area of influence, what they do. Believing in all of that and following whether, consciously or not, following what the gods say." This interviewee cites not only following along with what the gods want, i.e. worshipping, but also believing that the gods are important and relevant. Thus, to young Hindus in the U.S., Hinduism is constituted by actions, but also by a particular mindset, and those two arenas do not necessarily coalesce. As Suryamukhi repeated over and over, you're Hindu if you think you are and act accordingly.

Since this is a group that, largely, does not perform traditional Hindu rituals and which has largely non-visual understandings of god, to what extent, then, does this group feel as if this identity, stipulated by practices and endorsed beliefs, describes themselves? Such contradictions can prove confusing when attempting to reconcile and spell out one's own identity (or lack thereof) as a Hindu. As one interviewee explained, "I don't know. I don't know because I don't 100% consider myself Hindu... Like I myself don't really see myself as a very steadfast Hindu kind of person, but if you said to me, what is a Hindu, I'd be like they believe in all these gods, and they don't eat cows... kind of like the stereotypical, all that kind of stuff, and then because I'm not that religious, I kind of put all this tradition on to some other Hindu person, if that makes sense." This explanation indicates that this particular group holds a set of practices and protocols in their heads for what it means to be Hindu. They've seen rituals and been told what is important, but the extent to which they actually take all of this upon themselves remains unclear. There is some other Hindu out there who does all of these things, but they themselves do not necessarily fit into this mold. To be Hindu, then, is constituted of a checklist of dos and don'ts; it is partially stipulated by heritage, but adoption of that heritage is more relevant to self-identification than the heritage itself.

Conclusion

Young Bengali Hindu Americans put together lists of what is Hindu, differentiating Hindu action from non-Hindu action, and, thus, perceiving Hinduism as constructed of Hindu actions— rather than a way of life— and a person who performs those actions as Hindu. Lewis notes that most ritual theorists have taken ritual to be either a distinctive action, or action which is not distinctive from all other human action (Bell 1992, 70). To emphasize the former is to take the perspective of the observing theorist, wherein an action appears to an out-group onlooker to have no discernible purpose, or at least a disconnected purpose. In this circumstance, the action is defined as an object of inquiry by this onlooker, who feels the need to impose purpose or meaning in an attempt at sense-making. J.Z. Smith (1987, 109) opines that "Ritual is, above all, an assertion of difference," and in so far as the person perceiving the ritual from the outside, that is the case: ritual sticks out as an action, and perhaps an irrational one, because it is different from what the onlooker understands or the schemas she may have internalized herself. Such an analysis indicates that it might be fruitful to define ritual as a construct itself constituted by the views of observers rather than performers: a ritual is something that, for the people who perform it, might happen every day and quite uneventfully, but for the onlooker, the particular observable action is unusual. To this end, only an observer could deem an action to be a ritual because to be a ritual is relative: it is to be different from that which is given, intuitive, internalized— all criteria that many Bengali Hindus attribute to *pūjā*.

Bell (1992, 54) discusses the construction of ritual as a decipherable text; the theorist can then deconstruct the ritual back into its pre-fused parts. Thus, the theoretical construction of ritual is a reflection of the theorist's mind and method. To this end, Strauss and Quinn (1997, 256) caution: "do not presume that your readings of public culture are the same as those of the

people you are studying." However, what is fascinating in this particular case is that the methods described above, the methods of the theorist, are precisely those taken by the younger generation of American Bengali Hindus. They are missing relevant relational schemas, and therefore, take on the approach of observeres, absorbing bits of Hinduism piecemeal, as rules that are not otherwise intuitive, and attempting to string these together. Even with repeated exposure, aimed at teaching such that networks of connection are established (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 93), only small segments might be transmitted.

Piaget (2001) calls the process of reflection and abstraction on lived situations *reflechissante*. This is when an individual first understands a lower structure (in this case, a way of life relational schema) at a higher level derived from that lower (intuitive) level, second, tries to make sense of and organize that higher level, and third, reflects on the abstraction itself. While the older generation who grew up in India, and likely the younger generation in India as well, can complete this process, the younger generation in America comes in at the second level and has no sense of how these extracted items should be ordered since they are missing the formative reference point: the lower level. These individuals often get stuck in the second level, unable to move up or down, much like an anthropologist entering a field site, who has enough familiarity with a tradition to engage it, but not enough to fully comprehend everything around her. Initially, at least, she resorts to scripts— individual actions or ideas summarizing what she knows, but not necessarily informing how real people within this culture live their lives, nor the ways in which they understand the lives they live. This limited understanding affects the extent to which she can truly participate in the ethos of the people she studies, including taking on an internal motivation for particular actions (e.g. showering before *pūjā*). Young Bengali Hindus who know the rules,

but don't connect to the relationality of Hinduism, who have not imbibed, are similarly observers of their parents' understanding of Hinduism as a way of life.

Chapter 6: Asking Questions and (Maybe) Finding Answers

The previous chapter examined how, in the absence of a Hindu relational schema, Bengali Hindus will often come to understand Hinduism in terms of rules and scripts: what they should and shouldn't do. These rules do not come intuitively, but are learned through observation outside of a schematically relevant context. This chapter takes into consideration what occurs when, rather than simply following these rules, one begins to ask questions about their origins and meaning, potentially leading to a questioning of and skepticism with regard to the tradition itself. Young Bengali Hindu Americans often engage in this type of questioning, acting as observers of what are ostensibly, to them and their parents, their own traditions; in this way, they try to make sense of Hindu particularities within the scope of their own internalized schemas. I postulate that asking questions and questioning is more profound, and sometimes leads to rejection of traditions, when the questioner has not internalized a relational schema, and thus has difficulty getting answers or making sense of the answers she receives. In this examination, I particularly focus on individuals who do not follow the standard patterns of their demographic group in order to understand what it means to be at the margins of question asking, and the limits of having internalized or not internalized a particular schema from a particular source.

Within any tradition that is passed down through generations, it is likely that some questioning will result. This questioning exists on a continuum; some people will never question the tradition, and others will question to the point of abandonment. Thus, asking questions, seeking knowledge about a topic, can potentially lead to questioning its validity or veracity. In the case of Bengali Hindus, asking questions about and potentially subsequently Hindu practices or edicts often arises from varying levels of schematic internalization; if one possesses a relational schema, the actions taken likely fall within this scope and are comprehensible within that context. However, taken out of the landscape reinforcing this relational schema (i.e. India and/or a strong Hindu community), one might begin to wonder why Hindus do what they do.

Some questioning is necessarily the result of individual personality and temperament; some people are more inquisitive and, potentially, adversarial, given their particular personal histories and inherited proclivities. However, I would argue that level of schematic

internalization skews the bell curve of asking questions toward either more asking or less asking, this also affects the potentially altered ways in which the initial tradition is followed (or abandoned) and passed down (or intentionally not communicated to younger generations).

One group prone to questioning, analyzing and interrogating tradition, explicitly or otherwise, is anthropologists. Strauss and Quinn (1997, 35) warn that anthropologists' work, if it fails to fully engage with the subjective understandings of the population in question, risks merely juxtaposing what the anthropologist understands to be "exotic" with his or her own ("non-exotic"?) practices, and, moreover, projecting the (potentially postmodern) moral landscape of the anthropologist him/herself. Bell (1992, 49) further points out that an object is not independent of analysis or method, and, in fact, the two are often attuned to each other, seeking to demonstrate co-established "naturalness." This relationship between the knower and the known is mediated by a particular body of cultural knowledge: that of the knower (50). To this end, in examining any object known, it is impossible to completely circumvent or otherwise escape the categorical comprehension of the anthropologist, the knower, the theorist. This person serves as a bridge between cultures, and as someone who might attempt to connect two cultural traditions, but, in the process reinvents them through his or her analysis (Wagner 1981). It is anthropologists' status as curious observers— or insiders taking an analytic lens— which compels them to ask questions about— and to potentially question— what they do not understand.

Bell is aware of these issues when she discusses ritual. She contends that "It is possible that the whole structure of theoretical discourse on ritual primarily serves to solve the problems posed for scholars by their reliance on a distinction between thought and action," (1997, 58). Still, she as a scholar, perceiving ritual as "contingent, provisional, and defined by difference,"

(91), sets ritual itself aside as different. For the people who practice these rituals, these actions are *not* necessarily set aside as different; when inquiring into a particular action as a performer (the person acting) would, this category that is established by difference and which sets aside particular acts as themselves different, to an extent reifies the category itself. As Ricouer (1971) explains, this attempt to treat action as a text disjoins what an anthropologist might call meaning from the internal state and intentionality of the actor (Bell 1997, 51). Ricouer attempts to resolve this problem by noting that the social instantiation of an act allows the act to construct meaning for the interpreter— however, Ricouer fails to take into account what exactly drives the social, relegating the performers of actions, who have their own objectives, to the role of merely performers *for* interpreters.

This position, that of the theorist, the analyst, the anthropologist, is to some extent intrinsic to the ways in which we as people attempt to understand anything that is not ourselves— ranging from broader social discourse to the actions and/or internal state of another person. To that end, our contemporary understanding of ritual is not only based upon our own internal schemas and understandings, but also the historical shifts that have constructed evolution of the category itself (Asad 1993, 55).

Putting aside the term ritual, this process of delineating an object for comprehension is a starting point for any inquiry into the unknown, including the ways in which the younger generation of American Bengali Hindus inquire into the Hindu traditions that their parents demonstrate and, often, expound. In this way, they ask questions, and if these questions are not addressed to satisfaction, this can lead to question*ing* of Hindu traditions more broadly.

Falling short of becoming completely inundated in another cultural tradition from all angles, there will be elements that a neophyte will not understand and, ultimately, will question,

and background schemas provide context for this acquisition of new information (Nishida 2005, 409). In fact, though some might assume that one's own schemas can "transform" into those of a new host culture (Nishida 2005, 408), Strauss and Quinn (1997, 133) contend that even if an immigrant is relatively "assimilated," "he or she will always be different with regard to interpretive sensibilities, emotional tonalities and motivational pulls that were a product of a childhood quite different from that typical of someone growing up in the United States." In this circumstance, the question arises of who exactly is assimilating to what cultural paradigm?

The older generation of Bengali Hindu Americans is certainly made up of immigrants, but, in a different way, so is the younger generation of Hindus in America. They ask questions in attempts to assimilate to the Hindu contexts in which they find themselves. The younger generation of Hindus, when they attempt to make sense of their elders' embedded schemas through ethnographic-style anthropologist-akin patterns of inquiry, try to understand actions in order to understand schemas which, for their interlocutors, are largely undefined and multiply interconnected. They necessarily ask about schemas from their own perspectives, and the more that is not initially understood, such as their parents' relationship with the deity, the more this act of asking questions can lead to questioning. Questioning, in this context, is an acknowledgement that a particular under-examined schema does not fit within the schemas an individual possesses or comprehends. Either mode— asking questions or questioning— are ways of saying "this doesn't make sense to me." This chapter attempts to understand both the asking of questions and questioning within a Hindu Bengali context, demonstrating that those who do not possess Bengali Hindu relational schemas have difficulty of resolving their questions and questioning.

Beginning to Question: Older Bengali Hindus in America

The object of questioning is, most often, acquiring knowledge. If there are not people

who are knowledgeable about a tradition or resources to determine the logic behind a stipulated

act, questions hang unresolved. Said knowledge can be about how a ritual is performed or, more

pressingly, the meaning behind said ritual. Moving to America highlighted for many Bengali

Hindus the extent of knowledge they didn't have; it is not necessarily the traditional Hindu

inclination to ask why a ritual is being performed (or so my interviewees said, and so I

observed), but rather, to follow along as generations before have done. Take, for example, this

woman who moved to the U.S., and is content to just follow along and perform ritual without

trying to understand more about it:

> I'm not very versed in what is allowed and not allowed, so I'll just ask somebody and
> follow the ritual, I would really not do anything to not follow the ritual ... I don't question
> it too much...

While this person is certainly inclined to follow the ritual, she first, doesn't entirely know how

and, second, it doesn't particularly bother her that she doesn't know much about the tradition.

She perceives it as her job to just go along. This is incredibly common in India, and collective

knowledge fills in the gaps; as Asad points out, "apt performance involves not symbols to be

interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in

authority: it presupposes no obscure meanings," but privileges the formation of skill as well as

knowledge (1993, 62). Strauss and Quinn (1997, 52) concur, that "no single unit knows much,"

but collective action linked by weights and repetition leads to expected outcomes.

When one grows up in a tradition, it makes sense that one would follow along; everyone

else is doing it too. Affect and motivation within schemas are layered on top of each other like a

trifle; they melt into and inform each other with no clear delineation or definition. However, upon moving to the U.S., Indians automatically became ambassadors of Indianness and of Hinduism to non-Hindu Americans who understand neither, and, later, to their children. They are forced to articulate in ways comprehensible for a non-Hindu American what may have never really been articulated to them in their lives. Even my interview questions tended to provoke a level of reflection that many people had not necessarily reached. I asked one American interviewee why she removed her shoes during *pūjā*, garnering this exchange:

> **R:** So is it just disrespectful to the community or to the god or to both?
> **S:** To god. That's a nice question. I've never thought of that before. And the thing is, as you're questioning me, I'm questioning myself too. Like why do I remove my shoe. Because I'm thinking, I'm thinking aloud.

In the last chapter, I discussed how many people in India couldn't even begin to articulate to me why they take their shoes off; to leave them on would be unthinkable. The questioning stopped there. This woman, however, must think about this issue and others, as must many Hindus in America who are regularly asked why they take their shoes off during worship.

Many Hindus who moved to America thus attempt to go back generations to determine reasoning for certain actions. They had followed along, assuming that those they followed must have thought things through and knew the underlying importance of what they were doing— or, perhaps, they didn't perceive knowledge of that importance to be particularly necessary to begin with. As with many traditions, however, in many contexts, the older generation of Hindus in America often didn't have the requisite understanding of particular aspects or of the totality to be able to explain to others:

> My grandma tells me something, so I question her. You know, why do you say that? And she says you know when we grew up that's how they told us, we never were questioned. They followed what they had been told and they tried to teach that to their kids, and that's how my mom learned it. She told it to me.

209

Strauss and Quinn (1997, 112) tell a similar story, of a girl who questions her mother, her grandmother, and her great-grandmother to find out why each cuts off the ends of a roast before putting it in the oven. The tradition was passed down through observation with no overt explanation. The girl's great-grandmother confided that she cut off the ends because her pan was too short, an issue possibly alleviated in later generations, rendering the original reasoning as obsolete. Without motivation to do otherwise, these behaviors become automated because they are familiar and perhaps the "only imagined possibility." Strauss and Quinn continue, "Their habituation may make them seem so natural that ways of acting differently become not just difficult to imagine but unlikely even to be noticed, let alone learned," (104). We don't know what prompted this girl to inquire about the roast, but we do know that living in America has caused Bengali Hindus to ask questions they had never thought to ask in their lives. Becoming interlocutors, needing to address these concerns, and identifiable by their brown skin and accents, they became representatives of Hinduism in ways they likely never intended to be.

As a result of having had to rationalize their traditions anew within an American context, many interviewees, as described, realized that they didn't have much knowledge about their traditions. People who had read a significant amount and who were pillars of the Bengali Hindu community in New Jersey would regularly tell me they knew nothing and that they wouldn't be very helpful in my research. It took me a long time to understand this modesty: whether it was culturally situated or whether they really felt they didn't know much. I've come to the conclusion that it is primarily the latter, given that many of these learned people also told me they'd struggled to explain some of the traditions to themselves. In other words, being in America and responding to questioning had provoked a certain autodidacticism and, as most scholars will undoubtedly attest, the more you learn, the more you often realize you don't know.

In India, there is no reason to question. As Sneha puts it, using Durgā Pūjā as an example, "it's just what you do, and everybody's celebrating, everyone's going, and you don't want to question that, right? It's fun! But you come here and it's a little different, why am I doing?" Why would one question something that is the cause for joy, societally, familially, and individually? This joy is all around, and everyone is acting in the same way; there's no reason to interrupt the merriment. As a result, however, Sneha reflects that: "we grew up a certain way, we really don't know why we grew up the way we did, we like the way we did grow up and when my daughter asks why are we doing this the way we're doing this? It's very challenging to give her a proper answer." Short of taking her daughter to live an alternate life, immersing her in India, there is no full way that Sneha can explain why she and other Hindus do what they do.

While it is often the case that non-Indian Americans will ask questions about Hinduism, given that it seems "exotic" and foreign, probably the most frequent questioners are Hindu immigrants' children. These children, born and raised in America, have little context for much of the Hindu content in their lives. Inquiring is instilled in most Americans who grew up in America, given American educational structures and the general ethos of our culture. In India, education can sometimes be more rote: memorize now, theorize later. This is certainly not the case in American schools which attempt to instill critical thinking skills, often above all else. Moreover, children are often quite inquisitive, and if they see their parents doing something that they don't see the general population doing, all the more so. Sneha talks about reading her grandchildren stories from the Mahabharata and realizing how violent they are when her grandchildren question them. She had never thought of it before. This was one moment when she realized that these were stories, but that the internal logic behind the violence, a given for her and her Indian peers, made little sense to her grandchildren, who ask questions about everything.

Another clarifying example is that of Kṛṣṇa. In India, children grow up seeing *mūrti*s and realize that often, gods are blue. However, Sneha had to make sense of this paradigm for her grandchildren, who had never before contemplated that a blue person could exist:

> So Cody at one point asked me, "Why is Kṛṣṇa blue?" That was a difficult question. I don't know why he is blue. There are things that we take, we have been taking as, you know, granted, taken for granted. Never questioned it. These kids are questioning it. So I started to ask people. I asked people in India also, why is he blue.

Hindus in America contend with these questions in differing ways. In this circumstance, Sneha's first reaction was to ask someone else, someone with more knowledge. Someone must know why Kṛṣṇa is blue. This is certainly one tactic to begin to explain to children why Hindu particularities are the way they are. However, sometimes they might turn up indigenous logics that do not translate to a broadly non-Hindu American context. For example, when Sutapa was young, she was told that one doesn't eat meat before *pūjā* because by eating meat, one's body heats up and becomes impure, as if one were drunk; this then affects one's ability to focus on performing *pūjā*. Eating meat in India is a contentious issue, and even Bengalis, who often eat meat, realize that it is very common for people not to. This understanding of meat as a heating and crazy-making substance is pervasive in India, and, thus, this logic follows. However, to a child in America, who sees people eating meat everywhere, and (one would hope) not acting intoxicated or crazed, or who had not even considered that possibility, this logic does not hold outside of its Indian context, or, in other words, its schemas. When explaining practices to children, the older generation of Hindu Americans often attempts to relate these practices to a set of schemas more salient in for non-Hindu Americans (Nishida 2005, 407).

As is increasingly common, Sutapa finds a way to explain Hindu practices through a largely non-Hindu lens, acquired from her time living in the US. Children have been told over and over again that it is important to wash one's hands, and particularly to wash one's hands

before one eats. This a trope that is extremely prevalent in America. So why do you wash your

hands when you walk into a Hindu temple? You do so because you've just removed your shoes

(dirty) and you're about to eat *prasād* (clean) which will be put in your hand by the priest. So, as

Sutapa puts it, "if you think about it, it forces you to clean your hands right?... So I explain

everything like for me. If my kids say they question, that why are you doing this? That's how I

explain it to them. Like this is what I think makes sense." Abstracting this activity from its

original context, it's not quite the same, and, moreover, any theorizing Sutapa does might miss

the dynamics of this practice in its original context (Bell 1992, 81, 83). Moreover, the danger

with this approach is that it demystifies the whole process, thereby changing what is sacred into

something that is more practical. In this circumstance, one names and/or defines a set of

practices, creating links which may or may not have been there previously, or which may or may

not have been acknowledged (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 41). Seeing this logic can make these

practices appear to be less binding and less cosmically necessary as one reflects upon and

abstracts the structural organization of the practices themselves.

    While these explanations are important, for the first generation of Hindus in America,

they by and large serve to rationalize something already adhered to. The justification for

performing a given act is quite clearly an *ex post facto* rationalization (Baumard and Sperber

2012; Haidt 2001; Hauser et al. 2007) in this case. In America, these Hindus have been exposed

to more questioning, but the majority of people do not intend to give up their Hindu traditions;

still, in order to explain, they must make sense of these practices in some way whether they want

to or not. And, moreover, it's not as if everything related to Hinduism has always made sense to

this population. If they've made it to the U.S., they tend to be among the better educated

population, as well as a population that has had more exposure to traditions outside of India, even before immigrating. Niyati explains going to a temple in her childhood:

> I saw a very lot of beggars outside, and there are people who were hanging, you know, these garlands made out of hundred dollar bills on the god. So that didn't make any sense to me. I thought it was purely rubbish. So I do understand there are some parts which are hypocritic, but you know, there's a lot of hypocrisy, there's a lot of fanaticism, and I can clearly differentiate it between that. So those little, little things. And because most of the temples you have a lot of beggars outside. So then I feel, what does Hinduism mean? The beggars are there and we go and say our prayers and we just go back to our good lives?

This theme of temples as money-making centers came up as problematic again and again. This dynamic draws upon an observation Kant made about religious institutions versus "true" religion; for an onlooker, which is the role Niyati fills here, the former is separate from the latter, but for most, this distinction may or may not be recognized, and the institutional aspects of religion might be a meaningful system unto itself or as part of a greater whole. Niyati had recognized this hypocrisy her whole life, and had always wondered how these elements fit together. However, witnessing these elements of Hindu practice that she did not agree with did not propel her to give up Hindu practice entirely; rather, she performs *pūjā* every day and is quite close to her traditions. She saw this hypocrisy and decided that it did not affect her own personal version of or relationship with Hinduism.

This, however, is not the case for everyone. There are two possible positions for someone questioning a particular aspect of Hinduism and who does not find a suitable answer to that question: to first, maintain the question, but also continue to adhere to whatever other elements of Hinduism he or she wishes, or, second, to drop Hinduism entirely, or at least to some extent. While Niyati chose the former, some Hindus in America do not, causing them to either abandon Hinduism completely or to alter how they understand it as a whole and the performance of the actions associated with it.

It should be noted that very few people actually fall into either of these categories. Most Bengali Hindus who move to America and start families continue to do what they've always done with regard to Hindu practice. They may change how they think about the practices they perform, but they still perform them. I encountered few interviewees who rejected Hinduism altogether. For example, one woman, who is an economics professor, grew up with quite orthodox parents: they did *pūjā* every day and all of their vacations were effectively pilgrimages. When she came to the U.S., however, she completely dropped any formal affiliation with Hinduism. Here she explains the change:

> The shift happened when I came here and I guess I kind of started questioning myself, you know, as to why, why am I doing this, or why am I not doing it, sort of like that, and I didn't find answers both places. Very frankly, I don't know why I don't do it, and I don't know why I did it... See, when I did the *pūjās* and I went to the temples etc., I did it as a minor with my parents. I didn't even think about it. In those days I wasn't even thinking about anything religious. So you kind of just, you know, follow what everybody else is doing.

This quote includes a great amount of detail about this woman's state of mind. She came to the U.S. and began to practice the way in which she'd grown up. Finding no definitive answers, she simply stopped her action. It was the examination of the practice itself, what she had done and could continue to do, and her reasoning that prevented her from continuing. In India, it was inertia; one just continues to do what one has been doing. In the U.S., it required effort, and that effort needed to be situated in reasoning: why is committing time to this a better use of time than some other type of commitment? This was a difficult or impossible question for this woman to answer.

Discussing why she gave up performing Hindu rituals, Shreya, another interviewee, recounted a conversation she'd had with her son:

> And you know, my 13 year old, he was telling me, "Why do they do that? It makes no sense?" And one time I listened to him, because I try to mind my, listen to the basic

subconscious reasons, and you know this young child was telling me, "Mom, it doesn't make sense. Why do we do that?" And I said, "You know what, you're right!" And I stared at him, and I started to think like a young teenager. Because why, because teenagers in our country, teenagers here learn to think independently. Unlike teenagers in India, because they are so brainwashed by their family, that they don't learn to think independently. So I had to grow up with my teenager, and I had to learn to think independently like him.

Shreya, who had never questioned Hindu ritual before, and who perhaps would not have otherwise, took the perspective of her son and realized that she couldn't explain what she was doing. Rather than seeking out some kind of learning, trying to understand the history of the practice, she deemed that in her life, it didn't have much of an outcome. As a result, she pared down and focuses largely on meditation in front of a *mūrti* rather than a more formal *pūjā*. She perceives this as a more enlightened way to practice Hinduism, but, in some ways, it's a method that is more adapted to the socialized means of questioning that her son brought to the table.

As with this example and others, we can see that children can serve the role of uninundated participant-observers. They are both within their tradition and outside, and they ask probing questions. They are in this position because they are being presented with cultural material that is outside of its cultural context, and therefore recognizing difference is easier. However, they also serve as provocateurs for the purveyors of this cultural material: their parents. This uninundated person's effect on an internal understanding of practice is an important one; in this case, the existence of participant-observeres in their midst comes as a surprise to parents. They often expect their children to learn as they did, but the fact that their children are growing up in America has not seeped in until the questioning begins.

