

Exaltation of the Goddess:
Narrative Expressions of the Feminine Divine in the *Devīpurāṇa*

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Abstract

The present work comprises a translation and study of the *Devīpurāṇa*, an understudied Śākta Purāṇa heretofore untranslated into English. Literary analyses of the narrative portions of the text demonstrate the novel negotiations of gender, power, and authority prompted by the integration of a burgeoning feminine divine within a Brahmanical religious frame. The introductory chapter introduces the text and situates it within its historical context of early medieval Bengal, while chapter one orients the study of the *Devīpurāṇa* within broader trends of Śākta and Upa/Purāṇa scholarship. Chapter two employs an intratextual approach to reveal a milieu which simultaneously exalts the Goddess in her various manifestations but regulates those feminine forces through Brahmanical male oversight; the intertextual analysis of chapter three emphasizes this distinct vision of the Goddess's tenuous position in the *Devīpurāṇa* in comparison with her unequivocal supremacy as posited by other Śākta Purāṇas. The fourth chapter considers other liminal figures in the text, such as Asuras and Vināyaka, to demonstrate how elements of the cultural fringe are ushered into the orthodox sphere in a manner consonant with the incorporation of the feminine divine. Lastly, chapter five, which focuses on the Tantric influences of the text, contends that the *Devīpurāṇa* enjoins the practitioner to praise the supremacy of the Goddess, to delight in her ferocious power, and through esoteric means to direct her feminine energies along fruitful spiritual pathways.

The second part of the dissertation offers a translation of more than one-third of the *Devīpurāṇa*, with attention to the text's four primary narrative arcs.

to Mom and Dad

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Introduction

Storied Goddess(es): Reading the *Devīpurāṇa*

The incorporation of a prominent and powerful feminine divine into a patriarchal worldview such as that of orthodox Hinduism¹ is a curious phenomenon that prompts questions about the role of gender in religious visions and communities. What might constitute the symbolic value of the Goddess's exaltation within Brahmanical Sanskrit literature? Why would a patriarchal textual tradition adopt formidable expressions of the feminine divine in any capacity? Could the Goddess in the context of premodern South Asia represent values that the modern reader would deem feminist in outlook? Though we as contemporary interpreters remain incapable of escaping our own hermeneutic perspectives, we endeavor to respond to such inquiries by situating our analyses within a web of associations that might be plausible for the region, period, and audience. In order to uncover the motivations driving a given textual composition, one must strive for immersion in the contextual worldview which gave rise to it. The study of premodern Goddess worship in South Asia and its implications for feminist symbolism necessitates a full consideration of socio-cultural conditions, historical evolutions, literary corpora, and religious lexicons. To that end, this project contributes to a more precise understanding of the Goddess's symbolic value through a considered translation and study of an influential Śākta text, informed by rigorous intra- and inter-textual analyses as well as an examination of its diachronic historical and synchronic socio-cultural

¹ While the category of "Hinduism" has been criticized as overly reductive and essentialist, I agree with Wendy Doniger that its use can be justifiable, with the caveat that we must recognize the plurality implied by the term. Throughout this study, I will speak of Hindu orthodoxy, understood as a Brahman imaginary centered around Veda, caste and stage of life (*varṇāśramadharmā*), karma, prescribed ritual of Sanskrit texts, and standards of purity/pollution. While no governing authority dictates an established dogma, thereby allowing for variations in the expression of orthodox values, a generally coherent traditional worldview stands as an accepted orthodox center in contrast to the varied peripheries that nonetheless come to be assimilated into the rubric of "Hindu." For an extended discussion on the use of Hinduism as a category, see Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 24-49.

backgrounds. By delving into the religious realms of the early medieval *Devīpurāṇa* and situating its vision within broader literary and cultural conversations, it demonstrates the ways in which the text exhibits inherent tensions arising from the clashing ideals of patriarchal orthodoxy with the prominent Goddess traditions of an indigenous environment that it seeks to incorporate. In striving to propagate and strengthen Brahmanic values, it adopts the widely acknowledged vitality of feminine forces but increasingly compels that power to abide by the authority of Brahmanic male oversight. Situated at an intermediary position between complete autonomy and total domestication of the feminine divine, the *Devīpurāṇa* offers a unique perspective of a tradition in transition. Through its Goddess-focused narratives, hymns, and rites it reflects the contemporaneous context of premodern Bengal and illuminates the Goddess's symbolic significance within the prevailing South Asian premodern worldview. Ultimately, it demonstrates a process of assimilating extra-Brahmanical popular religious life into the overarching umbrella of orthodox Hinduism, and in its measured domestication of female divinity highlights that even powerful goddesses are not necessarily indicative of feminist symbolism. Though one may exalt the Goddess, s/he may also dominate her.

Towards Feminist Theologies

In her seminal work on feminist religious movements, Mary Daly comments on the death of God the Father, not in an absolutist Nietzschean sense, but solely as a patriarchal theological vision. She emphasizes the significance of gendered symbolism for both religious expression and social realities. In a cyclic perpetuation of mutually constituted misogyny, patriarchal culture gives rise to and supports male-dominated religious worlds, which in turn reinforce the existing social matrix. As Daly indicates, "The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and

sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting.”² Such a view accords with the Geertzian perspective of religion, which underscores the fundamental impact of cultural symbols on the dual formation of religious ideologies and social constructs.³ In conceiving of the cosmos as produced and presided over by an omnipotent male ruler, such structure of governance becomes the natural order to be reproduced in the social world of men. The dominant ideology is externalized and eternalized as a static and justified divine sanction; patriarchal structures are normalized in the conceptual emblem of the Father God, who provides the paradigm for male governance. Correspondingly, a dearth of positive female imagery in the divine sphere encourages a cultural devaluation and disenfranchisement of human women as well. Obstruction of the cyclic reinforcement of patriarchal values and male dominated realities calls for a reformulation of religious symbols such that feminist theologies/theologies⁴ may emerge. Moving beyond God the Father allows for (though not necessarily guarantees) a more equitable religious community.

As resolute feminists strive to inaugurate more comprehensive and conscientious spiritual symbologies, many explore alternative religious visions throughout the world as they search for inspiring female divine figures that might offer a corrective to longstanding patriarchal theologies. Its Orientalist brand as a spiritual locale coupled with conspicuous Goddess worship and vibrant iconography marks India as especially attractive with possibilities for inspiring inclusivity. Evidence for the worship of female divinity extends back more than four thousand years, and

² Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 13.

³ Geertz famously defines religion as “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

⁴ “Thealogy” is a neologism which has been coined to emphasize the role of the feminine divine (*thea*) over that of the masculine (*theo*). Feminist movements of the 1970s sparked its development, and it continues to circulate in feminist religious discourse, though to a somewhat limited degree.

contemporary Hinduism continues to offer some of the richest and most vibrant Goddess traditions globally. The South Asian religious world is not only populated with, but pervaded by, significant and powerful female divine entities who demonstrate power and garner respect. Kālī, in particular, has captivated feminists worldwide as a guiding beacon of patriarchal resistance; in reading her imagery as a divine model of female autonomy, strength, legitimacy, and sexual liberty, they have exalted her as the paradigm of a feminist religious symbol.⁵ A surface read certainly would seem to suggest an association of feminist qualities: she stands atop the male god Śiva, emphasizing her dominant position; her naked body shines forth in resistance of patriarchal norms of modesty, covered only by a girdle of severed human arms and a garland of decapitated male heads; in one of her hands she holds a bowl filled with blood and her tongue lolls, eager to lap up the spoils of her ferocious combat (fig. 0.1). But the question then arises: with such divine models of female empowerment, why did the premodern context in which this religious imagery arose not reflect similar values in the social sphere? The label of “feminist” is certainly not one readily applied to the traditional, orthodox Hindu worldview.

Symbols, however, never remain static entities nor do they reflect inherent meanings; rather, their interpretation arises within a rich web of value and association. For Ricoeur, a symbol functions as a “surplus of signification,” which requires a discursive event to reveal correspondences between cosmos, language, and symbolic meaning. He comments: “Everything indicates that symbolic experience calls for a work of meaning from metaphor, a work which it partially provides through its organizational network and its hierarchical levels. Everything

⁵ A quick Google search of “Kālī, feminism,” for example, yields an abundance of discussions on Kālī’s unique character and its implications for feminist values. Sources range from popular forums such as the Huffington Post and personal blogs to more academic scholarship.



Figure 0.1: Sree Maha Kali. 1970s Poster Art, J. B. Khanna & Co. Artist: V. Krishnamoorthy.

indicates that symbol systems constitute a reservoir of meaning whose metaphoric potential is yet to be spoken.”⁶ The symbol resides within a systematic network of other significations and

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 65.

semantic potentials, and as such is constituted only within those shifting meanings. Symbols may be interpreted in an endless number of ways, resulting in diverse – even contradictory – analyses. With religion standing as a cultural expression of a symbolic system, context is key when reading for feminist religious perspectives. While the Goddess may stand as a feminist symbol within a particular cultural context, the mere presence of powerful goddesses within an ideological framework is not necessarily representative of female empowerment. Tracy Pintchman expands on this notion in her exploration of Hindu Goddess traditions as legitimate resources for feminist movements:

Rather, there are potentially empowering interpretations of goddesses that may or may not be articulated or effectively appropriated, just as there are potentially disempowering interpretations of the same goddesses. I would suggest that the reverse is also true: male god symbolism has tended to be sexist and anti-feminist not because it is inherently so but because it has been interpreted and appropriated in ways that make it so.⁷

Pintchman's words underscore the consequence of hermeneutic orientations. While Kālī may stand as a feminist emblem when regarded from a feminist perspective, she may also represent women's subordination when interpreted within patriarchal worldviews. Just as male dominated religious symbols tend to bolster sexist and anti-feminist social norms when read within a cultural context of gender bias, so too may the seemingly powerful female also promulgate discriminatory outlooks when interpreted within that same community.

The scholarship of Usha Menon and Richard Shweder substantiates this fluidity of meaning with regard to female religious symbolism as it emphasizes the influence of cultural and contextual clues in the dialectic unfolding of a symbol's implications. Their research on Kālī's iconography demonstrates that the same image which a contemporary American might read as indicative of

⁷ Tracy Pintchman, "Is the Hindu Goddess Tradition a Good Resource for Western Feminism?" in *Is the Goddess a Feminist?*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 191.

female empowerment and authority is instead understood as compliant submissiveness by Oriya Hindus. In particular, the symbolism is invoked to uphold Hindu family values, with special emphasis on female self-control and self-restraint. In conducting surveys about Kālī's ubiquitous image, Menon and Shweder reveal a nearly unanimous interpretation:

[I]t is female power that energizes the world, but such power when unchecked has disastrous consequences; furthermore, such power can only be effectively checked and regulated from within oneself, through developing a sensitivity to the emotion of *lajjā*. According to these Oriya Hindus, to be full of *lajjā* is to be refined, to be civilized, to be a moral being.⁸

Central to this vision of Kālī as a demure wife rather than a ferocious warrior is an emphasis on her demonstrated *lajjā* (shame, modesty). Rather than view Kālī's lolling tongue as a demarcation of ferocious bloodthirst driven by a fundamentally martial nature, Oriya Hindus understand it as an expression of embarrassment after stepping on her male consort. They relate a narrative that taps into the pervasive notion that without male authority, women – even divine women – become irrationally frenzied and can threaten the social order. According to their version of interpretation, the only means of preventing Kālī from destroying the cosmos during her hysterical outburst is for Śiva to remind her of her role as wife and mother. He lies down before her and when she steps on him – a totally inappropriate act – she's calmed by her shame, which she expresses through the protrusion and biting of her tongue, a regionally common semiotic marker. This example emphasizes that a prominent Goddess-focused religious system is not necessarily indicative of feminist ideals. If we look to the historical incorporation of the feminine divine into the orthodox sphere, we find that the textual developments increasingly serve to domesticate the Goddess. She is brought into the orthodox fold in such a way that her potency may be safely harnessed and made

⁸ Usha Menon and Richard A. Shweder, "Dominating Kālī: Hindu Family Values and Tantric Power," in *Encountering Kālī*, ed. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 87.

religiously productive. While simultaneously acknowledging her power, the patriarchal orthodox system increasingly strives to undermine her authority while domesticating her in accordance with Brahmanical norms of *strīdharma*, behavior appropriate for upright Hindu women. These values are thereby promulgated in extra-Brahmanical communities, which are ushered into Brahmanic society along with their religious symbols.

Bridging the Center and Periphery

Prior to the middle of the first millennium, goddesses had manifest only in subsidiary roles within South Asian religious literature. The material record indicates that the feminine divine was valued in local and indigenous religious life, with pottery and sculpture emphasizing associations with fertility, wilderness, and abundance (fig. 0.2).⁹ The pan-Indic orthodox sphere of the high-caste Brahmins, however, remained resistant to any significant incorporation of goddess figures – that is, until a genre of orthodox literature called *Purāṇa* began to develop in the early centuries of the common era. Renowned for its popularization of orthodox norms, this extensive collection of texts weaves together local religious practice, popular mythology, and orthodox social values.¹⁰ A major outcome of this interaction is the admittance of the feminine divine into the orthodox sphere and her exaltation to theological positions of prominence. The earliest and most influential of these Goddess-focused texts is that of the circa sixth century *Devīmāhātmya*,¹¹ the first Sanskrit text to

⁹ See also Sree Padma, *Vicissitudes of the Goddess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 71-131.

¹⁰ Romila Thapar, for instance, emphasizes the role of *Purāṇa* as an effective intermediary between Vedic Brahmanism and religions of local peoples, with both sides adjusting their religious worldviews in a complex process of negotiation. The Brahmin might usurp the rituals of the local priests or adopt local mythologies and iconography, but he would frame these elements within the Brahmanic religious lexicon. See Romila Thapar, *Early India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 294.

¹¹ Though Yuko Yokochi has argued rigorously for dating the *Devīmāhātmya* in the early eighth century, for the purposes of this study I adopt the more generally held opinion of the sixth century. Regardless, it almost certainly predates the composition of the *Devīpurāṇa*. See Yuko Yokochi, “The Warrior Goddess



Figure 0.2: Lajjā Gaurī, ca. 2nd-3rd century, Maharashtra. American Council for Southern Asian Art Collection (University of Michigan).

elevate the feminine divine to supreme positions of power. The Goddess of this text is fundamentally a fierce warrior whose primary role is the destruction of the demon forces that prove themselves resilient in battle against the male gods. The narratives of the text portray the Goddess almost exclusively in exploits of combat, and its hymns reveal a compelling theology. While the *Devīmāhātmya* strives to connect its conception of the Goddess with the prior Sanskrit tradition through Vedic-based epithets and association with previously established mythologies,¹² this appreciation of the female divine warrior is a strikingly novel notion, likely drawn from extra-

in the *Devīmāhātmya*,” in *Living with Śakti*, ed. Masakazu Tanaka and Masashi Tachikawa (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1999), 71-113.

¹² See especially the works of Thomas Coburn.

Brahmanical religious life. This smooth textual grafting serves to legitimately incorporate non-orthodox narratives and customs into Puranic literature of the Brahmanical sphere. The *Devīmāhātmya* thereby sets a new standard, the touchstone for all subsequent Puranic iterations of the evolving portrait of Devī, the Goddess.

While much Puranic literature incorporates the feminine divine to some degree, particularly as it recognizes goddess figures in their roles as vital wives of the prominent male gods, the Puranic texts which truly elevate the status of the Goddess are more limited in scope. Apart from the *Devīmāhātmya*, which is acknowledged as an integrated portion of the *Markaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, Śākta works are relegated to the category of Upapurāṇa, the so-called “Minor” Purāṇas which have garnered less attention than the male-dominated “Major” Purāṇas. In particular, a group of eight texts, largely of Bengali provenance, constitute what is considered the corpus of Śākta Upapurāṇas: *Kālikāpurāṇa*, *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Devīrahasya*, *Devīpurāṇa*, *Bhagavatīpurāṇa*, *Caṇḍīpurāṇa*, and a second *Kālikāpurāṇa*. Of these, the former four have been translated and have garnered noteworthy academic attention; the latter four, however, beg for further scrutiny. The *Devīpurāṇa* in particular offers significant potential for clarifying issues of Śākta belief, history, and practice. Deemed by the prominent Purāṇa scholar R. C. Hazra “one of the most important of the Śākta Upapurāṇas,” some adherents elevate the text as the veritable foundation for Śākta theology.¹³ Interestingly, this text has not only been largely overlooked by modern scholarship; much of Indian tradition itself has attempted to mitigate its influence, likely because of its Tantric nature. For example Vallālasena, one of the most learned and literary kings of Bengal who studied and wrote on Purāṇa in the middle of the twelfth century, explicitly states in his *Dānasāgara* that he excluded the *Devīpurāṇa* from his lists of the eighteen Upapurāṇas “due

¹³ R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1963), 35-36.

to its treatment of sinful acts.”¹⁴ Such a statement should not suggest, however, that the text did not have a large following or significant influence. Hazra finds that Vallālasena himself, despite his dismissal of the text due to its *vāmabhāva* aspects, repeatedly draws verses from the *Devīpurāṇa* in both his *Dānasāgara* and *Adbhutasāgara*, but fails to include it in his lists of attribution.¹⁵ Scores of other texts, particularly those of the dharma-oriented Nibandhas, also quote from the *Devīpurāṇa*, and in his commentary on *Kumārasaṃbhavam*, Bhagīratha even claims that Kālidāsa based his *kāvya* on the story of Kārttikeya’s birth as given in the *Devīpurāṇa*.¹⁶ Though this is certainly false, it suggests a significant level of prevalence and prestige attributed to the text.

The *Devīpurāṇa* is a collection of material largely dealing with narratives of Devī and instructions for her worship, delivered in over 5,000 verses in 128 chapters. It reveals important information about different incarnations of the Goddess, methods of yoga, Śākta iconography, ritual instruction, temple construction, worship of young girls, gift-giving, holy places, accepted customs, mantras, and much else. As with most Puranic literature, dating of the text is problematic due to the fluid nature of the genre, and certainly remains up for debate. Hazra, who legitimately can be considered the scholar to have studied the text most thoroughly, ascribes the text to the latter half of the sixth century, as do other scholars familiar with it.¹⁷ While much of Hazra’s

¹⁴ R. C. Hazra, “Purāṇa Literature as Known to Vallālasena,” in *Dr. R.C. Hazra Commemoration Volume*, Part 1, ed. Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (Varanasi: All-India Kashiraj Trust, 1985), 46.

¹⁵ Hazra, “Purāṇa Literature,” 43.

¹⁶ *kaviḥ kālidāsaḥ devīpurāṇīyāṃ kārttikeyajanmakathāṃ āśritya kumārasaṃbhavaṃ nāma mahākāvyaṃ idaṃ niravartayat* / See Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2, 67-68. Curious, however, is the fact that the *Devīpurāṇa* includes no mention of Kārttikeya’s birth story, nor does it present the Goddess in her motherly, domestic aspect. This discrepancy may indicate that a portion of the *Devīpurāṇa* has been lost, or that Bhagīratha was referring to another text by that name.

¹⁷ See, for example, Lina Gupta, “Tantric Incantation in the *Devīpurāṇa*: *Padamālā Mantra Vidyā*,” in *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 231-33. Gupta posits a *terminus ante quem* of the sixth century due to citation of the text in Varāhamihira’s *Brhatsaṃhitā*, though she suggests that the text was composed prior to this period. In analyzing its language and practices, she proposes that the *Devīpurāṇa* was one of the earliest Puranic texts, though her evidence is quite presumptive. Furthermore, her reference to citation of the text in the *Brhatsaṃhitā* is unverified,

arguments for an early dating are rather suppositional, his suggestion of the mid-ninth century as a *terminus ante quem* is well founded due to considerable citation of the text in the Nibandha literature. This period as a likely time of composition is supported by its measured incorporation of Tantric attitudes, perspectives, and practices that would have been developing in the contemporaneous social milieu. While not overtly or self-consciously presented as “Tantra,” the elevation of fierce goddesses, emphasis on masculine-feminine unification, incorporation of practices such as *nyāsa* and *vidyā* recitation, legitimization of animal sacrifice and alcoholic offerings, as well as worship of young maidens all speak to relatively nascent Tantric themes. This peripheral aspect of the *Devīpurāṇa*’s extra-Brahmanical religious frame of reference corresponds with the text’s geographic provenance as well. It is most likely a product of Bengal, which remained on the fringe of Brahmanical social convention. It exhibits familiarity with the geography of the region, the majority of the extant manuscripts are located in Bengal, it remains most authoritative there, and Hazra finds that the irregular Sanskrit of the text demonstrates connections with Bengali vernacular.¹⁸ This proposed location would fit with other prominent Śākta Upapurāṇas, most of which were composed in the northeastern regions.¹⁹ Apart from these basic speculations, however, definitive evidence of the *Devīpurāṇa*’s origins is lacking.

nor would such a lone citation necessarily suggest that the text had reached its full composition by that time.

¹⁸ The *Devīpurāṇa* may also offer some interesting insight into non-Pāṇinian Sanskrit. Composed in irregular language that some scholars compare to Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, the text demonstrates high vernacular influence. In his introductory studies of the text, Hazra notes numerous trends in its linguistic alterations, including particular changes to stems, irregular sandhi, alternate gender, variation in declension, adaptation of cases, and modification of verb formation. See Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2, 85-143.

¹⁹ Drawing from certain allusions in the text as well as evidence of a temple to Vindhyavāsīnī, the *Devīpurāṇa*’s prominent deity, Hazra specifies the city of Tamralipta (modern Tamluk) as the likely site of origin for the *Devīpurāṇa*, though this conclusion is rather loosely argued. See Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2, 80 & 90.

One of the most promising aspects of the text is its decidedly localized nature, a feature shared amongst many Śākta Upapurāṇas that allows greater access into regional premodern religious worlds.²⁰ Purāṇa is often characterized as bridging the gap between Brahmanic ideology and local religious practice, but as Kunal Chakrabarti discovers in *Religious Process*, this is particularly the case with the Bengal Purāṇas. Chakrabarti contends that when Brahmans began to migrate to the region more forcefully during the Gupta period, they required some means of establishing and maintaining their socio-cultural power among the existing inhabitants, who had remained peripheral to the Brahmanic sphere. He provides a compelling survey of the gradual recognition of Bengal as a legitimate region for habitation in orthodox literature. In the *Atharva Veda*, Aṅga²¹ is described as a land of *vrātyas*; in *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*, Vaṅga is recognized as beyond the Vedic realm; in the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*, visiting Vaṅga is an offence that requires expiatory rites; and the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* describes the people of the region as speaking an *asura* language.²² The epic and Puranic literature, however, acknowledges the incorporation of the region into the Brahmanical sphere. The *Rāmāyaṇa* explains that prominent royal families of central India were marrying into the realms of the east, and the *Vāyu* and *Matsya Purāṇas* relate a tale of the Vedic sage Dīrghatamas acquiring sons named Aṅga, Vaṅga, and Puṇḍra with the wife of an Asura king.²³ The material record accords with these narrative developments, with copper-plates indicating land grants to Brahmans in the late fifth century in north Bengal.²⁴

²⁰ For instance, in her study of the *Sarasvatīpurāṇa*, an Upapurāṇa from the Gujāra region that now constitutes the state of Gujarat, Elizabeth Rohlman expresses the value of the Upapurāṇas for understanding premodern local religion and its relationship with the broader tradition of Sanskrit culture. See Elizabeth Rohlman, “Geographical Imagination and Literary Boundaries in the *Sarasvatī Purāṇa*,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 15, no. 2 (2011): 139.

²¹ Aṅga, Vaṅga, Gauḍa, Puṇḍra, Rāḍha, Samatāṭa, and Harikela were all regions or kingdoms that were located within the boundaries of modern Bengal.

²² Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 110-11.

²³ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 111.

²⁴ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 113.

In order to foster ideological support, these migrating Brahmans strove to enter into a dialogue with the indigenous populations through the composition and dissemination of a new type of religious text, one which blended Brahmanic normative prescriptions with local religious practice. By developing what Chakrabarti terms the “Puranic Process,” Brahmans granted legitimacy to both Vedic authority *and* local custom. They “...performed the delicate task of widening the scope of Brahmanism to incorporate as many local cultural elements as could be accommodated and to induce as many local people to participate in this interactive process as was considered viable by the local *brāhmaṇas*, without endangering their social supremacy.”²⁵ This dialogic exchange allowed for the assimilation of local populations under the canopy of Brahmanism, thereby generating a more comprehensive social identity while revitalizing the orthodox social vision.²⁶ Such a Puranic process is evident throughout much of the *Devīpurāṇa*, as evidenced by the inclusion of non-Brahmanic popular customs, the incorporation of goddesses with explicit tribal associations, the transformation of local religious festivals, and the extension of religious instruction and practice to women, children, and *śūdras*.

Since its composition, the *Devīpurāṇa* has retained a subtle cachet amongst the learned, especially in Bengal, but has also exerted significant influence on religious practice for people at all levels of society. The text is frequently cited throughout much of Bengal’s Nibandha literature, an extensive genre of works composed in the medieval period, much of it sponsored by royal patronage. These texts, which largely consist of compendia of earlier material, served as digests

²⁵ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 32.

²⁶ Chakrabarti is right to emphasize the dual exchange occurring in this Puranic process. Contra Srinivas, who defined the notion of Sanskritization as the means by which low castes garnered social esteem by emulation of Brahmanic values, Chakrabarti also considers the ways in which high castes too draw from extra-Brahmanical culture: “...the Sanskritic tradition is not a monolithic entity but is involved in symbiotic interplay with many local traditions, so that Sanskritization is a very complex two-directional process, drawing from, as well as feeding into, non-Sanskritic culture.” See Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 82.

on issues of *dharma*. A great number of the most prominent Nibandha composers draw from the *Devīpurāṇa*, often in explication of ritual performance to honor the Goddess, and most frequently in matters of animal sacrifice. Vidyāpati in his *Durgābhaktitaranṅī*, Vallālasena in his *Dānasāgara* and *Adbhutasāgara*, Raghunandana in his *Durgāpūjātattva*, Śūlapāṇi in his *Durgotsavaviveka*, and Hemādri in his *Caturvegacintāmaṇi*, to name a few, reference the *Devīpurāṇa* as an authoritative source for proper rites of Śākta worship. They especially look to the text as a guide for rituals during the annual autumnal festival in honor of Durgā, an aspect of the text that continues to inform its usage as it exerts influence on the worship of the Goddess for contemporary Durgā Pūjā in Bengal, particularly in Kolkata. Modern ritual guides acknowledge the *Devīpurāṇa* as one of the three texts from which rituals have been drawn, the other two being the *Kālikāpurāṇa* and *Bṛhannandikeśvarapurāṇa*. Even those manuals that do not actually draw from the *Devīpurāṇa* claim to do so, further underscoring the authority that the name of the text bears in the region. Though most people do not actually know the contents of the Purāṇa, the educated in Kolkata at least recognize the authoritative heft of the moniker.²⁷ With the increasing popularity and inclusivity of modern Durgā Pūjā – crossing caste lines, financial status, and even religious boundaries – the *Devīpurāṇa* continues to unite communities under the umbrella of a shared cultural vision.

In Pursuit of Diligent Translation

The primary goal of this project is to clarify the vision and impact of a little studied, though significant, Śākta text. As such, it pursues an attentive translation and literary analysis of the

²⁷ This recognition is more than one finds in other regions of India or indeed in American academic circles. Though many contend that the *Devīpurāṇa* is identical with the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, the two are in fact completely distinct texts.

narrative portions of the composition. While some may object to such selective abridgement in favor of a comprehensive consideration of the text in its entirety, the extensiveness of its length and topical breadth prove excessively vast for a sufficiently rigorous singular study. Though a future project will address the ritual expressions of the text, the current translation and analysis focus exclusively on its narrative components. This particular emphasis is driven by a concerted effort to clarify the prominent cultural values concerning gender within the work's context of premodern South Asia. Foundational stories are ripe with possibility for such an undertaking, since, as Bruce Lincoln comments, myth is ideology in narrative form.²⁸ As such, it serves as an especially productive avenue for probing a society's guiding principles and concerns. In drawing together culture, group, and individual, myths are "a crucial resource for collective identity," and they "convey historic, cultural, and practical knowledge while also guarding a *Volk*'s distinctive values – and errors – against forgetfulness and change."²⁹ As a rich bearer of sociocultural meaning, mythological narrative provides an ideal entrée into a society's foundational worldviews, granting an emic perspective through thoughtful analysis. Furthermore, myth is not a fixed entity, but rather dynamically changes in order to maintain correlation between a society's evolving values and the stories it tells about itself. The standard of a myth is a collective, negotiated product that draws from past iterations and provides the platform on which future versions build their innovations. Tracing mythological developments through time correspondingly suggests adaptation in the sociocultural milieu.

The organizational structure of the *Devīpurāṇa* also renders the text particularly well suited for such selective redaction of mythological threads, composed as it is of four primary narrative

²⁸ Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xii.

²⁹ Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 53.

arcs separated by sections focused on matters of ritual and worship. The lengthiest and most detailed narrative, which begins with the first chapter and concludes in chapter twenty-three, relates the rise of an Asura named Ghora (a version of the famed Buffalo Demon) and his ultimate downfall at the hands of the Goddess. Chapters thirty-nine through forty-four tell of the Goddess's defeat of various Asuras and Rākṣasas, while also introducing the elephant-headed Gajānana, a martial incarnation of Gaṇeśa who wields his might in battle. The Goddess is accompanied by her cohort of associated Mothers for the slaying of the Asura Ruru in chapters eighty-four through eighty-eight, and chapters 111 through 119 explain Gajānana's origination as the gods invoke him to fell the Asura Khaṭva. Ritual details, pilgrimage site descriptions, laudatory hymns, and efficacious mantras pepper these narrative sections, though ultimately each cluster is driven by a unified narrative thrust.

Rendering an analytic, precise translation of these narrative portions has guided the initial drive of this project, which subsequently allows the *Devīpurāṇa* to enter into broader conversations within Śākta studies more readily. The task of translation is frequently undervalued in the modern Academy due to a prevailing (and false) view that “mere” translation lacks sufficient intellectual rigor. On the contrary, a successful translation – especially from a premodern language such as Sanskrit – requires a vast store of cultural and historical knowledge, dexterous facility with multiple languages, and a vigilant, critical eye. As Umberto Eco phrases it, “We decide how to translate, not on the basis of the dictionary, but on the basis of the whole history of two literatures...Therefore translating is not only connected with linguistic competence, but with intertextual, psychological, and narrative competence.”³⁰ Translation is not simply a shift between

³⁰ Umberto Eco, *Experiences in Translation*, trans. Alastair McEwen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 13.

languages, but between whole cultural paradigms, all of which must be nimbly negotiated with thoughtful awareness. As a complex art, the project of translation also requires critical decisions regarding style and methodological approach. Should the translation of a ninth century Sanskrit text transform its readers into members of a premodern South Asian audience, or should it update language and content to speak to the expectations of a contemporary reader? In other words, should it modernize or retain archaisms, should it foreignize or domesticate?³¹ For the purposes of this project, I tend to skew towards the archaic, indigenous end of the spectrum as I strive to bring Hindu mythological realms to life in a way that remains understandable to an English-speaking audience, though nevertheless recognizable within its South Asian context as well.

While the language of the text may be transformed, the intent is to enliven the tropes of classical Sanskrit rather than to re-render them into those of the target audience. Nevertheless, the style should elicit similar effects as would have been produced for the original reader/listener. As M. David Eckel proposes, “If the original is meant to be obscure, the translation should be obscure. If the original is meant to be clear, the translation should be clear.”³² In many ways, the genre of Purāṇa is intended to be somewhat archaic and foreign. It frequently and intentionally incorporates outmoded language to lend itself an air of legitimacy and authority; striving to situate itself as a self-proclaimed “fifth Veda,” the word choice and compositional styles are intended to evoke primordial time set apart from the mundane. Similarly, its mythological realms are also deliberately framed as foreign and other worldly. These are not times or locales accessible to *any* reader, whether premodern or contemporary, South Asian or American. Therefore, this English translation should strike the present reader as somewhat removed, its language vaguely old

³¹ See Eco, *Experiences in Translation*, 22-29.

³² Malcolm David Eckel, *Jñānagarbha’s Commentary on the Distinction Between the Two Truths* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 9.

fashioned, and its backdrop somewhat unfamiliar. The aim is to grant access to another world while remaining both faithful to the text's origins and understandable in its present contexts. In fact, such adaptation has guided the development of Purāṇa since its inception – reinvent the old to suit evolving sociocultural contexts. The present version of the text should flow easily for its English-speaking audience while also drawing out the styles and attitudes of the original text. I employ footnotes minimally to clarify points, to provide English translations of words retained in the Sanskrit, to indicate textual variants or emendations, and to provide any background information that might be necessary for full comprehension. While I agree with Eco to some degree and in certain circumstances that the footnote is a sign of weakness on the part of the translator,³³ for such a project that aims to bridge cross-cultural expressions rather than to transmit the verbal and symbolic lexicons of one culture into that of another, the footnote is at times a necessity. The intent is to transport the reader into another world in addition to bringing that world into the domain of the reader.

A prominent issue to address in the translation of this text – which is a complication that plagues much translation of Puranic literature – is that of textual emendation. The increasing interest in Puranic narrative over the past few decades has provoked intriguing debate concerning the methodological approaches of contemporary scholars as they edit and translate this corpus of texts. Early academic projects that focused on Purāṇa were conceived and executed by European Indologists trained in the “scientific” methods of rigorous philology; thus their primary goal was to weed out “corrupted” bits of text so as to reveal the work as it was originally conceived. Such a method continues in India today as the dominant approach to classical Hindu narrative, particularly in regard to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. Modern theorists such as the famed French scholar

³³ Eco, *Experiences in Translation*, 50.

Madeleine Biarreau, however, argue that such rules of textual criticism evolved in the context of written literature, and are therefore inappropriate for Puranic works, which have enjoyed a lively oral tradition.³⁴ For Biarreau, authority lies not within the earliest possible text as conceived by academics, but in the versions of the work as they have been accepted across time and locale. Though imbued with religious significance, the designation of Puranic narrative as *smṛti* (of human origin) rather than *śruti* (of divine origin) has granted a certain fluidity to the texts, allowing reciters some freedom of word choice, verse emendation, etc. The tradition does not conceive of the texts as completely rigid and static, so accepted regional and temporal variations abound. By highlighting the narrative *différance* rather than eliminating non-*ur-text* components, the various temporal, regional, and cultural imprints are not dismissively erased.

Though this project is by no means engaged in scrupulous critical editing, reference to numerous publications and vernacular commentaries has at times been necessary in order to render a coherent translation. The language of the *Devīpurāṇa* is oftentimes problematic in its fluid use of grammar and the occasional (though not infrequent) seemingly nonsensical passage. Three published versions of the text have been produced and are currently available. The first, offered in Bengali script, was edited by the prolific Sanskrit scholar Pancanan Tarkaratna in the early twentieth century, and has been republished since the 1970s by Nava Bharat Publishers in Kolkata. While the minimally edited text offers scattered variant readings, it presents no critical apparatus nor any significant discussion of the manuscripts referenced to produce the edition. It does, however, offer a Bengali “translation,” though the rendering is not strictly faithful to the presented Sanskrit text. Operating in an intermediary space somewhere between translation and commentary,

³⁴ See Madeleine Biarreau, “Some More Considerations about Textual Criticism,” *Purana* 10, no. 2 (1968): 115-23.

it tends to disregard the sections of text plagued by problematic grammar, while for others it occasionally elaborates loquaciously or translates loosely. The most conscientiously edited version of the text is that of Pushpendra Kumar Sharma, published in New Delhi in 1976. Sharma describes six manuscripts – all in Devanāgarī script – which he claims to have referenced for the edition, drawing from repositories in Kolkata, Banaras, Kathmandu, Bikaner, and London. Though he lists variant readings in a reasonably meticulous manner, he offers no clear comprehensive critical apparatus to distinguish between the various manuscripts. He presents the text in Devanāgarī script, and also offers a summary introduction to the *Devīpurāṇa* in Hindi as well as brief descriptions of the contents of each chapter. The final publication, by S. N. Khandelaval, was released in 2013 by Chaukhamba Publishing House in Banaras. Presented in Devanāgarī, this text is obviously drawn from the two prior publications, utilizing elements of both. The edited presentation of the Sanskrit *Devīpurāṇa* follows Sharma's almost exactly but offers none of the variant readings; additionally, the index copies the chapter descriptions from Sharma verbatim. Supplementing the Sanskrit verses is a self-proclaimed Hindi commentary (*tīkā*), which is a blatant word-for-word Hindi rendering of Tarkaratna's Bengali translation/commentary.

For the most part, the published versions of the *Devīpurāṇa* agree with one another, though Tarkaratna occasionally adopts an alternate word and his version follows a slightly different versification. The present translation employs the Sharma edition as its paradigmatic guide, so is based on the content and versification of that edition unless otherwise noted. Incorporations of alternative readings acknowledged in the Sharma edition have not been indicated, but those drawn from other publications are annotated. Furthermore, footnotes mark grammatically problematic passages in the Sanskrit that necessitated recourse to the Bangla or Hindi translation/commentary. While some may object that drawing from the vernacular supplements degrades the integrity of

the translation, one must recognize the fluid nature of the Puranic genre. Purāṇas have never been static texts, and thus to seek THE *Devīpurāṇa* is itself a questionable enterprise; rather, we should accept and appreciate multiple *Devīpurāṇas*. Although the Śākta Upapurāṇas have undergone less alteration than much of the Puranic corpus, working with the *Devīpurāṇa* nevertheless raises some editorial problems. On the one hand, heavily emending variants in an effort to uncover the original text can provide a more accurate historical glimpse, revealing the original intent and context; on the other hand, such an approach ignores textual fluidity. My own approach for this study has been guided by the spirit of both poles: I strive to reveal the text as a product of a premodern sociohistorical backdrop while also acknowledging the *Devīpurāṇa*'s ongoing tradition. My goal is to render a faithful translation of the text as it likely circulated – though not to search for an *ur*-text – while also allowing input from the vernacular understandings of the text, especially to clarify ambiguities or to remedy semantic gaps.

Intratextual Constancy and Intertextual Comparison

Accompanying the translation is a literary analysis of the *Devīpurāṇa* driven by complementary intra- and intertextual considerations. As Patricia Dold points out in her own study of the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, a similar though later Śākta mythological text, intratextual analysis reads for coherence through patterns of language, image, characterization, and event, while intertextual comparison reveals developments of theistic attitudes.³⁵ Operating in tandem, these dual perspectives on the narrative threads of the text reveal underlying nuance and meaning, prompting a deeper understanding of Śākta evolutions within their premodern socio-historical

³⁵ Patricia Dold, “The Religious Vision of the Śākta *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*” (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 2005), 16.

contexts. While the genre of Purāṇa does present significant difficulties in the application of a text-historical methodology due to its fluid nature and penchant for revisionism, these potential challenges do not negate the possibility and importance of contextualization. I follow C. Mackenzie Brown in arguing that the Śākta Upa/Purāṇas demonstrate a reasonable degree of integration and internal consistency that would suggest limited emendation, thereby allowing for a justifiable historical reconstruction of mythic themes and motifs.³⁶ As Brown emphasizes, “...Purāṇic texts, however fluid, exist in time and space, and were composed, edited, and redacted by specific individuals at specific times in response to particular situations.”³⁷ I largely join the text-historical camp that argues against solely reading myth from a timeless structuralist perspective, instead recognizing these texts not simply as literature, but as *sacred* literature within the context of a religio-historical community.³⁸ As the Talmudic scholar Jacob Neusner contends, one must recognize the story as part of a larger system of values in order to appreciate its contribution to religious worldviews; furthermore, one should investigate sociohistorical contexts in order to understand the stimulus for the arising of a particular story.³⁹ Only then does one fully grasp the story’s meaning and impact. The present study appreciates the structuralist method as a productive and intellectually stimulating enterprise, and acknowledges a certain degree of inspiration for its own interpretive strategies. Ultimately, however, the intent is to situate the *Devīpurāṇa* within a broader sociohistorical background, to consider its narratives against the

³⁶ C. Mackenzie Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), xi.

³⁷ Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 8.

³⁸ See, for example, Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 7-12; Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 40-45; Wendell Charles Beane, *Myth, Cult and Symbols in Śākta Hinduism* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 28-34; and Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 6-10.

³⁹ Jacob Neusner, *Method and Meaning in Ancient Judaism III* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1981), 233-34.

backdrop of that context, and to demonstrate its impactful role in the conceptual development of the feminine divine within Śākta literature.

The dominant trends in the study of the Puranic corpus have been driven by scholars who pursue compelling and influential studies by mining various works of the genre for narratives that speak to a given concern or theme, thereby drawing out overarching mythological motifs. Despite its illuminating results, such a methodological approach disregards the internal integrity of whole works, extracting narrative components from their contexts and intratextual correlations. As Greg Bailey has convincingly argued, even when narrative threads demonstrate an irreconcilable tension, that juxtaposition has been part of an intentional creation of an integrated literary unit; to neglect the syntagmatic axis risks an insufficient, misguided analysis.⁴⁰ Rather than gleaning information from a variety of Puranic sources, a comprehensive, focused analysis of singular works is necessary for an accurate understanding of the nuances and complexities of premodern religious life. Following A. K. Ramanujan, who criticizes the tendency to treat Indian texts “as if they were loose-leaf files, rag-bag encyclopedias” and who thereby advocates for contextually sensitive studies,⁴¹ this project strives to uncover the distinctive vision of the *Devīpurāṇa* by considering its various narratives together in their entirety. Portraits of the Goddess emerge, establishing a feminine divine that is not merely martial, but fundamentally argumentative, often misleadingly aged or emaciated, and nearly always deadly. She is an exceedingly potent force, but one which must be approached delicately and controlled carefully; throughout the text, she is accessed and invoked via Śiva, who functions as the male yoke of wild female energies. Though the text promotes the Goddess as supreme and reinforces her position of power, it nevertheless is

⁴⁰ See Greg Bailey, *Gaṇeśapurāṇa: Part I: Upāsanākhaṇḍa* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), 8-18.

⁴¹ A. K. Ramanujan, “Is There an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay,” in *India Through Hindu Categories*, ed. McKim Marriott (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), 49.

reluctant to acknowledge her absolute autonomy and authority. This exaltation of feminine vitality tempered by masculine governance is reinforced by the text's hymns and philosophical expositions as well; though the Goddess may transcend, she continues to require bounds. Additionally, the deceptive nature of Viṣṇu is featured in several narratives. Though the force of the Goddess underlies the efficacy of deceit, the male deity is ultimately responsible for wielding that power, and in this case arguably discredited by its use. Thus in considering comprehensively the components of the *Devīpurāṇa* in a singular work, this study reveals subtle frictions that arise within a Śaiva-Śākta ethos, and highlights the text's firm stance against Vaiṣṇava advance.

Despite such emphasis on intratextual analysis, this research also acknowledges the benefits gained from intertextual comparison; it thus engages readings of the *Devīpurāṇa*'s evolving narratives as they are incorporated throughout Puranic literature, particularly within other Śākta Purāṇas. Developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and initially popularized by Julia Kristeva, the methodology of intertextuality acknowledges the dialogic nature of word and text as a critical response to the stasis of structuralism. As Kristeva notes, "[Bakhtin] was moving toward a dynamic understanding of the literary text that considered every utterance as the result of the intersection of a number of voices,"⁴² and "[a]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."⁴³ The text is not an isolated island, but rather an interlocutor engaged in numerous conversations, all of which must be considered for truly rigorous literary analysis. The text is defined horizontally (between writing subject and addressee), as well as vertically (oriented towards anterior or synchronic literary corpus).⁴⁴ In order to unravel

⁴² Julia Kristeva, "Intertextuality and Literary Interpretation," in *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, ed. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 189.

⁴³ Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," in *Desire in Language*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.

⁴⁴ Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," 66.

these intertwined threads of the text, the literary critic must simultaneously perceive dialogues between narrative characters, between author and reader, and between the text and all other texts influencing it, including its own social and ideological context.⁴⁵

Considering the *Devīpurāṇa* in relation to other Śākta texts enriches literary analysis by accentuating nuance and uncovering the embedded conscious and unconscious cultural codes that are rich carriers of values and ideologies. Reading comparatively with such veiled indicators in mind allows for a more comprehensive glimpse into their hermeneutic influences, accentuating later texts' interpretation and reconceptualization of the earlier tradition. Though the dominant myths of the text may be shared throughout the Puranic canon, the ways in which different works employ the common tales is wholly distinct. Changes in the social environment are often reflected in its existing narratives, which themselves change to suit, or even to effect, new cultural ideologies. The old past is cast aside as former facts and narrative components are reconceived in a way that illuminates and supports an altered present. This process of reinventing the old so as to express the new is particularly evident in the Puranic corpus, which has undergone almost constant revision since its inception, despite acceptance of its divine authorship by the mythical sage Vyāsa. Due to this profusion of textual changes, it is constructive to read *Purāṇa* not as static, but as a transformable product of an evolving society. Daniel Boyarin points out in his study of intertextuality in Midrash that such reconsideration of the old in strikingly new ways is characteristic of a healthy, living tradition:

One of the tasks of a successful culture is to preserve the old while making it nevertheless new – to maintain continuity with a tradition without freezing it. Intertextuality is a powerful instrument in the hands of culture for accomplishing

⁴⁵ Megan Becker-Leckrone, *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 93.

this task...By absorbing and transforming, the textual system both establishes continuity with the past and renews itself for the future.⁴⁶

Recognizing the presence of earlier texts in later ones can influence our understanding of those subsequent texts and the ways in which they sought to interpret and reconceive. Intertextuality imbeds historical developments within the textual record; thus uncovering textual dialogues can clarify the direction of new theologies and ideologies. Investigating the narrative trajectory can reveal a wealth of information about the ideological environment in which a given text was produced as well as subsequent changes in the social milieu.

In pursuing this intertextual analysis, my research engages conversations begun by Thomas Coburn and C. Mackenzie Brown, whose scholarship focuses on other prominent Śākta Purāṇas. Coburn's work has traced the Sanskritic origins of the Goddess's epithets and hymns within the *Devīmāhātmya*, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing the incorporation of Vedic resonances; Brown's comparisons of the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* with the earlier *Devīmāhātmya* have revealed narrative shifts that alter the characterization of the Goddess in an effort to render the supreme consciousness of Advaita Vedānta's non-dual brahman and embodied manifestations of crucial Tantric identities as compatible visions. Building on these discussions, this work juxtaposes the contents of the *Devīpurāṇa* with that of the foremost Śākta Purāṇas – the *Devīmāhātmya*, *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, *Kālikāpurāṇa*, and *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*. A comparison of narrative threads throughout these texts emphasizes the *Devīpurāṇa*'s somewhat fraught portrayal of the Goddess, who suffers from an imposed domestication that she at times violently resists. In contrast to the other texts, she is neither a sovereign power with free license nor an obedient and supportive wife; rather, her untamed energies are forced into a discordant union with male oversight. As the

⁴⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 22.

normally obedient and benign Umā, for instance, she argues intensely with her husband, Śiva, ultimately delivering a menacing curse after he chastises her for her foolish woman's nature. This theme of undesired domestication pervades the text at levels deeper than mere plot structure, an important consideration when conducting such an analysis of shifting narrative. Tracing transformations of aesthetics and plot through an attuned reading of Śākta narratives as they transform from one textual manifestation to the next grants an enriched understanding of the Goddess in the *Devīpurāṇa* as well as the cultural forces driving historical developments.

Investigative Directions

Chapter one, which provides an overview of literature of Śākta and Purāṇa studies, situates the current project within ongoing conversations about the significance of the feminine divine in South Asia as well as the Goddess's incorporation into the Sanskrit corpus, particularly the Puranic genre. Modern scholarship in these fields emphasizes the capacity of both Purāṇa and the Goddess to act as bridges between the pan-Indic Brahmanic and popular localized religious forms. Anthropological works on contemporary South Asian religious life – such as Kathleen Erndl's studies in Jammu, Usha Menon's in Orissa, and Sree Padma's in Andhra – demonstrate the complex negotiations navigated by devotees who simultaneously conceive of the Goddess in multiple expressions. She is both the overarching Great Goddess beyond form as well as the localized incarnation; she is loving mother as well as wild and fierce warrior; she is both Brahmanic *prakṛti*, *śakti*, and *māyā* as well as the contentious local goddess who requires blood sacrifice. Similarly, compositions of the Puranic genre strive to integrate orthodox philosophy and dharmic worldview with the rituals, deities, and mythic narratives of popular religious life. Intertextual analysis, which has served many scholars of Indian literature as a fruitful

methodology, reveals the tradition's approach to reshaping old conceptions to fit new ideological contexts. Thomas Coburn's research on the *Devīmāhātmya*, C. Mackenzie Brown's on the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, Patricia Dold's on the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, and Elizabeth Rohlman's on the *Sarasvatīpurāṇa* all employ an intertextual approach in the study of Śākta Purāṇa in order to interpret the influences and implications surrounding the development of the feminine divine in South Asia. The current project joins this conversation by clarifying the content of the prominent *Devīpurāṇa* and considering its portrayal of the Goddess in relation to that of these other Śākta texts. In so doing, it reveals a gradual domestication of feminine divine forces as popular, local goddesses are incorporated into the overarching Brahmanic tradition.

Through an intratextual consideration of the feminine divine within the work's narratives, the second chapter argues that the *Devīpurāṇa* portrays a fundamentally fierce and powerful warrior goddess who nonetheless remains subject to controlling male authorities. The resultant subtle tension percolates throughout the text, which offers varied views on the nature of the feminine divine: the hymns laud a supreme Goddess whose cosmological significance corresponds with orthodox philosophical concepts; the battle narratives emphasize the autonomous martial goddesses likely inspired from local religious contexts; and the characterization of the *śaktis*/Mātṛkās emphasizes feminine potency as a corollary to masculine authority. Ultimately, however, it is this latter conceptualization (particularly as manifest in the Śiva-Śakti paradigm) that dominates. The text draws on local feminine divine forces in order to tap into their profound potency, but tempers their unruly tendencies by rendering them subject to the Brahmanical male. Through the Brahmanization of the local and the domestication of the Goddess, the narratives of the *Devīpurāṇa* thereby incorporate the productive popular goddess into the orthodox framework without upsetting Brahmanic control.

The third chapter expands on this process of domesticating the feminine divine by situating the *Devīpurāṇa* within broader trends revealed through intertextual survey. In so doing, it argues that the text stands at an intermediary stage of domestication in which the Goddess retains her wholly martial nature while nonetheless becoming intimately entwined with Śiva's male authority. In contrast to the *Devīmāhātmya*, which inaugurates a fully autonomous and supremely omnipotent Great Goddess, the *Devīpurāṇa* draws on the wild energies of the liminal feminine divine but begins to develop a more domestic portrait of the Goddess in the Himālayas, while also subtly rendering *śaktis* subordinate to male command. Though it incorporates the same narrative motifs such as the Buffalo Demon narrative and emergence of the Mātṛkās for battle, it retells them in a manner that corresponds with evolving ideologies. Such ongoing alterations to the Goddess's characterization continue to manifest in later Śākta Puranic literature, with the *Kālikā*-, *Mahābhāgavata*-, and *Devībhāgavatapurāṇas* emphasizing the wifely and motherly attributes of the increasingly Brahmanic feminine divine. Comparison with these other Śākta texts underscores the *Devīpurāṇa*'s respect and valuation of feminine divine forces, though also its project of harnessing the Goddess through male authoritative oversight.

As chapter four demonstrates, the *Devīpurāṇa* not only incorporates the feminine divine from the fringe of Brahmanical standards; the prominence of the moral Asura and an evolving portrayal of the elephant-headed Vināyaka also reveal an appreciation of the extra-Brahmanical, which is subsequently made commensurate with orthodox values. The Asura royalty of the *Devīpurāṇa* are frequently characterized as unyieldingly moral in their behavior, even from an orthodox perspective; nonetheless they must be brought under Brahmanic authority by whatever means necessary. Engaging tactics of treachery and deceit, the gods conspire to undermine the dharmic Asura, thereby reasserting Brahmanic authority over extra-Brahmanical power. Similarly, an

elephant-faced deity is incorporated from non-orthodox sources, likely drawn from the capricious supernatural Vināyakas, but then made subject to Brahmanic concerns. Commensurate with the inclusive nature of the text and its enterprise of assimilating feminine divine power, the *Devīpurāṇa* seems to legitimize, and to some extent exalt, the cultural fringe while nonetheless subsuming it under pan-Indic Brahmanic supremacy.

This theme of merging mainstream Brahmanic conceptions with extra-orthodox beliefs, practices, and narratives continues in the fifth and final chapter, which explores the Tantric elements and influences present within the *Devīpurāṇa*. With special attention to the text's development of *vidyās* (feminine-gendered mantras), the chapter contends that the *Devīpurāṇa* stands at the threshold of an emerging mainstream Tantra, which integrates local religious forms, esoteric practice, and a Vedic conceptual tradition. The Goddess as *vidyā* is a paradigmatic example of this negotiation between the Brahmanic and the non-orthodox, the devotional and the Tantric. As expressed particularly through the Padamālā Vidyā, the *Devīpurāṇa* strives to praise the supremacy of the Goddess, appreciate her ferocity, and also direct her feminine energies for one's own benefit. As such, it continues to support the notion that feminine divine power should be controlled by masculine authority. As reinforced through its explication of Sāṃkhyan philosophical categories, the text emphasizes that the masculine and feminine rely on one another in the formation of a productive union, but that ultimately the masculine remains supreme.

These analyses reveal the *Devīpurāṇa*'s overriding motif of integrating alternative religious beliefs and practices in a manner that remains consonant with conventional orthodox values. Though the text elevates the nascent feminine divine to novel positions of prominence, valorizes Asura kings as fundamentally moral leaders, and legitimizes the efficacious potency of unorthodox rites, it consistently foregrounds the inevitability of Brahmanic authoritative supremacy. The Great

Goddess is tempered by Śiva's command; the upright Asura is overthrown by means of the gods' deceit; and the power of wild, frenzied goddesses is harnessed through esoteric sonic formulae. While the *Devīpurāṇa* exalts the feminine divine as a foremost religious principle, it denies the Goddess her complete autonomy from male oversight.

Chapter One

Trending of Śākta Purāṇa

Though the worship of goddesses has remained an integral aspect of South Asian religious lives for millennia, the orthodox Brahmanic tradition resisted the recognition of an omnipotent feminine divine until the early centuries of the common era. Engaged in complex negotiations of competing religious worlds, it incorporated goddesses gradually by degrees. The corpus of texts known as Purāṇa offers insight into the underlying impetus for the rise of the feminine divine in the Vedic context, which had been dominated by masculine conceptions of divinity. Literally meaning “the old,” the name of Purāṇa is a fitting designation for these texts that are characterized by adopting previously existing religious elements and combining them in novel ways. Such reinvention is especially evident in the Śākta context, in which Vedic epithets, orthodox philosophy, Brahmanic ritual, and indigenous goddess worship are merged in a unified religious system. Recent scholarship has begun to recognize the importance of looking to Purāṇa as the bridge between Brahmanic and local religious belief and practice. By investigating Puranic narrative in relation to other orthodox and non-orthodox sources, scholars have begun to unravel the mystery of the “crystallization” of the Goddess. Furthermore, investigating shifting narratives as they weave through numerous Puranic texts highlights different characterizations and attributions of the Goddess, emphasizing her ambiguous nature. The following overview of formative literature on Puranic developments of the feminine divine presents the understandings of the Goddess revealed through various considerations and methodologies.

Upa/Purāna Studies: A Legacy of Colonial Indifference

In the introduction to his overarching survey of Puranic literature, Ludo Rocher begins by broaching the issue that has dominated scholarly Purāṇa research – its neglect. As he points out, despite the staggering volume of literature that can be categorized as Purāṇa, one of the most common claims about this corpus is its relative dearth of interest and study vis-à-vis other branches of Sanskrit literature. Such sweeping disregard, however, was not always the status quo.¹ A number of British colonialists in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries acknowledged the importance of the Purāṇas in India, and demonstrated an interest in these works and their contents. Warren Hastings requested a summary of the Purāṇas called the *Purāṇārthaprakāśa*; William Jones incorporated information gleaned from Puranic sources and offered some translation; Vans Kennedy read nearly all the major Purāṇas, as did Horace Hayman Wilson, who hoped to commission a survey of all Puranic literature. It was ultimately Wilson himself, however, who effectively sabotaged the future of scholarly research on Puranic materials, having become disinterested after completing his extensive studies and translation. Labeling the Purāṇas unoriginal and of a late date was a death knell which rang throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth; by the 1950s, however, Purāṇa research began a slow but steady revival. Though Rocher argues that continuing to refer to the Purāṇas as a totally neglected genre is erroneous and misinformed, this assertion should not suggest that the Purāṇas are well studied. Rocher acknowledges in particular a great need for acceptable editions, as well as increased translation and analysis. Though arguments persist regarding ideal methodologies for future Puranic study, agreement prevails on one matter – an enormous amount of work remains to be

¹ See Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986).

done in order to consider adequately these texts and their role in Indian society, both premodern and contemporary.

Though the inclusion of Puranic literature in scholarly circles has suffered a thorny history, the pervasiveness of Puranic influence on the religious lives of Indians themselves was never ignored. As a storehouse of mythological narrative, ritual explication, guidance on dharma, and countless other topics, the Purāṇas have always been acknowledged as the basis of popular religion in South Asia, providing a rich historical background of nearly every aspect of Hindu culture and civilization. The Purāṇas attach themselves to the Veda, claiming to be elaborations on Vedic truth necessary for adequate comprehension and interpretation. A famous quote found throughout the Purāṇas as well as the *Mahābhārata* asserts that even if a Brahman knows the Vedas and Upaniṣads, he lacks true insight if he does not also know the Purāṇas thoroughly; “he should supplement the Veda with epic and Purāṇa.”² The necessity of the Purāṇas as a conduit to Vedic knowledge seems to have been a means of extending and reinforcing Brahmanic orthodoxy among those who had no other access to Vedic text, particularly women and *śūdras*.³ As such, Puranic literature served as the primary means by which the majority of people were allowed to participate in the Sanskritic tradition, and so became the bearer of popular religious identity. The extensiveness and popularity of the Purāṇas – some for more than 1500 years – are what render these texts so important for further study. Rocher sums it up wonderfully:

The purāṇas are, first, important documents for the study and reconstruction of the history of Hindu India. In a more practical way, they have contributed to the continuity of Hinduism through the ages, and are indispensable for a correct

² *yo vidyāc caturo vedān sāṅgopaniṣado dvijaḥ /
na cet purāṇaṁ saṁvidyān naiva sa syād vicakṣaṇaḥ /
itihāsapurāṇābhyāṁ vedaṁ samupabṛṁhayet /
bibhety alpaśrutād vedo mām ayaṁ prahariṣyati* // (*Mahābhārata* CE 1.2.235).

³ In his commentary to the Ṛgveda, Sāyaṇa makes this thought explicit: *strīśūdrayoḥ tu satyām api jñānāpekṣāyām upanayanābhāvenādhyayanarāhityād vede ‘dhikāraḥ pratibaddhaḥ / dharmabrahma-jñānaṁ tu purāṇādimukhenotpadyate* // (Ṛgveda comm., 1966 ed., 1, p. 18).

understanding of Hinduism today. As a matter of fact, every Hindu is influenced by the purāṇas, and his activities are guided by them.⁴

The necessity of delving thoroughly into all available Puranic material, then, is readily apparent; by uncovering the Purāṇas, we can reach the heart of popular Hindu traditions.

Though the study of Purāṇa generally has enjoyed increased attention in recent decades, two intersecting arenas of Puranic literature call for further exploration: Śākta Purāṇa and Upapurāṇa. The first, Śāktapurāṇa, refers to Purāṇa in which Devī, the Goddess, is the primary deity, an aspect of the somewhat sectarian nature of Puranic literature. Though Purāṇas generally emphasize the importance of numerous deities, any given text typically positions one of these deities above the others in its consideration of that divine figure as the supreme and fundamental nature of the universe from which all else emanates. The Purāṇas can therefore be grouped into three broad categories: Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta, according to the exalted deity of the text. While Śiva and Viṣṇu previously had been considered in such a lofty role, the Purāṇas exhibit the first instances of the Goddess rising to the fore of Brahmanic religious awareness. While goddess-based traditions had been prevalent in South Asia on the local level, the feminine had remained subordinate to the masculine in orthodox religious life. Despite revealing such a momentous event in South Asian religious history, the study of Śākta Purāṇa has been understudied in relation to its Śaiva and (even more so) Vaiṣṇava cousins, a trend influenced by the second area in need of further study, Upapurāṇa.

Puranic texts have also been categorized, somewhat misleadingly, into two designations: Mahā (Great) and Upa (Sub/Lesser). Modern scholarship has unfortunately generated a sharp distinction between the two, giving precedence to those texts traditionally considered *mahā-* at the expense

⁴ Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, 12-13.

of all other Puranic texts, mistakenly perpetuating the notion that the Upapurāṇas are, for some reason, less “great.”⁵ In general, the Upapurāṇas have been considered to be later compositions, more sectarian, and of a particularly local focus, characterizations which have further deterred their adequate consideration in modern scholarship. Interestingly, as Rocher points out, the Mahāpurāṇas were no better known in India, nor more important or popular; in fact, *paṇḍitas* often knew only one or two Mahāpurāṇas, while they possessed greater familiarity with their localized Upapurāṇa traditions.⁶ This tendency to privilege the Mahāpurāṇas over the Upapurāṇas in modern scholarship has been particularly relevant for the study of Goddess traditions, as nearly all Śākta Purāṇas fall within the purview of Upapurāṇa literature. Increased academic interests sparked by the feminist movements of the 1970s have yielded increasing scholarship on these Śākta Upa/Purāṇa texts, which emerged with greater prominence in the mid-1980s and slowly gained momentum in recent years. However, a great number of texts – including the *Devīpurāṇa* – remain untranslated and relatively ignored, and to these texts we must now turn in order to foster enriched understandings of Śākta narratives and practices, as well as their relationship to the broader Brahmanic/Sanskritic tradition.

Rustic Goddess, Urbane Worlds

One of the driving themes in the study of Goddess traditions in South Asia has been the role of the feminine divine in bridging the divide between orthodox values and local, popular religious

⁵ Hazra provides an informative synopsis of the colonial (dis)interest in Upapurāṇa, a discrimination that has continued to impact contemporary Purāṇa studies. While the colonial literature on Purāṇa was itself insubstantial in comparison to studies of other Sanskrit literature, the writings on Upapurāṇa were exceedingly meager, relegated to a few paragraphs in the studies of such prominent philologists as H. H. Wilson, M. Winternitz, J. N. Farquhar, and A. A. Macdonell. For the brief but comprehensive overview of colonial writings on Upapurāṇa, see R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1958), 1.

⁶ See Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, 68.

belief and practice. Generally, scholars agree that prominent goddess figures entered Brahmanical religious life from the periphery of the orthodox community, which incorporated and elevated the feminine divine as a means of drawing people into the orthodox sphere. By absorbing the multitude of goddesses that pervade religious life on the local level and equating them with a singular overarching Great Goddess commensurate with Brahmanical conceptions, disparate groups are incorporated under a single overarching orthodox umbrella. Such navigated religious experience continues in contemporary South Asian religious life, as emphasized by many of the prominent scholars working on modern Śākta issues. For example, by drawing from interviews, participant observation, and analysis of both oral and written text, Kathleen Erndl explores the theological, mythological, and ritual meanings of contemporary worship of the Goddess. Focusing her studies on the Seven Sisters – Vaiṣṇo, Jvālā Mukhī, Kāṅgrevālī, Cintpūrṇī, Nainā, Mansā, and Cāmuṇḍā – whose temples are situated in Himachal, Jammu, and Haryana, Erndl seeks to understand how pilgrims and devotees approach these local goddesses and how they ultimately understand them as manifestations of the Great Goddess Śērāṇvālī. In accord with other scholars, she finds the relations between such individual goddesses and a transcendent Goddess figure as a result of the interactions between the Brahmanic and the non-Vedic indigenous during the period of the Purāṇas. Such interweaving of previously distinct elements has resulted in four strands that make up Śākta ideology and practice: (1) the Vedic tradition, with emphases on Vāc, Trayī, and Vidyā, (2) the philosophical traditions of Sāṃkhya and Vedānta, with concepts of Prakṛti, (3) Puranic mythology in which goddesses are the śaktis of male deities, and (4) local and tribal cults. As the original and often paradigmatic Śākta text, the *Devīmāhātmya* is a prime example of such a Puranic process that reworks disparate religious elements into a new ideological form. In the context of pilgrimage, this same process manifests in a physical way through the incorporation of prominent

goddess sites into the system of *śakti pīṭhas*. The local worship of an indigenous goddess is thereby integrated into a Brahmanic frame and is also absorbed into the body of the Goddess as it accounts for the issue of universalization inherent within seeming division.

Such importance of physical location resulting from the concept of the *śakti pīṭhas* is merely one example of what Erndl calls a divine materialism. She contends that in contrast to other devotional theologies, consideration of the Goddess in Śākta beliefs reveals a justification and appreciation of the material world. Erndl comments:

Although Śākta theology has much in common with the formal philosophical systems of dualistic Sāṃkhya and monistic Advaita Vedānta, it differs from them in its relentless exaltation of the material world. It is more thoroughly “world-affirming” than either of them. The Goddess is often identified with Prakṛti, the matter-energy that is the basis of all creation...Śāktism turns this concept of Prakṛti on its head, giving it not only ontological and cosmogonic status but soteriological status by identifying it with the Great Goddess, who pervades the phenomenal world and saves all beings.⁷

Contemporary goddess worship supports such characterizations of the Goddess in-the-world, particularly in terms of embodied manifestation, devotional practice, and ritual possession. In each of the temples of the Seven Sisters, for instance, the Goddess inheres within the natural elements, generally in the form of stone outcroppings called *pinḍis* (fig. 1.1). Additionally, the temple of Jvālā Mukhī (where the Goddess’ tongue fell), houses a naturally occurring flame which is itself a manifestation of the Goddess, emerging from the earth in this potent elemental form. Identification of the Goddess with flame is also carried over into *jagrātās*, evening ritual performances in which participants intone devotional songs and narrate stories. A lamp is lit at the beginning of the ceremony and kept burning all night, allowing the Goddess to visit in the form of the flame and temporarily consecrating the space as a temple of Devī. By keeping the Goddess

⁷ Kathleen M. Erndl, *Victory to the Mother* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31.



