Navarātri - a woman's festival in what way?

What does it mean that Navarātri is a “women’s festival”? The project investigates this label by looking into domestic and temple celebrations of Navarātri in Kanchipuram, South India.

About the Project

Navarātri is an autumnal festival dedicated to the Great Goddess, and it celebrates the goddess’ triumph over the (buffalo) demon.

Navarātri is often described as a 'woman's festival' in the sense that it is centered upon the powers of the Great Goddess (sakti), powers ordinary women also possess, and because the majority of participants are women.

In addition, many of the festival’s rituals, mainly in the domestic sphere, are centered upon women, and the role women in the temples are also more pronounced than during the rest of the year's ritual cycle.

Through an ethnographic study of this annual festival as it is celebrated in homes and temples of the south Indian temple town Kanchipuram, as well as by studying its textual sources, the project aims at:

- investigating female ritual agency through the case study of Navarātri
- exploring textual and performative differences between Navarātri celebrations in Brahmin and non-Brahmin goddess temples
- investigating the interrelation of mythology and ritual in light of the festival