Such conjectures bring into focus the role of the family vs. the macrocosm of society. Hindu children in America are both in and out. They've been raised with certain practices, but those practices are specific to their families; they can't be taken for granted as the way everyone

216

does things. Moreover, unlike some familial practices that could go unacknowledged as unusual, given questions from their peers, either based on observations, studies, or hearsay, as well as their own observations of others, young American Bengali Hindus come to understand that some particularities that are so pervasive in their own family lives, such as *mūrti*s in their houses, do not extend to their non-Hindu American friends. These acknowledgements pin child as anthropologist, simultaneous insider and outsider, conjecturer. And, as their parents did in response to questions, a child often has to decide whether answers to questions are sufficient for him or her to continue Hindu practices, or whether the questioning instigates an abdication of intentional performance that more accurately reflects the relationship— or lack thereof— he or she have with *mūrti*s.

Starting from Questions: Young Bengali Hindus in America

> I don't understand why the actions that are taken are the actions that are taken. I guess, why the dos and don'ts of the *pujo* are, why they are there. The taking off your shoes in front of the idol— it's something you're supposed to do, and I'll do it, but I don't understand why, and when you ask, nobody really tells you, they just say this it's something you're supposed to do. And I think it's because they don't know, but some of them it doesn't matter as much as it does for me, and so, I can't... **I can do it, go through the motions, but I don't feel it inside**. (emphasis added)

As indicated earlier, the younger generation in the U.S. is happy to go through the motions of *pūjā*, to follow scripts, but when it comes to understanding what is going on, they feel lost. They question and question, but are often met with little to no explanation. This interviewee astutely deduces that the elder generation may not even know why they're preforming these actions, or may know intuitively, and he goes even farther to realize that for them, it doesn't particularly matter. For this group, the actions of *pūjā* are tied up in a system of Hinduism as a way of life, of performing these actions as if it were obvious to perform them, and particularly

217

that they are in conjunction with cultivating a relationship with a *mūrti*. Simply explaining this underlying premise of relationality is challenging if not impossible, even for a particularly reflective devotee. Thus, the complete frame of reference for understanding action is different. While this older group might not overtly, in a conscious way, "feel it inside," they do "feel it" implicitly; this is what you're supposed to do, and not to do it would be almost unfathomable. While for this group, Hinduism as a way of life takes precedence, dictating that they should do what they do, even if there is no explicit why, for the younger generation in the U.S., who has tried to piece Hinduism together through rules and scripts, needing to take your shoes off in front of a *mūrti* makes little intrinsic sense. The two groups share the same outline of a schema, but what that schema means to them, the circumstances in which it can/should be invoked, and its network of connections to other schematic webs and ideas certainly vary at the level of the individual (D'Andrade & Strauss 1992, 12; Westen 2001, 38).

To this end, these schemas are "functionally inert" if they lack necessary affect, though they can certainly exist without motivational aspects. For example, one might have a schema to get in line, but will not necessarily get in line unless there is some reasoning for doing so (Westen 2001, 38, 39). Though the younger generation here has the outline of the schema, there is little motivation to apply it except when familial responsibility serves as the motivation; this schema in and of itself might not carry any weight of motivation. In other words, the ritual might be lifted out of a context "formed by other ways of acting in a cultural situation," (Bell 1992, 90).

D'Andrade (1992b, 227), drawing from Shweder (1992), notes that if one contends that witches exist, then strategies for magical protection, for example, begin to make sense as a consequence. However, for the younger generation in America, it is as if they encounter these

218

strategies for magical protection with no understanding of witches. To that end, they use their

non-Hindu schemas common in America to try to make sense of these strategies and practices

(Nishida 2005, 411), which make perfect sense for the older generation in so far as they perceive

the *mūrti* to be a god, a relation. These pre-existing schemas provide hypotheses, which try to

make the data all fit together, and the individual then goes about testing these hypotheses, often

through lines of questioning (Taylor and Crocker 1981, 89-91). If one understands schemas as

pyramidal,[87] an example resides at the top, for which a person might form a hypothesis to see if it

can be generalized to a lower level. For example, if I have a friend who has x characteristic, is

there a class of people who also have x characteristic, and what do they have in common (Taylor

and Crocker 1981, 92)?[88] If this generalization, or fitting within a schema, cannot be performed,

people reside in a state of disequilibrium (Piaget 1964), when there is a lack of coherence in

cognitive structures. In other words, someone might possess many tops of pyramids, different

examples, but might lack the bottoms that support them, categories or ideas explaining those

examples. Many unclassified pyramid tips, or exhortations from one's parents that one cannot

relate to, for example, might eventually cause one to simply ignore that these examples or pieces

of advice exist (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 109). In other words, they carry no motivational weight.

Back to our astute American interviewee, he explains that though the shoe part of *pūjā*

doesn't particularly make sense to him, there is another component that does:

> **R:** So the shoe part, for example, does not feel like much, but conversing with the god
> specifically is more important.[89]

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[87] Not in general, but purely for the sake of this example.

[88] This understanding privileges an *a priori* understanding of particular types of examples from which one generates broader conclusions. I would attribute this to the lens discussed in Chapter 2, through which we see the world, established in infancy, and to the ways in which Geertz explains that to be a person is necessarily to be cultured.

[89] In this question, I'm referring back to something he said previously and am reaffirming that statement.

S: Yes, again, because I think that's something I can understand, that's something I can internalize, and taking off the shoes is a gesture that I feel like I'm doing but I don't actually know if it's going through. I don't know if my talking's going through either, but it feels more like it does if I talk. It's more genuine.

R: So what about the philosophical part resonates with you?[90]

S: I'm not sure. It resonates to me because I guess it makes sense. It makes sense why that would be a part of the philosophy, that I could see this being good for you and the world. So I guess that's why it makes sense. I don't know, I don't have the words to describe it very well.

Just as taking off one's shoes in order to subtly communicate with a physical deity makes sense to an Indian, speaking directly with the god makes significantly more sense to this interviewee. This is not to say that others in India do not come to this conclusion as well, but rather to emphasize that this interviewee is emblematic of his American peers: almost all of them would rather communicate with a deity directly, not necessarily in front of a *mūrti*, because within the American milieu of question-asking and individualism, this is what makes sense to them; this is this young Bengali Hindu's way of life as it has been constructed. He might have some relationship with a deity, but it is not characterized by that deity's physicality or by a relationship with that deity.

These interviewees take it upon themselves to bifurcate thought and action in relation to the ritual of *pūjā*. They perceive the two as separate. Though they can comprehend direct communication, however, it is exceedingly difficult for them to reconcile particular god-oriented actions in the physical world that they can't make sense of and which no one can explain to them. This echoes an ethics of autonomy: interviewees see no point in performing these actions if they don't want to, unlike their peers in India, who will likely perform the actions anyway. Moreover, though questioning and the Socratic method are regularly taught and encouraged in

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[90] Again, here I'm using the interviewee's explanation of the "philosophical part" of Hinduism, meaning any abstract part, as definitional; the interviewee defined this earlier in the interview.

American educational institutions as well as more broadly, in India, this behavior can come off

as almost offensive (particularly when directed towards an elder), further explaining why, within

the scope of Hinduism as a way of life, fewer Indian Bengali Hindus question the actions they're

performing in overtly direct or verbal ways. Akashi sums this up succinctly, including why

young Hindu Americans end up ceasing to ask questions eventually:

> I think in Indian culture, there is such a respect for elders, it's almost automated, so you just listen to what you're being told to do, whereas at Exeter,[91] you're taught to think critically, so you ask, ask questions, and that's very looked down upon in Indian culture. So it's almost like questioning authority, is what it seems like, when it's more of trying to gather knowledge. So you don't really ask about that stuff, and no one's really going to tell you, then, like why do you want me to walk around a fire seven times when I'm getting married, maybe I'm not going to do it. So, maybe that's the reason why it's not so sustainable. Because the questions don't get asked, because they're not going to get answered. So, I don't know.

As observers, the younger generation Bengali Hindu Americans do not necessarily

understand the actions occurring in ritual settings, potentially even when these actions are

explained. While they engage with these actions as participant-observeres, their elders assume

they share the appropriate schemas, expecting them to follow edicts of authority and limited

question-asking, and as individuals whose experiences originate from the same cultural context

as do their parents. At the heart of this issue is the failure of each party to see beyond its own

perspective; adults treat their children as if they are Indian, and children assert themselves as

Americans, comprehending the world with American logics. The younger generation attempts to

comprehend the Indian view by using the American strategy of asking questions, which is what

they've come to know. However, often times these strategies are met with inability to respond,

given that the older individuals are still working within the Indian frame of their youth and it is

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[91] This is where Akashi went to high school.

difficult to comprehend why younger American Bengali Hindus do not also fall into this frame. Essentially, the two groups are speaking past each other.[92]

It's not as if there aren't answers to the questions that might be asked. Rather, these answers are often difficult to access (they're in a Sanskrit text somewhere), are contingent upon other knowledge, or are, ultimately unsatisfactory in terms of what second generation American Bengali Hindus expect. Or, perhaps, the answers simply don't make sense for young Bengali Hindus steeped in predominantly American schemas. For example, in earlier research I interviewed a young Gujarati American woman who had entirely rejected her family's Swaminarayan sect as well as Hinduism more broadly. As a child, she had been told at their *mandir* that she shouldn't move around while brushing her teeth, which is something she regularly did. She asked the *paṇḍit* many times why this was the case, and though he tried to answer, she couldn't understand why it was against her family's tradition to move around while brushing her teeth.[93] Both this prohibition, which she didn't understand, as well as the explanation, which didn't make sense to her, instigated the eventual unraveling of her adherence to her family's tradition. She herself pinpoints this instance as the one that dissuaded her from any further voluntary involvement with Swaminarayanism.

This example brings to mind the brilliantly crafted article about the Nacirema (Miner 1965), in which the American practice of teeth-brushing is analyzed as an anthropologist might analyze another group's daily practice. The *paṇḍit*, in this case, is part of the Nacirema; he has

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[92] A simpler example of this is a young Tamil-American woman I know who embarked on a fellowship with several Indian (and often non-Tamil) peers. Seeing her as Indian, they continually spoke to her in Hindi, a language she doesn't understand. Had she been born in India, even as a Tamil, she would have had some basic comprehension, but given that she is from America, she does not. Because of her heritage, she is taken to have the same knowledge and sensibilities of her Indian peers when she often does not.

[93] This is actually attested to in both major Swaminarayan texts: the *Śikṣapatrī* and the *Vacanāmṛut*.

been raised in a certain way and that is what makes sense to him. His frame is set, and in many ways, he does not question it, like most Americans do not question brushing their teeth. However, in this case, the interviewee takes on the role of anthropologist assumed to be insider. These stipulations regarding brushing her teeth do not make sense to her and do not fit in with her broadly American framework where no one would question moving around while brushing; as a result, such an instance provokes her to question the entire system being presented to her.

Similarly, many of my current interviewees could pinpoint specific instances where they lacked comprehension and which ultimately led them to veer away from the practice of Hinduism. To this extent, young American Hindus are faced with a choice of opting in or opting out, and opting out is often provoked by a single instance of dissatisfaction with one explanation of one practice. However, due to what I assume are individual differences, or, perhaps, entrenched schemas more closely approximating the ones their parents hold, others take these instances in stride and presume the system of Hinduism is sound even if individual components are not. While this latter approach is significantly more prominent among those growing up in India, rejection is much more likely among those growing up in the U.S. In the pages following, I will illustrate several examples wherein siblings and cousins react to the same supposed inconsistencies quite differently, though all illustrating how pulling particularities of Hinduism out of "Hinduism as a way of life" creates particular data points, rules, and scripts, which lose their context in America. In such instances, action is often jettisoned in service of underlying ethos. Discussing actions whose reasoning she does not comprehend, Akashi deftly sums up the young Indian American viewpoint:

> Then, maybe that's a religion I don't want to be part of, so… You know, I think that's what it comes down to. It's more of, if Hinduism at its highest level is just spirituality, then I'm in. If it's anything more than that, where you're required to do certain things, I don't know how I feel about that.

One Event Can Change It All

As Judeo-Christian religions have often been structured around texts, and as many scholars have attempted to create a notion of internal validity in religions, Hinduism in America is often taught and viewed as a monolith of tradition, as one internally coherent system. Moreover, due to the penchant, historical and otherwise, for Hinduism to be construed as a way of life, often that which is sociological or political becomes conflated with "Hinduism," a "religion" as it is translated for and by non-Hindus and in a Judeo-Christian context. The boundaries of Hinduism are fluid, but, rather than taking it as an evolving tradition with many branches, influenced and influencing simultaneously, in order to facilitate comprehension in America, it becomes understood as bounded. I have previously described how this is the case in terms of dissemination to children: there are certain prescribed rules, there are certain things you do, rather than living the tradition. When, perhaps inappropriately, viewed as one coherent system, a single objection to or questioning of something Hindu can tug at one thread and unravel the assumed logic behind it all. It becomes easier for a young American Bengali Hindu to reject all of Hinduism if he or she does not understand one aspect, ultimately realizing other components that remain obscure.

History classes in schools, where the inclination is to identify how non-Western traditions are different from Western ones, facilitate this motive by attempting to make sense of the many diverse strands of Hinduism as one coherent system based upon edicts and beliefs. One common way that non-Hindu Americans construe Hinduism begins, and often ends, with the caste system. Thus, the caste system comes to represent and almost constitute Hinduism itself. Such a characterization of explicit and unalterable hierarchy is difficult to reconcile with the American

ideals of autonomy and lifetime success achieved through hard work, and when the caste system becomes synecdoche for Hinduism, Hinduism also becomes difficult to integrate with the aforementioned American ideals.

In these ways, Hinduism often becomes essentialized, dramatized, symbolic, and superficial when it is perceived by non-Hindu Americans, but also when it is passed back to Hindu Americans through a non-Hindu filter and internalized, positioning these Hindu "natives" as even further away from their parents' views than they might have already been. An example of this is Heritage Day as described by Shankar (2008): young Punjabi Americans in California dress up in Indian clothes and parade in front of non-Indian peers, showcasing a tiny fragment of Indian culture while owning this essentialization of culture-into-clothing. This social performance for an observer, then, is co-created by actor and onlooker; while Ricoeur and ultimately Bell feel as if the social unifies thought and action, in some instantiations, social expressions create actions unto themselves, reminiscent of but separated from their initial meanings. Young Hindu Americans, often recognizing these co-created narratives as different from what they learned as children, but as nonetheless pervasive, must contend with these alternative renditions of the cultural precedents they've known.

Rupali, in particular, was distressed by the extent to which Hinduism is associated with the caste system in America. As an American, bent on equality, the idea of the caste system affronted her sensibilities, and she, too, found it reprehensible. When I asked Rupali how she had learned about Hinduism, she replied:

> A lot from school, and every time we learn, like take world history classes, literally like the first thing they associate Hinduism with is like the caste system, so I was always really embarrassed to say I was a Hindu. This was actually like middle school, because people were very ignorant, and they're like oh, I can't believe your people would do these things and have these untouchables... cause a lot of times they don't even know the

origins of the caste system. It's always been associated with, like, Hinduism... [94] Like, the whole thing about the caste system really was off-putting to say that I was Hindu because that was literally, almost like an equal sign, like Hinduism equals caste system. Especially when you're learning that at twelve or thirteen, like I said before, kids'll be like, I can't believe your religion teaches these things.

Hinduism as essentialized, as equated with the caste system, didn't make sense to Rupali's peers and it didn't make sense to Rupali. As she grew up, she refused to identify with Hinduism and now has little interest in *pūjās*. It was others' ignorance and lack of understanding of her traditions which drove her to recede from Hinduism, taking every cultural component as complicit in the construction of the caste system, though, intellectually, she would agree that there was much more nuance to these conflations.

This is an instance when the purported logic behind Indian hierarchies could not be reconciled with American ideals. To this extent, being part of and surrounded by broader American culture, Rupali was forced to question her own tradition. This questioning was not an internal event; it was imposed on her from outside. Still, it was significant enough for Rupali to choose her primary affiliation: she is American, and wants to appear American to other Americans, hence her rejection of Hinduism, given that, in America, Hinduism is affiliated and equated with Indian norms such as the caste system.

Interestingly enough, Rupali's younger sister Madhumita independently brought up the same example: learning about the caste system in school. While Rupali understood questions about the caste system to be offensive, Madhumita took them as moments to teach, serving as a spokesperson for Hinduism. She noted to me that her friends ask her about Hinduism, and I inquired about what kinds of things they asked:

Like, we just learnt Hinduism, like we were learning all the religions. And they asked me what gods I prayed to and like the caste system— that was so long ago! Yeah, I got a lot

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[94] Here Rupali also discusses how Hinduism was taught as polytheistic.

of questions about that... It's definitely like, a lot of people ask me more about Hinduism because not a lot of people know a lot about Hinduism, so it makes me prouder because I'm able to answer all the questions and stuff. Like if I was living in India, everyone would already know. It wouldn't be as much of a big deal.

Madhumita recognized that many non-Hindu Americans know very little about Hinduism and, as a result, that their comments and questions might be coming from a place of ignorance rather than offense. Stepping into the role of Hindu interlocutor, she asserted her identity as a Hindu, potentially increasing her inclination to affiliate with Hindu practices more broadly. Indeed, while Rupali will sometimes pray but has no interest in *pūjā*, Madhumita does not perform *pūjā* regularly, but has a significant interest in it. She is involved in her high school's South Asian student group. She chooses to identify as a Hindu American rather than just as generic and unspecified American.

Notably, Madhumita's father also takes on this role; he was the first person to respond to my request for interviewees, and provided me with significant support throughout my research. Throughout the years, as he's attempted to explain Hinduism to non-Hindu Americans, he's become more invested in it himself, performing *pūjā* every day and reading about Hinduism when he can. His family was always observant of Hindu norms, but his role as spokesperson propelled him to maintain this affiliation after he moved to America.

It's uncertain why Rupali was so distressed by discussions of caste while Madhumita took them as opportunities to have a discussion and teach. One hypothesis is that the girls' grandmother began living at the house when Madhumita was still young, but Rupali was already a teenager; this grandmother would live in India half the year and America the other half, and thus, imparted a great deal of Indian knowledge and understanding, which might have affected Madhumita more given how young she was. What can certainly be gleaned, however, is that this single instance highlighting how an aspect of "Hinduism" might violate broadly American ideals

227

affected each young woman. It is not the recognition that Hinduism is different, but rather the conflict of Hindu and American statutes which distressed Rupali, causing her to abandon Hinduism entirely, and also the fact that she did not have a strong association with Hinduism to begin with. These small instances, single events or issues, can provoke an unraveling of traditional affiliation, particularly compelled when one aspect of Hinduism is questioned, found to be irreconcilable, and is, moreover, part of what is understood as a bounded whole of "Hinduism."

While this example related to American ideals of equality and, by and large, discussed lines of questioning originating from a non-Hindu American peer group, Hindu norms that infringe on one's sense of individual autonomy can create the same questioning effect. There are, again, two components here: the extent to which American ideals of autonomy have seeped into the way an individual expects to act and be treated, as well as the fact that the American individual in question can't rationalize why particular actions are necessary; the actions are plucked from "Hinduism as a way of life" and transplanted into American contexts.

Among my Bengali Hindu American interviewees, Suryamukhi was probably the most interested in Hinduism and had incorporated it into her daily life more than any young Bengali Hindu American I spoke with. She describes growing up in an emotionally abusive environment and looking for some form of solace, which she found in Kṛṣṇa. As she grew up, she learned more and more about Hinduism, eventually participating in the Hindu Students Council,[95] a Hindu student organization in universities across the country. Among Bengalis specifically, she is particularly plugged into the American Hindu network and the type of ecumenical Hinduism

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[95] Among scholars, this group is often thought to be a means to convey right-wing Hinduism to young Hindus.

often understood to be what American Hindus practice. Throughout these next examples, Suryamukhi serves as a counterpoint, readily accepting most particularities of Hinduism as she's learned them, regardless of whether she fully agrees with the reasoning thereof.

One striking example of Suryamukhi's resolve relates to an instance when a Christian group targeted her *mandir*, attempting to spark conversion. To do this, they chose to focus on the goddess Kālī, who is known to be violent and fearsome: "How could you be part of this religion that worships this horrible demon? This type of woman who has heads on her? Bloody, and this and that, and they would say all these awful things about Mā Kālī and I was just like put it away, I'm scared of her too, but like, come on." To have a fearsome goddess, one who runs around with a garland of human heads, is certainly something which makes little sense to non-Hindu Americans. Kālī comes to make sense for many Bengali Hindus in India because she represents a certain aspect of motherhood, femininity, and, ultimately, human behavior; in other words, Bengali Hindus see Kālī as another variation of how a person might be, and thus, as relational. However, Suryamukhi, who is American, and who is likewise terrified of Kālī, doesn't let this instance deter her from practicing Hinduism. Rather than prioritizing the broadly American system of understanding what or who god is, Suryamukhi realizes that she may or may not like Kālī, and may or may not understand why she is so violent, but Kālī is an element of Hinduism she is willing to accept without defaulting to rejecting every practice and god.

Particularly in relation to infringement on her autonomy, Suryamukhi shows less concern than one might expect. She grew up in an active Bengali Hindu community and was close friends with the priest's daughter. The priest's wife was her main source of information about Hinduism, and regularly modeled Hindu principles, practices, and the type of relationality with the god that is requisite to fully internalize and comprehend the rest. Suryamukhi described how strictly this

229

woman followed specific rules in Hinduism. In one instance, Suryamukhi was left to guard the

bhog, food for the gods, to make sure no one on her period would touch it. Suryamukhi knew

that the consequence of someone impure touching the food would be throwing it all away. She

was often asked if she was menstruating, and then preemptively scolded for even potentially

considering going near the *bhog*. Thus, from these experiences Suryamukhi gained an

understanding of the contagion of pollution.[96] Suryamukhi herself didn't think touching the *bhog*

while menstruating would make any real difference; in general, she disagrees with many

precautions related to menstruating in so far as they infringe upon women's autonomy. However,

this disagreement did not compel her to question Hinduism as a whole, as if it were a coherent

system. She even advocated that if someone had touched the *bhog* while menstruating, that

person should just avoid telling this particular woman or anyone else who was so strict about

these rules.

In contrast, Suryamukhi's cousin Mona responded quite differently to scolding and,

ultimately, rejected most of the tenets of Hinduism:

> I guess throughout my life I kind of got a distaste with [Hinduism], but that's more
> personally... like I'm left handed, so especially as a little kid, they'd be like give me your
> hand, and I'd always go like this, and everyone would always be like that's wrong! And
> bat it away and stuff, so that kind of made me feel like, well I know why I guess they say
> that, but this kind of made me feel like this is a really dumb thing that they all buy into,
> but afterwards I guess it's more like, because everyone in my family, they're right-
> handed mostly, I think, so it's more like ok, you guys do your thing and I'll like, on the
> big occasions I can go in and pray or something like that or if I feel my own personal
> need I'll do that or something, but otherwise, you guys are going to start touring around
> and stopping at every single temple you see to pray, like I'm not doing that.

In this statement, Mona describes being given *prasād*, which you're supposed to put in your right

hand, with the understanding that your left hand is impure. Mona states that she does understand

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[96] Parish (1994) discusses this among Newars too.

the reasoning behind why one's left hand is impure,[97] but that said reasoning doesn't map on to her daily life, the way she experiences the world, wherein plenty of people use their left hands for a myriad of things. As a result, she feels that everyone "buys into" a "really dumb thing." The logic of said thing does not hold up in her own experience. Just as Soma thought it was "dumb" for me to ask whether god was in a *mūrti* because the answer was obvious to her, Mona finds this understanding of left-handedness to be obviously fallacious. Though Mona doesn't state so explicitly, the last part of this statement implies that because of particular personal characteristics, she feels left out and thus, separate from the rest of her family and how they practice Hinduism. She attempts to use logic to reconcile what she doesn't intrinsically understand, but this doesn't satisfy her either. Though the adults correcting Mona likely perceive using her right hand as more of a role obligation, she perceives it as a problem with something particularly about her, as Americans are wont to do (Shweder & Bourne 1984). On the premise that this one example of interacting with Hindu content does not map on with her own autonomy or her own world, she rejects everything else. Though Suryamukhi disagrees with the premise of not touching the *bhog* while menstruating, she is able to accept the notion as something which is traditional, and about which some people care more than others. For Mona, however, one inconsistency regarding a particular part of a particular practice brings all other practices into question, and perhaps her conclusions are reinforced by the fact that because being left-handed is deep-rooted in who she is rather than being circumstantial.

Strauss and Quinn (1997, 77) point out that this type of instruction is fairly common: adults and older children tend to correct errors in performance, often to keep younger children

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[97] Ostensibly, people use their left hands to clean themselves after defecation, and, thus, the hand is unclean.

out of social, intellectual, or moral danger (c.f. Whiting and Whiting 1975). In fact, one is

unlikely to find a socialization circumstance in which this type of instruction and correction do

not occur (D'Andrade 1981, 185). However, a child also attempts to adjust and to comprehend

the origins of parental approval or apprehension. The child learns to understand that a parent's

love continues when she is good, but might be withdrawn when she is bad (Strauss and Quinn

1997, 95). Search as she might, Mona can't connect using her left hand to doing anything

inappropriate for which she should be scolded.