Figure 1.1: Three *piṇḍis* of Vaiṣṇo Devī – Mahāśarasvatī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahākālī. Devotional art.

awake, accessible, and active in their lives, devotees can thereby insure her grace. In addition to her manifestation in the flame, the Goddess often manifests herself through ritual possession, in which the Goddess is said to “play” in the body of one of her devotees, usually female. While possession by evil spirits is considered an affliction or punishment, possession by the Goddess is a sign of grace, and is therefore thought to be a great gift. When the Goddess’ *pavan* (wind, breath) has entered the body of the devotee, her eyes glaze, her voice changes, and her hair is loosened as she wildly circles her head. At this time she is approached for *darśan*, prophecy, healing, or material gain. These and other such practices reveal a theology, mythology, and cult practice of

Goddess worship that continues to exhibit both Brahmanic and non-Vedic religious influences. Though considered to be transcendent and ultimate, the Goddess is also available for encounter in local, personal, and embodied forms. As modern life transforms the religious environment, the feminine divine continues to exhibit tremendous adaptability.

Mark Edwin Rohe also bases his research on the Goddess at the cave shrine temple of Vaiṣṇo Devī in Jammu. In particular, Rohe explores the varied interpretation of the Goddess's identity as conceived by her devotees, who acknowledge both her unified status as Mahādevī and as localized incarnations. Rather than an iconographic portrayal, Vaiṣṇo Devī *is* the cave shrine itself, embodied in the three small stones (*piṇḍis*) identified as her tripartite identity as Mahāśarasvatī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahākālī. Apart from this characterization, however, conceptions of exactly *who* Vaiṣṇo Devi is are as numerous and diverse as her pilgrims themselves. Rohe argues that the theology of Vaiṣṇo Devī is deliberately fluid in order to suit the needs of a varied populous, allowing everyone to establish a meaningful encounter regardless of devotional affiliations:

Simultaneously distinct and ambiguous, Vaiṣṇo Devī is Mahādevī. She contains all *śaktis*, all beings, and all creation; she is broadly inclusive, connecting deities, sects, times, places, and a diversity of devotees. Through her blessings, Vaiṣṇo Devī recreates the lives of her devotees, and they continually recreate her according to their own beliefs.⁸

Thus we find in Vaiṣṇo Devī a clear example of how bridging the Brahmanical and the local can establish a pan-regional identity that attracts people of varied backgrounds to a single religious expression, albeit one accompanied by varied theological supports.

Similarly, Usha Menon explores the varied characterizations of the Goddess that arise despite recognition of divine power as ultimately singular. Menon focuses on the seeming paradox of

⁸ Mark Edwin Rohe, "Ambiguous and Definitive: The Greatness of Goddess Vaiṣṇo Devī," in *Seeking Mahādevī*, ed. Tracy Pintchman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 74.

simultaneously wrathful and motherly manifestations of the Goddess, specifically in the context of contemporary religious thought in Orissa. While many local goddesses, particularly multiforms of Kālī, are often considered to be uncontrolled, wild, and destructive, Oriya Hindus suggest that she is able to exercise self-restraint when necessary, especially when reminded of her domestic duties. As discussed in the opening of the Introduction, Oriyas tend to interpret the oft-cited iconography of Kālī standing on Śiva with her tongue protruding as an expression of embarrassment and regained composure. Similarly, when devotees invoke the Goddess by saying “Mā,” they remind her of her domestic duties, prompting her to restrict her wrathful nature in order to become the nurturing, compassionate identity required of her. Thus we see a continued domestication of the Goddess, taming her wild nature by placing her within a role acceptable to Brahmanic social norms.

Sarah Caldwell’s research also emphasizes the potential of the Goddess’s multiple characterizations as a means of addressing the needs of varied social groups. Attuned to the varied ritual performances and theological perspectives that accord with diverse social strata, Caldwell finds that different caste groups, though drawing from a common stock of texts, mythologies, and religious practices, nevertheless develop distinct conceptions of the goddess Bhagavatī. Caldwell explains:

Yet while she remains at all times the supreme Goddess for her devotees, the way that Bhagavatī’s physical form is “constructed” through ritual enactments and textual recitation varies significantly from one social group to another, highlighting aspects of the Goddess’s identity meaningful to each community.⁹

Caldwell discovers that the martial castes praise the Goddess’s beauty and power, invoking her *śakti* and absorbing it into themselves in order to become stronger warriors to whom enemies must

⁹ Sarah Caldwell, “Waves of Beauty, Rivers of Blood: Constructing the Goddess in Kerala,” in *Seeking Mahādevī*, ed. Tracy Pintchman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 94.

submit. Brahmans emphasize the Goddess's fierce aspects, calling on the warrior in order to defeat the antinomian forces that threaten dharma and Brahmanic purity. The lower castes and forest dwellers look to the Goddess as earth mother, accepting both her wild, untamable nature as well as her capacity to nurture. Finally, for females across caste lines, the Goddess is a demure and obedient daughter, a characterization which reveals concerns of vulnerability, affection, and importance of family; the feminine must be domesticated in the constructions forged by women. Thus the Goddess can manifest herself to suit the needs of individual communities, allowing for varied interpretations of the feminine divine which resist essentialization.

The intersection of the Brahmanic and the local is of particular concern to Sree Padma, who approaches the issue of Sanskritization in the context of contemporary goddess worship in Andhra Pradesh. Padma argues that although local goddesses in the region have been incorporated into the conception of the Great Goddess as expressed in the pan-India, Sanskritic tradition, in everyday religious life this process seems to have affected local practice only negligibly. The main protective function of local goddesses on the village level is sustained while the influence of Sanskritization adds only elements of liturgy, iconography, or ritual structures, "metaphysical 'window-dressings' that do not alter the fundamental ethos of goddess veneration."¹⁰ The worship of local goddesses remains the "great tradition" while Sanskritization largely serves as a means of adapting goddess worship to an urban context, where religious groups are less homogenous. Padma concedes that Sanskritization *is* currently altering goddess traditions in the face of urbanization, which encourages movement toward anthropomorphic rendering of deities, attempts to disguise village origins, a tendency to characterize goddesses as benevolent rather than fearsome, and transition

¹⁰ Sree Padma, "From Village to City: Transforming Goddesses in Urban Andhra Pradesh," in *Seeking Mahādevī*, ed. Tracy Pintchman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 117.

from annual rites to daily *pūjā*. On the other hand, she recognizes a counter process of “de-Sanskritization” in which Sanskritic goddesses are made to appear more as local goddesses, thereby rendering them more appealing to devotees. Ultimately, Padma calls for greater consideration of local religious forms in constructions of the Great Goddess; the dominance of Sanskritization in the scholarly discourse should not obscure the fact that overall, goddesses on the local level are still invoked for their protective capacities and their ability to fulfill this-worldly desires, not their power to grant liberation.

The scholarship of Kunal Chakrabarti addresses such navigation of varied religious perspectives, though with a focus on its textual ramifications rather than its social effects. His analysis of Purāṇa as both fundamentally Vedic and quintessentially extra-Brahmanic emphasizes the role of the genre as a conduit for complex religious navigations. On the one hand, the Purāṇas are rooted in the Vedas, at least nominally. The general assertion is that Puranic texts convey the Vedic essence, but do so in a way suitable for all levels of society; they are re-statements of Vedic knowledge available even to low-castes and women. “They enshrine the essential wisdom of the *Vedas* but simplify, condense or enlarge it, depending on the needs of the common people, as perceived by the authors.”¹¹ In this regard, the texts support the infallibility of the Vedas, the necessity of *varṇāśramadharma*, the centrality of *brahman*, and the ritual importance of the Brahmins. On the other hand, the Purāṇas present an evolution of principles to justify the inclusion of local customs, particularly the adoption of goddess worship and the performance of the *vrata*.¹² The assimilation of local, non-Sanskritic goddesses is effected through the philosophical

¹¹ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 58.

¹² Involving fasting, domestic rituals, and prayer, the *vrata*, or religious vow, is generally undertaken by women in pursuit of particular goals. Commensurate with the *Devīpurāṇa*’s inclusive nature – particularly with regard to women and low castes – the text includes instructions for a number of *vratas* in its ritual sections.

elaboration of the Vedic notion of *śakti*. By considering all goddesses as a manifestation of this abstract power, their inclusion in the Brahmanic pantheon is easily justified. Development of the devotion and austerity undertaken during the *vrata* also allows for the incorporation of local religious forms. Chakrabarti explains:

Brahmanism transformed the character of the indigenous *vrata*, drew upon its potential to arrange a gathering, widened its scope and inflated its number to make it as pervasive and frequent as possible...Several *vratas* were observed in honour of specific goddesses, and the local legends connected with them were either restructured to make them fall in line with the archetypal brahmanical myth about the goddess, or were composed afresh.¹³

The Purāṇas thus exhibit an explicit emphasis on *ācāra* and *laukika* norms, and at times even suggest that *laukika* dharma trumps *vaidika* dharma.¹⁴ Although the orthodox is highlighted as more productive as the primary means of liberation, the local is not only allowed but significantly incorporated into the Brahmanic tradition.

This Puranic process spurs the acceptance of orthodox norms by other factions of society, thereby accounting for the establishment of Brahmanic hegemony. Drawing on M. N. Srinivas's notion of Sanskritization, Chakrabarti highlights this two directional exchange of beliefs and practices between the orthodox and the local. While the Purāṇas aimed to draw people into the Brahmanic fold by legitimizing the local, this assimilation of indigenous traditions leads to a general universalization that processes the diversity of the local through a common Brahmanic lens. The Brahmins are thus able to transcend regional boundaries by instituting an overarching

¹³ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 34.

¹⁴ Referring to popular custom, *ācāra* (accepted conduct) and *laukika* (worldly, i.e., customary) behavior can vary regionally, and at times contradict Brahmanical Vedic expectations. For an excellent study on how South Asian communities navigate multiple sources as they establish ethical codes, see Leela Prasad, *Poetics of Conduct: Oral Narrative and Moral Being in a South Indian Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

tradition that unifies the varied and fragmented local cultures. Chakrabarti outlines three reasons for the Brahmans' success in establishing this singular cultural identity:

First, it is not a destructive force; it constantly absorbs and conserves existing practices and customs. Second, it reduces a bewildering mass of cultural elements to some homogeneity and synthesis. And third, this incorporation and systematization by the great tradition result in refinement of the little tradition practices by conferring on them an esoteric significance.¹⁵

Brahmanism is thus able to subsume indigenous peoples by absorbing their cultural elements, fitting them into a universal Brahmanic framework, and granting that practice special privilege. In Bengal, this process centers around the incorporation of local goddesses and subsequent recognition of the Great Goddess. Having met with varied local traditions with a common focus on cult goddesses, the Brahmans in Bengal granted these disparate deities a collective identity by drawing from Sāṃkhya philosophical elements. In this way, the Bengal Purāṇas acknowledge the varied local religious forms, but also accord them a universal Brahmanic character.

The adoption of the indigenous *vrata* has served as another fundamental means of incorporating local peoples into the Brahmanic fold. Drawing from religious practices which were initially restricted to the woman's sphere, the Purāṇas are able to present Brahmanic rites in a familiar religious vocabulary. Certain items, offerings, and iconography associated with any particular *vrata* are presented as legitimate expressions of orthodox ritual, based within the Brahmanic tradition itself. These *vratas* are subsequently extended to all segments of the community, requiring the participation of an entire village in order to remain optimally effective. Additionally, the Brahman inserts himself into the *vrata* as the sole appropriate enactor of the ritual sphere who conducts religious performance and recites religious text, especially Purāṇa. The

¹⁵ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 96.

indigenous *vrata*, now modified to Brahmanic standards, becomes an option simpler than Vedic sacrifice, but one with the same effect in the degenerate age of *kaliyuga*.

Recognizing Puranic Intertextuality

In teasing out the varied strands of Śākta belief and practice as presented in Puranic texts, intertextual analysis has emerged as a popular methodology for determining the ways in which Puranic texts both draw from an orthodox past yet reinvent it for the context of an evolving present. Merging orthodox theologies and perspectives with mythological narrative has been demonstrated as a prominent means of incorporating the extra-Brahmanical into the Sanskritic tradition. For example, though not focused on issues of the feminine divine, Laurie Patton examines the circa 1st-5th century *Bṛhaddevatā* in comparison to other texts in order to trace the transition of textual elements from their Vedic to their classical incarnations. Initially conceived to be of Vedic origins, an analysis of the narratives of the text reveals more similarity with Epic and Puranic narrative versions; however, the content of the *Bṛhaddevatā* emphasizes a different ideological purpose. Largely concerned with the appropriate use and the explanation of mantras in Vedic ritual, the text adopts narrative episodes in order to render the mantra more meaningful and the sacrifice more efficacious. Focusing specifically on the famed tale of Urvaśī and Purūravas as well as accounts of the births of the sages Aṅgiras, Bhṛgu, Atri, and Vasiṣṭha, Patton demonstrates that the *Bṛhaddevatā* accomplishes more than simply drawing on Vedic antecedents in order to establish itself as an authentic text; it also situates the text within the tradition more generally. Patton explains:

...the *Bṛhaddevatā* adds certain emphases to these famous tales that the Brāhmaṇas lack, but that the Epics begin to incorporate, and the Purāṇas solidify and amplify. Thus, coming as it does in the later period of the formation of the Epic and the beginning period of the formation of the Purāṇas, the *Bṛhaddevatā* both reflects the

changes in emphasis that the Epic makes and anticipates the further elaboration on these changes that are found in the Purāṇas.¹⁶

Through analyzing these narratives common to various segments of the tradition, Patton finds that the *Bṛhaddevatā* possesses an ideological perspective all its own. While the Vedic perspective focuses on sacrifice and the Epics highlight the notion of dharma, the *Bṛhaddevatā* relegates sacrifice and dharma to the background in favor of Vedic deity and mantra, which is more in line with the Puranic theological focus. Reading the narratives with an eye toward their different values and usages thus uncovers the changing landscape of the Vedic interpretative tradition.

Patton discusses three “attitudes” of Sanskrit religious literature, previously delineated by Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty: (1) the Vedic attitude in which gods and men unite against their common demonic foe, with the gods supported by the sacrifices performed by man; (2) the post-Vedic ascetic attitude in which both men and demons are threats to the gods’ power due to the possibility of accumulating *tapas*; and (3) the *bhakti* attitude in which man’s dependence on the gods’ power is reintroduced so that protection is earned through virtue and devotion. Patton finds that while the *Bṛhaddevatā* incorporates elements of each, its “*bhakti*-like alliance between *ṛṣi* and god” brings it more in line with Puranic portrayals. It thus serves as an ideal example of the aspects of movement between Vedic and Puranic forms of thought, echoing the Vedas yet presaging the Purāṇas. As Patton comments, “its very nature is to shift and mix religious registers.”¹⁷

Doniger herself, who has excelled at the analysis of mythological analysis throughout her extensive corpus of scholarship, also advocates an intertextual methodology. For example, in her examination of frame stories in the *Mahābhārata*, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, she traces the saga of Śuka from the *Mahābhārata* through the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which self-

¹⁶ Laurie L. Patton, “The Transparent Text: Purāṇic Trends in the *Bṛhaddevatā*,” in *Purāṇa Perennis*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 8.

¹⁷ Patton, “The Transparent Text,” 29.

consciously echoes the *Mahābhārata* and is subsequently self-consciously emulated by the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*. Doniger focuses on the complex intertextuality of the tradition, drawing out themes revealed through the various ways the texts engage with one another. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, for instance, situates itself within the larger *Mahābhārata* by presenting that tale as narrated to the dying Parikṣit by Śuka, the son of Vyāsa. It thereby projects its frame into the narrative in which the *Mahābhārata* frames itself. The *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* employs a similar yet distinct strategy, portraying the text as narrated to Śuka by Vyāsa, an event that is framed before the events of the *Mahābhārata* take place. Furthermore, in its own retelling of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* replaces the snake sacrifice performed by Janamejaya with a sacrifice to the Goddess, thereby exalting the Purāṇa in a Śākta context. In these various selections of narrators Doniger finds a deeper significance, one that reveals the underlying emphases of the texts. In the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Vyāsa is portrayed as somewhat involved in worldly concerns – he is subject to passions and fathers a number of sons, including the martial kings at the center of the Epic. Vyāsa’s detached Brahman son, however, is a dispassionate renunciant, a characterization which qualifies him as a more appropriate narrator of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. As Doniger mentions, “...the *Mahābhārata* explains how the son surpassed the father, even as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* claims to surpass the text that is its father, the *Mahābhārata*.”¹⁸

In her examination of the *Skandapurāṇa*, too, Doniger emphasizes the intertextual aspects of Puranic literature, arguing that the *Skandapurāṇa* is not quite as random and disordered as is often considered. Although the text is a bit of a “scrapbook” of textual narrative, its stories are organized

¹⁸ Wendy Doniger, “Echoes of the *Mahābhārata*: Why is a Parrot the Narrator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*?” in *Purāṇa Perennis*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 40.

around abstract themes, in opposition to more blatant connections to people and/or places. This is particularly evident in the first chapter of the text, the *Kedāra Khaṇḍa*, which “looks at its own mythological tradition, selects from it, rearranges it, and restructures it into a thematic essay,” winding old stories and new stories together so as to effect a new ideological spin.¹⁹ Doniger finds the text to be counterrevolutionary in a sense, surpassing *bhakti* through its revaluation of the conservative ritualist tradition in the parlance of Puranic myth. The *Kedāra Khaṇḍa* constructs itself around the theme of the undeserving or accidental devotee who unknowingly performs a ritual act. Stories such as the thief who inadvertently rings the bell in the temple while attempting to steal it and thereby earns the grace of the deity reshape the devotional tradition. Doniger comments:

The theme of the undeserving devotee implicitly repositions ritualism, apparently “mindless” ritualism, over *bhakti*. It argues that feelings, emotions, intentions, do not count at all; that certain actions are efficacious in themselves in procuring salvation for the unwitting devotee...But the accidental devotion of the “Kedāra Khaṇḍa” is far from a return to Vedic ritualism. For knowledge (an essential criterion of Vedic ritualism) does not count any more than emotion, in this line of argument; you don’t even have to know how to do the ritual, but you do it “naturally,” almost like the natural (*sahaja*) acts of Tantric ritual.²⁰

This notion of natural, unintentional worship connects with the second dominant theme of the text, what Doniger calls a primitive feminism. The text is filled with strong human women as well as powerful, savvy goddesses who represent nature (*prakṛti*) over culture. The worship of the divine is accomplished not through elaborate ritualism or intentional devotional acts, but through the worship of the *liṅga* and *yoni* that are inherent in human nature. Thus, although the text seems to present a pastiche of narrative threads, it nevertheless formulates an intentional, unified theme; once again Purāṇa is availed as a means of altering the direction of the tradition.

¹⁹ Wendy Doniger, “The Scrapbook of Undeserved Salvation: The *Kedāra Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*” in *Purāṇa Perennis*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 52.

²⁰ Doniger, “The Scrapbook,” 63.

Emphasizing theological concepts such as *prakṛti* and equating them with manifest goddesses in order to modernize the Vedic tradition is a topic that guides the scholarship of Tracy Pintchman as well. Following textual developments through the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Epic, and Purāṇa, Pintchman traces the origins of the Great Goddess, particularly with regard to the concepts of *prakṛti*, *śakti*, and *māyā*. She demonstrates how later texts draw on the concepts and narratives found in earlier layers of Vedic literature in order to gain legitimacy within the Brahmanic tradition. The development of Mahādevī, in particular, represents an attempt to preserve Brahmanic orthodoxy by drawing from theological elements within the accepted tradition, thereby absorbing non-orthodox elements and conforming them to a new textual environment. A synthesis of philosophical and mythological cosmogonic categories subsequently gives rise to the conception of the Great Goddess, made legitimate in the Brahmanic context through the inclusion of authoritative Vedic themes. Pintchman ultimately argues that while the goddesses and narratives are not originally Vedic-Brahmanic, the framework and principles for the construction of Mahādevī are incorporated directly from Vedic philosophical systems, subsequently allowing for various goddesses to be viewed as different levels of manifestation of a single, inherently female cosmogonic power.

Pintchman begins with an exploration of the feminine divine within the Vedas themselves. By focusing on six female deities – the waters (*ap*), earth (Pṛthivī/Bhūmi), Aditi, Virāj, Vāc/Sarasvatī, and Śacī/Indrāṇī – she demonstrates that although male deities dominate the Vedic textual tradition, female deities perform integral cosmogonic roles. In the Saṃhitās, these goddesses have distinct identities which, Pintchman argues, can be viewed as laying the foundation for later formulations of the Great Goddess as *prakṛti* and *śakti*. The waters (*ap*) are both material and abstract in their unmanifest form as the foundation of creation. They are a healing, life-affirming

maternal goddess and they also serve as primal matter. Pr̥thivī/Bhūmi is the physical earth that sustains living creatures, the universal mother of corporeal creation, and the manifest matter formed in cosmogony. Due to her procreative powers, her maternal nature is characterized as her dominant quality. Aditi is at times conflated with earth; she is a mother figure, she is the earth, and she is a universal abstract goddess representing physical creation itself. Virāj is a divine cosmic force that enlivens creation, but is also considered a foundational material principle. Vāc is the faculty of speech and the universal creative power that sustains and stimulates the cosmos as its life energy. Śacī is considered to be the strength of the gods, the energy that is an inherent aspect of the male. Thus in the Saṃhitās, Pintchman discerns two prominent tendencies regarding the nature of female divinities. First, several goddesses are associated in some aspect with materiality and/or energy, exhibiting both manifest and unmanifest principles of creation. Second, these goddesses are distinct divinities, though they share certain characteristics and identities. Drawing from this aspect of cross-attribution, the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads demonstrate a tendency for these separate goddesses to shed their individual personalities in favor of a unified identity, thereby establishing a more general notion of a fluid female divinity. The general cosmogonic pattern that emerges posits two distinct phases:

(1) creation is impelled into motion by the interaction of a male creator figure, Prajāpati, with his female counterpart or mate, Vāc; (2) this interaction leads to the production of the primordial waters from or as Vāc. The waters are then manipulated, and the manifest cosmos or earth is formed.²¹

This two-fold model of creation thus gives rise to conceptions of the feminine divine as both an activating principle *and* the material from which the cosmos is formed.

²¹ Tracy Pintchman, *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 54.

Pintchman then proceeds to connect these Vedic cosmogonies with post-Vedic developments of Sāṃkhya philosophy, which subsequently influences Śākta theologies to a great degree. Similarities between older cosmogonic themes and the developing concepts of *prakṛti*, *māyā*, and *śakti* allow for an easy integration of Vedic identities with Sāṃkhyan categories in Epic and Puranic literature. This then exalts the Goddess within three cosmogonic roles: the supreme creator who wills creation, the material basis of creation, and creation itself. In the classical Sāṃkhya formulation, the two opposing ontological principles of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are the source of existence – *puruṣa* as inactive consciousness and *prakṛti* as the material basis, itself composed of the three basic *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. When the *guṇas* are in equilibrium, *prakṛti* exists in an unmanifest state called *mūlaprakṛti*; when the *guṇas* are unbalanced and in tension, the manifest *prakṛti* arises from *mūlaprakṛti*, a transformation itself brought about through the power of *śakti*. Similarly, the concept of *māyā* allows for a transition from *nirguṇa brahman* to *saguṇa brahman*, the two ontological levels of reality of Advaita Vedānta philosophy (though the lower is ultimately considered as illusory). The Epic and Puranic materials recast these philosophical concepts by combining them with the older Vedic mythological narrative strands, the two-fold model of each system allowing for a straightforward conflation. Influenced by the context of *bhakti*, *nirguṇa brahman* is conceived as the transcendent form of a particular deity; *puruṣa* becomes the divinity's *saguṇa* form, while *prakṛti* replaces the primordial waters as the material cause of the manifest universe. This basic framework can be adapted to fit any sectarian context, and accounts for the incorporation of various deities by recognizing them as distinct manifestations of a unified whole. The Brahmanic tradition is thus able to maintain its authority while simultaneously strengthening its appeal by incorporating local deities into its ideological frame.

Accompanying this emphasis on intertextual methodologies is an acknowledgement of the deep literary criticism necessary for each narrative involved both within and across texts. Arguing that the reader must delve deeply into rigorous analysis that probes below the surface structure of the text, David Shulman, for example, examines how Puranic narrative has continued to be shaped and re-shaped outside of the Sanskrit tradition. He traces the cyclic appropriation of a particular South Indian narrative as it transitions from an Ālvār devotional hymn to the Sanskrit *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, and then returns to the vernacular in a somewhat altered form in the 15th century Telugu *Bhāgavatamu* of Bammara Potana. Unlike previous scholarship on Potana, which focused on his narrative changes, elaborations, and occasional deletions of the Sanskrit prototype, Shulman looks beyond the surface structure of the work in an attempt to uncover a distinct essence that pervades its overall outlook. Shulman explains:

Narrative innovations alone are often the least impressive transformations we find in studying these works. In fact, in Potana's case actual changes in the narrative structure, including the detailed progression of most individual narrative episodes, are relatively minimal; in retelling the stories, he has, on the whole, stuck closely to his Sanskrit text, often to the point of quoting whole phrases verbatim in the form of long Sanskrit compounds...Nevertheless, despite this close verbal correspondence and even, on occasion, identity, Potana's verses breathe a rather different spirit from that of the Sanskrit original – the spirit, no doubt, of fifteenth-century Andhra as well as of the idiosyncratic inner world of the particular poet.²²

Shulman urges, then, an evaluation of shifting narratives that runs much deeper than alterations in language and plot; he aims to reach the heart of the work through a more sensitive reading of the texts. In comparing two versions of the scene that sets the stage for the *Gajendra-mokṣa* episode common to the texts, Shulman perceives a much more sensual, erotic atmosphere in Potana's *Bhāgavatamu* than the others, achieved through more vital language and the presence of semiotic

²² David Shulman, "Remaking a Purāṇa: The Rescue of Gajendra in Potana's Telugu *Mahābhāgavatamu*," in *Purāṇa Perennis*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 123.

markers such as bees, which naturally evoke a sensual eroticism in the context of South Asian literature. Similarly, in considering the inner monologue of a distraught and dying Gajendra, Shulman finds the language of the *Bhāgavatamu* here to be much more personal and familiar than the formal speech of the Sanskrit version of the episode, a transformation brought about through colloquial syntax and style. Such shifts in language and texture, he finds, direct the text away from the Advaita metaphysics that underlie the Sanskrit original to a text more grounded in physical sensation and personalization as befits the motivations of *bhakti*. Reading the texts with an attuned, interpretative eye thus uncovers a more semantically rich comparison, which in this case demonstrates a decided de-emphasis on *mokṣa* in favor of a deeper intimacy with the manifest divine.

Burgeoning Studies of Śākta Upa/Purāṇa

Though scholarship had acknowledged the pervasiveness of goddesses within South Asian religious worlds prior to the 1980s, the recognition of Śākta Purāṇa as a noteworthy literary genre remained obscure until that time. The emergence of significant academic studies – particularly those of Thomas Coburn and C. Mackenzie Brown – launched ongoing dialogues about the role of the feminine divine in Sanskrit literature and the rise of a Great Goddess within Hindu traditions. Coburn has devoted an entire career to the analysis of the *Devīmāhātmya*, arguably the most influential Goddess-focused Sanskrit text. In his early work, he strives to understand the work in its original religious contexts by uncovering the relationships between the *Devīmāhātmya* and earlier Sanskrit literature. Through the examination of literary motifs present in the text, he traces their textual precursors through pre-*Devīmāhātmya* Sanskrit materials and thus sheds light on how the *Devīmāhātmya* itself draws from the existing tradition while formulating its new

characterization of the Goddess. His studies thus address two fundamental questions: “How is the Sanskrit tradition made contemporary, and how is the worship of the Goddess made traditional?”²³ In other words, how do the Sanskrit/Brahmanical and the non-Sanskrit/extra-Brahmanical intertwine on the popular level?

Coburn’s scholarship centers on investigating Purāṇa – the *Devīmāhātmya* in particular – as it engenders Vedic truths in a contemporaneously relevant way. In his landmark introductory monograph on the text,²⁴ he focuses on three primary aspects: its epithets, myths, and hymns. The initial component of the project consists of a series of word studies in which the names and descriptive adjectives accorded to the Goddess in the *Devīmāhātmya* are considered against a Vedic background. Coburn argues that the text employs Vedic Sanskrit terminology in describing the rising figure of Mahādevī as its primary means of depicting the Goddess as a traditional figure. The second portion of the study focuses on the three narrative episodes in which the Goddess slays the Asuras (1) Madhu and Kaiṭabha, (2) Mahiṣa, and (3) Śumbha and Niśumbha. Coburn demonstrates that narrative precursors to each of these mythological strands are present in Sanskrit literature prior to the time of the *Devīmāhātmya*, though without associations with the Goddess. The text incorporates these tales that were previously connected with Viṣṇu, Skanda, and Kṛṣṇa, but then either substitutes the Goddess or depicts the deity as subject to her control. It thereby regenerates the former narrative threads for an innovative Śākta theology. Following a similar analytic approach in the third section of his research, Coburn indicates correspondences between the hymns in the *Devīmāhātmya* and others of earlier textual origins. Underscoring particular motifs and significant verbal correspondences, he argues that the hymns of the *Devīmāhātmya* are

²³ Thomas B. Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 9.

²⁴ Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*.

a prime representation of how the Vedic-Sanskritic tradition is operative in the devotional core of the text. The tradition has evolved by adopting new concepts clothed in old language.

In a subsequent monograph,²⁵ Coburn also explores the supplementary *aṅgas* that precede and follow the text as well as two of its primary commentaries, a method he employs to shed light on the tradition's later understandings of the text and its role within the ritual sphere. Since at least the fourteenth century (though likely much earlier), the *aṅgas* have been an integral component of the *Devīmāhātmya*, so much so that a modern commentator declares the real reason Rāma slew Rāvaṇa is because he recited the text without them. These “appendages” are largely concerned with the ritual use of the text's words, which are to be uttered in the presence of an image of the Goddess. The three *aṅgas* that precede the text focus on the ritual preparation of the reciter and the maximization of the text's power, while the following three are concerned with the iconography of the images and their relationship to the Goddess herself. As Coburn puts it, “The *aṅgas*, in short, deal with the acts, the sounds, and the sights of worshipping the Goddess.”²⁶ Ultimately, Coburn demonstrates how these developments and varied hermeneutical positions have influenced the interpretative process, giving rise to multiple views on Śākta theology. As a bearer of great ritual and semantic importance, the *Devīmāhātmya* continues to engage as a dynamic influence for contemporary religious life in South Asia.

Apart from Coburn's influential studies, those of C. Mackenzie Brown also stand as influential pioneers for the genre of Śākta Purāṇa, specifically with regard to his emphasis on the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*. He often employs an intertextual approach that situates the *Devībhāgavata* in conversation with the *Devīmāhātmya*. A noteworthy example of such intertextual considerations

²⁵ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*.

²⁶ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 101.

in his work concerns the incorporation of *Devīmāhātmya* narrative components into the circa 12th-16th century *Devīgītā*, a portion of the *Devībhāgavata*. Brown suggests that while simultaneously developing a Tantric and Advaitic identity of the Goddess, the *Devīgītā* presents her in a decidedly tamed form in comparison with her martial portrayal in the earlier *Devīmāhātmya*. Focusing on the myth of the initial emergence of the Goddess, Brown focuses on two primary motifs in the *Devīgītā*: the Goddess as an aniconic blazing orb of light, and the iconic form of the Goddess that emerges from that light. Whereas the myth as expressed in the *Devīmāhātmya* portrays the Goddess as issuing forth from the collective anger of the gods, in the *Devīgītā* she manifests from an orb of light after having been praised by the gods for several years. Brown suggests that the initial ball of light symbolizes the supreme consciousness that is the non-dual *brahman* of Advaita Vedānta, while the embodied manifestation stands as her Tantric identity, Bhuvaneśvarī. Brown elaborates:

The synthesis of the Vedic and Tantric within a Śākta perspective stresses the identity of Bhuvaneśvarī with Brahman and her absoluteness and complete independence from any male consort...As both Bhuvaneśvarī and Brahman, she is paradoxically the benign World-Mother beyond all relationship, identical with all and subject to none.²⁷

The myth of the emergence of the Goddess in the *Devīgītā* represents both her Vedic identity as the ultimate principle as well as her manifestation as a Tantric deity. This dual nature is reinforced through the text's identification of the Goddess as both Om̐ (her sonic representation as fundamental basis of the universe) and as Hrīm̐ (the seed-syllable of her Tantric essence as World-Mother). The *Devīgītā* thus draws connections between the Vedic and Tantric spheres by equating manifestations of the feminine divine with the absolute.

²⁷ C. Mackenzie Brown, "The Tantric and Vedāntic Identity of the Great Goddess in the Devī Gītā of the Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa," in *Seeking Mahādevī*, ed. Tracy Pintchman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 28.

Brown focuses further on the relationship between the Brahmanic and the local in the majority of his scholarship, with continued attention to intertextual methodologies. He explains that the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* was composed as an explicit response to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, though its theology is rooted in the *Devīmāhātmya*; it thus converts Vaiṣṇava themes into a Śākta context. However, unlike the earlier *Devīmāhātmya*, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* emphasizes the maternal characterization of the Goddess while downplaying her martial aspects. Although it retells the narratives of the *Devīmāhātmya* (twice), it does so in a way that emphasizes notions of infinite compassion rather than brutal destruction. The two prominent trends of the text, then, are (1) to usurp the position of masculine theologies and (2) to steer existing feminine theology toward a more tender position.

In striving to position itself above the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* draws from many of its narratives but refashions them to glorify a distinct set of issues, in particular that of renouncer versus householder. Brown argues that the ideal devotee presented in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is the *saṁnyāsin*; on the whole the text seems wary of the householder stage for fear of attachments to worldly life. The *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, in contrast, portrays the householder stage in a positive light, and insists that a man must pass through all four traditional *āśramas*. Brown comments:

This more positive assessment is due in part, I suggest, to the *Devī-Bhāgavata*'s greater appreciation of the maternal role not only in the divine but also in the human realm. Both *Bhāgavatas* share the same ultimate goal of transcending the limitations of the finite world, yet often the *Devī-Bhāgavata* author seems a bit more comfortable being in the world, a little more able to appreciate, or to be amused by, the mother's play with her children.²⁸

²⁸ Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 32.

In addition to this affirmation of the worldly path, the *Devībhāgavata* attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the *Bhāgavata* by embarrassing and demeaning Viṣṇu as it also inverts the *Bhāgavata*'s theological significance. The *Bhāgavata* seems intent on subordinating karma to *bhakti*, as even the worst of atrocities (such as brahminicide) can be cleansed through devotion to Lord Viṣṇu; the *Devībhāgavata*, on the other hand, supplants this devotional attitude, instead emphasizing the patience and love of the divine Mother. The *Devībhāgavata* demonstrates that in contrast to the tactics of *deception* that Viṣṇu employs to overcome demonic forces, the Goddess relies on *delusion* to destroy the pride of demons and thereby rid any threats to her children's well-being.²⁹

In reconsidering existing Śākta theology, the text utilizes two recountings of the three narrative episodes of the *Devīmāhātmya*, but re-envision the characterization of the Goddess. Brown indicates that a fundamental tension has existed in identifications of the Goddess as simultaneously mother, alluring woman, and warrior hero. While the *Devīmāhātmya* presents a shift from the erotic/romantic to the horrific, emphasizing the destructive aspects of the Goddess and supplying devotional hymns for her pacification, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* presents a more even split between her erotic and horrifying aspects. It absorbs this innate tension by emphasizing the contrasting manifestations of the Goddess, Ambikā and Kālīkā, thereby allowing for a clear distinction between explicitly light and dark aspects.

The work of Patricia Dold, which focuses on Śākta devotionism as expressed through the narratives of the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, also demonstrates the ways in which the tradition grapples with the fusion of the Goddess's simultaneous ferocious and tender aspects. Kālī stands

²⁹ As Brown emphasizes, the text clearly demarcates between two sets of terms, with Viṣṇu associated with words of trickery and deceit. The Goddess contrastingly employs *māyā* (delusion, illusion), which evokes much more philosophical sentiments regarding the nature of reality. See Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 72.

as the foremost deity in the text, though her characterization is modified from earlier iterations to suit its *bhakti*-focused context. While other Śākta Upa/Purāṇas emphasize Kālī as a terrifying and grotesque facet of the Great Goddess, the *Mahābhāgavata*, which considers Kālī as equivalent with Mahādevī, tempers these less attractive traits of the feminine divine. Dold explains that the Kālī of the text is not emaciated, angry, destructive, or governed by blood lust; she is not linked with the cremation ground as the personification of death, nor with thieves or other peripheral communities on the margins of Brahmanical society.³⁰ Her “attire and ornaments still include a lolling tongue, disheveled hair, and a garland of heads, but these are euphemistically called lovely, charming, and beautiful, and are said to complement her ‘sparkling tiara’ and ‘full high breasts.’”³¹ Despite this taming of her appearance and character, Kālī maintains her terrifying and wondrous powers, but now employs them to test the resolve of her devotees. For instance, now recognized as the wife of Śiva, as well as the daughter of Dakṣa and subsequently Himālaya and Menā, Kālī adopts more domesticated roles, though she occasionally reveals her wild and wrathful form as she tests the resolve of her husband and parents. For instance, when she shows herself to Dakṣa, he laments the loss of his daughter’s golden skin and fine dress, and blames her shamelessness on her new husband, Śiva. He fails her test, and thus loses both his daughter and his own head as a result. Similarly, devotees must move beyond her fearsome surface to reach the motherly core. “Those who pass her test,” Dold explains, “acknowledge her supreme status in spite of, or perhaps *because of* [emphasis hers], her terrifying appearance...”³² Though the Goddess may frighten, the

³⁰ Patricia Dold, “Kālī the Terrific and Her Tests: The Śākta Devotionalism of the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*,” in *Encountering Kālī*, ed. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 41.

³¹ Dold, “Kālī the Terrific,” 41.

³² Dold, “Kālī the Terrific,” 52.

true devotee perceives her loving temperament; s/he thus suffers pain when separated from her, longs for her presence, and experiences utmost joy when graced by it.

While the *Devīmāhātmya* and *Devībhāgavata* have kindled a good deal of scholarly discussion, guided especially by Coburn and Brown, the lesser known Śākta texts have only recently begun to attract academic attention. Dold's work on the *Mahābhāgavata* is one of only a few, and studies of the *Kālikāpurāṇa* are similarly scant. Consideration of the *Devīpurāṇa* is even further limited; apart from R. C. Hazra's examination of the text in his comprehensive studies of Upapurāṇa, the text is nearly absent from scholarly discourse, apart from passing references by Śākta and Purāṇa specialists such as Rachel Fell McDermott and Wendy Doniger. Brown himself acknowledged a similar, though less severe, state of disregard for the *Devībhāgavata* prior to his own research:

While many scholars of Hindu goddesses in recent years have increasingly turned to the *Devī-Bhāgavata* as a rich source to mine, quoting a few lines or passages here and there to illustrate certain aspects of the Devī or her cult, there has not been any systematic and critical attempt to comprehend the text's vision of the Goddess as a whole. Often the text is simply alluded to as a great Śākta exposition of the female principle as mother.³³

This quote is as equally applicable to other Śākta Purāṇas today as it was thirty years ago to the *Devībhāgavata*. In order for Śākta studies to progress, untranslated and understudied works such as the *Devīpurāṇa* must be addressed.

In Conversation: Incorporating the *Devīpurāṇa*

The most substantive studies of the *Devīpurāṇa* have been carried out by the prolific scholar R. C. Hazra, who conducted rigorous historical analyses of a wide range of Purāṇic literature.

³³ Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, xii.

Writing in the mid-20th century, his research on Puranic texts and language earned him multiple awards from the Asiatic Society, as well as esteemed positions on various boards and committees. Based as he was in Bengal – first at Dacca University and subsequently at Calcutta Sanskrit College – he demonstrated particular interest in the Upapurāṇa tradition of the Northeast. He published a two-volume study of Upapurāṇas, the second of which is devoted largely to the Śākta Upapurāṇa tradition, with a 150-page section solely devoted to the *Devīpurāṇa*.³⁴ This scholarship is by far the most extensive consideration of the text to date, and as with many Śākta Upapurāṇas, has served as the basis for contemporary scholars’ understanding of the text. The work offers a basic introduction to the text, a brief synopsis of each chapter, and historical contextualization including his arguments for dating and provenance. The majority of his study – accounting for more than two-thirds of the content – focuses on an exhaustive linguistic analysis of the text’s non-standard Sanskrit grammatical forms. He provides extensive lists of examples from the text of issues such as: alterations to nominal stems; irregular sandhi and double sandhi; manipulation of vowel length; fluidity of number, gender, and case; irregular conjugations of verbs; variations in the use of tense and mood; imprecise versification; mingling of voice; and general ungrammatical constructions. Hazra compares the language of the text with other non-Pāṇinian Sanskrit forms, ultimately determining that it expresses linkages with Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit as seen in the *Mahāvastu*, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, and *Lalitavistara*.³⁵ Such flexibility in grammar, Hazra finds, is indicative of the peripheral nature of the text, intended as it was for “unorthodox members of the Hindu society”; it thereby follows “a middle course lying between correct Sanskrit and the highly incorrect synthetic language of the pre-Pāṇinian days...”³⁶ This assertion that the language

³⁴ See R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2, 35-194.

³⁵ Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2, 143.

³⁶ Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2, 183-84.

of the text reflects a navigation of both orthodox and non-Brahmanical communities accords with the narratives as well, with the Goddess and other liminal figures assimilated along with Vedic values.

Apart from Hazra's work, only a few brief articles have focused their attention on the *Devīpurāṇa*, including a consideration of the text's position on the arts,³⁷ an acknowledgement of its contribution to the craft of bookmaking,³⁸ and an analysis of iconographic data to establish its possible dating.³⁹ The most recent study examines the incorporation of incantation in the text, with specific focus on the Padamālā Vidyā, an invocation of the fierce Cāmuṇḍā revealed in the ninth chapter.⁴⁰ In this work, Lina Gupta contextualizes the *Devīpurāṇa* to a minor extent, but her primary interest remains focused on the singular aspect of sonic formulae. The remainder of the text's inclusion in scholarly research rests in minor references by specialist scholars, usually with regard to the Goddess's characterization or some aspect of her worship, particularly in the context of Durgā Pūjā in Bengal.⁴¹ Unsurprising given her vast knowledge of epic and Puranic narrative, Wendy Doniger also reveals some familiarity with the text, drawing on a few scattered references throughout her scholarly corpus.⁴² While these citations demonstrate a general awareness of the

³⁷ Manabendu Banerjee, "Devī-purāṇa on Indian Art," *Purāṇa* 26, no. 1 (1984): 11-20.

³⁸ Pratapaditya Pal, "The Gift of Books According to the *Devī Purāṇa*," in *Kusumāñjali: New Interpretation of Indian Art and Culture* (Delhi: 1987).

³⁹ Pratapaditya Pal, "The Mother Goddesses According to the Devī-purāṇa," *Purāṇa* 30, no. 1 (1988): 22-59.

⁴⁰ Lina Gupta, "Tantric Incantation in the *Devī Purāṇa*," 231-49.

⁴¹ See, for example, David Kinsley's reference to the *Devīpurāṇa* as support for worshipping the Goddess in the form of a sword; N. N. Bhattacharyya's mention of the Goddess as Victory personified in the *Devīpurāṇa*; Rachel McDermott's comment on the *Devīpurāṇa*'s equation of Durgā Pūjā with the *aśvamedha*; or Sree Padma's reference to the *Devīpurāṇa*'s Mātṛkās. David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986), 109; N. N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram, 1996), 164; Rachel Fell McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 24; Sree Padma, *Vicissitudes of the Goddess*, 175.

⁴² Doniger's most involved engagement with the text occurs in a discussion about the gods' corruption of Asuras. Limited to a single page, she provides a brief synopsis of Ghora's deception at the hands of Nārada, who guides the royal Asura along a path of false dharma (see chapter four of the present study for

Devīpurāṇa as relevant to Śākta studies, a clear portrait of the text is lacking. The current project addresses this lacuna by designating the *Devīpurāṇa* as its primary focus. While the work of Hazra has probed the linguistic components of the text, this study aims to uncover the *Devīpurāṇa*'s distinct vision of the Goddess through comprehensive narrative analysis. Inspired by foremost scholarship in the field of Śākta Purāṇa, it continues methodological trends of intratextual sensitivity and intertextual framing. It thereby joins an ongoing conversation, but broadens and enriches it by incorporating the hallmark of a rich and nuanced text.

further consideration of this topic). See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 176.

Chapter Two

Argumentative, Aged, and Deadly: Portraits of the Feminine

As one of the earliest Sanskrit literary sources to incorporate the feminine divine to a meaningful and significant extent, the *Devīpurāṇa* serves as a fitting entrée into a conversation about the relationship between the Goddess/goddesses and the orthodox Brahmanical establishment, which had begun to acknowledge the efficacious role of the feminine by the middle of the first millennium. In its four primary narrative arcs, the text presents complex and nuanced characterizations of the feminine divine which deviate from prior Vedic considerations of the ideal woman, whether earthly or heavenly, and which differ even from the slightly earlier evolutions of the Goddess in the *Devīmāhātmya*. Eschewing any maternal qualities and instead emphasizing her martial and ferocious nature, the *Devīpurāṇa* presents a feminine divine that is combative, formidable, and ultimately deadly, but which serves under the direction of masculine authority and for the bolstering of power among the male gods in the Brahmanical religious sphere. Her erotic, terrifying, and elderly depictions mark her as a liminal figure despite her potent divinity, while her associations with the male gods, though at times fraught and tenuous, subtly situate her in a position subordinate to orthodox control. Such a mythological depiction mirrors the social situation of early medieval Bengal, when Brahmins immigrating to the region during a period of economic transition began to interact regularly with indigenous and tribal peoples living beyond the parameters of caste-based social norms. Relying on the brawn of these groups to fuel the development of a feudal economic structure, the Brahman elite ushered them into the orthodox domain, granting them social legitimacy while integrating them in a controlled and cautious manner not threatening to orthodox standards. The *Devīpurāṇa* presents a means of introducing

indigenous beliefs, practices, and mythologies into a traditional context and vocabulary, while serving as an allegory for the social evolutions of premodern Bengal.

Narrative Impacts, Intratextual Connections

In accomplishing this syncretism of competing ideological realms, the *Devīpurāṇa* employs mythological narrative as it restructures the role of the feminine divine within a Brahmanical context. Narrative can serve as a powerful tool for occasioning such social evolutions, particularly as an effective means of inciting reconsiderations of relationships between persons, objects, and situations. These altered correspondences arise in processes of change, a fundamental aspect of narrative structure. One common definition of narrative, for instance, recognizes a series of five stages, relationally established: (1) an initial state of equilibrium; (2) a disruption of the equilibrium by some action; (3) a recognition that there has been a disruption; (4) an attempt to repair the disruption; and (5) a reinstatement of the initial equilibrium.¹ In addition to this basic mode of narrative as a restorative endeavor, Rick Altman also emphasizes the role of character in the establishment of such a narrative structure: “Narratives are not made of characters here and actions there but of characters acting.”² Our study of the *Devīpurāṇa* therefore must consider not only actions of the text and their purpose, but also the mythological figures who undertake these activities. What happens? Who effects change? How is this significant? As we’ll discover, the innovations introduced in the *Devīpurāṇa*’s Goddess-focused narrative cycle largely occur within the fourth stage of narrative construction – i.e., the actions undertaken to return the cosmos to a state of equilibrium. By invoking the Goddess as the sole means of reestablishing the status quo,

¹ See Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 6-7.

² Altman, *A Theory of Narrative*, 15.

her prestige is elevated within the traditional framework. Her characterization as a liminal figure, however, emphasizes her outsider status, even as her actions strive to bolster Brahmanical supremacy. Such narrative not only unites the indigenous and the orthodox within a mythological realm, but it bonds indigenous social groups with Brahmanical society in an inclusive environment of *communitas*. By incorporating indigenous goddess figures in their literary corpus, the Brahman elite established a shared social imaginary that brought disparate groups together. The *Devīpurāṇa*'s portrayal of fierce goddesses acting under the direction of accepted male gods and for the benefit of orthodox hegemony offers a wealth of interpretive possibilities as a literary tool of social unification in the face of competing indigenous worldviews.

Mythological narrative is rich with meaning, and therefore necessitates a multifaceted approach to the interpretive process. In his seminal study of the Gaṇeśa cycle of myths, Paul Courtright emphasizes varied interpretive dimensions when approaching iterations of religious narrative in order to address their layered, multiple meanings. He draws from and enriches an interpretive apparatus previously put forth by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, which had established four possible levels of meaning in any given myth: narrative, metaphoric, cosmological/metaphysical, and sociopsychological.³ To these he adds a fifth: the etiological.⁴ Considering the goddess-centered mythologies of the *Devīpurāṇa* with such an analytic guide in mind provides a variety of vantage points for assessing their implications.

First, on the narrative level the *Devīpurāṇa* is pervaded by fierce, martial goddesses who defeat the Asuras that threaten claims to power of the dominant male gods. Second, on the metaphorical level in which narrative themes link one iteration of myth with others, pervading issues of power,

³ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 2.

⁴ Paul B. Courtright, *Gaṇeśa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 18-19.

liminality, ferocity, and eroticism are intimately entwined with the divine female form. On the third level, that of cosmology and metaphysics, the creative potentialities of the feminine principle are highlighted, emphasizing the role of the Goddess in productive capacities. Fourth, the social and psychological dimensions of the *Devīpurāṇa*'s myths indicate the inclusion of new social bodies within the orthodox structure, referencing the adoption of new peoples into an expanding caste-based system. Lastly, on the etiological level which links narrative with ritual practice, the slaying of Ghora is the mythological justification for the annual Durgā Pūjā festival, while the countless achievements of goddesses are cited as reasoning for offering devotion and material gifts to immanent goddesses rather than pursuing Vedic-based ritual performance. This five-tiered approach emphasizes the multivocality of the narratives which must be considered in order to appreciate the richness of mythological potentialities, though certainly further interpretive strategies may be possible. As we proceed, the various levels of meaning will be addressed, though the interpretation remains boundless.

Courtright's approach to the Gaṇeśa myths bears relevance for our own approach to those of the Goddess in another manner; we share with him a reticence for identifying an incontrovertible meaning of a given myth. He explains:

None of the approaches we shall explore are definitive; all are suggestive. Our purpose is not to fight the battle of methodological verification or falsification but to continue moving through the myths in various ways, gaining an insight here and there that makes them come alive and moves us to an understanding of the worlds from which they come and the worlds from which we come.⁵

There can be no final interpretation of the *Devīpurāṇa*'s myths, but we can attempt to understand how the people of premodern Bengal conceived of the Goddess and what sort of relevance she

⁵ Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, 92.

bore in their religious lives. In so doing, we may come to a clearer sense of who the Goddess is and how she came to be.

Orthodox Appropriation of Feminine Potency

The vision of a formidable, martial Goddess now pervades religious life among people of all social strata in contemporary Bengal, such that distinctions between the Brahmanical, local, and tribal with regard to the feminine divine are largely blurred. As Rachel McDermott notes:

One must conclude that the process of Brahmanization, which occurred quite late in Bengal, from the eighth to ninth centuries CE, has so assimilated and transformed goddesses like Durgā that, invested with new concerns for royalty and riches, they have lost their once-ubiquitous tribal associations.⁶

Though these goddess figures often transgress the normal boundaries of mainstream orthodox conventions – particularly in their irreverent attitudes and their demand for blood, wine, and meat – they have embedded themselves within the narratives, theologies, and rituals of the Bengali imaginaire. Goddess worship is not solely a lower-caste affair, “but one sponsored in temples run by Brahman priests, in the wealthy homes of the upper classes, and by a population...that is meat-eating.”⁷ Despite such firm entrenchment within the modern religious life which the Goddess has come to inhabit, however, the most prominent features of the feminine divine have entered the orthodox sphere from extra-Brahmanical sources. As R. C. Hazra indicates, though we find glimpses of Vedic deities such as the earth-goddess Pṛthivī in the general portrait of Devī, her

⁶ McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing*, 14. Citing Amita Ray, McDermott explains that the beginnings of Brahmanism in the region are traditionally traced to the invitation by King Ādisura to five Brahmans from Kanauj between 732 and 1017 (pg. 260, n17). See Amita Ray, “The Cult and Ritual of Durgā Pūjā in Bengal,” in *Shastric Traditions in Indian Arts*, ed. Anna Libera Dallapiccola in collaboration with Christine Walter-Mendy and Stephanie Zingel-Avé Lallemand (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1989), 133.

⁷ McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing*, 211.

identity is largely of non-Vedic origin.⁸ The *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa*, and early Purāṇas offer initial portrayals of a non-orthodox feminine divine who is often connected with wild tribes of Śābaras, Barbaras, Pulindas, and Kirātas, and as such challenges the status quo of the Vedic establishment. Though these goddesses are often presented as virgin deities sporting on mountain peaks, they begin to be associated with established male deities in a variety of ways, be it as spouse, divine mother, and/or subordinate. As Kunal Chakrabarti explains, these associations provided a legitimate space for the nascent feminine divine within the orthodox context: “The Bengal *Purāṇas* carefully constructed a plausible genealogy of the goddess and attached her manifestations to the important male members of the brahmanical pantheon to ensure authenticity and a proper place for her in the divine hierarchy.”⁹ By establishing relationships between indigenous goddesses and the male gods, the Puranic narratives offered legitimacy to powerful divine figures while fitting them into the recognized mythological framework, all without upsetting Brahmanical supremacy and control. We therefore find in the Śākta Purāṇas a Brahman elite inhabiting a “creative religio-political tension with popular and/or tribalistic ideas and forms,” as Wendell Beane phrases it.¹⁰ In this process of exchange – and it should be noted that this is a two-way dialogue of osmotic influence, despite the unidirectional implications of such terms as Aryanization, Sanskritization, Brahmanization, or Tribalization – the non-Brahmanic feminine principle is incorporated and elevated in terms borrowed directly from the orthodox context into which it enters. Tensions pervading the social reality reflect in tensions on the mythological plane, which bends to make allowance for these new inclusions. Nilima Chitgopekar comments on the complex dynamics brought about in such exchanges: “This entire process of acculturation is at times overtly and at

⁸ R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2, 16.

⁹ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 34.

¹⁰ Beane, *Myth, Cult and Symbols*, x.

times covertly marked by cultic tensions that get manifested in clashes between the deities which may be seen in the realm of mythology, and iconography, rituals and symbolism therein.”¹¹ The narratives of the *Devīpurāṇa* reveal such tensions between the non-orthodox feminine divine and the male gods who embody the Brahmanical context that the Goddess at times struggles to inhabit and which she occasionally violently resists.

These narrative activities rendered within the mythological realm bear implications for social, cultural, and ritual constructs as well. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty has argued that Puranic myth in particular not only speaks to metaphysical convictions, but also has much to say about social realities.¹² As I will argue, the fraught dynamic between the Goddess and male authority in the narrative realm of the *Devīpurāṇa* thus reflects the troublesome merging of ideologies in the mortal sphere, with mythological roles mapping onto social ones.¹³ In his studies of religious life in Kerala, Rich Freeman has demonstrated how resonances within Kerala’s social structure find expression in the mythological narratives of the region, so that “high male gods correspond to the social roles of Brahmins and kings, heaven represents the temple or palace, and goddesses stand in frequently for the lower castes who were brought into relation with these complexes.”¹⁴ In entering the Brahmanical sphere, the indigenous and tribal groups previously living outside of the caste structure underwent a “stigmatized feminization of their identity,” becoming mythically represented through the goddesses of their own religious worlds.¹⁵ Just like their fierce goddesses,

¹¹ Nilima Chitgopekar, “Indian Goddesses: Persevering and Antinomian,” in *Invoking Goddesses*, ed. Nilima Chitgopekar (New Delhi: Shakti Books, Har-Anand Publications, 2002), 19.

¹² O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, 7-9.

¹³ Various scholars have supported such an approach of reading mythology as an expression of social hierarchies. See, for example, Rich Freeman, “Purity and Violence: Sacred Power in the Teyyam Worship of Malabar” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 368-371, 546-547.

¹⁴ Rich Freeman, “Thereupon Hangs a Tail: The Deification of Vāli in the Teyyam Worship of Malabar,” in *Questioning Ramayanas*, ed. Paula Richman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 202.

¹⁵ Freeman, “Thereupon Hangs a Tail,” 202.

the impure and powerful local peoples reluctantly submit to male purity and the authority of the orthodox establishment.

The *Devīpurāṇa* thus weaves together varied ideological strands, giving rise to new, complex Śākta theologies that fit indigenous goddesses within a male-governed religious structure. Such syncretism offers no unusual phenomenon in South Asian religious life; in fact, the Purāṇas in general are renowned for absorbing elements of popular, devotional religion into the Vedic rubric and making them compatible with established orthodox doctrine. In striving to understand the rich diversity of influences of that which comes to stand as “Hinduism,” Günther-Dietz Sontheimer notably highlights five component factors of South Asia’s evolving religious world: (1) the teachings of the Brahmins; (2) asceticism and renunciation; (3) tribal religion; (4) folk religion; and (5) *bhakti*.¹⁶ These disparate domains converge in the *Devīpurāṇa*, and each contribute in noteworthy ways to a complicated vision of the feminine divine and to a multiplicity of theological hermeneutics. A dominant approach in this syncretic project is to equate local goddesses with the pre-existing Vedic conceptions of *śakti*, *māyā*, and *prakṛti*, all of which carry feminine grammatical gender and easily map onto perceived dominant female characteristics of potency, duplicity, and fecundity, respectively.¹⁷

As *śakti*, the Goddess becomes the power underlying the male divine, enlivening it and prompting creative activity. As such, without his female counterpart, the male deity is impotent – ineffective and immobile. In her facet of *māyā*, the Goddess takes on the somewhat negative trait of delusory capacity, but also becomes the very means of achieving an escape from the illusions

¹⁶ See Günther-Dietz Sontheimer, “Hinduism: The Five Components and Their Interaction,” in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 197-212.

¹⁷ For further discussion of this association, see David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 104-05; Tracy Pintchman, *The Rise of the Goddess*, 2-7, *passim*; and Tracy Pintchman, “The Goddess as Fount of the Universe: Shared Visions and Negotiated Allegiances in Purāṇic Accounts of Cosmogogenesis,” in *Seeking Mahādevī*, ed. Tracy Pintchman (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), *passim*.

that normally restrict one from understanding utmost metaphysical truths. “*Māyā* is that which impels individuals into self-centered, egotistical actions,” says David Kinsley, “*Māyā* is the sense of ego, personal identity, and individuality which clouds the underlying unity of reality and masks one’s essential identity with *brahman*....”¹⁸ This power of illusion, however, also emphasizes feminine creative capacities – the Goddess’s ability to establish or dissolve whole worlds according to the whims of her divine play. Lastly, the identification with *prakṛti* highlights the immanence of the feminine divine by recognizing her intimate connection with materiality and by highlighting her procreative potential. Counted as the basic primordial matter from which all objects and life emerge, the Goddess then becomes inextricably connected with the physical world, established as the earth itself and all its inhabitants. As Kinsley notes, “She is the foundation of all creatures and that which nourishes all creatures. As the embodiment of the earth she supports, protects, and mothers all beings.”¹⁹ Fundamentally present in the world around us but nevertheless transcendent, deluding us into false perceptions of material experience, the emergent portrait of the feminine divine within orthodox theology is complex, prompted and enriched by ongoing encounters with extra-Brahmanical goddesses. Though this is the case throughout much Puranic literature, the navigation of competing religious spheres is especially apparent in the *Devīpurāṇa*.

Śākta texts strive to incorporate local and tribal divine figures and to make them compatible with orthodox philosophical categories, Vedic goddess models, and a male-dominated conception of the cosmos. As such, they prompt shifting notions of a Great Goddess capable of diverse manifestations. This complexity results in varied understandings of the Goddess’s identity, her relationship with an array of subsidiary goddesses, and the resultant implications for cosmology,

¹⁸ Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 104.

¹⁹ Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 105.

metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology. June McDaniel traces the multiple theological visions that evolving considerations of the feminine divine may substantiate:

There is Shakta monism, in which all phenomena are the parts of the goddess, whose deepest nature is *brahman* or universal consciousness. There is Shakta monotheism, in which all other deities are aspects of a single goddess, who has created the universe. There is Shakta dualism, in which the divine couple Shiva and Shakti are the primordial deities, and Shakti is the more important figure, the mother of the universe. There is Shakta polytheism, in which many goddesses hold great power, and sometimes compete for power and devotees with other goddesses or with male gods. And there is Shakta henotheism, where many goddesses are recognized as legitimate, but one is most powerful.²⁰

The emerging conceptions of the feminine divine thus have quite varied implications for how one conceives of the world, ultimate reality, and the means to attaining religious truths. There is the idea that the Goddess is unitary, that she is the lone existent giving rising to the multiplicity of perception, experience, and even other divinity; as such, to know the Goddess is to know ultimate truth. Also present is the notion that the Goddess is a fundamental half of a masculine-feminine union, the female energy animating inert male bodies; to access the feminine divine is to tap into powerful vitality. Coexisting with both of these approaches that emphasize the unitary nature of the feminine divine are the lived realities of a multitude of goddesses. Each of these goddess figures maintains her own nature and sphere of activity but ultimately participates in an amalgamated portrait of a potent feminine divine.

We find in the *Devīpurāṇa* instances of all of these varied views – at times the Goddess is conceived as the single existent, at others she is the feminine corollary of the male gods, and throughout she exists as a variety of individual goddess figures. However, the emphasis – particularly in the narrative portions of the text – is directed toward supporting the Śiva-Śakti model in which divine feminine energies are recognized as necessary for the pursuits of male gods.

²⁰ June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

With her martial depictions, the potency of the feminine divine is undeniable, but she is nonetheless consistently portrayed as subject to male direction, particularly in the repeated motif of the *śaktis*/Mātrkāś as female counterparts to the established male gods. Though often portrayed as erotic and/or ferocious, the female divine of the text undergoes an uneasy domestication, I argue, in order to introduce precisely this theological vision, which exalts the position of the feminine while nevertheless tempering it with masculine control. As mentioned, such activity within the mythological realm reflects the contemporaneous social realities of the indigenous groups that were incorporated into the caste structure of the Brahmanical mainstream at the time of the composition of the *Devīpurāṇa*.²¹

Martial Efficacy of a Divine Feminine Nature

While other epic and Puranic works incorporate the feminine divine in the form of a domestic wife and nurturing mother, this in line with more mainstream conceptions of the normative Hindu female, the *Devīpurāṇa* presents the Goddess as a decidedly martial deity – she revels in battle, channeling her ferocity and unbridled fury toward the destruction of threatening Asura forces, satiating her bloodlust in the service of reinstituting the conventional cosmic order. What, though, is the import of conceiving of the Goddess in such terms, which seem antithetical to orthodox codes of female submission and subservience? In considering the feminist implications of the martial capacities of the Goddess as portrayed in the *Devīmāhātmya*, Cynthia Humes draws from Lacanian theory by assessing the text’s internalization of the symbolic order imposed through the acquisition of language. In a patriarchal symbolic structure, the woman is regularly presented in terms controlled by men, and so the exaltation of the female involves not a corresponding

²¹ See, for example, Thapar, *Early India*, 290-97.

reverence of the feminine, she argues, but an ascription of masculine traits to female characters, a masculinized female or “phallic feminine.” Humes points out that the authors of the *Devīmāhātmya* accept the female nature of the Goddess, but deny her the traits characteristic of women in the contemporaneous social context in doing so; they instead present her as an accomplished warrior, making use of phallic and masculine imagery. She goes on to explain that such a designation prompts two interpretations: (1) she is being described as a masculinized female, accepting traditional male functions; or (2) the ascription of male imagery to the Goddess serves to subvert its dominance.²² Humes finds the latter option more in keeping with the spirit of the text, arguing that the radical nature of the *Devīmāhātmya* strives to portray the feminine divine as transcending the boundaries of gendered categories, thereby subverting the masculine:

[The authors] took care to portray her as eschewing marriage...Unlike human women, this divine force is entirely self-sufficient and creates by her own power from internal resources as well as manipulating matter out of herself. The authors even put into her mouth the express denial that she depended on any other, and the claim that she alone was real.²³

According to Humes’s analysis, the Goddess’s refusal of patriarchal expectations is precisely what demonstrates her elevated position of divinity, vitality, and autonomy.

The situation revealed in the *Devīpurāṇa*, however, does not offer such an unequivocal subversion of patriarchal structure, presenting the Goddess as it does as fundamentally potent but nonetheless structured by male authority and concerns. Humes notes that in the later *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* the portrayals of the Goddess (and her heroism) are guided by patriarchal values and normative gendered aesthetics.²⁴ Though the portrait of the Goddess in the *Devīpurāṇa* differs somewhat from that of the *Devībhāgavata*, it too seems to promote a notion of the feminine

²² Cynthia Ann Humes, “Is the Devi Mahatmya a Feminist Scripture?” in *Is the Goddess a Feminist?*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 133.

²³ Humes, “Is the Devi Mahatmya,” 134.

²⁴ Humes, “Is the Devi Mahatmya,” 139.

divine that is less subversive than the revolutionary feminist theology of the *Devīmāhātmya*. In particular, the *Devīpurāṇa* hesitates to divorce the feminine from male authoritative oversight, despite acknowledging her substantial fount of power. The distinction between authority and power is salient when considering the Goddess's nature and her narrative exploits in the text. Rita Gross has commented on this variance in the patriarchal society of South Asia:

Authority, which is men's prerogative, is the right to command and to be obeyed. Power is the ability to influence how things happen, even though one does not [possess] the formal authority to determine what is done. Women often have considerable power in patriarchal societies, even though they have little or no authority.²⁵

While the power of the feminine divine is undeniable in the *Devīpurāṇa*, the Goddess consistently lacks complete autonomy or the freedom to elect to pursue a particular course of action – a feature that occasionally gives rise to frictions between the Goddess and the males with whom she interacts. The text endeavors to substantiate her acute potency by emphasizing her female form, ferocity, martial ability, and liminal status, but also underscores her pervasive coupling with male gods who summon her and direct her various pursuits. Though the hymns of the text often supplicate the Goddess by praising her utmost position of supremacy as ultimate creatrix, the narratives depict a feminine divine who must bend to patriarchal control.