Mona sees Suryamukhi as someone who knows so much more about Hinduism than she

does. She feels as if, perhaps, Suryamukhi has all of the requisite knowledge to reconstruct and

comprehend the logic behind each particularity of Hinduism. While Suryamukhi does know a

great deal about Hinduism now, and despite her background growing up with the priest's wife to

answer questions, she describes her initial attempts to learn more about Hinduism as "scary":

> I mean the first time I went to a Hindu students group for *pūjā*, I was like scared. I was
> like all these people are chanting these things and I was like I don't know what's going
> on, I don't know what they're saying. It was kind of scaring me, but now I really like it. I
> was like this is like a cult going on! It felt cultish. Like everybody went to turn the paper
> at the same time and knew how to say the things I didn't know how to say. It was scary at
> first, but yeah. It's nice now.

This lack of knowledge, this incomprehensibility of something so large as "Hinduism," scared

Suryamukhi at first, but did not deter her from exploring further. She didn't see these elements of

difference as potentially alienating, but rather as illuminating, as something she was willing to

accept as a different system of thought, and one that was in some way hers. It was outside of her

daily broadly American purview, but she was willing to explore something beyond that scope

and to take individual elements of Hinduism solely as that, rather than as synecdoche for the

whole.

Mona, however, takes the same experience of insecurity and lack of knowledge as a reason to stay away. She accompanied Suryamukhi to the Hindu Students' Council retreat, notably with more of an intention of spending time with Suryamukhi than of learning about Hinduism. However, what Suryamukhi described as "cultish," as something reserved for insiders, pushed Mona further away whereas it had drawn Suryamukhi in:

> When I was there, I thought, like it was Hindu Students' Council, but everyone there basically was like really into Hinduism, really knowledgeable about it... So everyone there is reciting all these things by heart and knowing all these things and I'm just sitting there like I have no idea what they're saying. And they all knew the answer, and I just thought ... that made me feel like I don't know a lot about Hinduism... I was kind of, I guess irritated because I felt like it was kind of a presumptuous thing that everyone will know so much about it without even bothering to give a slight... I don't know, I'm not expecting them to teach me, but a slight acknowledgement for the people who don't know that much about it... they even gave us... this huge book and they wouldn't tell me what page they were on, so they kind of assumed that everyone knows this stuff... I know it's not Hinduism's fault that I don't know all this stuff about it.

Beyond any kind of disruption of broadly American ideals, and beyond any infringement on personal autonomy, this instance highlights the extent to which Mona feels like an outsider. Without significant effort, she might never feel like an insider, and in some ways, she was not raised to be one, as was Suryamukhi, who spent much of her childhood at a *mandir*. Given how vast Hinduism is, and given Mona's prior experiences with it, it makes sense that she would be less inclined to devote effort to becoming someone who is an active Hindu, both in practice and self-defined.

Though whether or not someone opts out of Hinduism or opts in is at least partially related to personality constructs— e.g. whether someone is likely to join a group, how easygoing someone might be— it is relatively clear that the three examples here illustrate three reasons why someone might opt out of Hinduism, and all three relate to the fact that, in America, Hinduism is displaced from its position as a way of life and that the initial relational schemas which might

233

place everything else into proper perspective were not necessarily imbibed into the younger generation in America. As Bengali Hindu Americans attempt to reconstruct a tradition practiced amongst themselves as an American minority group, they find it difficult to live that tradition unless they concertedly attempt to. Whether it feels as if the tradition is contradictory, illogical, or simply too large to grasp, any one instance of any of these possibilities, when questioned, could push a young Hindu to opt out.

To some extent, by naming an entity, thus bounding and defining it, it comes to encapsulate "needs, desires, motives, and purposes." For example, a mother isn't just someone who has birthed a child— a practical function— but she also has a social function; for example, caring about and for her child. For one to be a mother "is not a description of the world independent from [her] involvement with it," and, moreover, the importance of being a mother, the ethos of it, is internal to its content (Shweder 1992, 54). Asking whether a mother cares about her child might be understood as "dumb." The ethos of Hinduism is embedded within the elements that construct it, but this ethos is obfuscated if someone does not have the internalized relational schema that connects disparate parts. As demonstrated, if one fails to understand that which is embedded and rather views the construct of Hinduism in a practically functional way— as a set of rules or gods or people without any underlying sinew— it becomes much less comprehensible. The social function becomes less obvious and, perhaps, unintuitive. In other words, having a relational schema of Hinduism allows one to make sense of its practices and for Hinduism broadly to stand up to questioning of any of its specifics. Otherwise, as Holland notes, "An assessment that a world— a culturally interpreted world— lacks validity, truth, correctness, or rightness may indeed affect whether an individual can conceptualize or personalize the system as relevant to him or herself," (Holland 1992, 83).

Attempting to Answer Questions Before They're Asked

In recent years, Hindu American organizations have realized that young Hindus are questioning Hindu traditions and feel as if they have no recourse to answer their questions. The Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference, the largest gathering of Hindu officials in North America, has hosted panels and entire conferences on how to engage youth and how to make Hinduism more accessible. They have realized that answering questions, stemming the tide of defection due to lack of understanding, is necessary to keep the majority of Hindu traditions alive among Hindu youth in America. While some Hindus, those particularly in touch with the community, want to explain why things are the way they are, this isn't a universally held or understood position; in some circumstances, it's difficult for someone already embedded in Hindu tradition to take the perspective of another who is not embedded. Suryamukhi discusses why her mom wouldn't let her attend a weekly Hindu educational program for kids at her *mandir*:

> There were even classes like "why do Hindus blank," trying to make Hinduism accessible to kids, but she basically would be like no... like why complicate our lives for no reason? ... which is funny, because she does a ton of rituals. Like her every day is completely integrated into all these different rituals... But she doesn't know what they mean, because she never wanted to know why do Hindus blank blank blank, whatever.

Because of Suryamukhi's mom's hope that her children stay in America, she wanted them to follow Hindu practices and traditions to some extent, but didn't want to complicate their lives with Hindu reasoning; she didn't find it necessary to understand the logic behind Hindu practices she expected her children to follow without question. Though inquisitiveness actually inspired Suryamukhi to learn more, Suryamukhi's sister was entirely deterred by the fact that she didn't understand the reasoning behind the practices being performed. It caused her to relinquish

the practices themselves. Echoing much of what other young Hindu Americans have said, Suryamukhi's sister describes the fact that she needs to understand why she's doing something in order to do it at all: "And I feel like whenever I try to question people who did identify as religious, like for example my mom, she's all into the rituals and this and that, but if you ask her certain things, like she doesn't know, cause she never thought about it, and it's just like, well I can't be that way, I need to think about stuff before I accept it or not." Suryamukhi and her sister felt much the same way; they both asked many questions, and both wanted to know why certain Hindu practices were done the way they were. The difference is that Suryamukhi either accepted reasoning she didn't fully understand, or worked harder to uncover reasoning she could comprehend. Moreover, she immersed herself in Hindu communities in order to make each prohibition come in line with the rest of the way she lived. Her sister, however, who had many non-Hindu friends in college, began to question what she'd learned growing up:

> I just started to question I guess why I was doing things like [*pūjā*]. Because I probably felt that if I go, it will be the right thing to do or maybe I will get some sort of... I don't know, reward or something for it in a sense, like maybe doing well on an exam or something like that... I kind of just did it because it was the habit that I grew up with and I [was] just taught it was the right thing to do, kind of like a lot of things are the right thing to do, like sending thank you letters or whatever.

This reasoning explains two lingering dilemmas. First, Suryamukhi's sister explains asking for something during *pūjā* as a way to make the logic of *pūjā* seem valid. In so far as she was able to accomplish something in her own life through these particular actions, it made sense to perform *pūjā*; there needed to be a rationale behind the performance. However, as she got older and realized that there were factors perhaps more correlated with performance on a test than was *pūjā* performance (e.g. studying), that logic fell apart. With a dearth of other explanations, the notion of "getting something" from *pūjā* had filled in the gap. Second, by the time this logic might have been depleted, she was in the habit of performing *pūjā*, and it felt like

236

it had been presented to her as an imperative part of life, but one that she didn't necessarily feel internally. Just as one sends thank you letters, and one might feel it utterly inappropriate not to send them, Suryamukhi's sister was brought up to feel like the only appropriate course of action was *pūjā* performance. However, as she realized that her life matched less and less with the way of life of which *pūjā* was a part, she jettisoned the practice. In summary, she first, didn't live a predominantly Hindu way of life, complete with a relationship with a *mūrti*, that would have contextualized the actions she was obligated to perform and, further, after initial questioning, she couldn't rationalize those actions along any other lines.

To this end, though *mandirs* and organizations attempt to make Hindu practice and ideas more accessible, they again come up against the problem of attempting to teach a Hindu way of life to individuals whose lives are steeped in broadly American ideals. There is a myriad of detail that someone might only learn by osmosis, by imbibing, which is difficult if not impossible to teach concertedly. For example, Suryamukhi's cousin Mona, who grew up with *mūrti*s all over her house, doesn't know which god is which; she might have liked to know, but it was never overtly communicated and, as a result, becomes inaccessible even with attempts to make it accessible. She also served as a Hindu camp counselor and realized that she didn't know any of the mantras or what was going on. She made use of intentional efforts to teach and learn, but the practices were so decentralized and decontextualized that they produced much the same problem they attempted to solve: without significant explanation, and without comprehensive explanation (which is almost impossible), young Hindu Americans can construct Hinduism as a set of rules, a series of mantras, and as constructed by logics they can't comprehend or which they disagree with. It is likely the case that only concerted and immersive effort on the part of the individual can combat these leanings.

237

Interestingly enough, Suryamukhi explains that *mandirs* in India are so loud and that no one pays attention largely because the material is inaccessible; no one knows what is going on, and no one asks questions. The *pūjā* is often done by the priest with little input from the individual. At Hindu Students' Council meetings, however, and at several *mandirs* today, there are booklets for people to follow, letting attendees pay attention to what is going on, and also understand it better. Suryamukhi describes this as more accessible, and as a way to facilitate autonomy and individual knowledge as opposed to community knowledge. Such booklets and structure create an economy of knowledge: one has to put in effort and attention in order to glean understanding. In India, however, knowledge is free, but incomplete, given that there is little explanation. Though Suryamukhi's assessment here is correct, what she doesn't designate is that the nature of access is different in these two places: for people in India, who live Hinduism as a way of life, explicit knowledge and understanding of what is occurring is not necessary. No one has to ask; it's immaterial because the actions are part of a larger relational system which is understood. In this way, accessibility of knowledge and answers differs in character and necessity; the need itself is asymmetrical. In America, understanding becomes increasingly more necessary, thus constructing a Hinduism based on comprehension, which needs to be worked at, rather than one based on simply being, and being among other Hindus. Through the ways in which Hinduism is necessarily communicated in America, plus the American penchant for question-asking and necessary understanding, Hinduism is defined anew, and one's ability to fully participate is often directly proportional to the effort put into comprehension.

Though many of the individuals mentioned reject most of Hindu tradition and practice based on incomplete understanding of requisite Hindu logics and schemas, it is worth noting that their adherence is in some way restructured, perhaps redefining what it means to practice

Hinduism as a way of life. The interviewee who rejected Hinduism due to concerns related to brushing teeth majored in religious studies and frequently visits places of worship; the idea of religion still fascinates her as a result of experiences such as this one. In college, Rupali studies Hindu temple architecture and is planning to have a career in art history. Mona is a Hindu camp counselor, and Suryamukhi's sister married an Indian in her family's *mandir*, though insisted on wearing her shoes (because they matched her outfit) through the entire ceremony, causing a bit of an uproar. Another young Bengali Hindu American I know is less overtly interested in Hinduism, but has a large tattoo of Durgā. Through questioning, therefore, perhaps traditional aspects of Hinduism are rejected, but additionally, Hinduism or interest in it can now be construed as a differently constituted way of life: one which is more disparate, and more individual, but which still has its basis in living with reference to Hindu content.

Back to India

For Bengali Indian adults, the primary notable component which could derail simply accepting Hindu content was the role of money in the act of temple-going. One interviewee could barely answer my questions: he was so incensed about the fact that all temples strongly recommend donations that he had in fact rejected a great deal of other Hindu tenets. While this extreme reaction is the exception to the rule, many Bengali Indian interviewees were skeptical of temples and priests as a result of this phenomenon. One younger American interviewee described the way money plays a role in temple-going in India:

> "Even in Kolkata, where all you do is like, it's just a money-laundering machine. Like you buy the bangle that you give to *bhagavān*, and then they recycle the bangle, give it back to the vendor, and you... like, it's just a waste of money. And like every single *mūrti* you go to there's a box, a huge box that's for donations. And you just drop money in

239

every single bin and drop money, money, money, and there are beggars, and you have to give them money, and there's like, it's like oh my god! money all over the place and that can drive some people crazy."

Even when older Indian interviewees recognized that temples were in some way more like businesses than they were spiritual places, this rarely discouraged them from rejecting all of Hinduism, and only in the instance detailed above did it result in someone rejecting the performance of *pūjā* entirely. By and large, this fact was recognized, and was blamed on humans rather than on the system or complexities of Hinduism, or on the practices.

For the most part, for Indian adults, there are certain things you just do or don't do, and the violation thereof seems unreasonable and pointless. Why would one question the system? What is the value in that? Even when questioned about certain practices, many interviewees held steadfast:

> **R:** What about doing *pūjā* while you have your period.
> **S:** Basically we don't do *pūjā*.
> **R:** So you don't do it.
> **S:** No.
> **R:** And why is that important?
> **S:** You know, you can't explain it. That is the Hindu system. We are doing it, just following our elders. You can't get the answer.

It's not as if older Indians don't know that they could question; they do know. Rather, they concede that there will be no viable answer to their queries, and that ultimately, the answer isn't as important as participating in the practice, following the rubric of relationality stipulated in previous chapters. And thus, this issue of not performing *pūjā* while menstruating, which frustrated so many young American Hindu women due to its violation of equality, and which compelled them to become skeptical of Hinduism, in India remains an unexplained prohibition, but without worry. There is no answer; it's just how it is. There's no reason to take offense. To live Hinduism as a way of life is to participate in this system and to do what it stipulates. To live

Hinduism as a set of rules, however, as prohibitions and obligations, brings into focus questions that could be asked and practices which could be questioned.

When to Question Witches

Like many young Hindu Americans, I ran into my fair share of frustration when attempting to understand some of what was occurring in various *pūjās*. While I know enough about *pūjā* as a form to follow along, and can understand the gist of most of the Sanskrit as it is chanted, the practices of particular types of *pūjā* which accompanied the words were sometimes obscure to me. For example, while in Kolkata, I attempted to learn more about Kolabo, Gaṇeśa's banana (*kola*) wife (*bo*), who is, quite literally, a banana plant. She makes an appearance at Durgā Pūjā, wrapped in a sari for modesty, and there is a special event of throwing her into the water early on the morning of *saptami*, the seventh day. At Jalahasini and Joydita's Durgā Pūjā celebration, I spotted Kolabo and asked the priests about the story behind her presence— why does Gaṇeśa have a banana plant as a wife? The priests merely kept proclaiming that she was Gaṇeśa's wife. I asked to see the texts they read while performing *pūjā* to her, which didn't really explain anything; they were the traditional Sanskrit Durgā Pūjā texts, and Kolabo had simply been looped into the whole process without textual mention. I should have expected as much, given that Kolabo is a uniquely Bengali phenomenon, as indicated by the etymology of her name. At the end, I was dissatisfied with the explanation that the expert priest had provided. Bell (1992, 139) points out a similar instance in which scholars provided a textual version of a ritual that Nambudiri brahmins were performing to point out differences, and the brahmins acknowledged this text and continued to perform the tradition as they had inherited it.

241

Ultimately, the differences and the textual precedent aren't really important, nor is establishing the true purpose of Kolabo.

The difference, perhaps, between my behavior and that of an Indian, is that the Indians simply accept Kolabo for who she is. I singled her out because, due to my American perspective, a wife who is a plant seemed unusual. Joydita seemed disinterested in my search for Kolabo's origins, despite being quite engaged with the *pūjā*. Suryamukhi, on the other hand, who is more likely to accept Hindu content for what it is even though she is American, explained how she answered questions about Kolabo:

> I actually had to teach a little baby. Cause they were like what, how is that Gaṇeśa's wife? She was like what is it, where is it, I can't see it. So I took her all the way to the other side and I was like this one is Kolabo, she's like draped over and has the modesty and is all shy. But yeah, I don't know the story of Kolabo other than that she's really modest. Her name is— *kola* is banana, *bo* means wife. I know that my knowledge of Hindu texts is very, very limited, and I work with what I have.

In this instance, Suryamukhi relies on the assumption that there is some reasoning behind Kolabo, and that Kolabo makes sense as part of the *pūjā*. She recognizes that perhaps she doesn't understand something, and doesn't immediately assume that the idea of a banana plant as a wife seems impossible.

Though among young Bengali Indian Hindus there is sometimes skepticism about and lack of understanding regarding Hindu practices in India, young Bengali Hindus rarely overtly reject Hindu traditions the way Americans do. They might not practice much, and may not be very interested, but the act of rejecting remains undone. Joydita describes a time when she went to a temple in Puri and was lost from her parents. The way she describes it is as if she were in a haunted house on Halloween, full of terrors: "I was a tiny child and I was so scared, it was night, and then people screaming and chanting and brahmins saying give me money and those kind of things and I was so scared." This was not the only negative experience that Joydita had at a

242

temple, but, despite this, she didn't question why temples were scary places full of people, didn't question why there was *prasād* on the ground (a pure substance on a dirty surface), but instead, resolved simply to go to less crowded temples. As Hollan notes (2001 55), "we can never really know how this person experiences a particular event or aspect of life without asking him or her about it."

Even in particularly negative instances such as these, which might cause an American Hindu to question everything else about Hinduism, as has been described above, for young Bengali Hindus in India, these instances are seen merely as such, and not as a reason to reflect upon the tradition as a whole. The reason for this is likely that, again, to reject "Hinduism" would be to reject most of the ways in which these young Hindus overtly or implicitly live their lives. To young Hindus in India, Hinduism is less bounded than it is for Americans; rather, it is defined simply by life in India. If it is not a bounded object, it is less subject to acceptance or rejection. Moreover, since Hinduism is understood as relational, perhaps Joydita could come to the conclusion that a further relationship with that particular temple, that *mūrti*, was not in the cards for her, and thus, it was easier for her to pursue other relationships.

Many young Bengali Indian Hindus, though raised with parents who regularly performed *pūjā*, were free not to do so themselves. They may or may not acquiesce, may or may not follow along, but under few circumstances did they denounce the act itself. One interviewee describes: "It was just something... if I wanted to, I could, if I didn't want to, I didn't, and most days I didn't, and then when I did, when I did consciously think about these things, that's when I realized it's not something that appeals to me." This statement indicates that the performance of *pūjā* simply didn't appeal to her. It's not that she felt that people were "buying into" something fallacious or "dumb," as described above, or that there was something wrong with *pūjā*. Rather,

243

it was just something that didn't interest her in particular. Another young woman explained that Hinduism— with all its varied stories— was just too complicated for her to comprehend. She didn't see this is as indicative of its worthlessness, but, rather, these complications identified Hinduism as something she didn't have time or interest to invest in. She assumed that, of course, there was internal logic and worth to these traditions, but also that her level of engagement was negotiable.

Shweder discusses the anthropologist's Nietzschean assumption— "all those things people bow down before do not exist"— as an explanation to treat reality as "reality" for any particular group, and in order to better understand the perennial theoretical question: "how to explain the purported fact that so many phantom-like, delusionary, or arbitrary issues have got themselves lodged and stuck inside people's heads," (1992, 50). Young American Bengali Hindus often participate in this witch hunt, following along with a common anthropological example—do witches exist?— first brought into focus by Evans-Pritchard (1974) and elaborated upon by Luhrmann (1989) and also by Shweder (1992). In asking questions, young Bengali Hindu Americans serve as anthropologists, trying to find out one way or another if there is reason behind the practices of *pūjā* and if these are thus ideas they can endorse. For the older generation of Hindus, and to some extent for the younger generation of Indian Hindus, it's quite obvious that witches exist, that *pūjā* is relevant, given the presupposed element of relationality with a *mūrti*. As Shweder points out, sons and wives contend that their fathers and husbands, respectively are "moving gods" and that they are devotees (1992, 52). As caring for a child is implicit in being a mother, for those who do not themselves question "witches," relationality is embedded in divinity— or vice versa.[98] Though younger Bengali Hindu Americans question,

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[98] One might ask to what extent the word "god" truly means the same thing in both India and in America.

244

attempting to uncover a set of rules they can comprehend, Bell (1992, 85) interprets Gramsci (1957) as pointing out that "ideology is not a disseminated body of ideas but the way in which people live the relationships between themselves and their world," whose Hindu content is quite obvious for the other three groups in question. However, even Bell's interpretation ends by stating that these relationships are "a type of necessary illusion."

Perhaps the best way to investigate the struggle with witchcraft, as I have attempted to do, is to examine those at the margins, such as Suryamukhi: people who follow a trend primarily followed by another group but understand the trends as their own. As another example, a young Indian man, who had been extremely observant, changed how he felt when his father died. He was required to perform the ceremony with the brahmin and asked many questions. The brahmin explained a great deal, such as that the rice balls they were offering, which would eventually be thrown into the water, would feed the fish. Seeing some of the logic within Hinduism, seeing how things worked, he chose to give up many Hindu practices, since they were demystified, similar to the way that *pūjā* couched in explanations drawing on non-Hindu logics ceased to be quite as important qua itself; he no longer saw these practices as having cosmic significance, but rather as a system of actions performed for particular purposes. Such a response also echoes that of the Hindu American woman (also at the margins) whose son questioned why one performs all of these practices and she realized she could do without them. However, such explanations, such as feeding fish, might cause a young American Hindu to reject the entire system as unnecessary, rather than as a means to an end, given that they don't have the broader background of how the system played out in an Indian context.

As shown in this example, experiences at the margins, in which young Indians question Hinduism in the way young Hindu Americans do, more often than not simply leave the Indians

more open to considering Hinduism a "different way of thinking," as one interviewee described it. Rather than decrying Hinduism as illogical, they perceive it as a separate system of logic, that is nonetheless descriptive of reality; in other words, they juggle two simultaneous (and to some extent overlapping) realities that intermingle to differing extents overall and for specific individuals differently. Indeed, as Strauss and Quinn point out, to perceive this as a cultural meaning implies that others with different life characteristics would have a different interpretation (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 6). These systems begin with different schemas that have different sets of assumptions taken as given. These occurrences of a young Bengali questioning Hinduism often happen when said person is past childhood and they often coincide with a time when the person went abroad. These moments also coincide temporally with when the internet became readily accessible in India and when Indians could now see media from all over the world. Another interviewee, who had lived in Florence, Italy, described the process of her thinking after she met Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Jains, and after her studies abroad:

> So yeah, I think those are the times when you talk about religion to them, you kind of realize that oh, ok, these things you guys don't really do and why we do it if you guys don't really do it? So I think that's the time I actually started to think about Hinduism and started understanding a lot of things which I didn't know, those things which you don't really question, but you just keep doing blindly. For example, doesn't happen now anymore, but earlier, whenever you see an elephant or a cow, you offer some money or food or something.... later on when you grow up, you're like why are we giving money to an elephant? Why are we doing this to a— you know, it's a cow, end of the day.

It wasn't simply that these interactions made this interviewee aware of difference; she had likely always been aware of difference. Instead, she was being exposed to, inundated in, a different way of thinking, and was thus able to see her own traditions as if she were from some other background. In other words, she had gained the purview of an anthropologist. Though her American counterparts also had this ability, it often came with a certain form of judgement about what was the correct system, given that they'd grown up in two competing ones rather than being

exposed to a different one later and often by choice. Lacking this element of competition surrounding them throughout their youths, Indians are more able to accept both systems as separate but both viable; they are able to see that the internal logics of each were internal without conflating one to be part of or in reference to the other, at least to some extent.[99] One can think of them as anthropologists late in their fieldwork. Such is an event that occurs solely because the individual has been inundated in both systems separately, and is able to separate them. Growing up Hindu in America, one ultimately makes choices, consciously or unconsciously, about which, in fact, is the primary system, at least in so far as one can distinguish between elements of the two. Otherwise, they meld to create a complicated middle, and perhaps do so in some ways necessarily, such as through unacknowledged familial circumstances and practices present as one grows up.

Thus, D'Andrade points out that cultural meaning systems, coalescing with schemas, are modifiable and reflexive such that people can alter their own meaning systems so as to order coexisting understandings. However, he also notes that there are limits on this self-induced change, and if it is not completed— such as maintaining lingering questions, for example— individuals can get themselves into "a terrible muddle," (D'Andrade 1984, 104). This is where those questioning tenets of Hinduism reside. Nishida (2005, 412) insinuates that after a prolonged period of exposure to two sets of schemas, a non-native might have difficulty distinguishing one from the other. This is likely more so the case for younger Hindu Americans who grow up within the muddle, and who may or may not have been able to distinguish certain aspects of Hindu tradition from the beginning, but for whom others components are markedly

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[99] This line of inquiry brings into question what it means to be bicultural as opposed to singly cultured, and, moreover what it means to be brought up in non-Indian American culture tinged with Indian culture. These are issues I've attempted to tease out.

different. For younger Indian Hindus, the ability likely still exists to distinguish between two sets of schemas (which are, again, not necessarily separate in their entirety, and which are interconnected), but the circumstances of invocation might change. Luhrmann (1989) describes this beautifully when she discusses how she somewhat automatically began to conjecture the existence of witches and to act accordingly. I, too, have experienced this: a family I interviewed gave me a beautiful Durgā *mūrti* which I wrapped carefully and placed in my suitcase. Upon returning to America, I found that the *mūrti* had broken into two pieces, which invoked a level of angst that, internally, I couldn't explain: this isn't my tradition. However, I had a schematic understanding of what it means for a *mūrti* to break (it certainly isn't good, and might indicate that bad things are about to happen) and thus unease set in. There is certainly no typical American schema for what it means for a statue of a god to break, and so I reverted to a tradition which isn't mine, but which purveyed a more relevant understanding of the circumstances. To extend the metaphor, though not explicitly endorsing the existence of witches, I had learned to think as if there were witches when witchy circumstances arose, and I did so almost automatically.

Minoura (1992) examined to what extent Japanese children who lived in America had internalized an American model in order to better understand the gradation of "the muddle." As I have argued, it is as a result of varying levels of schematic internalization that questioning arises. At the first level, children did not perceive differences between Japanese and American ways of acting, and, thus, their behavior and thought were quite Japanese. This is an example of a group which had fully imbibed a Japanese model despite coming to America. At the second level, children understand the differences between Japanese and American models, but advocated Japanese ones— this is the level for many Indian American adults. At the third level, children

248

switch between Japanese and American models as per the situation— similar to how I did above, and to how many young Indian Bengali Hindus act. At the fourth level, children primarily invoke the American model, but are not attached to it. At the fifth level, the American way is the only way— which is often how many young American Hindus act, despite occasional attempts otherwise. Notably, all Japanese-American children who found themselves in this fifth level came to America before they were nine years old. This is a pattern I have also noticed with Hindu Americans: the more time they spent in India while they were quite young, the more likely they will fall into one of the lower levels. This evidence suggests that perhaps there is a critical period for cultural internalization (as per Lorenz 1965) in which affect follows along with cultural imbibing (D'Andrade 1995, 240), and it is within this time that one would absorb a Hindu relational schema, thus reducing the need to question particularities that would normally belong to that schema.

To that end, the character and extent of questioning that a Hindu might engage in is certainly mediated by the circumstances and saturation of imbibing, and each group of Bengali Hindus I interviewed embodied this in different ways, as described above. Strauss and Quinn (1997, 29) point out that the average person does indeed see boundaries between their own inner worlds, likely primarily tinged by Hindu schemas or American ones, and the outside world in which they live, as well as the relevant and predominant schemas therein. However, it is where these boundaries are delineated for each individual and for groups on average which invokes questions, and which potentially results in levels of contradiction, in behavior and thought, as they are separated as objects, consciously, and in the combination thereof, as they are assumed and accepted, implicitly.

Chapter 7: Making Sense of Contradiction

While asking questions and questioning about pūjā *can result from failing to internalize a Bengali Hindu relational schema, even in these instances, different components of a schema are likely internalized to varying degrees. To that extent, what occurs when only certain parts of a Hindu Bengali relational schema are internalized? In this chapter I examine perceived contradictions of espousal and behavior that can occur when certain connections are stronger than others and when these components of a Bengali Hindu relational schema interact with and come up against alternate and competing schematic components. In doing so, I put forth a system of understanding particularities, parts of schemas, as on a spectrum with three axes: implicitness— difficulty of full communication to others, internalization, and acknowledgement of internalization. Different metrics on these three scales result in differing internal understandings— fueling how one relates to the world— and potential observed contradictions that may or may not be troubling to the individual in question. Moreover, using these metrics, I attempt to explain belief and how it differs from internalization of a Bengali Hindu relational schema. This system ultimately attempts to understand, from a schematic perspective, when contradiction occurs and why and how. Following this theoretical set up, this chapter examines particular examples of contradiction as connected with a Bengali Hindu relational schema.*

Reading earlier analyses, it becomes obvious that there are many points of view among Bengali Hindus regarding what one must do versus what one could do. Performance of actions seems to correlate with whether one feels as if the god is in the *mūrti*. In general, if one individually agrees that, at a particular time, the god is indeed in the *mūrti*, he or she will perform the requisite actions as he or she sees fit. However, what is the nature of the instances when an interviewee declares that there is no god in a *mūrti* and yet still goes through the necessary actions, or vice versa? This is a contradiction of action and assertion, or, sometimes, a contradiction of action and assumption— an understood but unspoken assertion.

These instances of contradiction aren't specific to Bengali Hindus or to my interviewees; rather, this type of observable contradiction transcends cultural boundaries. For example, Bell (1992, 185) discusses missionaries in China who would convince some Chinese individuals that bowing to statues was foolish, but these people would do it anyway. However coercive this was,

if we assume that these Chinese people actually were convinced, their behavior seems contradictory and inexplicable from the outside.

This type of contradiction— seen from the outside as contradictory but which is still potentially internally coherent for an individual— often happens with regard to practices that are approved of in one (potentially predominant) culture, but not designated as appropriate or necessary in another culture. This might also occur when certain accepted logical premises of one culture don't hold with reference to the logical stipulations of another; for example, most Bengalis will happily eat chicken, but many won't touch beef, though both are meat. While most non-Hindu Americans can rationalize cleanliness, and, thus, taking off one's shoes, it's very difficult for them to understand avoidance of only beef, menstruation as a contagion, or understanding god to be in a physical object. Thus, some of these associated actions— like eating chicken but not beef— seem illogical; a non-Hindu American would likely understand both to be meat and, thus, similar. Though many of these particularities display as social norms, many of these norms are truly psychologically ingrained, and represent expressions of underlying schematic internalization, as does worshiping a physical deity with regard to a Bengali Hindu relational schema.

Going beyond a way of life, particular practices can be isolated and interrogated by onlookers through observing whatever evidence that seems to impute illogic, in whatever cultural context. This is similar to how some young American Bengali Hindus began to ask questions: they didn't understand the logic behind the Hindu particularities around them. To this end, thought can be designated as separate from action and practices interrogated as such. Though my analysis below often examines this dichotomy from the space of bifurcating thought and action, because this is what my interviewees do when they talk to me, I contend that the two

251

are, *a priori*, not actually bifurcated in so far as the action correlates and is potentially motivated by and underlying internalized schema; it is our examination and assumptions which treat them as such.

Through taking into account schemas as implicit versus explicit, internalized versus uninternalized, and acknowledgement of internalization or lack thereof vs. lack of this acknowledgement, patterns of supposed contradiction begin to emerge, as does reasoning for why these patterns might come to be among different groups of Bengali Hindus. Additionally taken into consideration is the fact that context is important, and can potentially lead to inconsistency: Bengali Hindus might choose to eat beef at some times and not at others, for a variety of reasons. Moreover, there is significant variation with regard to implicitness and internalization within a particular group (Strauss 1992, 218) and with regard to each component (as the individual might have internally isolated it) of a particular schema.

Implicitness and Explicitness

Schemas, the lenses through which we come to filter data about our world, often remain out of awareness, and thus it is often difficult to fully articulate their contexts (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 57). Bourdieu categorized this type of schema as doxa, which is something known but left unsaid, and which is often not known to be known, even though it establishes a type of order. To this end, for Bourdieu, knowledge is embodied in social action and is not necessarily recognizable in codes of conduct or in what people say (1977). Briggs (1998, 9), discussing Whorf (1956), describes these schemas as "covert categories," which people are often "unable to define in words." Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) term these as hegemonic representations, which are so habituated as to be hidden from view, and Hutchins (1980) labels these schemas as

252

"transparent," such that the world is viewed through them, but they themselves are not seen. As D'Andrade (1992a, 38) gloss it, this transparency helps to give schemas "motivational force because although the person sees the world a particular way, it is experienced as an undeniable reality." Adding to this list, I term these schemas implicit, for reasons that will become clearer in the following paragraphs. I understand implicitness to be a measure of potential for relatively complete and intentional communicability to someone unfamiliar with that schema, assuming that said communicability actually captures the links, confines, and character— motivation, affect, applicability— of the schema.

There are many examples of implicit schemas. One relatively implicit schema that Strauss and Quinn (1997, 239) mention is that of what a woman might wear: even though a woman might dress radically differently than others in the U.S., she likely still dresses within the same spectrum of choices that her peers do, and this spectrum constitutes an implicit schema; it is difficult for her to embody anything beyond it or to communicate fully what that schema is. Finally, implicit schemas can defy logical analyses: Haidt (2001) found that people still thought incest to be morally wrong, even when their rationalizations for this point of view were pointed out as invalid. Thinking about incest was less something to be rationalized and was more an implicit schema through which people viewed the world.

Ethics, overall, can be implicit, and are thus often imbedded in practices rather than in dictated codes or rationalizations, as we have seen (Lambek 2010). They are not easily intentionally communicable, and if they are communicated in the form of codes or rationalizations, lack the same force and comprehensiveness. Moreover, they are often highly internalized in addition to implicit: moral cognition is often intuitive, and is a matter of gut

253

feelings;[100] ultimately, there is (perhaps implicit) affect and motivation within these internalized schemas. Beyond the scope of this research, but worthy of contemplation, is the question of whether something might be deemed by general societal consensus to be moral specifically because it is implicit, internalized, and motivating. These internalized models are often learned through direct experience (Westen 2001, 37), and imbue such understandings as autonomy or equality (especially in America), and role obligations, such as how to engage with a deity-as-relative (especially in India). Hindus who maintain an internalized schema are well aware that *mūrti*s are not actually their relatives, but, rather, what they find difficult to explain, what is largely implicit, is that, for them, it is obviously and necessarily as if these *mūrti*s were relatives; this is how they must treat them. To wear shoes in a *mandir* is intuitively wrong for them, like incest is for Haidt's subjects, and, similarly, for those who have affect and motivation tied to this internalized schema, it is wrong to treat a *mūrti* as anything other than a relation. Thus, I perceive schemas to be situated along often correlated axes of implicitness/explicitness and internalization/non-internalization.

Strauss and Quinn (1997, 39) take these internalized schemas as unsaid and stipulate different reasons that they might be unsaid. First, they note that some unsaid schemas are such because they are also unknown (e.g. information about a different society), that others are unsaid because they are obvious (e.g. in India, rather than in America, that one needs to take off one's shoes in a *mandir*), and finally, that some unsaid schemas are unsaid because to say them would require making new connections between scattered bits of knowledge. The measure I propose above, implicitness, primarily regards the potential for saying— in other words, can something be said in a way that would fully communicate it and its inherent motivational force? While

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[100] C.f. much of Haidt's work.

young Bengali Hindus in America attempt to execute the last of Strauss and Quinn's explanations (e.g. I know I should take my shoes off in a *mandir*, but why? What pre-existing rationale can I invoke?), Bengali Hindu adults in America and India, and often younger Bengali Hindus in India, tend to operate within the second realm (e.g. one takes off shoes in a *mandir* because that is what one does). While Strauss and Quinn (1997, 40) term this third category as having the "greatest potential for fundamental behavioral and cognitive change," I also perceive it as presenting the greatest potential for exploring the negotiation of ideas and lingering issues of schema cohesion— or lack thereof— resulting in contradiction, which is what I attempt to take on in this chapter.

The counterpoint of something which is implicit is, of course, something which is explicit. How one should behave in a restaurant, for example, is mostly internalized and unsaid, but is explicable, and therefore, is often explicit. In fact, it is relatively easy to catch on to how to act in a restaurant in another country, at least in so far as one understands the primary goal to be procuring food.[101] This is in part because it is a fundamental human schema to eat; though there are many different practices, understandings, and motivations related to this schema, all humans understand the need to ingest food. However, the more implicit a schema is, the less separable it is from the processes that produce it (Bloch 2012, 144), and, thus, is very difficult to make explicit, and any attempt to make it explicit, such as when the older generation of Hindu Americans tries to explain reasoning behind elements of *pūjā* to their children, is often clumsy. As Lambek (2010, 2) notes, these implicit schemas are often "grounded in agreement rather than rule," and are made explicit 1) with respect to breaches (such as using your left hand to take

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[101] In this case, yes, the inherent schema is the same: there is a restaurant to begin with. Still, it is the basis for communicating the process; having the common schema as a base makes it easier to communicate what is going on.

prasād), 2) with regard to ethical problems in which the right thing to do is unclear, 3) in movements aimed at renewal, or 4) when trying to rationalize and/or educate (as happens quite often for Hindus in America).

Though I've just set up schemas that are implicit and those that are explicit as a dichotomy, in reality, they are on a continuum, and, moreover, of the different parts that might be collapsed into what we think of as a single schema, there is likely variation in how implicit and explicit each part might be. Making use of this continuum, on the far implicit end, I would place schemas consisting of things that people know, but, though they may be communicated in some way, are very difficult to fully communicate intentionally to someone who does not already share that schema or at least the structure of it. Colloquially, these are things people know they know, but they don't know that they know them. For example, a young American woman might be dressed in clothing which I, as an American, can identify as relatively mismatched and second-hand. That means something to me automatically (that this woman likely falls into a category of "hipster," participating in historical social movements geared towards recycling, reuse, uniqueness, and authenticity), but it is difficult to convey what exactly this might mean to someone who has never seen any type of American dress at all, and which would require skill and reflection to explain. Something which is highly implicit, such as a distaste for incest, when communicated, is often done in the form of value judgement: incest is bad. On the far explicit end is knowledge that people can and might actually voice, in so far as it is high on a measure of the possibility of potential communication. Thus, the difference between implicit and explicit is a matter of degree (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 184), and the segment in the middle might be described as, but not equated to, Comoroff & Comoroff's (1991) explanation of the space

between conscious and unconscious, "inchoate awareness," "ambiguous perception," and/or "creative tension."

The relationship between that which is implicit versus explicit and that which is unconscious versus conscious is a complicated one. Though these categories would seem synonymous, the unconscious/conscious dichotomy first, does not take into account the communication and/or verbalization of ideas; it does not correlate nor fail to correlate with communication in any predictable way. Moreover, the unconscious/conscious designation privileges the position of the individual and her internal world rather than letting internal and external exist as continuous instead of dichotomous, before they were ever separated, since this is to some extent how they exist for each individual whose mind bathes in a sea of dynamic implicitness and explicitness, in differing and changing expectations and understandings of what is true of the world. In other words, as a particularly implicit schema becomes more explicit, accompanying the realization that others might not share the initial schema, it becomes more obvious to the individual in question that he can't take this schema as given, as an assumption about how things really are. Thus, the terminology of implicit versus explicit is not agnostic of subject and observer, but is rather an understanding of the extent to and manner in which the internal may or may not be externally conveyed, and the subjectivity in what that means; there is certainly a perceived line between internal and external, but that line moves with regard to different categories and for different individuals. These lines themselves are perpetually being drawn and redrawn, and the designation of implicit and explicit takes that into account. As Spiro (1993) found, all societies do distinguish between inner states and the outer world; however, the manner in which this distinction is conveyed and where the distinction lies may vary, as it does with a Hindu relational schema; there are differing imputations of "me" and "not me."

Moreover, a particular schema or formulation of viewpoints varies to the extent that it is internalized or not internalized. For example, there is much that is mostly internalized about a restaurant schema: that it is a place where people go to eat, that one has to pay for the food, that (in America) one sits on a chair while eating. All of this, however, is relatively explicit in so far as it can be communicated, though likely isn't. People might not even think about these regularities as they act, but what they do think about, what must be made even more explicit through intentional communication, is what they will order; one has to voice "I think I'll have the chicken parmesan" thus uniting what is internally understood with what is externally required in order for the schema to function and, despite this current explanation, this process is rarely directly discussed as such. What is more explicit, then, is that which is more intentionally and completely communicable, even if it is not necessarily communicated. The schema is internalized, however, if one does in fact know what to do at a restaurant, often automatically.

Layered on top of the continuum of implicit versus explicit and internalized versus uninternalized is a metacognitive continuum of acknowledgement of internalization, ethnographic examples of which will be provided in upcoming pages. Thus, a schema which is primarily implicit and primarily unacknowledged as internalized, like the understanding of a *mūrti* as relative, is almost impossible to intentionally communicate; rather, it is lived.[102] The way these schemas are learned is likely less than explicit also: as a child, one might simply

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[102] Addressing Strauss & Quinn (1997, 46), I do not mean to say here that it cannot be communicated, but perhaps that the communication of something implicit and unacknowledged as such is incredibly difficult to communicate *fully*. Moreover, the example they give— of a novelist describing how preppies act — is one of someone who is reflecting as an observer. In other words, the implicitness is acknowledged, and observation of that implicitness is communicated rather than is the livedness of it. Something acknowledged and implicit can certainly be communicated, but often without the affect and motivation behind it, more akin to Strauss & Quinn's example of Paula's depression-era parents imploring her to save, but Paula ignoring the advice (1992, 233), or to Bengali Hindus in America attempting to implore their children to participate in Hindu rituals.

observe that which is implicitly present, internalizing, but not acknowledging that observation or internalization. Thus, as Bell says, this type of understanding occurs "below the level of discourse," and "ritualized agents... see themselves only acting in a socially instinctive response to how things are," (1992, 206). In other words, the internalized implicit which is unacknowledged as internalized constitutes, for an individual, the way things are, and the way the world is, undifferentiated between internal and external, since external as such is individually determined and colored.

Points of perceived contradiction and inconsistency in the ways in which people act and think can be seen in different segments of this illustration. For example, a schema which is largely implicit, internalized, and acknowledged as internalized leaves open the potential for an individual to question his own actions, but to be unable to change them even if he or she would like to. On the other end of the spectrum, if someone communicates one thing explicitly, but proceeds to act or think in a way that contradicts that assertion of how things are, this thing communicated is not internalized, nor has this person acknowledged that it is not internalized; what is communicable, what is said, is separate from whatever is implicitly operative.[103] It is these types of permutations that account for how a person might express— verbally or observably— what he or she really understands reality to be like, as well as his or her relative

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[103] Strauss (1992, 214) discusses possibilities for manifestations of this type of contradiction at a more micro level: one might consciously choose part of a schema to condone; one might unconsciously integrate divergent parts of competing public discourses into one schema; one might internalize different parts of competing discourses into linked schemas, thus causing anxiety; one might be ambivalent since there is no workable compromise to be made; or one might compartmentalize competing discourses into separate schemas. This analysis, while cogent, relies on the understanding of schemas as discrete and bounded "things" rather than an interlinking system of schemas with different parts interlinked to differing degrees. Strauss offers many practical examples for coordinates along the axes of implicitness, internalization, and acknowledgement of internalization, with the level of anxiety likely corresponding to the extent of acknowledgement of internalization in so far as that internalization contradicts another line of thought which is perhaps less internalized, but is more explicitly endorsed.

place within that reality. The following pages detail many such instances in relation to a Bengali Hindu relational schema.

What is Belief?

I contend that what we often refer to as belief resides within the realm of something which is explicit, internalized, and acknowledged as such; in other words, it is communicable and often intentionally endorsed. Something in another cultural tradition that appears to be a "belief" (e.g. witches exist) is likely, for that group, implicit, internalized, and unacknowledged. It is beyond obvious that witches exist; it is our outside view of reality that brings this into question, drawing out the underlying assumptions of an alternate view of reality, that which is unquestioned. To this end, I would term our view that something is irrational within a different tradition to often be a measure of difference in terms of underlying assumptions about the world, and of our assumptions which are often hidden from our own view and implicit. Thus, a belief only becomes a belief— explicit, internalized, and acknowledged as such— under certain circumstances, and only under these circumstances does a schema persist in a thought-state which has been fully considered and endorsed or rejected.[104] It is likely that the motivational impact of this belief will correlate to the extent that it is internalized. However, even a schema which falls into this category, by virtue of being made explicit, may contradict more unacknowledged and implicit and internalized forms of reasoning for a particular person. Thus, the idea of possessing discrepant beliefs is problematic, but having internalized discrepant

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[104] Another way to think of this is by considering whether a religious tenet is subject to question or whether it is not (Southwold 1978). Moreover, what is the extent of the doubt to which a religious tenet can be subjected?

schemas which may or may not correlate with explicit and acknowledged assertions is plausible, and perhaps even common.

Geertz positions enactments of ritual as models of what people believe, "but also models for the believing of it," (1973, 114). While the latter holds to some extent, if we take these into account as models of implicit schemas, there is a residual conflict regarding imputing the explicit and acknowledged meaning of the content of that schema. From watching a ritual, as per the system I've been attempting to establish, one does not necessarily gather anything about what performers believe per say, in so far as it is acknowledged and explicit. Rather, what one views is an implicit and likely unacknowledged schema or set of schemas being enacted in the world as the actor perceives it to be. Thus, for observerse to even question, for example, whether the prayed-to god exists, brings the schema into focus as a belief, when it did not originate as one; it could be translated as such, but would lose some rigor, some sense of validity as an understanding of the way in which things are. It is this assumption and perspective that allows anthropologists and scholars to think that the native has "confused his or her own mental constructs with external reality, and that the world in which he or she lives is a kind of fantasy or delusion or false consciousness," (Shweder 1992, 49). Rather, I contend that this conclusion is the result of differing measures of implicitness and internalization as well as differing, though fluid, unbounded, linked, and always changing, coherent systems for understanding not necessarily what reality is (e.g. we all know a *mūrti* doesn't have organs and an immune system like humans do), but, rather, the ways in which one can and should engage with reality.

Thought and Action

261

Hollan (2001, 56) warns that it's hazardous to make inferences about experience based on overt behavior, since, as I have illustrated, the two are complicatedly connected. Bell (1992, 16) gears her argument toward resolving a bifurcation that scholars have stipulated between thought and action: as she proposes, scholars presume separation and the theoretical work they do is intended to reunify the two. For example, ritual is often construed as an expression of religious ideas, and is secondary.[105] Thus, many problems commonly encountered in analyzing ritual result from how it is theoretically constituted (Bell 1992, 17). Bell further asserts that attempts to fuse thought and action are actually fusing a theoretical project and its object, the former ostensibly generating meaning for the ritual actor and the latter for the theorist (28). Foucault concurs: objectivity is affected by particular historical paradigms and strategies of inquiry, as it certainly is in this case (Bell 1992, 13).

Bell goes on to discuss ritualization rather than ritual, and to discuss it 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," as well as considering ritualization to be "a strategy for the construction of a limited and limiting power relationship," (1992, 8). Neither of these explanations is particularly fruitful in bypassing the thought/action divide, since, though she focuses on process rather than action, Bell ultimately still treats this process as object which may or may not be construed as object by the ritual actors themselves. Much of what we as anthropologists witness ritual actors doing is not set off for them; rather, it is implicit, internalized, and unacknowledged, even if the performing of the practice itself is a rarity. A theorist is thinking precisely because a theorist is a theorist, but this does not mean that

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[105] Bell (1992, 14) cites many theorists who adhere to this understanding: Max Müller, Edward Tylor, Herbert Spencer, James Frazer, Rudolf Otto, William James, and E. O. James, among others.

thought is not already embedded into the actions of actors, so seamlessly that scholars of ritual have spent at least a century attempting to find the seam. Theorists are thinking about the same object, but through a different— and explicit— mode, reifying the object itself. To that end, why and how are thought and action always already fused when found within the implicit, internalized, and unacknowledged?

Motivation

Shweder (1992, 47) explains this another way: one must attempt to fuse the directive force (akin to an impetus to action) of a culture to its directive content (akin to thought). This should be done without appealing to any "irrational or extrarational or extrinsic energy source." I would argue that something which is implicit and internalized is separate from considerations of rationality— itself a historically situated construct— and, instead, begins to constitute a given system, coherent in itself through locally understood means, with a given set of implicit assumptions that are perpetually in flux. To that end, this content-laden schema itself is the primary and underlying motivational energy source, even, and maybe especially, if that source is unacknowledged. Something internalized and implicit is almost always motivating, but it's not always obvious how.

These motives are woven in with what is internalized and implicit, but might be linked in differing ways for different people. If links for an internalized and implicit schema are relatively vertical, they might be easier for me to discern, and, thus, I might be able to better understand the role of that schema in relation to other schemas. However, if the schema is interlinked in many directions, it might motivate several actions or several different schemas could motivate the same action. If all of these links cannot be conceptualized, it is likely that this schema will be

motivating, but the individual might not understand why. Moreover, motivation due to similarly interconnected schemas can be different for one person than it would be for another. Though the majority, on a bell curve, of people go to a restaurant to eat, there are others who go with different motivations which are likely internalized and which may or may not be implicit or acknowledged.

D'Andrade (1981, 193) points out that, when a schema is particularly internalized, affect is deeply embedded in the facts of how the world is perceived, creating powerful directive impact. He further notes that advertising creates motivation with problematic success. In my assessment, advertising is highly explicit and may or may not resonate with anything highly internalized for a particular individual; automatic motivational force lies more within the extent to which a schema is internalized. Advertising is at its most effective when it touches upon something already highly internalized and maybe implicit. This internal implicitness allows for rules, even if explicit and clearly externally supplied, to "be experienced as powerful by people," (Bloch 2012, 149) and given that motivation therein corresponds to affect or motivation already present within an individual's schematic map. Thus, learning these schemas and internalizing them is more than a matter of mere exposure: one also needs to pay attention (Strauss and Quinn 1992, 238). As a result of this factor of attention, which is likely to some extent determined by how much and in what ways a new schema may resonate with already internalized ones, it is difficult to determine who will be motivated to exhibit which specific behaviors. To this end, messages are not merely passed from one person to another, but, rather, these messages are subject to "individual transformation, absorption and creation" that affect their motivational and affective impact (Bloch 2012, 178). Thus, different conditions for motivation are often

interlinked with different forms of learning (Strauss and Quinn 1992, 232; Bloch 2012, 178)—such as implicit learning (largely consisting of observation and inference) and explicit learning.