Battling Asuras in the *Devīpurāṇa*

The martial capacities of the Goddess are presented in each of the four primary narrative arcs, though the first, which is the longest and most complex, presents an expansive platform for portraying the prowess, fury, beauty, and victorious nature of the feminine divine. The basic frame

²⁵ Rita M. Gross, "Is the Goddess a Feminist?" in *Is the Goddess a Feminist?*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 108.

of the narrative involves the rise to power of the Asura Ghora, who along with his sons Vajradaṇḍa and Kāla garners control over the earth, heavens, and netherworlds, achieved by a boon won through his paradigmatic dharmic nature and his unflagging devotion to Lord Viṣṇu. In order to defeat the Asura generals and ultimately overcome Ghora himself, the displaced gods conscript the various manifestations of the feminine divine in order to harness female ferocity in battle. The Goddess is portrayed throughout as angry, hostile, and skilled in the deployment of weaponry; in successive battles, she wrathfully defeats the Asuras who threaten the established order. First, she slays Kāla with ease, destroying his army and slicing him apart:

He [Kāla] sank to the ground, wounded in that attack by the Goddess. Having revived and having steadied his mind, with a stormy anger he hurled the terribly painful barbed arrow; but the Goddess shattered that approaching [weapon] with arrows, and cast many others at him. With one [arrow] she shattered the chariot of mighty Kāla, with another his horse, and with another his umbrella along with the banner and flagstaff. His fury was increased by her arrows. Then Kāla hurled a mace and proceeded towards the Goddess to attack. The Goddess threw a discus at the warrior Kāla, and he fell to the ground, dead.²⁶

Similarly, the fury of the Goddess is provoked in battle with Kāla's brother, Vajradaṇḍa, and she dispatches terrifying weapons that bring down the Asura warrior and his surrounding forces:

Vajra[daṇḍa] launched five hundred arrows at the Goddess's bow; [seeing] her bow shattered by them, the Goddess was inflamed with the fire of rage. She released a Vāruṇa weapon that was equal in splendor to a mighty storm cloud, thundering terribly and filling the ten directions with lightning. It then rained down and washed away all of the Dānava army...Having destroyed his chariot and charioteer, as well as the staff bearing the umbrella and banner, [the Goddess] slew the mighty and courageous Vajra[daṇḍa] with an arrow feathered with fragments of gold.²⁷

In the final battle with Ghora, the vision of the Goddess is one of terror and might, comparable to the forces that will bring about the dissolution at the end of time:

[Ghora] saw her, powerfully inflamed with fury like the dissolution fire, seated on the best of lions, creating fear in the Danu lord and allaying that of the chief of

²⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 14.23-25.

²⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 15.17-18, 21-22.

gods...All of the army of Ghora, its vicious form arisen through illusion, was thus hindered. The Goddess threw the approaching [Ghora] to the ground and slit his throat with a sword.²⁸

Her frenzied laughter underscoring her insouciant approach to battle,²⁹ the Goddess deftly dispatches the enemy to the realm of the dead, channeling her ferocity in the service of the gods' benefit.

The might and martial prowess of the Goddess are emphasized throughout the text, particularly in the first narrative arc, this by her perpetual association with the conception of victory. She frequently manifests as the so-called four sisters – Jayā, Vijayā, Ajitā, and Aparājītā – whose names literally conjure feminized embodiments of Victory, Triumph, Invincibility, and Unconquerability, respectively. Assisting in battle, they prove themselves to be indispensable and talented warriors, of vicious nature and adept at weaponry, their portrayal as stunning young maidens who are paragons of youthful beauty notwithstanding. As Vijayā approaches for battle, for example, the mere glance from her eyes yields deadly force, effortlessly bringing down an Asura who was filled with desire for her:

Adorned with ornaments, opulent with the luster of various gifts, [the Goddess] began to frolic with other youthful maidens...A mighty Dānava warrior named Durmukha was dispatched to the head of the army, and the goddess Vijayā also arrived there for the sake of play. Having seen her, the mind of that Daitya leader was afflicted with desire, and he extended his hand to her. When the goddess glanced at him, that sinner fell to the ground, lifeless. Vijayā then approached the Goddess Sandhyā, the original principle, and explained, “Oh Goddess, a Dānava came, possessed by desire for me. I became so angry that when I looked at him, he died.”³⁰

The portrayal of Vijayā here serves to emphasize the feminine charms of the four divine sisters, but also underscores their deadly power. Though they may appear innocuous, as delicate young

²⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 20.24-25, 32-33.

²⁹ See, for example, the passage at *Devīpurāṇa* 18.4.

³⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 13.63, 68-70.

women, their feminine allure is transmuted into corresponding feminine power, dangerous when unleashed. Such portrayals linking lovely, somewhat erotic visions of the feminine divine with deadly, brute force serve to present orthodox ideals of conventional female beauty as consonant with evolving notions of a martial Goddess. In a passage which calls to mind these four sisters who are consistently invoked in support of female martial accomplishments, established poetic tropes of female beauty rigorously describe four guardian goddesses explicitly named as embodiments of the four Vedas. Adorned with celestial silk garments and shining divine ornaments, bearing *vīṇā* and weaponry in hand, the goddesses are intimately detailed from head to toe: their musk-scented blue-black hair appears like snakes bound in a braid gliding down their backs; their doe-like eyes are bright blue like the petals of a lotus blossom; their lips are bright red like the *bimba* gourd; necklaces fall in between their perky round breasts; their hips are broad, like the back of a tortoise, and their thighs are like elephant trunks; their lovely toes are all proportionate.³¹ While these goddesses are unambiguously identified with Veda and traditional portraits of the female body, they are also attributed unconventional forms of power: merely viewing them is said to be bewildering; they offer protection to gods during periods of misfortune; and they bestow whatever is desired, including liberation.³² The gentle forms of the feminine divine are thereby connected with the vigor of more fearsome manifestations, their gentle beauty overlaying an uncompromising ferocity, as the text plainly states: “She who bears a beautiful, peaceful form also manifests as a frightful slayer of the gods’ enemies.”³³ The nurturing cow of a Vedic mother now merges with the demoniac vision of the non-orthodox goddess, highlighting the efficacious power of such a union.

³¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.19-36.

³² *Devīpurāṇa* 7.25, 36-39.

³³ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.41.

The feminine divine not only wields incredible power over the threatening forces of Asura enemies, but also seems able to affect the capacities of the gods as well, though ultimately in support of divine objectives. For instance, when the Asura Ghora prepares for battle with the Goddess and her heavenly retinue, the gods are plagued by anxiety and fear. In order to allay their distress, the Goddess grants them a palliative by overcoming their minds in her form as yogic sleep:

When the sun had set and twilight set in, Ajitā was dispatched to remove the fear of the gods. Yogic sleep was called to the minds of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra, and Rudra...The Great Goddess thus approached at night for the preservation of the gods.³⁴

Unlike the *Devīmāhātmya*, the *Devīpurāṇa* does not include the legendary narrative of Viṣṇu asleep on the cosmic waters, overwhelmed by the soporific effects of the goddess Yoganidrā; however, the text here seems to be referencing the episode by dispatching the Goddess to delude the minds of the most powerful of the established male gods. Not only is she powerful enough to overcome any Asura foe, but her strength surpasses that of all other divine forces.

Despite this superior position, however, the force of the Goddess does not seem to be held entirely under her own authority; rather, it is directed by others, consistently put to use in the benefit of male gods. In the preceding passage, for instance, though the agent is not explicitly mentioned, the text is clear that the Goddess was sent by another in the service of the gods' psychological welfare. Such direction pervades the text, making apparent the subjection of the feminine divine to the desires of others, regardless of the Goddess's position of prominence and potency. She may be the very embodiment of power, but she is not the authoritative wielder of that power. Though the point is not belabored, she is repeatedly positioned in a subtle subordination to

³⁴ *Devīpurāṇa* 20.18-20.

male control, usually that of Śiva. For example, when the gods wish to proposition the Goddess for her assistance in defeating Ghora and his Asura forces, they first must appeal to Śiva, who then calls her forth and compels her to action: “By the command of Śambhu, she appeared in manifest form along with Jayā and the rest.”³⁵ Similarly, when the gods desire help in defeating Ruru, another Asura who threatens their hegemonic control, they first praise Śiva, prompting a terrible manifestation of the Goddess to emerge from his anger, eager to follow his command:

Frightening all the directions, she came before the lord of gods [Śambhu] and said: “What shall I do? Oh lord of gods, tell me quickly.” The unconquered Aparājītā was addressed by the pleased god: “If you are lovingly devoted to me, Oh Goddess, you must attack Ruru.” [She replied:] “Oh lord of gods, I will do as you have spoken.” Then Śambhu created a great ocean of wine. [He said:] “Drink this along with the [other] *śaktis*, and come under the control of anger.”³⁶

Such passages suggest that the Goddess is at the beck and call of masculine divine forces, particularly those of Śiva. She approaches when summoned, dutifully requests instruction, and compliantly employs her immense power in service to the gods.

Such an agreeable comport, however, is not always expressed in the Goddess’s nature; she occasionally reveals a defiant streak when scorned or pressed to perform acts she finds undesirable. This discrepancy between power and authority at times becomes clear when the Goddess, like an unruly adolescent, lashes out at the authoritative establishment. The most blatant example of such rebelliousness is found when an Asura manifests before Śiva and Umā, and she curses him to take birth on earth as Ghora. Viewing this command as a strengthening of the enemy’s position rather than a retributive sentence, Śiva chastises the Goddess, calling her a foolish girl and noting her capricious woman’s nature. Angered by her husband’s harsh words, the Goddess lashes out, conferring excessive might to the gods’ foe in retaliation for insensitive treatment:

³⁵ *Devīpurāṇa* 16.15.

³⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 85.22-25.

Thus addressed by Śambhu, the Goddess was angered. Looking towards that [Asura, she said]: “Having become the best of my devotees, you will conquer all the gods. As one who remains supremely affectionate toward Viṣṇu, you will become invincible....Having become commander of the seven continents [of earth], the seven netherworlds, and the seven worlds along with heaven, you will be unconquerable.”³⁷

Here the rancorous Goddess passionately resists male authority and demonstrates her unencumbered abilities by elevating the enemy Asura to new heights, thereby surpassing Brahmanical oversight. She broadens a domestic quarrel into a fundamental cosmic struggle, threatening the status quo and universal norms. Her attempt is undermined, however, when Śiva delivers a counter curse, deeming that the Goddess too will embody on earth and submit to marriage with the Asura lord, once again subject to male authority. So while the Goddess may be divine power incarnate, she is not in control of that power, instead subject to the exploits of the male divine world.

Tamed Śaktis and Wild Mātrkās

The notion of the powerful feminine guided by the authoritative masculine appears throughout the text, particularly with the narrative development of the *śaktis*, conceived as female counterparts who enliven their male correlates. While goddesses had previously been associated with male gods as wives and lovers, the theological evolution of the *śaktis* raises the feminine divine to a more empowered and influential position, positing feminine power as a constitutive attribute of animated male divinity. Thomas Coburn notes that the *Devīmāhātmya* is careful to distinguish a god’s consort from his *śakti*, emphasizing that the *śakti* is more than simply a female companion to male

³⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 4.75-77.

authority, but is a fundamental, internal component of his character and power.³⁸ As Coburn explains, the *śaktis* of Indra and Śiva, for example, are not presented as Śacī and Umā – their long-known respective consorts – but as Aindrī and Māheśvarī, the female versions of the gods themselves. While characterization as consort generally implies inferior power and status to the divine spouse to whom they are appended,³⁹ consideration as *śakti* involves a much more essential relation. The *Devīpurāṇa* continues to build on this concept of female *śaktis* as fundamental to male identity, demonstrating that the invigorating power of the feminine inhabits the male form and can be conjured for worldly successes. Also referring to them as “rays” (*marīcī*), the text emphasizes their unlimited capacities as condensed energy, though it continues to represent them as subject to male direction. They are frequently called forth in battle because of their ferocity and potency, but they act when called forth by their male counterpart. For example, when Brahmā feared for the gods during a battle with the Asuras, he summoned the female version of himself:

“Having taken on the form of a woman, I will assist Maheśvara...” Then Brahmā generated his own *śakti*. That goddess was luminous like sunbeams. In one hand was a water pot, and in the other was a bow. Though one, she was established in crores of manifestations, bearing all the weapons. They killed, but were not struck; they felled [Asuras] by the thousands. Though bearing the form of Brahmā, her body appeared as that of a woman. She was mounted on the goose vehicle and was bearing her own appropriate weapons. Threatening, she terrified the floods of Dānavas.⁴⁰

The passage intimately connects the potent feminine *śakti* with the male creator god, Brahmā, blurring boundaries between his male and female forms. The portrayal is undeniably that of Brahmā, drawing as it does from the firmly established attributes of water pot and associated goose

³⁸ See Thomas B. Coburn, “Consort of None, *Śakti* of All: The Vision of the *Devī-māhātmya*,” in *The Divine Consort*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982), 161.

³⁹ See Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, “The Shifting Balance of Power in the Marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī,” in *The Divine Consort*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982), 129.

⁴⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 84.21-25.

vehicle; but the form is emphasized as irrefutably female, and it is by harnessing that threatening feminine power that Brahmā is able to turn the tide of battle. As the other gods witness the efficacy of Brahmā's transformation, they too summon their own inherent feminine energies. By thinking of the radiant one "present in the lotus of his heart," Śaṅkara, Kārttikeya, Viṣṇu, Yama, and Śakra each recall their female forms, who subsequently bring down the Asura forces.⁴¹ Again, the feminine is associated with power, the masculine with the authority to deploy that power.

The tensions of the unbalanced power/authority relationship occasionally come to light in the characterization of the *śaktis*, which the *Devīpurāṇa* consistently conflates with the Mātṛkās, as do many Śākta texts. The association of *śaktis* with the Mātṛkās serves to incorporate liminal divine powers into the orthodox structure and to tie them to the male divine, but in so doing also characterizes the *śaktis* with the wild nature which had been attributed to the Mātṛkās for several centuries. Some of the earliest references to the Mātṛkās are found in the *Mahābhārata*, in sections likely dating to the first century CE.⁴² At this early stage, they possess inauspicious qualities and are especially dangerous, as evidenced when these bad tempered, threatening goddesses are dispatched to kill the young Kārttikeya; though they are wooed by him and instead become his mothers, they continue to be conceived as evil spirits who are particularly inimical to children. They are fierce, terrifying, and grotesque; they are successful in battle; they live on the fringe, in trees, at crossroads, in caves, on mountains, at springs, and in burning grounds.⁴³ By the time of the *Devīmāhātmya*, the Mātṛkās were transformed from threatening, peripheral figures to the

⁴¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 85.1-12.

⁴² Mātṛkās and Yoginīs were likely drawn from the pervasive *grāmadevatās*, or village goddesses, who form the basis of popular religious life on the local level. Still today, *grāmadevatās* inform the religious beliefs and practices governing rural village life, and in many locales continue to manifest as threatening goddesses of sickness and in the gnarled bodies of aged women. For discussion of the *grāmadevatās*, see Sree Padma, *Vicissitudes of the Goddess*, *passim*.

⁴³ See David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 151-53.

fundamental energies fueling an orthodox Śākta theology. Drawing from a long tradition of sacred female heptads that extends into the Vedic period,⁴⁴ the *Devīmāhātmya* formalized the Mātṛkās as seven *śaktis*, female correlates vivifying the male divine body, namely Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Nārasimhī, and Aindrī. The *Devīpurāṇa* inherits this theological vision, but tends to oscillate between this later Puranic development and the prior notions of the Mātṛkās as wild, liminal figures. On the one hand, the Mātṛkās are tamed by becoming correlated with an authoritative male figure, though on the other hand they at times lash out, threatening orthodox norms with their unleashed and inauspicious vigor. Such threat is made explicit, for example, when the *śaktis*/Mātṛkās go wild gorging themselves on the flesh of slain Asuras after battle:

The Great Goddess wounded that [lord of Dānavas] whose courage and might had been destroyed, drawing out a stream of blood, fat, marrow, and bone. The Mothers gathered up his head and skin, and departed; they assembled together and began to dance wildly. Observing this inclination of theirs, all of the gods were alarmed. They said: “Oh Rudra, what shall we do? The rays have taken on terrible forms.”⁴⁵

Here the non-Brahmanical nature of the *śaktis*/Mātṛkās is made explicit, referencing their penchant for blood, flesh, and frenzy. Though the *Devīpurāṇa* posits the Mātṛkās as fundamental to male essence within Brahmanical norms in their role as *śaktis*, it nevertheless draws from a tradition of Mātṛkās as portentous beings on the fringe of the orthodox community. This unleashed feminine force, however, is once again brought under masculine control when the gods are instructed by Śiva to reabsorb their female correlates and thereby subvert their uncontrolled potency: “Śiva then addressed those gods headed by Brahmā, oh Purandara: ‘Delight in being the husbands of those

⁴⁴ See Michael W. Meister, “Regional Variations of Mātṛkā Conventions,” *Artibus Asiae* 47, no. 3/4 (1986): 238. Meister references in particular the “seven mothers of Soma (*Rgveda* 9.102.4) or of Agni (*Rgveda* 1.141.3)” as well as the seven flames of Agni (*Rgveda* 10.5; *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* 1.2.4), which are directly referenced at *Devīpurāṇa* 43.44. Prior narratives connecting the Mātṛkās with Skanda also occasionally list them as seven in number.

⁴⁵ *Devīpurāṇa* 86.23-25.

intoxicated ones. Be their leaders, and guide them away.’ Thus the eminent gods quickly did.”⁴⁶

Though each of the gods subsequently praises his corresponding *śakti* in a respectful and at times deferential manner, the implication of male command over feminine force remains.

The *Devīpurāṇa* is clear then in its positing of the Mātṛkās as peripheral figures, and it seems that this liminal position is precisely what grants them their inherent power, to be put to use for worldly benefit. A mention of the Mātṛkās in the first narrative explicitly refers to them as the vital power underlying the male form, thereby considering them as the *śaktis* of the gods, but situates them in the fringe wilderness of the Vindhya mountains:

The Mothers headed by Jayā arose from the vitality of the [gods’] bodies...They stayed in the Vindhya, king of mountains, where the water of the Narmadā froths and where accomplished sages dwell, freed from agitating desire. They remained there in order to slay the gods’ enemies, to benefit mankind, and to rescue devotees of all castes and stages of life.⁴⁷

This association with the fringe is further emphasized with the Mātṛkās’ association and conflation with sets of Yoginīs, also often referred to as Vidyās within the text, underscoring their Tantric affiliations.⁴⁸ Composed at a time when the Yoginī cult was developing and becoming formalized within the mainstream Brahmanical context,⁴⁹ the *Devīpurāṇa* begins to group *śaktis*/Mātṛkās with other feminine figures who exhibit terrifying features and undeniable potency, betraying along the way their popular or tribal origins. When Rudra solicits the help of the Goddess in battle with Ghora’s Asura forces, for instance, he calls forth his *śakti*, who appears in a frightful form along with eight female attendants:

⁴⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 86.26-27.

⁴⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.91-94.

⁴⁸ See chapter five for further discussion of *vidyās* and their Tantric implications.

⁴⁹ Vidya Dehejia demonstrates that though drawing from earlier influences, the archaeological and textual evidence suggests that an established Yoginī cult emerged around the ninth century, likely contemporaneous with the composition of the *Devīpurāṇa*. See Vidya Dehejia, *Yoginī Cult and Temples: A Tantric Tradition* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1986), 67.

The supreme Śakti endowed with the eight-part *vidyā* was recalled...Having abandoned her youthful body, the Goddess then became an old woman. She was covered in veins, emaciated, with sunken eyes and colorless lips. She was bound with serpents. Her two ears were half adorned. She stood stooped over, with her left hand placed on her thigh and her right hand supporting her back. Her mouth hung open and her unequal limbs trembled. She seemed a hundred *ayuta* [years old].⁵⁰

The text here works to connect the developing *śakti* theology with the pre-existing notions of terrifying Mātṛkās, positing the *śakti* of Rudra as a grotesque, elderly woman reminiscent of the Mātṛkās revealed in the *Mahābhārata*. She and her eight attendants, who sit astride their own associated animal vehicles, are specifically recognized as goddesses of various peripheral regions, including the Himālayas, Kāmākhyā, and Tibet; furthermore, though they receive worship in the right-handed manner from royalty, they are particularly known for their left-handed worship performed by the non-Brahmanical communities of Pulindas, Śabarās, Tuḍas, Hūṇas, Khasas, courtesans, and cowherding girls.⁵¹ The might of these terrific feminine figures is incontrovertible, as evidenced when one of the Asura warriors tries to force the elderly iteration of the Goddess from the path, but falls lifeless to the ground when he raises up the seemingly frail old woman.⁵²

By incorporating the liminal feminine divine in this manner as simultaneously *śakti* and Mātṛkā, the *Devīpurāṇa* allows access to the potency of vital forces, but also underscores the danger and necessity of taming wild energies. As such, it grants legitimacy to the extra-

⁵⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 39.132-137.

⁵¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 39.138-145. The text also frequently emphasizes the form of the Goddess as Vindhyaśāsinī, the one who dwells in the Vindhya Mountains, and explicitly connects her with the barbarous Śabara and Pulinda tribal groups thought to inhabit the region. The spatial location and tribal associations emphasize the Goddess's peripheral nature as well as her primitive energies. Vindhyaśāsinī is often described in terms of her mountain abode, "which is an extension of herself," as David Gordon White describes, "a vast forest teeming with plant and animal life, a place of savage energy, at once alluring and terrifying, nurturing and deadly to the men who would attempt to penetrate it." Incorporating the Goddess in such a manner allows access to the potency of vital forces, but also underscores the danger and necessity of taming wild energies. David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 115.

⁵² *Devīpurāṇa* 39.154.

Brahmanical but tempers it through orthodox oversight, thereby harnessing the inherent power of the impure Yoginī/Vidyā but in a safe and productive manner in keeping with mainstream religious life. Conflating the developing theology of the *śaktis* with pre-existing narrative expressions of the Mātṛkās and the developing figure of the Yoginī/Vidyā, the *Devīpurāṇa* stands at the intersection of the Brahmanical and the indigenous, the cultivated and the wild, the center and the periphery. The Mātṛkās may be tamed *śaktis* or dangerous Yoginīs; they may be worshiped in the manner of Vedas, Āgamas, or Tantras; they may be dear to Śaivas, Buddhists, or Jains; they may be approached by high caste Brahman males or outcaste women.⁵³ What remains consistent to everyone at all times, however, is their unflagging potency; when pleased, the kingdom will prosper, while individuals will receive long life, material success, great powers, and ultimate liberation.⁵⁴

Hymnal Praise: Goddess as Supreme and Subordinate

Though the narratives of the *Devīpurāṇa* largely present the feminine divine as a wild energy tamed by masculine control, its hymns to the Goddess present a more elevated consideration of the feminine in line with a strictly Śākta theological stance. Scattered throughout the text, these eulogies of varying length and emphasis strive to connect all iterations of the feminine divine with a unitary, supreme Great Goddess who pervades the universe as a foundational force, giving rise to all things, activities, and the temporal sphere. Though the narratives of the *Devīpurāṇa* do not portray specific examples of various goddesses emanating from a single Great Goddess as do other Śākta Purāṇas,⁵⁵ the obsequious hymns and laudatory descriptions make clear that so much is

⁵³ *Devīpurāṇa* 88.1-5.

⁵⁴ *Devīpurāṇa* 117.1-12.

⁵⁵ See, for example, the merging of the *śaktis* into Mahādevī as revealed in the *Devīmāhātmya* 10.4.

accepted by the composers of the text. For example, when Śiva enthusiastically acclaims the virtues of the Goddess to Brahmā and Viṣṇu, he justifies all pacific and terrible forms of the feminine divine as manifestations of a single, overarching Goddess force:

Among them is the Great Goddess of unparalleled power, who is herself cause and effect, the omnipresent immortal principle. She abides in all things...She who bears a beautiful, peaceful form also manifests as a frightful slayer of the gods' enemies. She is present in crores of separated divisions as the manifold [goddesses], though she is truly unitary. That great-souled one always reigns over our existence.⁵⁶

Though disparate female divine forms may be gentle, beneficent, and serene while others are monstrous, threatening, and wild, they all derive from the singular, inclusive Mahādevī who transcends her more worldly descents. Such an all-encompassing nature is emphasized in other passages, which explicitly link specific goddess figures with a single, usurping Goddess. When Nārada seeks to incite the Goddess to battle with Ghora, for instance, he reverently lists roughly 115 epithets of the Goddess in an effort to placate her: “Oh Śaṃkharī, be pleased with my [recitation] of all your names. I will glorify those celebrated names of yours by which you are continually praised here in the world.”⁵⁷ He continues, providing the names of established deities, such as Durgā, Vindhyavāsinī, Gāyatrī, Lakṣmī, and Cāmuṇḍā; monikers which pay tribute to the various types of activities of the feminine divine, such as Varadā (giver of boons), Aparṇā ([eats] not a leaf), Sarvabhūtādimadhyāntā (beginning, middle, and end of all existents), Caṇḍamuṇḍavināśinī (slayer of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa), Niśumbha-śumbhadamanī (subduer of Śumbha and Niśumbha), and Mahiṣāsuraḡhātini (slayer of the Buffalo Demon); flattering descriptions, such as Jyeṣṭhā (preeminent), Surūpā (of beautiful form), Sādhvī (virtuous), and Revatī (shining); as well as numerous remarkable nouns of feminine grammatical gender, such as

⁵⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.40-42.

⁵⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 16.20.

Buddhi (intellect), Dhṛti (constancy), Śānti (peace), and Kīrti (glory). By equating all of these feminine figures, activities, and qualities with a singular divine entity, the *Devīpurāṇa* establishes a more eminent Great Goddess. Other portions of the text emphasize this absorptive function with reference to the numerous *pīṭhas*, or seats, of the Goddess scattered throughout South Asia. Though the Dakṣa myth that serves as the narrative basis for the establishment of *śakti pīṭhas* is not offered in the *Devīpurāṇa*, as it is in other prominent Śākta literature, the text nevertheless cites the *pīṭha* structure. In a description of pilgrimage sites, for instance, the sage Manu describes more than thirty locations – mostly in wild mountains, by rivers, or at trees – where the Goddess manifests in various forms and is worshiped by gods, sages, kings, and virtuous Rākṣasas.

In many ways, the hymns strive to present the Goddess as an innate and worldly presence, indicating that she forms the fundamental components of the surrounding material world. Indra praises the manifest nature of the Goddess after her destruction of the Asura Kāla in battle, for example: “You yourself are the earth, wind, sky, water, fire, the ten directions, the ocean, and the cycle of the constellations.”⁵⁸ The Goddess here *is* the physical world around us, providing the elements that make up the material realm. This manifest state is reinforced in Śiva’s exclamations of his *śakti*’s virtues when the gods face an onslaught in battle with Ghora’s forces: “Oh you who have arisen as wind, fire, and water. Oh you who dwell on the mountain, though you yourself are the great mountains Hemakūṭa, Mahendra, Himādri, Vindhya, Sahya, and Śrīgiri.”⁵⁹ Such designations allude to the long-held notion of the earth and its geological features as fundamentally feminine divine forces. The Goddess does not simply manifest on the earth, but as the earth, its mountains, rivers, and creatures. She is, as Nārada says, the “Goddess who gives rise to dependent

⁵⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 15.7.

⁵⁹ *Devīpurāṇa* 17.20-21.

existence,”⁶⁰ or as Brahmā and Viṣṇu laud, “the foundation of all the worlds’ creatures.”⁶¹

Furthermore, she is the basis of all entities in the cosmos, including the gods themselves, the animals and plants of earth, and the creatures of the netherworlds. Brahmā and Viṣṇu indicate such in another of their fawning eulogies of the Goddess’s traits:

Oh you who establish the various natures of gods, Asuras, men, and holy sages. Oh you who exist as domestic animal, forest animal, bird, amphibian, grass, and man, you are Brahmā, Prajēṣa, and Soma. Among existents, you are Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Piśācas, and Gandharvas.⁶²

The expanse of the Goddess is all inclusive, extending to all facets of the manifest realms including the divine, the mundane, and the infernal. Whatever may exist necessarily dwells in her, as part of her and subject to her. Though cosmological processes were regularly attributed to the *trimūrti*, the *Devīpurāṇa* recognizes the feminine divine as their undeniable fount and therefore the true creatrix. As Nārada exclaims, “Victory! Oh you who are the cause of origination, maintenance, and destruction as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Īśa.”⁶³ As in many Śākta texts, the Goddess thus usurps the cosmogonic function.

Despite this emphasis on the essentially immanent nature of the feminine divine, the hymns of the *Devīpurāṇa* also extend beyond corporeal manifestation, transcending gross materiality. As gods and sages exalt the Great Goddess throughout the text, they posit a feminine divine nature that extends beyond the confines of space and time as generally conceived, given that she pervades along both synchronic and diachronic axes. She is more than the world of simple sense perception, but is herself time, sound, and causation. As Brahmā and Viṣṇu proclaim:

Oh Goddess who is both cause and effect, among measures of time you are *lava*, *spanda*, *truti*, *meṣa*, and *muhūrta* moments. [You abide] in the *kalā* division of the day as well as the *yāmā* and half *yāmā* division. [You abide] in the dawn, day, and

⁶⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 16.18.

⁶¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 83.49.

⁶² *Devīpurāṇa* 6.36-38.

⁶³ *Devīpurāṇa* 16.17.

night, in the fortnight, month, and several seasons, in the half year and the entire year.⁶⁴

What these preeminent gods here indicate is that the Goddess transcends temporality because she herself is the basis of constructions of time. In each moment and in the flow of the passage of those moments she is present. Similarly, the Goddess inhabits all manner of sound, saturating and empowering sonic reverberations. She is the “Goddess of auspicious speech”⁶⁵ who abides “in the recitation of Veda and Vedānta,” “in mantras and Tantras,” “in word and valid means of perception,” “in the Śāstras of Astrology and Vedas, the Kāla and Gāruḍa Śāstras, as well as those regarding the oceans of rivers of words mined for literary sentiment.”⁶⁶ Continuing a long tradition of conceiving of speech (*vāc*) as a prominent goddess, the *Devīpurāṇa* makes explicit connections with the Vedic tradition while also extending the Goddess’s empowerment of word beyond the orthodox sphere, so that she not only inhabits and makes efficacious Brahmanical ritual, but also unconventional Tantras and more mundane literary exegesis.⁶⁷ So while the Goddess forms the elemental components of our corporeal experience, she also transcends the boundaries of gross materiality, pervading all facets of cosmogonic structure and beyond.

The numerous laudations in the *Devīpurāṇa* exalt the Goddess to supreme positions of stature and power. She is posed as present in all things and all processes, as both cause and effect, and as dual subject and object, as indicated by Brahmā and Viṣṇu:

You pervade all actions, oh you who effect all states... Your fame as the doer of all actions is constantly promoted. You are the praiser and you are the praised; you are the knower and the knowledge. Who is the praiser? Whose praise is done by people past, present and future? You are speech and that which speaks.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *Devīpurāṇa* 6.38-39.

⁶⁵ *Devīpurāṇa* 16.18.

⁶⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 6.41-43.

⁶⁷ The implications of the *Devīpurāṇa*’s conception of the Goddess as word within the Tantric context will be addressed in further detail in chapter five.

⁶⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 6.44-46.

The Goddess is both the physical manifestation of the cosmos and the force propelling its activity; she gives rise to various types of phenomenological experience and is herself the fundamental experiencer of those phenomena. One of the extended hymns exhaustively stresses the multifarious and pervading nature of the feminine divine as Śiva beautifully describes the Goddess's manifest forms and methodically enumerates her exceptional traits.⁶⁹ While largely framed around her anthropomorphic incarnations, both gentle and ferocious, depicted in slightly erotic tropes of *kāvya* and acknowledged as inciting desire among gods, men, and Asuras, the hymn also references the unlimited potential of the Goddess in her other innumerable capacities. It mentions her pervasion of the material realm as earth, mountains, cascading water, and sunlight, and makes passing reference to her role as the three *guṇas* of Sāṃkhyan metaphysics. It moves beyond such innate, tangible forms by considering her presence in abstract qualities such as peace and fortune, her empowerment of superhuman agency in bestowed *siddhis*, and her imbuing of the sounds of mantras with strength. Ultimately, it considers her supreme transcendence as it posits the feminine divine as the eternal, immeasurable, undivided absolute. Because of her diverse character, she becomes the ultimate refuge – the one who deludes and entraps in the cyclic existence of *saṃsāra*, but also the one capable of granting liberation from the anxieties and toil of untold rebirths. Śiva exclaims, “Oh you who fetter and you who liberate”⁷⁰; Brahmā and Viṣṇu declare, “You are the great delusion that snares one in death, and you liberate from the binds of destruction.”⁷¹ These hymns are intended to acknowledge the increasing influence of the feminine divine and the Goddess's notably elevated roles in cosmogony and soteriology, while also placating her fickle nature with sweet words so that she might bestow her grace in the form of material pleasures,

⁶⁹ See the hymn in its entirety, *Devīpurāṇa* 17.17-32.

⁷⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 17.17.

⁷¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 6.36.

increased potency, and ultimate salvation. Allaying skeptics, the hymns clearly indicate that through their recitation, anyone with faith may receive great benefit without regard to social station, gender, location, or sinful background.⁷² Whatever is desired shall be granted, so great is the influence of the Goddess; by devotedly praising her one will achieve the same results as great Vedic sacrifices such as the Aśvamedha and Agniṣṭoma. They will receive the same benefits as visiting all the pilgrimage sites on earth, they will gain entrance into heavenly realms upon death, and ultimately they will merge with her all-pervading unity.⁷³

Though the *Devīpurāṇa*'s hymns to the Goddess suggest that the feminine divine is supremely transcendent and authoritative, hymns to other deities contrastingly suggest otherwise, in line with the more nuanced narrative portrayals throughout the text. Numerous praises of prominent male gods such as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Gaṇeśa offer competing and contradictory views as to who exactly reigns supreme within the divine hierarchical structure. While some of the hymns – particularly those to Brahmā and Viṣṇu – may be viewed within the narrative structure as flattery offered while tendering a request and thus perhaps not entirely genuine, the exaltations to Śiva are presented more formally and appropriate for faithful repetition. One prime example occurs just after Brahmā and Viṣṇu have offered their praises to the Goddess in order to secure her assistance in battle; they subsequently approach Śiva in order to glorify him as well, describing him in many of the same terms that they previously attributed to the Goddess.⁷⁴ Like their eulogizing of the feminine divine, Śiva is also considered by them in both immanent and transcendent forms. He is the foundation of corporeal reality as the basis of elemental structure, both the gross elements of tangible nature as well as the subtle elements necessary for perceptual experience. He inhabits

⁷² *Devīpurāṇa* 83.115-18.

⁷³ *Devīpurāṇa* 17.29-32.

⁷⁴ See the hymn in full, *Devīpurāṇa* 7.7-17.

more refined elemental structure as well in his roles as intellect, mind, and self-consciousness, but he also moves beyond refined materiality, deemed the witness of the three *guṇas*, the intangible, supreme, eternal truth, and the pervading omnipresence. What sorts of implications are raised by dual attributions to both Śiva and the Goddess? How are they both conceived as the underlying foundations of cosmological phenomena? On the one hand, the *Devīpurāṇa* seems to suggest that Śiva and the Goddess are one and the same, a notion emphasized by the text's frequent appellation of the Goddess as Śivā, merely the feminized form of the male god. They are simply dual perspectives of a singular reality, expressing the same traits as part of a unified whole. This intimacy between the two is particularly emphasized when Brahmā and Viṣṇu offer an extended hymn to Śiva and Śakti for assistance in battle with the Daitya lord, Ruru.⁷⁵ Oscillating repeatedly between the two deities as the object of their adulations, the verses blend boundaries between the complimentary male and female iterations. Though the differentiation of grammatical gender renders the intended recipient more clear in the original Sanskrit than in translation, the hymn nonetheless suggests a conflation between Śiva and the Goddess, with their identities merging in a sharing of associated traits, cosmological supremacy, and metaphysical transcendence. That being said, overt statements and nuanced wordings instead indicate that Śiva is truly the transcendent supreme, who gives rise to, supports, directs, and vicariously acts through his associated feminine divine power.

Though the hymns present a vision of Ardhanārīśvara that could be construed as equitable, the wording subtly suggests that Śiva is the original, whole male body, while Śakti merely inhabits his form as a second sex. Even the hymn just discussed, which eliminates boundaries between the two so effectively, praises Śiva for gifting half his body, while lauding the Goddess's strength despite

⁷⁵ See the hymn in full, *Devīpurāṇa* 83.47-112.

bearing only half a form; it also concludes by praising “Śambhu and the Goddess who dwells in his body.” In other hymns as well, the Goddess is recognized as having “arisen from the body of Rudra,”⁷⁶ while her attendant *vidyās* originate from and are contained within the body of Śiva.⁷⁷ In the preface to one hymn, Brahmā diminishes the position of the Goddess even further, describing Śakti as an adornment on the left side of Śiva.⁷⁸ Not only does the Goddess lack autonomy within such a Śiva-Śakti formulation, but also equality and ultimate authority. While Śiva may be conceived as a whole entity, the Goddess must be granted a portion of his form in order to abide in any meaningful way, and so is subject to the direction of her male provider. This subordination is revealed when Brahmā and Viṣṇu praise Śiva: “Victory! Oh you by whom Śakti is governed.”⁷⁹ So on the one hand the *Devīpurāṇa* asserts the supremacy of the Goddess, while on the other it continues to frame the feminine divine as reliant on and subservient to the established male divinity.

Conclusion

Alternations between conflicting views regarding the Goddess’s power and supremacy are discussed by Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, who emphasizes the role of Pārvatī as a pivot between male-dominated and female-dominated marital structure, given her ability to straddle mundane and transcendent identities. O’Flaherty comments: “Below Pārvatī is the figure of the merely mortal worshipper of the God; but above her, and infusing her with power, is the figure of Devī, the Goddess herself, regarded not only as *a* divinity but as *the* divinity.”⁸⁰ Throughout Puranic

⁷⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 16.17.

⁷⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.10; 83.61.

⁷⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.4.

⁷⁹ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.10.

⁸⁰ O’Flaherty, “The Shifting Balance of Power,” 134.

literature, the Goddess is consistently presented on three levels in the narrative structure: she is the supreme Devī above all other gods, the deferential Pārvatī/Umā in a more equitable relationship framed on the Śiva-Śakti model, and the powerful yet mortal immanent manifestations of a subordinate feminine divine. While the *Devīpurāṇa*'s primary hymns to the Goddess envision and support the first of those levels as they position the Goddess as a supreme and indomitable figure, much of the text focuses on the two more subservient levels, depicting her continually subject to Śiva as his consort or the agent of his will. The notion of the feminine divine as subsidiary and merely acting on Śiva's behalf is especially reinforced when Brahmā and Viṣṇu, after mentioning Śaṃkara's command over the Goddess, proceed to praise him as the destroyer of Ghora and the fearsome pair Kāla and [Vajra]daṇḍa, as well as the killer of Ruru,⁸¹ activities which are undeniably performed by the Goddess and her supporting retinue of *śaktis* in the narrative portions of the text. The implication, then, is that Śiva is ultimately responsible for those actions by compelling the feminine divine to act on his behalf. Though the Goddess actually performs the slaying, Śiva is granted credit as the slayer. As ultimate overseer, he directs the immense power of the feminine to achieve the gods' desired aims, revealing the influence of male conceit present in the *Devīpurāṇa*.

An analysis of the *Devīpurāṇa*'s narrative portrayals leaves us with a complex, multivalent vision of the feminine divine that resists any singular definition. While overall the hymns of the text present a consideration of the Goddess as supreme, this formulation is at other times tempered by other cosmogonic attributions that place the feminine in a relation of subtle subordination to the male establishment. Similarly, the narratives of the text highlight the powerful potential of the feminine, but consistently depict that power being subject to the authority of the male overseer, who alone is granted true sovereignty. Especially focused on the wild and vicious nature of the

⁸¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.11.

Goddess, the *Devīpurāṇa* acknowledges the inestimable potency of feminine energies and strives to bring them into the orthodox sphere, but in a tamed and productive manner. The Brahmanical thus becomes the handler of the ferocious and at times unruly feminine indigenous beast. Influenced by guiding Vedic principles of *śakti*, *māyā*, and *prakṛti* as well as the dualistic ontology of Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, the *Devīpurāṇa* largely champions the vision of a Śiva-Śakti model, which intimately entwines enlivening feminine energies with authoritative male bodies. While the text nominally supports the conventional notions of Sāṃkhya, positing the Goddess as the material realm of the feminine *prakṛti* and particularly connecting the Goddess with nature, mind, and sound, it more often inverts the traditional dualistic paradigm by insinuating the inherent inertia of the male body. The male *puruṣa* of classical Sāṃkhya exists as Spirit apart from the encumbrance of matter, but the evolving Śākta orientation advanced by the *Devīpurāṇa* highlights the ineffectual male form that requires female vitality in order to function and prosper. The wild potency of the liminal feminine divine is therefore tapped to invigorate the languishing form of the Brahmanical male, with local goddesses, savage Mātṛkās, and unruly Yoginīs/Vidyās re-envisioned as necessarily coupled with male oversight in their burgeoning roles as *śaktis*. While they may be fierce, and though they are able to accomplish feats of which the male gods are incapable, they are presented as subject to the whims of male control. The *Devīpurāṇa* thus offers an uneasy characterization of the feminine divine that stands in between more liberated portrayals of an autonomous supreme Goddess, such as that of the *Devīmāhātmya*, and fully domesticated visions of a pliable, deferential Goddess, such as that of the *Devībhāgavata*. As a rigorous intertextual analysis will emphasize, while the *Devīpurāṇa* presents the Goddess in a process of being tamed, the feminine divine nonetheless retains a fierce and independent nature.

Chapter Three

From Warrior to Wife: An Intertextual Consideration

Focusing on the other primary Śākta Purāṇas – the *Devīmāhātmya*, the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, and the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* – this chapter will explore how the feminine divine has been variously conceived, and will position the *Devīpurāṇa* within a broader trend of domesticating feminine divine energies. The circa sixth century CE *Devīmāhātmya* sets the stage by promoting a formidable feminine divine who is both cosmically supreme as well as indomitable in her embodied manifestations. While subsequent Śākta Purāṇas uphold the supreme vision of the Goddess as the nondual *brahman* of Advaita Vedānta, their considerations of her manifestations grow increasingly tempered by male oversight and/or domestic roles as wife and mother. For instance, the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, likely composed in 10th-11th century Assam,¹ adopts the figure of Kālī, who had been characterized as terrifying and grotesque in the earlier *Devīmāhātmya* and *Devīpurāṇa*, but recasts her in more conventional and maternal terms. Likewise, the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, also a product of late medieval Assam,² portrays Kālī as the paradigmatic wife and mother, even while acknowledging her autonomous supremacy demanding utmost devotion. The late medieval *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* also advocates for the Goddess's preeminent status, even while denigrating the base female nature of her various divine embodiments; while the Goddess may be supreme, femininity here is neither valued nor empowered as in other Śākta texts. With its period of composition situated between that of the *Devīmāhātmya* and these other Śākta Purāṇa works, the *Devīpurāṇa* reveals itself as commensurate with an ongoing trend of the

¹ Though disagreement persists regarding precise dates for the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 10th-11th century is a conservative estimation. See Hugh Urban, "Matrix of Power: Tantra, Kingship, and Sacrifice in the Worship of Mother Goddess Kāmākhya," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (2008): 508. For more extended discussion of the various arguments for dating the text, see K. R. van Kooij, *Worship of the Goddess according to the Kālikāpurāṇa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 1-37.

² See the works of Patricia Dold.

Goddess's domestication. It adopts narrative elements present in the *Devīmāhātmya* which emphasize the potency of the feminine divine, but begins to connect the Goddess more intimately with male oversight, which becomes increasingly entrenched in the Goddess's identity as narrative iterations continue to evolve in subsequent Puranic texts. Though the feminine divine retains its might, it loses its authority in line with male-centered Brahmanical norms.

The Rise of the Asura Slayer

As has been established in the previous chapter, the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* is explicitly and fundamentally characterized by her martial nature, which consistently enables her to battle and overcome the Asura forces that threaten the gods' position of prominence. While in later texts the Goddess comes to adopt increasingly domesticated roles, this penchant for battle – which has been intimately associated with the feminine divine since at least the early classical period – remains an essential feature of the Goddess's character, epitomized by the paradigmatic portrayal of the Goddess as Mahiṣāsuramardinī, Slayer of the Buffalo Demon. This role of the Goddess in overcoming the buffalo pervades mythological narrative and the iconographic record, indicating its foremost significance. The vision of the Goddess trampling and striking down the buffalo enemy continues to dominate her characterization, as is conspicuously evident every autumn during Durgā Pūjā, when clay *mūrtis* enacting the scene fill the streets of Kolkata (fig. 3.1). Likely influenced by folk traditions, royal symbolism, and Brahmanical cosmology, the vignette of the Buffalo Slayer is an amalgam of varied ideological threads. Appearing in the earliest centuries of the common era, Mahiṣamardinī comes to define the characterization of the Goddess, serving as a dominant paradigm which nearly all Śākta texts must acknowledge, if not adopt. The *Devīpurāṇa* expectedly offers its own version of the tale, with Ghora, the Asura king of the first

narrative arc, adopting a buffalo form towards the end of his battle with the Goddess. While his theriomorphic capacity is much less emphasized in the *Devīpurāṇa* than it is in other Śākta literature, the text nevertheless seems obligated to reference this popular component of the Goddess's characterization, as if mention is necessary to garner legitimacy in the estimation of its audience. The strength and skill of the Goddess are assumed by invoking her exploits as Mahiṣamardinī.



Figure 3.1: Durgā slaying Mahiṣāsura. Durgā Pūjā 2012. Author's photograph.

The earliest representation of the Goddess slaying the buffalo, which has been dated to the first century BCE/CE, is to be found in terracotta plaques discovered at Nagar in Tonk District, Rajasthan.³ Such images become prevalent throughout much of South Asia by the fourth century CE,⁴ though seem not to have reached Bengal, the likely region of the *Devīpurāṇa*'s provenance, until a few centuries later, contemporaneous or just prior to the text's period of composition.⁵ The textual depiction of the fierce and demon-killing Goddess is similarly early, though the portrayal of Mahiṣamardinī has undergone somewhat complex textual evolutions, with a quite different conception of the Buffalo Slayer in epic and early Puranic literature. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, for instance, eschews a vision of the Goddess as a supreme warrior, consonant with its limited acceptance of the potency of the feminine divine; however, it does acknowledge the presence of an Asura named Dundubhi who bears the form of a buffalo.⁶ Rising in battle to fight the Vānara king Vāli, he is defeated and slain by the monkey in an otherwise uneventful side narrative. Interestingly, the *Devīpurāṇa* may reference this Asura named Dundubhi, even though the primary Buffalo figure of the text is identified as Ghora. In a sub-narrative discussed in the previous chapter, an Asura named Dundubhi approaches Śiva and Umā, compelled by the beauty of the Goddess, but is consumed by the fire of Śiva's third eye when he falls under its gaze. Ghora, who subsequently becomes the Buffalo Demon in the *Devīpurāṇa*'s iteration of the tale, arises from the ashes of Dundubhi's incinerated body.⁷ The text here seems to endeavor to link the two Asura figures in an

³ Erndl, *Victory to the Mother*, 168 n. 18; Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya*, 227-28.

⁴ David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 96.

⁵ The earliest known Bengali image of Mahiṣamardinī comes from seventh century Murshidabad. See McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing*, 284 n. 45.

⁶ *mahiṣo dundubhir nāma kailāsaśikharaprabhaḥ /
balaṃ nāgasahasrasya dhārayām āsa vīryavān // (4.11.7);
dhārayan māhiṣaṃ rūpaṃ tīkṣṇaśṛṅgo bhayāvahaḥ /
prāvṛṣṭva mahāmeghas toyapūrṇo nabhastale // (4.11.25).*

The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, vol. 4, ed. D. R. Mankad (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1966), 59-60.

⁷ See *Devīpurāṇa* 4.58-69.

attempt either to recognize multiple known buffalo demons as legitimate iterations of *the* Mahiṣāsura, or to provide justification for Ghora’s buffalo form by referring to a prior established narrative.⁸ Ghora’s association with the buffalo body is much more downplayed in the *Devīpurāṇa* than in other versions of the Mahiṣamardinī tale, and nowhere is Ghora’s ability to transform into a buffalo during the final battle scene explained as it is in other texts (i.e., birth from a buffalo mother); Ghora’s connection to Dundubhi, however, implicitly justifies his otherwise unexplored shape-shifting potential.

The *Mahābhārata*, too, recognizes an Asura associated with a buffalo form, but under different circumstances of battle. When the Dānavas are fiercely attacking the gods, a warrior named Mahiṣa emerges from the enemy forces, flinging mountains at his divine foes as he progresses towards the chariot of Śiva.⁹ In this narrative iteration however, the vanquisher of the Buffalo is not acknowledged as the Goddess, but as Skanda, whose mythology positions him within a Śaiva lineage. The text presents Skanda as a particularly valiant warrior by offering a poetic description of his might and by situating him as an impressively capable attendant of Śiva:

And when this grisly danger beset the Gods, out came Mahāsena, furiously blazing sun, girt in his blood-red robe, sporting blood-red garlands and jewelry, blood-mouthed, the strong-armed, gold-armored lord riding his sun-like, gold-sparkling chariot; and on seeing him the Daitya army suddenly vanished from the field. And, great king, puissant Mahāsena threw his blazing, shattering spear at Mahiṣa, and, once thrown, the spear hit the big head of Mahiṣa; and Mahiṣa’s head was split, and he fell down relinquishing his life. Throw after throw the spear smote the foes in

⁸ The *Vāmanapurāṇa* also connects Mahiṣa with Dundubhi, but presents Dundubhi as an emissary who approaches the Goddess with a proposal of marriage on Mahiṣa’s behalf. See *Vāmanapurāṇa*, ed. Ānandasvarūpa Gupta (Varanasi: Sarva Bhāratiya Kāśirāja Nyāsa, 1968), 96-97 [20.21-29].

⁹ *atha daitya balād ghorān niṣpapāta mahābalaḥ /
dānavo mahiṣo nāma pragrhya vipulaṃ girim // (3.221.52);
tataḥ sa mahiṣaḥ kruddhas tūrṇaṃ rudra rathaṃ yayau /
abhidrutya ca jagrāha rudrasya rathakūbaram // (3.221.57).*

The Mahābhārata, vol. 4, ed. Vishnu S. Sukthankar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1942), 790-91.

their thousands and then, as witnessed the Gods and the Dānavas, it returned again to Skanda's hand.¹⁰

With the destruction of Mahiṣa and the accompanying Dānava forces attributed to Skanda, his assimilation into the Brahmanical sphere is solidified. The depiction of Skanda warding off the buffalo-bodied Dānava who is threatening Śiva also serves to clarify Skanda's parentage, which was alternately attributed to Agni. To position him solidly as a progeny of Śiva, the narrative allows him to serve his father in battle. As Thomas Coburn comments, "Although the battle is not extraordinary by epic and Puranic standards, it is clear that the Mbh understands it as the culmination of its account of Skanda, wherein the son visibly works out his relationship to his father."¹¹ As the narrative develops in the Puranic literature, however, the connections between Skanda and the Buffalo Demon are lost as Devī rises in prominence, assuming the role of Buffalo Slayer for her own exaltation and legitimacy within the Brahmanical Sanskrit textual corpus.

Though Skanda continues to appear occasionally as the slayer of the Buffalo Demon in Puranic literature,¹² Devī undoubtedly becomes the paradigmatic vanquisher, with her version of the narrative informing much classical and early medieval literature. Of the earliest Purāṇas,¹³ only the *Matsyapurāṇa* indicates any familiarity or concern with Mahiṣa, and even then he appears as a fairly minor Asura without a developed narrative. As Coburn points out, however, the text presents an interesting episode in which Viṣṇu refrains from killing Mahiṣa, because it was foretold by Brahmā that a woman would bring about his downfall, though the event is not relayed in the

¹⁰*The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 663; see *The Mahābhārata* (Poona edition), 3.221.62-67.

¹¹ Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*, 223-24.

¹² See, for example, the *Vāmanapurāṇa*, which offers both versions of the tale: one in which Devī destroys the Buffalo (chs. 19-21), and one in which Skanda is triumphant (chs. 31-32).

¹³ I refer to those Purāṇas deemed by O'Flaherty as "early" (i.e., 300 BCE – 500 CE). See *Asceticism and Eroticism*, 14.

Purāṇa itself.¹⁴ In agreement with Kane, C. Mackenzie Brown argues that the earliest instance of the Goddess slaying Mahiṣāsura in Puranic literature appears in an account of the *Varāhapurāṇa*, followed by a similar instance in the *Vāmanapurāṇa*.¹⁵ These iterations establish the origin of the Goddess from the combined *tejas* of the gods,¹⁶ and present her as the sole slayer of the tormenting Buffalo Demon. A roughly contemporaneous sixth century CE cave inscription from Nagarjuni Hill in Gaya District, likely the earliest epigraphic mention of Mahiṣāsura-mardinī, reinforces this emerging portrayal of the Goddess as the paradigmatic warrior:

May the Devi's foot, its gleaming nails emitting a mass of rays, point the way to the abode of riches. Her foot challenges with its splendor the full beauty of a blossomed lotus. With its twinkling anklet it contemptuously rests on the head of Mahiṣāsura. It rewards your condition as petitioner that suits the expression of firm devotion.¹⁷

By the middle of the first millennium CE, the characterization of the Goddess as a capable protectress of the Brahmanic pantheon had been firmly established.

The most well-known and celebrated account of Mahiṣāsura-mardinī is found in the circa sixth century CE *Devīmāhātmya*, the first Sanskrit text to exalt the feminine divine to supreme positions of power and authority. The Goddess of the *Devīmāhātmya* is fundamentally a fierce warrior whose primary role is the destruction of the Asura forces that prove themselves resilient in battle against the male gods. Other than the narrative of the text's opening chapter – in which Yoganidrā

¹⁴ Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*, 227. See *The Matsyamahāpurāṇam, Part II*, ed. Nag Sharan Singh (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1983), 651 [147.28], 655 [148.42], 669 [150.113], 671 [150.130-140], and 683 [152.17-24].

¹⁵ Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 94.

¹⁶ Though as Brown points out, the *Varāhapurāṇa* account limits the origin to the creative capacities of the *trimūrti*, the three constituent gods giving rise to the *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* of the arising Goddess; see *The Varāhapurāṇa*, ed. Anand Swarup Gupta (Varanasi: All-India Kashiraj Trust, 1981), 304-05 [89.18-30]. This version seems to have influenced the later account of the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, though in most other accounts the establishment of the Goddess is attributed to all of the gods; see Brown, *Triumph*, 96-97.

¹⁷ David N. Lorenzen, "Early Evidence for Tantric Religion," in *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 29.

is placated so that she will free Viṣṇu from her overwhelming power of yogic slumber – the Goddess is involved exclusively in exploits of combat. Coburn discusses the Goddess’s martial propensities, with specific reference to Indian analyses of the text:

Two recent Indian studies are particularly impressed by the martial character of the vision of the Goddess that emerges in the DM, for Bhattacharyya claims that “in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, the Devī is primarily conceived as the war goddess...” while Kumar notes that, in our text, “in her perfect nature, she [the Goddess] has been described as the most beneficent; but her fierceness as a martial goddess dominates in the main episodes and we always find her killing the demons.”¹⁸

While the *Devīmāhātmya* strives to connect its conception of the Goddess with the prior Sanskrit tradition through Vedic-based epithets and association with previously established mythologies, this appreciation of the female divine warrior is a strikingly novel notion, likely drawn from non-Brahmanical religious life. As Kunal Chakrabarti notes, this smooth textual grafting is not contrived, arbitrary, or insincere, but is a means of legitimately incorporating non-orthodox narratives and customs into Puranic literature of the Brahmanical sphere.¹⁹ The *Devīmāhātmya* establishes the form of the Goddess which was to become standard in subsequent Puranic literature, “[a]nd this goddess is neither wholly non-Vedic nor entirely brahmanical; she is a product of interacting tradition. Indeed, the goddesses, in their individual identities, continued to be worshipped, but the process of integration was accomplished in the *Devī-Māhātmya*.”²⁰ The *Devīmāhātmya* sets a standard, the touchstone for all subsequent Puranic iterations of the evolving portrait of Devī.

¹⁸ Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya*, 56. See Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion*, 78; and Pushpendra Kumar, *Śakti Cult in Ancient India* (Varanasi: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1974), 46.

¹⁹ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 170.

²⁰ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, 170-71.

Incorporating the *Devīmāhātmya*'s Martial and Independent Goddess

The *Devīpurāṇa* adopts many of the general tropes of battle presented in the *Devīmāhātmya* and shares its overall martial vision for the nascent feminine divine; however, variations in certain narrative elements and divergent implications of nuance demonstrate the *Devīpurāṇa*'s own unique iteration of the Goddess in a fundamentally Śaiva-Śākta ethos. The *Devīmāhātmya* and the *Devīpurāṇa* both strive to present the Goddess as essentially fierce, and to a certain extent, independent. In both texts, the Goddess faces a series of battles in which she must overcome Asura forces in order to return the cosmos to its normal state of equilibrium; as such, she is presented as an important facet of maintaining Brahmanical norms. Though the *Devīmāhātmya*'s narrative of the Asuras Śumbha and Niśumbha is significantly more lengthy than that of Mahiṣāsura, the overcoming of the Buffalo Demon has enjoyed a much more prominent history, and ultimately seems to influence the *Devīpurāṇa* more significantly. Interestingly, neither text concerns itself with providing a background narrative for the Asura's buffalo form, and the *Devīpurāṇa* merely mentions it in the final stages of battle, almost as an afterthought inserted in order to tap into the renown of the *Devīmāhātmya*. While subsequent Puranic texts provide reasoning for the Asura's shape-shifting nature, namely by ascribing his birth to a she-buffalo,²¹ the *Devīmāhātmya* and the *Devīpurāṇa* take for granted Mahiṣa's animal nature, and the *Devīmāhātmya* refrains from addressing how Mahiṣa attained the power which allowed for his rise to ultimate sovereignty. In a matter of two verses, the *Devīmāhātmya* introduces Mahiṣa as chief of the Asuras and accounts for his conquering of Indra.²² Similarly, the *Devīpurāṇa* lacks any back-story for Mahiṣa's buffalo

²¹ See, for example, *Vāmanapurāṇa*, 87-89 [18.39-72] and *Devībhāgavatam*, ed. Pancanan Tarkaratna (Kolkata: Navabharat Publishers, 1981), 337-40 [5.2.3-50].

²² *devāsuram abhūdyuddham pūrṇam abdaśataṃ purā /*
mahiṣe'surānām adhiṣe devānām ca purāṇdare //
tatrāsurair mahāviryair devasainyaṃ parājitam /

form, employing it suddenly during battle well into the twentieth chapter of the text. At that point, Ghora adopts the buffalo body before entering into combat with the Goddess:

When half the night had passed, the mighty Kāla, possessed of great *māyā*, also [approached], having adopted many forms. Though only one, he fashioned crores of buffalo like Yama's vehicle, appearing like dark storm clouds at the beginning of the rainy season and possessing terrifying red-eyed bodies that frightened the gods and Asuras. From his moving about, the earth quaked, creating mountains and canyons. The gods and Asuras became afraid. Ghora took on a similarly terrifying form and set out for battle with the Goddess...In anger, with his hooves he kicked up mountains that agitated the moon, sun, and stars.²³

The text here clearly exhibits a shared vision of Mahiṣāsura entering battle, with the *Devīpurāṇa* mimicking almost exactly the imagery of the *Devīmāhātmya*, which reads, "When his own army was thus being destroyed, Mahiṣāsura in his own buffalo form caused (the Goddess's) troops to tremble...In anger he of great valor, pounding the earth with his hooves, hurled up mountains with his horns and bellowed."²⁴

Though the portraits of the Buffalo joining the fray are nearly identical in both texts, they differ somewhat in the execution of the battle sequence, even if expressed quite rapidly in each. The *Devīmāhātmya* presents a grand battle in which Mahiṣāsura transforms into a number of animal figures while the Goddess pursues him, finally emerging in anthropomorphic form from the slit neck of the buffalo body before being decapitated by her sword. The vision of the Goddess standing on the body of the buffalo and attacking the Asura as he emerges has become a pervasive and paradigmatic symbol of the warrior Goddess, which is especially evident every year during Durgā Pūjā when the scene is replayed in countless clay *mūrtis*. The *Devīpurāṇa*, however, does not share this renowned portrait of defeat, offering a somewhat reconfigured battle scene. The text suggests that the Asura Ghora abandons his buffalo body after a particularly fierce skirmish with

jītvā ca sakalān devān indro'bhūn mahiṣāsuraḥ // (*Durgasaptasatī* 2.1-2).

²³ *Devīpurāṇa* 20.21-26.

²⁴ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 46.

the Goddess's lion. As is evident, Ghora battles the beast in his buffalo form: "From the blows of [the lion's] claws, blood issued forth from the body of the buffalo like streams of water; it appeared to the gods like necklaces suspended on the body of that injured one."²⁵ Immediately following this episode, however, Ghora unleashes an attack on the Goddess that would necessitate his anthropomorphic form, as he utilizes mallet, noose, club, and a volley of arrows which the Goddess deflects before throwing Ghora to the ground and unceremoniously slitting his throat.²⁶ Despite this seeming end of Ghora, the *Devīpurāṇa* continues, reviving the Asura in a narrative iteration that references the *Devīmāhātmya*'s figure of Raktabīja, the Asura whose flowing blood gives rise to unending replicas:

Arising from his severed head, hundreds of [Dānavas] bearing Ghora's terrifying form came forth, their faces flushed, red-eyed, and burning with anger, their hair loosened, and their hands bearing swords. They roared from the sight of the Goddess's face and produced fear amongst the gods. As soon as the Goddess saw this, she bound them with a noose and split their heads with a thrown spear. Caught, they fell, their courage abandoned. Oh lord of gods, that king of the Daityas was thus slain, and he proceeded along the path of ghosts.²⁷

These three verses, almost as if an addendum, actually do little to advance any narrative development, and seem to be in place largely to cite a recognizable trope of the Asuras' battles with the Goddess. In the *Devīmāhātmya*, Raktabīja is introduced in the third narrative arc as a means of involving the Goddess's ferocious manifestation of Kālī. With each drop of his blood giving rise to identical Asura warriors, Kālī's penchant for devouring meat and gore is necessary in order to prevent new replicas from forming, thereby allowing for triumph over the resilient enemy. The *Devīpurāṇa* eschews any mention of this detail, simply alluding to the ability of the Asura's self-replicating abilities. What is here important is not to introduce the efficacy of Kālī,

²⁵ *Devīpurāṇa* 20.27-28.

²⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 20.30, 33.

²⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 20.34-36.

which is demonstrated in other ways throughout the text, but to tap into an established narrative form. This seems to be the case for the text's overall incorporation of Mahiṣāśura as well, briefly tapping into an established literary convention for legitimacy, even though the trope does little to advance the narrative trajectory.

In addition to a nonchalance regarding the origins of Mahiṣāśura, the *Devīmāhātmya* also expresses a lack of interest in his rise to power, merely stating that he was able to overcome the gods in battle and usurp the ruling position of Indra. Many texts attribute Mahiṣāśura's strength and near invincibility to a boon granted by Brahmā, who was impelled by the Buffalo's ardent ascetic practice.²⁸ Requesting that no man be able to slay him in battle – assuming that a woman would be too weak to pose a threat – Mahiṣāśura's hubris ultimately allows for his downfall at the hands of the Goddess. In contrast to the *Devīmāhātmya*'s neglect of the issue, the *Devīpurāṇa* offers two explanations for Ghora's expanding dominion and subsequent defeat by the Goddess, neither of which involves Brahmā's influence as in other narrative iterations. Initially, the text presents Ghora as an unwavering devotee of Viṣṇu, who is so flattered by the Asura's propitiation that he decrees Ghora's universal reign:

His [Ghora's] earnest devotion exceedingly pleased that eight-limbed god. Then he made his request, and that yellow-garbed, compassionate lord of gods bestowed the boon to the Daitya just as it was desired, oh king. [Viṣṇu decreed]: "You will be unconquerable amongst the assembly of gods. You shall be equal in strength to me, endowed with immense ascetic power. Rule heaven, earth, and the seven netherworlds."²⁹

Though Brahmā becomes the paradigmatic bestower of problematic boons in Puranic literature, the *Devīpurāṇa* makes clear that Viṣṇu is the troublemaker. He not only doles out the boon that allows for the gods' defeat, but seems to will it, specifically indicating that the Asura should take

²⁸ See, for example, *The Varāhapurāṇa* and the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, cited previously.

²⁹ *Devīpurāṇa* 2.40-42.

control over heaven, a statement which he subsequently qualifies: “Rule heaven just as desired. You will be vulnerable to the Goddess Śivā, but amongst the others you will be unconquerable.”³⁰ In a text that consistently presents an anti-Vaiṣṇava point of view while simultaneously recognizing Viṣṇu’s power and influence his depiction as a reckless and untrustworthy figure is not surprising. Though his followers may secure blessings and material reward, his resolute maintenance of cosmic welfare should not be assumed.

Contrary to this formulation, which denigrates Viṣṇu while exalting the Goddess as the sole means of Ghora’s destruction, a second narrative element actually rests the blame of Ghora’s ascendancy on the truculent nature of the Goddess. When Śiva chastises her for sending Ghora to earth after he arises from Dundubhi’s ashes, she quickly angers and retaliates by fortifying the Asura’s strength:

Having become the best of my devotees, you will conquer all the gods. As one who remains supremely affectionate toward Viṣṇu, you will become invincible ...Having become commander of the seven continents [of earth], the seven netherworlds, and the seven worlds along with heaven, you will be unconquerable.³¹

After further debate with Śiva, the Goddess vows that she herself will destroy the powerful Asura: “Frolicking, seated on my lion, I will destroy you.”³² While such a threatening maneuver may initially seem out of place in a text largely geared towards elevating and celebrating the Goddess, it remains perfectly consonant with the text’s vision of a volatile feminine divine. This second narrative justification for Ghora’s ultimate sovereignty differs from the first, however, by highlighting the Goddess’s assurance of an eventual return to normalcy. Whereas Viṣṇu grants Ghora power but does little to moderate it, the Goddess ultimately maintains cosmic norms. She may threaten with one breath, but she will provide promise of protection with the next.

³⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 2.50.

³¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 4.75-77.

³² *Devīpurāṇa* 4.79.

The martial characterization of the Goddess, which is fundamental to both the *Devīmāhātmya* and the *Devīpurāṇa*, is accompanied by an independent, antagonistic nature (though somewhat tempered in the *Devīpurāṇa*, to be discussed below). The Goddess balks at the advances of men, subsequently overcoming them in battle in order to retain her chastity and autonomy. The third narrative arc of the *Devīmāhātmya* is advanced by the Goddess's rejection of Śumbha and Niśumbha's proposal of marriage, which incites battle in a pronounced display of power:

“He who conquers me in battle, he who overcomes my pride, he whose strength is comparable to mine in the world, just he will be my husband. Therefore let Śumbha come here, or the great Asura Niśumbha. Having conquered me, he will (then) readily take my hand in marriage. Why delay?” The messenger said: “You are a haughty one, O Goddess!”³³

Seemingly unaccustomed to such refusals, Śumbha and Niśumbha are insistent on the Goddess's subjugation, saying “Forcibly bring that wicked woman here, upsetting her by dragging her by the hair.”³⁴ Great battles are then prompted by the Asuras' desire to dominate the Goddess sexually and to break her “haughty” nature like a recalcitrant mare. While the *Devīpurāṇa* lacks a narrative so explicitly and exclusively driven by lust for the feminine divine, the Ghora narrative does introduce the notion that unwanted sexual advances will provoke the Goddess's wrath. In the argument with Śiva that prompts the Goddess to deed the rule of heaven to Ghora, ultimately the threat of marriage to the Asura impels her to decree his ultimate demise. Angered at the Goddess's willful behavior, Śiva delivers a curse upon her: “You too will go to earth, where this wicked one will solicit [you] for marriage.”³⁵ Though Ghora initially demonstrates a respectably chaste and virtuous disposition, he is eventually driven to desire by the trickery of the sage Nārada, who advises him to enjoy the physical pleasures of the divine maiden, saying, “Oh mighty one, a

³³ Coburn, *Encountering*, 58. See *Durgasaptasatī* 5.69-71.

³⁴ Coburn, *Encountering*, 59. See *Durgasaptasatī* 6.3.

³⁵ *Devīpurāṇa* 4.78.

mountain girl resides in the Vindhya range on Jambudvīpa. She is an eighteen-year-old maiden who bears all the marks of beauty. Oh king, she is fit for the female apartments of your dominion.”³⁶ Spurred by the words of the duplicitous Nārada, Ghora sets out for the Vindhya mountains seeking marriage with the Goddess, reminiscent of Śumbha and Niśumbha’s venture to win her hand.

Also similar to the *Devīmāhātmya*’s iteration of the Śumbha-Niśumbha narrative thread, the exploits of the Goddess in the *Devīpurāṇa* have her easily destroying any emissary who approaches her with sexual ambitions. In the *Devīmāhātmya*, the messenger Dhumralocana speedily succumbs to death when dispatched by Śumbha and Niśumbha to retrieve the Goddess:

Seeing the Goddess standing on the snowy mount, he bellowed in a loud voice: “Come into the presence of Śumbha and Niśumbha! If you do not come with delight to my master right now, then I will immediately take you by force, upsetting you by dragging you by the hair.”...Ambikā reduced him to ashes with the menacing sound of “Hmmmmmm!”³⁷

The *Devīpurāṇa* also suggests that unwanted advances will be fatal. When the general of Ghora’s army, Durmukha, is filled with desire for the goddess Vijayā and extends his hand to touch her, her mere glance immediately destroys him. She explains: “A Dānava came, possessed by desire for me. I became so angry that when I looked at him, he died.”³⁸ While the Goddess consents to Ghora’s rule over divine forces, this by endowing him with authoritative power, she herself refuses to submit to him or his agents. In fact, a recurrent theme throughout the *Devīpurāṇa* suggests that females possess agency in the deployment of their sexuality. This notion is epitomized in a story about rape, which Ghora’s wife relates to her husband in order to dissuade the Asura king from his

³⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 8.53-54.

³⁷ Coburn, *Encountering*, 59. See *Durgasaptasatī* 6.6-7, 9.

³⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 13.70.

emerging appetites for wanton pleasures. She recounts the beautiful daughter of a sage who unwittingly becomes the object of desire for a wandering king named Sumedhas:

In time he traveled there [to Puṣkara], but he did not see that ascetic sage, oh lord. Only that beautiful and charming girl was there, and he longed to marry her. He was afflicted with passion, perturbed, and lacking discretion. Even though she didn't desire him, he grasped her by the hand. That lovely and pleasant girl was weeping, but still he did not release her. Having enjoyed her, the king returned to Śākadvīpa.³⁹

When the sage returns to the hermitage and learns of his daughter's ordeal, he curses the king, and "Sumedhas then went from the surface of the earth into hell."⁴⁰ While this narrative is relayed in order to emphasize the necessity of curbing male desire, it also reinforces the conviction that women have a voice regarding their sexual lives. To violate this right is to risk punishment in hell. A beautiful yet mighty and deadly female, the Goddess stands as a formidable symbol of such empowered sexuality.

The Liminal Vindhyas and Domestic Himālayas

Underscoring the Goddess's rather independent nature is her consistent portrayal as dwelling in mountainous regions, outside of established communities and their affiliated social expectations. The *Devīmāhātmya* clearly situates the Goddess in the Himālayas in the third narrative arc. When the gods realize the necessity of the Goddess's assistance, they must travel into the northern mountains in order to offer their hymn in supplication: "Having made up their minds, the gods went to the Himālaya, lord of mountains. They then praised there the Goddess who is Viṣṇu's *māyā*."⁴¹ After the gods offer the hymn, the text locates the Goddess even more explicitly by

³⁹ *Devīpurāṇa* 9.42-45.

⁴⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 9.47.

⁴¹ Coburn, *Encountering*, 53. See *Durgasaptasatī* 5.6.

presenting her bathing in the waters of the Gaṅgā: “Thus (entreated) by the gods who are filled with praise and the like, Pārvatī then went to bathe in the waters of the Ganges, O king.”⁴² Though we do not yet find a fully developed mythology portraying the Goddess as the daughter of Himavat and later the wife of Śiva, explicit connections are drawn between the Goddess manifest as Pārvatī (a name used, albeit infrequently, in the text), the Himālaya mountains, and the flow of the Gaṅgā river. Furthermore, the text accounts for the dark complexion of the Goddess – an aspect that underscores her potential for ferocity⁴³ – by positing that the fair Ambikā emerged from the manifest Goddess’s body. Here Pārvatī becomes associated with the dark Kālikā: “When she had come forth, Pārvatī became black. Known as ‘Kālikā,’ she makes her abode in the Himālayas.”⁴⁴ The location of the mountains as a site of independence is underscored when the Asuras approach the Goddess, who is “standing on the snow mount,”⁴⁵ “smiling slightly, mounted on her lion on the great golden peak of the highest mountain.”⁴⁶ She dwells in the Himālayas alone, unencumbered, but the Asuras insist that she descend in order to enter into marriage with Śumbha-Niśumbha. Rather than relinquish the autonomy she enjoys in her mountain abode, she enters into battle and defeats those Asuras who seek to tame her.

The *Devīpurāṇa*, too, distinctly locates the Goddess within mountainous regions, but predominantly in the Southern Vindhya range rather than that of the Himālayas to the North. When Brahmā and Viṣṇu approach Śiva to seek help in overcoming the threatening domination of the Asura Ghora, Śiva explains that the manifest Goddess and her attendant female divinities dwell in

⁴² Coburn, *Encountering*, 55. See *Durgasaptasatī* 5.37.

⁴³ With regard to Wendy Doniger’s noted delineations, the gentle, motherly “goddesses of breast” tend to exhibit fair complexions while the fearsome “goddesses of tooth” display dark skin. Portraying Pārvatī here as black underscores her autonomy and power, and hinders domestic associations.

⁴⁴ Coburn, *Encountering*, 55. See *Durgasaptasatī* 5.41.

⁴⁵ Coburn, *Encountering*, 59. See *Durgasaptasatī* 6.6.

⁴⁶ Coburn, *Encountering*, 61. See *Durgasaptasatī* 7.2.

the mighty Vindhyas: “Thus addressed by them, Īśa considered and said: ‘She who is the unparalleled highest power, the yogic sleep of great-souled ones, has gone sporting in the Vindhyas, mounted on her lion.’”⁴⁷ The text proceeds to explain that the Mothers also dwell in the Vindhyas, thereby associating their wild feminine energies with the untamed mountainous regions:

The Mothers headed by Jayā arose from the vitality of the [gods’] bodies...They stayed in the Vindhya, king of mountains, where the water of the Narmadā froths and where accomplished sages dwell, freed from agitating desire...So those respected and honored noble women remained on earth in the Vindhya, best of mountains, having been dispatched by Śambhu. Though omnipresent and pervading the seven continents of earth, they manifest there in the Vindhya, chief of mountains.⁴⁸

While ultimately both texts aim to emphasize the Goddess’s liminality and corresponding inherent power through these associations with mountains and nature, the alternate locations are curious. Echoing the structure of the Śumbha-Niśumbha narrative, the *Devīpurāṇa* recounts a description of the beautiful maiden relayed to Ghora by the sage Nārada. After telling of her splendor, Nārada directs Ghora to retrieve the Goddess from the mountains in order to wed her and bring her into his domain.⁴⁹ Thus instructed, Ghora sets out for the Vindhyas, which are described in detail in a poetic style. In portraying the inhabitant untamed fauna, the vibrant flora, the disciplined yogīs, and the fierce native tribes, the text glorifies the liminal space of the fringe as freed from the constraints of normal social convention.⁵⁰ Likewise, the Goddess is untempered by cultural norms, epitomized by her establishment in remote regions.

The beginning of the narrative concerning the Asura Ruru in a later chapter, however, situates the Goddess in the Himālayas rather than the Vindhyas, and may offer insight into the varied

⁴⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.19-20.

⁴⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.91-97.

⁴⁹ *Devīpurāṇa* 8.53-54, previously quoted.

⁵⁰ See *Devīpurāṇa* 13.40-60. This theme will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

positioning of the Goddess's residence. The description particularly conceives of the Goddess as the *śakti* of Śiva, and begins to develop the domesticated portrait of Umā/Pārvatī.

Lord [Viṣṇu] said: "The three-eyed lord of gods who is revered by gods and sages is seated on the peak of Kailāsa, Umā residing in half [his body]. Lord Brahmā, Śakra, Brhaspati, and I went to see him. There Skanda is always sporting, mounted on his peacock. Brahmā's mount, the goose, was struck by the peacock with his beak. It yelped out a pitiful sound that was heard by the Goddess. Smiling, she watched Brahmā as he struck the peacock lightly with a staff, which caused the peacock to cry out. When she heard this, the Goddess felt for the distressed."⁵¹

Unlike the *Devīmāhātmya*, which conceives of Pārvatī as dwelling in the Himālayas independently, the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* dwelling in the northern Mount Kailāsa is intimately associated with Śiva. She is not an autonomous entity, but an innate portion of the male god. Also, though the passage does not explicitly describe the Goddess as the mother of Skanda, we see here a connection which suggests that this relation has been, or is in the process of becoming, firmly established. The vision of the Goddess living in the Himālayas is here one of domesticity and the associated constraints that accompany a householder lifestyle. The Goddess's concern at the peacock's crying out reflects this more motherly nature, rather than the warlike mien that typifies the Vindhya-dwelling feminine divine of the text.

While the *Devīmāhātmya* does not assume any established relation between the Goddess and her domestic life with Śiva, the *Devīpurāṇa* acknowledges a more fully formed mythology in which the Goddess of the Himālayas necessarily invokes a somewhat tempered feminine divine. By instead focusing on the Vindhyas, which continue to offer the wild nature of liminal space, the text is able to feature the unencumbered power of the Goddess. Such association is emphasized by connecting the Goddess of the Vindhyas with the tribal peoples of the region, a connection that had been established for several centuries by the time of the *Devīpurāṇa*'s composition. In the

⁵¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 83.3-7.

Harivaṃśa, for instance, we have evidence of a wild, tribal goddess situated in the Vindhyas, worshiped by tribal groups:

Honored by Śabarās, Barbaras, and Pulindas, you whose banner bears a peacock feather always proceed towards the people. Crowded by cocks, goats, rams, lions, and tigers, accompanied by the din of bells, you are renowned as She Who Dwells in the Vindhya Mountains.⁵²

The *Mahābhārata* also cites this connection of the Goddess to the Vindhyas. For instance, when Yudiṣṭhira offers a hymn to Durgā, he notes, “Your eternal abode is in the Vindhya, foremost of mountains.”⁵³ As Cynthia Humes points out, it was not uncommon for classical Sanskrit literature to draw from the ancient regional goddess Vindhyavāsinī, developing the warlike characterization of the Goddess by adopting her ability to overcome demonic forces. The Śumbha-Niśumbha episode, for instance, was originally attributed to the Goddess’s Vindhyavāsinī incarnation. As these early texts developed the role of Vindhyavāsinī, however, they also connected her with the god Viṣṇu by conceiving of her as the slain sister of Kṛṣṇa-gopāla, born of Yaśodā. The *Mahābhārata* reflects this connection prior to the aforementioned hymn to the Goddess offered by Yudiṣṭhira, explaining:

And while Yudhishtira was on his way to the delightful city of Virata, he began to praise mentally the Divine Durga, the Supreme Goddess of the Universe, born of the womb of Yasoda...her who ascended the skies when dashed (by Kansa) on a stony platform[,] the sister of Vasudeva...⁵⁴

⁵² *śabarair barbaraiś caiva pulindaiś ca supūjitā / mayūra-pakṣa-dhvajinī lokān kramasi sarvaśaḥ // kukkuṭaiś chāgalair meṣaiḥ siṃhaiḥ vyāghraiḥ samākulā / ghaṇṭā-nināda-bahulāviśrutā vindhya-vāsinī //* [1.8.9-12]

The Harivaṃśa, vol. 2, ed. Parashuram Lakshman Vaidya (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1971), 35.

⁵³ *vindhye caiva nagaśreṣṭhe tava sthānam hi śāśvatam / Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, ed. Rāma Nārāyaṇa Datta (Gorakhpur: Gītā Press, 1964), 1857 [4.6.17].

⁵⁴ *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 4, ed. Hiralal Haldar and trans. Pratap Chandra Roy (Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co., 1955), 11. This passage is not included in the Poona critical edition.

Humes suggests that the *Devīmāhātmya* adopts the Śumbha-Niśumbha myth, but attributes it to Pārvatī dwelling in the Himālayas in order to escape this escalating association of the Goddess with Viṣṇu and his incarnation of Kṛṣṇa.⁵⁵ The *Devīmāhātmya* strives to avoid the implicit connections with an overseeing male divinity, and so reconceives the Goddess, shifting from a focus on the Vindhya to an association with the Himālayas. It would seem that the *Devīpurāṇa* has similar, though contradictory, concerns regarding the Vindhya-Himālaya distinction. It consistently locates the Goddess in the Vindhya without concern for any connection with Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa – there is not a single mention of Kṛṣṇa or any of his associated narratives in the text. This Vindhyaśinī of the *Devīpurāṇa* is distinctly not the Goddess born to Yaśodā, but an independent Goddess of war. Rather than expressing concern regarding associations with Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, the text is much more interested in navigating the Goddess’s associations with Śiva. The portrait of the Goddess dwelling in the Vindhya is one of wilderness and untamed ferocity, juxtaposed against the Goddess of the Himālayas as the obedient wife of the preeminent ascetic god.

Śiva and the Abiding Śakti

The Goddess’s relationship with Śiva is of special concern in the *Devīpurāṇa*, which presents a significantly distinct portrait of their liaison. The Goddess of the *Devīmāhātmya* has no special connection with Śiva, and is certainly not presented as his consort. Thomas Coburn highlights the *Devīmāhātmya*’s surprising dearth of motifs that have subsequently become firmly entrenched in a Śaiva ethos.⁵⁶ The text evokes the name Pārvatī only in the preamble to the Śumbha-Niśumbha

⁵⁵ Humes, “Is the Devi Mahatmya a Feminist Scripture?” 127.

⁵⁶ Coburn, *Crystallization*, 177.

battle discussed previously, and it never presents the appellation Umā, which pervades the *Devīpurāṇa*. The *Devīmāhātmya*'s only portrayals of Śiva interacting with the Goddess are found in her initial manifestation in the Mahiṣāsura narrative and then in the Śumbha-Niśumbha narrative when the *śaktis* emerge for battle, neither of which present a special relationship between the pair. The initial manifestation of the Goddess occurs when, incited by fury, great *tejas* emerges from the bodies of all of the gods and unifies into the manifest form of the Goddess:

Then from Viṣṇu's face, which was filled with rage, came forth a great fiery splendor (*tejas*), (and also from the faces) of Brahmā and Śiva. And from the bodies of the other gods, Indra and the others, came forth a great fiery splendor, and it became unified in one place...That peerless splendor, born from the bodies of all the gods, unified and pervading the triple world with its luster, became a woman.⁵⁷

The text here suggests that the power of the Goddess lies latent within the forms of all the male gods, and indicates no special relationship of the Goddess with any of them. The only other instance of a direct interaction between Śiva and the Goddess presents Śiva in a subordinate and deferential position to the supreme Goddess, certainly not indicative of the Goddess as consort. When the *śaktis* emerge from each of the gods, Śiva approaches Caṇḍikā along with them in order to request her assistance in battle: "Then Śiva, surrounded by these *śaktis* of the gods, said to Caṇḍikā: 'May the demons now be quickly slain by you in order to please me.'"⁵⁸ The Goddess responds by commanding Śiva to approach Śumbha and Niśumbha with an ultimatum:

And she, the invincible one, spoke to Śiva, of smokey, matted locks: "You yourself become my messenger to Śumbha and Niśumbha..." Since Śiva himself was sent by her as a messenger, she has become known throughout the world as Śivadūtī ("She who has Śiva as messenger").⁵⁹

Śiva is thus instructed to serve the Goddess, couriering messages on her behalf. The authoritative position of the feminine divine is emphasized by the grammar of the pair's utterances. Śiva offers

⁵⁷ Coburn, *Encountering*, 40. See *Durgasaptasatī* 2.9-12.

⁵⁸ Coburn, *Encountering*, 64. See *Durgasaptasatī* 8.21.

⁵⁹ Coburn, *Encountering*, 64-65. See *Durgasaptasatī* 8.23, 27.

his request to Caṇḍikā in the deferential, polite third person passive form (*hanyatām asurāḥ śīghram*), while the Goddess commands Śiva with the more abrupt second person imperative (*dūtatvaṃ gaccha bhagavan*). The language suggests that the relationship between Śiva and the Goddess is not between equals, but that Śiva, too, is subject to the supreme feminine power. It also makes clear that the Goddess's epithet of Śivadūtī does not imply that she is the messenger of Śiva (a *tatpuruṣa* compound), but that she has Śiva as her messenger (a *bahuvrīhi* compound).

Unlike the *Devīmāhātmya*, which as we have noted presents a fundamentally independent and autonomous vision of the feminine divine, the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* is intimately intertwined with Śiva, necessarily associated with him as his empowering *śakti*. While the *Devīmāhātmya* does promote the conceptual formulation of *śakti* as animating power underlying material activity, there is no preference for Śiva when discussing the Goddess as *śakti*, nor is the *śaktimān*, the possessor of *śakti*, necessarily limited to the male gods. As Thomas Coburn points out, the *Devīmāhātmya*'s narrative episode in which the *śaktis* emerge presents a *śakti* emerging from the Goddess herself, joining the others as one of the Mothers.⁶⁰ The *Devīpurāṇa*, on the other hand, focuses specifically on the relationship between Śiva and the Goddess as his *śakti*, conceiving of her as his wife Umā/Pārvatī, a relationship that had long been established. As R. C. Hazra discusses, the earliest works mentioning Umā are the *Taittirīyāranyaka* and the *Kenopaniṣad*, which refer to Rudra as the husband of Umā and to Himālaya as her father, respectively.⁶¹ The *Devīpurāṇa* draws on these previously established connections when it promotes the vision of the Goddess as a mountain girl

⁶⁰ Coburn, "Consort of None, Śakti of All," 162.

⁶¹ R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, vol. 2, 24. See *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka of the Black Yajur Veda*, vol. 2, ed. Rājendralāla Mitra, vol. 52 of *Bibliotheca Indica* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872), 736: (...*ambikāpataya umāpataye paśupataye namo namaḥ* // [10.18]); and *Kenopaniṣad*, ed. Swami Sharvānanda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1965), 26: (*sa tasminn evākāśe striyam ājagāma bahuśobhamānām umāṃ haimavatīm* / [3.12]).

who is fundamentally connected with Śiva, abiding in the left half of his body as his animating power.

Such association is emphasized when the narratives of the Goddess's origins are taken into consideration. As previously mentioned, the *Devīmāhātmya* presents the origins of the Goddess in the Maḥiṣāsura episode as the *tejas* emerging from the gods and unifying in the form of a divine woman. In contrast, the *Devīpurāṇa* offers no such narrative of origins, a notable absence of a well-known and pervasive narrative thread. The first appearance of the Goddess in the *Devīpurāṇa* is in the sub-narrative in which the Asura Dundubhi is consumed by Śiva's fiery anger when he dared to gaze upon the Goddess. In this narrative, the Goddess is simply present, an integral component of the body of Śiva: "That powerful one went to the mountains, and then saw the Mistress of Gods who inhabits the body of Śaṅkara, her exceedingly beautiful form on the left side, honored by all the gods."⁶² Rather than an involved narrative of origins, the text assumes an innate connection between Śiva and the corresponding feminine divine, frequently referring to Śiva as "the one who bears Umā in half his body" and noting the Goddess as Śivā, the feminine corollary to the male god. The next appearance of the Goddess, also in a sub-narrative, highlights this interconnection by presenting Śiva as the conduit to the Goddess's presence and her accompanying power. When the fiery Dānava named Hālāhala threatens to consume the cosmos, the gods first approach Śiva before they are granted access to the Goddess. Brahmā explains: "I invoked Rudra, resplendent with his skull-staff in hand...for the sake of our protection and for the quieting of the flames [he] then summoned Cāmuṇḍā, whose appearance was like the fire of destruction at the end of time."⁶³ This theme of Śiva as the manager of access to the Goddess recurs

⁶² *Devīpurāṇa* 4.60.

⁶³ *Devīpurāṇa* 6.22-23.

throughout the text, with most appearances of the Goddess mediated by Śiva's control. When the gods require help defeating the Asura Ghora, they first must praise Śiva, who directs them to the Vindhya mountains where the Goddess appears at the time of battle.⁶⁴ Similarly, when Nārada meditates on the Goddess for the sake of her assistance, she simply manifests before him, bearing her plethora of weaponry and associated accoutrements of hides and *akṣa* beads; however, she does so specifically “by the command of Śambhu.”⁶⁵ In a later battle when Viṣṇu and Indra realize that they require the assistance of the Goddess in order to defeat the Asuras Subala and Dundubhi, they note that they must first propitiate Śiva who is the possessor and moderator of the Goddess's power:

Viṣṇu said: “She who is the supreme highest power, the auspicious Śaṅkarī, the source of mantras according to the division of *padas* and sounds, the utmost principle that encompasses all, will be favorable to you, oh Vāsava; there is no doubt. Oh faultless one, having pleased Śaṅkara with me, that possessor of the Padamālā may grant you the prosperity that accompanies the eight-part *vidyā*. By the power of the mantras of the *vidyā* that mighty Dānava will be subjugated; otherwise, he will remain unconquered.”⁶⁶

This passage makes explicit the notion that the feminine is power while Śiva is the wielder of that power. The gods must propitiate him rather than the Goddess directly; once pleased, he summons the Goddess and commands her. This motif appears again in a following narrative arc in which the power of the feminine divine is required in order to overcome the Asura Ruru. Again, the gods must approach Śiva, who grants the *śakti* from his own body before the gods may enter into battle.⁶⁷ The *Devīpurāṇa* thus presents Śiva as the paradigm for an evolving *śakti* model in which male authority controls feminine power, despite the supreme and unruly nature of the Goddess.

⁶⁴ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.19-20 and 13.62.

⁶⁵ *Devīpurāṇa* 16.15, 38-40.

⁶⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 39.122-124.

⁶⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 84.4.

The *śaktis* of the *Devīmāhātmya* exhibit significantly more agency in the employment of their energies. When they emerge from the bodies of the gods in order to assist in battle, they do so of their own volition, rather than by the command of their male counterparts:

At that very moment, O king, in order to destroy the enemies of the gods, and for the sake of the well-being of the supreme gods, very valorous and powerful *śaktis*, having sprung forth from the bodies of Brahmā, Śiva, Skanda, Viṣṇu, and Indra, and having the form of each, approached Caṇḍikā.⁶⁸

In their emergence for battle, the *śaktis* themselves issue forth (*vinīṣkram*) as active agents rather than being summoned or commanded. This agency is contrasted sharply with the *Devīpurāṇa*'s emergence of the *śaktis*, in which the male gods act as the driving force of the *śaktis*' manifestation. Brahmā initiates the sequence, realizing that he can summon his innate feminine power as a means of victory in battle. Rather than the *śakti* of Brahmā herself emerging, the language of the text makes clear that Brahmā is the agent of the active verb, employing a causative past active participle agreeing with Brahmā as the linguistic subject who generates the *śakti* as grammatical object.⁶⁹ When Śiva witnesses Brahmā giving rise to the *śakti*, he also decides to establish his own, again offered in language that presents the male as actively producing the feminine power: "Śiva was amazed. [He thought:] 'This *śakti* of the creator is always victorious over the opposition. I will create a second *śakti* of my own, the unconquered Aparājītā."⁷⁰ Śiva then enters into meditation in order to conjure his *śakti*, emphasizing the necessary role of the male god in bringing forth his feminine force, which "was present in the lotus of his heart."⁷¹ When the other gods see that Brahmā and Śiva have given rise to their own *śaktis*, they each summon their latent feminine energies by recalling them and making them manifest. The *śaktis* of Kārttikeya, Viṣṇu, Yama, and

⁶⁸ Coburn, *Encountering*, 63. See *Durgasaptasatī* 8.11-12.

⁶⁹ *Devīpurāṇa* 84.22, *tatrotpāditavān brahmā svaśaktim kiraṇojjvalām* /.

⁷⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 84.25-26, ... *asyā śaktidvītyāhaṃ srjāmi aparājītām* //.

⁷¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 85.1-3.

Indra are all established in this manner. Emphasizing this shift in thinking about the relation of masculine authority and feminine power, the *Devīpurāṇa* never presents a *śakti* emerging from the Goddess herself, as does the *Devīmāhātmya*. As mentioned previously, the *Devīmāhātmya* does not attribute *śaktis* solely to male vehicles; after the other *śaktis* emerge from the gods, one also issues forth from the body of the Goddess: “Then from the body of the Goddess came forth the very frightening *śakti* of Caṇḍikā herself, gruesome and yelping like a hundred jackals.”⁷² Once this *śakti* of Caṇḍikā emerges, she commands Śiva to act as messenger on her behalf. The *Devīpurāṇa*, which follows a very similar sequence of the *śaktis* emerging from the gods, offers a quite different conception, substituting in place of the Goddess a terrible form of Rudra as the vehicle for the particularly fierce *śakti*.

A great anger arose [in Śambhu], and from that anger a fire issued forth. The flames of that fire shone brilliantly, alighting across, above, and below. Situated amongst the rings of flames, her brilliance equal to myriads of suns, the *śakti* of Kālarudra was manifest for the assistance of Śiva.⁷³

By replacing the Goddess with Kālarudra as the origin of the final, terrifying *śakti*, the *Devīpurāṇa* supports the notion that authority lies solely with male wielders of power. This conception is reinforced by the actions of this *śakti* upon emergence. Whereas the *śakti* of the *Devīmāhātmya* issues commands to Śiva, that of the *Devīpurāṇa* immediately seeks direction from him: “Frightening all the directions, she came before the lord of gods and said: ‘What shall I do? Oh lord of gods, tell me quickly.’”⁷⁴ While both texts present the *śaktis* as incomparably powerful, the *Devīpurāṇa* presents them with substantially less autonomy and self-agency.

⁷² Coburn, *Encountering*, 64. See *Durgasaptasatī* 8.22.

⁷³ *Devīpurāṇa* 85.18-19.

⁷⁴ *Devīpurāṇa* 85.22.

Expanding Domesticity in the *Kālikāpurāṇa*

A notable narrative which is absent in both the *Devīmāhātmya* and *Devīpurāṇa* is that of the Dakṣa cycle of myths, which becomes prominent in other texts and pervasive throughout the entire Puranic canon. The majority of the narratives of the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, for instance, focus on establishing the Goddess as Satī, the daughter of Dakṣa and first wife of Śiva, as well as her reincarnation as Pārvatī after the events of Dakṣa's sacrifice. Dakṣa, one of the mind-born sons of Brahmā, is compelled by his father to solicit the Goddess Mahāmāyā, compelling her to take birth as his daughter; in this form, she is expected to incite lust in Śiva, which Brahmā claims is necessary for cosmic creation but which is also provoked by divine retribution. The text opens with Brahmā becoming sexually aroused by his own daughter Sandhyā: "Brahmā, lustful as he was, did cast his side-long glance on emotional Sandhyā constantly; his body became wet with perspiration and he lustfully desired her."⁷⁵ As he was passing, Śiva witnessed the arousal of Brahmā and laughingly began to ridicule him not only for being incited to lust, but by none other than his own daughter:

Śiva said: "O Brahman! How is it that having seen your own daughter you have developed the carnal desire? It is highly improper for those who follow the path of the Vedas. That 'the daughter and the daughter-in-law are as good as the mother' – this ordination of the Vedas has come out of your mouth. How is it that the insignificant Kāma made you forget all about that maxim?"⁷⁶

In retaliation and to support the process of creation, Brahmā enlists Dakṣa to praise the Goddess, who then grants him a boon because of his devotion. Whereas the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* is conscripted for battle when she grants boons, the Goddess of the *Kālikāpurāṇa* is valued for her ability to provoke lust. Dakṣa requests: "O Jaganmayi! (the omnipresent) Mahāmāyā! If you are

⁷⁵ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, trans. B. N. Shastri (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1991), 17 [2.32].

⁷⁶ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 18 [2.38-39].

pleased to grant me a boon, then you should now be born as my daughter and be the consort of Śiva.”⁷⁷ The Goddess complies with Dakṣa’s request, and subsequently takes birth as his daughter Satī, so named for her depth of virtue and righteousness.

As she matures, Satī becomes an ardent devotee of Śiva, presenting appropriate offerings and undertaking ascetic vows in his honor. Her strict religious observances, along with a blow from Kāma’s arrow, attract Śiva’s attention, and he is compelled to accept her as his wife, adopting a domestic life with her in the Himālayas. Śiva’s prolonged dalliance with Satī comes to an abrupt end, however, when she abandons her life after a perceived insult by her father. Dakṣa invites “whoever and whatever exists in the three worlds” to his immense public sacrifice, but he considers Śambhu ineligible because of his status as a *kapālin*, an ascetic skull-bearer.⁷⁸ Satī had previously vowed that she would give up her life if ever offended by her father, but she had also agreed to become the consort of Śiva and to give rise to a son. She thereby resolves to abandon her body through yoga and to adopt a new persona as the daughter of Himālaya and his wife Menakā: “Thereafter the Goddess Kālikā, Yoganidrā, the embodiment of the world, who had given up her former body of Satī in order to be born again, went to Menakā and was conceived by her in due course, in her womb.”⁷⁹ While the Goddess’s iteration as Satī had previously been associated with Yoganidrā or Mahāmāyā, and by extension with Viṣṇu, the text conflates the manifestation of Pārvatī with Kālī/Kālikā, thereby domesticating an otherwise ferocious and independent goddess. The discrepancy is striking; while the Kālī of the *Devīmāhātmya* and *Devīpurāṇa* laps blood in drunken abandon, the Kālī of the *Kālikāpurāṇa* is portrayed as a bashful and obedient young maiden, the “mother of the world.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 19 [8.30].

⁷⁸ See *Kālikāpurāṇa* 16.28-30.

⁷⁹ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 540 [41.39-40].

⁸⁰ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 539 [41.29].

Like Satī, Kālī devotes herself to propitiation of Śiva, and with the assistance of Kāma is able to incite lust in the ascetic god, compelling him to accept her as his second wife.⁸¹ Again, the role of the Goddess here is to incite lust in the famously aloof and celibate god, thereby giving rise to the son who will be capable of defeating the Asura forces that threaten cosmic norms.

She [Kālī] alone is capable of making Śambhu, the celibate (whose semen remains always on his head) discharge his semen; there is no other woman except her who is competent to do this. From his semen, which he would ejaculate, a son shall be born, and he shall kill the demon Tāraka; none else can do this.⁸²

The Goddess is not valued for her martial capabilities, which are so pervasive in other Śākta texts, but predominantly for her ability to incite desire in Śiva and thereby become his adjoining consort. She is not presented as the slayer of demons, but as the potential mother of the slayer of demons, her power relegated to her fertility. In fact, the only example of invoking the Goddess's martial capacity occurs in the text's abridged versions of the *Devīmāhātmya*'s narrative threads, a seemingly conspicuous appropriation of established narratives, nominally cited (probably) for the sake of legitimacy. Even in these instances, however, the warrior-like propensities of the Goddess are downplayed in favor of highlighting her generous nature. In the *Kālikāpurāṇa*'s iteration of the Slaying of the Buffalo Demon, Mahiṣa and the Goddess do not engage in an antagonistic battle; rather, Mahiṣa readily accepts that he must be slain, and humbly propitiates the Goddess so that she may grant him a portion of the sacrifice as he abides in service at her feet.⁸³ Though the Goddess slays the Buffalo Demon, she does so graciously, granting him freedom from rebirth for crores of *kalpas*. The text then presents an alarming reconsideration of the narrative, explaining that Mahiṣa is in actuality the god Śiva himself, who after being propitiated by the Asura Rambha

⁸¹ This narrative, highlighted by the burning up of Kāma by Śiva's third eye, is particularly renowned, and is most eloquently presented in Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhavam*.

⁸² *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 561 [42.88-90].

⁸³ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 877 [60.104-05].

had taken birth as his son, born of a she-buffalo. Having been cursed by the sage Kātyāyana that “A woman shall be your killer,” Śiva had requested to be slain by the Goddess, ever connected with her.⁸⁴ Subsequent mention is made of the Goddess manifesting in light and dark forms for the slaying of Śumbha and Niśumbha⁸⁵ and the emergence of the various *śaktis* for the destruction of Raktabīja,⁸⁶ though the narratives offer no depiction of battle, and thus no instance of the Goddess as competent warrior. The text also includes an iteration of the Madhu-Kaiṭabha narrative, but in this instance the Goddess herself draws out the Asuras from the dirt of Viṣṇu’s ears, an act she undertakes in order to incite a battle that will ultimately buttress the solidity of the earth.⁸⁷ Once Viṣṇu slays the two demons, their lifeless bodies are employed to raise the earth from the cosmic waters, keeping it dry and allowing it to solidify by rubbing it with the Asuras’ fat.⁸⁸ Again, though the role of the Goddess is acknowledged and appreciated, she is not presented in any way as herself an aggressive fighter, but as a means to a desired end.

Though the Goddess lacks aggression in the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, she continues to maintain a somewhat capricious nature, epitomized in a series of arguments she provokes with Śiva while living a domestic life in the Himālayas. In these episodes, the Goddess is offended by various actions of Śiva and she lashes out in frustration; ultimately, however, the two always reunite, emphasizing the necessary unification of the masculine and the feminine which is fitting for the text’s Tantric milieu. In general, Śiva and Pārvatī are depicted as abiding in a state of wedded bliss, with Śiva enjoying the sexual pleasures of his youthful and beautiful bride.

⁸⁴ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 884 [60.149-51].

⁸⁵ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 895-96 [61.58-60].

⁸⁶ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 903 [61.111].

⁸⁷ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 907 [62.12-13].

⁸⁸ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 912 [62.48-49].

Despite the complimentary physical descriptions of Pārvatī, however, her dark complexion is a point of contention, a subject of insecurity for the Goddess. When Śiva one day says to her, “O Kālī, you are as black as spreading collyrium,”⁸⁹ she recoils in anger and runs off to hide in a mountain cave. Unlike the paradigmatic argument of the *Devīpurāṇa* in which the two curse one another in retaliatory frustration, the Goddess here expresses her aggression passively, while Śiva plays the part of the somewhat tactless and oblivious husband. He searches for her, despondent with grief, saying “O my beloved! Why have you taken recourse to the wounded sense of honour? This hurts me.”⁹⁰ The Goddess emerges from her hiding place and subsequently schools Śiva on appropriate manners, but then vows to withhold sex until he removes her dark complexion:

One should not be ridiculed because of one’s low caste, joblessness (poverty), bad appearance, lack of generosity, and one having one limb less or one more. Brahmā in the past pronounced this as the essence of the Vedas, but you have flouted that and derided me by saying those (cruel) words. Let me tell you the truth; until my body turns to be of the golden-white hue I shall not enjoy sexual pleasure with you.⁹¹

While the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* responds to threats and offenses with direct curses and brute force, the Goddess of the *Kālikāpurāṇa* finds her power in her role as a sexual companion. Withholding that sexual capacity prompts Śiva to agree to her demands; he takes her to the river and bathes her in the waters of the Gaṅgā, from which she arises with a lightened hue: “As soon as she rose from immersion in the water she turned into the hue of lightning white. The Goddess standing in the midst of crystal water looked like the lightning in the clear autumnal sky.”⁹² While the Goddess of other Śākta texts adopts fierce and gruesome forms, Kālī of the *Kālikāpurāṇa* is concerned with her pleasant and agreeable countenance, which is fundamental to her position as a

⁸⁹ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 613 [45.53].

⁹⁰ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 614 [45.60].

⁹¹ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 615 [45.65-67].

⁹² *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 622 [45.105].

divine consort. The Goddess becomes so beautiful, in fact, that she no longer recognizes herself when she perceives her reflection in Śiva's shining chest. She thinks that her husband has taken another woman into his breast, and runs off to hide in anger and embarrassment.⁹³ When Śiva explains her misperception, she feels ashamed of her doubts, but the doting husband drives away her emotional response: "Mahādeva then constantly encouraged her with words of consolation and said this to Pārvatī: 'Oh illustrious one! Do not feel ashamed (of your conduct). Who does not err?'"⁹⁴ He then invites his wife to inhabit half his body, abiding constantly at his breast and giving rise to the striking image of Ardhanārīśvara.⁹⁵ Again, the underlying emphasis is on the necessary merging of the masculine and the feminine, bringing the two together in a productive and dynamic unity.

Devotional Emphasis in the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*

The *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, a Śākta Upapurāṇa of like provenance and ideological context to that of the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, shares a similar vision of the feminine divine, but further emphasizes the status of the Goddess – particularly manifest as Kālī – as the supreme *parā prakṛti* worthy of utmost respect and devotion. Like the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, the majority of the text's narratives are focused on the birth of the Goddess as Satī, her marriage to Śiva, her self-immolation as a consequence of the perceived insult by her father Dakṣa, her subsequent rebirth as Pārvatī, and her ensuing life as wife to Śiva and mother to Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa. One of the most striking variations is the addendum of the ten Mahāvidyās, who manifest when Śiva offends Satī. The two have been arguing about whether or not they should attend Dakṣa's sacrifice despite the lack of an

⁹³ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 624 [45.113-17].

⁹⁴ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 628 [45.143].

⁹⁵ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 632 [45.164-75].

invitation, with Śiva claiming that he should obey the father-in-law's wishes while Satī demands that he deserves a portion of the sacrifice. Exasperated, Satī takes on a terrifying form, "her lower lip trembling with rage, the pupils of her eyes resembling the doomsday fire...her mouth full of terrible fangs...She appeared old, naked, her hair flying."⁹⁶ Seeing this terrifying form before him, Śiva is overcome by fear and attempts to flee, regardless of the Goddess's assurances that he should not be afraid. Finally, in order to restrain her panicked husband, the Goddess manifests in ten forms, one for each of the ten directions:

Seeing her husband so overcome by fear, she, endowed with compassion and wishing to restrain her husband, immediately stood before [him] in all ten directions, after becoming ten different forms. He, the lord of the mountains, running about very quickly, encountered her in every direction. After seeing one horrible one, he ran to and fro fearfully in another direction and thus ran into another [of those forms]...Seeing her thus Śambhu said, as if very afraid, "Why are you black? Where has Satī, dear as life itself, gone?"⁹⁷

The Goddess proceeds to explain that she *is* indeed Satī, and describes each of the ten Mahāvidyās that surround him.⁹⁸ She lists the benefits of devotedly worshiping them, including the fulfillment of desires and the granting of various types of superhuman powers, and she insists that their identity, mantras, *yantras*, and manner of worship must remain secret, hidden from those who are not trained adepts.

This exchange exhibits an unmistakably Tantric flair, but its treatment of the Mahāvidyās is quite different from the *Devīpurāṇa*'s approach to the Padamālā Vidyā, which also presents a fierce manifestation of the Goddess who grants *siddhis* when properly invoked (a facet of the text to be discussed in further detail in chapter five). The *Devīpurāṇa* presents a vision of the fierce Goddess as controllable by esoteric means, necessarily compelled to act as a feminine conduit of

⁹⁶ Dold, "Religious Vision," 276-77. See *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.47-50.

⁹⁷ Dold, "Religious Vision," 277-78. See *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.57-61.

⁹⁸ The text follows a traditional list of Kālī, Tārā, Kamalā, Bhuvaneśvarī, Chinnamastā, Śoḍaśī, Sundarī, Bagalāmukhī, Dhūmāvatī, and Mātangi. See *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.62-63.

power. The *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, in contrast, emphasizes the agency of the Goddess herself; the Mahāvidyās are not invoked by a masculine directive, but manifest in order to control the actions of a male god. Śiva is forced to abandon his own whims in compliance with the wishes of the feminine divine, and is afterwards apologetic for questioning the Goddess’s supremacy:

Śiva said: “I know you are the supreme queen, the supreme, full *prakṛti*. Please forgive what was said by me, ignorant due to delusion. You are the primal, supreme knowledge abiding in all beings, the self-dependent, supreme *śakti*. Who would command or prohibit you? Forgive me...and do as you please!”⁹⁹

The *Devīpurāṇa* emphasizes the Śiva-Śakti relation, but suggests that Śiva is the ultimate arbiter of the Goddess’s actions; as exhibited here, the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa* inverts the hierarchy of power, revealing that no one can monitor or govern the Goddess’s actions; rather, others must submit and obey.

Śiva’s deferential approach to the Goddess in this sub-narrative is indicative of a more pervasive trend throughout the text, which Patricia Dold argues is primarily interested in establishing a spiritual economy dictated by *bhakti*, emphasizing utmost devotion for the ferocious Goddess. As she indicates, “The text’s narratives show the joy of the devotee in the presence of the supreme divine being, the devotee’s quest to achieve such a state of intimacy or union, and the devotee’s sorrow when separated from the deity.”¹⁰⁰ For example, in the previous narrative Śiva is portrayed as blissful when wedded to Satī, wild and despondent when she leaves him as punishment for his lapse of devotion, and desperate to reunite with her, which is granted when she takes rebirth as Pārvatī. The text further supports its *bhakti*-focused religious vision in its portrayal of a theophany reminiscent of (but distinct from) Kṛṣṇa’s in the *Bhagavadgītā*, as well as a brief retelling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in which devotion to Kālī is instrumental. As Dold demonstrates, in a

⁹⁹ Dold, “Religious Vision,” 281. See *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.89-92.

¹⁰⁰ Dold, “Religious Vision,” 4.

portion of the text called the *Bhagavatīgītā*, Pārvatī reveals to her father Himālaya her terrifying true nature, just as Kṛṣṇa allows Arjuna to glimpse his genuine cosmic form; whereas Arjuna is overwhelmed by the fear of this vision, however, Himālaya, though astounded, reverentially requests to see more. The implication is that Himālaya behaves as a proper devotee, bowing in supplication and unquestioningly accepting any form of the Goddess. As Dold comments, the text “suggests that the ideal devotee welcomes all aspects of the deity, even her fearsome, dreadful, and apocalyptic character.”¹⁰¹

The efficacy of such unflagging devotion to the Goddess is buttressed in the episodes adopted from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which emphasize the importance of *bhakti* over that of the dharmic norms which are its traditional focus. While certain matters of undharmic activity are referenced, the gains and losses present in the narrative are sparked by expressions or lapses of devotion, respectively. As Dold points out, the Goddess withdraws her protection from Rāvaṇa when she no longer remains the focus of his attention, a momentary lapse on the battlefield that results in his demise; victory, on the other hand, goes to Rāma because he worships her devotedly in the execution of *pūjā* rituals on each night of battle.¹⁰² Though the Goddess may threaten and terrify, she must ever remain the sole focus of one’s devoted attentions.

The *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*’s Supreme and Impetuous Feminine Divine

The *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* is far less concerned than the *Devīpurāṇa* in emphasizing the role of the feminine *śakti* as a pervasive empowering force. This voluminous text is comprehensive, varied, and complex, but the overall focus is on the elevation of the Goddess as an abstract supreme

¹⁰¹ Dold, “Religious Vision,” 8.

¹⁰² Dold, “Religious Vision,” 35. See *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa* 39.49-55; 45.13-36; and 47.1-14.

absolute, while her immanent manifestations are often portrayed in an unflattering manner as typically petty, jealous, and conniving women. The text is overtly misogynist, claiming that “women suck the blood out of persons like leeches” or “steal away the semen virile, the strength and energy in the way of giving them happiness as sexual intercourse...women can never be the source of pleasure; they are the source of all miseries.”¹⁰³ As Cynthia Humes points out, unlike the *Devīmāhātmya*, which never denigrates the female sex, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* presents the Goddess herself expounding the negative attributes of woman’s nature (*strī svabhāva*), seen as reckless, foolish, deceitful, and cruel.¹⁰⁴ Lakṣmī explains: “Falsehood, vain boldness, craftiness, stupidity, impatience, over-greediness, impurity, and harshness are the natural qualities of women.”¹⁰⁵ She then exhibits these very traits by cursing her husband, dictating that his head will fall off because he had laughed upon viewing her face. Her insecure and erratic personality is revealed as she considers what may have sparked his amusement, deciding that he has seen something ugly in her face or has taken a beautiful co-wife in her place. Owing to her feminine nature (as conceived by the *Devībhāgavata*) she curses “without thought of good or bad, causing her own suffering.”¹⁰⁶ In a later, similar passage of domestic discord induced by the problematic nature of women, Lakṣmī, Gaṅgā, and Sarasvatī – all conceived as co-wives of Viṣṇu – devolve into a clichéd catfight over jealousies of their husband’s affections. Gaṅgā casts provocative glances and smiles at Viṣṇu, who responds in kind. Viewing this exchange, Sarasvatī becomes irrationally angry, claiming she is the least loved among the three wives, even though the others are illiterate and thus ignorant of the Vedas. She then begins to abuse the other wives verbally, and

¹⁰³ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇam*, trans. Swami Vijayanand (Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratisthan, 2008), 67 [1.15.18-21].

¹⁰⁴ Humes, “Is the Devi Mahatmya a Feminist Scripture?” 139.

¹⁰⁵ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇam*, 23 [1.5.83].

¹⁰⁶ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇam*, 23 [1.5.81].

violently rises up to grab Gaṅgā by the hair.¹⁰⁷ When Lakṣmī attempts to intervene, Sarasvatī lashes out with a curse: “No doubt you will be turned into a tree and into a river.”¹⁰⁸ Gaṅgā berates Sarasvatī, claiming that she is always quarrelsome because of her presiding arena of speech, and she then delivers a counter curse that Sarasvatī, too, should become a river; finally, Sarasvatī retaliates and condemns Gaṅgā to descend to the earthly realm as a river as well. Here the feminine divine is unequivocally represented as petty, excitable, and lacking in self-assurance, undesirable qualities for an attentive wife. As Viṣṇu proclaims: “Rather to dwell amidst rapacious animals or to enter into fire than remain with a bad wife...Those that are under the control of their wives, know that they never get their peace of mind until they are laid on their funeral pyres.”¹⁰⁹ The episode prompts Viṣṇu to drive away the two most disobedient wives, sending Gaṅgā to Śiva and Sarasvatī to Brahmā, but retaining the more docile Lakṣmī. While the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* is occasionally portrayed as capricious and impulsive, epitomized in the previously discussed argument with Śiva, she is not so petty, and the feminine is ultimately conceived as a positive and necessary force. In the Dundubhi episode, for instance, Śiva is primarily the instigator, lashing out at his wife for initiating what he perceives to be an irresponsible action; Umā retaliates in anger, and indeed delivers menacing and reckless curses, but she is presented with more dignity than the hair-pulling divine wives of the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*. Though the supreme Goddess may be exalted in the text, the feminine in general is not granted the respect and reverence of the elevated position that is present in other Śākta Purāṇas.

Many aspects of the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*’s narratives aim to emphasize the distinction between the divine woman and the supreme feminine godhead, emphasizing the Goddess’s

¹⁰⁷ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇam*, 990 [9.6.31].

¹⁰⁸ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇam*, 990 [9.6.32].

¹⁰⁹ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇam*, 992 [9.6.60, 62].

transcendence of gender rather than acknowledging the power inherent in her female status. While the *Devīpurāṇa* recognizes potency in the feminine form and strives to harness that potential, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* downplays such associations. For instance, though the Goddess is invoked for her martial abilities, she denies her femininity, viewing war as a decidedly masculine affair. The majority of the Goddess's warrior exploits are transparently adopted from the narratives of the *Devīmāhātmya*, with the battles of Madhu-Kaiṭabha, Maḥiṣāsura, Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa, Raktabīja, and Śumbha-Niśumbha revisited in two separate iterations (though the second is substantially condensed). In the two main narrative arcs of Maḥiṣāsura and Śumbha-Niśumbha, Brahmā grants boons to the entreating Asuras, thereby ensuring that they may only be slain by a female, whom they assume must necessarily be too weak to carry out the act.¹¹⁰ This narrative addendum, which does not appear in the iterations of the *Devīmāhātmya* or *Devīpurāṇa*, underscores that the Goddess's innate female form is not the guarantor of her strength above that of the gods; rather, circumstances of the boon have rendered the males ineffective. Whereas femininity in other Śākta texts is itself the underlying cause of potency, the Goddess of the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* supports the notion that womanhood is not itself powerful, and that masculinity is the normal arena of battle. The Goddess chastises Maḥiṣa's minister for thinking of her in feminine terms:

O Stupid one! Did you think a little beforehand the meaning of your words when you told me of my feminine nature? Though I am not apparently a man, yet my nature is that of the Highest Puruṣa (Man); I show myself simply in a feminine form...I have come here in the shape of a woman to effect my purpose.¹¹¹

The implication of the Goddess's statement is that she is not inherently female, and therefore does not channel her power from her femininity, but that she normally transcends gender boundaries; she merely chooses to embody in a female form in order to meet the needs of the battle's

¹¹⁰ See *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* 5.2.12-14 and 5.21.24-28.

¹¹¹ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇam*, 452 [5.10.31-32, 35].

circumstances. By inserting the boons delivered by Brahmā necessitating that only a woman may defeat the bolstered Asuras, the text is able to circumvent the notion that the feminine is inherently powerful while also recognizing the Goddess's potentialities.

C. Mackenzie Brown has argued that the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* strives to establish distinctions between the Goddess as supreme *brahman* and the lesser manifestations of the feminine divine by explicitly contrasting the Goddess as aniconic light with the goddess as embodied form. Inspired by the *Devīmāhātmya*'s narrative of the Goddess's origination from the gods in order to battle Mahiṣāsura, the text emphasizes the fiery light that emerges from each of the gods to unite in a luminous mass from which the embodied Goddess Mahālakṣmī emerges.¹¹² As Brown indicates, this aniconic light-form of the Goddess represents her supreme nature as the highest reality of the Upaniṣads, which transcends all dualities, including those of gender.¹¹³ The Goddess does not emerge from the collective anger of the gods as she does in other texts, but reunites into the supreme consciousness of Advaita Vedānta which had been diffused amongst them.¹¹⁴ This connection with *brahman* of the Upaniṣads is supported by the *Devīgītā* portion of the text (7.31-40), which employs established terminology and concepts of the Upaniṣads in considering the Goddess as supreme. As Brown points out, the *Devīgītā* refers to the Goddess as light with the term *mahas*, which is employed in the *Taittirīyopaniṣad* to indicate the transcendent reality of *brahman*. Brown explains: "The *Devī Gītā*'s use of this ancient mystic utterance, in the sense of light, points to the transcendent nature of the Devī as pure consciousness (the "fourth" level of consciousness beyond waking, dream, and deep sleep)."¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the Goddess in the *Devīgītā* is described, by herself and others, as *saccidānanda*, the infinite being, consciousness,

¹¹² *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇam*, 441-42 [5.8.33-46].

¹¹³ Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 191-92.

¹¹⁴ Brown, "The Tantric and Vedāntic Identity," 21.

¹¹⁵ Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 192.

and bliss renowned in the Upaniṣads as the three primary aspects of *brahman*.¹¹⁶ This supreme aniconic Goddess stands in opposition to the manifest embodiments of the feminine divine, which are often portrayed in a less flattering light.

The text also diminishes the inherent power of the feminine divine by downplaying the role of the *śaktis* as empowering forces of male gods. Though *śaktis* are acknowledged in certain portions of the text, they are less pervasive and less influential than they are in the *Devīpurāṇa*. As discussed previously, when the *śaktis* manifest in the *Devīmāhātmya* and the *Devīpurāṇa*, the texts make clear that they emerge from the bodies of the gods, and that they are a latent force of male divinity. The *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, in contrast, resists acknowledging an inherent feminine potency; when the *śaktis* are needed on the battlefield, they simply appear rather than springing forth from the bodies of the gods as they do in other narrative iterations. As normally conceived, the *śaktis* are accompanied by the weapons, ornaments, and vehicles of their associated male god, but they are not portrayed as intimately and irrevocably connected with them.¹¹⁷ The implication is that they are more like consorts or wives to the gods rather than an intrinsic portion of their being. In contrast, the text does emphasize that the *śakti* of Caṇḍikā emerges out of her body, suggesting that links between the body and feminine power are restricted to the female form. While the *Devīmāhātmya* presents power as feminine and wielded by both males and females, and the *Devīpurāṇa* suggests that power is feminine but should be exercised by males, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* refrains from attributing power solely to the feminine. While the text seeks to exalt the Goddess as a non-dual absolute, in general it does not esteem the feminine or female embodiment.

¹¹⁶ See *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.32.25 and 7.40.4.

¹¹⁷ See *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* 5.38.17-26.

Conclusion

When considered in the context of the other major Śākta Purāṇas, the *Devīpurāṇa*'s emphasis on the Śiva-Śakti cosmic model is made apparent, enhanced by comparison of the variations in an established Śākta mythic vocabulary. While many of the other texts reinforce the Goddess's supreme status through narrative portrayals of her assertive nature or her capacity for transcendence, the *Devīpurāṇa* yokes the formidable feminine divine to authoritative male oversight. Feminine potency is recognized and valued, but is invoked in service of male interests. Consonant with its guiding Tantric perspective, the text accentuates the productive union of masculine and feminine forces, with the Goddess intimately connected with Śiva and recognized as an innate facet of all male divinity in the role of energizing *śakti*. Whereas other Śākta texts position the Goddess as dominating or directing her male companions, however, the *Devīpurāṇa* defers to a more conventional male authoritative structure. The Goddess may exhibit greater power and efficacy – exemplified by her martial conquests, wild temperament, and liminal location – but her actions are directed by a Brahmanically-oriented mandate; she is threatening and mercurial, but she can be controlled. The text seems to draw from the imagery of the *Devīmāhātmya* and other similar narrative threads in establishing the Goddess as a legitimate and estimable divine force, but begins to recognize Śaiva connections that ultimately become fundamental to her character. It contributes to a process of domestication by associating her with Śiva, adopting established narrative elements but remodeling them so as to incorporate the Goddess in innovative capacities. Compelled by such textual evolutions, the Goddess is ushered from her demoniacal nature to that of a dutiful wife and nurturing mother; the *Devīpurāṇa* is demonstrably a notable step along that path.

Chapter Four

Deceptive Gods and Virtuous Demons: Morality at the Fringe

A persistent theme pervading Hindu mythic narratives, particularly those of epic and Puranic literature, is that of the ongoing struggle between the gods and a host of semi-divine or supernatural creatures that in English translation are often grouped together under the rubric of “demon,” or the slightly more accurate “daemon.” Despite variations in their pedigree and inherent features, these daemonic beings – whether they be Rākṣasas, Asuras, Daityas, Dānavas, Bhūtas, Piśācas, Vetālas, or others – are generally considered morally suspect and essentially malevolent. As we find in the *Devīpurāṇa*, however, such is not *necessarily* the case. Though Puranic daemons may threaten the established hierarchies of cosmic authority and power as structured by Brahmanic dharma, the narratives of the *Devīpurāṇa* demonstrate that daemons are capable of fundamental goodness, while the gods engage in nefarious activity in order to maintain their elevated supernal status. So what then marks the fundamental difference between gods and daemons if not virtue? And why would the *Devīpurāṇa* present the Asuras as venerable while simultaneously emphasizing the necessity of their defeat at the hands of ignoble gods? The analyses of this chapter suggest that just as the *Devīpurāṇa* assimilates the feminine divine from the fringe yet renders it subject to masculine control, so it recognizes the validity of other unorthodox divine entities, such as Asuras and Vināyakas, but underscores the necessity of ultimate Brahmanic authority. Though the text strives to expand the reach of orthodox influence by incorporating elements from fringe communities, it renders them subject to the Brahmanical worldview.

Demonology and Cultural Othering

Before exploring the divide between Devas and Asuras/Dānavas/Daityas in the specific context of the *Devīpurāṇa*, a consideration of the implications and historical development of the English word demon will inform our discussion and provide compelling points for cross-cultural comparison. The term demon (from the Latin *dæmon*) is rooted etymologically, and to some extent conceptually, in the Greek *daímōn*. Derived from *daío* (to divide or apportion), the *daímōn* of ancient Greece delineated a category of somewhat ambiguous supernatural power, less personalized than the gods (*theoí*) but nonetheless superior to the mortal realm.¹ Capable of exerting quasi-divine influence over the lives of people, the variable benevolent or malevolent nature of a *daímōn* could bring forth either good fortune (*eudaimonia*) or bad (*kakódaimonia*). In the Homeric poems, for instance, the word *daímōn* most frequently refers to an unspecified but potent divine power that provokes unexpected or unwanted fates.² It refers to divinity in a broad sense, indicating supernatural forces that impact the unfolding of mortals' lives regardless of their own desire or intent. As Menelaos, king of Sparta, exclaims at the brink of battle in the *Iliad*, “When a man would fight against his lot (*daímōn*) with another whom a god (*theos*) honors, then swiftly on him rolls a great woe.”³ Plato, too, underscores the powerful intermediary status of the *daímōn* in the *Symposium*, when Socrates and Diotima are discussing the nature of Love (*Eros*):

“He [Love] is a great spirit [*daímōn*], Socrates; everything that is of the nature of a spirit is half-god and half-man.” “And what is the function of such a being?” “To interpret and convey messages to the gods from men and to men from the gods... Being of an intermediate nature, a spirit bridges the gap between them...Through

¹ See John E. Rexine, “*Daimon* in Classical Greek Literature,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30, no. 3 (1985): 335-36.

² Rexine, “*Daimon*,” 337.

³ *Iliad* XVII.98-9. See Rexine 339.

this class of being come all divination and the supernatural skill of priests in sacrifices and rites and spells and every kind of magic and wizardry.”⁴

Here Plato indicates the rather ambiguous nature of the *daímōn*; it remains a vague conceptual divinity, such as love, which connects the earthly and heavenly realms, empowers rites, and impacts livelihood through its ontologically superior station. The *daímōn* remains capricious, however, and may inflict disease and misery just as easily as prosperity.

The characterization of demons as fundamentally malevolent and evil beings arises in the 2nd-3rd centuries in the wake of Christian influence, which foregrounded a conscious othering of the semi-divine *daímōn* through deliberate vilification. Early Christian authors inherited this project of religious bracketing from Jewish translators, who incorporated the Greek term *daímōn* in their translations from Hebrew scriptures to refer to the gods of other peoples.⁵ These *daímōns* frolic with centaurs, provoke pestilence, and reside as false idols; as “the gods of the nations,” they remain inferior, but not wicked. Interestingly, translators seem to avoid the use of *daímōn* to refer to the Hebrew word for “messenger” or “angel,” which aligns conceptually with the Greek *daímōn*’s intermediary status between the worlds of gods and men; instead, they incorporate the word *ággelos* to signify such a being. Like the *daímōn* of classical Greece, the angels of the Hebrew Scriptures engaged in morally ambiguous conduct, capable of helpful or terrifying behavior as they acted on behalf of the high God.⁶ By introducing the new technical term *ággelos* as reference to a specific type of cosmic being that otherwise could have been conceived as *daímōn*, the Jewish translators actively sought to distinguish their own religious world from that

⁴ *Symposium* 202e. See Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (New York: Penguin Books, 1951), 81.

⁵ See Dale Basil Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 4 (2010): 659. Martin explains that the translators choose the Greek word *daímōn* to replace Hebrew words that refer to the abstract nouns of fortune or fate but also to names of gods in surrounding cultures.

⁶ Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” 665.

of the indigenous Greek context. Angels were servants of their own God, while *daímōns* belonged to the sacrificial cults of the cultural Others. The *daímōn* was not necessarily *evil*, but it did reside outside the Jewish religious purview.

As Christian doctrine, mythology, and cosmology developed in the early centuries of the common era, the *daímōn* became increasingly defined by a perceived morally corrupt nature, particularly as it became equated with fallen angels who in their debasement had lost the ability to pursue the good. Emergence of this equation is marked in the Gospels, which tend to move towards talk about “demons” over that of “evil spirits,” and which posit Satan as the ruler of demons (Mark 3:22; Matthew 12:24; Luke 11:15).⁷ When various references from the Gospels are considered together, a distinct narrative emerges in which “Satan is the prince of fallen angels who are identical with demons and who will all eventually be punished or destroyed.”⁸ This identification is further emphasized in the postcanonical Christian authors such as Tertullian, who glosses “demons and spirits” as “the apostate angels.”⁹ The demons are now conceived as fundamentally sinful chastisers of humans; fallen from God, they become locked in patterns of vice, no longer capable of choosing the good.¹⁰ Though they may be ontologically superior due to their angelic origins, they have fallen into moral inferiority.

The historical evolution of the daemon in the religious contexts of South Asia demonstrates some notable similarities and differences with the Greek/Jewish/Christian developments of the *daímōn*/demon, particularly with regard to the daemon as a marker of cultural difference. While the daemon need not necessarily manifest an immoral nature, the categories of demons generally

⁷ Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” 673.

⁸ Martin, “When Did Angels Become Demons?” 673-74.

⁹ See *De Idololatria* 4.2 and 9.1-2. Quoted in Martin 675.

¹⁰ Morwenna Ludlow, “Demons, Evil, and Liminality in Cappadocian Theology,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20, no. 2 (2012): 186.

exhibit undesirable traits and are normally associated with the social fringe, dwelling beyond the purview of Brahmanical norms. Consequently, the daemon frequently stands as a symbol of the cultural other, such as indigenous peoples or rival religious groups.¹¹ Much as in the Jewish context, the daemons may represent a sectarian outsider – not necessarily evil nor ineffectual, but also not ideal. This ambiguity allows for seemingly contradictory notions such as that of the heroic daemon, who demonstrates nobility and enviable strength despite a fundamentally inadequate nature. For instance, consider Rāvaṇa, the doomed antagonist of the famed *Rāmāyaṇa*. Though his Rākṣasa nature renders him fierce, deceitful, and treacherous, he is also a mighty warrior, elite Brahman, and charismatic leader. These contrasting characteristics create a unique situation in which the cultural and religious other may be simultaneously vilified and respected.

Such honoring is highlighted even further when the intended audience views themselves as some sort of cultural other, such as we find in Michael Madhusudan Datta's 1861 *Meghanādavadha kāvya* (*The Slaying of Meghanāda*), a colonial retelling of portions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* that focuses instead on the experiences of Rāvaṇa and his family.¹² In a political environment in which the authorial Indian had become culturally inferior, the symbolic otherness of the daemon serves as a rallying point for resisting colonial oppression. Datta explicitly indicates such in a letter to a friend: "People here grumble and say that the heart of the Poet in *Meghnad* is with the Rakshasas. And that is the real truth. I despise Ram and his rabble; but the idea of Ravan

¹¹ This association is directly emphasized by the Adivasi community known as the Asurs, who inhabit areas of Jarkhand, Bihar, and West Bengal. They consider themselves descendants of Mahiṣāsura, and as such enter a period of mourning during Durgā Pūjā. Some Asur activists are advocating for the end of Durgā Pūjā celebrations, revealing a certain level of caste tension as expressed by the God-Asura motif: "Ravan and Mahishasur are our ancestors and the celebration of their killing by trickery must not continue the way it has for centuries. The so-called upper caste always had a grip over documentation of Indian mythology and that is the reason why the tribal perspective never got highlighted." See Jaideep Deogharia, "Asur Tribals Mourn 'Martyr' Mahishasur," *The Times of India*, 11 October 2013.

¹² See Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Meghnadbaddh Kavya*, trans. Shyamal Bandyopadhyay (Calcutta: Toms Publications, 1986).

elevates and kindles my imagination; he was a grand fellow.”¹³ Writing through the lens of British colonial education, Datta identifies as a cultural and political other, and so recognizes within the daemon the struggles he himself faces; though Rāvaṇa is not without blame and must ultimately suffer defeat, he also exemplifies courage, heroism, and loyalty.