These differing modes of motivation and affect contained within that which is implicit and internalized can lead to contradictory behavior or ways of thinking, as understood by the individual or otherwise. In other words, not all parts of an internalized schema will necessarily be motivating. One example of this is lip service: something is endorsed but not acted upon (Strauss and Quinn 1992, 233). In terms of that which is acted upon, unless something disruptive occurs, what is implicit and internalized leads to what we might call inertial behavior (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 233), habitus (Bourdieu 1977), or common sense (Geertz 1983). It is the acknowledgement of that internalization, however, which can cause conflict and contradiction observable within an individual. For example, for years Catholics often felt they should be allowed to take birth control (and did), though the pope indicated that they shouldn't (Bell 1992, 214). What was internalized was first, "I am Catholic," but second, that birth control was permissible. In this circumstance, something explicit and uninternalized (the idea of not using birth control) carried little motivational force, though likely caused anxiety for some Catholics due to the acknowledgement that they had not internalized this edict, but had internalized an explicit identity of being Catholic. Moreover, non-Catholics who understood this edict to be part of Catholicism because it is what they heard through explicit means, were often surprised by this contradictory behavior. It was their assumption of internalization that led to perceived contradiction.

Examples of Contradiction: *Mūrti*s, Menstruation, and Beef

Differences in motivation in relation to a schema that is only partially internalized, or of which parts are internalized rather than the whole, result in many different behaviors, or, to an observer, something that can look like contradiction. The interplay of multiple schemas— e.g. a Hindu relational schema in terms of how one should treat a *mūrti*, but perhaps more importantly, one's elders, as well as a schema of American feminism— can also result in what appears to be contradictory thought and behavior since, in many circumstances, components of each schema vary on metrics of implicitness, internalization, and acknowledgement thereof, and each combination provokes a different set of observable behaviors.

In some circumstances, conflictual behavior and worldview are at the forefront and become obvious to the person struggling with these issues. Such instances are often couched in a rhetoric of just not being able to complete or not complete some action. Though the person in question often expounds significant reasoning as to why the requisite behavior is either illogical or irrelevant, violating that behavior simultaneously provokes a certain level of anxiety and discomfort. Suryamukhi, who would likely term herself a feminist, discussed the prohibition of not performing *pūjā* while menstruating: "I mean I don't know if I necessarily agree with it, but I do it." As in, she disagrees with the premise of refraining from performing *pūjā* while menstruating, but she goes along with the prohibition. To this extent, she is aware of an implicit and internalized schema and has understood it as something which she can question and negotiate, she but cannot move beyond treating this schema as internalized and it is implicit; some part of the practice remains implicit for her— part of the way in which she conducts her life— and she can't quite communicate why. She goes on to explain further:

> **S:** Like if my friend's like oh, I don't care, I'll go and touch stuff when it's my time of the month, I'll be like you go girl! I wish I could do the same thing. It's just like a mental block for me, I can't do it... But at the same time, I do understand that it does, it can put women in a secondary spot and that's not ok with me. So part of me wants to be able to

266

change that, but it's also like, I can't like, if I'm on that, I just can't like touch this picture [of Durgā], like I won't even touch this picture. I just can't do it, whereas other women can and I'm like, I'm so proud of you for being able to be a feminist and touch the picture. I just can't do it... I mean I would love if I can get over it at some point, but I don't think that I can.

R: So the benefit of getting over it would be what, exactly?

S: I just think it's more empowering. You know I should be able to go and do *pūjā* whenever I want to do it, right? I should be able to... like why do I have to ask a man to hold the box[106] for me when I could? I'm perfectly capable. I think part of it was cleanliness back in the day when there weren't as many sanitary ways of dealing with it. But now a lot of it is just up in you and it's not even, you're not dirty. And why should it still be something that keeps women outside of the *mandir*? Like they don't go in. Or why should it be that a woman can't touch her children unless they're like at the age of so young that they can't feed themselves? And I get the reasons why those rules exist. But it's also like ok, but those things aren't a problem anymore.

In this discussion, Suryamukhi really struggles with the idea of performing *pūjā* while she has her period, and though it is certainly part of an external discourse related to pleasing others (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 238), said discourse obviously resonates with an already internalized paradigm for Suryamukhi: this prohibition has become part of her. She simply can't perform *pūjā* while she has her period, despite actually wanting to, and despite being unsatisfied with the way in which she must conduct herself in accordance with this principle. It's clear that she's thought about this a great deal: she agrees with principles of feminism, and wants to be self-sufficient. Simultaneously, however, she acknowledges that she herself can't compromise and will likely never be able to perform *pūjā* while menstruating. Toward the end of this passage, she makes an impassioned argument for doing so, illustrating exactly how difficult this conflict is for her. She knows that she is living at the intersection of two sometimes contradictory systems of thought, and, despite a great deal of effort expended to this end, still has difficulty reconciling them.

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[106] A box full of *mūrti*s used for Hindu Students' Council meetings that Suryamukhi used to lead.

As one interviewee explained, broadly, that "you just kind of make up your own reasons for what you want to do and for why you're doing it," but in this case, none of Suryamukhi's reasons correlate with what she actually does. Rather than attempting to ameliorate cognitive dissonance, she acknowledges and lives with the contradiction, understanding that something stops her from doing what she would like to do, but not knowing what that is or how to go about changing these circumstances. To this end, explicit reason regarding what a feminist should do is at odds with what Suryamukhi actually executes, and it is difficult for her to come up with reasons for what she actually does. She holds two opposite premises afloat, albeit precariously.

Suryamukhi is someone who, by and large, is a very observant Hindu. She spends her free time engaging with the Hindu community and actually helping to plan events and teach others. She follows most other ritual stipulations in Hinduism, and is an avid student of Hindu history. While it's not significantly surprising that Suryamukhi might be compelled to avoid the *mandir* while menstruating, what is more surprising is that someone like Akashi also would. Just as these schemas regarding menstruation and *mandirs* were implicit, internalized, and acknowledged as such for Suryamukhi, the same is true for Akashi, who is also American. This relational schema, based on how one should or shouldn't interact with a *mūrti*, is more internalized and implicit and was likely learned earlier than were tenets of feminism. Akashi was quoted earlier as saying "Yeah, you're not supposed to [go to a *mandir* while menstruating], apparently. Which I was like, yes! Awesome, like cool, I got my period!" This statement indicates that, because she had her period, she didn't have to do *pūjā* and was excited by that fact. Having her period, which she perceived as arbitrary, released her from something she didn't want to do anyway. By and large, there is little Hindu content in her life; she lives alone in DC and doesn't regularly interact with a Hindu community. Still—

268

R: So would it bother you to do that? To go with your period—
S: Yeah.
R: Ok, so you wouldn't do it?
S: Yeah.
R: Just because…
S: They can like sniff it out of you, like your grandmothers. I don't know, I mean… I think you go, but you just don't do things. So, I just wouldn't do [*pūjā*], I guess, if I went. Which is interesting, yeah I don't know.

Though there is some anxiety here about others finding out about her period, Akashi also knows that this is, in actuality, unlikely. She feels guilty that she might choose parts of this schema to disregard, because they are not in accord with the schematic way of thinking that she hopes to act on. She might not possess a full internalized relational schema with regard to a god, but she certainly internalized some components of this. The assumption that there would be communal ramifications is only part of what causes Akashi to personally feel anxiety and stress at the thought of performing *pūjā* while having her period. Of my interviewees, she was certainly on the less-observant end of the spectrum, and certainly articulated that she actively disagreed with many of the ways in which Hinduism construed obligations for women. She acknowledges this contradiction of ethos and behavior to some extent, as Suryamukhi does, but does not contemplate it too deeply, ultimately ending by confessing that "I don't know," regarding not understanding her own behavior and inclinations.

Mahi, a young Indian Bengali Hindu, is less aware of how internalized certain rules are for her, stating that the entire process of *pūjā* is unimportant and that she's reluctant to do *pūjā* and won't do it unless asked, but she will still refuse to do *pūjā* while having her period:

S: Yes, when my parents forced me to.
R: So you were never interested.
S: I was never interested in the sense that it was something that I thought had to be done. You know you have to do some things in life, so it had to be done.
R: Why did it have to be done?
S: Because everybody's doing it, [but] I had my own perception, I had my own ideas. [My mother] always asked me to come do *pūjās*, I would pretend to do it. Sometimes she

269

even forces me to do those through my husband. She knows that I'll not listen to her, so she asks my husband to make me do it.

R: So if you have your period, you won't do it?

S: No.

R: Why is that important for you?

S: Because there are certain rules that you need to follow, so I usually maintain those. You are supposed to be unclean during that period.

Mahi still has a relational schema, but it just seems to apply more to her obligation to her husband than to her obligation to any deity. Westen states that it is difficult to distinguish "culturally patterned compromise formations from idiosyncratic compromise formations that draw on cultural idioms but are iteratively developed autonomously by multiple members of a society," (Westen 2001, 41). In this scenario, a culturally patterned compromise might be to go to the *mandir* while menstruating, but not touch anything. However, these women and others come to formulate similar idiosyncratic compromises: when presented with alternate and simultaneously internalized schemas for the same idea (i.e. level of purity during menstruation), and when acknowledging that discrepancy, the schema that is more internalized prevails, but the accompanying explicit discourse may differ. The occurrence and the acknowledgement of this discrepancy are both examples of (sometimes uneasy) compromise drawing on cultural idioms. This implausibility of actively defying is one instance where internal contradictions alight. Coupling this particular trouble of defying prohibitions with the fact that, in America, women are not usually seen as impure while menstruating creates added and more often acknowledged anxiety regarding what is the right and proper thing to do.

Shimantini, an extremely well educated and thoughtful person, contends with this same issue of conflicting schemas as she goes to worship Kālī. For most of her life, she was disinterested in *pūjā*, but finding herself in need of someone to talk to, she has recently started to visit a *mandir* weekly. Shimantini elucidates her contradictory behavior here:

S: We would like to believe that god is in a *mūrti*, because it is a one to one thing. I mean I go to my Kālī temple, I would like to believe that she's listening to me. If I knew she was just an idol, then who would I be talking to? So this is my perception of it, but scientifically or otherwise there is no reason for me to believe that she is god. She's a man-made *mūrti*. We have turned her into a goddess.

Here Shimantini relies upon a common trope: that it is people who make gods. Moreover, this trope is augmented by the prior assertion that it is focus which imputes the presence of a deity in a *mūrti*; if someone thinks god is in a *mūrti*, god is there. If someone shares an image of the goddess, she is instantiated as such. Shimantini explains that she knows Kālī isn't truly a goddess, but then she can't make sense of her own behavior as she talks to Kālī. Why should she talk to someone who isn't there? Still, she feels compelled to talk, using an internalized strategy related to a relational schema. In this instance as well, Shimantini is very much aware of what appears to be contradictory behavior and thought.

Shimantini continues, highlighting her own struggle with this issue:

The rational part of my head will tell me who are you talking to? And my heart will tell me never mind, maybe she is listening, or I'm hoping she's listening. So I know, I'm very conscious of this dichotomy. I am very conscious of the fact that she is not god.

In the second sentence here, Shimantini notes that, despite the "rational" part of her, she still talks to Kālī, assuming that Kālī is listening. She convinces herself that it doesn't matter, and for a moment, an onlooker can see a glimpse of acquiescence, agreeing that Kālī is in the *mūrti*. In the final sentence, however, Shimantini reverts, saying that she knows the *mūrti* isn't god. Even as she speaks, one sees what she describes as a dichotomy; the vacillating between two schemas as she tries to explain behavior she can't explain. Ultimately, Shimantini holds two directly contradictory thoughts in her mind at once: that Kālī is there and that Kālī isn't there. She is aware of her implicit and internalized feeling that Kālī is there, is listening, and this feeling

271

corresponds with her behavior, whether her explicit reasoning corresponds or not, and in this case, it does not.

However, there are certainly instances in which this dichotomy— of conflicting behavior and assertion— is not a conscious one for the performer of said behavior, and, perhaps, this is the more common tendency. To recognize that this is occurring, however, requires monitoring of someone's behavior, and with regard to *pūjā*, such behavior is often more private than it is public. One might also ask to what extent a proclamation of contradiction can be made if the practitioner does not see the behavior and line of thought as contradictory. This is, indeed, the perspective of an onlooker, but also exposes a circumstance in which a person may or may not have reflected upon his own behavior, and thus, the behavior itself is implicit, internalized, and unacknowledged as internalized, and the person performing that behavior also doesn't realize that the behavior is so ingrained that an onlooker might see it as contradictory to the viewpoint that said person espouses.

For example, Amitav moved to America recently to attend business school. In many ways, he's adjusted to his new home, and unlike most Bengali Americans of the previous generation, did not come with a wife and family; instead, he started dating a non-Indian-American woman, a friend of mine. While interviewing Amitav, he spoke of staying in America, and explained to me how temples in India house fortunes in gold, how the system is entirely corrupt. He told me he had little interest in Hinduism at all and that it was ultimately not very important to him. When I asked him "To what extent do you think there is god in a *mūrti*?" his reply was:

S: Zero
R: So not under any circumstances?
S: No

I placed him neatly in the category I was beginning to see emerge: a younger generation that was less inclined to feel as if there was god in a *mūrti*, and which was less inclined to perform *pūjā* of any sort unless prompted. Thinking our interaction with regard to research was complete, about a month later I had lunch with Amitav's girlfriend, who had originally connected us for the interview. She asked me how it had gone, and I assured her that he had been very helpful. But then she asked: did he tell you about those little statues? No, he hadn't.

When Amitav had moved from Chicago, where he attended business school, to New York, he had left a box with his girlfriend. At some point later he had visited her and opened the box to see what it contained. Inside, he found two small *mūrti*s, and proceeded to become quite distressed that they had been sitting in the box for so long and, even more problematic, some pieces of them had broken off. Amitav's girlfriend, seeing his distress, immediately offered to glue them back together, and though Amitav protested that one shouldn't do that, he relented, and they set the reconstructed *mūrti*s off to the side where they wouldn't break again.

Amitav's girlfriend was somewhat unsure of what exactly had occurred. She recognized these little statues as something Hindu, but had never seen Amitav really engage with much of anything Hindu in the years they'd been together. When she told me about this incident, I no longer knew how to understand what he'd told me: that there is never a god in a *mūrti* under any circumstances.

To Amitav, this might not appear to be contradictory behavior; he can think there is no god in a *mūrti* and still see it as a sacred object. However, that leaves the question of why exactly this object is sacred, and why it needs to be treated in certain ways. Though he has actively espoused that much of Hinduism was irrelevant to him and did not affect his behavior, he was

still significantly upset when these *mūrti*s were broken, likely because he has an implicit and internalized relationship with them, which is likely a primary motivational goal that is part of a schema for what it means to have any relationship with another person and how that person should be treated (D'Andrade 1992b, 235). Another young man I met in India, whom I did not interview, seemed to act similarly. His wife and father both told me that he has little interest in Hinduism, and that he didn't feel any need to participate in anything Hindu. When I met him, his comments were flippant and dismissive, insinuating that there is no god in a *mūrti* and that he was disinterested entirely. On one occasion, he was driving his wife and me to meet some of their friends, and pulled over at Lake Kalibari Mandir so that he could perform a quick *pūjā*. His wife told me that he does this with regularity.

These examples illustrate instances in which people are espousing certain convictions and acting conversely. Perhaps it is the case that the motivation for these actions is so implicit that what seems contrary to an onlooker coheres for these individuals internally. However, simply the discussion of these topics, the fact that Amitav was able to offer me a definitive answer regarding whether god is in a *mūrti*, is indicative of the fact that the schemas have been to some extent examined and are, indeed, relevant junctures of contemplation for this population. In other words, though it is perhaps unacknowledged, there is ambiguity to be interrogated.

A more straightforward example of this lies in the case of a friend who recently moved to Chicago from Kolkata. When I met him, he insisted to me how much he loved burgers— beef burgers— going as far as to cite a restaurant in America that he had visited which had excellent burgers. Later, we would chat on WhatsApp while he still lived in India, and on multiple occasions he brought up the topic of eating beef, and why, in his estimation, it was no different from eating chicken or any other meat; as a Bengali, he was accustomed to eating meat already,

274

so why should beef be a special case? At the time, I was intrigued: he would happily eat beef, but certainly felt the need to justify this conviction, and the fact that we were having this conversation alone indicated that he had considered this subject before and, also, that it was a necessary topic to consider, given that he would be spending significant time in America. Effectively, he was wrestling with the logic he was espousing and the traditional belief with which he had been raised. Any internalization with regard to this schema— such as that this is even a topic under consideration— wasn't necessarily acknowledged already, but he was in the process of acknowledging, attempting to make explicit the implicit.

When my friend reached Chicago, knowing he liked burgers, I suggested we should go to Kuma's, a Chicago burger institution. He demurred, asking that we go somewhere else. The next time we got together, I asked again, and again, he was disinclined. At one juncture, we went to a tapas restaurant serving a skewer of beef and I suggested we order it. His response surprised me: he didn't really like to eat any kind of beef that was not a burger, and burgers, at that, he had had only had a few times. Despite his logic and his continued insistence (still) that he loves burgers, he's still reluctant to eat them, and tells me he feels a bit guilty when he does. He even made sure to avoid eating meat on Durgā Pūjā, when one is required to eat only vegetarian food. In this instance, he toggles between the ingrained schema that he shouldn't eat beef and the clear path of logic he's established, based on the schema of cows as other animals, that he should be able to eat beef.

This tension surrounding beef in particular is familiar. Throughout Kolkata, when one orders a burger, it is most often buffalo and not beef. That said, burgers are everywhere; the American restaurant Chili's, known for its burgers, is a wild success in Kolkata, as is a small restaurant called Burger You run by an Indian in his twenties. Burger You is likely the only place

to get a beef burger in Kolkata, and is renowned among young Kolkatans. In fact, at a recent music festival, Burger You was the highest grossing food vendor. It is clear that there is a demand for beef in Kolkata, and to eat it there is seen among younger Kolkatans as something special, as a treat, partially because it is difficult to track down. Similarly, in Mumbai, young Indians host beef parties with varying levels of secrecy, and such parties have become all the more popular since the ban on beef, passed in 2015 and repealed in 2016.[107] There is obviously a significant demand— among Hindus— for beef in Kolkata and in India more broadly.

Though the demand is certainly present, and though many are enthusiastic about eating beef, this does not mean there isn't significant tension and ambiguity associated with the act itself. One day, while sitting and chatting with friends in Kolkata, the fact that I'm Jewish came up in conversation. Suddenly inspired, one friend remarked that, since I'm Jewish, do I know how to make brisket? Could I make it? I was slightly surprised that they knew what brisket was (they had heard about it on an episode of the *Big Bang Theory*), but we agreed that the next time I came to India I would make a whole Jewish meal, if they could procure the beef. No problem, they assured me.

The next time I came to India, I was prepared. One friend, the only Muslim, knew where to get beef and brought me a slab of brisket. I baked challah, made kugel and matzah ball soup, and even put together a salad, all to accompany the brisket. While those who had lived abroad ate without apprehension, others were a bit more reluctant. One friend in particular was having trouble making himself take a bite, and while it was my inclination to leave him alone, another friend egged him on, asking when else he would ever have the opportunity to taste home-cooked

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[107] For news sources, see the following: Mumbai Mirror, Al-Jazeera, Mid-Day, The National.

beef, particularly of this type? He stated that he wanted to, he really did, but it was difficult for him. He ate a bit, politely said it was good, and didn't try any more.

While this is not exactly contradictory behavior, it's certainly fraught behavior, and is behavior that indicates an inclination and urge to break with tradition, but, usually, a failure to actually do so. That which these individuals purport to be logical— that eating beef isn't any different than eating any other type of meat— is still challenged in the actions they choose to take. As a result, what comes to light is that these choices, these inclinations, are not a matter of logic or reason, even when that logic or reason is acknowledged. Particularly in an era, the *kālī yug*, in fact, when breaking with tradition is designated as the "cool" thing to do in India and as almost a necessity in America, under certain circumstances, individuals find themselves confronted with and contemplating these choices of adherence or violation, and often veer toward adherence, even without full understanding of why.[108] These understandings are internalized and implicit. Acknowledging them creates anxiety if another schema, which is explicit but also internalized is at odds with the former. In most cases, the implicit is more likely motivating; to be implicit, difficult to communicate, a schema likely has many links in many directions than just one vertical connection, joining node to node to node with no branching. As a result, an implicit schema has more potential for being joined with motivating schemas or nodes, and to have many weights reinforcing those connections.

In this instance religion is not a special case. Rather, most people would indicate that they have seen others act in ways that are apart from what they assert, whether acknowledged or not. This distinction between logic and feeling often underlies such instances of inconsistency;

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[108] In some tantric texts, eating meat is seen as empowering precisely because it is prohibited. To that end, there is precedent for this, but what I witnessed was likely more so the result of having been exposed to non-Indian norms.

religion itself, often defined by Judeo-Christian consensus as a set of beliefs to "buy into," simply exemplifies the potential for instances of hypocrisy. Beliefs as I have outlined them are explicit, internalized, and acknowledged when they are fully formed. However, any instance of a schema which is explicit but not fully internalized and not acknowledged lends itself to a perceived contradiction.[109] It is with this understanding of religion-as-beliefs that we bifurcate thought and behavior to begin with, and it is within this paradigm that many of my interviewees consider and evaluate their options and their actions.

In many ways, young Hindu Americans serve as participant observers of what they and others might presume to be their own traditions and contend with the issues that anthropologists have dealt with *ad infinitum*: that some things people do just don't "make sense," and particularly don't "make sense" when coupled with what these people say. In Shweder's words, they question how witches could possibly exist: witches are within the category of belief for them, but not for those who have internalized the phenomenon of witches. Within different cultural traditions, it is likely that different schemas or categories of schemas are subject to different placements as per their status as belief. In other words, in Judeo-Christian America, the existence of god is explicit(ly endorsed or rejected), internalized, and acknowledged. In Hindu India, though, thinking about god is often implicit, internalized, and unacknowledged and, accordingly, there are connotations that come along with that— such as that god is a relational figure. Many young Hindu Americans attempt to take god in the former category because they have internalized that rubric but, in fact, it is difficult for a Hindu god to live in the land of belief. If she does, she becomes disconnected from the schema of relationality as it likely exists— with

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[109] Drawing clear connections between what is internalized and specific behaviors is also difficult since, as we have seen, one behavior can result from multiple different schemas individually or combined; what we can say is that a behavior is necessarily part of *some* schema.

many connections— and many of the actions that make that schema particularly Hindu can be jettisoned. However, when this lack of sense-making, in terms of espousal contradicting behavior, is perpetuated by one's own adherence, despite what might be one's inner state, the division between thought and behavior becomes all the more visible and, moreover, unlike anthropologists and colonialists, Hindus who see these differences have the propensity to be personally bothered by what they perceive as inconsistencies.

How, then, do we go about reunifying thought and action, beginning prior to their division? As Bell (1992) indicates, synthesizing *post hoc* does not dissolve the problem of their division within our initial evaluation. When, in the process of denoting potential contradiction, are thought and action not differentiable, and to an extent, undefinable as such, or undefinable as anything beyond part of an overall meaning system? In the lives of my interviewees, these contradictory behaviors stem from the ways in which they were raised, how they learned to live and cope. Suryamukhi explains that she learned not to do *pūjā* while she was menstruating because she was friends with the priest's daughter:

> I kind of grew up with the priest's daughter as one of my best friends, so when we came of age, they didn't let me come and play with her when, like I wasn't allowed to come to her house at that time, cause like the priest lived there, and they have like very strict rules. So like, I kind of grew up learning more about what those rules were. And so I still follow a lot of them today.

Suryamukhi spent much of her childhood enveloped by her Hindu community. She spent a significant amount of time at the *mandir*, felt close to the priest and his family, and was forcefully taught rules of how she should behave. In effect, though she didn't live in India, because she was inundated in an enclave, Hinduism constituted her way of life. This is obviously true to varying levels for each young Hindu American or for each young Hindu in India. These

279

differing experiences and differing levels of internalization of certain schemas as ways of life set up the potential for contradiction and, moreover, discomfort.

To this end, the ways in which scholars approach other cultures' practices and understandings— as having necessary explicit reasoning— is to some extent flawed. Logic is not necessarily at play and logic itself is a means of making explicit, often propagated in the West. Actions that people take are not necessarily taken for logical reasons, but, rather, are taken because they are internalized and implicit and often unacknowledged. Short of putting oneself in the place of fully internalizing, realizing that some categories of schemas do not necessarily fall within the scope of the explicit, internalized, and acknowledged— or belief— it would be difficult to fully understand the system being invoked. Thus, religion is not a special case, but it's one often seen as such because in Judeo-Christian America, religion is a matter of belief. What is surprising to many Americans is that this is not the case elsewhere. Young Bengali American Hindus, having internalized this understanding of religion-as-belief struggle by contending with what their parents do— as an anthropologist might, or as a colonialist might. For young American Bengali Hindus, however, this lack of understanding affects self-perception and identity, and often in confusing ways.

The researcher is the one for whom meaning is explicit, but that meaning is often deferred onto the people observed, and there is little means to bypass this deferral within the process of meaning-making. As Shweder (1992, 46) notes, analysts have perpetually felt compelled to separate conflations attenuated by commonplace practices. A non-Hindu anthropologist might be more likely to conduct this process with respect to something like religiosity, which Judeo-Christian traditions perceive as highly moralized and, moreover, as explicit. This speaks to Cassiniti and Hickman's (2014, 256) point that "domains of experience

that become heavily moralized will necessarily vary cross-culturally." Moreover, I would add, even these patterns shift historically, and at different rates for different components or sets of components and for different individuals within these historical shifts. Contradiction observed by the individual contradicting or by an external party is more likely to take place when dominant modes of implicitness and explicitness coalesce or attempt to coalesce, but cannot cohere.

While much of this may appear initially to take a relative perspective, an important caveat is as follows: though there are certainly relativities at play, these relativities are based upon certain human universals: eating, having relationships and engaging with others, biological functions such as menstruation. Each schema related to these universals is constituted by particular knowledge (e.g. we must eat), but the construction thereof is what differs. To this end, competing schemas are simply alternate patterns for comprehending these givens we encounter as human.

Chapter 8: Within-Schema Variation

Previous chapters in this section discussed occurrences which might result from not internalizing or not fully internalizing a Bengali Hindu relational schema, such as formulating scripts, asking questions and questioning, and engaging in what could be perceived as contradictory actions. This chapter acknowledges that even when a Bengali Hindu relational schema is internalized— fully, to the extent that is possible, or mostly— there is significant variation in understanding and expression of that schema among those who have internalized it. This results from first, the fact that individual interpretation of the schema is part of the fabric of the schema itself, second, the schema may partially or completely overlap with other relevant schemas, and third, the means of communication and comprehension of the schema affect what is understood and acted upon. Finally, movement through one's life course can affect which parts of a schema are demonstrable and observable; to that end, even one possesses a schema, the extent to which it is motivating could vary through time.

As Briggs (1998, 15) states, "The constructions of any one individual are no more likely to add up to a coherent whole than are all the bits and pieces of culture." As we've seen, there are trends within Bengali Hindu communities regarding the ways in which they as a group comprehend divinity. There are, however, also variations according to individual temperament, personalities, and histories. In such circumstances, one might have internalized part of a schema, or a schema which overlaps with other relevant schemas in places, but which does not overlap completely. Thus, the nodes of connections are stronger in some circumstances, for some individuals, than for others and in other circumstances.

Compounding this understanding is the portrayal of Hinduism itself as adopted according to individual proclivities; in other words, the notion that one can construct Hinduism individually is built into the fabric of Hinduism itself. In India, this portrayal makes sense: Hinduism consists of a cluster of schemas that often are, as discussed, implicit and internalized. Picking and choosing which pieces to emphasize at which points in time, acknowledging that choice or not, the milieu of the other options still exists in close proximity. In the U.S., since these schemas

may be less internalized or more subject to outside input, a focus on individual choice and construction of Hinduism allows an individual to transform what he or she feels Hinduism to be, thus rebranding the entire construct into a set of schemas that is ecumenical, but also likely more complicit with non-Hindu American norms. This new understanding may only overlap to some extent with an Indian version that uses the same names for what are likely different concepts.

Finally, individuals are never fully independent, but are subject to first, their own movement through their lives and also their movement through globally-affected time as new developments lead to potential paradigm shifts and alterations in broader understandings of constructs such as religiosity. Moreover, these potential changes could lead us to communicate with and comprehend each other in drastically different ways throughout time, and given, as shown, that the ways in which Bengali Hindus engage with a *mūrti* are largely dependent upon relationalities, and given that the model for those relationalities is relatively flexible, this type of change lends itself to altering ways of engaging with a deity based on differing levels of individual absorption of societal flux. In short: schemas are often societally held, but ultimately, this means that they are constructed by the collective and dynamic understandings of individuals. It is likely, then, that those circumstances with which humans unavoidably contend, such as forming relationships, are omnipresent as themes for schemas, but the schemas themselves as they are collectively understood are largely made up of how individuals define, internalize, and make sense of these circumstances as they move through time— together and interactively.

Thus, the idea of a schema as individually construed is to some extent tautological. Though previous chapters have discussed a Bengali Hindu relational schema as internalized or not— to some extent treating the schema itself as bounded— this chapter instead focuses on differences complicit in any internalization of any part of that schema or, perhaps more concise,

this chapter discusses within-group variation. Rather than placing individuals into one camp or another— having internalized or not— here I examine the latitude of that internalization. What are the limits of internalizing this relational schema— the boundaries of what is necessarily internalized— to have the effect of internalization documented earlier?

I argue that, in this circumstance, three areas of focus affect the extent of variation in amount of internalization as well as which parts of this unbounded and dynamic schematic network come to be absorbed. First, taking Hinduism, and as part of that, this Bengali Hindu relational schema, as necessarily individually construed exacerbates this variation. Can schemas made up of individual nodes that is intentionally recognized and emblazoned as such cohere and to what extent under what circumstances? Second, interference affects the ways in which a Bengali Hindu relational schema may or may not be internalized. For example, if two conflicting schemas overlap, which gains precedence and why? As shown below, for a Bengali Hindu raised in America, it is likely the prevailing American precedent, but when there is no prevailing American precedent, the prevailing Bengali Hindu precedent fills in the gaps. Third, the means of learning and communicating affects what parts of a schema can be and are disseminated and understood. To this end, the schema itself might become reconstructed under new circumstances, such as immigration, and which parts correlate with the version of the same schema in its Indian context is a function of the means through which it was reconstructed. Finally, even if this schema were bounded, movement through one's life course can alter and affect which parts are expressed and when, illustrating more variation that is indicative both of the three foci above, but also that a Bengali Hindu relational schema can play different roles at different points in one's life.

284

Differing Indigenous Instantiations of Similar Schemas: Superstition and Religiousness

Understanding schemas as made up of individual viewpoints allows us to make sense of why some people in a given group would understand actions as having *x* consequence, while some would understand these actions as having *y* consequence; each is an interpretation of given schematic information whose connections are weighted in different ways for different individuals. For example, interviewees designated different ways in which one can practice Hinduism and occasionally attributed additional labels to those who perform certain actions, such as superstitious or religious, designating variation in even an implicit and internalized schema. To be superstitious in this instance revolves around presupposing that something negative will occur if one does not follow certain ritual prohibitions. Though there were a few instances where interviewees asserted that this would be the case, by and large, interviewees were loath to assert that there would be any cosmic consequence to relinquishing particular actions within a ritual framework:

> "So we grew up not eating anything til you give *añjali*. So it would be like, pretty much like twelve o'clock one o'clock or whatever. For a long time I actually did that, but then it wouldn't really matter. I would try and not eat meat, so anything vegetarian would be, but uh, I'm not really superstitious about it. Because in my mind, I think a lot of this is really manmade and stuff, it's not like the gods are going to come from the heavens and tell you can't eat meat or you can't do this is how I see it."

Jettisoning certain ritual particularities, such as not eating meat before *pūjā*, this interviewee was able to individualize and customize the ritual practice to suit her own predilections. In this case, some elements of an implicit schema surfaced as explicit and thus, were subject to deliberation. It is possible that parts of internalized schemas are more likely to surface in non-Hindu contexts, due to a potential highlighting of difference. Under these circumstances, the individual can explicitly deliberate and decide upon actions related to these parts of schemas. Given this, in many instances, an individual will forego particular ritual actions

in favor of comfort, convenience, or personal contentment while performing a *pūjā*. For example, in the U.S., Durgā Pūjā is often performed on the weekend so as to accommodate work schedules, rather than at the ritually appointed time. When peeling away certain particular prohibitions, though, or adjusting a ritual, what, then is the goal, or point of the ritual itself? How does one choose which actions to perform? The core connective tissue of the schema is what is left after this peeling away.

One interviewee discusses the ways in which she alters her own celebration of Durgā Pūjā:

> "Superstitious for me, you know, I can give you an example. I do Durgā Pūjā, and I do Durgā Pūjā in my house in a pretty pompous way. I call all my friends and you know the *pūjā* is done, but then the priest comes and there is a direction the *mūrti* has to be placed and that does not go with my house the way people come in, you know to put the, place the *mūrti* and so on, so I just do it the way I feel convenient. The way I feel I pray to god better, rather than put it in a direction it seems to me is not needed."

This kind of individualized alteration of the ritual is common, and makes sense in the light of the fact that most interviewees feel as if there is no particular consequence to abandoning certain ritual stipulations. This interviewee felt as if she could pray to god better, and that her guests would be more comfortable if the *mūrti* were in one place rather than another. She subtly, and perhaps without significant consideration, defines the ethos of a *pūjā* itself and, for her, what makes it minimally viable; she turns the focus on herself rather than on the *mūrti*, making the act such that she can pray to god better. In effect, she has identified what node of connections within a relational schema are the most important to her, the most likely motivating, and has pruned down the network, at least in action. For her, this *pūjā* is more about facilitating her connection than it is about following the letter of the law; this is the core of the relevant schema for *pūjā*-performing. In this instance, the performance of the *pūjā* is significantly more important than is spatial orientation of the deity. In other words, to be "superstitious" is not so important.

While being superstitious means following specific ritual prohibitions and worrying about consequences if these are not fulfilled, being "religious" was often defined as performance of *pūjā* and Hindu ritual more broadly, or at all, on a consistent basis, whether this is at home or in a temple. Three interviewees illustrate:

> "I grew up in a very religious family. My parents were temple-goers almost, at least, if not once a week... well definitely once a week, actually, now that I think about it."

> "I'm probably the least religious, like, in my family. I was never into the whole ritualistic thing such as going to *pūjās* and whatnot."

> "I kind of define it like the religious people, they go to church or temple or the mosque all the time, they do have the formal ceremony kind of things, regardless of what those are, they follow all those different like oh, I'm vegetarian, because of my religion, or I don't do this, because of my religion. Kind of following the laws or whatever of the religions."

By and large, religiosity was defined as the frequency of performance of ritual, but not by the form that ritual took. One could be Hindu without being religious and could be Hindu without being superstitious. Even those interviewees who would fall into the category of religious rarely indicated any particular fear that something would occur if they did not follow every step of the ritual; they had differently defined the core, the ethos, the point of the ritual.

One interviewee defined continual *pūjā* performance as fashionable religiosity. When I inquired what that meant, exactly, she explained:

> "Fashionable sense as in I have to go this temple, I have to fast on this day, like Shivratri I'm supposed to fast from morning to evening, and I have this friend in my class who actually did that during Shivratri and I said ok, I'll eat veg that day, but I didn't fast. But she said my mother told me to fast so I fasted. That. Fashionable as in following in the trend, following the whole mentality.

Despite declarations of Hinduism as individual, and despite proclamations that nothing will happen if one does not fast, for example, what is the motivation to perform *pūjā* at all? Under what circumstances does it become important that one follow the "trend" rather than coming up

with her own idea of what Hindu practice should look like? In this circumstance and in others, which expression of relationality is privileged— that of connections with friends, or of connections with the goddess? Finally, what does it mean when Hinduism as individually defined follows the trends of "traditional" Hinduism, regardless of superstition, and particularly when an individual actively denotes elements of ritual practice as unnecessary? These circumstances and these questions illustrate the stickiness of implicit and internalized schemas; the extent to which one can individually define and practice is dependent upon pre-existing corners of the particular schema at hand. To practice Hinduism in a purely individual way, unfettered by any connection with a Bengali Hindu relational schema, would be to step outside of the schema itself, and, arguably, would relinquish what is otherwise understood by the majority as "Hinduism."

Hinduism as Individual

Despite the fact that there are extensive ritual practices present in Hinduism, most dating back thousands of years (though, obviously, subject to changes), interviewees continually claimed that Hinduism is fluid, that there are no strict regulations, and that above all, that this religious tradition is malleable:

"That's why I say sometimes, you know, we don't, we don't have rules and regulations."

"The Hindus have no rules. I don't have to. If I want to, I do."

"I'm happy that I'm a Hindu, because I get to choose my own way. I have a lot of friends and I know people who are born as a Muslim, they have to believe something, even if they don't, they are, by law, they have to believe in something. It's like a compulsion. Like, we don't have anything like that."

What these interviewees describe is partially the extent to which Hinduism is primarily implicit and internalized versus structured around belief. These quotes illustrate that first, to be a Hindu, one does not necessarily need to perform rituals, but one doesn't have to believe anything either. In other words, one does not need to mentally, verbally, or practically ascribe to a particular ideology in order to be a Hindu, as was discussed in a previous section. Building on these claims, however, is the acknowledgement not only that rules and regulations in Hinduism are not stringent, but that whether one follows these rules is entirely based on individual choice. However, what they propose is that Hinduism is itself a tradition defined by malleability and fluidity. When a schema is defined by the potential for change and interpretation, one must ask how much change, malleability, fluidity can manifest before the entity is not itself any longer. What, then, is the end point?

This contemporary view of Hinduism as individual is not uncommon, but still might prove startling to students of religion. "Individual" does not refer simply to holding one's own particular interpretation of Hinduism, but, rather, states that one simply does not have to participate in any ritual or do anything demonstrably Hindu in order to be a Hindu. Rather, today's Bengalis in the U.S. and in Kolkata tend to see rituals as set up in case one wants to communicate with a deity in a traditionally Hindu way:

> "And I felt that Hinduism teaches us to be individuals and you do it your way. There's no cookie cutter ten commandments or you know you gotta go to church on Sunday or you gotta pray on Friday. And I like that. Then of course there is rituals if you want to follow rituals."

> "And Hindu religion is such that nothing is sacrosanct. God has never told you that you have to do *pūjā* for me. Hindu religion just says that whatever you feel and you want, you do that. And there's always a way, like we say today is Monday, today is an auspicious day, I will do *pūjā* today, but somehow you cannot do it, you can also do it in another day. So there is nothing written that you have to do this only."

This, of course, goes back to the notion that if one were not to perform *pūjā* for a day, or if one were to violate some element of ritual protocol, nothing would happen. Rather, it is the role of the individual's conscience that determines consequence, and, as discussed, those consequences are almost always internal. The ritual scripts are present, but are not necessary to follow.

Individuals in the U.S. were more likely to mention Hinduism as individual; this brand of Hinduism illustrates the interaction of the individual herself with American individualism. However, this is not to say that interviewees in India did not mention Hinduism as individual. It is likely that in practice, Hinduism in America becomes more individualized based on claims made in previous chapters: often times, prayer is more relevant than *pūjā*, and *pūjā* does not necessarily occur every day both due to practical constraints and to gathering new experiences. A young adult in India, even though she might be told that Hinduism is individual and personal, could still be required to fill in and perform *pūjā* if a relative is away. Moreover, inundated with the broader Hindu ritual culture as one is in India, though perceiving Hinduism as individual, it is more likely that a young adult in India would participate in some kind of ritual, whereas a young adult in the U.S. might think that since Hinduism is individual, this means he or she does not have to participate in any way.

Sabitri offers an interesting example of this. After moving from India, she still continues to perform *pūjā*, despite having an upbringing in which it was not necessary to do so. Though she does perform *pūjā* in order to show her daughters what it is and how to do it,

> "I'm also very liberal in that sense, I don't force anybody. Like if they want to practice it they can, if they don't want to. That's how I was brought up too. Like there were no things like, you have to do this otherwise it's not right or something like that. It was totally dependent on me. How much would I do."

As a result, living in the U.S., neither of Sabitri's daughters performs *pūjā*, nor sees it as particularly important. Though they see their mother performing *pūjā*, and though she is

attempting to pass it down, the attitude that Hinduism is individual and, therefore, that performing *pūjā* is not required, that there is no consequence to not performing, renders Sabitri's girls able to say that they don't want to participate at all, and acknowledges that leaning as a legitimate opinion.

Risu and his brother, who lives in India, have a similar story. When they were young, their family guru prescribed the obligations each brother had with regard to ritual performance. Surprised by the guru's proclamations, their grandmother asked why Risu had practically no responsibilities whereas his brother had many. The guru explained that Risu's brother was much more likely to actually perform the rituals; that it was the way that he individually could connect with a higher power. Risu, however, would not be as cooperative and, perhaps there were better ways for him to commune with the divine. It's no surprise, given these early assessments of personality, that Risu now lives in the U.S. and his brother is still in Kolkata. Though Risu ascribes to being more "spiritual" than "religious," notably, he still performs *pūjā* every day, as does his brother. To this extent, though Risu was allowed to practice Hinduism in his own way, individually, he still practices much in the same way his brother does. This scenario brings into question whether, perhaps, some people prefer or need the stipulation of individualism in religious practice, rather than the necessity of performance, in order to actually perform. Moreover, Sabitri, like Risu, condones individualism within the practice of Hinduism, yet both perform *pūjā* every day, while their children, who were reared on individual preference within Hinduism, do not perform *pūjā*. In this way, given the choice, why would one who is free not to perform instead choose to perform? Both Sabitri and Risu had in place a particular schema for relationality and for interacting with a deity, which, despite individualism, had already shaped many of the ways in which they interact with the world. Strauss and Quinn (1997, 117) note that

291

presence of past schemas does not necessarily guarantee their continued force, and caution that "appropriate understandings and feelings about them and the appropriate motivations toward them" must be "passed on (even if in altered form) across generations," if these schemas are to have their directive force. Strauss and Quinn don't say so specifically, but this is equally applicable across one's life course, as it was for Sabitri and Risu, but as it might not be for their children, given that the initial schema may never have been formed.

For the younger generation in particular, sometimes individualism within Hinduism can even have its end in acceptance of violating specific edicts. For example, echoing the findings of previous sections, one young adult in the U.S. explained:

> **R:** So what would happen if someone were to point his or her feet at a god?
> **S**: I, honestly, I think that part's not that big of a ... it depends, I honestly don't know, because I don't know what god is thinking. If someone sees them doing it, it's a big sign of disrespect. At some really holy places, they'll probably be asked to get out. I mean Hinduism is not that strict of a religion, like you're not required to do things."

Though this interviewee notes that one is not required to do things, perhaps he rather means that one is not required not to do things, in so far as this example allows. In other words, though pointing one's feet towards the god is not ideal, and though it is disrespectful, and though there is technically a prohibition against doing so, because Hinduism is flexible, because it is individual, an individual person is allowed to feel as if he or she can perform this action. To this end, nothing cosmic would really happen if someone pointed his feet towards the god; in order for Hinduism to truly be individual, such consequences can't be viable. In this instance, the idea of Hinduism as individual takes precedence within the given schema over the notion of violations as consequential.

Thus, Hinduism as individually defined ranges from only doing what one wishes to even potentially doing something actively in opposition to what Hindus tend to do. What is the logical

end of these proclamations of individualism? To the extent that the younger generation feels as if

they are still Hindu despite 1) not performing any Hindu actions and 2) sometimes intentionally

violating specific prohibitions, it appears that the limits of this individualism are far reaching.

Describing Hinduism as a "free for all," one interviewee expressed particular ideas about the

limits of what "no rules and regulations" can entail:

> "Like I know some other religions, at least that we're learning in history, like some other religions, they have certain guidelines that you have to follow, or otherwise you're, like, not that religion. But for like Hinduism, it's kind of free for all. You could be like... obviously you can't go and smash a god or anything, but it's more like oh, you can eat beef, that's all good. Like it doesn't really matter that much."

For this interviewee and others, eating beef, once deemed the highest level of anathema

in Hinduism, is permissible. There are several reasons this could be the case, but one striking

possibility is the fact that due to attempts at Sanskritization, taking on practices of the "elite,"

traditionally brahmins, or, in this case, of non-Hindu Americans, in order to socially move

among them (Srinivas 1989). Eating beef is common in the U.S., and for this interviewee, the

schematic connections between eating beef and smashing a good are quite weak; for her parents,

this connection would likely be stronger. Due to its social acceptance in America, eating beef

becomes acceptable given social prevailing scripts of what it means to be American and to live in

America. However, there is no particular prevailing and widespread reason that one would

"smash a god" in America. Indeed, almost every person I interviewed expressed a significant

amount of anxiety when faced with the possibility that a *mūrti* would not be disposed of

properly. For this interviewee, and likely for others, what signifies Hinduism in this case, where

the limits of Hinduism as individual lie, are with regard to the *mūrti* in so far as it represents

Hinduism. Hinduism in this instance becomes newly defined according to the confines of what is

acceptable in America. There is no non-Hindu American schema for a *mūrti*, a physical god, so only the imported Indian schema is relevant and accessible in these circumstances.[110]

Though some Bengali Hindus advocate Hinduism as a "free for all" and as without rules, there are obviously certain rules that people possessing a schema with particularly strong connections are likely to follow, even if these rules are societally constructed rather than individually formed (to the extent that these two constructs can even be isolated). Under what circumstances would an individual, such as Risu, specifically negate the necessity of ritual, the need to act out Hinduism, particularly in relation to a *mūrti*, and then, simultaneously, feel the need to adhere to certain ritual actions? In what ways do individualism and ritual compulsion overlap and interact? The ways in which Risu practices are implicit and internalized and he only acknowledges that internalization to some extent. That said, it is the promise of individualism, the insinuation that he can make what is implicit explicit and thus, bring it into the realm of belief, which comforts him. Thus, in this context, individualism is a measure of the flexibility of engagement with that which is implicitly internalized, acknowledging that different parts might be differently motivating for different people.[111] Though the perceptibility of this individuality is infinite, if a person has internalized the relevant schema, the possibility for individual interpretation is likely quite rigid without breaking the confines of that schema or otherwise reducing the strength of relevant connections.

Coming to the U.S. and Hinduism through the Life Course

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[110] The only available widespread American schema for *mūrti*s is that of idolatry, which is negatively tinged. Given that young American Hindus likely grew up seeing *mūrti*s in their homes, I would assume that they are less likely to adopt this understanding.
[111] This assumes that some Hindu schema for relationality exists to begin with, particularly for young American Bengali Hindus.

Though I initially thought that coming to the U.S. would create a significant disjuncture in practice and understanding of Hinduism for those who moved, it is difficult to disentangle simply growing older, and particularly attempting to transmit traditions to younger generations, from any real ramifications of the geographical switch. If anything, people who move abroad take more advantage of the fact that Hinduism— as they perceive it— is a flexible "way of life" rather than a stringent list of rules that must be followed. In fact, one interviewee justified not performing *pūjā* exactly as it should be performed because "everything is not readily available," and, thus, so long as she maintained the right mindset, a pure mindset, lapses in ritual particularities were permissible. Such understandings of what one can and cannot do in Hinduism lend themselves to taking up Hinduism as a way of life, as individual and flexible, in the diaspora.

Living in America provides justification for Hinduism as a way of life, but, moreover, can be the basis of decisions to directly defy particular Hindu tenets. In relation to eating beef, one interviewee noted: "It's okay, God is not going to be upset with me because he knows I'm in a foreign country. And it's okay, if I can eat a lamb, I can eat a cow also." This interviewee eats beef and, while she never grew up doing so, and, while she notes that her grandmother would deem her un-Hindu if she had known about this, she still feels justified in her actions because she's in a foreign country. Hinduism is so much a way of life, so much a set of values, that the particularities blur in a foreign context; mingling of the foreign way of life with the Hindu way of life is what takes precedence over maintaining anything that is particularly "Hindu," such as not eating beef. Hinduism remains a way of life, but what it means as a way of life changes with context. As D'Andrade (1992a) and Strauss (1992) note, "life conditions are related to the degree to which schemas can realistically function as goals."

295

This logic of the importance of conditions is not dissimilar from the logic espoused by Bengali Hindus in India. They, too, act in Hindu ways, but the difference is that they do not need to incorporate an additional American way of life. To this end, the particularities of a way of life change, but the fact that Hinduism is understood as a way of life remains consistent across contexts. Simultaneously, however, what exactly a Hindu way of life is becomes complicated, given that the broader Hindu milieu does not exist in the U.S.; determining what a Hindu way of life in America should looks like necessitates including other American ways of life, but also the omission of certain aspects of an Indian Hindu way of life. Srijata explained that growing up, her parents went to temple after temple. Each family vacation they had was effectively a pilgrimage. However, "I think since I've been in the United States, and I have been away from my parents, and I'm leading my own life, since then I haven't really kind of gone to the temple or definitely never had a *pūjā* at home, and very rarely have gone to a temple or prayed." In the U.S., as many interviewees pointed out, there are just fewer temples. It is harder to get to them, and, for an individual coming to the U.S. to study and possessing limited resources (i.e. most interviewees), it was nearly impossible to go to temple regularly even if they desired to, potentially leading to the realization that "I stopped going and I kind of started realizing that I really don't need to." When put in a position where it is difficult to actually act as a Hindu would act, what it means to live as a Hindu changes, and changes what the individual deems important. As seen previously, Hinduism can be encapsulated into certain tidbits, practices, instances and, thus, for the second generation, Hinduism is less a way of life and more often a set of practices.