Similarly, the daemons of the *Devīpurāṇa* exhibit traits considered to be moral and worthy of imitation; however, they must always be overcome in order to maintain the orthodox status quo. What, then, is the impetus for portraying daemons in a positive light while simultaneously emphasizing that they must be undermined? This discrepancy becomes even more interesting due to the fact that the Brahmanical gods act in ways that would be considered disreputable. While the demons of Christian theology are most associated with the three vices of deceit, envy, and anger,¹⁴ in the *Devīpurāṇa* those qualities are almost solely reserved for the gods rather than the daemons. One possibility – in line with the trend of incorporating indigenous goddess figures in order to popularize Brahmanical norms – is that the text is to some extent intended for communities on the social fringe, for people who would identify with the outsider daemon more than the Brahmanical establishment. Religious narratives, practices, beliefs, and spaces can provide significant openings to religious others,¹⁵ so the trope of the deceptive god and virtuous daemon may serve as a means of legitimizing and exalting the cultural fringe while nonetheless incorporating it into the broader pan-Indic religious milieu. We find a somewhat comparable utilization of the daemon figure in the

¹³ Quoted in Julie Cyzewski, “Heroic Demons in *Paradise Lost* and Michael Madhusudan Datta’s *Meghanadavadha kavya*: The Reception of Milton’s Satan in Colonial India,” *Milton Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2014): 217.

¹⁴ Ludlow, “Demons, Evil, and Liminality,” 195.

¹⁵ Kathinka Frøystad argues that rather than accepting the notion that religious communities close in upon themselves within cosmopolitan and multicultural contexts, they instead open up through malleable boundaries that can invite ritual elements and divine beings of others into the central religious world. Religion is in this sense a “social glue” that binds varying cultural communities into a single social entity. See Kathinka Frøystad, “Divine Intersections: Hindu Ritual and the Incorporation of Religious Others,” *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2012): 1-2.

Maṅgalacaṇḍīra Gītā, a circa 1579 CE composition by the Bengali Dwija Madhava. Faced with aggressive Mughal expansion, Madhava develops a narrative about “Mongol Daitya,” who overtakes the gods and must be slain by the Goddess in order to reinstate the balance of power. Despite this necessity to overcome Mongol, however, Mughal rule is nonetheless lauded as idyllic, with the emperor Akbar recognized as a great ruler on par with Rāma, who nurtures his subjects with valor, intelligence, and compassion.¹⁶ While the Mughals may be excellent rulers who bring the promise of peace and prosperity, they represent a threat to hegemonic control and must be conceptually overthrown in the religious sphere through the trope of the outsider daemon. While they may wield muscle and political clout, the Brahmanical establishment retains its status of supremacy by means of access to the divine figures who are capable of overthrowing encroaching daemonic power. As cultural others, the Mughals become daemons on the religious plane, incorporated into the Brahmanical hierarchy in a productive yet nonthreatening manner. The *Devīpurāṇa* too strives to recognize the integrity of fringe peoples and political forces while nonetheless suppressing any claims to hierarchical supremacy in the mainstream religious realm. Though the daemon may be fundamentally good, even the malevolent god will always rise above.

Competing Cousins: The Deva/Asura Divide

With a focus on establishing and elevating non-Brahmanical goddess figures within an orthodox vocabulary, the *Devīpurāṇa* is situated at a complex intersection of competing worldviews, an underlying aspect of the text that occasionally surfaces to reveal an ongoing tension between competing values. On the one hand it supports a religious life previously unrecognized

¹⁶ Kumkum Chatterjee, “Goddess Encounters: Mughals, Monsters, and the Goddess in Bengal,” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2013): 1450.

by the established tradition, while on the other it seeks to be adopted as a component of that esteemed lineage. This uneasy traversal of ideologies is at times revealed in the text's portrayal of (particularly Vaiṣṇava oriented) gods behaving in a deceptive manner, while the Asuras¹⁷ act according to dharmic norms. Such narrative developments result in the devaluation of the orthodox Vaiṣṇavas contrasted by an appreciation of non-Brahmanical indigenous life. Two substantial episodes in the *Devīpurāṇa* stand out as particularly demonstrative of this more nuanced approach to divine moral realities, with the gods undertaking projects of deceit in order to overthrow prosperous and dharmic Asura rulers. Such narrative accounts raise questions regarding the efficacy and ethicality of the gods' behavior. Why must the gods overthrow virtuous Asuras? And more importantly, why did the composers of the *Devīpurāṇa* present the Asuras as righteous at all? Other epic and Puranic tales in which demoniacal forces are actually threatening and vicious present more straightforward rationales: Rāma defeats Rāvaṇa and the Rākṣasas because of Sītā's peril; Kṛṣṇa slays Pūtānā, Baka, and Kāliya due to threats against himself and the people of Vṛndāvana; even the Goddess in other iterations of Śākta narratives justifiably overcomes Mahiṣāsurā, Raktabīja, and Śumbha-Niśumbha when they each provoke battle of their own accord. The virtuous Asuras of the *Devīpurāṇa*, on the other hand, must be tricked into their ultimate downfalls.

This issue of moral association with regard to the Deva-Asura divide is influenced by a long and complex historical background. In her study of the concept of evil in Hindu mythology, Wendy Doniger traces the evolution of the relationship between the gods and the Asuras, finding that

¹⁷ While the word "demon" is most often employed as a translation of Asura, the appellation is a bit of a misnomer, as will be demonstrated. Other beings such as Rākṣasas, Yakṣas, Pīśācas, and others might also be included in the category, though none are necessarily evil, as the word demon might suggest. I prefer to maintain the Sanskrit terminology both to delineate more specifically the various demoniacal beings as well as to steer away from a misleading, morally charged translation.

tensions between the two groups are present as early as the Vedas. However, in these early texts the two sides clearly do not represent a dichotomy between good and evil – misfortune may be attributed to the gods while the daemons demonstrate an ambiguous nature. As Doniger stresses, though the gods and the daemons are invariably at odds as natural enemies, they are not *morally* opposed.¹⁸ They are not fundamentally different; on the contrary, they share an equivalent fundamental divine essence. Genealogically related, the boundaries between them in Vedic texts are often blurred. The renowned art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy speaks to this intrinsic similarity: “Although distinct and opposite in operation, [gods and demons] are in essence consubstantial, their distinction being a matter not of essence but of orientation, revolution, or transformation.”¹⁹ While the gods and Asuras may not share a common identity, they differ only superficially and not inherently.

Vedic demonology is rich and varied, with multiple classes of supernatural beings existing on different planes and in hierarchical relation. The Rākṣasa is the most frequently occurring demonic term in the *R̥g Veda*, used to refer to a terrestrial daemon that plagues mankind. It eats human flesh, causes disease, provokes madness, invades human dwellings, and attacks sacrifices.²⁰ For example, *R̥g Veda* 10.87 offers an extended hymn to Agni, who is beseeched to quell the evil forces of the hordes of flesh-eating Rākṣasas:

I balm with the oil the mighty Rakṣas-slayer; to the most famous Friend I come for shelter enkindled, sharpened by our rites, may Agni protect us in the day and night from evil. O Jātavedas with the teeth of iron, enkindled with thy flame attack the demons. Seize with thy tongue the foolish gods’ adorers: rend, put within thy mouth the raw-flesh eaters.²¹

¹⁸ O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, 58.

¹⁹ A. K. Coomaraswamy, “Angels and Titans: An Essay on Vedic Ontology,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 55, no. 5 (1935): 373-74.

²⁰ N. N. Bhattacharyya, *Vedic Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2000), 41.

²¹ *R̥g Veda*, tr. by Ralph T. H. Griffith, 10.87.1-2.

This paradigmatic example characterizes the Rākṣasas as fundamentally fierce, malignant, monstrous, and vile, a demonic portrait that continues to pervade Indic literature beyond the Vedic period. In contrast to these terrestrial savages, the Asuras stand as hierarchically superior and cosmologically more powerful, more divine, and more comparable to the godly forces than the despicable Rākṣasa. In the *Ṛg Veda*, the term “asura” occurs only a handful of times in the sense of demon, yet indicates powerful figures who stand in opposition to the gods: Indra battles the Asuras Pipru (10.138.3) and Varcin (7.99.5), Bṛhaspati is entreated to quell a wolf-like Asura (2.30.4), and Agni formulates a hymn by which the gods may vanquish various Asuras (10.53.5).²² In these instances, the Asuras stand as the powerful and threatening foes of gods, but in contrast to the Rākṣasas rarely demonstrate aggression towards people. Interestingly, however, a few references indicate a blurring of boundaries between Asuras and the gods, with important Vedic deities such as Varuṇa, Mitra, Dyaus, Indra, Rudra, Agni, and others described as “asura.”²³ These early Vedic passages emphasize that Asuras are not morally reprehensible figures who stand in opposition to righteous gods; rather, all powerful divinity may be conceived of as Asura. This period of overlap may be attributed to connections with Iranian religious life as revealed in the *Avesta* prior to a sectarian schism that resulted in oppositional divine hierarchies.

As the Vedic period progresses and segues into the Epic/Puranic, the division between the Devas and the Asuras becomes increasingly more pronounced, with the separate categorizations implying more significant essential difference. The Asuras come to be viewed as overtly opposing Vedic standards, while the Devas are positioned as the rightful recipients of admiration and ritual sacrifice.²⁴ An underlying assumption arises that the gods benefit humankind but the Asuras

²² Bhattacharyya, *Vedic Demonology*, 46.

²³ Bhattacharyya, *Vedic Demonology*, 47.

²⁴ Interestingly, the situation is reversed in the Persian Avesta: Ahura (Sanskrit: Asura) refers to the highest gods while the term *daeua* (Sanskrit: *deva*) is employed for demons. As Bhattacharyya notes, these

threaten universal well-being; the two groups, however, do not necessarily correspond with benevolence and malevolence, respectively. As Doniger argues, the crucial distinction between the gods and Asuras revolves around issues of power rather than moral integrity.²⁵ Demons may legitimately display benevolence and virtue as long as they remain impotent, while the gods may devolve into malevolence and wickedness in order to retain their eternal hold on power. Their conflict is not governed by dichotomies between good/evil, life/death, virtue/vice, light/dark, but rather dominance/submission. As such, the Devas and Asuras are not bound by moral categorization; the gods are worshiped and the Asuras denigrated not because of their underlying natures, but because of power dynamics. As Doniger phrases it, “Our allegiance to the gods is based not on moral factors but on agonistic ones: the gods always win, and so we are always on their side...We say ‘Boo!’ to the demons and ‘Hoorah!’ to the gods, and this is the difference between them.”²⁶ As if the gods and Asuras are two opposing teams engaged in an ongoing cosmic match, humans, as spectators, have selected the gods as their home team and now cheer for them for reasons of affinity. Relegated to their status of Other, like a disdained rival the Asuras are branded as “bad” regardless of their moral standing.

The mere inclination of humans to side with the gods, however, does not *necessarily* render the gods morally superior in all instances; the gods too are perfectly capable of acting in ways that seem morally bereft, particularly when facing off against powerful Asura forces. A passage from an iteration of the Prahlāda narrative arc in the prominent Śākta *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* highlights this capacity of the gods for disreputable behavior and openly questions the justifiability of their duplicity. When Śukrācārya, the teacher of the Asuras, is lured into a ten-year sexual escapade,

etymologically identical but diametrically opposed meanings may be attributed to an Indo-Iranian religious schism. See *Indian Demonology*, 46.

²⁵ See O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, 63.

²⁶ O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, 64.

Bṛhaspati, instructor of the gods, adopts the guise of Śukra's appearance and fools the Asuras into accepting him as their respected leader, compelling them to dismiss their conflict with the gods.²⁷

Later, he even teaches them false dharma, speaking ill against the Vedas. In the narrative's outer frame, a confused king questions the venerable Vyāsa:

How could he [Bṛhaspati] deceive the Demons? In all the religious Śāstras, Truth is declared to be the essence of Dharma; and the Supreme Self is attained through Truth, so the wise sages say. How can we expect an ordinary householder to be true when such a man as Bṛhaspati takes recourse to falsehood with the Demons?... When Bṛhaspati can even commit such condemnable deceitful acts and speak falsehood, we can expect no virtuous respectable persons in the world.²⁸

As the passage expresses, if even the paradigmatic upholder of dharma in the celestial realm is incapable of abiding by moral norms, then how could any mortal be expected to adhere to them? Vyāsa responds by emphasizing that the gods too inhabit bodies, and that this embodiment renders the inner Self corruptible, egocentric, and susceptible to sensual vice.²⁹ Thus even Bṛhaspati can be "impelled by covetousness" and a Brahman may act "like a rogue."³⁰ Just as people, the gods are ultimately material beings and subsequently susceptible to becoming caught up in worldly matters and all the immorality that materiality can entail. The text does not strive to justify the gods' behavior so much as to explain it, though the implication is that the gods will do whatever seems necessary to maintain their supremacy, even if those actions cross ethical boundaries.

Conversely, the Asuras are fully capable of becoming arbiters of dharma, as revealed in another of the *Devībhāgavata*'s narrative arcs. In the detailed exposition on the slaying of the Asura Vṛtra – an old narrative of Vedic origins which is present throughout epic and Puranic sources,

²⁷ This narrative thread is likely inspired by an older brief passage in the *Maitri Upaniṣad*, in which Bṛhaspati becomes Śukra and fosters ignorance among the Asuras in order to lead them into destruction. See *Maitri Upaniṣad* [7.9-10].

²⁸ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatam*, 348 [4.13.2-3,6].

²⁹ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatam*, 349 [4.13.15-16].

³⁰ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatam*, 352-53 [4.13.61].

particularly the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and *Mahābhārata* – the powerful Asura adopts a noble nature of humility, abandoning his pride and ferocity. Not only does Vṛtra become a morally upstanding figure, but he also rises hierarchically as a socially elite Brahman. The slaying of Vṛtra by Indra therefore opens a moral conundrum with regard to the gods’ behavior – how can such a mighty god undertake such a morally reprehensible action, and how is one of such stature to be punished for the most heinous of crimes such as Brahminicide? Indra is haunted by the sin, which anthropomorphizes as the hag Brahmahatyā. She arises from Vṛtra’s corpse and plagues Indra until Brahmā offers his grace and Indra performs a horse sacrifice. As van Buitenen points out, the Deva/Asura divide is less important in these episodes than “the affirmation of the manifest destiny of the brahmin to impose drastic penalty on anyone, however powerful, who wrongs him.”³¹ While the moral ambiguities posited by such action are present in iterations throughout epic and Puranic literature, the problem of moral complicity is specially emphasized in the Śākta telling of the episode. The *Devībhāgavata* version renders the deceptive action of Viṣṇu as the centerpiece of the narrative, giving special focus to Viṣṇu instructing Indra to initiate a false peace treaty with Vṛtra and then slay him when the Asura least expects it. Indra recognizes the inherent goodness of Vṛtra but remains undeterred in his project of deceit,³² thus further emphasizing “the contrast between the wicked-hearted god and the blameless demon.”³³ The gods, especially Viṣṇu,³⁴ become characterized by deception, while the demons rise above the fray as morally superior beings.

Such emphasis on Viṣṇu as a fundamentally deceptive god is commensurate with the general trend in the *Devībhāgavata*, which as C. Mackenzie Brown emphasizes, is intent on embarrassing

³¹ *The Mahābhārata*, trans. van Buitenen, 166.

³² See *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* 6.2.3.

³³ Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 65.

³⁴ As the text makes clear, Viṣṇu is “expert in fraud (*chala-jñā*).” See *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* 6.4.56.

Viṣṇu. One of the primary narratives of the text, for example, assimilates a myth from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* in which Viṣṇu is decapitated as precedent for a Vedic rite; however, the *Devībhāgavata* emphasizes Viṣṇu's stupidity, which leads to his unfortunate maiming, and then further desecrates his headless corpse. According to this version of the tale, Mahālakṣmī curses him to lose his head after she believes him to be mocking her; he then decapitates himself with his own bowstring while resting on it in a deluded slumber. The Goddess instructs Tvaṣṭṛ to affix the head of a horse onto Viṣṇu's body. The text further derides Viṣṇu by adopting and transforming his common epithet of Māyeśa, Lord of Delusion. Whereas older versions of the *Śatapatha* myth emphasize that Viṣṇu controls the magical power of the personified goddess of *māyā*, the *Devībhāgavata* inverts the power dynamic, placing Viṣṇu under the delusory control of the Goddess.³⁵ As Brown comments, "The *Devī-Bhāgavata*'s use of the epithet Māyeśa, then, is clearly ironic: he who is called 'Māyā-Master' is really he whose Master is Māyā."³⁶ The Śākta text is striving to discredit a prevailing and well-established god in order to raise the status and popularity of an evolving Goddess cult – a marketing tactic of attack ads in the transformation of mythical narrative. The *Devīpurāṇa* likewise engages in a program of presenting prominent Brahmanical male gods (particularly Viṣṇu) in a negative light while elevating the status of the Goddess and respecting the moral conduct of the Asuras.

³⁵ Brown notes the important distinction between delusion (*māyā*, *moha*) and deception (*chadman*, *chala*, *dambha*, *kapaṭa*, *pratāraṇa*, *śaṭh*, *vañc*, etc.) as revealed in the *Devībhāgavata*. The Goddess becomes firmly connected with the power of delusion, which she never deploys in a duplicitous and scheming fashion. As Brown says, "The Devī may delude demons, gods, the whole world, even Viṣṇu, but she does not practice deceit." See *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 72.

³⁶ Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, 43.

Dharmic Daemons: Asura Morality

In its exaltation of the feminine divine, the *Devīpurāṇa* challenges the boundaries of orthodox patriarchal convention, incorporating and valuing nontraditional goddesses as both powerful and legitimate recipients of devotional worship. Standing as it does at the fringe of Brahmanical standards, its portrayal of morally righteous Asuras is consistent with its peripherally oriented lens. Throughout, the text presents the Asuras as admirable, upstanding figures who abide by the established statutes of dharma. In particular, Asura rulers appear as naturally inclined to integrity, prudence, and resolve. Contrastingly, the text underscores the weakness and guile of the gods, who must resort to fraud in order to maintain their cosmic supremacy. Despite their questionable tactics, however, the necessity of the gods' rule is assumed. Though the *Devīpurāṇa* elevates the status of peripheral figures, it nonetheless stipulates Brahmanic supremacy.

The first example of such dignifying of the Asuras and vilification of the gods occurs in the primary narrative arc concerning Ghora, his rise to power, and his ultimate defeat at the hands of the Goddess. Ghora is initially portrayed as a particularly virtuous Asura leader who abides by his kingly dharma, ruling his kingdom according to prescribed standards of duty. A succinct passage in the second chapter describes in detail his daily schedule, which includes appropriate hygiene and ritual purifications; meetings with those seeking audience, in which he exhibits a fair and equable nature; consideration of matters regarding the state treasury; advantageous counsel with his learned ministers; generous offerings to the gods and ancestors; and strategizing for the protection of his subjects. As the text makes clear, the Asura rules his kingdom with a faultless disposition, intent upon the utmost well-being of the community.³⁷ His exemplary character begins to erode, however, when his overly ambitious son and minister incite him to seek greater power

³⁷ See *Devīpurāṇa* 2.76.

and a more expansive dominion; having propitiated Viṣṇu and received his favor, Ghora begins to subdue the sovereign powers of the triple world, including the divine heavenly realm. Realizing that his success in battle stems from his abiding *kṣatriya* dharma, the gods undertake a course of deception in order to weaken their Asura foe; only by propelling the Asura king along a path of false dharma are they able to crack his inviolable stronghold. Headed by Brahmā, the gods enjoin Viṣṇu to dispatch the sage Nārada as the primary vehicle for their project of deception, propelled by Brahmā's urging:

Oh Viṣṇu, propitiate Nārada, who will deceive the Asuras. By him [Ghora] will be impelled into unrighteousness (*adharma*). His devotion to the Vedas, Brahmans, and gods will be suppressed; even his wife will reject dharma and fall into unrighteousness. All of his subjects will delight in *adharma*, and will grant no peace.³⁸

Abiding by the gods' request, Viṣṇu then commands the sage to "propagate the impediment of *adharma*," thereby distracting the dharmic resolve of the otherwise righteous Asura leader.³⁹ The Brahmanical gods, epitomized by Viṣṇu and his cohort, thus become a force of deceit and self-serving behavior, in contrast with noble daemonic rule.

Once Nārada is graciously welcomed into Ghora's assembly, he begins to institute his enterprise of deception, championing the pursuit of sensual pleasure as the touchstone of a meritorious and satisfying life. As he proselytizes, "Value enjoyment of the senses. Value attachment to desire, and always delight in amusement with women. Continued lordship and youthful women are to be enjoyed – this is the fruit that arises from propitiating the gods, oh king."⁴⁰ Continuing, Nārada emphasizes that even the highest gods indulge themselves in sexual pleasures, with Śiva sporting in the forests with sage girls and Viṣṇu continually abiding at the

³⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 8.5-7.

³⁹ *Devīpurāṇa* 8.9.

⁴⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 8.17-18.

breast of Śrī. With the gods as a guiding paradigm, Nārada insists that the fulfillment of desire is not only valid, but is the true path of a righteous royal life. “The fruit of dharma,” he underscores, “is the sense object.”⁴¹ Ghora is rightly hesitant in accepting this wildly divergent notion of good conduct, countering with the more traditional view that sensory passion leads to entrapment: “Oh Nārada, surely this is not proper; liberation from sense objects is virtuous!”⁴² Ghora then offers an astute discourse on the necessity of curbing sensory indulgences in order to free oneself from their cyclical prison, revealing his depth of wisdom and truly upright character. Striving to entrap Ghora in the senses by means of his false dharma, Nārada ripostes, claiming that enjoyment of alcohol, intercourse, and meat are birthrights which incite joy and virility in the worthy *kṣatriya*. The more women one beds, the more prosperous one becomes, according to Nārada’s deceit. Wealth, supremacy, and divinity are the results of the systematic pursuit of sexual pleasure, with lovemaking driving away the decrepitude of age. As Nārada concludes, “Thus he who often makes love to eighteen-year-old maidens bearing luscious, perky breasts will attain immortality.”⁴³ Finally goaded by the duplicitous words of the scheming Nārada, Ghora yields to the passions of the flesh, and agrees to pursue the young divine maiden dwelling in the Vindhya.

The text makes explicit the downfall of Ghora as a result of Nārada’s pretense, with Brahmā explaining, “Due to the speech of Nārada, oh Śakra, that Asura became devoted to false dharma.”⁴⁴ Whereas previously Ghora filled his days with virtuous activities befitting his station – his primary concerns being the propitiation of Viṣṇu and meeting the needs of his kingdom – the Brahmanically-aligned Nārada leads him along a path of pleasure-seeking and self-involvement. He abandons his religious activities, ignores his ministers, shuns his wives, and neglects his armies

⁴¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 8.22.

⁴² *Devīpurāṇa* 8.23.

⁴³ *Devīpurāṇa* 8.48.

⁴⁴ *Devīpurāṇa* 9.1.

as he immerses himself in “drinking, lovemaking, singing, and the practice of gambling.”⁴⁵ Due to Nārada’s guile, the formerly upstanding Asura devolves, fostering a newfound attachment to sensory pleasures while believing this reckless path to be the true fruit of dharma. The other Asuras, however, are skeptical of their leader’s transformed disposition. The chief queen, noted for her attentive adherence to dharma, accompanies the head minister to Ghora’s assembly, where she reprimands the king for his weakened resolve that places him and his kingdom in danger. She exclaims:

Enjoying drink, girls, thrones, couches, and vehicles will no doubt lead the king into death, difficulty, and disease...Oh lord of Asuras, I impede you not because of concern for mistresses, but because I desire your welfare and the prosperity of the kingdom.⁴⁶

When Nārada realizes that Ghora may return to true dharma by the fundamentally principled nature of the Asuras who surround him, he is compelled to employ the formidable force of the Padamālā Vidyā in order to manipulate them all.⁴⁷ By means of its immense delusory power, all of the Asuras are coerced to abandon their virtue, with Ghora’s generals, ministers, and priests succumbing to licentious behavior while his queen joins the heretical Jains:

Following [the example of] their leader, everyone took up the path against dharma. They began to cheat with his wives, and steal his wealth and property. Those deluded Asuras abandoned the ways of righteousness. They were engaged in wrongful acts, oh young one, and they practiced creeds against dharma. The queen adopted the customs and tenets of the Digambara [Jains]; she adopted their vows and became a follower of their argued positions. She settled into heretical dharma, and began to detest Śiva and Viṣṇu...Having abandoned the way of virtue and taken up false dharma, the entire assembly of Ghora proceeded along the wrong path.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Devīpurāṇa* 9.3.

⁴⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 9.35, 48.

⁴⁷ The employment of the Padamālā Vidyā is discussed further in the following chapter, which considers the deployment of feminine powers through esoteric means.

⁴⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 13.8-11, 13.

By portraying the Asuras as initially intent upon the pursuit of proper dharma, and subsequently led astray by the meddling Nārada, the *Devīpurāṇa* problematizes the Deva-Asura dichotomy, prompting questions about who the “good guys” really are. As Wendell Charles Beane discusses in his consideration of the rise of Durgā-Kālī, by the time of the Purāṇas the distinction between the gods and Asuras “had become a symbol of the ontological polarization of the universe,” with the conflict between the two groups epitomizing the struggle between cosmic welfare and encroaching entropy.⁴⁹ While Ghora’s overthrow of heaven and subsequent displacement of the gods indicates a breach of cosmic norms, his rule is not presented as in any way a threat to the overall well-being of the universe; rather, his essentially moral constitution bolsters the prosperity of his expansive kingdom. As the paradigmatic *cakravartin*, goodness radiates from him into his dominion, infusing it with success, wealth, happiness, and health.

With concern for their own positions of prominence and sovereignty, the gods seek to dismantle this beneficial Asura reign as they employ whatever means necessary to achieve their aims. Rather than encouraging the pursuit of appropriate Brahmanical dharma, the gods deter the Asuras from righteous lives in order to weaken them and thereby expose them to defeat through processes of intrigue and deception. Presented as trustworthy, diligent, and reputable, the Asuras of the text emphasize that peoples existing outside of the orthodox fold are capable of living according to Brahmanical moral standards, thereby reinforcing the text’s project of inclusivity. While uplifting the extra-Brahmanical in this way, the text also seeks to denigrate the established traditional gods, particularly Viṣṇu, perhaps in an attempt to divert prospective devotees away from a Vaiṣṇava orientation to that of the emerging Śiva-Śakti theology. While feminine divine power provides the force that the gods ultimately tap for the delusion that blankets the Asura

⁴⁹ Beane, *Myth, Cult and Symbols*, 175.

cohort, Viṣṇu and his emissaries stand as the active wielders of the formidable Padamālā Vidyā in their project of deception.⁵⁰

Viṣṇu undertakes a course of deceit for the undoing of another Asura ruler named Bala in a subsequent narrative of the *Devīpurāṇa*, in which he appears as a Brahman in the royal court in order to exact an offering from the dutiful king. Like Ghora, Bala had achieved utmost sovereignty due to his great strength and courage, overcoming all the realms of heaven, earth, and the netherworlds. The gods are subsequently evicted from heaven, and though granted a new home in one of the underworlds, they desire the reclamation of their heaven-dwelling status. Seeking the means of their reinstatement, the gods approach the guru Bṛhaspati for advice:

Entreated thus by the gods, the guru spoke these words: “This Dānava cannot be subdued in battle, oh Śakra. All is destroyed by his strength because he is unconquerable in war. You must invoke the rite for undertaking deceit.” Thus allayed, they all went to lord Janārdana.⁵¹

Again, the text presents the Brahmanical gods in an unflattering light, portraying them as desperate and willing to pursue any means in order to achieve their self-serving goals. The text also immediately draws connections between Viṣṇu and deception, with the gods setting out for his assistance once advised that it may be their sole course of action. Reaching Viṣṇu, they explain that they sought him because he himself possesses the power of delusion, which remains their only recourse. Viṣṇu clarifies further, indicating that the force underlying his deceptive potential lies in the feminine power of the Mohinī Vidyā; as the wielder of that potent delusion, Viṣṇu is able to trick the valiant Asuras, compelling them to agree to self-destructive demands. He adopts the guise of a Brahman, and is granted audience with the king because of his fortuitous recitation of the

⁵⁰ The presence of Nārada often reveals a Vaiṣṇava connection, so employing him here as the primary agent of delusion is a fitting means of implicating Viṣṇu by association. See Loriliai Biernacki, *Renowned Goddess of Desire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15.

⁵¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 39.35-37.

Veda. When the generous king asks what gift he can bestow on this learned priest, the disguised Viṣṇu requests that the king grant an undisclosed item which will complete the gods' sacrifice. Without inquiring what that offering might be, the Asura lord consents, saying "Request that by which the gods' sacrifice may be performed, oh best of Brahmins. I will grant to you today wealth, wives, or even my head."⁵² After confirming that the king will supply whatever is required for the sacrificial offering, Viṣṇu reveals that the gods request the Asura's body; the Asura immediately consents, and Viṣṇu speedily decapitates him with his discus.

As in the Ghora narrative, Viṣṇu's unbecoming behavior is contrasted by the supremely dharmic nature of the Asura whom he seeks to dethrone. Viṣṇu himself acknowledges the king's numerous virtues: "This [Asura] possesses great strength, is endowed with virtue, understands proper conduct, is learned in the meaning of all the Śāstras, knows the procedures of esoteric mantras, and has made dharma his single aim."⁵³ Again, the Brahmanical gods demand the deposition of a venerable and sympathetic Asura figure simply to pursue their own self-serving agenda. The virtuosity of the Asura is underscored when his earthly body is offered in sacrifice to the gods, at which point he adopts a new divine body composed of precious jewels:

Having cast off his physical body, he then adopted a divine body. His limbs appeared, composed of diamonds and gems. Shining rubies arose as his eyes. His body became a mine of jewels because of the donation of that virtuous adept.⁵⁴

The Asura thereby becomes a paragon of proper behavior, epitomized by the extraordinary form he is granted upon death.⁵⁵ Again, though the narrative thrust seeks to resume cosmic norms

⁵² *Devīpurāṇa* 39.59.

⁵³ *Devīpurāṇa* 39.41-42.

⁵⁴ *Devīpurāṇa* 39.66-67.

⁵⁵ Similarly, those who have mastered esoteric *sādhana* are said to adopt an adamantine body (*vajra-deha*), which is not subject to disease, heat, cold, hunger, or thirst; Bala's divine form may be referencing this ideal of Tantric practice. See S. C. Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992), 160.

through the Asuras' downfall and the gods' subsequent return to heaven, the text also uplifts the Asuras' character while debasing that of the gods. Though Brahmanical standards are supported, their sole claim to legitimacy is also questioned.

From Daemon to God: Appropriating Vināyaka

Just as the Goddess begins to enter the Brahmanic pantheon in the middle of the first millennium of the common era, so is the elephant-headed Gaṇeśa adopted into the Hindu corpus in the early Puranic period. The origins of Gaṇeśa as an elephantine Brahmanic deity are rather vague, with passing references in older literature before the development of clear narratives and characterizations in the Purāṇas. While the *Ṛg Veda* includes an invocatory hymn addressed to Gaṇapati⁵⁶ – a common epithet later associated with Gaṇeśa – scholars agree that the reference is most likely intended as Br̥haspati, the divine teacher.⁵⁷ A more compelling Vedic reference in *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 10.15 mentions “one with the elephant head [*hastimukha*],” “one having a trunk [*karāṭa*],” and “one having a tusk [*dantin*],” while the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* lauds “the one with the twisted trunk [*vakratuṇḍa*]”; these epithets, however, could pertain to Śiva, who slays an elephant demon and retains the head and tusks as trophies.⁵⁸ Another possible (and more likely) origin for the Brahmanic Gaṇeśa lies in second to fifth century texts and iconography that reference Vināyakas, a class of beings that possess people and impose obstacles; tellingly, “Vināyaka” subsequently serves as a typical moniker for Gaṇeśa. Vināyaka imagery of the period presents dwarfish Yakṣas with elephant faces, thereby offering a preliminary portrait of Gaṇeśa as

⁵⁶ See *Ṛg Veda* 2.23.1 [*gaṇānām tvā gaṇapatiṁ havāmahe*].

⁵⁷ See Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, 8-9.

⁵⁸ See Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, 9.

somewhat malevolent and dwelling outside of the established Brahmanical fold.⁵⁹ Paul Courtright, who has conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of Gaṇeśa's development and characterization, comments on this outsider theory for Gaṇeśa's rise in the orthodox sphere:

The Brahmanic tradition eventually assimilated the worship of this outsider, as they had done with Śiva, but relegated him to the category of demon, that is, Vināyaka, the one who was defeated and then transformed into a devotee of Śiva. Gaṇeśa's powers are delegated to him by his conqueror.⁶⁰

According to this theory, then, the indigenous elephant-headed god is brought into the Brahmanic pantheon through connection with and subordination by Śiva, who himself had been enlisted from the fringe.

Regardless of the seeds of Gaṇeśa's historical origins, his developing mythologies present an array of possibilities for his divine genesis. A number of narrative backgrounds are proposed throughout Puranic literature, with inconsistencies and conflicting accounts explained through recourse to the cyclic nature of time; Gaṇeśa arises variously according to the needs of a given temporal cycle. The most popular of these origin myths presents Gaṇeśa as fashioned from the dirt of Pārvatī's body; he subsequently acquires his elephant head when Śiva unknowingly decapitates his own son. Then faced with his wife's ire, he orders that the head be quickly replaced with that of the first creature discovered in the surrounding forest, which happens to be an elephant. Though this narrative account stands as the most pervasive, alternative explanations are not uncommon. Rather than receiving his head from a random elephant, for instance, varying versions suggest that the head is that of the elephant-headed demon Gajāśura, Indra's vehicle Airāvata, or Gajendra, the elephant king who was saved by Viṣṇu from the jaws of an alligator; other tales eschew the

⁵⁹ See, for example, A. K. Narain, "Gaṇeśa: A Protohistory of the Idea and the Icon," in *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God*, ed. Robert L. Brown (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 30; and M. K. Dhavalikar, "Gaṇeśa: Myth and Reality," in *Ganesh*, ed. Robert L. Brown (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 57-58.

⁶⁰ Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, 10.

decapitation theme altogether, instead describing him emerging from his father's laugh, or indicating that his parents, Śiva and Pārvatī, transformed themselves into elephants and made love to bring him forth.⁶¹ Regardless of the explanations for his elephant head, the elephantine symbolism is paramount to Gaṇeśa's mythological and ritual importance, with dominant associations of guardianship, domestication, and grace operating within the South Asian idiom.

Gaṇeśa's provenance is murky both mythologically and historically, though Puranic narratives reveal clear attempts to inaugurate this outsider as a legitimate and worthy insider. Such transformation is especially emphasized in those origin narratives that associate Gaṇeśa with elephant-headed Asuras such as Gajāśura. By subduing the gods' foe and then reframing him as connected with the orthodox tradition, opposing powers are usurped and incorporated. Like Kālīya, the serpent demon whom Kṛṣṇa defeats and thus renders his disciple, or Mahiṣa, who receives salvation from Durgā once beheaded, Gaṇeśa crosses party lines from Asura to Deva when Śiva defeats him and subsequently grants him access to the world of gods as guardian of obstacles and leader of Śiva's *gaṇa* troops. Gaṇeśa's prior Asura connections also extend to his affiliation with the Vināyakas, who inflict obstacles rather than remove them, which comes to fall under Gaṇeśa's purview. As Courtright points out, clever tales seek to provide false etymologies for Gaṇeśa's epithet of Vināyaka, which previously referred to "the one who leads astray." One such example is when Śiva sees Gaṇeśa arise from Pārvatī's sweat and bathwater, and says to his wife, "A son has been born to you without [*vinā*] a husband [*nāyakena*]; therefore this son shall be named Vināyaka."⁶² Despite such attempts to obscure Gaṇeśa's more malevolent origins, he retains these connections in certain religious strands, such as Tantric Buddhism. Like many local indigenous

⁶¹ Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, 21.

⁶² *Vāmanapurāṇa* 28.71-72, quoted from Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, 135.

deities, such as the *grāmadevatās*, both the positive and negative forms are acknowledged, with Gaṇeśa acting as both the creator of obstacles (Vighnakartā) and their remover (Vighnahartā).⁶³

This liminal nature of Gaṇeśa is also evident in his mythological, iconographic, and sociological positioning within South Asian religious realms. Relevant to our study of the *Devīpurāṇa*, iconographic portrayals often connect him with the seven Mothers (*saptamātrkāś*) in visual representation, with the male god appended to the standardized set of autonomous female divinity (figs. 4.1 and 4.2).⁶⁴ Both Gaṇeśa and the Mothers faced a roughly contemporaneous



Figure 4.1: The Seven Mothers, Flanked by Śiva and Gaṇeśa. 9th century, Madhya Pradesh. Red Sandstone. American Council for Southern Asian Art Collection (University of Michigan).

transition from malevolent to benevolent roles, so this conceptual association is apt. They both stand as bridges between Brahmanical and extra-Brahmanical religious worlds. Such liminality has continued to function into the modern period, with the propagation of the famed Gaṇeśa Caturthi festival offering a prime example of the rotund elephant-faced god contributing to a process of community building among various strata of society. When Bal Gangadhar Tilak was

⁶³ Robert L. Brown, "Introduction," in *Ganesh*, ed. Robert L. Brown (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 6, 17n.11.

⁶⁴ Spatial connections between Gaṇeśa and the Saptamātrikāś may also be seen, for instance, in Cave Six at Udayagiri. Placed at the entrance to the cave, devotees would have had to pass by them first before proceeding to the primary deities, thus emphasizing the liminal nature of both Gaṇeśa and the Mothers.



Figure 4.2: Sapta Matrkās with Gaṇeśa and Cāmuṇḍā. Cave 14, Ellora, Maharashtra. American Institute of Indian Studies Photo Archive.

searching for a means of bridging the gap between Brahmans and non-Brahmans in a newfound grassroots unity at the end of the nineteenth century, he settled on Gaṇeśa as the rallying point for a revitalized Hindu community due to his capacity for traversing religious boundaries.⁶⁵ Similarly, the composers of the *Devīpurāṇa* seem to be engaged in a process of community unification, and though the Goddess serves as their primary rallying point, they also recognize Gaṇeśa as an important, if not enigmatic, deity. The text devotes significant passages to developing mythologies and characterizations of Gaṇeśa, though does not yet seem to possess a firm grasp on his usual

⁶⁵ Courtright, *Gaṇeśa*, 233-34.

mythological exploits and traits. It offers somewhat disparate and convoluted understandings of the god, and unexpectedly presents him as a martial deity, which is a rare characterization for this most approachable and generally pacifist deity, though not completely extraordinary given Gaṇeśa's Vināyaka background

While much of Gaṇeśa's standard classical mythologies present him as an innocuous, loveable deity, the *Devīpurāṇa* offers narratives centered on the establishment and exploits of Gaṇeśa as an elephant-headed fighter of Asura forces. Though the text offers tentative connections between the Goddess and Gaṇeśa, who in later textual evolutions becomes firmly established as the loyal son of Pārvatī and Śiva, explanations for the origin of the god are somewhat muddled, alternately attributed to Śaiva-Śākta and Vaiṣṇava orientations. Gaṇeśa is initially introduced amidst a series of battles against various Asuras, when he and his faithful friend Paraśurāma are invoked by Kālīkā to overcome the Asura Amaya. Amaya's severe asceticism had pleased Viṣṇu, who offered the boon that he should become "mighty and unconquerable, no doubt causing fear amongst the gods and Asuras," another instance of Viṣṇu acting in problematic ways that provoke suspicions of his affiliation and character.⁶⁶ He does qualify his declaration, however, explaining that though the Asura will break apart thirty-five military arrays during battle with the gods, if he proceeds into the thirty-sixth he will meet his end. Bolstered by Viṣṇu's words, he sets out to subjugate Brahmans, gods, and sages in a campaign for supreme sovereignty. His progress is halted, however, when he advances towards the abode of Gaṇeśa⁶⁷ in the Daṇḍaka forest. The "elephant-faced god" is described in especially martial terms as the "jovial friend of [Paraśu]rāma who is skilled in military principles, who can guide all manner of weapons, and who possesses foremost

⁶⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 43.12.

⁶⁷ The name "Gaṇeśa" is not employed in this narrative passage, which limits its appellation of the god to Lord of Obstacles (Vighneśa) or Elephant-Faced (Gajānana and Gajavaktra).

knowledge of the cosmos.”⁶⁸ When Amaya solicits Sumati, the daughter of Agastya and a maiden particularly dear to Gaṇeśa, he and Paraśurāma unleash their military prowess, organizing the successive thirty-six military arrays as they stand against the Asura armies. Just as Viṣṇu had foretold, Amaya’s troops succeed in overcoming the first thirty-five battle formations, but fortune abandons them as they attempt to break apart the thirty-sixth. In a fierce battle in which both sides conjure powerful divine weaponry, Gaṇeśa secures victory by invoking the Pāśupata weapon, which shatters the Asura army and dispatches Amaya to the world of the dead. This relatively concise battle narrative, then, considers Gaṇeśa as a particularly fierce and adept warrior, unlike the more domestic portrait that comes to dominate his narrative portrayal in later texts. Though the *Devīpurāṇa* seems to acknowledge a burgeoning association with Pārvatī (the text describes him in passing as “born of the mountain’s daughter” and “son of Pārvatī”⁶⁹) and with Śiva (through the employment of the Pāśupata weapon, which compels Śiva to action), the text is primarily concerned with establishing Gaṇeśa as a military-minded companion of Paraśurāma. The vision put forth is not that of the rotund, laddu-eating scribe who abides in a domestic role as dutiful son; rather, he is a redoubtable force of war.

The second narrative thread to feature Gaṇeśa highlights his origins. This iteration reveals an unexpected association with Viṣṇu, surprising due to the text’s general anti-Vaiṣṇava stance as well as Gaṇeśa’s common Śaiva connections. A condensed synopsis introduces the account, explaining that while dwelling on Mālavya mountain and engaged in amorous sport with Śrī, Viṣṇu provokes the arising of “the one who possesses the body of a man but an elephant face” by rubbing the essence of *rajas* in his hands.⁷⁰ The gods, celestial beings, Dānavas, Rākṣasas, and Nāgas then

⁶⁸ *Devīpurāṇa* 43.16-17.

⁶⁹ *Devīpurāṇa* 43.28, 37.

⁷⁰ *Devīpurāṇa* 112.10-11.

inhabit the various portions of his body, empowering him and providing justification for positing him as a pervading divinity worthy of veneration. The following chapters elaborate further on this narrative thread, initiating disparate and at times contradictory views regarding the elephant-faced god's origins and affiliations. After Viṣṇu has given rise to Gaṇeśa through his employment of *rajas*, he praises him as “the one born of the chief of Pramathas [i.e., Śiva]...whose delightful form is like a second body of Śambhu,”⁷¹ thus referencing Gaṇeśa's more conventional, domestic portrait and Śaivite associations rather than acknowledging his own role in Gaṇeśa's manifestation. Viṣṇu then proceeds to request Gaṇeśa's assistance in battling the troublesome Asura Vighna, further highlighting the text's martial vision of the deity. Each of the gods then offers Gaṇeśa a gift, with Śiva providing the half moon, Viṣṇu a conch, Yama a staff, etc. – a passage reminiscent of the conferral of gifts to the Goddess in the Mahiṣāsura narrative arc of the *Devīmāhātmya*. Pleased by their devotion, Gaṇeśa consents, and is branded by Śiva as Vināyaka, the remover of obstacles; he subsequently validates the moniker by slaying in battle the disruptive Vighna and his Asura forces, returning the heavenly kingdom to Indra.⁷²

The following chapter seeks to qualify the earlier associations with Viṣṇu, re-orienting the emphasis in line with a Śaiva-Śākta stance by presenting Viṣṇu's procreative influence as sanctioned by Śiva and empowered by Śakti. The text here stresses that Viṣṇu approached Śiva when faced with the mighty Vighna in order to request his assistance, offering an extended hymn in praise of Śiva and Umā who abides in the left half of his body. Pleased by Viṣṇu's obeisance, Śiva determines that Gaṇeśa will take form in order to defeat the Asura foe. He commands Viṣṇu:

Go to Mālavya mountain along with Lakṣmī, oh Viṣṇu. Keeping in mind that Śaiva goddess by the name of Sarvamaṅgalā, you should remain there one night, oh best of gods. Then the Goddess who is the cause of all causes shall approach. She will

⁷¹ *Devīpurāṇa* 113.3, 5.

⁷² *Devīpurāṇa* 115.8-9.

produce one who is equal to me, oh young one. He will have the face of an elephant and the body of a man. He will destroy all obstacles.⁷³

This narrative development demands a reconsideration of the previous iteration of Gaṇeśa's arising, which presented Viṣṇu in a more prominent position of creativity. Likely a later textual insertion or a means of revaluing an existing narrative element, the passage indicates that although Viṣṇu *seems* to give rise to Gaṇeśa, who is to appear as his son,⁷⁴ Śiva and the Goddess are truly the underlying force of his origination. Notable also is the passage's implied support of the *śakti* cosmic model – not only are Śiva and the associated Sarvamaṅgalā represented as the necessary complement of masculine and feminine forces, but Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī are also recognized as intimately entwined. Śiva insists that Viṣṇu must visit Mālavya mountain along with Lakṣmī, who is conceived as an “illustrious portion” of himself, and it is her energies (perhaps as a manifestation of Mahādevī) that allow for Gaṇeśa's arising. These complex elements of the narrative structure indicate that the text is grappling with Gaṇeśa's identity and characterization. There seems to be a genuine desire to include him as a prominent and formidable god (perhaps because of his liminal status at the time of composition), but the text remains unsettled about the details of his background and nature. He is at once both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva-Śākta, both solidly martial but also progressively domestic. Like the Goddess, he is a hesitant addition to the Brahmanical pantheon, and his roles in orthodox religious life continue to be subject to complex navigations.

Conclusion

Composed in the geographically and culturally liminal region of Bengal, the *Devīpurāṇa* is infused with an extra-Brahmanical spirit in varied and discreet ways. While the incorporation of

⁷³ *Devīpurāṇa* 116.45-48.

⁷⁴ See *Devīpurāṇa* 116.49.

the indigenous feminine divine stands as one of the most notable of these expressions, the portrayal of other mythic beings supports the valuation of the nonorthodox as well, particularly as revealed by the moral Asura and the martial Vināyaka. The honorable nature of the upright Asura kings as presented by the text demonstrates that the *Devīpurāṇa* respects the integrity of the cultural Other, even as it demands submission to Brahmanical hegemony. Ghora, though a righteous and praiseworthy Asura leader, must be deceived and overthrown; similarly, the honorable Bala must sacrifice himself to orthodox forces, and in so doing attains even greater acclaim and higher station. Such narratives convey the message that the Brahmanical establishment deems the peripheral worthy of inclusion, but requires adaptation for entrance into the orthodox center. The elephant-headed Vināyaka underscores this theme as well. Assimilated from the fringe, his evolving origins and allegiances situate him squarely amongst the established gods. Just as the *Devīpurāṇa* prizes the power of the Goddess yet renders her subject to Brahmanical authority, so does it esteem other liminal figures as it escorts them into its traditional domain, thereby further extending the pan-Indic Brahmanical worldview.

Chapter Five

Reigning yet Reined: The Efficacious Energies of the Goddess

Despite the designation of the *Devīpurāṇa* as Purāṇa, a corpus of literature most often associated with the devotional movements of *bhakti*, the text also reveals the incorporation of beliefs, practices, and vocabulary normally associated with Tantric idioms. How one may define Tantra and what may be considered Tantric have long remained a matter of debate, though as prominent contemporary scholars have been striving to develop an acceptable consideration of what constitutes Tantra, they have repeatedly emphasized that Tantric elements are certainly not isolated to texts explicitly classified as such. So what do we intend when we reference the realm of Tantra? Drawing from the characterizations offered by Madeleine Biardeau and André Padoux¹ – who conceptualize Tantra with regard to the negotiation of the mundane as a fulcrum for the development of spiritual energies – David Gordon White offers the following working definition:

Tantra is that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways.²

Though intentionally broad, White's definition offers a general starting point for delimiting what may and may not be considered Tantric, guided especially by an emphasis on the power of pervasive cosmic energies. Tantra may thus be considered broadly as a ritual system intended for the access and exploitation of powers normally beyond the human pale. Teun Goudriaan presents an elaboration of a Tantrism so conceived, highlighting eighteen explicit constituents of Tantric

¹ See Madeleine Biardeau, *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 149-50; and André Padoux, "Tantrism," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 14: 273.

² David Gordon White, "Introduction," in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.

ideology and practice, including the incorporation of sonic formulae (mantras and *vidyās*), geometrical designs (*maṇḍala*, *yantra*, *cakra*), and gestures (*mudrās*) into ritual performance (*sādhana*); the pursuit of superhuman accomplishments (*siddhis*) in addition to the ultimate spiritual goal of liberation; the development of yogic philosophies and incorporation of yogic practice; the divinization of the body; the visualization and meditational worship of divine figures; an emphasis on the feminine, particularly in the role of *śaktis*; and an intentional, regulated contact with substances, people, or activities ordinarily considered polluting.³ The *Devīpurāṇa* incorporates each of these elements to some extent throughout its narratives and ritual explications, and as such may legitimately be considered Tantric in its purview.

The *Devīpurāṇa*, in a manner similar to other Śākta Upapurāṇas, presents an oscillation between the devotional and the Tantric; in its devotional aspect it aggrandizes and reveres a nascent feminine divine, while in its Tantric mode it presents the means of inciting feminine powers to action on one's behalf. As Rachel McDermott notes, these at times conflicting approaches give rise to a tension within a goddess-centered religious life, guided as it is by the devotional and the Tantric:

The former is exoteric, focuses on self-surrender, encourages worship of the heart, and eschews ritual action, unless done with disinterest and in love. The latter, on the other hand, entails a sacrificial component, often bloody, an esoteric set of ritual and meditation prescription, an emphasis on *siddhis*, or spiritual powers, and a detailed iconography.⁴

On the one hand, the practitioner in a devotional mode strives for respect and deference, filled with adoration for the divine; on the other hand, while in the Tantric mode he strives to direct divine energies along particular pathways for the sake of his own benefit. The *Devīpurāṇa* interweaves

³ Sanjukta Gupta, Dirk Jan Hoens, and Teun Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 7-9.

⁴ Rachel Fell McDermott, "Evidence for the Transformation of the Goddess Kālī" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993), 15.

these varied theological strands throughout the text, engendering an abiding tension through its simultaneous exaltation of the Goddess and appropriation of her powers. Though not *de rigueur*, such fusion of the devotional and the Tantric was not uncommon in Puranic – particularly Śākta Puranic – literature.⁵ These Śākta texts thus present an engaging platform on which mainstream Brahmanical conceptions of religious life merge with and find expression through unorthodox practices which supersede those very notions of conventional religious authority. They serve as a snapshot of a shifting religious identity, molded through the relational encounters occurring between competing ideologies.⁶

Scholars of Tantra at times suggest that the infusion of Tantric elements into mainstream religious life served as a revitalizing negotiation between a stagnating “big tradition” and lively “little traditions,” necessitating the adoption of popular religious practices in order to attract, or at least retain, dedicated followers.⁷ Through the incorporation of new rituals, initiations, mantras, yoga, feasts, and ecstatic practices, orthodox religious life was made more compatible with contemporaneous popular trends. With their dual emphases of propagating Brahmanical values and legitimizing Tantric spiritual practices, Śākta Purāṇas provide a consequential glimpse into this evolving mediation between competing religious realms. For example, the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, as Hugh Urban has argued, reveals an evolving Assamese religious life in which the Brahmanical and the indigenous are richly entwined, giving rise to complex new relationships between expressions

⁵ See Sir John Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra*, Part I, 2nd ed. (Madras: Ganesh & Company, 1978), 75; Biardeau, *Hinduism*, 156; Cheever Mackenzie Brown, *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India* (Hartford, Vermont: Claude Stark & Co., 1974), 38.

⁶ See David B. Gray, “Eating the Heart of the Brahmin,” *History of Religions* 45, no. 1 (2005): 45.

⁷ Miranda Shaw, for instance, says the following about Tantric influences within the Buddhist context: “Tapping into the same wellspring as Hindu Tantric and Śākta movements, the Buddhist *tantras* arose from a dynamic interchange among diverse elements of society that revitalized Buddhism with fresh infusions of cultural energy.” See Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 21-22.

of power, performance of ritual, and the established royal institutions. The text is not merely the result of a unidirectional process of Sanskritization, a veneer of Brahmanism overlaying a non-Hindu substratum, but a dynamic dialectic of ideologies:

...the Tantric tradition represents a complex and ongoing *negotiation* between the indigenous tribal communities of Assam and the Sanskritic, Brahminical Hinduism coming from North India. Above all, it represents a negotiation between Assam's kings – many of whom came from non-Hindu indigenous communities – and the Brahman priests whom they patronized.⁸

As Urban proceeds to suggest, the *Kālikāpurāṇa*'s "brand of Tantra" is the result of a complex mediation between the Sanskrit educated Brahmans and their royal patrons, each seeking legitimacy through the endorsed efforts of the other. Brahmans gained royal favor through the incorporation of an expected regional religious vernacular, while Assam's kings were granted divine sanction by means of Brahmanical ritual authority, resulting in the adoption of evolving esoteric rites designed for the assumption and exercise of power. Similarly, the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, another late medieval Puranic text of Assamese provenance, charts a course that integrates the competing realms of *bhakti* and Tantra. Patricia Dold has demonstrated that in its attempt to present Tantra as a valid religious category in line with Vedic values, "the *Mahābhāgavata* integrates Tantra and *bhakti* through narratives that depict Tantric practices and principles while demonstrating their compatibility and even their unity with *bhakti*."⁹ Through its narrative episodes, the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa* highlights the Goddess's nature as essentially frightening and transgressive, but also powerfully benevolent when appeased through devotional reverence. The adept must acknowledge and appreciate the dark, destructive nature of the Goddess, but in doing so may elicit divine energies through her favor.

⁸ Hugh B. Urban, "The Path of Power: Impurity, Kingship, and Sacrifice in Assamese Tantra," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 4 (2001): 790.

⁹ Patricia Aileen Dold, "Tantra as a religious category in the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*," *Studies in Religion* 38, no. 2 (2009): 221, 223.

Such emphasis on the Goddess raises an issue of particular import at the intersection of Tantra and the Śākta Purāṇas – the broadening role of the feminine in the conceptualization and expression of religious life. Tantra is renowned for its ideology in which feminine powers are elevated to a level of featured and esteemed facets of spiritual practice, in which the integration of women becomes fundamental for certain ritual expressions. With its emphasis on non-normative sexuality, scholarship has often considered Tantra as exploitative of women’s bodies and corresponding feminine energies, viewing it as a system in which active male practitioners benefit from the manipulation of the passive female.¹⁰ Though considering specifically the Buddhist context, Miranda Shaw has argued against such an outlook of the general Tantric milieu, instead emphasizing the respect and deference afforded to female Tāntrikās. She states:

Tantric Buddhism offers not a model of exploitation but one of complementarity and mutuality. Rather than offering a justification to oppress women or to use them sexually, Tantric texts encourage a sense of reliance upon women as a source of spiritual power. They express a sense of esteem and respect for women...and evince a genuine concern for finding and showing the proper deference toward religiously advanced, spiritually powerful women.¹¹

Fundamental to this Śākta idiom is the notion that cosmic energies are by nature generated within the female form rather than that of the male; gender relations then by necessity also become negotiations of power and authority. Shaw presents a decidedly positive and generous consideration of such mediations centered around issues of power, suggesting that men must remain humble or even obsequious in order to participate in the fecund energies of the feminine:

Men can tap into this power [of women], and it can flow through the women to the men, but it cannot be taken or stolen from women. The texts give no indication that the men are contesting or competing with the power of women, seeking to deprive

¹⁰ See for example, June McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 171: “The function of the woman is to ripen the male substance...she is to be used as a ritual object and then cast aside”; and Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 25-26: “Women, like the goddess herself, are made ultimately subordinate to and dependent upon males; their ritual role is often limited to the position of being a partner for male adepts.”

¹¹ Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 11.

them of it and appropriate it for themselves. A man's relationship to this power is one of awe, receptivity, and dependence.¹²

Shaw presents a compelling case for such an envisioning within the Buddhist context, but the legitimacy of extending such an approach to the Tantric realm writ large is somewhat dubious. While Shaw locates in Tantric language a complimentary gender symmetry and interdependence rather than male domination and exploitation,¹³ David Gordon White, for instance, finds that "Tantra has essentially consisted of a body of techniques for the control of multiple, often female, beings, both for one's own benefit and as tools to use against others," negotiated particularly through the employment of mantras, possession, and ritual offerings.¹⁴ Shaw is correct in asserting that the Tantric female, including the Tantric feminine divine, does not serve as a mere object of male spiritual pursuits, inactive and acquiescent, but neither does the Goddess in this context necessarily possess absolute autonomy, as Shaw would like to suggest. Even if granted that "[Tantric] texts do not seek to legitimize or justify male authority or superiority,"¹⁵ the result is often a buttressing of masculine control, whether intentionally sought or not. The *Devīpurāṇa*, as will be demonstrated below, presents an ideological realm in which the feminine divine, incited by esoteric ritual means, may be necessarily compelled to act for the benefit of the male practitioner.

The intent of the following chapter is thus twofold: (1) to acknowledge and clarify the Tantric elements of the *Devīpurāṇa* within the context of its otherwise *bhakti*-oriented narratives, and (2) to parse the intertwining issues of gender and the negotiation of power. Particularly through the incorporation of feminine sonic formulae and non-Brahmanical female divine beings, an elucidation of yogic philosophy inspired by gender considerations of Sāṃkhya, and the installation

¹² Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 176.

¹³ Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 173-74.

¹⁴ David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 13.

¹⁵ Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 35.

of divine figures within the body, the *Devīpurāṇa* presents a Tantric practice informed by Brahmanical values in line with devotional Purāṇa. It draws from the ritual conceptions of a Vedic past, but reinvents them in a process of innovation grounded in *laukika*, or popular, religious forms. In so doing, it introduces novel visions in which the feminine divine assumes powers previously unrecognized in the orthodox context. The practitioner, in accordance with the simultaneous Brahmanical and Tantric outlook of the *Devīpurāṇa*, is now enjoined to praise the supremacy of the Goddess, to confront and revel in her awesome ferocity, and to direct her feminine energies along productive spiritual pathways. He becomes at once her supplicant, but through esoteric means also her conductor.

Evolving *vidyā*: Female Sonic Theology

The Sanskrit word *vidyā* conventionally renders as “knowledge” or “learning,” but in the Tantric context, the term is extended to refer to a more complex concept – an intertwining of supreme knowledge, the feminine divine, and ritual incantation. In accordance with standard Tantric forms, the *Devīpurāṇa* presents *vidyā* not only as esoteric knowledge, but as the Goddess herself, a powerful entity capable of achieving all sorts of ends, including supernatural abilities and ultimate liberation. To conceive of *vidyā* in such a manner influences the nature of its character, infusing it with the traits that dominate portrayals of the Goddess throughout the text – it is powerful yet unwieldy, generous yet fickle. It is not an innocuous understanding of information, but a fierce and potent force to be harnessed and controlled by ritual means.

The most prominent display in the text is that of the Padamālā Vidyā, which is transmitted and explained as a means of achieving one’s goals. By learning and reciting this incantation, one invokes the Goddess and thus may harness her power, allowing for the defeat of enemies, control

of weather, attraction of women, and many other feats of will. Knowledge really does become synonymous with power. Though inspired by concepts of older, more traditional Brahmanical texts such as the *Atharva Veda*, the *Padamālā* further empowers its words by connecting them intimately with an aggressive feminine divine, thereby elevating them, setting them apart, and imbuing them with strength. When considered against other facets of the Puranic genre, such *vidyās* stand in a subtle tension with competing notions of *bhakti*, in which devotion alone is capable of securing liberation. The other primary Śākta Purāṇas – the *Devīmāhātmya*, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, and the *Kālikāpurāṇa* – offer no *vidyās*, as does the *Devīpurāṇa*, and their visions of the Goddess are generally of a more auspicious, benign, authoritative, and rather more universally accessible deity. The *vidyās* of the *Devīpurāṇa*, on the other hand, establish a Tantric spiritual economy based in an empowering and liberating knowledge, albeit an esoteric and undemocratic one concealed from the eyes of the uninitiated. Thus with special learning comes virtue, accomplishment, and ultimate liberation.

Though not stated in the same explicit terms found in the later Tantras, the correspondences between spoken word, the feminine divine, and ultimate knowledge extend back into the earliest strata of Vedic literature. A linguistic event, including the seemingly non-communicative speech act, can transcend the mundane, tapping into a grander, eternal power – the essence of Veda that renders it as sacred knowledge. So conceived, vocalized sound is not merely expressive word, but a tool for moving beyond the human condition through acts of divinization. In prescribed recitation, Vedic verses transport the ritual participants from the realm of the mundane to an elevated state in which godliness and ontological truths become accessible. Additionally, sound is conceived as the goddess Vāc, one of the few female divinities of Vedic literature and certainly

one of the most important. In the *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā*, Vāc boldly proclaims her power as comparable to that of the gods, and also suggests her role in leading to truths of metaphysical knowledge:

I am the queen, the confluence of riches, the skilful one who is first among those worthy of sacrifice. The gods divided me up into various parts, for I dwell in many places and enter into many forms. The one who eats food, who truly sees, who breathes, who hears what is said, does so through me. Though they do not realize it, they dwell in me.¹⁶

Here sound is recognized as something more than potentiality for human communication; it is the very basis for existential possibilities. All things reside in sound; they are fundamentally rooted in sound and therefore supported by it. The one who realizes this significance of Vāc delves into the ultimate truth of euphony, accessing the substance underlying existential reality. Furthermore, the consideration of sound as feminine is emphasized, so that speech becomes profoundly associated with the feminine divine, particularly her alluring female form:

One who looked did not see speech, and another who listens does not hear it. It reveals itself to someone as a loving wife, beautifully dressed, reveals her body to her husband.¹⁷

In this *Ṛg Veda* verse are present an influential eroticization of sound as well as its association with esoteric knowledge. Like the beautiful demure wife, Vāc bares herself to those who are worthy, and does so slowly and reservedly. Some of the earliest Vedic literature thus presents a personification of speech as a desirable divine woman, richly adorned and enticing, able to uplift and incite.

In addition to the parallels drawn between sound and the feminine divine in Veda, the incorporation of methodic recitatives is also germane to the present discussion of *vidyā*. The development of Vedic ritual gave rise to the vocalized repetition of single syllables, called *stobha*,

¹⁶ Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 63. See *Ṛgveda* 10.125.3-4.

¹⁷ Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, 61. See *Ṛgveda* 10.71.4.

which appear initially to be semantically void. For example, the Udgātr̥ priest would chant in calculated sequences sounds such as *phāt*, *hā*, *bu*, *hau*, *kā*, or *hvā*.¹⁸ The efficacy and power of the ritual was bolstered not by the linguistic meaning of such sounds, but by the variations, repetitions, and inversions of their presence. The power released by such utterance of Vedic mantra could be significant, and if used negatively, potentially catastrophic. In the following verse from *R̥g Veda*, for instance, the power of mantra is tapped for revenge against the ritual patron who has reneged on the sacrificial fee, thereby removing the efficacy of the patron's ritual words and turning them around as retributive weapons:

When, Agni, the malicious, greedy skinflint hurts us [priests] with his duplicity, let the mantra fall back on him as an oppressive [curse]! He shall be done in by his own unholy speech.¹⁹

Extending back to this early Vedic period, mantric words could activate energies for the purpose of benefit or for harm. The wielder of mantra could effect a variety of outcomes through the mere presence of particular vocalized syllables in meticulously scripted repetition. The Vidhāna literature of the late Vedic period continues to explore and expand this use of the Vedic mantra, moving beyond the normally prescribed ritual sphere. Laurie Patton has outlined four characterizations of this Vidhāna literature: (1) it emphasizes the desire of the reciter; (2) it involves soft repetition, or *japa*; (3) it supports the notion that the mantra can be efficacious without associated ritual act; and (4) it includes an accompanying visualization through both mental and physical imagery.²⁰ As will be demonstrated, these developments are especially relevant for the subsequent establishment of *vidyā* invocations. It is from the orthodox exegetical context of

¹⁸ Frits Staal, "Vedic Mantras," in *Understanding Mantras*, ed. Harvey P. Alper (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 55.

¹⁹ Ellison Banks Findly, "*Māntra kaviśastā*: Speech as Performative in the *R̥gveda*," in *Understanding Mantras*, ed. Harvey P. Alper (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 15. See *R̥gveda* 1.147.4.

²⁰ Laurie L. Patton, *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 28.

Vidhāna that efficacious mantra and monosyllabic repetitions emerge in the Tantric and Puranic literature of early medieval India, though in a somewhat reconceived form. By moving away from intricate ritual activity in favor of the potency of sound, and by establishing more egalitarian rites accessible to all levels of society, Vidhāna serves as a critical bridge between Vedic and popular religious life.

Tantra is often portrayed as opposed to Vedic orthodoxy, but this is not the way most Tāntrikas envisioned themselves and their tradition. Weaving together various concepts and prescriptions that established a new type of spiritual discipline, many Tāntrikas did not consider their texts and practices as non-Vedic, but as a superior type of interpretation of Vedic truth. Douglas Brooks notes:

Tantrics offer rejuvenation, not complete renovation; they are radical and innovative enough to win over the critics of traditionalism and conservative enough to claim continuity with the Vedic and Hindu past...Tantrism presents before the Hindu imagination both new and old sets of symbols and ideals. Tantrics do not merely present to other Hindus new symbols, which reestablish an inherently conservative body of traditions. Rather, they dare to use symbols in bold and innovative ways and refuse to accept that humans are limited to single points of view.²¹

In both Tantric and Puranic literature, the old sets of symbols mingle with the new and are recast in novel modes. For this reason, the Vedic mantras were considered to be devoid of their energy in the degenerate *kaliyuga*, but the efficacy of mantra itself was not discarded. New types of mantras were employed – mantras which were able to bear fruit quickly and effectively, and which were suited to an evolving emphasis on disruption of convention.

The incorporation of the semantically void utterance was perfectly suited for this new Tantric context, which sought to tear down boundaries imposed by a dualistic consciousness. The

²¹ Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities*, 136.

successor of the Vedic *stobha*, the *bīja* mantra – or seed syllable – promotes the breakdown of usual modes of thought by altering the function of language. Loriliai Biernacki poses the apt question: “What does it mean to use a language that doesn’t *mean* at all in the ways we normally construct meaning?”²² She goes on to suggest that the Tantric mantra enacts a deliberate stammer that disables the standard mode of the linguistic system. In suggesting no referent, it imposes a block to the usual modes of meaning and understanding, thereby elevating the practitioner and offering him fusion with the true knowledge of absolute reality. Furthermore, the mantra is considered a middle level stage of speech which bridges devolved mundane language with the more refined and subtle *śabdabrahman*, the original state of ontological unity. This tripartite consideration of reality’s manifestations persists as specific deities are associated with each mantra. Three aspects of the deity are recognized: first, the *sthūla* or material form, which is the refracted, imperfect, anthropomorphized image; second, the *sūkṣma* or subtle manifestation of the deity in the sound of the *bīja* mantra; and lastly, the *para* or highest incarnation of the deity, realized only by the mind. As Biernacki indicates, this consideration produces a bodying of sound, resulting in words that are not merely signs pointing beyond themselves, but actual presence of the divine.²³ The mantra is now the deity him-/herself, continuing to serve as a bridge by which the practitioner can transition consciousness from the mundane realm to the absolute.

With this association of mantra and deity in the Tantric context, sonic formulae are demarcated with regard to sex categories – mantras are the male deities while the sounds that are the female deities are considered *vidyās*. During this period in which the Goddess was increasingly conceived as the *śakti*, or energy, of the male divine, the *vidyās* were associated with practices aiming for the

²² Biernacki, *Renowned Goddess*, 114.

²³ Biernacki, *Renowned Goddess*, 119.

attainment of powers, or *siddhis*, in addition to the ultimate soteriological goal. Through the continued recitation of the *vidyā*, the corresponding goddess could be invoked and her power harnessed, allowing the practitioner to garner superhuman abilities. Previously considered solely as knowledge, *vidyā* now bears a dual role: it continues to be ultimate understanding, unimpeded by dualistic consciousness, but it is also a feminine divine esoteric incantation capable of bestowing great power. The early Śākta Tantric literature thus concerns itself with propelling the practitioner to the heightened state of Vidyādhara,²⁴ one who bears or possesses that esoteric knowledge which calls for the goddess and grants superhuman agency. The power of these *vidyās* was prized and revered, yet to a certain extent also feared due to the *vidyās*' formidable potential. Intentional obscuration was necessary in order to keep them from the uninformed and uninitiated. The sounds themselves or context of their ritual use thereby remained hidden.

The Terrifying Potency of the Padamālā Vidyā

Incorporating explicitly Tantric influence, the *Devīpurāṇa* – unlike the other prominent Śākta Purāṇas – offers extended discussion and explication of *vidyās*. Though many are mentioned throughout the text, the most prominent and extensively described is the Padamālā Vidyā, which is invoked by Nārada in order to delude the Asura Ghora and thereby allow for his defeat by the Goddess. Intended to invoke the presiding deity Cāmuṇḍā, a ferocious manifestation of the feminine divine (fig. 5.1), the passage includes more than forty phrases describing the Goddess's physical form, over one hundred single-word imperatives, and numerous *bīja* mantras, followed

²⁴ Literally indicating “the one who bears/possesses *vidyā*,” Vidyādhara is a category of semi-divine beings who have become supernatural adepts. David Gordon White, for instance, translates the term as “Wizard.” Wielding the power of *vidyās*, the Vidyādhara is capable of remarkable feats, such as the power of flight. See White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 181-82.

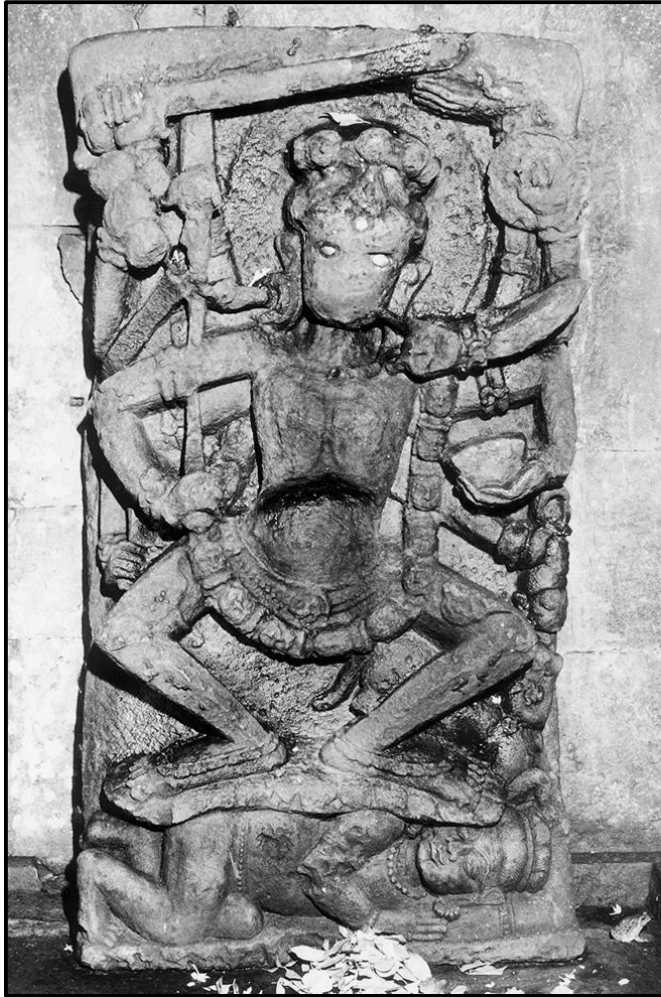


Figure 5.1: Cāmuṇḍā. ca. 776-799 CE, Orissa.
Khondalite. American Institute of Indian
Studies Photo Archive.

by an additional passage listing thirty-two powers to be gained through the repetition of the various verses. The Padamālā Vidyā thereby offers a detailed guide to visualization; it invokes the Goddess in her sonic manifestation; and it impels her to activity for the sake of both worldly and spiritual benefit.

The characterization of the Goddess in this *vidyā* is unequivocally fierce; the epithets and physical descriptions evoke a daunting and somewhat gruesome portrait. She dwells in the cremation ground, accompanied by ghoulish attendants and ghosts; appearing like the dark night of destruction, she carries a staff of bone and a

skull as her begging bowl; from her fang-filled mouth she roars with ferocious laughter, and her tongue lolls wildly; her brow is furrowed, her eyes red with anger; she is garbed in elephant hide, adorned with garlands of skulls, and smeared with blood and flesh; her matted locks are piled high on her head; like darting lightning, her splendor is electric. Clearly, she is not the Goddess as nurturing Mother common to the later devotional traditions; she is unmistakably the so-called

“goddess of tooth”²⁵ indicative of ferocious, unleashed force. This picture of the threatening Cāmuṇḍā is consonant with other characterizations of the feminine divine throughout the text. Even when referenced as the usually benign Pārvatī/Umā, wife of Śiva, the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* is decidedly martial. The Padamālā Vidyā draws from this established mythic discourse in order to imbue its words with undeniable potency and the ability to triumph in battle, whether on the physical or spiritual planes. The invocation of Cāmuṇḍā grants efficacy by tapping into the *śakti* of the Goddess and directing it towards one’s goals.

This summoning is furthered by the explicit directives presented to Cāmuṇḍā. She is incited with such words: bring about this deed; make haste; destroy with the hook; slay; crush; annihilate; dance; consume; seize; cleave; pierce with the trident; destroy with the *vajra*; come forth.”²⁶ Again, we are confronted by the fierce, destructive, warlike aspects of the Goddess. She is compelled to act for the sake of victory and protection; it is by means of her power that obstacles and enemies may be overcome. At the same time, however, these directives indicate a certain level of subservience and required obedience. Though the goddess is frightful and deadly, it is the practitioner himself who controls her power by means of the mantra. He does not make polite requests; rather, he addresses her in abrupt second person imperatives of the singular, informal conjugation. There seems to be no hesitation or humility on the part of the reciter. He is not approaching the fierce goddess with any trepidation or any deference, but is boldly and assertively directing her to act. He offers instruction rather than supplication, indicating a degree of command over these energies despite their formidable potential. Through his knowledge of the *vidyā*, he is

²⁵ For a discussion of delineation between “goddesses of breast” and “goddesses of tooth,” see Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 91. O’Flaherty conceives of goddesses of breast as auspicious and nurturing, while goddesses of tooth are ferocious and threatening. While such a sharp dichotomy has been criticized as reductive, it nonetheless demonstrates the divergent poles of a continuum for goddesses’ characterizations.

²⁶ See *Devīpurāṇa* 9.57.

able to access divine power and gain authority over it in order to utilize it according to his own motivations.

In addition to these descriptive phrases and brief imperatives, the Padamālā is also peppered with *bīja* mantras, though the precise mantras for each of the thirty-two *siddhis* to be gained through their employment have been redacted from the text in order to retain their secrecy. Repeatedly, the expression *kili kili huṃ* is noted, or the similar *hili hili* or *mili mili*; the sounds *vīṃ*, *vicce*, and *phaṭ* are also present. Once again, many of these sounds, though without direct meaning, are connected with aggression and power. The vocalization *phaṭ* has long been associated with bursting or exploding, and as such is referred to as the weapon mantra; *huṃ* is called the armor mantra due to its ability to protect from interferences of evil; and *kili kili* here is indicative of the roaring, demoniac laughter of the Goddess on the battlefield. These *bīja* mantras fight against the negative forces that would impinge upon successful performance of the *vidyā*, purifying the space and arming the knowledgeable practitioner.

After the initial revealing of the Padamālā Vidyā, an additional passage of exegesis extracts thirty-two of the included characterizations of the Goddess and correlates them with specific *siddhis* to be gained through the repetition of associated mantra. For instance, Bhairava explains: “‘Om. Honor to you who are the dark night of destruction.’ [Saying] thus [you will gain] ability to disappear.”²⁷ Fitting with the overall martial theme, many of the attained powers involve the capacity to slay others and gain mastery over weapons; however, the *vidyā* also allows for the development of *siddhis* that control rain, attract women, inflict madness, and ward off disease, all fairly standard Tantric powers. Though the mantras for each of these *siddhis* have not been included, the description of the Goddess associated with each could presumably be coded language

²⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 9.70.

for a specific *bīja* mantra. The visualization of the Goddess garlanded in skulls, for example, could refer to the *sthūla* or image form of a more refined, *sūkṣma* sound. This sort of covert description would allow for safe transmission, while also directing the mind of the practitioner effectively, guiding him beyond the conventional realm of the mundane.

After divulging the Padamālā Vidyā, the *Devīpurāṇa* also offers an exposition on the principles and practice of Śaiva yoga, explained as a means of granting further efficacy to the deployment of the feminine energies of *vidyā*. Condensed into ten concise sections, this yogic philosophy attributed to one of Brahmā's four mind-born sons, Sanatkumāra, draws from established categories of Sāṃkhya as it promotes devotional attachment to the supreme Īśvara.²⁸ The exposition, then, presents an ongoing attempt to connect the *Devīpurāṇa* with an accepted, legitimate tradition, while also representing it in an evolving context, compatible yet contemporary. The simple ascription of the yoga to Sanatkumāra, for example, situates it within a respectable, Brahmanical lineage; the four *kumāras* – Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana, and Sanatkumāra – are the mental sons of Brahmā, incarnations of purity (*sattva*) who are known to be conversant in contemplative yoga and possessed of a deep knowledge of Sāṃkhya. At the same time, however, the text presents atheistic Sāṃkhya within a devotional context, instituting an additional existential category hierarchically superior to all others in order to allow for an overarching divine.

The Padamālā Vidyā, then, presents a jarring and innovative means for the accrual and command of a transformative, superhuman agency. The sounds and the visualizations of a fearsome feminine divine presented by the *vidyās* of the text are unprecedented and unexpected.

²⁸ Characteristic of the *Devīpurāṇa*'s wavering between Śaiva and Śākta modes, the supreme entity of the Yoga of Sanatkumāra is recognized as Śiva rather than an all-encompassing Devī.

They intentionally jolt the practitioner through the incorporation of the shocking; however, such ingenuity is couched in familiar concepts and language of the established orthodox tradition. In fact, the text explicitly connects the Padamālā with Veda, indicating that by means of its performance one will achieve results ordained in the *Atharva*,²⁹ as well as the complex metaphysical and soteriological conceptions of established philosophical schools. The Padamālā is offering a new type of knowledge and a new type of spiritual practice, but is not suggesting a break with the established lineage; rather, it offers a reconceptualization, a freshening of older practices and ideas.

Gender, Power, and Authority

Though the *Devīpurāṇa*, like all Purāṇas, is influenced by an orthodox past, it offers a unique evolving perspective on religious life, conceiving of and approaching the feminine divine in ways that are notably different from visions and means even of other Śākta Purāṇas. The Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* is especially fierce and therefore potent; she appears often in her terrible form and in all manifestations wields deadly force. Despite this elevated level of martial capacity, however, she lacks full autonomy and authority. Throughout the text, she is accessed and invoked via Śiva, who acts as the male yoke of wild female energies. When the gods seek the Goddess for her assistance and protection, they first must laud Śiva in order to win his favor. It is Śiva who then calls for the Goddess, bringing forth her deadly energies under his control. The *Devīpurāṇa*'s *vidyās*, which are absent from the other Śākta Purāṇas, allow the practitioner to adopt the role of Śiva, thereby becoming the male bearer of the reins who directs feminine power for his own benefit. In such a system, the Goddess is not propitiated for her grace, but is invoked and controlled

²⁹ See *Devīpurāṇa* 9.69.

for the assumption of powers. The practitioner does not humbly request her generous guidance, but demands her presence and compliance. This system of mastery of female energies is highlighted when contrasted with the position of the feminine divine in other Puranic literature.

The earliest Puranic text to highlight the supremacy of the Goddess, the circa sixth century *Devīmāhātmya*, presents a vision of the feminine divine in which the Goddess is absolute, autonomous, and omnipotent. As universal Mother, she oversees all and is subject to none. Unlike the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa*, she must be deferentially honored rather than invoked through the control of sonic formulae. Though the *Devīmāhātmya* addresses the Goddess as Mahāvidyā³⁰ and acknowledges her as the basis for all the various types of knowledge,³¹ this foremost Śākta text nowhere contains the type of *vidyās* present in the *Devīpurāṇa*. The closest parallels to be found are the hymns to the Goddess of chapters four, five, and eleven; however, the characterization offered by these hymns is an auspicious protectress who is herself ultimate reality. Her beauty shines incomparably even when she is provoked to anger:

Slightly smiling, spotless, like the orb of the full moon, as pleasing as the lustre of the finest gold (is your face). Wondrous it is that when the Asura Mahiṣa saw (this) face, he suddenly struck it, his anger aroused. But, O Goddess, the fact that Mahiṣa, having seen (your face) angry, terrible with knitted brows, in hue like the rising moon, did not immediately give up his life is exceedingly wondrous – for who can live, having seen Death enraged?³²

In this case, even when framed in the context of destructive anger, the Goddess is described in terms of splendor rather than the grotesque. Though red with fury, her moon-like face continues to shine forth with indisputable beauty. In contrast to this usual pleasant visualization of the Goddess,

³⁰ *mahāvidyā mahāmāyā mahāmedhā mahāsmṛtiḥ / mahāmohā ca bhavatī mahādevī mahāsurī* // [1.58].

³¹ *vidyāḥ samastāstava devī bhedaḥ striyaḥ samastāḥ sakalā jagatsu* / [11.5ab].

³² Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 49. See *Durgāsaptasatī* 4.11-12.

one verse of a later hymn does reference the frightful Cāmuṇḍā, describing her as does the Padamālā Vidyā:

O you whose mouth is terrifying with its teeth, who are ornamented with a garland of skulls, O Cāmuṇḍā, crusher of Muṇḍa, O Nārāyaṇī, praise be to you!³³

Like the Padamālā, the Goddess here is fanged and covered in skeletal remains, an acknowledgement of the Goddess's inauspicious manifestation rare in the hymns of the *Devīmāhātmya*. Though the terrible form of the Goddess appears regularly on the battlefields of the text, she is infrequently lauded in its hymns. In this instance, however, she is included among a list of goddesses who are then equated with Nārāyaṇī, the female cosmogonic power; this verse, then, is not intended to invoke the gruesome goddess, but to situate her explicitly as a manifestation of the absolute, an aspect of the transcendent Mahādevī. Another example of the intentional inclusivity of the *Devīmāhātmya* occurs in the hymn of chapter five, which lauds the Goddess as a series of feminine gender nouns, so that she is considered as consciousness, intelligence, power, patience, modesty, tranquility, compassion, and Mother.³⁴ Though the list does allow for less positive traits, such as hunger and error,³⁵ nearly all of the associated traits are auspicious or favorable. Similarly, Mahādevī incorporates all goddess manifestations, even if inauspicious, though her beneficent nature continues to dominate. What the *Devīmāhātmya* offers, then, is not incantation intended to invoke the Goddess and harness her power, but propitiation and appeasement of the magnanimous Great Goddess in order to secure her grace, which may then grant protection from enemies and calamities in addition to ultimate liberation. The authority and

³³ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 75. See *Durgāsaptāśatī* 11.20.

³⁴ Respectively, *cetanā* [5.13]; *buddhi* [5.14]; *śakti* [5.18]; *kṣānti* [5.20]; *lajjā* [5.22]; *śānti* [5.23]; *dayā* [5.29]; *mātr* [5.31].

³⁵ Respectively, *kṣudhā* [5.16] and *bhrānti* [5.32].

autonomy of the Goddess are further evidenced by the humble supplications of the hymns, rather than the directives of the *Devīpurāṇa*. For example, the *Devīmāhātmya* requests:

May this gentle face of yours, adorned with three eyes, protect us from all ghosts; O Kātyāyanī, praise be to you! That fearsome trident, terrible with flames, laying waste the Asuras without remainder, may that trident protect us from danger; O Bhadrakālī, praise be to you! That bell that destroys demonic splendors, having filled the world with its sound, may that bell, O Goddess, protect us from evils as if we were children. That sword of yours, smeared with mud and the blood and fat of Asuras, gleaming with rays, may that sword be for our welfare; O Caṇḍikā, we are bowed down to you!³⁶

The practitioner approaches as a child to its mother, offering tribute, respect, and deference in hopes of winning the Goddess's nurture and protection. These polite petitions framed in indirect, eulogizing language contrast sharply with the blunt imperatives of the *Devīpurāṇa*'s Padamālā Vidyā:

Split. Split with the trident. Kill. Kill with the *vajra*. Strike. Strike with the staff. Slice with the discus. Slice. Cleave. Cleave with the spear. Catch with the fangs. Catch. Split with the knife. Split. Seize with the hook. Seize.³⁷

The practitioner here approaches the Goddess with command and a bit of conceit, operating under the assumption of the Goddess's required assent. These varying requests suggest that the Goddess of the *Devīpurāṇa* is more accessible, controllable, and intimate, whereas in the *Devīmāhātmya* she is more distant and requires more formal address in order to compel her to grant her grace and act on one's behalf.

The *aṅgas* that later envelop the *Devīmāhātmya* offer invocations more in line with the Tantric *vidyās* of the *Devīpurāṇa*, but which nevertheless differ in vision and intent. The three preliminary additions – the *Kavaca* (Armor), *Argalā* (Stopper), and *Kīlaka* (Bolt) – aim to tap into divine powers, particularly feminine powers, while also recognizing the supremacy and self-agency of

³⁶ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 76. See *Durgāsaptāśatī* 11.24-27.

³⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 9.57.

the Goddess. Even the fearsome Cāmuṇḍā is called forth, as well as the Four Sisters of victory who pervade the *Devīpurāṇa*:

Just so may Cāmuṇḍā, who rides a corpse, protect the ten directions. May Jayā stand in front of me, may Vijayā stand behind, Ajitā on my left side, Aparājītā on my right.³⁸

The fierce and martial goddesses are politely summoned to stand guard against malevolent forces by means of the esoteric mantras of a *kavaca*, or divine armor. Like the Padamālā Vidyā, this *kavaca* is described as difficult to obtain, even for gods, but effective for protection and for achieving whatever goal is desired. He who successfully invokes the Goddess becomes elevated in status and matchless in strength:

If one is concerned for his own wellbeing, he ought not to take a single step without being covered by the *kavaca*; wherever (one who is protected by the *kavaca*) goes, there will be accomplishment of his purpose, victory, and the satisfaction of all desires. Whatever desire he may set his heart upon, that will he certainly obtain. (Such) a man will acquire unparalleled lordship over the earth. A mortal, (but) fearless, not to be conquered in battles, he will be victorious.³⁹

Through the efficacy of the installed feminine divine, one is able to achieve all sorts of successes, and is prepared for the continued recitation of the *Devīmāhātmya*. Once the practitioner has been protected by the force of the *kavaca*, he may proceed with the *Argalā*'s series of formulaic *dhāraṇīs*, which laud the beneficial character of the Goddess and put forth the following request with each verse: "Give the form, give the victory, give the fame, kill the enemies."⁴⁰ The imperatives of the *Argalā* more closely resemble the direct method of approach in the *Devīpurāṇa*, but the Goddess invoked is supreme, demanding utmost devotion in order to secure her favor. Several verses emphasize this *bhakti*-focused nature:

You grant everything to those who are bowed down with devotion; O Caṇḍikā, to me who am bowed down, give the form, give the victory, give the fame, kill the

³⁸ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 176. See *Kavaca* 17.

³⁹ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 178. See *Kavaca* 38-40.

⁴⁰ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 180.

enemies. O Caṇḍikā, who destroys the illnesses of those who are bowed down, filled with devotion to you: give the form, give the victory, give the fame, kill the enemies. O Caṇḍikā, to those who constantly praise you here because of their devotion, give the form, give the victory, give the fame, kill the enemies.⁴¹

Though the imperatives suggest a certain amount of informality and intimacy, one must humbly supplicate, bowed down with admiration. The *Kīlaka* goes on to highlight that whatever may be gained through devotion and mantra recitation is granted only by the grace of the Goddess. The final verse questions:

Why should she not be praised by the populace since it is by her grace that lordship, auspiciousness, health, success, destruction of enemies, and the highest *mokṣa* come to pass?⁴²

Whereas the *vidyās* of the *Devīpurāṇa* aim to harness feminine divine power for oneself in order to become superhuman, the *Devīmāhātmya* and its preliminary addenda seek protection and liberation by the grace of the Great Goddess.

The *aṅgas* which follow the body of the *Devīmāhātmya* – the *Prādhānika*, *Vaikṛtika*, and *Mūrti Rahasyas* – are much more philosophical in nature, striving to make compatible a monistic Śākta theology with the three *guṇas* of dualistic Sāṃkhya. The *Rahasyas* present a vision of the Goddess in which Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī – ruled by *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*, respectively – manifest from an overarching Mahālakṣmī who is herself the absolute, ultimate reality. In these philosophical expositions of the latter three *aṅgas*, the terrible manifestation of the Goddess is designated as the tamasic derivation of this supreme Mahālakṣmī. The *Prādhānika Rahasya* explains:

Having seen the void that was this whole world, the supreme queen took on another form, by means of pure *tamas*. She became a woman, with wide eyes and slender waist, shining like cut collyrium, her fair face featuring sharp fangs. Her four arms

⁴¹ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 180. See *Argalā* 7-9.

⁴² Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 183. See *Kīlaka* 14.

were graced with sword, blood-drinking vessel, skull, and shield, and she wore a necklace of headless trunks, with a garland of heads around her neck.⁴³

The *aṅga* thus presents a horrifying vision of the Goddess similar to that of the Padamālā – she is fanged, pitch black, and adorned with skulls and corpses; however, she is overseen by the auspicious, fair, and lovely Lakṣmī. Though the terrible manifestation of the feminine divine has been invoked, she has been usurped and yoked by the more acceptable, auspicious, Vaiṣṇava-leaning Great Goddess. She is merely the dark qualities of the superior, over-arching Mahādevī.

The *Vaikṛtika Rahasya* supports this layered containment of the inauspicious:

O king, even though she is of dreadful form, with teeth and fangs aglitter, she is the foundation of form, of auspiciousness, of beauty, of the great Śrī (herself). She is armed with sword, arrow, mace, spear, conch, discus, and *bhuśuṇḍi*; she carries an iron bar, bow, and a skull dripping with blood. She is the *māyā* of Viṣṇu, Mahākālī, who is hard to surpass; when propitiated, she makes the worshipper master over all that does and does not move.⁴⁴

Though terrifying, the ferocity of the terrible goddess is tempered by making her subject to a hierarchically superior beneficent Great Goddess. The final *aṅga*, the *Mūrti Rahasya*, continues this taming of the fierce goddess; it provides a visualization of Cāmuṇḍā similar to that of the *Devīpurāṇa*, but transforms her from a powerful terror into a nurturing mother, couched in terms of nourishment, protection, and devotion:

She wears a red garment, her color is red, all her bodily ornaments are red. Her weapons are red, her eyes are red, her hair red – truly terrifying! With sharp red nails, red teeth, red tusks, this goddess will be as attached to the person who is devoted to her as is a wife to her husband. She is broad like the earth, with a pair of breasts like Mount Meru, long, pendulant, massive, exceedingly attractive. Those firm, beautiful breasts are oceans of utter bliss: she causes her devotees to suckle at those breasts that satisfy every desire.⁴⁵

⁴³ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 185-86. See *Prādhānika Rahasya* 7-9.

⁴⁴ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 188. See *Vaikṛtika Rahasya* 4-6.

⁴⁵ Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 191-92. See *Mūrti Rahasya* 5-8.

Though red-eyed with anger, her fangs covered in blood, and her nails like claws, the Goddess remains a nurturing mother to her faithful followers, nourishing them and fulfilling their desires. With these characterizations of the Goddess as Mother and the arbiter of grace underlying all accomplishment, the *Devīmāhātmya* presents a spiritual economy based much more firmly in devotion than that of esoteric knowledge and power, such as in the *Devīpurāṇa*.

Unlike the *Devīmāhātmya*, which offers no *bīja* mantras, the later *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* presents many series of invocations empowered by the seed syllables that become firmly established in the Śākta tradition. The productive nature of such mantras is indicated, highlighting their ability to grant desired accomplishments:

The lotus born Brahmā gave this mantra “*śrīṃ hrīṃ klīṃ aiṃ kamalavāsinyai svāhā*.” This is like a *kalpavṛkṣa*, or wish-fulfilling tree.⁴⁶

Exhibiting a rather standard Tantric form, the verse introduces the non-orthodox mantric elements such as *hrīṃ* but also connects them with the traditional Vedic veneration of *svāhā*, considering them both as components of an efficacious sonic formula. Though the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* incorporates these new elements of ritual, like the *Devīmāhātmya* the form of the Goddess invoked is entirely auspicious, and her powers are valued largely for protection and ultimate liberation. The mantra offered by Brahmā, for instance, is described as invoking Mahālākṣmī in order to win prosperity and sovereignty. Even when the terrible Cāmuṇḍā is invoked in the nine-syllable mantra of “*aiṃ hrīṃ klīṃ Cāmuṇḍāyai vicce*,”⁴⁷ no frightening visualization accompanies; each syllable is installed in a precise part of the body specifically for protection, not preternatural power. The closest correlate to the *siddhis* of the *Devīpurāṇa* are the benefits of invoking the mantra of Manasā, which grant fame, turn poison into nectar, and allow the practitioner some control over

⁴⁶ *Śrīmaddevībhāgavatapurāṇa*, trans. Vijayanand, 1162. See *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* 9.42.41-42.

⁴⁷ *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, 9.50.

serpents.⁴⁸ Ultimately the focus of these invocations is the Great Goddess, who through mantra and yoga training will lead one to liberation from *saṃsāra*.

Even the much more Tantra-influenced *Kālikāpurāṇa* lacks explicit *vidyās* akin to those of the *Devīpurāṇa*, though it does incorporate a profusion of *bīja* mantras, some terrifying Goddess characterizations, and passing acknowledgments of superhuman *siddhis* to be obtained through exacted methods of worship. The closest analog to the *vidyās* of the *Devīpurāṇa* are the detailed *kavacas* revealed. By means of single syllable mantras, the Vaiṣṇavītantra of chapter fifty-six, for instance, invokes various gods, the supreme goddesses Mahāmāyā, Mahālakṣmī, and Sarasvatī, as well as numerous *yoginīs*. These syllables acknowledged as deities are installed throughout the body in order to grant purification and protection for the practitioner:

Let Mahāmāyā protect me on my nostrils, the goddess protect me on the opening of my throat; the goddess Durgā, who removes all the distress and troubles, on all my joints. Let Kālikā always save me on my ears with *hum* and *phaṭ*; and the three *netrabīja* must remain always there for protecting my eyes. Let Caṇḍikā save me on my nose with *om aiṃ hrīṃ hrauṃ*; let Tārā be there always to protect me at the roof of my tongue with *om hrīṃ hum*.⁴⁹

Like the *Kavaca aṅga* preceding the *Devīmāhātmya*, the *Kālikāpurāṇa* respectfully summons divine entities and installs them throughout the body in order to benefit from their shielding strength. Merely a single recitation of this *kavaca*, it is noted, will grant defeat of enemies, will generate protection from weapons, disease, and sorrow, will bestow wealth, and will accomplish various kinds of *siddhis*, such as invisibility.⁵⁰ Unlike the *vidyās*, most of these *kavacas* are empowered by both male and female divinities; even when a given *kavaca* is overseen by the feminine divine, the figure is decidedly beneficent, visualized as an auspicious and lovely Mahāmāyā who is Mother to the world. While more akin to the *vidyās* of the *Devīpurāṇa*, the

⁴⁸ *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, 9.48.

⁴⁹ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, trans. Shastri, 793. See *Kālikāpurāṇa* 56.37-39.

⁵⁰ *Kālikāpurāṇa*, 56.55-69.

kavacas of the *Kālikāpurāṇa* do not offer one-to-one correlations between frightful goddess *bīja* mantras, their accompanying visualizations, and the *siddhis* to be gained through them.

In the Tantric context of the *Devīpurāṇa*, the concept of *vidyā* has been strikingly transformed through its association with an innovative conception of the feminine divine. It incorporates a recognizable and acceptable established orthodox vocabulary, but posits a powerful female divine force distinct from the preceding tradition as well as subsequent Śākta Purāṇas. The emerging *vidyā* conjures the Vedic Vāc by positing speech as a female divine and by acknowledging the role of sound in broaching the absolute; however, the associated divinities have moved far from the feminine charms of earlier characterization, establishing instead a fierce and frightening Goddess more suited to the shock-inducing Tantric context. The *vidyās* also accept the efficacy of the semantically void *stobha* of the earlier Vedic ritual realm, adopting outright some sounds such as *hum* and *phaṭ*, and introducing others such as *kili* and *vicce*, thereby establishing seed syllables that are connected exclusively with a feminine divine. The linguistic stammer generated through the repetition of the referent-less word encourages the breakdown of dualistic thought, but also taps into divine energies by invoking the Goddess herself. Lastly, the power underlying the efficacy of incantation shifts away from male deities, harnessing instead the wild and virulent potentialities of the Goddess.

What constitutes knowledge and the ways of knowing have been somewhat reconceived, so that *vidyā* becomes more than simple understanding or learning, and insinuates more even than the deeper comprehension of a non-qualified absolute. *Vidyā* is itself the Goddess – Cāmuṇḍā in the case of the Padamālā – as well as a recognition of the Goddess's fierce potency. *Vidyā* is esoteric sacred sound, bridging the gap between the mundane and the transcendent, propelling the practitioner towards liberation. *Vidyā* is guarded, mystical incantation, able to defeat the enemy,

guard against malevolent forces, and endow with superhuman capacity. Like the Goddess herself, knowledge becomes difficult to access – the province only of the initiated⁵¹; it is powerful, allowing one to achieve lofty goals, but it is also threatening and dangerous, necessitating rigid systems of control. Furthermore, it is variable, with disparate manifestations in the mundane, subtle, and highest experiential realms. The *Devīpurāṇa* thus weaves together orthodox and non-orthodox elements as it establishes an innovative knowledge for an unfolding Tantric religious life. Though the text also supports an emphasis on surrender and devotion to the Goddess as legitimate and efficacious means available to all levels of society, including women and those of low-caste status, the *vidyās* of the *Devīpurāṇa* are continually presented in the frame of the esoteric. Knowledge is thus not egalitarian – it is available only to those deemed worthy, who are capable of comprehending it and channeling its energies in productive ways. In this Tantric atmosphere, the feminine passions of the divine *vidyā* necessitate systems of control, and knowledge becomes utmost power.

Tantric Formulations of the Divine Body

Tantra presents a notable emphasis on the physical as a legitimate aspect of spiritual pursuits, a marked shift away from the mental and ascetic foci of earlier South Asian religious traditions. The physical body not only serves as a necessary instrument of utmost spiritual accomplishment, but can itself become a supernal entity. The development of ritual practices such as *nyāsa*, for

⁵¹ As befitting the Puranic genre, the *Devīpurāṇa* is intended for a broad audience, counteracting the Brahmanical tradition of exclusivity by appealing to people across boundaries of caste, age, economic status, and gender. The inclusion of Tantric themes demonstrates an intriguing popularization of esoteric practice, though the text maintains a certain level of secrecy by limiting details; while the text refrains from discussion of Tantric initiation (*dīkṣā*), passages such as the Padamālā imply that total divulgence is restricted.

example, function to divinize the corporeal form, transitioning the mundane physicality of the practitioner by means of inscribing it with the presence of divine energies. As the various gods and goddesses are directed on or into the body through the employment of powerful mantras, the Tantric body is constructed and its divinity made manifest. Such an intentional, prescribed, and often textualized process is driven by unique considerations that speak to the social contexts of their employment. With the “transformations of intellectual and social practices into sacred physical terrain,” the body itself comes to function as the representation of tradition, text, and cosmos.⁵² To read the body is to read the discourses that give rise to it. In his study of the body within the context of Tantric formations, Gavin Flood draws on this notion of the body as a socio-politically determined object of representation, which when analyzed can reveal underlying matrices of power:

The body is inscribed, both hegemonically by the self and by external relationships, in accordance with the power structures of a given society through time. The laying bare of these relationships and forms of inscription through genealogical analysis is an attempt to dissolve them and thereby offer liberating social critique.⁵³

Though Flood himself diverges slightly from a strictly Foucauldian envisioning of the body as the locus of contested power, he posits that the body, informed by its own temporality and associated narrative structure, is bound with tradition and culture in its relationship with communities of other bodies. The body as representation acts as a “symbolic system that encodes a culture’s ideas and practices,” and as such may reveal prominent cultural currents.⁵⁴ The Tantric body can, and does, confirm certain conventional matrices of social power, even as it strives to break taboos of the tradition. What, then, can the Tantric body of the *Devīpurāṇa* reveal?

⁵² Frederick M. Smith, *The Self Possessed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 376. Also see Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2006), 5.

⁵³ Flood, *Tantric Body*, 22.

⁵⁴ Flood, *Tantric Body*, 24.

Unlike the incorporation of the Padamālā Vidyā into the narrative structure of the text, the *Devīpurāṇa* refrains from offering any explicit instructions for constructing the Tantric body with recourse to divine energies in processes of *kavaca* or *nyāsa*.⁵⁵ Within its narrative arcs, however, are two notable passages in which divine beings are established by directing gods, goddesses, and other supernatural entities to form and inhabit new bodies in a system highly suggestive of certain Tantric ritual practices. The first occurs in chapter seven, beginning at verse forty-four, when Brahmā begins to fashion a lion vehicle for the Goddess to ride into battle. The primary gods and goddesses, the Nāgas, the Yakṣas, the celestial entities, and even the Rākṣasas are settled by Brahmā throughout the body, mind, and breath of this emerging divine beast. So instructed, they invigorate this corporeal space by means of their habitation, generating protective forces and a ferocious inclination – Carcikā empowers the fierceness of its roar, the demoness Pūtanā promotes its savagery, Śrī maintains its beauty, etc. As Brahmā makes clear, opponents will surely be overcome with the supportive backing of such divinity: “In this way we shall have the utmost protection during the ocean of battle as well as in difficulties with enemies, Bhūtas, Rākṣasas, Vetālas, and the rest.”⁵⁶ The Tantric body, composed and protected with other divine bodies, is thereby strengthened and elevated.

The second such passage occurs in chapter 112, when Viṣṇu establishes the body of Gaṇeśa by rubbing the essence of *rajas* in his hands, which compels various supernatural entities to compose the body of this foremost of gods. Again, the task is carried out by a diverse collection of divine beings, including the primary gods and goddesses, the Rudras, the sages, the Gandharvas, Piśācas, Danus, and Rākṣasas, the Nāgas, celestial and earthly entities, the netherworlds, and even

⁵⁵ However, chapter 70 describes a certain *kavaca* as an amulet empowered by the protective force of Vināyaka, while chapter 124 makes passing reference to the efficacious performance of *ṣaḍaṅga nyāsa* prior to worship of the Goddess.

⁵⁶ *Devīpurāṇa* 7.55.

measures of time. As Manu narrates: “Thus he contained all the gods. Having seen them all as the essence of that elephant-faced one, Viṣṇu honored him joyfully and devotedly, and pleased him with various praises.”⁵⁷

Such structuring of Gaṇeśa by means of collective supernatural energies functions in two primary capacities. Directly, it fortifies the might of this nascent deity by supporting him with the recognized energies of established formidable figures, offering strength and protection as Gaṇeśa enters battle with the Asura Vighna. Buttressed by the aid of their presence in his body, he is able to overcome the enemy threat. Secondly, this acknowledgment of familiar divine entities as fundamental to the very nature of Gaṇeśa serves to legitimize the elephant-faced god within an evolving religious context. Conceiving of this relative newcomer as the distilled essence of all the gods and other supernatural powers allows for his reasonable incorporation into the existing narratives and rituals. He is no longer an outsider god, but can be embraced as an embodiment of varied divine energies.

Though these passages do not align neatly with the ritual processes of *nyāsa* and *kavaca*, they nevertheless begin to promote the ideological principles that underlie such constructions of the body, and in so doing present a means of domesticating local divinities in addition to practitioners of fringe communities. The idea develops that the energies of any supernatural entity may be compelled to inhabit the body, which then is itself transformed into a divine vessel. By including malevolent forces, autochthonous beings, and various manifestations of the feminine divine alongside the established and acceptable Brahmanical male gods, the efficacy of their inherent power is sanctioned. The non-Brahmanical is ushered into the orthodox fold and incorporated in a meaningful and less threatening manner. Fred Smith suggests that the introduction of a

⁵⁷ *Devīpurāṇa* 112.19-20.

Brahmanically aligned *nyāsa* likely indicates the incorporation of popular religious possession, but in an organized and cautious way:

Through exercising programmatic control, which occurred as a result of the elimination of its unstructured, noninstitutionalized, unpredictable, and (thus) frightening aspects, possession was drained of its spontaneity. It became *vidhi* (ritual prescription)...Indeed, for many, particularly among non-brahmanized sects, such confinement served to confer acceptable social dimensions upon it, thus legitimizing it as a viable form of religious expression...⁵⁸

Flood agrees with such a notion of domesticated possession and *nyāsa* as a means of legitimizing non-Brahmanical beings and practices in order to incorporate them in a managed and orthodox way. He states: “The body is colonised by textually defined supernatural beings, it is then recolonised by the Brahmanical tradition, tamed, controlled, and brought back into conformity through being entextualised in ways legitimised by a tantric, Brahmanical orthodoxy.”⁵⁹ We see the introduction of such domestication of popular supernatural entities and the non-Brahmanical body in the *Devīpurāṇa* with the physical establishment of Gaṇeśa and the Goddess’s lion, though the process expands and becomes more explicit in subsequent Śākta texts. The *Devīmāhātmya*, for instance, does not include any passages resembling such divine embodying, but the *Kavaca* that is later appended to the text provides an armoring by feminine divine forces.⁶⁰ The various auspicious and fierce goddesses are compelled to abide in the physical form of the practitioner, thereby elevating it and protecting it. Previously non-Brahmanical goddesses are thereby compelled to act within a Brahmanical ritual framework for the orchestrated protection of the orthodox practitioner. Popular supernatural beings are incorporated into mainstream practice as are their followers, now encouraged to engage their religious lives in a Brahmanical manner. The *Devīpurāṇa* suggests this

⁵⁸ Smith, *The Self Possessed*, 385.

⁵⁹ Flood, *Tantric Body*, 94.

⁶⁰ See the discussion of *kavacas* in other Śākta Puranic texts above.

shifting dynamic in its *nyāsa*-like constructions of an empowered divine body, perhaps indicating an early stage in this Tantric development.

Conclusion

With its tentative introduction of such Tantric elements, the *Devīpurāṇa* stands at the threshold of an emerging mainstream Tantra, which is incorporated into the Sanskrit literary tradition and legitimized by orthodox Brahmanism. Drawing from the regional deities, practices, and beliefs of the popular religious imaginaire, the text strives to bring these disparate elements into line with Vedic norms by assimilating them in a ritually controlled manner, thereby taming them and diminishing their threatening potential. Most notably, this developing Tantric ideology recognizes the power and efficacy of feminine energies, elevating and revering them, but seeking to cultivate and deploy them in service of one's own spiritual benefit. We find with the inclusion of *vidyās* – particularly the Padamālā, for example – a welcoming of the fierce feminine divine, but one in which the terrifying goddess is directed to particular ends through the use of sonic formulae, employed in a rather conventional manner of mantra repetition. Directed by the force of vocalized words and sounds, the goddess is compelled to bestow sought superhuman *siddhis* and to lead one along the path towards liberation. The *nyāsa/kavaca*-like constructions of the divine body, too, seek to harness the beneficial and protective capacities of the varied manifestations of the Goddess. Imperatively installed throughout the body, one may tap into the creative potential of the supernatural.

Despite such promotion of the feminine divine, and contrary to some of the text's hymns which posit the Goddess as ultimate, these Tantric influences on the *Devīpurāṇa* subtly emphasize that the feminine divine is not supreme, nor even equivalent to the divinity of the primary male gods,

particularly Śiva. As demonstrated with the Yoga of Sanatkumāra, for instance, the text refrains from leaping advancements in yogic and philosophical formulations, instead retaining a monistic Śaiva theological framework supported by a traditional system of Pātañjala yoga. So while the text encourages certain inclusions of a Tantra made compatible with an adapting Brahmanism, its aim is not an upheaval of all established convention, but a calculated inauguration of popular religious life within the orthodox idiom. This tempered and cautious approach as a preliminary stage of Tantric development is emphasized when considered against the other prominent Śākta Purāṇas. The earlier *Devīmāhātmya* eschews any significant influence of Tantra, but its impact becomes increasingly prevalent in the subsequent *aṅgas* of the *Devīmāhātmya*, the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, and the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, which are pervaded by esoteric practices, the supremacy of a terrifying female divine, a dominant shift to Haṭha yoga, and further overturning of convention, particularly with regard to the *pañcamakāras*. The *Devīpurāṇa*, it seems, opens the door to such suffusion of Tantra within the Brahmanical sphere of Purāṇa, initiating its inclusion within this popular genre of Sanskrit literature and representing it as compatible with conventional religious life. It integrates the non-orthodox, domesticates it, and thereby effects its legitimacy; it tames the Tantric and encourages its promulgation.

Conclusion

As demonstrated, the *Devīpurāṇa* offers a literary snapshot of a shifting religious identity as it strives to incorporate aspects of local religious life into a traditional Brahmanical frame. Intended to harmonize popular practice with orthodox ideology, the text pivots on the integration of a burgeoning feminine divine and the novel negotiations of gender prompted by this inclusion. By introducing fierce indigenous goddesses who challenge Brahmanical convention, it ascribes to the feminine divine a position of power and prominence previously unrecognized in the orthodox sphere; the broadening role of the feminine as a legitimate and potent facet of religious life thus incites a reconsideration of established norms. Though the text draws from the conceptions of a Vedic past, it reinvents them in an innovation grounded in *laukika* religious forms, to which the Goddess is central. In this developing Śākta idiom, cosmic energies are by nature generated within the female form, which is to be regulated by the Brahmanical male. Negotiations of religious power and authority thus necessitate the mediation of gender relations, giving rise to a milieu which simultaneously exalts the Goddess in her various manifestations and regulates those feminine forces in religiously productive ways.

The narratives of the *Devīpurāṇa* underscore the delicate dynamics of power/authority relations as it navigates the inclusion of the extra-Brahmanical into the orthodox idiom. An intratextual consideration reveals the potency of the Goddess as it emphasizes her liminal status – she demonstrates remarkable prowess, empowering fury, and a wild nature bolstered by her peripheral abode in the Vindhya mountains. As the text showcases these formidable traits of the feminine divine, it simultaneously moderates the Goddess by invariably coupling her with a Brahmanically-oriented masculine authority. The ferocious Mātṛkās become the reined *śaktis* of the gods; the independent Goddess of the Vindhyas merges with the wifely/motherly Pārvatī of

the Himālayas, becoming merely an inherent secondary portion of Śiva. An intertextual analysis reveals this process of subjugation as an ongoing trend in the development of Śākta literature. While the Goddess of the earlier *Devīmāhātmya* prevails as a fully autonomous and commanding martial presence, the subsequent *Devībhāgavata*, *Kālikā*, and *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇas* increasingly render the feminine divine subject to patriarchal concerns of domesticity. She continues to become subject to the controlling male authority of dominating husband and sons.

Other elements of the *Devīpurāṇa* support this view of the text as an amalgam of the competing religious spheres of Brahmanical center and indigenous periphery. The theme of the dharmic Asura juxtaposed against the deceptive nature of the gods demonstrates a sensitivity to extra-Brahmanical communities, though also a recognition that these peoples, despite their goodness, must be ushered into the orthodox structure, subject to its dictates. Similarly, the capricious Vināyaka is coopted through the elephant-headed Gajānana, whose origins are ascribed to the activities of both Śiva and Viṣṇu. Like the Goddess, Gajānana battles Asuras on behalf of the gods, obeying their direction and fortifying their cosmic authority. Lastly, the Tantric influences of the text also reveal a popularization of extra-Brahmanical beliefs and practices, but within an orthodox frame. The inclusion of efficacious *vidyās*, *nyāsa*-like installations, and offerings of meat and alcohol indicate the emergence of mainstream Tantra, though these non-orthodox influences are moderated by the Brahmanical male, who continues to control feminine energies and direct rites within purified religious space.

In its complex negotiations of gender prompted by the inclusion of a frightening and powerful feminine divine, the *Devīpurāṇa* inaugurates a tenuous position for the Goddess in which she is no longer subordinate but also not yet equal. The text seems to be offering innovations to religious life, but doing so conservatively and cautiously, if not reluctantly. Unlike other Śākta Purāṇas

which present the Goddess in unequivocal positions of supremacy, the *Devīpurāṇa* hesitates to attempt such leaps in the development of a distinctly Śākta ideology. The lack of free rein, however, may account for a welcoming inclusion of a fiercer feminine divine, as well as the mainstream acceptance of peripheral religious life. By accounting for a continued position of authority, the developing Brahmanism of early medieval Bengal could incorporate elements of local religious expression without threat or concern for loss of stature. The *Devīpurāṇa* exhibits this ongoing negotiation in which orthodox norms may allow for the possibility of a formidable feminine divine without yielding fully to indigenous practice. It thus provides an early glimpse into the emergence of a distinct Tantric typology in the Northeast.

The legacy of this premodern divine gender construct continues to manifest in contemporary Bengal, a region that remains noteworthy for its intense devotion to the Goddess. Still, the Goddess (and women generally) are subject to the interests of patriarchal Brahmanical hegemony, underscoring that in the modern period too the pervasive worship of female divine figures is not necessarily indicative of a feminist perspective. In his 1960 film *Devi (The Goddess)*, for example, the renowned director Satyajit Ray presents a critique of the subordination of women – even divine women – in Bengali society. The film portrays the simultaneous exaltation of a young woman to divine status and her resultant increased oppression by a patriarchal social world. The 17-year-old newlywed, Doyamoi, has moved into the home of her husband's joint family, which is headed by her wealthy, aristocratic father-in-law, Kalikankar, a pious and ardent devotee of the Goddess. One night Kalikankar has a dream in which the goddess Kālī morphs into a vision of his young daughter-in-law. He awakens, disoriented, and arrives at the conclusion that Kālī has visited him in order to reveal that she has in fact incarnated in embodied form as Doyamoi. He immediately rushes down the corridor to awaken his daughter-in-law, prostrating before her and explaining that

he now recognizes her true divine identity. His son, Doyamoi's brother-in-law, emerges to investigate the commotion, and is compelled to follow his father's example, bowing before Doyamoi as she shrinks back in confusion and fright.

Doyamoi is trapped. Her discomfort in the situation is apparent, revealed through her recoiling toes that struggle to resist the touch of her father-in-law as well as her clawing hands that grasp desperately for some escape. As a young woman overshadowed by the authority and position of her father-in-law, she lacks a voice to express her discomfort. Nor does Kalikankar much care about her voice; it seems that he never even considers that she might possess one of her own. While he acknowledges her presence of power, he automatically takes control and governs that power. Moving into the next scene, Doyamoi has literally been placed on a pedestal, surrounded by male priests and worshipping devotees. As they proceed with their religious rituals, the personhood of Doyamoi is demolished, and doll-like, she has become a static religious icon (fig. 6.1).

Ray's brilliant cinematography clearly conveys the broader sense of social oppression through the claustrophobic framing of the scene. The thick incense smoke, the clanging bells, the sweeping movements of the yak-tail fan, and the piercing eyes of the all-male audience combine as an overwhelming prison in which Doyamoi's identity is suppressed. Her vacant expression and dispirited eyes convey her lack of engagement, which is underscored further by her loss of consciousness. But again, despite her perceived divine power, Doyamoi's own well-being and desires bear no influence in this patriarchal system governed by male authority. And Doyamoi herself submits to this patriarchal control. When later presented with the opportunity to escape, she falters. Though her life has been stripped away and she's become desperately unhappy, she begins to allow for the possibility that she might actually be an incarnation of the goddess Kālī.



Figure 6.1: Still from *Devī*, dir. Satyajit Ray (1960).

In fear and uncertainty, she accepts the decisions that have been made for her, and dutifully returns to her position in service to patriarchal control. By the conclusion of the film, Doyamoi's life and identity have been obliterated, subject to the passing dream of an authoritative old man.

Likewise, a recent advertising campaign in India, which was intended to draw attention to pervasive problems of sex trafficking and domestic violence, also emphasizes the general lack of feminist advocacy despite veneration of divine women.¹ The campaign, titled "Abused Goddesses," depicts Durgā, Lakṣmī, and Sarasvatī in their traditional iconographic portrayals,

¹ See Sayantani DasGupta, "Abused Goddesses, Orientalism and the Glamorization of Gender-Based Violence," *The Feminist Wire*, 12 September 2013, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2013/09/abused-goddesses/>.

though with battered and bruised faces; provocative copy accompanies the striking imagery: “Pray that we never see this day. Today more than 68% of women in India are victims of domestic violence. Tomorrow, it seems that no woman shall be spared. Not even the ones we pray to” (fig. 6.2). While this portrayal of the Goddess emphasizes her passivity and subjugation, it draws on the feminine divine to incite more awareness of feminist values. Similarly, many women of the Gulabi Gang, an extensive grassroots network of women



Figure 6.2: Durgā. Abused Goddesses Campaign, Taproot Ad Agency (2013).

activists working towards justice for the oppressed, look to the potency of the feminine divine to fuel their fight against patriarchal control. “My real strength is not in the stick,” explains Malti, one such vigilante in pink, “it is in my capacity my goddess gave me to give lessons to those

abusive men.”² Here, the courageousness of the feminine divine serves as a model for proliferating feminist resolve. The Goddess guides others as they demand both power and authority.

So the question remains – is the Goddess feminist? While the feminine divine has without doubt been powerfully incorporated into Hindu traditions, is the simple acceptance and appreciation of feminine divine power enough? As Rita Gross points out, “Hindu goddesses have not done a good job of promoting the humanity of Hindu women,”³ and they may be criticized as supporting patriarchal systems of control. To consider the historical development of the Goddess as revealed in premodern texts such as the *Devīpurāṇa* certainly underscores this point, and facets of Indian society continue to revere Goddesses while suppressing women. Ultimately, however, the Goddess as a religious symbol is ever evolving, an expression of those who worship her rather than an eternally fixed entity. While her background may be complex, she remains rich with possibility for a feminist future. Such transitional nature of the Goddess is highlighted in a Śākta devotional poem by the renowned 18th-19th century poet Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya:

Who is this,
dressed like a crazy woman,
robed with the sky?
Whom does She belong to?
She has let down Her hair,
thrown off Her clothes,
strung human hands around Her waist,
and taken a sword in Her hand.
Her face sparkles
from the reflection of Her teeth,
and Her tongue lolls out.
The smile on that moon-face drips
heaps and heaps of nectar.

² GMB Akash, “Quest for Justice – Vigilantes in Pink,” *GMB Akash: A Photojournalist’s Blog*, <https://gmbakash.wordpress.com/>.

³ Rita Gross, “Is the Goddess a Feminist?” in *Is the Goddess a Feminist?* ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 105.

Mother,
are You going to rescue Kamalākānta
in *this* outfit?⁴

As Kamalākānta emphasizes, the Goddess manifests variously. She's enrobed in garments which are expressions of particular social concerns and desires. If she neglects to rescue us in this outfit, perhaps she'll adorn another and rescue us with the next.

⁴ Rachel Fell McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kālī and Umā from Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 32.

Devīpurāṇam

Chapter One

Oṃ. Honor to Caṇḍikā.

Having honored Nārāyaṇa, Nara, and Narottama,
as well as the goddess Sarasvatī, thus one shall rouse victory!

Having honored the Goddess Śivā, that wholly supernal belle, I will narrate the *purāṇa* just as it was imparted previously by Brahmā. [1]

The sages said:

“Lord, you know the true nature of all that is perceptible and imperceptible. Manifest on earth, we all have come for the sake of [hearing] *purāṇa*. Let it be told how the Goddess, honored by the gods, will bring about the destruction of the Dānavas¹ of past, present, and future, such as Ghora and the rest. [Let it] also [be told how] the heaven of Indra, whose kingdom had been seized, was obtained by the Dānavas, and how Śakra, revered by the god of gods, undertook victory. [2-4]

Oh most excellent of sages, [tell us] also the sixty distinct incarnations [of the Goddess] as well as how a mighty king should worship that Goddess who effects all goals. [Tell us about] the arising of the Mothers [which brings] the downfall of the distinguished Ruru, wherefrom [manifests] the Goddess as Cāmuṇḍā or Sarvamaṅgalā. And [tell us about] the explanation of names, the invigoration of the [*homa*] fire, the rites of Vasudhārā, and the installation of deities, etc. [5-7]

[Tell us] how [the Asura] Māya, possessed of powerful illusion, was slain by the arrows of Rāma, and how the Goddess was variously established on the surface of the earth. And [tell us] the various hymns and the variety of glorifications performed by those distinguished ones headed by Śiva. And [tell us] the hymn to Śiva and the paired hymn to Viṣṇu and Brahmā, as well as the great eulogy performed by Śukra for the benefit of the world. [8-10]

[Tell us] the explanations of meritorious acts that destroy sins such as chariot processions, and the narrations of the rise of the terrible general Kaṭvā [as well as] his destruction. [Tell us] the story of Vighnanāśa, [about] worshiping with various offerings, and the consecration beginning with flowers which brings about great peace, such as that of the wondrous Śakra which was performed at the behest of the guru [Bṛhaspati]. [Tell us about] the numerous abodes and forts, and the varied sorts of fine arts. [11-13]

[Tell us] about how Brahmā instructed when Manu and the others inquired; [tell us] about positions of caste and stages of life, and the expositions of good conduct. [Tell us] about the tales

¹ The Dānavas (or Dānus) are a lineage of Asuras, the so-called demons of the classical Sanskrit realm who stand in opposition to the gods. While they are technically distinct from the Daitya clan, another Asura lineage, the two are generally conflated, and the terms are used interchangeably throughout the text. I’ve retained the Sanskrit nomenclature in order to avoid the heavily loaded English translation of “demon.”

of the gods, the description of the virtues of Sāṃkhya, and how kings are respectively seized by death, the Seizers,² or the Ādityas.³ [14-15]

Sir, [tell us] how that honorable divine doyenne of all things, that destroyer of sins and enemies, that supreme purifier of earth, was previously praised by Śakra and the rest. [Tell us how] Hariścandra and his retinue continue to thrive due to the grace of the Goddess. [Tell us] how Māṇḍavya, that tiger among sages, worships Śivā, and how [the physician] Dhanvantari obtained the benefits of Ayurveda. And [tell us about] the manifestation of Viṣṇu, religious observances and obligations, the Vedic rites, as well as the explanation and performance of oblations. [16-18]

[Tell us about] the motion and the elevation of the planets, and the explanation of rotation. [Tell us] about the abiding and perseverance of the Nāgas who dwell in the netherworld. [Tell us about] the calculated measurement of time, the explanation of the division of the epochs, and the reckoning of words in the world according to the auspicious and inauspicious. [19-20]

[Tell us] the meritorious manner of the Padamālā [Vidyā] and the related exposition on yoga, as well as those visible marks of yogīs which indicate the realization of felicity. And [tell us about] the many types of flowers [to be offered] at the occasion of bestowing banners, the tremendous merits of various donations, and the unparalleled granting of *vidyās*.⁴ [Tell us about] religious vows, fasts, observances, and restrictions, as well as the installation of the Goddess with water in palaces, enclosures, and other such places. [21-23]

Since there are pūjās [to the Goddess] associated with the disruption of the Seizers according to rites both gentle and terrible, so one may succeed in all aims [through her worship]. You are capable of communicating to us the truth [of this *purāṇa*] according to all its various divulgences and in customary successive order, as is suitable for intellect and epoch. Virtuous one, tell how the Goddess is pleased by the performance of rites and sacrifices just as appropriate for one's status." [24-26]

Thus was Vasiṣṭha entreated by all those venerable sages, those knowers of proper manners and precepts. He said: "Let this be heard." The *purāṇa* was then related concisely by that one reflecting on the beginning. All that is desired shall be accomplished in the [first] quarter, [called] "The Conquest of the Triple World." [27-28]

Vasiṣṭha said:

"Let it be heard. I will proceed quarter by quarter with this exalted honoring of the Goddess which effects all desires. Once worshiped [in the manner] that has passed down through the ages by means of these four-fold portions, the Goddess shall grant the attainment of all pleasures. [29-30]

² The term *graha* (Seizer) here could be referring either to the planets or to evil spirits, both of which are capable of exerting negative influence on a person's actions and disposition.

³ The Ādityas are a particular lineage of celestial deities, the "sons of Aditi."

⁴ The use of *vidyā* here may be indicating knowledge in its general sense, but more specifically addresses the *vidyās* – feminine-gendered mantras – that are incorporated and referenced throughout the text.

Agastya will tell that ancient narrative which you venerable sages have requested of me for the sake of increasing merit. It was received from Śiva first by Viṣṇu and the rest, and was then obtained from Brahmā by Mātariśvan. It then descended to us from Manu, Atri, Bhṛgu, and the rest. Disseminated by Agastya, it will achieve fame in the world amongst kings. And those people who listen [to this *purāṇa*] devotedly, properly, and in its regular course shall have all of their bad deeds completely destroyed, whether all, half, a quarter, or even an eighth [is heard]. Invariably those who seek joy will at once obtain their goal. [Listening] uninterruptedly grants the fulfillment of whatever is desired; due to interruption, the conferral of worldly pleasures may become ineffectual. [31-35]

First, for the sages who were inquiring, the telling of the arising of creation will be narrated in the divine quarter called “Victory,” as will the tremendously meritorious tale of Śakra, the rise and annihilation of Ghora, and the slaying of Dundubhi. The mighty Ghora arose, and having undertaken severe austerities, he received a boon from the supreme Lord Viṣṇu, such that the Nāga kings in the netherworlds were subdued by his foremost mantras. His son received [instruction on] the sound [Om] from Śukra and traveled to heaven. Though [Ghora] mastered *māyā*,⁵ he was subsequently deceived by the guru [Bṛhaspati]. [36-39]

Highly honored by Brahmā and Viṣṇu, the Goddess then went to the Vindhya mountains, while Nārada recited the powerful Padamālā Vidyā in order to incite Ghora with desire for battle as a buffalo. Then the destruction of Khaṭvā, Māya, and the rest was achieved by the gods; having propitiated the god Rudra, Śivā was requested⁶ for her various apportionment [in her different manifestations]. [40-42ab]

The second [quarter of] narration is called “The Prosperity of the Triple World.” The excellent third quarter is called “The Slaying of Śumbha and Niśumbha.” There was a great battle with Andhaka during the war between the gods and Dānavas. Having praised the god of gods Hara, [Andhaka] subsequently became one of his attendants. There was a battle between Tāraka and Guha called “The Battle of Gods and Asuras.” Kumāra descended and the body of Kāma was destroyed. Hari also propitiated Rudra on behalf of Śakra; the god then manifest and Guha became general of the army. Umā-Kālī arose; upon propitiating the Lord, the Goddess obtained the all providing Śaṃkara as her husband and Himavat, chief of mountains, arranged the marriage. [42cd-48ab]

⁵ Most often translated as illusion or delusion, *māyā* is a semantically rich term intended to convey a sense of paranormal, celestial, or spiritual power that is capable of overcoming the mind and senses. Throughout the *Devīpurāṇa* the term is most often invoked to indicate magical abilities for conjuring illusory objects and beings, particularly in battle. It stands as a learned and valuable skill.

⁶ Though the text reads as *-arthatā* here, I have taken it as *-arthitā* (asked, desired, requested) in order to make sense of the half verse, though the intended meaning of 42ab remains somewhat obscure.

There is the origin of the *hotṛ* priest, and the great⁷ sages amongst the gods such as the Vālakhilyas,⁸ who accompany the chariot of Āditya.⁹ There is also [the description of] manifold processions which give rise to good effects when performed. There is the origination of the brilliant Mahāśvetā, Jambha, and the rest who were directed for the protection of Ravi, as well as the gods who were established as embodiments of the planets. Worshipped for the sake of welfare, Śivadūtī manifests. There are [descriptions of] the offerings to the planets performed by Brahmā of boundless energy (*tejas*). The Mothers of the people, those Mothers [who act] for the benefit of all creatures, were divided amongst the people and established with the desire for the welfare of children. [48cd-52]

Thus having outlined in short this sacred Purāṇa narrated by Brahmā, it is to be told for the benefit of all people. And he who in due order and according to rule of knowledge recites or hears all of it or divided, be it half, a quarter, an eighth, or only the first three chapters – [this Purāṇa] which contains the true meaning of the Veda, grants every desire, puts forth the renown of Śiva, Brahmā, and Hari, and generates auspiciousness – that man shall obtain whatever his heart desires. From hearing this Purāṇa related by Śiva, he shall receive happiness, fame amongst men, wealth, sons, and well-being. [53-57]

One should recite [the Purāṇa] in recitation halls, in meeting places, in temples of gods and goddesses, in various purified and auspicious palaces, on the banks of rivers, in gardens of trees, and in gatherings of virtuous people – places that have been consecrated with incense, perfume, garlands, etc. One should fix one’s mind on the single aim [of this Purāṇa], with one’s inner essence directed toward it; one apprehends its truth by means of a fully purified soul. The deceitful, the vile, the troublesome, and the intolerant should never hear [it], nor should those people who are not devoted to the gods, who are hostile, or who are jealous. He who devotes himself to the Goddess as well as those gods headed by Śiva, Sūrya, Brahmā, and Hari, and who remains beneficent to teachers and Brahmans, shall receive advantageous results.” [58-62]

Nṛpavāhana said:

“Illustrious one, please tell us that divine knowledge which bestows all that is desired, just as you previously heard it from Indra. For the sake of well-being, illustrious one, tell [us] that knowledge relating to sacrificial rite, whose many aspects regarding sword, garland, collyrium, bells, and the rest were revealed for the benefit of all creatures.” [63-64]

Citrāṅgada said:

“Oh you who are skilled in knowledge, you are learned; dear one, you must question Agastya about that knowledge which you wish to hear. That one whose nature is dharma knows all manner of learning – past, present, and future.” [65-66]

⁷ Though “*mahān*” is rendered in the nominative singular, I’m reading it as plural to make sense of the verse.

⁸ The Vālakhilyas (alternatively Bālakhilyas or Vālikhilyas) are a class of sages produced from Brahmā’s body that surround the chariot of the sun.

⁹ Āditya here could be referring to the entire class of seven celestial deities, but is most likely speaking of Sūrya alone in conjunction with the Vālakhilyas.

Thus addressed by his teacher, that one skilled in the employment of knowledge went to the most excellent hermitage inhabited by Agastya, who was expert in *brahman*. Having fixed his mind, the intelligent Nṛpayāna then strove for the goal of knowledge which bestows divine accomplishments. In order to achieve all that he desired and for the sake of increased auspiciousness, that devoted one, single-minded in Śiva, reached the hermitage and beheld the sage. [67-69]

**Thus is the first chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Going to the Hermitage of Agastya.”**

Chapter Two

Having completed the Kāmikā Vidyā which fulfills every aim, the great-souled Nṛpavāhana proceeded to the hermitage of Agastya. There he heard the sounds of the Veda recited by those who perform meritorious acts; there virtuous sages dwelled, fully devoted to the study of Veda. Many accomplished ones were there, sages who make the *vidyās* known; there dwelled men who were liberated from faults which are difficult to abandon. There was no fear of disease there, and joy was unsurpassed. It was the abode of both lions and elephants, dwelling together, and horses continually frolicked there with buffaloes; those creatures who are normally enemies invariably delighted together. Having travelled there, even the most vile sinners all attained virtue, and sages wishing for release practiced austerities for the liberation of the soul. [1-6]

There dwelled Sanaka, Sanatkumāra, as well as Nārada, Ātreya, Gautama, Pulastya, Pulaha, Bhānu, Śaṅkha, Jābāli, and Pāṇini; they lived along with the foremost sages Bhṛgu, Aṅgīrasa, Vāsiṣṭha, Māṇḍavya, and the great sages Śāṇḍilya and Vahni, as well as other eminent hermits. Their faults burnt up by knowledge, they were endowed with strength, constancy, and valor. [7-9ab]

Some ate only once a day, some not at all, while others sat to eat only at night. Some were engaged in fasting, eating only after three nights or five nights; some ate only after ten nights, while others ate after a fortnight or even a month. Some drank only milk, some ate only fruit and roots, while others ate only bulbs and leaves; some ate only once during the year, and some ate only fruits such as amla or bael.¹⁰ Some ate only leafy greens or grains of barley, while others took cow urine or dung as their food. [9cd-12ab]

For the sake of liberation, they were continually engaged in ritual bathing, worship, recitation, and *homa* sacrifice. There, they remained intent on the propitiation of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Skanda, Umā, and Durgā – worship that brings about the result of all accomplishments (*siddhi*). There in that delightful hermitage dwelled the sage Agastya, by whom the Vindhya mountain was restrained, using the trap of speech as a fetter because it had risen up, enlarging itself to become an obstacle in the path of the sun. In his presence, water that is defiled by the poisonous venom of serpents or contaminated by the runoff of rainclouds becomes cleansed, pure, and clear. [12cd-16ab]

Having approached his hermitage, the king bowed in obeisance. The sages returned the honor with a seat, offerings of respect, fruit, and water. Whether a priest, spiritual leader, king, teacher, kinsman, or ascetic, whoever visits the home should be treated as if worthy of reverence. Filled with joy, the king then asked about the manner of sacred knowledge. [16cd-18]

¹⁰ Both amla (or Indian gooseberry) and bael (also called Bengal quince, stone apple, or wood apple) bear religious significance and are prized for their therapeutic properties in Āyurvedic medicines.