Faced with a lack of an inundating Hindu way of life, parents often have to actively consider how exactly to communicate Hinduism to their children. For some parents, this means picking up *pūjā* when they've never previously performed *pūjā* in an attempt to inculcate that

296

particular segment of the relevant schema. At least, they think, their children will see what they saw growing up, mimicking some bit of the daily life they absorbed. Despite the fact that children and young adults are rarely charged with performance of *pūjā*, sometimes discussion fills this purpose: "I've been talking to my children more about religion than my dad talked to me. Because when I was there we didn't have the fear of losing anything, you know." In some ways, this parent fears losing something that was never there: an explicit discussion of what Hinduism is. The very act of attempting to communicate itself communicates the previously absent need for such an attempt.

Hinduism is not present in any pervasive way in America; the true loss, it would seem, occurred when the parents left India. A loss for them— a dearth— for their children, is something that never existed. In other words, there is an invisible void present in the lives of Bengali Hindu American children; their parents attempt to fill it in, but children don't even know it's there, or, they do, but they don't understand what should fill it in since they haven't lived Hinduism as a way of life where Hinduism is the predominant way of life. While some parents try desperately to analogize their children's very different lives to theirs, others see the effort as futile: "This is not their fault. We come in this country and they born here. They mix in this country, they are not in the Indian culture. They have to live their way... Why to stop them? They do their own thing."

Though most theorists would agree that we cannot think of culture as bounded, there is no denying that it does, indeed, have a history. The ways in which Hinduism was perceived and practiced in the 1980s when most of my adult interviewees left India is distinct from the way it is currently understood and practiced in India. While the ways in which one performs *pūjā* might not change much, or the festivals celebrated remain consistent, the ethos surrounding Hindu

297

practice can and has shifted in the past thirty years, due to political movements, caste and class reform and struggles, and economic booms, among other stimuli. However, for this group that moved to America, the 1980s are very much still alive: "When we came to this country our time froze, so whatever we learned at that time from India, try to maintain that. And the people in India like their time is the same, it's changing. So they do change, but here we don't change. Whatever we learned from when we came in 1980s, we invented those values here." Thus, the Hindu ideals and practices that parents attempt to teach their children in America serve as a time capsule; not only are parents attempting to fill a void for their children, but they fill it with a permutation of a relational schema that now only exists in their own minds and practices, and solely persists as it has interacted with broader American culture in the interim, with little additional Hindu input besides that gleaned from other Hindus whose time has frozen and the occasional influx of Indian newcomers. To this extent, culture in this case is bounded by time: it is what one had learned and can refer back to as having known at the particular juncture of departure from India. Moreover, even though many of these practices and understandings have changed little, society has changed, the way people interpret and understand culture has changed, technology has changed, and many other factors have aided in governing the embodiment of this particular time capsule.

Given variants in internalization among individuals, including which segments of a cultural tradition are emphasized by various individuals in various ways (D'Andrade 1992a, 41), and given a relatively smaller and more dispersed number of people than might be necessary to reconstitute even a version of what Bengali Hindu culture in the 1980s had been, many cultural remnants remain clichés, or are otherwise altered to adhere to their current context(s). As has occurred in this circumstance, over time, a group of people is likely to adapt its cultural

particularities to solve particular problems (Westen 2001, 40), such as communicating to children, in the process making alterations to the tradition itself. The means of communication established and the nature of the content they impart necessarily determine how widely shared these altered cultural premises can and will become (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 123).

Upon reaching the U.S., many Bengali Hindus had not previously been the person in their family to perform *pūjā*, nor had they been particularly focused on learning about Hinduism. In fact, given that they were the ones to leave, it stands to reason that they might have been less engrained into these societal structures than were their peers who stayed. However, upon coming to the U.S., many felt the need to harken back to the time capsule they'd created, not only to teach their children, but to remind themselves of their own origins and to get them through personal struggles. Sneha explained to me the loneliness of her initial move to the U.S. She was 21, pregnant, had never cared for a baby, and had no idea what she was doing. She detailed a scene of laying her newborn daughter on a table as she read Dr. Spock in hopes that, alone, she would successfully raise her daughter. This important moment in a woman's life course, giving birth, which in India is accompanied by fanfare, celebration, and support, was a lonely one for Sneha. She craved familiarity and companionship. As she explains:

> **S:** My father was an atheist, and for the longest time I was also... I don't have that kind of courage to say that much anymore. At one time I did, not anymore, so I say my prayers...
> **R:** What do you think changed, that made you…?
> **S:** Probably being a mother. And then being over here... being over here and not having anyone else, I guess after I had my children and all that, I lost that courage to say "I don't believe."

Unsure how to proceed, Sneha created Hinduism anew for herself. She might never have performed *pūjā* before, but now she does. She took what she knew from when she left and recreated it in order to maintain some sort of sense of self, even a self — as a practicing Hindu—

299

that she had previously rejected, but which was within the purview of her childhood, given how she'd understood relationality with family members more broadly. Sneha couldn't call home to ask for a recipe, couldn't call to ask a question about raising her daughter. There was a divide between her and her home, and, thus, the way she currently understands what it means to be Hindu sprouted from latent understandings resurrected in times of necessity. D'Andrade (1981, 188) summarizes that cultural programs for action and understanding are rarely well specified, that people typically learn informally through guided discovery, and that, without that guided discovery, people aren't good at learning on their own. For Sneha, there was no guide, and she was left with the unspecified and amorphous understandings she'd internalized: a schema of relationality for how to interact with people. Given an absence of familiar people, she sought out the goddess. Living in her parents' world had not been the only determinant for attempting to reproduce that world (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 113), but doing so set the stage for a world she could co-create on her own and in the absence of verbally interactive others.

The broader world, however, has changed and is changing. The ways in which we maintain relationships have altered: we text, we expect immediate responses, we draft emails, we travel much more. We maintain relationships from great distances which, previously, were more difficult to maintain, and while the nature of the relationship must also change with the medium of its construction, a more immediately iterative connection exists today where there previously was none. Not only is the U.S. changing in these ways, but India is as well. It is now possible not only to maintain contact with a friend in India, but also to talk every single day. Sneha describes this shift:

> And in those days, the phone calls were much more expensive... I would call my mother once a month, maybe. Now with WhatsApp, and Skype, and everything else, it's constant. Just the other day I was talking with my friend, who I've known actually since we were both born. We were friends in India. Just before going she had said, "What's

going on, you have been quiet for a few days?" So we have been going back and forth a lot. There were…nothing was there.

In the interim between the most populous influx of Indian immigrants to the U.S. and now, Hindus in the U.S. have created their own brands of Hinduism. As previously seen, Durgā Pūjā, while the performance of the ritual itself was the same, brought with it significantly different connotations, organizations, and executions in the U.S. The way people thought about Durgā Pūjā itself was different, as was the way that different groups of people reacted to experiencing similar ritual performances in two different contexts. Even when there are not excessive phenotypical differences in the ways in which a ritual is performed, the ways in which individuals interact with these phenotypes is different in India than it is in the U.S., and both instantiations change with time. Sneha discusses talking to her friend on a daily basis, maintaining a relationship. This is made possible through the same apps that allow for the relationality of Durgā between the U.S. and India. These increased forms of communication allow for a coalescence of the Durgā Pūjā that has evolved in the U.S., largely based on 1980s versions of Hinduism, with an ever-expanding volume of information about what Durgā Pūjā is like in India today. Not only are relationships maintained, but so is the performance of Hinduness.

In effect, with the advent of these technologies, the time capsule of Hinduism in America has been opened. No longer is immigration a life event which halts expressions of Hinduism in one stage— that of being a child and merely observing— while ushering in the ways in which one must act as a Hindu adult. Instead, one can still observe, albeit likely from a distance. In addition to the continual transmission of data back and forth across oceans, people also travel. Sneha now owns a flat in New Alipore, Kolkata, and goes back at least once a year. Silence has turned to constant feedback. As Hinduism in America coevolves today in conversation with

Hinduism in India, it is reminiscent of finding a time capsule from an alternate reality, or at least one potential version thereof. Adults who have lived in America for years are now viewing the current day practice of Hinduism in India and they can make discernible claims about how it has changed. Simply through this knowledge, it might affect how they themselves practice Hinduism, hence the emerging tension between sitting attentively and taking pictures of Durgā; there are differing understandings of what it means to maintain relationality, and anxiety emerges from conflict regarding which ways of interacting with the deity denote a closer relationship with the deity. The maintenance of this relationality pertains to relatives, but also pertains to Hinduism. It's now much easier to keep in touch with the immersion of home, with a Hindu way of life that is itself inundated with American culture through media, economies, movement of people, but not through geographical overlap. In other words, American Bengali Hindus have a window looking out onto the space of Hinduism, the geography of India itself, through a trade of images and voices that seemed impossible even ten years ago.

In both circumstances, these changes are incremental and largely affect everyday practices. These small changes accumulate to affect migrants, those left at home, and others within the transnational networks of these migrants. The resulting relationships formed within and between these groups "may contribute significantly to broadening, deepening or intensifying conjoined processes of transformation that are already ongoing," (Vertovec 2004, 972). As Super and Harkness (1981, 84) summarize LeVine: "All cultures, including our own, are in the process of disappearing," which we can gloss as changing, potentially slowly, but consistently. Moreover, what is possibly confusing for Indians and Indian Americans is the continual feedback from each place to the other via media— feedback that communicates something from one place to another, but that thing communicated, while interpreted as a representation of real life in the

other location, is likely also dramatized, essentialized, and/or edited. Thus, it is difficult for learners in either context to fully keep track of what is real in joint yet independent versions of what the world is like (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 78).

Thus, while Bengali Hindus in India and Bengali Hindus in America might feel as if they're getting a fuller view of each other due to media innovations, and while they are to some extent, the view is necessarily selective and fractured. As Geertz (2000) notes, even before the age of WhatsApp, the world scene was "growing both more global and more divided, more thoroughly interconnected and more intricately partitioned, at the same time. Cosmopolitanism and parochialism are no longer opposed; they are linked and reinforcing. As one increases, so does the other." As this process occurs, people and communities in each location change and alter, affect and are affected, simultaneously and iteratively, but so do the confines, structure, and potential effects of what Parish (2014) calls the "space between persons," the concession of meaningful interaction that occurs when anthropologies seek to acknowledge selves. Media play within this space, and it is this space, particularly in its relationality as it pertains to Hinduism, that shapes how each individual or group might come to understand themselves and those with whom they communicate and interact across the world.

What exactly this means for the practice of Hinduism in America is unclear. As the 1980s version of Hinduism becomes more quickly and meaningfully unbounded with the impact of globalization, as young Hindu Americans travel back and forth to India in search of their roots, as they follow blogs and Instagram accounts generating from India, as they see their parents potentially incorporating contemporary Indian understandings of what Hinduism is into the ways in which they themselves think, how will this affect young Bengali Hindus' lives and understandings of what Hinduism is? While this generation is simultaneously the farthest from a

continual and immersive Hindu experience, digitally, as digital natives, they are also the closest

to it. They have the potential to absorb contemporary Indian Hinduism in a way that their parents

never did, and to balance that understanding with what they learned growing up. Moreover, they

have a means to transmit to India the ways in which Hinduism is understood and practiced here.

Perhaps most importantly, there is room for a potential rise in the number and intensity of

relationships between the two places— cousins to cousins, aunts and uncles to nieces and

nephews. The ways in which these connections influence how Hindu identities as well as

individually constituted schemas are constructed and maintained remain as of yet undetermined,

but have the potential to completely transform the mechanisms and expression of Hinduism in

America.

Hindu Stages of Life

Despite the many conclusions I draw based on the differences between generations, it is

entirely possible that the relative disinterest of the younger generation is related not to distaste or

to the changing tides of history, but, rather, could result from the particular developmental

system woven into Hinduism. There is evidence that, in general, people become more religious

as they age (c.f. Hayward and Krause 2015). While this might be the case overall, there is a

relatively stratified and specified system in Hinduism: as one gets older, one devotes more time

to religiosity.

In the *āśrama* system, there are four ways of living that one could adopt. There is

brahmacharya (student), *gṛhastha* (householder), *vanaprastha* (retirement), *saṃnyāsa*

(renunciation). Attested to in multiple texts, sometimes these stages are meant to be lived in

sequence, but one person can also primarily live in one of these stages throughout his whole life, unveiling another layer of potential individual choice. The premise here is that in each stage, after each rite of passage, an individual has a different dharma, a different way in which he is obligated to interact with the world. In the first stage, *brahmacharya*, one devotes his life to learning. In *gṛhastha*, the householder stage, an individual gets married and starts to create a family. In *vanaprastha* one is supposed to take up the mantle of *pūjā*-doer and devotee. After one's children have grown, and once one no longer has responsibilities for supporting a family, this is the time to take up the responsibility of *pūjā*. It is possible and even likely that this system constitutes part of an implicit and internalized schema that is woven within Hinduism more broadly.

Only once was this system specifically mentioned to me, and, at that, it wasn't by an interviewee, but rather by another family member who happened to be walking by and offering his two cents. By the time he mentioned it, I had already been wondering whether this particular system of development was subtly at play, even if interviewees weren't discussing it directly. This classical system has uncanny resemblance both to what I heard from interviewees in the U.S. and in India. Multiple interviewees mentioned becoming more involved as they aged: "I think with age we have become a little more religious. It's like a daily prayer, we did not do it when we were younger, we would just leave it to our parents. But gradually, our parents are unable to do it so we take it over. Certainly, I'm more curious about my religion than I was before." When Shubham was younger, there was no need to pray. In fact, *pūjā* was often something he had to sit and watch, waiting for the performance to finish so he could eat the sweets as *prasād*. In these circumstances, no one expects children or young adults to perform *pūjā*, and the children and young adults have no interest themselves. One interviewee mentioned

305

that while watching her mother, she truly did not care about the *pūjā*. She noted: "And as I grew

up – I think the hope is that you don't have to do that. At a certain time of your life you start

spiritual thinking. When you're young, you're going to school, college, getting married, then you

have your career. That's the last thing, you think spiritual thing... children often ignore it, but I

know…You know, my mom wouldn't know when I cared, but it was in the back of my mind."

Though this interviewee had no interest at all as a child, by the time she grew up and was, in fact,

more interested, she remembered what her mother had done and how she had done it. As she

notes, it was in the back of her mind, but wasn't yet ready to surface until she was older.

Another interviewee describes watching her father's daily *pūjā* and the impact it had on

her later:

> And then I would see my father praying, you know, sitting every day, reading the books,
> and then ringing the bell, and putting the flowers and it made no sense to me because
> most of the mantras are in Sanskrit. So I didn't understand; I had no connection with it.
> So I never prayed really. It was much, much later in life, I think, when I turned, around
> when I became 50, around that time. I started noticing that we had this *mandir* down
> there. We had it always, I never noticed it. So then I started going to that, I loved putting
> water on the *tulsī*. And then I started praying to the gods, maybe because of insecurity,
> maybe it was aging, for whatever reason, I started lighting the incense before the gods
> and *pūjā*, and flowers, and doing hare *Kṛṣṇa hare Kṛṣṇa*.

What is particularly interesting in this instance is that this interviewee barely knows how she

started to pray or why. Unlike the interviewees above, who became more interested in Hinduism

as they got older, this interviewee simply fell into practice. She saw the *mandir* in her house,

remembered her father's role, and felt that since he was no longer alive, perhaps it was her turn

to take up the responsibility. To what extent, then, is performing *pūjā*, falling into this role, a

constructed developmental stage that, given certain sociological circumstances, one simply falls

into? Or, perhaps, to the extent that developmental stages are to some extent biologically dictated

and to some extent constructed by societal schemas, perhaps this one is particularly built into how Bengali Hindus understand the process of aging itself.

Is entering a developmental stage something that can be intentional and when is a given stage a necessary part of being human? What happens through volition and what through inertia? When Sajani was a little girl, neither of her parents ever performed *pūjā*, to the extent that they didn't even have a prayer room. She would watch her grandmother and follow along, eventually creating a home temple. Sajani married, moved out of the house, and moved to Dubai for a period. When she came back, she woke in the morning to find her father performing *pūjā*. She was shocked; she knew her father was ill, but had no idea he would begin to perform *pūjā* or that he had developed any type of religiosity. In this instance, moving toward an interaction with a higher power seems an act of inertia: as one becomes older, closer to death, one wonders what might lie beyond and what is beyond our human powers of perception. One starts to make of the world what one wants it to be. In contrast, Shimantini's mother did little by way of *pūjā* when she was young and raising a family; she would just do a quick prayer. By the time I met her, she was intent upon fasting, going to temples, saying prayers, etc. Shimantini explained that when her mother was younger, she not only had a young child, but was also a schoolteacher. In those instances, she did what she could, but once her daughter was grown, she had the time to devote to *pūjā* and prayer. This, in contrast, is an intentional move towards devotion to religiosity. Both individuals veered towards the same stage, but perhaps, for different reasons. To that extent, though, is it possible to separate inertia from volition? Is it possible that a life stage is simply what occurs at a certain point, whether it is helped along by the individual or whether it simply occurs? Given that Hinduism, as my interviewees understand it, is customized for each individual, one must wonder how much of progressing from one life stage to another is

307

individually intentioned and explicitly considered and how much is implicitly internalized, dictated by the course of aging we all necessarily take.

Though most younger Hindus expressed disinterest in *pūjā* regardless of time commitments, there was also the implication that they are extremely busy shaping the ways in which their lives will play out. While they might perform *pūjā* occasionally, likely hoping for success on tests, in no way is performance of *pūjā* their priority, and in no way is it particularly on their minds. As one young interviewee noted to me: "We are always out of the house, like I wake at six and then I go out of house at 7:30 and then I come back at 9:30. So the whole day I'm out of my house, so when do I do my *pūjā*? After my bath I just go." Schedules like these, as well as broader internalized cultural schemas, are what Strauss and Quinn (1997, 73) might call soft constraints, influencing but not entirely determining outcome. It's difficult to tell if young Hindus perform *pūjā* less often because of disinterest, because they have other ways to communicate with a deity, or because they're just busy. Regardless of reasoning, a more pressing question, perhaps, is whether or not this reluctance will persist as they get older, or if they're just in the *brahmacharya* stage of life, destined to one day move towards living as *saṃnyāsis*, concerned only with liberation.

Throughout the lives of these young Bengali Hindus and of their parents, there have been different resources available with regard to expression of a Bengali Hindu relational schema: in India there might be others to take up the mantle, but in the U.S. there likely aren't. This variation of expression of internalization throughout the life course illustrates that schemas are multifaceted, unbounded, and though I have tried to do so here, very difficult to define. Whether or not a schema is internalized is less likely to indicatein a yes or no answer than in a discussion of a set of circumstances, caveats, specific data points, and trajectories; ultimately, the question

amounts to which parts, when, for whom, and how? Though this variation necessarily exists, I have endeavored to elaborate upon certain components which propagate and encourage certain behaviors as wrapped up themselves in the internalization of those components. Moreover, I have attempted to collate nuances to elucidate patterns, but these nuances of variation in internalization are part and parcel of what makes a schema a schema: a conglomerate of many viewpoints.

Conclusion

Through numerous examples, I have attempted to show how consequential the formulation of a relational schema, in whatever form, is for how one navigates and comprehends the physical world and the relationships one forms therein. For Bengali Hindus, this can be observed in how they interact with deities— the actions they take as well as what they espouse. Moreover, the usual character and applicability of these schemas— implicit, internal, acknowledged as such— has consequences for the extent to which they are motivating and under what circumstances. By understanding this motivating schema, which has salience for a particular aspect of being human— interacting with others— it is possible to discern that Bengali Hindus potentially see the physical world quite differently than non-Hindu Americans do on average, accounting for differences in actions which otherwise appear inexplicable.

To be a person, then, to act in the world, is to have some schemas or parts of schemas for which thought and action are never separated; one acts according to how the world is, and how the world *is* is practically beyond question. Unless these schemas become explicit for an individual, they are motivating in ways that person may or may not understand, and that motivation is automatic. Additionally, any onlooker sees some of this behavior, particularly as it relates to ritual, as different and potentially irrational. What is irrational to an observer likely makes a great deal of sense within the context of the schema the actor may have internalized. To that end, at least some measure of this perceived irrationality is the result of a dearth of perspective-taking, and delving deeper would likely unveil a coherent system that, in itself, makes sense if one is thinking automatically in a particular way.

When a motivating schema, such as one for how interacts with, understands, and empathizes with others, differs from person to person, then how the world appears to be, as well as what is motivating in the world, is also potentially different for each person. Additionally, if the operative parts (already difficult to define) of a schema are not necessarily internalized or implicit, that schema can become less motivating. Different parts of a relational schema are internalized for different groups and for different individuals within that group— and also to differing extents. We see this when examining different effects of lacking certain aspects of a Bengali Hindu relational schema: understanding socially requisite behavior as rule-based, asking questions and questioning, and engaging in perceived contradiction.

I'd like to return to the idea that if reality were plotted at sea level, for each aspect of that reality, a particular person's view may be more or less implicit, more or less internalized, and more or less acknowledged as such. To this end, for some individuals, *mūrti* and person are exactly the same— they're both at sea level. An example here is Soma, who insisted that my question about whether god is in a *mūrti* was just dumb— the answer was obvious. Therefore, how to treat a *mūrti* comes automatically, since Soma understands how one should treat a *mūrti* to be exactly the same as one should treat a human. When one stops to consider that there are likely patterns of terrain for different cultural groups, it becomes easier to understand how differing views of reality might occur. In the West, for example, we often understand god as something one believes in or not; internalization, how closely the concept of god and reality as physically perceived are to each other, is not a given. When a person begins to see god in the world— such as helping him to get a job or win a basketball game— the concept of god comes closer to sea level, meaning that god is part of the world and the world is not separate from god.

311

For my interviewees who illustrate what a Bengali Hindu relational schema might look like, the connections that make up this schema are simply "real," and, for them, rational. It's easy for non-Hindu onlookers to misunderstand this. The behavior of Bengali Hindus won't make much "rational" sense if one is steeped in a faraway god whom one endorses or doesn't endorse. Freud, in *The Future of an Illusion*, spends the entire essay describing religion as illusory and untenable, only to caveat: "I know how difficult it is to avoid illusions; perhaps the hopes I have confessed to are of an illusory nature, too." Freud (1961[1927], 53) states, quite simply, that illusions, as they might be interpreted by others, are extremely difficult to avoid; I would interpret this to be an acknowledgement that others might actually see reality differently, might see god as real and as part of the physical world, for example. Perhaps one's view, observing others, is not the others' view, and perhaps what Freud understands to be rational from his perspective is just as illusory.

However, Freud follows up this humble and humbling assertion with another: "But I hold fast to one distinction… my illusions are not, like religious ones, incapable of correction." Freud feels as if religious assertions, such as, perhaps, that god is in a *mūrti*, are illusions that persist as such and resist correction. This is not necessarily inaccurate (leaving aside the pejorative term "illusion"): it is difficult to alter an internalized understanding or viewpoint if that viewpoint is implicit and not acknowledged as internalized. In other words, that viewpoint— or schema— isn't even subject to discussion because it is melded so seamlessly into one's reality— at sea level— that it is unable to be scrutinized without scrutinizing existence itself, at least for those who have internalized it. Freud goes on to explain that his assertions are in fact alterable— they are explicit and acknowledged as internalized. Like God in the West, using whatever reasoning, Freud's illusions are endorsable and dynamic.

312

To compare religion, understood as something endorsed or not, and rationality—

complete with alterable hypotheses— in some way, misses the point. First, rationality is itself

culturally situated: it includes the assertion that evidence is needed to support a point of view.

For Freud, this is an internalized edict, and I would guess that he would have had a difficult time

seeing the world apart from this understanding of rationality, or, at least, I know that I do.

Second, though this system of rationality is internalized for Freud, the fact that this system is

internalized allows for other particularities, such as god, to be evaluated. In other words, while

god as physical for a Bengali Hindu who has an internalized relational schema *is* synonymous

with reality— is internalized— for Freud and others, God is not necessarily internalized, but is

instead subject to the scrutiny of rationality, which is internalized. To that end, the two systems

which bear comparison are an internalized schema about god and god's place in the world and

rationality, which advocates a particular view of the world embedded in reality. It's important to

note that these two schemas are not necessarily mutually exclusive, though it is possible that an

observer would perceive behavior of someone possessing both as in some way contradictory.

Thus, the "irrationality" of worshiping a physical god (or believing in witches, for

example) is to some extent accounted for *by* the notion that thought and action are not neatly

separable for the person inhabiting that thought and action. The existence of a motivating

schema— comprised of understanding as it inspires action and vice versa— *as* internalized

explains how someone with that schema might act, and, therefore, the action which might be

observed. An onlooker might perceive this action as irrational, but that onlooker has his or her

own sets of internalized schemas and does not necessarily possess the internalized schema of the

performer. If he or she did, the rationality of the act performed likely wouldn't be in question.

Many Bengali Hindus understand the world as made up of relationships, and thus, interactions with the physical world become relational. I endeavored to explain this understanding of reality as much as is possible without being raised in a context that would imbue this understanding. Differences between groups of Bengali Hindus in the U.S. and in India and across generations have less to do with nationality or age, and have more to do with whether or not they have had the opportunity to internalize the relational schema in question— including to what extent and including which components. Without a critical mass of connections that make up this schema, distant connections are not so easily made and, thus, the entire schema risks becoming incomprehensible.