Nṛpavāhana said:

“Oh lord, by what means shall I become a lord of Vidyādhara¹¹? Make this known to me, oh excellent one!” [19]¹²

Agastya said:

“The *vidyā* was long ago granted to Viṣṇu by Śiva, and then subsequently given by Viṣṇu to Pitāmaha. It was then presented by him to Śakra. Through its performance, oh young one, the Goddess accomplishes all desired aims, bestows virtue, and grants liberation. Hear it from me, telling [you]. When Hari¹³ obtained heaven after completing one hundred horse sacrifices according to prescription, Brahmā went to see him accompanied by the best of sages. When Śakra saw the divine Pitāmaha approaching, he quickly abandoned his lion-seat and fell to the ground like a stick. Oh king, worshipping at his two feet, with this hymn he pleased the one whose seat is the lotus, that lord of creatures, the creator of the world. [20-24]

Indra said:

“Oh divine one, honor to you who are the womb of Vedas, who as the *trimūrti* are the triumvirate cause of creation, maintenance, and destruction, who are the three *guṇas*. Honor to you who are without characteristics, oh one beyond qualities. Honor to you who are the supreme-souled Śiva. Honor to you who are existence, whose form manifests the universe in its beginning, middle, and end [though] you are eternal. Today my birth has become fruitful; my sacrifices have granted reward. By the sight of you, oh god of gods, certainly I am freed from sin. To see you is efficacious, oh lord; it grants all desires. Thus as my mind remains fixed at your feet, oh foremost of the divine, may I never fall from heaven. Please grant me this boon.” [25-28]

Thus addressed by Indra, Brahmā was surprised. [He thought:] “I have many thousands of steadfast devotees; pleased by the granting of boons, they trouble the gods.¹⁴ Even this one who is the lord of gods worships me.¹⁵ Even a faithful devotee causes annoyance once fattened by boons, but one who has arisen in the twice-born lineage, who delights in worship of the gods, and who remains virtuous and promotes the truth of Veda, never causes difficulty.” Having thought thus, he then considered granting him the boon. [29-32]

¹¹ The usage of “*vidyādhara*” here could simply indicate one who bears *vidyā* (meaning knowledge generally or more specifically feminine-gendered esoteric incantation), but it may also refer to the enigmatic class of supernatural beings called Vidyādhara.

¹² A translation of the third *pada* of this verse is not rendered due to ambiguity. The Hindi and Bengali translations suggest that the quarter – which reads “*bhūtavānacale tasmin*” – indicate that the *vidyā* to be relayed is capable of driving away malevolent spirits (*bhūtas*).

¹³ Here Hari refers to Indra.

¹⁴ The text here employs neuter plural forms rather than the standard masculine plural (*anekāni sahasrāṇi mama bhaktiratāni ca*).

¹⁵ This translation of 30cd is uncertain due to dubious grammar in the text (*tadā ca maṃ kadā vindhyādayameva surādhipaḥ*).

[Brahmā said:]

“Devote yourself to the Great Goddess who is the unparalleled innate power (*śakti*) of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and myself, who is both remote and proximate, whose body is the world, and who confers all pleasures.”¹⁶ [33]

Indra said:

“How is the Goddess known to be Parā, Aparā, and Parāparā?¹⁷ How is she preeminent? You, lord, are paramount (*para*), beyond all others (*apara*), and the highest supreme (*parāpara*). I consider no other to be worthy of worship, fit for meditation, or deserving of praise, oh best of the twice-born.” [34-35]

Brahmā said:

“Nevertheless, I will tell you this truth, best of the gods. There was a great Daitya named Ghora who battled with all the gods. He was learned, practiced in asceticism, powerful, and knowledgeable of the Śāstras. He had risen to a mighty position and was in possession of many myriads of war elephants. Everyone obeyed his command and he was cherished by all. [36-38ab]

Oh king, long ago the divine Janārdana was propitiated by him. Only after much time was the one whose seat is a bird pleased with him; satisfied, [Viṣṇu] granted¹⁸ a boon: “Be the sovereign ruler on earth.” But the Daitya lord did not accept that [boon]. His earnest devotion exceedingly pleased that supreme eight-limbed god.¹⁹ Then he made his request, and that yellow-garbed, compassionate lord of gods bestowed the boon to the Daitya just as it was desired, oh king. [38cd-41]

[Viṣṇu decreed:]

“You will be unconquerable amongst the assembly of gods. You shall be equal in strength to me, endowed with immense ascetic power. Rule heaven, earth, and the seven netherworlds.” [42]

Having devotedly bowed and accepted that utmost boon, the one who had completed his vow praised Viṣṇu with a hymn. [43]

Ghora said:

“Honor to you, the one clothed in yellow, the unsurpassed supreme. Honor to you who bear the conch, discus, and mace, who are garlanded with wildflowers. Honor to you who bestow that which is desired, who are praised by all the gods. Honor to you who are the essence of Veda and Vedāṅga, the womb of sacred knowledge. Protect me from the ocean of worldly existence, oh lord of gods, oh abode of the fortune of Lakṣmī. Honor to you who manifests variously, delighting in many forms, whose own body is itself the manifestation of the world, both auspicious and

¹⁶ Here I resort to the Tarkaratna edition and also append an *anusvāra* to “*viśvarūpā*” in order to render a corresponding series of feminine accusative forms.

¹⁷ Indra references the three supreme Goddesses of the Śaiva Trika school.

¹⁸ Though the conjugation of *pra+dā* is present tense (*prayacchati*), the sense is clearly past tense. Such fluidity of tense is a common feature of the text.

¹⁹ The grammar of this verse in the available texts is problematic, rendering the translation uncertain.

unfavorable.²⁰ Oh you who possess great *tejas*, who are indeed the abode of *tejas*, honor to you who are chief amongst all the gods. Honor to you who are both the perceptible and imperceptible, existence and non-existence, the essence of reality. Oh slayer of Madhu, lord of gods, I do not know all your virtues. Oh Keśava, have compassion on me, distressed and despairing.” [44-49ab]

Thus addressed, Hari was pleased. [He responded:]

“Rule heaven just as desired. You will be vulnerable to the Goddess Śivā, but amongst the others you will remain ever unconquerable.” Thus having given the boon to him, Viṣṇu disappeared. [49cd-50]

Then that tiger of Asuras went to the continent of Kuśa, where his wife by the name of Candravatī dwelled. When she heard that he was arriving after having obtained a valuable boon, the residents of the palace organized a marvelous festival.²¹ The gates of the city shone like the morning moon,²² with various colored cloth and resounding chowries. Ferris wheels and swings were erected, and there were courtyards with fountains. Lotus pools made of gold, silver, and copper were constructed, filled with camphor-scented water and beautifully colored with saffron. There the people delighted, bristling in the drunkenness of youth. That supreme city of his shone forth with increased brilliance as if illuminated²³ by the luster of moonlight, oh king of gods. [51-56]

Puraṁdara, the king who rules over Dānavas proceeded [into the city] thus prepared. There groups of Brahmans were engaged in singing out the Vedas. There were groups of merry, benevolent women who bring about the end of misfortunes; they had with them milk and unbroken *dūrva* grass, as well as conch shells, mirrors, and flutes in hand. There was a pleasant cool breeze which the clouds followed from the east. Birds sang sweetly, and the planets abided in positions of vital power. The trees [were bent by the burden] of fruits, flowers, and creepers. Particles of dust were nowhere to be found. All of the rivers were flowing with water and the wells were brimming with sweet drink, while countless ponds were present in their natural condition. [57-61ab]

[Ghora’s] cherished ones saw him on the road and raised the cry, “Victory!” Songs of praise were raised up by minstrels, resonating with the skillful beating of the *bherī* drum.²⁴ There was a cacophony from the sounds of conchs, flutes, *mṛdaṅga* drums,²⁵ *paṭaha* war drums,²⁶ gongs, bells, tambourines, and *kāhala* drums²⁷ – collections of various instruments whose sounds filled heaven, earth, and the netherworlds. On an auspicious day at the appropriate time, the king entered the city that had been thus prepared, presenting manifold riches to the groups of townspeople and

²⁰ There are various readings of 47b offered in the available texts, none of which are fully satisfying. Variants include *ahatāya hatāya*, *akṛtāya kṛtāya*, and *ahṛtāya hṛtāya*. I am suggesting *ahitāya hitāya*.

²¹ Here the text employs gerunds as finite verbs with each gerund applying to a different agent, again reflecting the fluidity of verb tense.

²² Though the text offers *caiva* in 53a, I am reading it as *ceva* (*ca* + *iva*).

²³ The verb *vi+rāj* is inexplicably rendered in the plural rather than singular in agreement with *puram*.

²⁴ The *bherī* is a type of kettle drum.

²⁵ The *mṛdaṅga* is a type of drum with drumheads at both ends.

²⁶ The *paṭaha* is also a type of kettle drum.

²⁷ The *kāhala* is a type of large drum.

Brahmans. Having taken approval of the esteemed elders, he proceeded to his own palace. There he was lauded by all of his kinsmen with benedictions. Among them were the guardians and gatekeepers, whom he also duly honored with favors one after the other. [61cd-66]

He then settled in the city and remained intent upon the propitiation of the gods. Having fashioned an image of Nārāyaṇa which was adorned with jewels and pearls, ornamented with various colors, attractive, incomparable, and with an enjoyable appearance, that Dānava worshiped it, oh Śakra. [67-68]

Having divided the day and night into eight parts with the aid of clocks, oh Śakra, he maintained a focused mind and brought about no neglect of dharma, etc. Having arisen at the *brahmā muhūrta*,²⁸ he would undertake the necessary purifications. Then²⁹ [he employed] the toothbrush made from the auspicious thorny tree. Having eaten according to injunctions described in the Āgamas and having sipped water from the palm of the hand for purification as is proper, he would examine his face in ghee or a mirror and then give the gift of a cow. Having entered the assembly, he would then see to disputes of plaintiffs and defendants. He remained equally fair to both friends and enemies, and his devotion to dharma was unwavering. He would calculate the income and expenditures, and would consider virtuous conduct along with the righteous. Having performed ritual bathing, presented libations to the divine ancestors, offered sacrifice, dined, and entertained himself, he would reenter the assembly hall and inspect his own military forces. [69-73]

Once evening arrived, he would then dismiss the people and take council with his ministers with regard to friends, enemies,³⁰ and the unaligned, as is proper. With keen intellect he would consider the circle of kings, the eight types of fort, the increase of the treasury, the protection of his subjects, the eradication of seditious persons, and the distribution of powers of state. That great Asura thus ruled his kingdom, free from the eighteen faults. [74-76cd]

In time he produced a son, the mighty Asura by the name of Vajradaṇḍa. Having completed all of the [*saṃskāra*] rites according to precept, beginning with conception (*garbhādhāna*), he reached maturity. One day he appeared before his father. [76ef-77]

Vajradaṇḍa said:

“Father, I must make something known, but please do not fault me. There may be something worthwhile in my words; good counsel might be taken from me. There are kings endowed with military powers who wish to conquer other kingdoms, but such is not the case with you, oh foremost of Danus.” [78-79]

Having heard those words of his respectful son, the laughing Ghora responded in a pleasant and resounding voice. [80]

²⁸ The *brahmā muhūrta* is the time before dawn.

²⁹ I read *tato* from the Tarkaratna edition rather than *hato*, which is offered in the other versions.

³⁰ Rather than *-śāstravān*, I translate the variant *-śātravān* from the Tarkaratna edition.

Ghora said:

“Clever one, having overcome all physical impediments by means of severe austerities, I obtained this kingdom by the grace of the imperishable [Viṣṇu]. To this day, oh mighty one, I worship that deity who is honored by all the gods, who annihilates all enemies. He has granted me successes, sovereignty, sons such as you, and my wife Candralekhā. That omnipresent one protects me. I ask for nothing more than this utmost kingdom of Kuśadvīpa, this heaven where I worship Keśava.” [81-84]

In this way he advised his son who had grown desirous of kingdoms, oh sovereign of the gods. Then his minister, a Dānava named Suṣeṇa, went to him. [He said:] “Lord of Asuras, I must speak about the thoughtfulness of your son.” Then that minister who was learned in all manner of knowledge addressed him. [85-86]

Suṣeṇa said:

“If a king becomes complacent after acquiring his own dominion – even if that kingdom is successful and wealthy – it will quickly fall into decay. There the king who is knowledgeable of polity and capable of prosperity should foster the desire for distant realms and the wish for wealth. Sages seeking refuge in the forest want to take up garments of bark, but certainly kings who are rulers of earth are not said to desire such articles. They rule the earth without [excessive] discipline and from the power of beneficence. But you, king, have taken up a vow and are intent upon the propitiation of Keśava. Possessed of his grace, you have received the command, ‘Defeat the enemies!’” [87-91]

Due to the rising fire of the minister’s speech about the illuminated good, the mind of the Dānava lord turned toward fulfilling the vow. In the month of Pauṣa he completed the twelve day rites that destroy all defilements, completing them by offering a pot of ghee, oh Śakra. Then Janārdana, the god of gods, manifest before him, displaying his shining body, four-armed and robed in yellow. Upon perceiving him, the mighty Ghora lauded Hari with a hymn. [92-95]

Ghora said:

“Honor to you who are robed in yellow, holding the conch and discus. Honor to you who wield the mace, bow, and sword, and who are praised by all of the gods. Honor to you who bore the three strides as the gentle dwarf, and who as the slayer of Madhu are the enemy and attacker of Daityas. Honor to you who support the good fortune of Śrī. Oh all-pervading one, through the bestowal of your *tejas* I will conquer all enemies, just as you must do in heaven, oh lord of gods.” [96-98]

Having considered, from his compassion [Viṣṇu] granted him the punishment of the guilty, the honoring of the righteous, the just accumulation of wealth, the protection of friends, and the destruction of the enemy. Once he presented this boon, Hari vanished once more. Proud from receiving another boon, [Ghora] became possessed of power and great arrogance. He then sought counsel with the assembly of all his ministers as well as his wife. [99-101]

Having given much abuse to the east, he subdued the enemy power; thus that merciless one conquered the king named Atibala. He conquered [the kings] named Saubala and Ugra in the Southeastern and Southern directions, as well as the mighty [kings] named Kāla and Vāruṇya in the Southwest and West. His son conquered those who were settled in the Northwest, as well as

Anuhrāda and Mahāhrāda in the North and Northeast. Thus having conquered all of the kings, he took control over all the earthly continents. [102-104]

**Thus is the second chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Instruction of Indra by Brahmā.”**

Chapter Three

The king of gods said:

“Oh lord who is supreme amongst all the gods, who has mastered the meaning of all the Śāstras, with the goal of a boon your praise has been undertaken for [the sake of] narration, oh heavenly one. Brahmā, I [want to hear] that ancient tale you – who are considered eminent amongst the gods – were relating about the [boon] received from Janārdana by that one desirous of heaven.³¹ You are to be praised by all the gods; you are to be worshiped as supreme among gods. Thus taking your refuge, I have devotedly approached you, the creator.” [1-3]

Brahmā said:

“This is true,³² supreme sovereign of gods – I have been devotedly worshiped by you. Because of that, I will indeed tell you³³; listen to me as I speak. Previously, the continent of Kuśa had been acquired by the mighty [Ghora], along with Jambu, Śāka, Krauñca, Śālmālī, and Puškara. Thus the seven continents were seized by him, oh king of gods. The earth along with the seven oceans of saltwater, milk, curds, ghee, sugarcane juice, wine, and sweet water were conquered, his own authority provided through the bestowal of the boon. [4-7]

Oh Śakra, once the control of earth had been established, Vajradaṇḍa and the principle commander, Kāla, commenced war with the underworlds. They went to address that first great netherworld where the Nāga lord Ananta himself dwelled, along with the mighty Kulika, Elāpatra, Mahānāga, and Drṣṭiviṣa, and where the Rākṣasas Vikāta, Śūkarāśya, and Lohitākṣa abided, as well as the great Asuras Nadana, Nandana, and Br̥ṅgu. When those Nāgas, Rākṣasas, and Dānavas saw those earthly warriors, they prepared a mighty army and entered into a magnificent battle. The army of Vajradaṇḍa and the forces of Kāla were destroyed by those brutal Nāgas, Rākṣasas, and Dānavas. Having seen their army defeated, the mighty Kāla conjured Gāruḍī Māyā while Vajradaṇḍa summoned Bhairavī Māyā. When those Nāgas, Rākṣasas, and Dānavas observed [this], they were immediately terrified. They made obeisance, sought refuge, and thus came under their subjection. [8-14]

I say, oh Śakra, having conquered those royal lords of Pātāla and usurped their abodes, the Asuras Kāla and Vajra[daṇḍa] went to Rasātala. The Dānavas Hilihila, Bhadra, and Ghorarūpa were there, as were the great serpents Śaṅkhaṇḍa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and Vidyūnmālī, as well as the Rākṣasas Vidyūjjihva, Hiraṇya, and Andhakāra. All of these Nāgas, Rākṣasas, and Daityas became alarmed when they saw those mighty ones. Frightened by them, they bowed to them without undertaking war. [15-18ab]

Having placed them in submission, they came once more to the netherworlds where the Dānavas Tārākṣa, Śiśupāla, and Abhaya, the powerful Nāgas Kambala, Takṣaka, and Padma, as

³¹ The translation of verse 2 remains questionable due grammatical inconsistencies in the text, such as multiple subjects, atypical case usage, and an unreconciled relative-corerelative clause.

³² None of the available readings (*satyedam*; *satye tam*; *satyevam*) are grammatically precise, though the general meaning is clear.

³³ I employ the variant *kathayāmyeva* from the Tarkaratna edition rather than *kathayāmyeṣa* or alternative *kathayāmāsa* from the other versions of the text.

well as the flesh-eating [Rākṣasas] Yamadaṇḍa, Ugradaṇḍa, and Viśālākṣa dwelled. These were extremely vicious Daityas, Rākṣasas, and Pannagas. When the two earth-born warriors saw them, they quickly approached and undertook battle with swords, nooses, hooks, and clubs. Thus they conquered³⁴ that army of the Nāga, Rākṣasa, and Daitya lords, who all fell into submission due to Kāla and Vajra[daṇḍa]. [18cd-22ab]

Then those two mighty, fearsome ones went to the Śarkarā netherworld. The strong Daitya kings Mahiṣa, Yama, and Kāla,³⁵ the sovereign Urugas Padma Karkoṭa, and Śaṃkukarṇa, as well as the night-walking [Rākṣasas] Mahodara, Mahākāya, and Mahābhujā dwelled there in Śarkarā. Having conquered them, [Vajradaṇḍa, Kāla, and their forces] went to another place called Gatasta. The Asuras Śumbha, Tārākṣa, and Baladarpita, born of Danu, the serpents Kulika, Sauvarṇa, and Dhanañjaya, and the night-walking [Rākṣasas] Ugrarūpa, Akṣibhadra, and Virupākṣa were overcome just by the sight of them. [22cd-26c]

Then they went to the Rasā netherworld, where Kālanemi, Hiraṇyākṣa, and Niśumbha, the Urugas Pauṇḍarīka, Duṣprekṣya, and Śvetabhadra, as well as the flying [Rākṣasas] Meghanāda, Mahānādī, and Piṅgalākṣa dwelled. Those mighty, courageous ones merely stood, astonished. When those two strong and proud earth-born warriors suddenly glanced [at them], all of those Daityas, Rākṣasas, and mighty Urugas were struck with bewilderment. Having become subject to their command, they made repeated obeisance. [26d-30ab]

Having conquered the Rasā netherworld, the two proceeded to another, where the great Asuras Jarāsindhu, Mahāsindhu, and Virocana, the Urugas Airāva, Aśvatara, and Piṅga, as well as the mighty Rākṣasas Mālya, Mārīca, and Kumbha dwelled. Having taken over that place, those two powerful chastisers named Vajra[daṇḍa] and Kāla, those sons of Ghora endowed with might and learned in all the Śāstras, then defeated those kings of the netherworld according to the precepts illumined by Uśanas.³⁶ Having brought them all under their own authority, the two returned to the surface of the earth, where the mighty Bhārgava³⁷ continuously dwells, settled in the city of Udumbara in the central region of Madhyadeśa on the continent of Jambu. [30cd-34]

**Thus is the third chapter of the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Conquest of the Netherworlds,”
in “The Instruction of Indra by Brahmā.”**

³⁴ The verse here employs the gerund form as a finite verb, which is a common feature of the text.

³⁵ Though the first half of verse 23 employs singular forms of the nominative, the commentaries suggest that it refers to three separate Daityas, which fits with the trend of trios throughout this passage.

³⁶ Uśanas (also known as Śukra) is guru to the Asuras.

³⁷ Another name for Śukra.

Chapter Four

Brahmā said:

“Then the burly and powerful Vajra[daṇḍa] and Kāla inquired of Bhārgava, lord of planets, son of Bhṛgu: “Oh lord, we were impelled to victory by our father. Having traveled to the regions of every direction, we have conquered the seven continents of earth as well as the seven netherworlds. The subjects thus reside under our dominion, subject to the king’s command. Now we have come here to you. By what means may I defeat those headed by Indra and thereby conquer heaven? You are accomplished in all knowledge. Tell me this.” [1-4]

Śukra said:

“All of Jambudvīpa and the terrestrial continents are easily attained, as are all of the underworlds, but heaven is won with difficulty. Residing there are the divine lord Hara who is esteemed amongst all the gods, Viṣṇu whose essence pervades all, as well as Brahmā who is skilled in Veda. The intellectual Bṛhaspati who has toiled over the meaning of the Śāstras is there, as are the mighty Indra, [Kubera] the giver of wealth, Vahni, Nirṛtī, Vāyu the wind, Yama, Candra, Divākara, the Viśvedevas, the [eight] Vasus, the [eleven] Rudras, as well as the planets, stars, and other heavenly bodies. [5-8]

Protected by dharma, heaven cannot be conquered, Kāla. Rule the earth and the netherworlds according to the prescriptions of kingly dharma; otherwise, the kingdom obtained by means of dharma will fall into destruction. Just as the conflict between cat and mouse or crow and owl, just as the clash between buffalo and horse or elephant and lion, thus battle between you and the gods is said to have only one outcome. [9-11cd]

Those kings who battle without comprehending the financing of war, the time and place, or the military might of both themselves and the enemy proceed to their own destruction, their faces turned away from prudence. Those kings who battle having understood that in war good policy and virility endowed with divine sanction are powerful, they undoubtedly obtain victory and the destruction of their enemies. As long as they remain alive, those [rulers] who follow proper conduct in due order shall retain steadfast custody of the earth with its cities, towns, mountains, and forest groves. They obtain kingdoms by means of dharma, and from dharma they shall be victorious in battle. [11ef-15]

But how shall the one who desires war with the gods Rudra, Brahmā, Indra, Keśava, Ravi, and Candramā triumph joyfully? Your foes the gods will never be driven off without battle. In battle, my child, there will be devastation, the annihilation of friends and relatives. In battle wealth, horses, elephants, and great armies will be lost. Even favorable circumstances are brought to misfortune³⁸ where Śaṅkara and Keśava appear.” [16-18]

Kāla said:

“Those mighty and fearsome Urugas headed by Ananta, their glances like venom, were conquered along with the Asuras and Rākṣasas who dwell in the underworlds. By no means can I be defeated by the great-souled Śaṅkara, much less by that pitiable Brahman [Indra], king of gods.

³⁸ The translation of 18c is uncertain (*same ’pi punarviṣame*).

If I have my companion Vajradaṇḍa and my sword in hand, who shall be my enemy in battle? He will be drawn into the noose of death, even if it be Brahmā or Rudra, honored by all the gods. The earth and the range of netherworlds have been overpowered by us; having received audience with you lord, now heaven will be obtained. Then there shall be victory, fame, and the opponents' total defeat. Oh tiger among planets, we are prepared. Please grant your consent." [19-24ab]

Having taken leave of Śukra, the two set out in the northern direction on the second day of the Uttara lunar mansion during the month of Śrāvaṇa. They went to the Nandana forest and there remained along with their entire army. Yamāntaka was positioned to the east of Meru, Ghora to the north, Vajradaṇḍa to the west, and Kāla himself to the south. Having encircled [the mountain] with scores of troops, they ascended to the palace of Yama, situated high on Meru, surrounded by several moats, and shining splendidly like the sun. [24cd-28ab]

There stood those mighty troops with clubs in hand, their dark gaping mouths dreadful. And Yama, mounted on his buffalo, held upraised his noose of death. Battling in a great war, that Dānava army was then rent apart by the mighty, great-souled Yamarāja. Having seen that [army] quickly defeated, [Yamāntaka] became inflamed with fury. Oh Śakra, a powerful and valorous roar was rising up. Devastating that army of Yama with his sharp sickle shining forth like the sun, it was as if elephants were trampling lotuses. The powerful Yamāntaka then created a mighty buffalo composed of great illusion (*māyā*) in order to bring about the downfall of Yama and his own buffalo. When Kāla and Kṛtānta³⁹ were overcome by that club-carrier, they too fabricated illusory beings singly, ten-fold, hundred-fold, thousand-fold, by the ten thousands, lakhs, and crores. Having discovered himself surrounded by them by the hundreds, Dharmarāja⁴⁰ abandoned his armies and weapons, and went to the palace of Pāvaka.⁴¹ [28cd-35ab]

There the enemy Ghora saw [Agni's] army, difficult to behold, mounted on rams. They all [entered] battle along with Vahni.⁴² That fire⁴³ rose up with innumerable flames, like the conflagration at the end of time. Oh Śakra, it immediately consumed the army of Vajradaṇḍa. That city of his [Agni's] was gleaming, its ramparts and gates blazing coppery red. Then many lakhs of Brahmans came forth with the oblation ladle in hand; by means of contemplation, they burned up all of the army led by Ghora. [35cd-38]

Witnessing this, Kāla directed Daṇḍin and Sarvaga⁴⁴ to extinguish [the flames] with rain brought forth from clouds of illusion. With these mind-born [rains] which quieted the conflagration,⁴⁵ he revived all the wounded. Thus quelled, the fiery energy (*tejas*) enlivened by the rage of Vahni rained down mud, moss, plantain trees, and blue lotuses. Having seen his army thus

³⁹ Yamāntaka.

⁴⁰ Yama.

⁴¹ Agni.

⁴² Agni.

⁴³ The subject and corresponding descriptors are here declined in the neuter rather than standard masculine.

⁴⁴ It remains unclear to whom the text is referring in 39b (*daṇḍinā sarvagena ca*). The Bangla and Hindi commentaries suggest that these are the names of other Asuras, perhaps including Vajradaṇḍa.

⁴⁵ The meaning of 40a is unclear; multiple variants – none of which are sufficient – suggest textual emendation or corruption. The translation therefore remains imprecise, though semantically faithful.

subdued by [Vajra]daṇḍa, the brilliant Pāvaka abandoned his pride and went to Indra's [residence] Amarāvati. [39-42ab]

Having been noticed by Indra, both Yama and Hutāśana⁴⁶ approached. Greatly agitated, he [Indra] mounted [Airāvata], that king of elephants who appears like a rising mountain, his body ornamented with vermillion red like the dawn, augmented by the sound of bells and jingles, adorned with fly whisks – a four-tusked mighty elephant who instills fear in the enemies of the gods. That mighty sovereign of the gods rose up with his *vajra* in hand, having placed [his charioteer] Mātali in front. [42cd-45c]

Having learned of this battle of the divine lord, the supreme Viśvedevas quickly approached, along with [the armies of] Viṣṇu, Varuṇa, Soma, Indra, and Candra; the wealth-giving Kubera, Candra, Vāyu, and Varuṇa themselves also came there, all eager for battle, their excellent weapons raised in their hands. Thus those thirty [gods] headed by Śakra were ready for war, oh Śakra.⁴⁷ When he learned of this, [Viṣṇu] himself, the god with the Garuḍa banner, arrived there. Having beheld that supreme Lord bearing the conch, discus, and mace, Indra devotedly fell at his feet and honored him with a hymn. [45d-49]

Indra said:

“Honor to you, supreme god among gods, the mighty one who comprises all divinity, who bears conch, discus, and mace, who is adorned with garlands of forest flowers. Oh you who are marked by the *śrīvatsa* curl, the great god whose breast is ornamented with the *kaustubha* jewel, the downfall of the gods' enemies, the lord of gods, the womb of Veda, honor to you. You are divine form as well as formlessness, oh you who bestow the fruit of Vedic sacrifice. You are the triumvirate [of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva] and the triple modes [of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*], oh god who annihilates the fear of devotees. Oh you who are equitable to friends, foes, and the unaligned, who are the downfall of troops of rogues, protect me oh lord of gods, you yellow-robed lord of the world. Oppressed by Dānavas, the gods take refuge with you. [Yama] the master of the *yamayajña*⁴⁸ and the radiant Vahni have been conquered. Thus I have appealed to you, lord. What shall I do? Please tell me.” [50-55ab]

Having listened compassionately to those words spoken by Śakra, the lord Viṣṇu responded, smiling: “Don't be afraid in my presence. Even if [Śiva], the ruling god among gods who bears Umā in half his body, shall come to your [side], oh lord of gods, nevertheless he would perish. But I will tell you the true reason; listen to it. [55cd-57]

Viṣṇu said:

“There was a great lord of Asuras named Dundubhi. All of the gods had been conquered by him due to the power of a boon from Brahmā. He was invincible against Brahmā, Sūrya, Yama, and all of us. Having conquered the gods, he in fact forced them to leave heaven, so great was his strength. That powerful one went to the mountains, and then saw the Mistress of Gods who inhabits

⁴⁶ Agni, the “oblation-eater.”

⁴⁷ This verse explicitly reveals the curious situation of Brahmā narrating a tale about Indra to Indra himself. One explanation is that these are Indras of different temporal cycles, and thus not one and the same.

⁴⁸ A particular sacrifice performed by those seeking mental vigor, worldly possessions, or sons. See Jan Gonda, *Vedic Ritual: The Non-Solemn Rites* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 470.

the body of Śaṅkara, her exceedingly beautiful form on the left side, honored by all the gods.⁴⁹ When he saw her, he became quite aroused, his mind afflicted with desire. He was about to speak to the Goddess when he was spotted by the god and immediately consumed by the fire born of [Śiva's] eye. By the wrath of that god of gods, the Dānava was turned to ashes along with his weapons, chariots, fierce soldiers, and mounts. Having seen him quickly reduced to cinders, the three-eyed god chose from among the red, yellow, white, and blue-black ashes, and then smeared the Goddess with the white ash. From the movement of his hands, he generated an expansive and polychromatic glow.⁵⁰ [58-65]

Having regarded that ascetic Umā who was honored by all of the gods, a shadow figure bearing all the auspicious marks arose there [from that light], a mighty one who entreated that second portion of God. Having recalled the great Asura Ghora, Umā then dealt a curse: “Go to earth, you wicked one. You are mighty though of poor conduct. Embodied with splendor like that of a dark blue cloud, you shall be Ghora.” Thus that mighty [Asura] caused fear among the gods, Asuras, and Rākṣasas. [66-69ab]

Having seen this, the god [Śiva exclaimed]: “What has the Goddess done? The defeated enemy has now risen up for our annihilation. It is never proper to advance the side of the opposition. One must distinguish delightedly between causal elements.⁵¹ Whoever compassionately spares [the enemy] is a fool headed towards destruction; but whoever assails them all completely cannot be uprooted. He shall become strong, and shine forth like the jujube tree. You are of weak intellect. This [Asura] slain by me is now a destroyer of gods, and he causes fear among the Brahmins and sages. The strengthening of adversaries of gods and Brahmins is not suitable. Oh foolish girl, you always abide by a woman's nature.” [69cd-74]

Thus addressed by Śambhu, the Goddess was angered. Looking towards that [Asura, she said]: “Having become the best of my devotees, you will conquer all the gods. As one who remains supremely affectionate toward Viṣṇu, you will become invincible. You will reside in the city of Candraśobhā on the continent of Kuśa. Having become commander of the seven continents [of earth], the seven netherworlds, and the seven worlds along with heaven, you will be unconquerable.” [75-77]

Having heard that improper speech of the Goddess, [Śiva] became enraged and delivered a curse: “You too will go to earth, where this wicked one will solicit [you] for marriage.” Inflamed by the fire of anger, [the Goddess] cursed that supreme Asura ruler, whose appearance resembled a dark cloud and Yama's buffalo: “Frolicking, seated on my lion, I will destroy you.” Thus the angry Goddess spoke, and thus Śiva spoke to her. [78-80ab]

Oh chief of gods, thereby he was previously formed by Śambhu, born of the body of Dundubhi. Having become attentively devoted to me, that dweller of the city of Candraśobhā began to conduct my worship. His difficult instruction was accepted even by Brahmins. If that Dānava named Ghora

⁴⁹ The Tarkaratna edition includes an additional half verse not present in the other publications.

⁵⁰ Verses sixty-four and sixty-five are loosely translated with reference to the vernacular commentaries due to unclear language in the Sanskrit. An acknowledged lacuna in the Tarkaratna edition suggests textual loss and alteration.

⁵¹ This translation of the first half of verse 71 is uncertain.

has once again grown powerful by means of every effort, then he shall suppress even Rudra and the rest.” [80cd-82]

Having heard those words of Hari, [Indra said]: ‘What shall I do, oh lord? Tell me. By you heaven was given to me and by you all the sacrifices are protected. You are supreme among lords; you are the chief guardian of the gods.’ Thus addressed, Viṣṇu said: “Listen attentively, oh Śakra.” Then Bṛhaspati, the erudite lord of speech, arrived there. [83-84]

Bṛhaspati said:

“Merely by his command, all of the gods accompanying Bhāskara⁵² and joined by the Vasus were quelled like fire by rain. Who shall be able to overthrow him and his army in battle, if even Brahmā and Rudra are excluded from proper means of conciliation?⁵³ He is invincible to all of the gods, as was granted by you, lord. He is a thorn of an enemy to all the gods, as was previously determined by Umā. He understands the principles of all weapons and he is fully devoted to dharma. Oh lord, his wife is virtuous, the utmost devotee. [85-88]

Following the path of dharma, he is the guardian of the worlds and protector of the people. Myriads of great kings have been overcome [by him]. His fourfold [troops] of rutting elephants and wild horses are all like moving mountains resembling Airāvata. He possesses the Nārāyaṇa weapon, the Brahmā weapon, the Śaiva and Vāruṇa, as well as others. How shall such an enemy be defeated? He converses individually, appropriate to time and place. He is liberated from the faults produced by fear or born of anger. He understands each of the seven.⁵⁴ He possesses the highest of virtues. Just as the battle between horse and buffalo, cat and rat, crow and owl, or snake and mongoose, oh lord, you will not succeed in war.” [89-93]

**Thus is the fourth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Words of Bṛhaspati,”
in “The Instruction by Brahmā.”**

⁵² Sūrya.

⁵³ The text employs the word *sāma[n]*, which along with *dāna*, *bheda*, and *daṇḍa* makes up the four *upāyas*, or means of success against an enemy.

⁵⁴ It remains unclear what is indicated here by the number seven; it could perhaps be referencing the seven primary branches of yoga.

Chapter Five

The Lord said:

“Oh Br̥haspati, erudite lord of speech, you alone are able to know truth; you are judicious in the proper manner of all things. He who is learned in the song⁵⁵ of Śambhu as well as those of Uśanas and himself, who knows the song of Brahmā and my own, he is the master of words. Who could not be defeated by you, the great-souled lord and advisor of Indra? With effort even trident-wielding [Śiva] could be defeated by you. The six royal courses of action that are chief of all virtues are difficult to know even for great-souled yogīs, but ministers must speak of alliances, etc. He who comprehends the various means of forming alliances as well as the ailments arising from *doṣa* imbalance remains a vital and valuable healer of two kinds [– minister and physician]. Venerable one, you know what is proper for the three periods [of past, present, and future]. You are proficient in all realms of knowledge. Tell what should be done with regard to the chief of gods.” [1-6]

Br̥haspati said:

“Oh god of gods, chief of gods who bears conch, discus, and mace, my intellect is your gracious intellect; I possess no knowledge of my own, oh destroyer of Asuras. There is a feeling in your presence, oh lord of gods, that whatever we say to you great-souled one is like an unchaste woman speaking to a virtuous wife. It is your speech possessed of virtue that has come forth from my mouth; thus have I [advised] the chief of gods regarding advantage and disadvantage, oh lord. If the gods seek happiness, then let them act under your authority, as long as the three-eyed god [Śiva] and the Goddess who dwells in the Vindhya mountains are pleased by his words.” Thus having conferred, Śakra, Viṣṇu, and Br̥haspati then sent forth Nārada into Vajradaṇḍa’s domain. [7-11]

Viṣṇu said:

“You possess great ascetic power, oh divine sage, lord of Brahmans, son of Brahmā. Having approached that enemy of the gods, the son of Ghora, speak to that scoundrel.” On the command of Viṣṇu, Nārada went where that Asura was stationed. Having seen that sage approaching, Kāla and Vajra[daṇḍa] honored him. [12-13]

Nārada said:

“Oh mighty Vajra[daṇḍa], son of Ghora, the gods abide under the authority of you along with Kāla. Even those Brahmans fully devoted to Viṣṇu who have conducted one hundred sacrifices have come under your command. But the Goddess seeks to destroy you. Rule heaven and earth until the God and Goddess bring about your death.” Having thus established the dominion of Ghora over Indra, Agni, and the other gods in heaven until the sixtieth [day], Br̥haspati and Viṣṇu went where Pitāmaha⁵⁶ was stationed. [14-16]

**Thus is the fifth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Hari and Br̥haspati Reach the Abode of Brahmā,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

⁵⁵ *gītā*.

⁵⁶ Brahmā.

Chapter Six

Brahmā said:

“Honor to you, lord whose form is that of the world; essence of the cosmos, honor to you. Oh one who maintains all the gods, glorious one, lord of the Vasus, honor to you. Honor to you who are the cause of past, present, and future, but are yourself without cause. You are eternal, oh one who is the underlying impetus of beginning, middle, and end. One whose form is the fish, honor to you. Oh Lord who bears the earth as a tortoise, who becomes a boar, who is a royal man-lion, honor. Honor to you, lord of all gods, the one regarded as the essence of Vedānta. Honor to you who are the dwarf. Honor to you who are Rāma. Lord of the Vasus, honor to you. Honor to you who are embodied as Kṛṣṇa. [1-4]

Honor to you who are the essence of existence, oh bright one whose form has arisen as pure intellect. Honor, oh you who are free from enmity and anger, robed in saffron garments [as the Buddha]. Oh you who are mounted on a horse, the arbiter of dharma in the *kali yuga*, you are mighty. You support the sky-clad, oh lord who promotes the dharma of *śūdras*. Honor to you who are the manifestation of Kalki, who eradicates the multitudes of foreign classes, who advances the course of the *yugas* as the origin of time and the end of time. Honor to you who bestow whatever may be desired, oh chief among gods. That for which I yearn shall be mine, oh lord, because of you. Oh Keśava,⁵⁷ supreme of the gods, give assistance in my actions for achieving whatever future things are desired.” [5-9]

Thus Viṣṇu was previously pleased by me, oh king of gods. He gave the boon of assistance in that which was desired, just as wished. Whoever shall present this hymn to Viṣṇu in the morning after waking, at midday, and in the evening shall have his desire fulfilled. He who wishes for a son receives a son; he who wishes for wealth receives wealth; he who wishes for knowledge receives knowledge; he who desires happiness shall be filled with happiness.” [10-12]

**Thus concludes “The Hymn to Viṣṇu,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess,”
in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*.**

Brahmā said:

“Previously you were addressed thus by me, lord Janārdana. That supreme boon of the Asuras should not have been granted, Destroyer of Madhu. Due to an excess of pride, those Asuras who obtained the boon now oppress the gods, and are destroying the Brahman’s sacrifices intended for the gods.” Then cow-obtaining Brhaspati, lord of speech, [said]: “Oh mighty Brahmā, such is the case. Let [us] consider the downfall of the Asuras.” [13-15]

Brahmā spoke [to Viṣṇu]:

“You alone know all, oh supreme among gods. Tell what must now be done; surely there’s no fault in this, Triple-strider. This [incident] occurred in a previous *kalpa*, during the Bhautya *manvantara*, oh Hari. He who is the supreme god of gods, he is the primary cause; Śiva is

⁵⁷ Viṣṇu.

omnipresent, all-pervading, without beginning or end. According to his desire, you lord were established as the maintainer [of the cosmos], oh chief of gods. [16-18]

The mighty and courageous son of Kālāgnirudra named Hālāhala abided on the peak of Rudrapāṣāṇa.⁵⁸ Having perceived that terrible son approaching, blazing like a second Pāvaka,⁵⁹ you lord struck him with a mallet. Then this fire inflamed by pure anger was roused. The flames arising from his exhalation manifest in the ten directions. You were bewildered and I became afraid. I invoked Rudra, resplendent with his skull-staff in hand. That one who is the essence of origination, who grants boons to those accomplished in meditation, for the sake of our protection and for the quieting of the flames then summoned Cāmuṇḍā, whose appearance was like the fire of destruction at the end of time. By merely viewing her, those flames [of Hālāhala] were pacified. [19-24]

Then the fire Hālāhala said to the god: “Tell me, Viṣṇu, why have you struck me?” Having been entreated by you, lord, that oblation-conveyer went where shining Kāl[āgni] had been residing.⁶⁰ That Rudra famed as Kālāgni was then informed by him, and said, “Tell me the reason for my disturbance.” Then pervading all with his radiant multitudes of mighty flames, Lord, Kālāgni rose up for the burning of the world. But that brilliance of his was once again extinguished by the Goddess. Then, oh great god, you understood the might of *śakti* for the creation, maintenance, and destruction of the world. We subsequently pleased her with a hymn of great devotion, oh Mādhava. [25-30]

Viṣṇu and Pitāmaha said:

“Honor to you, who extinguishes the frightful splendor of Kāla’s many flames; who arises like a blue moon, dark destruction, or fresh clouds; who appears red like vermillion, lotus tendrils, or coral; who manifests yellow like the lotus, dawn, or gold; whose brilliance is white like the conch, milk ocean, clouds, snow, or jasmine; who brings about creation and destruction; whose fearsome form shines; who enlivens Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Yama, Śakra, Candrar, and Sūrya; who protects the lord; who is honored as the essence of air, water, and fire. [31-34]

You, Śivā, are unitary, manifold, tenfold, and hundredfold, oh you who repeatedly effect the various causes that give rise to meaning of utterances and material things. You are the great delusion that snares one in death, and you liberate from the binds of destruction, oh you who establish the various natures of gods, Asuras, men, and holy sages. Oh you who exist as domestic animal, forest animal, bird, amphibian, grass, and man, you are Brahmā, Prajēśa,⁶¹ and Soma. Among existents, you are Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Piśācas, and Gandharvas, oh Goddess who is both cause and effect. [35-38ab]

⁵⁸ The text is unclear about the specifics of *rudrapāṣāṇa*. Perhaps it indicates the name of a specific place (“Dreadful-stone”), or the mountain dwelling of Rudra(s). The Bengali and Hindi commentaries suggest that it specifies a diamond mountain (*vajramaya pārvata*), apparently drawing on the alternative meaning of *rudra* as “shining, glittering.”

⁵⁹ Agni.

⁶⁰ Verse 26 seems to have undergone emendation that has rendered an indistinct meaning. The fourth *pada* is especially problematic.

⁶¹ Śiva Prajāpati.

Among measures of time you are *lava*, *spanda*,⁶² *truti*, *meṣa*, and *muhūrta* moments.⁶³ [You abide] in the *kalā* division of the day as well as the *yāmā* and half *yāmā* divisions. [You abide] in the dawn, day, and night, in the fortnight, month, and several seasons, in the half year and the entire year. [You abide] in the beings of men, the [Asura] enemies of the gods, and in us [gods] headed by Brahmā. [You abide] in the causes of creation, maintenance, [and destruction] during the various *kalpas* and *mahākalpas*. [38cd-40]

Oh you who know the performance of *vidyās*, [you abide] in the power of the mantras which are the essence of the divine *puruṣa*, as well as in the recitation of Veda and Vedānta. [You abide] in mantras and Tantras, in fiercely gruesome Kuṣmāṇḍa demons and Bhūta spirits, in word and valid means of perception, and in Siddhānta, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Āgamas. [You abide] in the Śāstras of Astrology and Vedas, the Kāla and Gāruḍa Śāstras, as well as those regarding elixirs and other medical treatments and those about the oceans of rivers of words. [41-43]

You pervade all actions, oh you who effect all states. Certainly your virtues in all arenas cannot be mentioned, oh Goddess. Your fame as the doer of all actions is constantly promoted. You are the praiser and you are the praise; you are the knower and the knowledge. Who is the praiser? Whose praise is done by people past, present, and future? You are speech and that which speaks.” The supreme Goddess was pleased and granted a boon to them both. [44-47ab]

The Goddess said:

“Oh Kṛṣṇa and Brahmā, I am pleased with you both. Request a boon.” Having considered, I then [said]: “Be an ally, oh virtuous one! In whatever *kalpa*, *manvantara*, or *yuga*, you will appear, oh Goddess, such that creation, maintenance, and destruction are brought about.”⁶⁴ Having said, “Thus it shall be,” she suddenly disappeared. In time, having heard that hymn, the fruit of praise shall be granted. He who devotedly recites this narrated hymn that was prepared by Brahmā and Viṣṇu – whether god, Gandharva, Yakṣa, sage, Brahman, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, Śūdra, or woman – or who hears it or even thinks it, shall attain all that is desired. [47cd-52]

There will no longer be [troubles of] the planets, Kuṣmāṇḍa demons, Bhūta ghosts, Rākṣasas, Piśāca goblins, Pūtānā, or wicked Nāgas, serpents, or Gonasa snakes. Those powerful and terrible afflictions born of the new moon or ghosts will be calmed, as will diseases arising from wind, bile, and phlegm [imbalance]. Dreadful poisons – whether vegetal, unnatural, or arising from fangs and claws – will immediately vanish, as will infectious plagues. Crimes committed such as slaying a Brahman or murdering one’s teacher, father, friends, relatives, mother, son, or daughter, all will be eradicated. From listening devotedly [to this hymn], one destroys sin and receives the benefit of ten Rājasūya sacrifices and one hundred Agniṣṭoma sacrifices. From hearing [it] one obtains the benefits accomplished through all manner of donations, vows, and the rest. That man is released from all sins and is absorbed into the Goddess [at death]. [53-58]

**Thus is the sixth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Hymn Performed by Brahmā and Viṣṇu.”**

⁶² The texts read *syanda*, but the commentaries instead suggest *spanda*.

⁶³ All are brief moments of time (though *muhūrta* may also be a longer period of 48 minutes, a thirtieth of a day).

⁶⁴ The grammar of verse 49ab is problematic, though I believe the translation is sound.

Chapter Seven

Brahmā said:

“Thus the Goddess was previously pleased by you, oh best of gods. She [said]: “You will gain all that is to be done from Śaṅkara.” Having approached that great god who manifests as cause and effect, Govinda pleased that one who was suitable for slaying Ghora and [Vajra]daṇḍa. Hence the greatest among gods, Viṣṇu and Brahmā, went where that god who is the subject of yogīs’ meditation dwelled. The Brahman and Mādhava fell at his two feet. Viṣṇu gazed at the three-eyed Śiva, his manifest body visibly adorned on the left side by Śakti. Brahmā observed a multitude of Viṣṇus, and understood this to be accomplished by the *dhyāna*⁶⁵ of the trident bearer. Acknowledging that he is master over all enterprises past, present, and future, he was pleased with a hymn glorifying his names. [1-6]

“Victory to you who are the basis of the triple causes, oh one who remains intangible, supreme, and eternal, who is practiced in *dhyāna*, who is the highest perception, and who is the witness of the three *guṇas*.⁶⁶ Victory! Oh you who are the truth which we must apprehend, oh chief of gods. Victory to you who are the form of ether, wind, fire, water, and earth. Victory! Oh you who are the subtle elements and who grant the [five] organs of action and [five] senses of perception. Victory to you who are the essence of intellect, mind, self-consciousness, primary nature (*pradhāna*), and the primeval soul (*puruṣa*). Victory! Oh you who awaken the knowledge of various fine arts and the multitude of *rāga* melodies. Victory! Oh you by whom Śakti is governed, that power that is the origin of *vidyās*.⁶⁷ [7-10]

Victory! Oh you who destroy as the conflagration at the end of time, who are the pervading omnipresence, and who bear the trident. Victory! Oh you who annihilate Ghora as well as the fearsome pair Kāla and [Vajra]daṇḍa. Victory! Oh you who wish to kill Andha[ka], Pṛthuskanda, Khaṭvā, and Ruru.⁶⁸ Victory to you who have suffered due to placing the profusion of dark poison in your throat. Victory! Oh you who are the destruction of Dānavas and who bear the water of the Gaṅgā in your matted locks. Victory to Śambhu! Oh you who scorched the triple cities and who incinerated Kāma. [11-12]

Victory! Oh you who are fond of the skull-staff and adornments of snake garlands. Victory! Oh naked lord of creatures. Victory to you who dwell in the cremation ground. Victory to you great-souled one clothed in damp elephant hide. Victory to you whose hand bears the trident and whose ears are pierced with thorns. Victory! Oh you whose belt is endlessly fashioned from [the Nāga] Vāsuki, conch, and lotus. Victory! Oh you whose ash-covered body hairs bristle at the touch of Gaurī’s breast. Victory! Oh you whose approach makes the earth tremble, oh god of gods, oh origin of existence. [13-15]

⁶⁵ Intense meditative practice. The commentaries suggest that he invokes the power of *māyā* by means of his contemplative abilities.

⁶⁶ The triple qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, which form the building blocks of material reality.

⁶⁷ *vidyā* here may be referencing knowledge generally, or the feminine-gendered mantras more specifically.

⁶⁸ Names of other Asuras whose downfalls will be narrated later in the text.

Victory! Oh you who are the great clamor and destruction. Oh Śambhu, Śaṅkara, Īśvara. Victory! Oh Rudra, oh Hara, oh frightful one, oh Sadāśiva who abides in truth. Victory to you who are the exalted supreme. Oh Puruṣa, oh lord of speech. Victory to you who are lord of creatures! Oh lord of all, oh terrific one, oh formidable one. Honor! Honor!" [16-17]

Thus praised, the god was pleased with Brahmā and Viṣṇu. [He said:] "Whatever is desired in your heart, oh Hari and Brahmā, request that boon." Having related the events just as they had occurred, [they said]: "Destroy Ghora and [Vajra]daṇḍa!" [18-19ab]

Thus addressed by them, Īśa considered and said: "She who is the unparalleled highest power, the yogic sleep of great-souled ones, has gone sporting in the Vindhya, mounted on her lion. She is established there as a portion of myself, the might of the supreme *śakti*, the embodiment of victory. Oh Brahmā, you and Viṣṇu should settle there as her servants. Four powerful and splendid guardians shall appear as the supremely mighty abodes of *R̥g*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva*; those knowers will become the embodiment and personification of those [texts]. They are goddesses, all with a *vīṇā* in hand and all with noose and hook upraised. They each possess a three-eyed face of white, red, yellow, or black. They are clothed in celestial silk garments and adorned with divine ornaments. Endowed with virtues such as thinness,⁶⁹ they are exceptional beauties, manifested desire. [19cd-25ab]

They are adorned with necklaces, anklets, bangles, jewels, and gems, with splendid, thick blue-black hair perfumed with musk which appears like snakes bound in a braid gliding down their backs, and with lustrous, sharply curved brows like half-moons. They have noses appearing like sesame blossoms and two fleshy ears, with doe-like eyes that are bright as the petals of a blue lotus blossom, and with lips resembling a ripe red *bimba* gourd, richly hued the color of coral. They have rows of gleaming teeth resembling jasmine buds, and they are delightful with their exquisite jaws, cheeks, and chins. They all are [endowed] with fleshy necks that resemble lines on a conch, and with perky round breasts, their necklaces falling in between. They have slender, hairless bodies, with tiny waists adorned by the triple fold and a deep, round navel winding clockwise. They possess splendid thick and fleshy buttocks, heavy and broad, and a captivating secret jewel of a clitoris, with a fair form like that of a fig leaf. They are resplendent with hips like the back of a tortoise, a magnificent private area, smooth and fleshy feet and ankles, lovely thighs like elephant trunks, hairless and free of veins, as well as splendid knees and legs of equal proportion. They are adorned with fair feet and hands which bear the various auspicious marks of the fingers and toes, properly established and successively diminishing from the middle. They possess proportionate, solid long arms, soft like lotus fibers. [25cd-36ab]

All of those goddesses are bewildering merely from viewing or touching [them]. Those goddesses – by whom even wise Dānavas are afflicted with desire – grant liberation to dispassionate sages and men. They protect all the gods during periods of great misfortune. If considered, invoked, or worshiped, those virtuous ones bestow whatever aim is desired. Bearing

⁶⁹ The Bangla and Hindi commentaries suggest that the phrase "*aṇimādiguṇaiḥ yutāḥ*" indicates that the goddesses possess the eight superhuman abilities (*aiśvarya*) of minuteness (*aṇiman*), lightness (*laghiman*), magnitude (*mahiman*), obtaining (*prāpti*), fiat (*prākāmya*), subdual (*vaśitva*), supremacy (*īśitva*), and suppression of desire (*kāmāvasāyitva*). While such an interpretation fits with the Tantric nature of the work, in this context of physical description *aṇiman* more likely refers to thinness as an ideal of beauty.

the form of young maidens, these illustrious [goddesses] are honored by the great [gods] and the rest. [36cd-39]

Among them is the Great Goddess of unparalleled power, who is herself cause and effect, the omnipresent immortal principle. She abides in all things. Oh Brahmā and Viṣṇu, she lords over you two. She who bears a beautiful, peaceful form also manifests as a frightful slayer of the gods' enemies. She is present in crores of separated divisions as the manifold [goddesses], though she is truly unitary. That great-souled one always reigns over our existence. She is chief among those four goddesses and she reigns over the gods. She is [the divisions of] *yuga*, *manvantara*, and *kalpa*. She is creation, maintenance, and destruction. She bestows the fruit of desired goals [not only] to sages such as Manu and Dakṣa who are knowledgeable of distinction and non-distinction, [but] to everyone.” Her vehicle was then fashioned by Brahmā, Hari, and Nātha. [40-44]

Brahmā said:

“Along with you, all of the gods and Gandharvas will abide in that vehicle; having been made to contain all of the gods, it will destroy the arrogance of enemies. Thus you, Keśava, will be rooted in the mane, Viṣṇu will abide at the neck, and all of the worlds will be the body.⁷⁰ An additional Mahādeva of dark form will accompany at the middle of the head. The Great Goddess will reside at the top of the brow, and Sarasvatī at the bridge of the nose. Six-faced [Kārttikeya] will be established at the wrists, and the Nāgas at its sides. The divine Aśvin twins will be at the two ears, while Śaśi and Bhāskara⁷¹ will be at the two eyes. At the teeth will be all of the Vasus, and Varuṇa will be settled on the tongue. The goddess Carcikā will be in the *hum* sound [of its roar], while Yama and Kubera will be at the two cheeks. The two twilights will be at the two lips, and Indra will reside at the nape. The stars will be in the folds of the neck, and the Sādhya celestial beings will be settled at its chest. The cruel demoness Pūtanā shall maintain its mental darkness in ferocity. Those goddesses the Mothers will be established in the in-breath, and the Fathers in the out-breath. The rays of the sun will be in its fur, and its beauty will be maintained by Śrī. Meru will be placed in the scrotum, the oceans will be settled in the saliva, and the rivers will be established in the perspiration, oh highest of gods. All of the Yakṣas siding with the gods shall be in the tail. Your strength and courage shall pervade it, oh lord of gods. Those devourers the Rākṣasas are to be established in it, oh divine lord, as are the divine vehicles of all [the gods]. [45-54]

In this way we shall have the utmost protection during the ocean of battle as well as in difficulties with enemies, Bhūtas, Rākṣasas, Vetālas, and the rest. There shall be protection for all those afflicted by the planets or the fear of misfortune, as well as for divine maidens, Kīṃnara girls, Apsarases, and one's daughters. There shall be protection of embryos, protection of mothers, and protection among pregnant women for the sake of sons.” [55-57ab]

Oh lord Śakra, then Druhiṇa⁷² made a request of Keśava, amiably speaking in just this manner: “Honor to the tawny-eyed, sunken-eyed Bhairava. Honor to you who bear a terrifying form, oh one who instills fear in gods and Asuras. Honor to the one clothed loosely in antelope hide, with skull-staff in hand. Honor to the one with dreadful garlands of skulls, whose cup is the head of

⁷⁰ The meaning of the first half of verse forty-six is slightly uncertain.

⁷¹ Candra and Sūrya, respectively.

⁷² Viṣṇu.

Brahmā and who abides in the body of Nārāyaṇa. Honor to the one who bears the sword and trident, and in whose hands are the mallet, axe, and the precious *pināka* bow. Honor to the one who sounds the *ḍamaru* drum of enlightenment, oh one whose hand bears the conch and mace. Honor to the one who resonates with great agitation, like shifting mountains. Honor to the one with *vajra* and discus in hand, oh terrible lord of the mountain. Honor to the one who thunders like mighty clouds, oh one whose piled up hair appears sublime. Honor to the one whose powerful electric tongue is like a fiery meteor, whose three eyes are Soma, Sūrya, and Agni, and who delights in various dalliances. Honor to the one who consumes many foods, who is pleased with various fares, and who enjoys meat, wine, fat, marrow, and the rest. [57cd-65cd]

Destroy. Cut down the multitude of enemies, oh mighty chief of the gods. Devour. Consume [them], oh fearsome bearer of the skull-staff and dagger. Entrap. Capture [them], oh one with mighty noose, oh destroyer of powerful enemies. Destroy the Daityas with your roar of *hāhāhuṃ*, oh one of great form, oh one of great stature, oh one who brings an end to all the enemies of the gods. Oh formidable Bhairava, oh Cāmuṇḍa, oh Ḍiṇḍimuṇḍa, oh one who bears matted hair. Annihilate [them]. Obliterate [them], oh one with the mighty discus, oh one with arrows in hand, oh Śaṃkara. Devour those headed by Jambhaka, Cāmuṇḍā, the Ḍākinīs, the Bhūtas, the Mothers, and any others on the side of the Dānavas, oh destroyer of Yama. Oh one with the *vajra*, spear, mighty club, sword, noose, and hook upraised, oh one with the mace and trident in hand, devastate all those tormentors. [May we] prosper, free of fever, possession, insanity, diseases of the demoness Śakunī, and all illnesses brought about by Nāgas, Kīṃnaras, or Gandharvas. Always soothe the sufferings of death, the harms of birth, the injuries of sin, and illness brought about by imbalance of *vāta*, *pitta*, and *kapha*, oh Bhairava. [65ef-72]

Mollify the impediments brought about through mantra and *yantra*, such as enmity, abandonment, killing, torpor, and attraction, oh highest of the gods. The one whose vehicle is the ox shall expel all afflictions prescribed by Atharva incantations, all curses inflicted by powerful ascetics, as well as all difficulties brought about through wicked speech. Suppress. Quell those who strike with dagger, spear, *bhūṣuṇḍi* weapon, discus, sword, *vajra*, fists, and the rest, oh resplendent god. May those other enemies with arrows of wood and stone go to the terrible and frightful peace [of death] during battles. Expel those [enemies] with poisonous fangs and terrifying claws. Drive back that supreme army of Kāla and Vajra[daṇḍa]. Slaughter those excellent ones in war, oh wrathful one. [73-78ab]

Oh god of gods, deliver me from fear of crocodiles, tigers, boars, lions, and rhinoceros. Protect me from thieves on the road. Guard me in oceans, rivers, lakes, groves, mountains, deep ponds, and the Vindhya forests. The mighty Śambhu protects from the front, trident in hand. The bull-bannered one who possesses the *pināka* bow protects from behind, arrow in hand. The great Rudra protects the sides, bearing the sword and shield. The mighty god protects in the sky, sounding out the bell and *ḍamaru* drum. Īśa protects in the underworld, adorning himself with Vāsuki. May Śaṃkara by the name of Śiva protect from fears everywhere. [78cd-83ab]

Having praised the great god thus, one receives whatever is requested. Oh Brahmā, whoever recites this regularly in the presence of the Mothers, in my temple or your pilgrimage sites, at meeting places and intersections, in fields, at ponds, on mountains, in forests, at the confluence of rivers, in the home, or at the sacrificial fire, he shall have no disease, sorrow, loss, or enemies. He

shall have no anxious fears of pain and fever, no ruin of cherished friends, nor untimely injury or death. One is released from all sins merely from hearing or reciting [it], or from maintaining [it] on birchbark pages or copper plates. Worshiping according to the *yantras*, books, and mantras grants whatever is desired. Sin from crimes such as brahminicide or drinking liquor shall be eliminated. From [its] skillful utterance, oh Brahmā, one receives the benefits of all ritual actions, all pilgrimages, ascetic practices, offerings, and all fasts. Śaṃkara protects, and all desired aims are accomplished. Whoever keeps this at home shall obtain happiness and respect.” [83cd-90]

Thus concludes “The Song to Śaṃkara for Protection.”