Though behaviors did not vary starkly along group lines, what did become clear is that a relational schema is internalized when one is young, and unless one is embedded and immersed in a sizable Bengali community while young, it is difficult to acquire the requisite amount of connectivity for this Bengali Hindu relational schema to become internalized and for divinity as physical to make sense. Many young American Bengali Hindus did not have this requisite connectivity. Thus, because acting in relation to a physical god requires the comprehensibility of this particular relational schema, many young American Bengali Hindus do not treat and revere *mūrtis* the way their parents do. In other words, this group often understands relationships— and how relationships play out in the world— quite differently than do their parents, thus understanding reality itself differently. Theirs is a reality of relationships in which they don't implicitly and internally understand what it means to have a relationship with a physical god.

Given the importance of this relational orientation, traditional prescriptions of how a *mūrti* should be treated are often less important; it's more important to follow the (relational) spirit of the law rather than the (prescribed) letter of the law. This does not mean that one might

not treat a *mūrti* as a traditional text says one should, but, rather, that in order to do so, one has to feel an individual connection with that *mūrti* and, thus, positing that the god is in the *mūrti*, perform what he or she perceives and understands to be the necessary actions— dictated at least in part by the components of a Bengali Hindu relational schema internalized, which is to some extent influenced by relationships present in one's family in addition one's community.

The relational schemas we all possess— at least with regard to relating to the physical world— seem to be set when we are very young and first understanding what is me and what is not me. Though behavior might change as one ages, it is not clear if this is part of the schema itself: that one does *w* at *x* age, and does *y* at *z* age. Many Bengali Hindus who moved to the U.S. found themselves practicing *pūjā* as they became older, for example, and perhaps more than they would have if they had stayed in India. That said, their peers in India also found themselves practicing more *pūjā*. Neither young Bengali Hindus in India nor in the U.S. are much interested in *pūjā*, but it remains to be seen what happens when they grow up. If Bengali Hindus in India do begin to perform *pūjā* as they age, while Bengali Hindus born in the U.S. do not, this would lend credence to the notion that the requisite relational schema for understanding god as physical is in fact predisposed by early and critical experiences.

An additional confounding variable, however, is technology. As technology changes, as we become more globally connected, we are likely exposed to more and more schemas— for how to relate to each other, for example — at numerous different points of our lives.[112] How does this confluence affect which schema for a universally human construct— such as what makes a person, or how we should engage with others— will take primacy? This analysis is limited by

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[112] For example, many Indians I know watched the show F.R.I.E.N.D.S. when they were young; this program likely appealed to them because of the close, and almost familial, relationships illustrated (similar to Indian sibling relationships), but also introduced American understandings of dating which have since become prominent in India.

our very movement through time as well as our ability to anticipate future advances in and alterations of the ways in which we communicate and interact. I resist the notion that we all become the same, but, at the same time, it is likely that we will all have more similar exposure to the same cultural material than we would otherwise, without technology.

Thus, two major conclusions can be drawn. First, there is a multitude of ways in which to understand reality, and the extent of this can be surprising, at least in part because we're all subject to our own prior internalizations of which we may or may not be aware. We create our own rational, and a conclusion about the rationality of an act cannot be made without considering the perspective of the actor. Second, as psychologists know, much of how we understand the world and our place in it comes out of our early experiences. What is striking is the extent to which we can forget this and fail to acknowledge differences in perception which could result in such divergences as perceiving god as physical or ethereal— or somehow both— variations on which might seem so unreal to one person and so obvious to another. Our perspective as onlookers, and our ability to analyze that perspective, dictate what we perceive as "rational" and even as "thought," while a schema much more intuitive and internalized prompts people to merely go about their days.

So on Mahālaya, should we tell the goddess that she can come in, or is she, in fact, here already?

I'm inclined to say yes— both.

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Demographic:
1. How old are you?
2. Where were you born?
3. When did you come to the U.S.?
4. Under what circumstances?

Structured Interview
5. Do you recognize this picture? (see picture of Durgā below)
6. Can you tell me the story that is associated with this picture?
   a. (I will ask questions about anything that was unclear in the informant's narrative, and will then present a full version of the story and ask for comment.)
7. What type of *pūjā* do you perform most frequently?
8. How often do you perform *pūjā*? How often do you come in front of a *mūrti* otherwise?
9. Do you have any deities in your house? Where are they? Who are they?
10. How do you perform Durgā Pūjā at home? What are the steps?
11. How do you perform Durgā Pūjā in a temple? What are the steps?
    a. (I will pick out steps that the informant details and will ask whether the *pūjā* would be successful without those steps. I will then provide a detailed version of *pūjā*, described above, and ask for comment.
12. What should you not do in front of *a mūrti* or while performing *pūja*?
    a. (I will ask questions about their answers that are similar to the questions below.)
13. What does it mean for a *pūjā* to be successful? What is the goal?
14. What would happen if you didn't take your shoes off in front of the *mūrti*? Would the *pūjā* be successful?
15. What would happen if you were intoxicated in front of the *mūrti*? Would the *pūjā* be successful?
16. What would happen if you ate meat before going in front of the *mūrti*? Would the *pūjā* be successful?
17. What would happen if you performed *pūjā* before bathing? Would the *pūjā* be successful?
18. What would happen if you wore dirty clothes in front of the *mūrti*? Would the *pūjā* be successful?
19. What would happen if the *mūrti* were kept in a bedroom or an unclean place?
20. What would happen if someone threw out or damaged a *mūrti*?
21. (for women) What would happen if you performed *pūjā* while menstruating? Would the *pūjā* be successful
22. What else might disturb a *pūjā*?
23. What do you think about possession?

Semi-Structured Interview
24. Are you a vegetarian?
25. Tell me about your relationship with Hinduism.
26. What life events have altered your relationship with Hinduism or made you think about Hinduism differently?

27. Tell me, beginning with your childhood, how you've felt about *mūrti*s, how you've treated them, regarded them.

28. How do you conceptualize god?

29. Is there a god in the *mūrti*?

30. What does it mean to be Hindu?

32. How would you answer these questions for each family member?

32. How do you think growing up Hindu has contributed to who you are? (After, substitute Hindu with: Indian, in the U.S.)

Figure 9: Image of Durga shown to interviewees during interviews

Appendix 2: Additional Discussion of Theory

Ritual

Bell (1992, 19) points out two models that scholars have used to understand ritual: in the first model, theorists separate thought and action, often taking the latter as in itself thoughtless and even meaningless (Staal 1979). For example, Smith (1912) takes ritual as more primitive than myth, privileging correct belief over collect practice. Geertz (1973) with his discussion of religious symbols as primary, also falls into this category. In the second model, thought and action, still assumed to be dichotomous, are reintegrated. For example, in Durkheim's (1965) work on cults, he discusses ritual as the necessary interaction between collective social life and individual experience and behavior (20). Parish (1994) understands ritual in a similar way to Durkheim, understanding it as a mediating device between the self and society, but, in the process, as self-making (235). Bell (1992, 21) summarizes this second model as follows: "ritual is first differentiated as a discrete object of analysis by means of various dichotomies that are loosely analogous to thought and action; then ritual is subsequently elaborated as the very means by which these dichotomous categories, neither of which could exist without the other, are reintegrated." Asad (1993) concurs, indicating that anthropological inquiries into ritual have also perceived it as "public and legible," while constituting feelings as "private and ineffable," (72). When theorists (e.g. Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Turner) attempt to reconcile these two, ritual is "essentially a species of representational behavior," (Asad 1993, 60). In so far as understanding ritual as a text to be decoded, Geertz (1972) and Ricouer (1971) agree. Ritual itself was seen to fuse the lived world and imagined world within a set of symbols (Bell 1997, 27). This specification negates the possibility of investigating ritual qua ritual.

Arguing against the assumption that religion is disjoint from reality at all, Geertz (1973) proposes that religion must "affirm something" objective about the fundamental nature of reality, even if it is misguided. Spero (1992) takes this notion further, understanding components of religion as illuminating a particular piece of reality; he argues that one should understand a personal relationship with divinity to be a part of psychological reality rather than as merely a part of psychological structure. Thus, the way that person conceives of reality dictates that particular relationship and vice versa. This would imply that the instantiation of this relationship, as an object of analysis, illustrates a dialectic between objectivism and subjectivism (Bourdieu 1977)— observing what one sees to be occurring versus understanding what an actor perceives to be occurring, his or her version of reality. While an observer attempts to understand a subject's "most salient thoughts, feelings and intentions," through observing that subject's involvements with the world (Hollan 2001, 55), without adequate caution, it is perhaps more likely that these observations "illuminate the [observer's] distinctive strategies of theoretical practices" (Bell 1992, 80) rather than any subject-focused dynamic that takes thought and action as a priori joined. Thus, due to the effect of this observation, this attempt at denoting another's reality while potentially unintentionally reflecting one's own, Asad's understanding of religion's definition as "itself the historical product of [theorists'] discursive processes," (Asad 1993, 29) likely applies to the definition of ritual (given it is a constitutive part of religion) as well.

Through taking thought and action as fused, and schema and person as always already linked, I hope to address these persistent dichotomies and to explore potential ways of understanding how schemas of differing underlying content, linkages, and applicability can account, first, for different renderings of reality which are equally valid, and to explain why, despite the initial appearance of contradictions, these differences are not mutually exclusive and,

in fact, give us a clearer picture of the myriad ways in which an individual can interact with and act within his or her world.

The idea of relationality in terms of ritual is far from new. Durkheim saw ritual as mediating between the individual and community, providing the connection between the two (Asad 1993, 74-75; Durkheim 1965). However, he proposed that the symbolism, the meaning, was housed within the rites themselves— the social discourse as opposed to the meaning attributed to it. To that end, the ritual informs and structures the individual as opposed to the opposite or to an iterative process. However, as Strauss and Quinn (1997) attest: "Social discourses do not directly construct psychological realities," (33), and, to that end, culture is both public and private (256). They continue by stating that social life results from the interaction of private understandings and public objects (45), agreeing with Bourdieu (1977) that, indeed, "extrapersonal culture is the product of intrapersonal culture," (46). Additionally, Durkheim doesn't necessarily account for particular relationships between individuals and the types and categories of those relationships, both in themselves and as they might constitute sociality more broadly. I contend that the qualities of relationality as a worldview are necessarily mediated at the level of individual relationships, which then iteratively reconstruct the worldview itself.

It is additionally important to consider that these types of relationships, while resembling each other globally, are necessarily culturally situated and constituted. Dumont (1980, 1983, 1986) notes that, in South Asia, the social whole has value while the individual does not; he emphasizes holism as a preeminent value. While Dumont's view is somewhat extreme, Shweder and Bourne (1984) also contend that the social whole in India might have more value than does the individual. Similarly, in his thoughtful study of Newari personhood, Parish (1994) stipulates that Newaris, also South Asians, understand themselves with regard to a "web of relatedness,"

(186) and interdependency as well as merging are highly valued; under these circumstances, Newaris do not feel as if self-identity is at risk (while others might), and, quite to the contrary, in relationships one discovers who exactly one is (129).

Of particular note within relationships is kinship. Bloch (2012) discusses this type of relationship as having a "sub-conscious, non-negotiable core of meaning" which itself affects historical process and discourse (168; c.f. Bloch and Sperber 2002). In India, these relationships are quite often hierarchical, with the superordinate person required to protect the subordinate person in specified ways, and, additionally, the subordinate person must take into account the needs and interests of the superordinate person (Shweder et al. 2003, 145). A self understood as hierarchical is differentiated and defended against the possibility of merging into holism (Parish 1994, 170). Thus, in Newari families, there are two types of relationships: hierarchical relationships, such as between a parent and child, connote a sense of duty, and empathic relationships subvert hierarchical relationships and promote oneness and warmth (176). One relationship can and often does have both of these components. While in North American society the self is valued more highly than is family (Robbins 2012, 122), in South Asia, the "self is founded in relatedness within the family," (Parish 1994, 176), which is often made up of warm yet hierarchical bonds.

Parish points out that, in South Asia, hierarchical love between parent and child is based on reciprocity and implies a natural moral identity. Your mother nourishes you quite literally and your father provides for you; thus, you must offer your parents obedience, respect, and deference. To the extent that parents have created a child, they experience that child as part of themselves, but also as a derivative of themselves, someone they must guide and who must afford them authority (Parish 1994, 135-137). Moreover, siblings are linked to you because the

received the same nourishment and care (166). To this extent, brothers and sisters are relative equals (though with the distinction of birth order) and are treated as such (167). Just as a photo of a deceased elder might be put on a *mandap* (the elevated platform on which *mūrtis* are placed in a *pūjā* room) with pictures of deities, as he has become their equal in earned respect, siblings are seen as on the same plane as one another. Thus, kin terms have "a core of culturally constructed, highly affective, and directive elements as well as a representational aspect," (D'Andrade 1984, 101).

Thus, these relationships are likely highly emotionally laden as well as motivating (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 103). It is in this hierarchical, familial, and relational way that Bengali Hindus see each other, but also how they see deities. While such a notion has to some extent been proposed before, familial and divine relationships have been taken as analogous, when, I contend, this notion of structured relatedness is quite literally and specifically understood and enacted in the ways in which an individual engages with a *mūrti*; to the extent that there is life in a *mūrti*, the *mūrti* isn't treated *as if* it were a relative— the *mūrti* is treated *as* a relative. It is this type of relationality which propels much of the predominant Hindu way of life, as well as how people understand divinity and each other.

Universals and Particularities

Determining what exactly is "human" is, of course, quite a task. What we do know, however, and what is taken as a given within cognitive anthropology, is the fact that cultural programs tend to take forms that fit well with "the natural capacities and constraints of the human brain," and, thus, when these forms exist in multiple societies, there are likely common psychological factors to be found (D'Andrade 1981, 182), thus reinforcing the entwinement of

that which is cultural with that which is potentially natural. To this extent, it is likely that much

of human tendency is innate, despite anthropologists' usual conclusions (Strauss and Quinn

1997, 79) and that it is likely necessary to postulate universals in order to understand cultural

variability (81). Thus, while schemas are "flexibly adaptive" rather than "rigidly repetitive," (53)

there are likely some core characteristics that do not (often) change and, due to the relatively

stable character of the external world as well as to the relatively stable ways in which humans are

humans, biologically and psychologically, schemas also remain relatively stable within a

particular person or group (6). However, one approach to acknowledging cultural difference

while searching for universals is to aspire to uncover them, but never to quite arrive, to the extent

that what the universal is, in the seeker's view, perpetually malleable. In doing so, we can

acknowledge that "universal aspirations must travel across distances and differences, and we can

take this travel as an ethnographic object," (Tsing 2005, 7). Because of this movement and

perpetual translation, or friction, as Tsing calls it, these universals might exist to some extent, but

will never be fully the same everywhere.

For example, different groups might have different causal ontologies— a person's or

people's ideas about orders of reality (Shweder et al. 2003)— but these ontologies might differ

for different people and groups along different spectra. Looking at these causal ontologies with

regard to morality, defined as relating to transgressions of obligation, can "illuminate some

aspect of mind, experience, or society," and can, moreover, allow us to understand varying

moralities cross-culturally (Shweder et al. 2003). Within Shweder et al.'s three moral causal

ontologies— ethics of community, autonomy, and divinity, Oriyas, a group geographically close

and culturally similar to Bengalis, tend to emphasize the importance of several themes echoed by

my interviewees: social order; duty; sacred order; hierarchy; purity, sanctity, pollution;

truthfulness, honesty, trustworthiness (436). Though all cultural groups likely ascribe some

salience to an ethics of divinity, Oriya Hindus ascribe relatively more, thus indicating that, for

them, "godliness permeates or interpenetrates the human social order as well as the natural world

and interacts with both, and that there are important communicative exchanges going on all of

the time between persons and the realm of divinity," (147). Because this is the case, such that

secular and sacred are less starkly separated, a breach of a domestic matter can be "rationally

regarded as a kind of desecration," (Shweder et al. 2003, 146). To this end, due to the way that

Hindus might acknowledge an ethics of divinity, their understandings of different cultural

spheres of life can be necessarily altered. This category of ethics, for which different cultural

groups hold clusters of schemas, and which is visible cross-culturally, manifests rationally,

though differently, under differing cultural circumstances.

These potential universals, however they may manifest, reside within specific people,

rather than existing as abstract Platonic ideals untethered to real-world occurrences (Straus and

Quinn 1997, 87). Thus, for each individual, the schemas bolstered by a universal are constructed

from idiosyncratic experience (122) and are subject to the vicissitudes of intrapersonal and extra-

personal processes as they come to represent how that particular person comprehends cultural

particularities (253). Thus, as Geertz (2000) stipulates, in order to understand the general, it is

necessary to address "instances, differences, variations, particulars— piecemeal, case by case."

He argues that doing so will both uncover variation as well as general affinities, each

illuminating one another. Shweder (1992, 51) moreover contends that doing so illuminates what

reality *is*, rather than obfuscating it by presuming others hold irrational interpretations of the

world. Thus, this study has as its goal to go beyond positivism— understanding seeing *what I see*

as believing, with no other recourse to experiencing what is real— to rather attempt to see as

others do, in order to understand what they say or otherwise show that they hold true. Assessing overlaps or lack thereof leads to a clearer picture of what might actually be "real" even beyond seeing-is-believing observation, and, more importantly, under what circumstances that reality exists as such in the understanding of a given person.

Schemas and Motivation

Strauss and Quinn (1997, 6) note that a given person's interpretation of an object or event, or, in other words, the way that person begins to conceive of some aspect of reality "includes an identification of it and expectations regarding it, and, often, a feeling about it and motivation to respond to it." To this end, as D'Andrade (1984, 89) also argues, cultural meaning systems, made up of specific particularities, can be directive as well as evocative. Thus, meaning embedded within these particularities and systems is simultaneously public as well as cognitive-emotional (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 13), and these systems create "particular senses of reality," (D'Andrade 1984, 116). For any given individual, how things are— the ideational— is fused with how we feel about them- the affective- and to separate these two makes use of an analytic that may not fully represent the object under consideration (D'Andrade 1981, 192). Another way to state this is that the signifier is not separate from that which it signifies, nor from its own evocation (Bloch 2012). For me, a non-Hindu, a *mūrti* might be just an object in the world, but for a Hindu, a *mūrti* and the idea of a *mūrti* come complete with certain understandings about reality: that god is in the *mūrti*, that one should revere god, that revering god connotes a particular type of relationship. This understanding is in many ways affective, and, moreover, I would postulate that schemas often become motivating precisely because they're affective. These

schemas become affectively laden through experience (Strauss and Quinn 1997, 101). The extent of this affectivity can also imbue durability (89).

Previous scholars have understood innate drives as primary motivators. However, D'Andrade and Strauss (1992, 33) contend that there are in fact top-level schemas which function as goals and drives, and affects activate these goal schemas; acting on these goals is then mediated by role and context. Strauss additionally cautions that not all high-level cultural schemas are similarly motivating, nor do they connote similar goals under all circumstances (Strauss 1992, 199). Though D'Andrade (1992a, 30) perceives some schemas— birthdays, memos, water glasses— to instigate "almost no actions" unless they interact with other higher level schemas, this understanding of lower level schemas can be teased apart in a few ways. For example, a goal schema of being thirsty might instigate action in relation for a schema of what to do with a water glass. What D'Andrade likely knows but does not state specifically is that first, many people might take the same action, but the goal of performing that action itself might differ regarding the schema involved and from individual to individual. Additionally, under some circumstances, it is the character of these lower level schemas— at the level of the individual— which might stipulate those goals that ultimately lead to the same action. To that extent, these lower level schemas themselves contribute to, or do not contribute to, particular goals based upon the affect and assumptions associated with them. A simple example, which I will return to, is going to a restaurant but not intending to eat. For one person, a restaurant might be primarily associated with consuming food, while for another person, it might be primarily associated with socializing, and it is important to consider that the same person might execute the same action— going to a restaurant— for different reasons under different circumstances, but that there will likely be a trend to each individual's behavior and to a similar group's behavior overall. A more

complex example of this relates to a *mūrti*: when and whether that *mūrti* contains or in fact is a god can be differently motivating under different circumstances and for different people, and may or may not relate to why someone performs *pūjā*.

Many theorists (c.f. Higgins et al. 1981) bring up the question of whether a schema is a content-free processing structure or a content specific knowledge structure. As D'Andrade also points out, some critics of schemas as motivating claim that if a schema is knowledge-based— containing procedural or content knowledge— the schema is not itself a thing which has force or power (D'Andrade 1995, 239). I have described schemas as frameworks that are perpetually populated and repopulated with novel data that may affirm or atrophy pre-existing connections. I would venture that it is a dangerous proposition to separate processing structure from knowledge within the framework of that structure; in reality, the two iteratively adapt as the individual collects more experiences, linking to and between specific content knowledge and ways of processing that knowledge, thus making up a full system of how an individual interacts with the world. If this is the case, that schemas contain both knowing something about the world and also a means to know how to interact with the world, it would follow that they eventually facilitate the interaction itself. Thus, knowing something (affectively) about the character of a *mūrti* -as-god, knowing what it means to anthropomorphize, and the act of anthropomorphizing are all part of a broader schema, and, additionally, are to some extent inseparable. What becomes operably differentiable is what it means to know and/or what it means to internalize knowledge.

Morality

The role of morality in relation to schemas is a complicated one. There is a running debate regarding whether ethics, values, morality, etc., are located within everyday actions

(Lambek 2010, 2), as related to some form of psychology, or are imposed from above. Csordas (2013, 524) notes that Fassin (2008; Fassin and Rechtman 2009) approaches morality as a social domain, or, as similar to Geertz's understanding of morality as a cultural system. This implies a system of symbols potentially distinct from anything psychological or social. Csordas also details Kleinman's (1999, 2006) and Parish's (1994, 2008) understandings of morality as "a form of consciousness, the seat of which is the self embedded in the context of a collective moral sensibility," which contrast with that of Fassin. This understanding, in combination with Shweder et al.'s (2003) stipulation of a moral causal ontology, is more in line with what it might mean for a schema to be moral.

If a moral causal ontology governs obligation— in so far as we should or shouldn't perform certain acts— there are two ways to comprehend this ontology within a schematic model. First, one could perceive it as governing all other schemas, or as the ultimate goal-schema. To that extent, it would be always activated, and would perpetually impose a particular rubric from above. This would fall in line with Fassin's and Geertz's view of an overarching symbolic system. However, in addition to the problematic notion of reification of objects present in this understanding, there is also the fact that individuals do not tend to perpetually experience lower level schemas in relation to a higher moral order; when I drink water out of a glass, under everyday circumstances, I do not engage in a quandary about whether that is moral. However, this is not to say that this isn't a *possibility* as it was in Shweder's (1992) example where a water glass connoted danger and harm for a small child. Thus, utilization of any given schema is not necessarily filtered by some system above which dictates morality.

More plausible in this circumstance, however, is the extent to which moral understandings of interacting with the world and the consequences thereof are embedded within

329

schemas, within an ontology, within the way a person sees the world. To that end, the combination and coalescence of the glass's function, the circumstance, one's role, and many more variables constitute and define an appropriate action. Some of these variables will be more embedded and entrenched than others— not all children would be so careful with a glass, or realize that there is a difference between an adult handling a glass versus a child handling a glass— and thus these internalized connections are stronger, and, perhaps, more likely to be motivating or to be attached to a more goal-oriented schema. Taking this gestalt instance as an object of analysis, one can separate out different nodes of connections— glass, child, adult, school, thirst— and can attempt to understand motivations through a particular action by understanding the varying levels of internalization of affect aligned with these constructs. Doing so unveils the role of a particular understanding within a particular schema, as well as its strength.[1] To that end, when mapping morality onto schemas, it might make sense to see morality as motivated and obliged behavior and thought resulting from particular contextual cues, circumstances, and an individual's patterns of ontological understanding, rather than as imposed from above.

Though many of these models of morality are likely instilled while young, there are certainly instances where an individual must make a choice based on data that is not discernible within any recognizable pattern of understanding. Robbins (2012, 118) stipulates the problem of what people do when confronted with a situation in which no model of morality, no internalized schematic understanding of appropriate behavior, is readily accessible: they must make use of the models they *do* possess, even to the extent that these models conflict. Under these circumstances, morality, or what is "right," may be abstracted, but, still, morality isn't just following rules, but is rather a matter of discrimination and judgement (Shweder et al. 2003, 156;

Shweder and Much 1987). These choices are guided by internalized individual schemas that may rely upon an ethics of autonomy, an ethics of community, and/or an ethics of divinity, attributing various weights to each within a particular calculation based upon societal prominence as well as individual connection with a particular set of ideas. Moreover, emphasis on these particular schemas also varies cross-culturally.

In order to accept morality as varied and varying cross-culturally— as schemas might— with regard to what moral objects are prioritized and, moreover, what is considered a moral object to begin with— one must accept potential "incommensurability between ultimate moral goods," (Cassiniti and Hickman 2014, 254). For example, In the U.S., discourses of autonomy, individualism, and equality are more prominent (Shweder et al. 2003, 141) and in Hindu society, community, divinity, and hierarchy take center stage (Shweder et al. 2003, 141; Parish 1994, 172). While all of these discourses exist in both places, some are more salient in one or another. For example, with regard to emotions, one should not neglect that they are themselves culturally shaped, and to the extent that they fit within a moralized schema, individuals might experience them internally as true or right; in this instance, the execution of socially-dictated hierarchical relationships can be experienced as emotionally salient and correct (D'Andrade 1995, 229). Thus, the idea of "good" is itself part of reality, and the individual strives for one's internal idea of good to be in concert with what is real (Shweder 1992).

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