Brahmā said:

“Oh lord, once the lion had been prepared, it was presented to the Goddess. The Mothers headed by Jayā arose from the vitality of the [gods’] bodies. Commanded by the Goddess, they went to earth and remained on the great continent of Jambu, which grants the benefits of every enjoyment. They stayed in the Vindhya, king of mountains, where the water of the Narmadā froths and where accomplished sages dwell, freed from agitating desire. They remained there in order to slay the gods’ enemies, to benefit mankind, and to rescue devotees of all castes and stages of life. Those goddesses are equitable to *śūdras*, non-believers, and devotees. Worshiped or praised, they bestow the fruits of karma. So those respected and honored noble women remained on earth in the Vindhya, best of mountains, having been dispatched by Śambhu. Though omnipresent and pervading the seven continents of earth, they manifest there in the Vindhya, chief of mountains.” [91-97]

**Thus is the seventh chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Goddess’ Descent to the Vindhya.”**

Chapter Eight

Vajradaṇḍa said:

“Thus the earth, the netherworlds, and the mighty gods headed by Śakra have been subdued by us with the grace of Kāladeva.” The envoys went to the highest heaven and delivered this message. Hearing the intentions of Vajra[daṇḍa] and Kāla, Bṛhaspati addressed Brahmā and Vāsava.⁷³ [1-3]

Bṛhaspati said:

“It has been announced that Ghora, along with Kāla and Vajra[daṇḍa], has succeeded in being brought amongst you heaven-dwelling lords.” [4]

Brahmā said:

“Oh Viṣṇu, propitiate Nārada, who will deceive the Asuras. By him [Ghora] will be impelled into unrighteousness (*adharma*). His devotion to the Vedas, Brahman, and gods will be suppressed; even his wife will reject *dharma* and fall into unrighteousness. All of his subjects will delight in *adharma*, and will grant no peace. Do this by whatever means necessary, oh Mādhava.” [5-7]

As requested, Viṣṇu then commanded Nārada: “Oh intelligent child of Brahmā, you are proficient in all of the Śāstras. Go to Kuśadvīpa, oh Brahman, and propagate the impediment of *adharma*.” [Saying], “Thus it shall be,” that dark-bodied one was directed by them for the sake of the gods. By means of meditation practices from the Āgamas, that independent bull of a sage instantly reached Kuśadvīpa, where the mighty Asura king was residing. Having seen that utmost son of Brahmā approaching, the doorkeeper appeared before that frightful and courageous king Ghora. [8-11]

The doorkeeper said:

“Oh mighty king of kings! Nārada, son of Brahmā, stands at the gate. Shall I let him wait, oh lord, or let him enter?” Having heard that Nārada had arrived at the gate, his hairs suddenly bristling by the delight in his heart, the Danu king commanded the doorkeeper: “Oh doorkeeper, allow him to enter! That Brahman is the embodiment of Viṣṇu.” Having received the command, the doorkeeper ushered in Nārada. [12-14]

Ghora, who was chief of gods and Brahman, was a devotee of Viṣṇu. Upon seeing [Nārada], the king rose [from his seat] and fell to his knees, placing his head on the ground. Having devotedly made obeisance and having honored him with respectful reception, water, and a seat, [he said]: “Rest comfortably, oh lord of sages!” Thus addressed, Nārada spoke. [15-16]

“Rise, oh mighty king. Value enjoyment of the senses. Value attachment to desire, and always delight in amusement with women. Continued lordship and youthful women are to be enjoyed – this is the fruit that arises from propitiating the gods, oh king. It’s heard from the wise that the highest lord himself is always pleased [thus], oh great king, and that the three-eyed god of gods indeed goes to the wooded forest to sport with the daughters of sages. And he, oh lord, is the god

⁷³ Indra.

who proclaims the meaning of utmost truth. Hence even the supreme among all enjoys sensory pleasures, oh king. Furthermore, Lord Viṣṇu abides at the breast of Śrī. Candra, Indra, Sūrya, Brahmā – they all wish for pleasure. Therefore, desire reigns; the fruit of dharma is the sense object, oh king.” Thus addressed, oh Śakra, Ghora responded. [17-23ab]

Ghora said:

“Oh Nārada, surely this is not proper; liberation from sense objects is virtuous! Those who are controlled [with regard to the passions] are righteous, oh Brahman, whereas those who allow [them] to run rampant proceed to hell. The man who is a victor over the senses engages in discipline. One who inhabits the world with the passions subdued shall obtain the riches of dharma, joy, and the preservation of his character. Oh Brahman, such nurturing grants fruits in the present [on earth] and in the future [in heaven]. [23cd-26ab]

A disease is suppressed, certainly, through the employment of medicine; but attending to the senses merely incites them. A home set alight in a great fire, encircled by flames, is pacified by another [substance, namely water]. Inflaming the senses gives rise to severe burning, great heat, and the production of fiery *pitta*. Oh sage, the senses cannot be calmed through contact with cooling sandalwood; by plantain leaves, water lilies, lotus root, lotus blossoms, ice, sandalwood, and camphor the fire of desire blazes even more. [26cd-30ab]

A debt is settled only by payment; a fire is calmed only with water; enemies are quickly quelled only by being attacked. Oh Brahman, consider the destruction of these [senses] as pleasurable; the suppression of sense perceptions – sound, touch, taste, sight, and smell – as well as the organs of actions – voice, hand, foot, anus, and generative organs – is delightful. The grasshoppers, deer, fish, elephants, worms, and birds are immersed in each of the senses, and are thus subject to death. The man who serves the complex of senses and who is attached to worldly objects shall fall from supremacy like an uprooted tree. [30cd-34]

Women, drinking, sleeping by day, musical performance, dancing, gambling, roaming at pleasure, hunting, and singing – all of these are born of desire and worthy of reproach. Acrid speech, envy, indignation, wrath, wickedness, boldness, violating the property of another, and injury – these eight faults bring about one’s destruction. Gods, Vidyādhara, Yakṣas, Kimpurāṣas, Nāgas, men, animals, and birds all go to destruction in [attachment to] the senses.” That chief among men then understood that Ghora pursued right judgment, and so sought to ensnare him in the senses by means of a false dharma. [35-38]

Nārada said:

“Having conquered the armies of enemies, [the king] should protect the dominion according to dharma. Accordingly, he should marry the well-born widowed maidens; he will not be at fault. The kingdom is attained by dharma, and from the kingdom comes supreme sovereignty. Other women adorned with jewels are also to be enjoyed. According to your fate there is no fault in alcohol, intercourse, and meat. The gathering of friends, joyful conversation, and enjoyment of women are causes of delight. The regular performance of tantalizing stories and songs grants joy. [39-42]

Gentle moonbeams on the palace roof, pleasant baths of hot water, drinking milk, the best of women – these all bring about joy. Nandikeśvara said that engaging [in these] incites virility. Having enjoyed a hundred women, a man shall receive great fortune; with a thousand [women] he will be exceedingly fortunate; with ten thousand he will be a lord of wealth; with a lakh⁷⁴ he obtains desired divinity; and with a crore⁷⁵ he attains the position of supremacy. Prompted by Nandin’s inquiry, the sage Kapila, foremost among sages, previously related this instruction regarding the highest truth of desire, which is the essence of both Viṣṇu and Śiva. Thus the man who often makes love to eighteen-year-old maidens bearing luscious, perky breasts will attain immortality. [43-48]

Having become fat, feeble, bad-smelling, squint-eyed, disagreeable, deceitful, curmudgeonly, diseased, mute, unsuitable, and slow-moving, a man is ailed by his loss of virility. At that time, women should be sought with every effort, oh intelligent one. Thus depending on [women], men become vigorous. The intelligent believe that clarity, vitality, utmost dynamic strength, and long-life [are obtained]. And these are increased through engagement with the might of beauty, oh lord of Asuras. Then a man will be pleased, prosperous, capable of anything. Oh Asura, therefore there shall be no hindrance to one’s conduct, wealth, and pleasures. [49-53ab]

Oh mighty one, a mountain girl resides in the Vindhya range on Jambudvīpa. She is an eighteen-year-old maiden who bears all the marks of beauty. Oh king, she is fit for the female apartments of your dominion. Bring her here in order to preside over the three worlds with great power. All of the netherworlds are the root, the earth along with its mountains, forests, and oceans is the tree; and heaven is designated as the flowers. The Apsarases are its fruit and that girl is the seed of the fruit.” [53cd-56]

[Ghora] then adopted this false dharma according to the instruction of Nārada. Oh Śakra, he agreed to wed that maiden. [57]

**Thus is the eighth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Luring Ghora,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

⁷⁴ Equivalent to one hundred thousand (rendered as 1,00,000).

⁷⁵ Equivalent to ten million (rendered as 1,00,00,000).

Chapter Nine

Brahmā said:

“Due to the speech of Nārada, oh Śakra, that Asura became devoted to false dharma. He no longer respected Brahmans, nor honored the Vedas, nor worshiped the imperishable [Viṣṇu]. He no longer abided by the words of his ministers and guards, nor lay with any of his wives. He no longer attended to his multitudes of armies and military vehicles. He abandoned all the paths of dharma. With a desire for drinking, lovemaking, singing, and the practice of gambling, longing constantly arose in his heart. He engaged with the wives of others and considered his own wife a poisonous woman. He no longer perceived dharma. [1-4ab]

[Ghora thought]:

“The Brahman Nārada, that utmost of sages, is my only friend. He imparted to me this attachment to sensory pleasures which grants happiness and enjoyment. By what other means could I bring near the delightful wives of others, radiant and lovely with full and buoyant breasts. This is truly the fruit of dharma. The kingdom is prosperous; the cities, villages, and homes are splendid; the women are beautiful. Gods, Vidyādhara, Yakṣas, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara – all should remain intent on the joy of desire; women and a love of drinking should be sought. Surely I will do just as Nārada truthfully said: I will enjoy that mountain girl who is eminent amongst the gods.” [4cd-8]

Brahmā said:

“Oh Śakra, having learned that Ghora had taken up that conviction from Nārada, the eloquent [queen] Candrabuddhi sought council with the minister. [9]

Candramati said:

“Sir, just as my husband is the great king of [the city of] Candraśobhā, so you, prime minister, are the guardian of my husband. All of the sacred texts, systems of logic, and other types of knowledge reside in you. How could such a person forsake his path? The kingdom is dependent on the ministers; the king relies on good ministers. He protects the earth according to your wisdom; otherwise, misfortune shall befall. [10-12]

The king has acquired all of this earth, the netherworlds, and heaven with you[r assistance], sir. How could he not be dependent on you? When the minister learns that the king has become attracted to sensual pleasures in an error of judgment, then naturally he should demonstrate alarm. [He should say:] “Your sons, wives, ministers, and chief vassals are seduced [by the passions]; in my opinion, you do not observe your own livelihood.”⁷⁶ Surely the king’s minister should not always be agreeable. How would the kingdom thrive?⁷⁷ [13-16]

[The king] whose learned ministers fêted and do whatever the king says certainly will not sustain a stable kingdom; like a garland on the head of a monkey, [it would immediately fall]. The king

⁷⁶ The grammar in the second half of verse 15 is problematic, with numerous variants in each of the published editions. The Bangla and Hindi translators suggest, “Abide by my opinion, otherwise you will not be able to protect your own kingdom.”

⁷⁷ The second half of verse 16 exhibits irregular case/gender.

whose chief royal ministers, guards, judges, chefs, women, bed-makers, and givers of water and betel are of good conduct always enjoys happiness. Any variation and all will be destroyed, sir, like gravel disturbed in a dam. The performance of dharma or *adharma* by the king is dependent on the servants desiring his well-being. Otherwise, sir, it will be your hell. [17-20]

Just as straight and blemish-free bamboo rafters support a house, so do ministers support the kingdom through their adjudication. The mere words “*my kingdom*” are the conceit of kings; the kingdom is actually dependent on the writings of ministers. It cannot be otherwise, sir. I am a woman, so if something spoken by me has been unrefined, then please forgive me. Do not be angry at the foolish.” Thus Candrabuddhi delighted that minister of her husband. He responded with words of praise. [21-25a]

Suṣeṇa said:

“You are a goddess amongst the gods. With your words, you are an advisor in matters of prudence. Something needed to be said, but what you thought is not exactly the case. [The king] has carried out all the proper policies, has remained respectfully bowed⁷⁸ to gods and Brahmins, and possesses a wise and virtuous mind. How has he ended up on the wrong path? Now suddenly he acts however he desires, impelled by the words of Nārada last night. He no longer wants us. [Nārada told him] his dominion was presided over by a madman minister, who has him served by barren elderly women. He has questioned the legitimacy of the scholars and priests. Having thus become of that opinion, fair lady, he has taken up the path of Nārada. Come. Let us go to him and advise him.” Ignoring the guards, the queen and the minister went to [the Asura king]. Seeing [the two], though red-eyed with anger he spoke not a word. [25b-30]

Candramati said:

“Though he does not acknowledge us with speech, nevertheless something must be said. I have no concern for mistresses. He will never approach harlot women of unknown character; it’s heard that the supreme fear is that of poisonous women who generate terrible sin. That king who put faith in marked ascetics, naked mendicants both fierce and timid, sacrificial priests, Brahmins, and astrologers has quickly sunk down into distress. The wives of the washer, the Tāntrika, the oil grinder, the cane splitter, the florist, the fisherman, the fortune teller, the mendicant, should not remain long at the palace. In women such as the the lying-in woman, the courtesan, the enchantress, and the potter woman, certainly even Dharmarāja would be swayed by them and fall into destruction. Enjoying drink, girls, thrones, couches, and vehicles will no doubt lead the king into death, difficulty, and disease. Girls without the desire should never be enjoyed, and certainly should never be married, oh lord. Hear this bygone tale. [From it] you will understand impropriety, so listen and comprehend. [31-38]

Long ago there dwelled on the continent of Krauñca a king by the name of Sumedhas. Indeed, he had sixteen thousand wives. He possessed great wealth, and had all manner of armies and vehicles. He was enjoying this earth with its oceans and groves of forests, oh lord. He roamed for quite some time around the foremost continent of Śāka, sporting there pleasurably, oh lord. He heard that on the continent of Puṣkara there dwelled the daughter of a sage who was endowed with

⁷⁸ I read *-natejyakaḥ-* rather than *-nadejyakaḥ* in the second *pada*.

exceeding loveliness, possessed of all the marks [of beauty] and adorned with all the various ornaments. [39-42]

In time he traveled there, oh lord, but he did not see that ascetic sage. Only that beautiful and charming⁷⁹ girl was there, and he longed to marry her. He was afflicted with passion, perturbed, and lacking discretion. Even though she didn't desire him, he grasped her by the hand. That lovely and pleasant girl was weeping, but still he did not release her. Having enjoyed her, the king returned to Śākadvīpa. In time, the preeminent sage came back to Puṣkara. When he saw that dejected girl crying, he inquired, and all was told just as it had occurred, oh lord. Hearing this, the sage was seized by anger and he cursed that king. Sumedhas then went from the surface of the earth into hell. Oh lord of Asuras, I impede you not because of concern for mistresses, but because I desire your welfare and the prosperity of the kingdom." [43-48]

Brahmā said:

"When Nārada heard those words meant to bolster the intellect of Ghora, he began to recite the formidable and deluding Padamālā Vidyā." [49]

Śakra said:

"What is the manner of that fearsome *vidyā*? What is its power? What is its ability? In what manner should it be recited? How was that incantation – which is capable of deluding gods, Asuras, and men – obtained from Śaṅkara?" [50]

Brahmā said:

"Long ago, when Nandin propitiated the god of gods by means of great yogic discipline, he then saw before him that guru to the world. Viewing Śambhu, lord of gods, he thoughtfully considered and then requested this boon; listen. [51-52c]

Nandikeśvara said:

"I request from you, lord of gods who bears Umā in half his body, the great Padamālā Vidyā, which removes all hindrances and sins and which is honored by all the gods. Oh lord of the thirty, giver of boons, if you are pleased with me, then grant me the Padamālā for the benefit of the world." [52d-54]

Īśvara said:

"Long ago Śukra practiced severe austerities, desiring that incantation; but I did not grant it to him because he makes trouble for the gods. Now that you have requested, dear child, I will assent – thus it shall be given. Sit, concentrate your mind, and listen carefully. [55-56]

Om. Honor to you, oh Bhagavatī Cāmuṇḍā,
oh you who dwell in the cremation ground,
oh you in whose hands rest the skull staff and begging bowl,
oh you who sit astride mighty ghosts,
oh you whose neck is adorned with extensive garlands,
oh you who are the dark night of destruction,

⁷⁹ In verse 43, I read *bhadrarāmā* from both the Tarkaratna and Kandelaval editions.

oh you who are surrounded by numerous attendant *gaṇas*,
oh you who possess a beautiful face and many arms,
oh you who bear the bell, *ḍamaru* drum, and *kinḱiṇi* jingles,
oh you whose laughter roars,

kili kili huṃ.

Oh you with fangs set in a frightful darkness,
oh you who are addressed by various words,
oh you whose body is covered with elephant hide,
oh you who are smeared with blood and flesh,
oh you whose formidable tongue darts about,
oh you who are like a mighty demoness (*Rākṣasī*),
oh you whose gaping mouth sports frightful fangs,
oh you who laugh loudly and terribly,
oh you whose splendor is equal to darting lightning.

Proceed. Proceed.

Oh you whose eyes are like those of the *cakora* bird,⁸⁰
hili hili.

Oh you with lolling tongue,
*vīṃ.*⁸¹

Oh you whose face bears furrowed brows,
oh you who terrify with the fierce *huṃ* sound,
oh you who are enveloped by garlands of skulls and who bear the moon in a crown
amongst your matted locks,
oh you whose laughter roars,
kili kili huṃ huṃ.

Oh you whose gaping mouth sports frightful fangs,⁸²
oh you who destroy all obstacles,

Fulfill this deed. Fulfill.

Quickly make haste. Make haste.

Begin.

Destroy with the hook.

Enter.

Bind. Bind.

Agitate. Agitate.

Proceed. Proceed.

Incite. Incite.

Oh you who adore blood, meat, and wine,

Slay. Slay.

Crush. Crush.

Annihilate. Annihilate.

Kill. Kill.

Bring your diamond body. Bring.

⁸⁰ The *cakora* is a partridge-like bird whose eyes blaze red when viewing poisoned food.

⁸¹ The Tarkaratna version adds an *anusvāra* to *vī*, which is not present in the other editions.

⁸² The Tarkaranta version, which I've followed here, inserts an additional short portion between *-dhāraṇi* and *sarva-*.

Make known all that is contained in the triple world, whether it be seen or
 unseen, perceived or unperceived. Make known.
 Step forward. Step forward.
 Dance. Dance.
 Bind. Bind.
 Oh you with cavernous eyes,
 oh you whose hair is piled up,
 oh you whose face is like that of an owl,
 oh you who bears skulls, who are garlanded by bones,
 Burn. Burn.
 Ripen. Ripen.
 Seize. Seize.
 Enter the *maṇḍala*. Enter.
 Shall you be detained?
 By the truth of Brahmā, by the truth of Viṣṇu, by the truth of Rudra, and by the truth
 of the sages, make known. Make known.
kili kili mili mili.
 Oh you who exhibit an extraordinary form,
 oh you whose body is enveloped in black serpents,
 oh you who abides in all seizers,
 oh you whose lips hang pendulously,
 oh you whose nose is crooked,
 oh you with tawny, matted hair,
 oh Brāhmī,
 Eat. Eat.
 Oh you whose face displays a tongue of flame,
 Burn. Burn.
 Quake. Quake.
 Hurl. Hurl.
 Oh red-eyed one,
 Shake. Shake.
 Descend. Descend to earth.
 Grasp the head. Grasp.
 Close the eyes. Close.
 Eat. Eat the heart.
 Seize the hands and feet. Seize.
 Burst the *mūdrās*. Burst.
hum hum phaṭ.
 Cleave. Cleave.
 Split. Split with the trident.
 Kill. Kill with the *vajra*.
 Strike. Strike with the staff.
 Slice with the discus. Slice.
 Cleave. Cleave with the spear.
 Catch with the fangs. Catch.
 Split with the knife. Split.

Seize with the hook. Seize.
 Leap upon the *ḍākinī* who inflicts bodily pains and fevers daily, every other day,
 every three days, or every four days.
 Drive away those seizers. Drive away.
 Manifest. Manifest.
 Arise. Arise.
 Descend to earth. Descend.
 Seize. Seize.
 Come, Brahmāṇī.
 Come, Māheśvarī. Come.
 Come, Kaumārī. Come.
 Come, Vaiṣṇavī. Come.
 Come, Vārāhī. Come.
 Come, Aindrī. Come.
 Come, Cāmuṇḍā. Come.
 Come, Kapālīnī. Come.
 Come, Mahākālī. Come.
 Come, Revatī. Come.
 Come, Mahārevatī. Come.
 Come, withered Śuṣkarevatī.⁸³ Come.
 Come, ethereal Ākāśarevatī. Come.
 Come, oh you who move about the Himālayas. Come.
 Come, oh you who move about Kailāsa. Come.
 Split the utmost *tantras*. Split.
kili kili vicce.
 Oh you whose form is both terrible and pacific,
 oh Cāmuṇḍā,
 oh you who issued forth from the wrath of Rudra,
 oh you who brings about the destruction of Asuras,
 oh you who travels in the sky,
 Bind with the noose. Bind.
 Slice. Slice.
 Destroy.
 Abide. Abide.
 Usher in auspiciousness. Usher in.
 Seize. Seize.
 Bind the head. Bind.
 Bind the eyes. Bind.
 Bind the heart. Bind.
 Bind the hands and feet. Bind.
 Bind all the wicked seizers. Bind.
 Bind in front. Bind.
 Bind behind. Bind.
 Bind above. Bind.

⁸³ A goddess inimical to children.

Bind below. Bind.
Enter by means of ash, water, clay, or mustard seeds. Enter.
Annihilate. Annihilate, oh Cāmuṇḍā.
kili kili vicce huṃ phaṭ. [57]

Thus is that incantation (*vidyā*) called the Padamālā, honored by all the gods, for which Bhārgava went⁸⁴ into my belly long ago. Vexed by my curse, he stayed there for one hundred divine years. Due to her compassion, the Goddess in time grew benevolent. [She said:] “One by the name of Śukra will issue forth from your phallus. Oh lord of gods, this son of yours will be foremost, adept in all the *vidyās*.” Oh child, you should not convey this [*vidyā*] to those who are not devoted or to those who have not yet conquered sensory delights. Oh leader of the *gaṇas*, [by means of the Padamālā,] one shall complete the one hundred and eight deeds.” Thus previously lord Nandin received that great *vidyā* from Śiva. [58-62ab]

Śakra said:

“Oh excellent one, what one hundred and eight deeds does pronunciation of all the verses accomplish? Oh lord, recitation of each of the verses accomplishes which deeds? Tell me all of this accurately.” [62cd-63]

Brahmā said:

“The delivery of each verse and its accomplishment were told by Umā precisely and in successive order, oh child. Now I’m imparting this to you; listen carefully, Vāsava. Among the rites of Veda and Siddhānta, as well as the incantations of the Atharva, there has never been any other *vidyā* such as this, nor will there be. [The Goddess spoke] to the foremost, courageous lord Śiva, dwelling on Kailāsa. [64-66ab]

The Goddess said:

“Told by you in the root Tantra, which was derived from many crores of texts, that great incantation accomplishes all deeds, oh excellent one. Tell [me] concisely the chant of each [verse] and the manner of its application.⁸⁵ Please tell me, oh trident bearing god, the garland of mantras by name and the verses of the mantras, as well as the manner and effect of its accomplishment, verse by verse.” [66cd-68]

Bhairava said:

“Oh wise, virtuous Goddess, you have asked about the unparalleled rite by which adepts attain their goals. Have no doubt; I will tell you. [69]

“Om. Honor. Honor to you, oh Bhagavatī Cāmuṇḍā.” If one recites thus one hundred thousand times, adhering to the heroic, he will obtain fame.

“Om. Honor to you who dwell in the cremation ground.” Thus, entry to the cremation ground.

“Om. Honor to you in whose hands rest the skull staff and begging bowl.” Thus, strength in the sound of the mantras.

⁸⁴ Though the subject is singular, the perfect form of *gam* is rendered in the plural.

⁸⁵ The grammar of *pada* 67c is problematic.

“Om. Honor to you who sit astride mighty ghosts.” Thus, restraining all weapons.
 “Om. Honor to you whose neck is adorned with extensive garlands.” Thus, ward off rain.
 “Om. Honor to you who are the dark night of destruction.” Thus, ability to disappear.
 “Om. Honor to you who are surrounded by numerous attendant *gaṇas*.” Thus, ability to control bodies of water.
 “Om. Honor to you who possess a beautiful face and many arms.” Thus, the casting of weapons.
 “Om. Honor to you who bear the bell, *ḍamaru* drum, and *kinkiṇi* jingles.” Thus, prevent all obstacles.
 “Om. Honor to you whose laughter roars.” Compel [others] towards death.⁸⁶
 “Om. Honor to you who gleam like flashing lightning.” Restrain the scimitar.
 “Om. Proceed. Proceed, oh you whose eyes are like those of the *cakora* bird.” Paralyze others’ armies.
 “Om. *hili hili*. Honor to you with lolling tongue.” Attract the dying of all through the churning of the skull.
 “Om. *bhrīm*! Honor to you whose face bears furrowed brows.” Attract women.
 “Om. Honor to you who terrify with the fierce *hum* sound.” Dismissal.
 “Om. Honor to you who are enveloped by garlands of skulls and who bear the moon in a crown amongst your matted locks.” Control all beings.
 “Om. Honor to you whose laughter roars. *kili kili*.” Impair the mantras of others.
 “Om. Honor to you, oh excellent one.” Activate a female Tantric companion (*bhairavī*).
 “Om. *vicce*. Honor. Honor to you.” One accomplishes oneself what has not been completed by the Goddess.
 “Om. *hum hum*. Honor to you.” Ward off the influence of the planets.
 “Om. Honor to you whose gaping mouth sports frightful fangs.” Possession.
 “Om. Honor to you who destroy all obstacles.” Animate with ashes.
 “Om. Honor to you whose hair is piled up.” Prevent misfortune.
 “Om. Honor to you whose face is like that of an owl.” Empower the rites of the skull.
 “Om. Honor to you who bear garlands of skulls.” Agitate the enemies and subdue them with the *ḍamaru* drum.
 “Om. Honor to you who exhibit an extraordinary form.” Cause madness by means of the insanity oblation.
 “Om. Honor to you whose body is enveloped in black serpents.” Cause serpents to strike.
 “Om. Honor to you whose lips hang pendulously.” Cause others to dance.
 “Om. Honor to you whose nose is crooked.” Feed.
 “Om. Honor to you whose face is flattened.” Deceive.
 “Om. Honor to you with tawny, matted hair, whose face displays a tongue of flame.” Set cities aflame.
 “Om. Honor to you with red eyes set in a face like the full moon.” Control all types of fevers.

Thus wearing black garments, garlanded with black [beads], anointed with black unguent,⁸⁷ upholding the vow of the hero (*vīra*), dwelling in the cremation ground, and living on alms, one

⁸⁶ Sharma inverts the order of epithet and accomplished skill beginning with this verse. I follow Tarkaratna in maintaining the prior format.

⁸⁷ Black ash mixed with ghee. See Gupta, “Tantric Incantation.” 245.

should recite every verse one thousand and eight times. Having completed this preparatory rite, one should make one thousand eight oblations of sesame anointed with three types of honey.⁸⁸ If one offers the supreme meat⁸⁹ smeared with the three types of honey, one will achieve wondrous deeds, receive the fruit of rites performed in another *kalpa*, and accomplish acts ordained in the Atharva Veda. One will personally be honored by the divine Bhairavas and accomplished ones. [70-71]

Thus is the magnificent Padamālā Vidyā, the goddess Cāmuṇḍā herself, who brings about the one hundred and eight accomplishments. Oh Pārvatī, [by means of this *vidyā*] the one engaged in yoga can accomplish crores of deeds. Reciting the incantation only once immediately removes [the sin of] brahminicide. Through its recitation or from hearing it, among all castes one receives benefits equal to bathing at all the pilgrimage sites and undertaking all the *vratas*. It destroys all misfortunes and prevents all ailments. It is not to be granted to those who are not devoted or to those who do not worship the Goddess.” [72-75]

**Thus is the ninth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Padamālā Mantra Vidyā.”**

⁸⁸ Honey is prepared in three distinct ways to conform with *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. See Gupta, “Tantric Incantation,” 245.

⁸⁹ The *mahāmamsa* refers to eight special types of meat sacred to the Goddess: human, cow, ram, horse, buffalo, boar, goat, and deer. See Gupta ‘Tantric Incantation’ 245.

Chapter Ten

Explanation of Yoga: First Section

Śakra said:

“The manner of the divine Padamālā was heard by Nandin,⁹⁰ and its accomplishment was told to that heroic one. How did Nārada receive it?”⁹¹ [1]

Brahmā said:

“I have a son named Sanatkumāra, a giver of boons whose impurities have been annihilated by means of ascetic practice; that wise one is pervaded by the essence of Śiva.⁹² Having propitiated lord Nandin – that equal of Śiva who has undertaken great vows – he properly requested that unsurpassed instruction on yoga. [2-3]

[Sanatkumāra said:]

“Tell me accurately that yoga imparted by the path of Śaiva Siddhānta as well as by the Vedas, Śāstras, and Āgamas.” Having obtained the yoga, that great sage of profound intellect also received the *vidyā* due to the graciousness of lord Nandin. Propitiated for some time by him, that bull of sages then granted to Nārada the *vidyā*⁹³ along with the yoga. With this yoga accompanied by the *vidyā*, that yogī became unaging and immortal; dwelling on a mountain path, he has generated ascetic heat due to the efficacy of Śaiva yoga.” [4-7]

Śakra said:

“Oh lord, tell me that yoga by which the *vidyā* is accomplished even by those who have not undertaken vows, that yoga by which all things are made possible. What is this yoga? How is it obtained? Oh god worshiped by gods, I want to hear this great fortune accurately.” [8-9]

Brahmā said:

“Having seen Sanatkumāra, the giver of boons whose splendor is equal to crores of suns, who dwells at the peak of Meru, and who is honored by all creatures, Nārada bowed his head to that yogic instructor and inquired about that foremost yoga, which is difficult to comprehend even with effort. [Nārada said]: “Oh lord, I want to hear this; tell it to me, oh supreme sage, oh upholder of vows – by what means is that yoga obtained?” That lord who is proficient in all of the Śāstras responded to him: “Listen, oh Nārada; I will tell you that yoga concisely. Like honey amongst flowers, the path of yoga is the extracted essence of the Śāstras. Having first propitiated Maheśvara, I will describe it. [10-14]

From knowledge there arises indifference to worldly desires, and from this indifference one travels the path of dharma; from dharma, yoga is established, and from yoga the virtues of Maheśvara. Once knowledge has been acquired, the one who is indifferent [to the senses] shall

⁹⁰ The second *pada* includes “*te*” which seems to have no referent.

⁹¹ Though the verb *labh* is conjugated in the potential mood, the implied meaning is unmistakably past tense. Such fluidity of tense continues throughout the passage, though every instance will not be indicated.

⁹² All the nominatives agreeing with *putra* in verse 2 are declined in the neuter rather than the masculine.

⁹³ *vidyā* is declined in the nominative though the context implies accusative.

approach dharma; however, the one who desires success (*siddhi*)⁹⁴ should not foster excessive attachment to knowledge. Yogīs especially must strive to act in accordance with dharma. Without dharma there is no [accomplishment of] yoga; thus it is understood by those learned in yoga. Those desirous of the fruit of dharma must fulfill dharma in accordance with proper time and place, with the proper materials, and in the appropriate succession, just as instructed. [15-18]

Pleasures are neither dharma nor *adharma*; sorrows are neither dharma nor *adharma*. The one desiring pleasure relinquishes dharma, while the one pursuing dharma must abandon pleasure. It is better that dharma not be procured at all rather than to neglect it once obtained, so acquired dharma must be preserved. [19-20]

Dharma is carried out inaccurately and explained incorrectly. Dharma must only be fulfilled and taught by those who are wholly devoted to dharma. Having abandoned all [other] dharma, one should conduct oneself toward the dharma of an ascetic. One who has fallen from ascetic dharma shall reap the fruits of *adharma*. Listen to the virtues and vices according to the dharma of an ascetic. From vigilance, one obtains the highest accomplishment (*siddhi*); from negligence, one surely goes to hell. [21-23]

Having conducted oneself toward dharma in a previous life by the means learned in the Śāstras – such as fasts, observances, and precepts – one shall take on a human form once more. The body is tormented by driving the plow, propelling the cart, or carrying pots. One may experience sensory enjoyments obtained by dharma, but they generally hasten one towards death. Once the body has been destroyed, then one will enter hell and must reap the fruit of sin. [24]

Thus is the first section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Second Section

The five subtle elements⁹⁵ are considered superior to the five manifest elements⁹⁶ due to causality [i.e., since the subtle give rise to the manifest]. Self-consciousness is superior to those and the senses.⁹⁷ The intellect is superior to self-consciousness since that great principle is prior to all things. The unmanifest primordial element (*avyakta*) is superior to the great principle of intellect, and the supreme absolute is superior to the primordial element. Higher even than the supreme *puruṣa* is Īśvara, the twenty-sixth principle, the end of which cannot be perceived even by those hermits who are able to accomplish all things. Having ascertained the Lord Śiva, who is

⁹⁴ It remains unclear whether *siddhi* refers to accomplishment generally, or to the development of more specific supernatural powers that may be sought by means of yoga.

⁹⁵ The five *tanmātras* consist of sound (*śabda*), touch (*sparśa*), form (*rūpa*), taste (*rasa*), and smell (*gandha*).

⁹⁶ The five *mahābhūtas* consist of ether (*ākāśa*), air (*vāyu*), fire (*agni*), water (*āpas*), and earth (*prthivī*).

⁹⁷ The *indriyas* are eleven in number, including the five organs of perception (*jñānendriya*) [eye/seeing (*cakṣus*), ear/hearing (*śrotra*), nose/smelling (*ghrāṇa*), tongue/tasting (*jihvā*), and skin/touching (*tvac*)], the five organs of action (*karmendriya*) [larynx/speaking (*vāc*), hand/grasping (*pāṇi*), foot/walking (*pāda*), anus/excreting (*pāyu*), and genitals/procreating (*upastha*)], and mind (*manas*).

supreme amongst all existents and the cause of all causes, a man is worthy of extinction (*nirvāṇa*). [1-4]

The eight primary essences⁹⁸ are to be understood, as are their sixteen derivatives.⁹⁹ Cause and effect should be known, as should the apertures and the control of them. Error, inability, satisfaction, accomplishment, kindness, happiness, sorrow, delusion, and the inner means of knowledge should be understood. All the realms of worldly existence should be known – the eight divine, the five animal, and the one belonging to man. [5-7]

Those who understand the arising of the principles (*tattva*), modes (*bhāva*), and elements (*bhūta*), who know Īśvara and *puruṣa*, they are considered wise. Such an adherent who maintains a clear mind and conquered senses, and who always remains non-violent, once he has learned Sāṃkhya and the foremost yoga he will reach the end of all sorrows due to his yogic practice. [8-9]

Thus is the second section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Third Section

I will instruct accurately regarding the similarities and differences of the natures of those principles previously indicated as Īśvara, *puruṣa*, and *vyakta*. They are all¹⁰⁰ most subtle, without creation, and all-pervading; they are eternal and steady, and all their natures comingle. The *pradhāna*, *puruṣa*, and Īśvara are marked by being formless, inferable, indivisible, and beyond the elements. The *pradhāna* is said to possess the three qualities (*guṇa*) as its members. It is characterized by production and is the object of experience. It lacks consciousness; it is neither self-willed nor refined. Both [*puruṣa* and Īśvara] are without qualities. Both possess consciousness and are refined; they are not characterized by being set in motion.¹⁰¹ They both are what know, what act, and what experience. [*Puruṣa*] is said to be involved with the various *guṇas* and dependent on their advancement. It is not introspective, nor omniscient, nor omnipotent. Śiva is the one sovereign lord, unchanging and complete. He is not involved with the development of the *guṇas*. He is without desire; he is introspective, omniscient, and omnipotent. [1-7]

All of this world with its moving and unmoving constituents lacks independence. Those deluded by the *māyā* of Rudra are enlightened [by the influence] of Sāṃkhya. The lord Īśvara is endless power who presides over all yoga. He abides in all things for the sake of the success of creatures. Sages know that the manifestation of the immeasurable Īśvara is for the cause of all creatures which cycle in *saṃsāra*. He inflicts great defilement to those devoted to *tamas*; he dispenses emotional sorrow to those devoted to *rajas*; he confers utmost joy to those devoted to *sattva*. Thus is the activity of Īśvara with regard to deeds. [8-11]

⁹⁸ The eight *prakṛtis* include the primordial element (*avyakta*), intellect, self-consciousness (*ahamkāra*), and the five subtle elements.

⁹⁹ The sixteen *vikāras* include the five manifest elements and the eleven senses.

¹⁰⁰ I assume a dropped *r* in *sava* of *pada* a in verse 2, and thus read *sarva*, as do the other publications.

¹⁰¹ I follow the commentaries in assuming a dropped *a-* before *prasavadharminau* in order to make sense of the trait as in contradistinction to *pradhāna*.

Thus is the third section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Fourth Section

As long as the body remains and as long as intellect is not abandoned, one should devote oneself to knowledge, yoga, and indifference to worldly pleasures. There may be extreme difficulties now, but later there will be unsurpassed joy; thus one should pursue the path of yoga for the sake of decreasing suffering. One should remain steadfast, knowledgeable of all principles (*tattva*), and vigilant; one should abide by precepts, foster total indifference to the material world, and remain devoted to meditation and yoga. One should conquer the senses, control the breath, and overcome sleep, food, and weariness; one should move beyond duality and must possess nothing. One should be without sorrow, a mendicant free from selfishness and the conceit of individuality. One should have no sensuous desires; one should be indifferent, unresponsive to thoughts of duality, and should possess no property. One should be a non-violent, content, dispassionate, and virtuous speaker of truth. One should move along the path of dharma unperturbed, devoted to the guru. [1-6]

One should remain unsettled amongst creatures and should foster aversion to all places. One should roam constantly in auspicious regions, and should consider clods of dirt, gems, and gold as equivalent. One should always dwell on alms by day and lie on the bare ground at night. One should always make use of purified water. Staying away from everyone, the mendicant should not remain in the presence of others; an ascetic takes birth as a worm due to vice contracted from association [with others]. One should not object to any difficulties, nor bring about any opposition; one must do penance with indifference, confronting it vigorously. The mendicant should wander during the eight months of summer and winter, but must remain in one place during the rainy season for the sake of compassion towards all creatures. When the season changes, one must not remain there any longer. Having abandoned oils and clothes, having adopted mendicancy, living on alms and bearing no marks, one should roam the land. When the sun sets, one practices austerities in a hut along the path.¹⁰² [7-12]

Thus is the fourth section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Fifth Section

Having become pure through bathing, having made ablutions, having bowed the head to the lord, and having honored the yoga instructors, the yogic adept should practice yoga in an open space, in a cowpen, at the root of a tree, at an intersection, on the bank of a river, in the cremation ground, in temples, or in some private, calm, silent, unpopulated, isolated, pure space devoid of any defilements. One should establish the splendid *padmaka*, *svastika*, *sthalika*, *jalika*, *pīṭhārdha*, *candradanḍa*, or *sarvatobhadra* postures. The upper body should be restrained with the face turned upwards. Having made the hands cupped like a lotus blossom, one should remain motionless with

¹⁰² The grammar of the final *pada* is questionable; both *āvasatha* and *patha* are rendered in the nominative.

the mind fixed. The senses should be diverted from all sense objects. Having abandoned all desires, one should take refuge in the self (*ātman*). [1-6]

One should quietly practice the three kinds of efficacious breath control – the foremost *kumbha*, the middle *recaka*, and the gentle *pūraka*. One shall burn up faults through breath control, and shall destroy sins by means of mental restraint. One overcomes attachment to pleasures by withdrawal of the senses. Through meditation, godly virtues arise.¹⁰³ [7-8]

For the accomplishment of yoga, the concentrated [*yogī*] should devotedly chant the Gāyatrī mantra, either in external verbalization or mentally. Chanting, the Brahman should think constantly [of Gāyatrī] and should not become a void. Having remained thus for some time, he should recall “Om̐.” The sacred syllable Om̐ is the imperishable *brahman*, the supreme state. These are the means of acquiring understanding as declared by sages. The wise who are engaged in the precepts of restraint, who retain equanimity even in the distress of impediments, and who have accomplished control of the winds of breath, thusly they attain victory. [9-12]

Thus is the fifth section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Sixth Section

Yogic practices of restraint, observances, and internal acts are to be foremost at all times and in all places. If there shall be any deviation, then the *yogī* will have acted in error. One must always abide by yoga, never any other mantra. Of all types of mantras, the mantra of yoga is preeminent; thus, yoga must always be practiced regardless of the situation. If one cultivates thoughts of bodily pleasures, then one’s yoga will have little efficacy. It is considered contemptible in the Yogaśāstras. He who meditates intent on the goal of mental restraint and knowledge, who knows all these things, he is a *yogī* worthy of practicing yoga. The self (*ātman*) is the meditator, the mind is [the instrument of] meditation, and the subtle Maheśvara is the focus of meditation. The objective of meditation is [to reach] this utmost sovereignty. [1-6]

Two *brahmans* are to be acknowledged: the *brahman* of sound (*śabda*) and the supreme *brahman*. The learned person discovers the supreme *brahman* within *śabdabrahman*. The utterance and hearing of that sound which is manifest from within the body, impelled by the *udāna* breath, that is called the *śabdabrahman*. If one aims to move beyond the self, then one should continuously concentrate the mind on that syllable of *śabdabrahman*, which is the supreme *brahman* in degraded form.¹⁰⁴ One who desires to speak shall obtain that goal which is uttered. Engaged with intellect and self-consciousness, one should practice meditation. Perception, memory, conceptions, images, emotions, worries, and thoughts should be directed towards the syllable Om̐ (*praṇava*). One should be marked by a motionless nature, like a flame undisturbed by wind. One should seem as if entering the infinite, a constant mind that has abandoned the senses. [7-12]

¹⁰³ The grammar of verse 8 is somewhat problematic, though the intended meaning seems clear.

¹⁰⁴ The grammar of the first half of verse 9 is quite fluid.

Thus is the sixth section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Seventh Section

If one abandons the breaths while concentrated on the syllable of Om̐, then he will proceed to the supreme sovereign after separating from his body. Thoughts are scattered and will be distracted from Om̐ repeatedly, but one must avoid engagement with the various senses and must direct thought toward Om̐ once more. If one is free from desires and continuously toils in yoga, in time one will achieve the status that is most concealed among the esoteric secrets. [1-3]

As long as one remains ignorant of yoga, one will be subject to karma; thus that creature will continue roaming in *saṃsāra*, wandering through the divine, human, and animal realms. If the mind is indifferent to all worldly attachments, regulated by intellect, and anchored in the syllable Om̐, it does not retreat from yoga. If one has invoked Om̐ with regulated breath, then one’s thought shall not abandon Om̐ to travel elsewhere. With a calm mind, one should draw out the short single moment [*a*], the long double moment [*a-u*], the protracted three moment [*a-u-m*], and its complete entirety. With a purified soul (*antarātman*), one should produce an extended syllable of Om̐, like a constant stream of oil, sounding like a resonating bell. [4-8]

Concentrated with a purified mind and peaceful soul, having abandoned delusion and achieved the foremost yoga, one attains that imperishable position. Having purified the soul by means of the syllable Om̐, one approaches the supreme *brahman*. Having united with the supreme *brahman*, one is liberated from *saṃsāra*. He who understands *saṃsāra* as the most inimical affliction, who is continually advancing in yogic practice, and who knows the path of yoga, he will enjoy the unparalleled fruit obtained by the grace of Śiva. [9-11]

Thus is the seventh section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Eighth Section

By continuously performing yoga with vigilance and one-pointed meditation, the yogic door may be seen. This door of yoga is a great secret that destroys all sin¹⁰⁵; it is pure, unequalled, and difficult to be seen by those with unperfected selves (*ātman*). Gods, animals, and men who are distracted by sensual gratification and whose committed offences are many are not able to see it. Ascetics who are concentrated in mind by means of yoga and who are firm in their austerities, they mount the chariot of Om̐ and travel along the supreme path. No other world is intended for those who have passed through the door of yoga; where they have gone they will not be born again due to the grace of Śaṅkara. [1-5]

Just as a smooth path helps you proceed along the road, thus this truth of *brahman* leads to sovereignty. Success shall not be far off for the one who constantly maintains the discrimination of this truth of *brahman* in the mind. The minds of men attach to all manner of thoughts, becoming

¹⁰⁵ I read *pāpa* from the Tarkaratna edition rather than *tāpa* as in Sharma’s.

identical with the various forms like a touchstone. When some object is desired, one must think of its destruction, and must consider it a disruption of the very subtle Om̐. Those best of Brahmins who are intent on the teaching of gurus, who possess knowledge, understanding, and satisfaction, who are liberated from the impurities of the *kali yuga*, who follow dharma totally, who are devoted to the great and virtuous Śaṅkara, and whose thought is concentrated on Om̐, they shall attain their goal. [6-10]

Thus is the eighth section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Ninth Section

The origination [of self] does not occur from the arising of thought, nor does annihilation [of self] occur from the destruction of thought; [self] is the all-pervading Maheśvara, who lacks beginning, middle, or end. In the origination of existence, the arising of mind is foremost, brought about by the two [Īśvara and *puruṣa*]. The two are the cause of becoming and of annihilation. Maheśvara is neither short, nor long, nor protracted. When the syllable which is the sound of truth and understanding [i.e., Om̐] arises at the time of meditation, it is employed solely for the sake [of meditation]. The syllable Om̐ shall be continually indicated in the five aims.¹⁰⁶ The *tattvas* are bound up with thought and thought is present in the mind; the mind, connected with soul, is situated in the body. [1-5ab]

Not perceiving the arising of sound, touch, sight, taste, or smell – this is the mark of a yogī. Comprehending liberation from physical pleasures and pains, such as not acknowledging [the difference between] hot and cold – this is the mark of a yogī. Not being roused by songs sung or various sounds made such as conch or kettledrum – this is the mark of a yogī. In the practice of yoga, the yogī encounters exceeding difficulties that give rise to impediments; having conquered them, he attains joy. He who becomes immured in troubles secures neither success nor accomplishment; therefore, obstacles must always be conquered by the actions outlined in the Śāstras. Described are troubles of vision, hearing, speech, and touch, as well as difficulties with confusion, fainting, and dizziness. [5cd-10]

There is virtue even in viewing those who have driven away all impurities, who purify with the daily bath, whose final aim is Śiva, who chant and live on alms, who are devoted to the teachings of the gurus, who have always uplifted dharma, and who have taken up the path of yoga. [11]

Thus is the ninth section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Yoga: Tenth Section

I will tell about the concentration of the mind that is to be conducted with effort. Abiding in the heart of the mind is called “*dhāraṇā*.” Just as the eye sees visible forms by means of light, so

¹⁰⁶ The referent of the five aims remains unclear.

the yogī perceives truths by means of subtle yoga. Just as one sees reflections clearly in an untarnished mirror, thus one perceives the absolute *brahman* in a virtuous mind. Just as one discerns subtle objects by means of the light of knowledge, thus one perceives the subtle Om by means of focused concentration. [1-4]

The unparalleled and glorious Śiva, free from attributes, the lord of creatures who encompasses *pradhāna*, *puruṣa*, and Īśāna, is perceived by the mind. That constant one is perceived with an unwavering mind; that pure one is discerned by virtuous thought; that subtle one is understood by means of manifest cause and effect. The yogī who is absorbed in thought of him, who is devoted to him, and who has him as the final aim, he sees the eternal Śiva by burning up all faults in the fire of yoga. He is able to perceive that one great lord who is eminent among the gods, who is himself uncreated, who is omnipresent, omniscient, and the cause of all things. Having discerned him, one accomplishes the attainment of all his same virtues; having apprehended him, one no longer falls into rebirth and delusion.” [5-9]

Thus is the condensed yoga; it is extensive when fully explained. It was conveyed by my son out of compassion for the sages. When Nārada obtained it, he became accomplished in the true state of knowledge. He who accomplishes it, even without having learned it, knows the utmost truth of Rudra.” [10-11]

Thus is the tenth section in “The Yogaśāstra of Sanatkumāra.”

Thus is the tenth chapter in the preeminent *Devīpurāṇa*.

Chapter Eleven

Brahmā said:

“Oh Śakra,¹⁰⁷ when Nārada that foremost of sages obtained the yoga, then he began to recite according to prescription the *vidyā* that had been told by Śiva. Oh young one, that *vidyā* previously attained was thus completed by Nārada. Due to its boundless grace, oh Śakra, he has become quite accomplished.” [1-2]

Śakra said:

“Thus is the *vidyā* completed, but how did it come amongst mortals? I want to know this; kindly tell me.” [3]

Brahmā said:

“Oh wise one, when I previously desired to undertake creation, I entreated Śambhu for the [*vidyā*] which is unsurpassed amongst *vidyās*, as well as the Aparājītā [*Vidyā*]. Wanting to bring about those future actions to be completed in *manvantaras*, *yugas*, etc., I was granted that *vidyā* from Prajāpati; then it was given by me to Aṅgiras, and from Aṅgiras to Br̥haspati.¹⁰⁸ By the guru [Br̥haspati] that brilliant *vidyā* was given to Savitr̥, then by him to Mr̥tyu, then by Mr̥tyu to Indra; then it was received by Vasiṣṭha. It was given once more by Vasiṣṭha to Sārasvata, by Sārasvata to Tridhāman, and by Tridhāman to Trivṛṣa. From Trivṛṣa it went to Bharadvāja, then to Antarīkṣa, and from Antarīkṣa to Bahvṛca; then, Bahvṛca gave it to Āruṇi. By Āruṇi it was given to Balaja, by him to Kṛtaṃjaya, and by Kṛtaṃjaya to R̥naja; then it was received by Bhāradvāja. By Bhāradvāja it was given to the great sage Gautama; from Gautama it was obtained by Uttami, and Uttami gave it to Haryarccana. From Haryarccana it was obtained by Purodhas, and by him it was given to Vājaśravas. Vājaśravas gave it to Soma, and from Soma Śuṣmādana received it. From Śuṣmādana Tṛṇavindu obtained it, and from Tṛṇavindu it went to Tarakṣu. From Tarakṣu it was obtained by Śaktri, and from Śaktri by Parāśara. From Parāśara Jātukarṇa received it; it was then obtained from Jātukarṇa by Dvaipāyana. Thus that *vidyā* which effects the visible and the invisible descended to earth for the benefit of the worlds. Oh Śakra, that esteemed *vidyā* was thus chanted by Nārada, having first directed his mind toward [Śiva], lord of the mountain girl. Oh young one, the Asura as well as his ministers were deluded by this *vidyā*. [4-14]

Śakra said:

“This great Padamālā Vidyā deludes gods and Asuras; but the Aparājītā Vidyā is also efficacious. It has been mentioned, but it has not been told what its power is or how it came to be.” [15-16ab]

Brahmā said:

“Just as the gods, so are the Asuras – apart from the eternal god, both are subject to creation and destruction. Long ago, there was a mighty Dānava named Hutāgni. That crusher of gods arose

¹⁰⁷ Following Tarkaratna, I read *śakra* rather than *śatruḥ*, as is present in both verses 1 and 2 in the other publications.

¹⁰⁸ Throughout this passage, the text employs the genitive case rather than the dative for those who are the recipients of the *vidyā*.

when I was concluding a *homa* sacrifice. He saw me and began to practice austerities.¹⁰⁹ Oh Purandara, I was pleased by his ascetic practice. Then, oh mighty one, I said: “Request a boon.” He entreated me: “May I conquer all the thirty [gods] along with Viṣṇu and Purandara.” I responded: “Thus it shall be.” [16cd-20a]

That mighty one then went to the surface of the earth, to the continent of Śāka, which possesses all pleasures. Oh Vāsava, having stayed there for fifteen years, he then married the daughter of Kālaputra. He had a son named Vajradāṇḍa, whose courage was equal to that of his fearsome [father]. Having conquered all the rulers of the earthly continents, he then won heaven. He conquered all of the gods and then proceeded to attack Viṣṇu. A crow was displayed on his banner, most formidable amongst all banners. [20b-23]

Having pleased the great three-eyed god [Śiva], I requested a boon for the sake of a banner for Viṣṇu. Gratified, Śiva [said]: “Request the boon that is fixed in your heart.” I then made a request: “Oh lord, grant a banner to Viṣṇu that will oppose the Daityas, and which will always assist and bring victory.” Thus it occurred. [The banner was] endowed with sparkling jingles, adorned with bells and flywhisks, furnished with many *piṭaka* ornaments,¹¹⁰ its splendor equal to a hundred suns. The various gods were appointed in the banner. The bull-marked [Śiva] was established, along with Garuḍa-mounted [Viṣṇu] bearing the conch, discus, and mace. Durgā was at the top, and Yama at the base. Indra, Vahni, Yama, Rakṣas, Jala, Vāta, [Kubera] lord of wealth, Īśāna, Sūrya, Kāla, Rāhu, Ārki, Śaśi, Induja, and the guru [Bṛhaspati] were all present throughout. Having been fashioned, it was then presented by Śambhu. When Viṣṇu saw it, he began to laud that bull-bannered one with praise. [24-29]

[Viṣṇu said]:

“Victory! Oh dark one with gaping jaws; oh you who are as splendid as black storm clouds; oh you mighty, dark-bodied one adorned with cobras. Oh lord, you bring about the peace of darkness. You are fearsome with dark fangs, oh you who are darker than the night of the blue moon.¹¹¹ Honor to you who are garlanded with multitudes of skulls, oh you who sliced off the head of Brahmā. You are the all-pervading, omnipresent lord of gods, oh you sky-clad one adorned with ash from the cremation ground. Honor to you who wear a belt of black snakes, who bear Vāsukī as the sacred thread. Honor to you who animate all creatures, who know the Veda and Vedāṅga, who are the priest of the sacrifice as well as the implements of sacrifice, oh lord of sacrifice. Honor to you who calm all forms of disease inflicted by the planets. Honor! Oh great lord of gods, oh bull-bannered one, may the destruction of the gods’ enemies be accomplished by you who are the essence of all things.” Pleased, [Śiva said] “Thus it shall be,” and bestowed the banner to him. [30-36]

[Śiva said:]

“Oh mighty lord Viṣṇu, behold this banner. Any powerful Asura, Gandharva, and Daitya enemies will meet¹¹² their death merely from the sight of your banner.” Viṣṇu said, “So it shall be,” and respectfully accepted that banner. When he raised it up, the cruel son of Hutavahni was

¹⁰⁹ I read *tapah* in verse 18 from the Tarkaratna edition rather than *layah* as found in the others.

¹¹⁰ The *piṭaka* is a special ornament unique to Indra’s banner.

¹¹¹ The meaning of the epithet “*tamaḥśadvāruṇopamaḥ*” in the fourth *pada* of verse 31 is uncertain.

¹¹² The text curiously employs a past perfect here when a potential mood is implied.

slain. Then, oh young one, that [banner] which destroys all enemies was granted to Śakra. Thus I have told you everything just as it occurred, oh lord of gods.” [37-39]

Śakra said:

“In what manner was the [banner] received by that former equal of mine? I ask you specifically about how to employ it. Tell me.” [40]

Brahmā said:

“Oh chief of gods, counting the grains of sand in the Gaṅgā can be done, but counting the multitudes of Daityas who wanted to conquer the king of gods is not possible. Some were destroyed by Viṣṇu and some by lord Śambhu; others were slain by Guha. Some were conquered by me and many others were overcome by the goddesses. But still [the enemy] was not diminished. Oh Vāsava, there was a mighty Daitya lord named Subala, whose emblem was the goose; he arose in my lineage, [the son] of Daṇḍaghāta. Oh excellent one, the gods were conquered by Subala during the Bhautya *manvantara*. All of them then assembled along with Indra, Vāsava. [They said:] “Grandfather, we are not able to vanquish the Daityas in battle, so we have come to you for refuge from the conquering enemies.” [41-46]

Oh Śakra, then I thought: “Surely, [victory will be achieved] by raising the banner of Viṣṇu and the gods, which had been granted by Śambhu. I then [addressed] the gods headed by Indra: “Propitiate Viṣṇu. He will grant that mighty banner that deludes all Daityas.” At my command, they went to the milk ocean where Keśava was residing. Those gods headed by Indra, who were tormented by fear of the enemy, praised him who is cause and effect, who is unborn, imperishable, and eternal, the multi-armed one marked by the *śrīvatsa* curl and adorned with the *kaustubha* jewel at his chest. Keśava was pleased with them [and said]: “Request a boon, Purandara.” [47-51ab]

Entreated by them, the god then granted the banner for the destruction of the gods’ enemies. That powerful [banner] that was given by him and wards off the fear of the gods was adorned by a white umbrella, garlands of flowers, and *piṭaka* ornaments. Its brilliance was equal to a myriad of suns. It was accompanied by the marvelous sound of jingles, furnished with flywhisk and palm-leaf fans, and marked by the emblem of Śambhu. Upon seeing it, the mighty army was broken and destroyed. [51cd-54ab]

Oh Śakra, this is how the banner descended to you from the beginning. Mounting it brings about victory over all other kings. If it is given by me, Hara, lord Viṣṇu, or Vāsava, the king should raise it up. He will be unconquered, the lord over all on earth.” [54cd-56]

Agastya said:

“Thus the raising of the banner was told to Śakra by Brahmā¹¹³; now it all has been illuminated by me for you, oh knowledgeable lord.” [57]

**Thus is the eleventh chapter in the foremost *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Raising [the Banner] of Indra.”**

¹¹³ I read the alternative *brahmeṇa* from Tarkaratna rather than *śabdena* as in the other editions.

Chapter Twelve

Nṛpavāhana said:

“Oh lord, I want to hear just how the raising up of that [banner] is done. Tell me the manner of the mantras, the necessary materials, as well as the appropriate date and constellation.” [1]

Agastya said:

“Just as I [learned] it from Bṛhaspati, as it was told to Śakra by Brahmā, thus I will impart [to you] the manner of raising up the banner. [2]

Bṛhaspati said:

“On an auspicious day during an auspicious constellation, in an auspicious moment (*muhūrta*) during an auspicious time of the day (*karaṇa*), a diviner and carpenter should accompany [the king] to the forest. The journey should commence only after the proper ceremonies for the Goddess have been conducted. They should seek the auspicious axlewood (*dhava*), arjuna, kadam (*priyaka*),¹¹⁴ fig (*uḍambara*), or sal (*aśvakarṇa*)¹¹⁵ trees – these five are considered superior. Oh young one, in the case of this banner, they should avoid trees growing in sacred groves. [3-5]

Among the maidens¹¹⁶ there shall be six measuring eleven hands and nine measuring five hands. Trees that are covered in vines, filled with worms, nested in by birds, infested with termites, arisen in the cremation ground, dried out and hollowed, crooked, watered with pots, called an undesirable female name, struck by lightning, or scorched by fire should be avoided. If [the previously mentioned five types of trees] are not acquired, then sandalwood (*candana*), mango (*āmra*), sal (*kala*),¹¹⁷ or teak (*śāka*) trees are permitted; no other type of wood should be used for the banner of Śakra. [6-9]

A tree growing in an auspicious location near a holy river or body of water should be chosen. Facing north or east, they should worship the tree, [saying]: “Honor to you, oh lord of trees. The king propitiates you for the sake of the flagstaff [of Indra]. Truly, no other shall be chosen.”¹¹⁸ An offering (*bali*) is to be given there near the tree at night. Having prepared that most superb of excellent trees, it should be taken elsewhere for the sake of the flagstaff of the king of gods. You should not delay. The tree should thus be worshiped and bestowed an offering in the proper manner. [10-13]

In the morning the tree should be felled, as long as auspicious dreams were perceived [during the night]. [Seeing] in a dream the bearing of white garments, the crossing of an ocean, a river, beautifully slender trees bent over [with fruit], the entering of heaven, the honoring of gods, Brahmans, and *sādhus*, the worship of the *liṅgam*, or images of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, or Śiva quickly bestows the fruit of all accomplishments. Obtaining fish, meat, or yogurt, or seeing blood, wine, tears, or intercourse quickly bestows the fruit of accomplishment. In the dream leaping across trees

¹¹⁴ I read *priyaka* rather than the text’s *priyaṅguka*, which seems to be a type of grass rather than tree.

¹¹⁵ The *aśvakarṇa* tree refers to the *Vatica robusta* species of sal.

¹¹⁶ The *kanyās/kumārīs* are smaller, supplementary flagstaffs.

¹¹⁷ The *kala* tree refers to the *Shorea robusta* species of sal.

¹¹⁸ I read *upa-* from Tarkaratna rather than *tetra* in the fourth *pada* of verse 11.

is auspicious; the destruction of the enemy is fortunate; receiving fruit, flowers, sugar, or *dūrva* grass brings about victory. Receiving conch shells, cows, or elephants bestows a kingdom; seeing a new mother cow along with her calf bestows the fruit of a son. Raising up mud from a well indicates freedom from disease for a long time. [14-19]

Having seen such auspicious dreams, facing north or east one should chop down the tree with an axe anointed with blood and wine. The tree¹¹⁹ falling north or east is favorable; falling silently is auspicious as is not striking other trees. Otherwise, it should be abandoned. Eight finger widths should be left at the trunk; the top portion should be cast into water. [20-22ab]

Oh young one, it should then be brought to the entrance of the city by cart, drawn by superior, strong bulls. When bringing the flagstaff, rounded or with four equal corners, if it is broken the sons and priests of the king will die. If a corner is cracked, his army will be shattered and will fall into destruction. If the axle on the car breaks, his wealth will be destroyed. In such a situation, one should restore peace by means of the Indra-parasol mantra, the Jātaveda, or something equivalent. [22cd-25]

Having been brought to the city in such a manner, it should be installed there at an auspicious time. The city should be pleasantly decorated, the gates shining and the homes inviting.¹²⁰ With the intense sounds of kettledrums, [the songs of] courtesans, blowing conchs, and the Brahmans' auspicious recitation of the Veda, the flagstaff should be brought where it is to be raised up. Once established, it should be wrapped up with beautiful silk white cloth, fashioned by artisans. [26-28]

The *kumārīs* called Nandā and Upanandā are to be settled in the first portion; the goddesses Jayā and Vijayā should be established in the sixteenth. The *śakrajanitrī* primary flagstaff should be divided into many parts, which the gods will inhabit. The first cloth should be equal in measure to the height and circumference of the flagstaff. The wise [king] should prepare what remains of the sixteen portions. First, the self-existent [Brahmā] shall give cloth of various colors. Secondly, Viṣvakarman shall give a deep-red square cloth. Śakra himself shall give an octagonal piece of blue cloth. Round black¹²¹ cloth shall be given by Yama, hexagonal cloth of bright red and smoky color shall be given by Varuṇa, and Vāsudeva shall give a peacock-blue cloth. Skanda shall give a variegated cloth, and Agni shall give the eighth [portion], a round cloth of golden color. [29-34]

Wise Indra shall give cloth the color of a cat's-eye gem¹²² necklace. Sūrya shall give cloth appearing with the mark of a circle, and the Viśvadevas shall give cloth appearing like a lotus. The sages shall properly give a blue cloth, splendid as a blue lotus. An expansive emblem shall be placed at the top by the guru Śukra.¹²³ Cloth painted with their own forms shall be given by the many seizing Mothers. Only with effort shall the adornment of the banner be granted. [35-37]

Observing all this along with mantras, etc., the flagstaff should be raised up; if it enters the ground immediately, the kingdom will endure. The sound of children clapping indicates the ruin

¹¹⁹ In the second *pada* of verse 21, I read *drumaḥ* from Tarkaratna rather than Sharma's *vraṇaḥ*.

¹²⁰ I employ Tarkaratna's edition for the second half of verse 36.

¹²¹ I read *kṛṣṇām* from Tarkaratna rather than *kṛtsnam* in the first *pada* of verse 33.

¹²² I read *vaidūryasadrśam* in the first *pada* of verse 35.

¹²³ I employ Tarkaratna's iteration of verse 36.

of the state. If the flagstaff is broken, the king will die. Otherwise, there will be prosperity and pervading peace. Yogurt and unhusked barley should be offered in a *homa* sacrifice, accompanied by recitation of mantras to Candra, Sūrya, Yama, Śakra, Soma, wealth-giving [Kubera], Varuṇa, Vahni, Īśa, the sages, Śukra, Skanda, the guru [Bṛhaspati], Rudra, the Apsarases, and the rest. Making the proper oblations, the wise [king] should strike up the flames of Agni. That inflamed fire should possess a pleasant light and exceeding splendor, beautiful with an appearance like red Aśoka flowers, and with a sound like a chariot or kettledrum. A roaring fire with a sound like the conch, kettledrum, or storm cloud is considered auspicious.¹²⁴ [38-43ab]

Then flags should be upraised on poles made from plantain trees or sugarcane stalks. Various others of great brilliance should be raised up on that banner of Śakra. The flagstaff should be raised up on the eighth day of the bright half of the month of Bhādra, or in the bright half of Āśvina under the Śravaṇa constellation. [The festival] should resonate with the sounds of *paṭaha* and *bherī* kettledrums, as well as the hum of citizens, bards, and musicians. The established flagstaff should be beautifully opulent and radiant with the many flags. It should be raised up, accompanied by those mantras of Viṣṇu, Īśa, and Śakra, which protect as if they were lions. It should be planted firmly in the ground and a beautiful gate should be constructed around it. It should be raised up not too slowly and not too quickly, so that the *piṭaka* ornament does not break. Before raising up the banner of Vāsava, oh excellent one, the wise [king] should honor it. While raising it, he should be careful to protect it from crows, owls, pigeons, and other birds, and should not tear it.¹²⁵ He should properly position the banner in the direction of the device. Having attached it tightly to the device, it should be worshiped. [43cd-49]

He should stay awake at night and sing the mantra of Indra. Priests and diviners should remain engaged in auspicious and peaceful activity. If the umbrella shall fall, the king will die; if the banners shall fall, then the queen will perish; if the *piṭaka* ornament shall break, then the prince will expire. If the flagstaff should shake, the ministers will be destroyed. If the gates should fall, so will the kingdom. If the poles shall fall, there will be famine. If the banner itself should fall, this indicates that another king [will takeover]. If the banner is caught up in spider webs, there will be plagues of locusts and thieves. [50-53]

If the banner is maintained splendidly, there will be peace for the king and his city. As long as the banner remains upraised, the citizens will continue to be joyous. They should continue to engage in the worship of the banner, and young Brahman girls should be fed. At the time of lowering the banner, it should be worshiped just as it was at the time of raising it. The banner should be lowered at night, as long as no crows or pigeons are seen. [54-56ab]

The king who performs such a banner raising will prosper along with his kingdom. If the citizens of the towns, cities, and villages shall do thus, then bulls, lions, and birds will settle at the gates of the city. Thus it is believed that the banner will destroy the causes of all terrible things and will bring about victory.” [56cd-58ab]

¹²⁴ In the second *pada* of verse 43, I read *śastāḥ* from Tarkaratna rather than *śastrāḥ*.

¹²⁵ The translation of the first *pada* of verse 49 is uncertain.

In such a manner, Viṣṇu previously received the banner from [Śiva], the one whose vehicle is the bull. Brahmā received it from him, and then from Brahmā it reached Śakra. By him it was then given to Soma, and then it reached Dakṣa. Since then, kings have been performing the raising of the banner [of Indra] until even today. The king who shall perform the raising of the banner in this way will achieve victory and will extend his authority over the continents of the mighty earth. [58cd-61]

**Thus is the twelfth chapter in the esteemed venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Marks of the Banner of Indra.”**

Chapter Thirteen

Agastya said:

“All that occurred regarding the raising up of the banner has been told to you. What else do you ask? Oh king, tell it to me. I will inform you.” [1]

Nṛpavāhana said:

“You have told about the greatness of the *vidyā*, the yoga requested by Nārada, and the meritorious raising up of the banner which bestows all desired joys. Now I ask further, oh elder – how was the mighty Ghora along with his wife and ministers deluded by Nārada?” [2-3]

Agastya said:

“Just as Śakra, the chief of gods, previously asked Brahmā about the secret of the *vidyā* and the yoga, oh young one, he also asked further about the hindrance of Ghora’s intellect. [He said:] “Oh mighty one, how did Nārada, best of sages, accomplish this?” [4-5]

Brahmā said:

“Due to the power of his chanting, oh best of gods, a great vision¹²⁶ of the gods occurred, able to bestow all joys. The entire forest was adorned with fruits and flowers. Ghora, his army, his ministers, and priests – all were deluded. Following [the example of] their leader, everyone took up the path against dharma. They began to cheat with his wives, and steal his wealth and property. Those deluded Asuras abandoned the ways of righteousness. They were engaged in wrongful acts, oh young one, and they practiced creeds against dharma. [6-9]

The queen¹²⁷ adopted the customs and tenets of the Digambara [Jains]; she adopted their vows and became a follower of their argued positions. She settled into heretical dharma, and began to detest Śiva and Viṣṇu. She no longer maintained piety in *homa* sacrifice, devotion to guests, or reverence for the planets. She had no [respect] for the illustrious Mothers, cows, or Brahmans. In this way, that one who had always been a virtuous wife adopted the dharma described¹²⁸ by Nārada. Having abandoned the way of virtue and taken up false dharma, the entire assembly of Ghora proceeded along the wrong path. [10-13]

Ghora said:

“Oh mighty son of Brahmā, who shall be able to bring the mountain girl to me? Tell me, who among my soldiers is capable of performing this duty swiftly?” [14]

Nārada said:

“Having seen her flawless face shining like the full moon, even restrained sages are disturbed. How much more the Asura lords! Thus you yourself – either with your army or alone, but armed – must travel to that young girl, the foremost daughter of the mountain king.” Thus addressed,¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Following Tarkaratna, I read *dr̥ṣṭi* in the third *pada* of verse 6 rather than *vṛ̥ṣṭi*.

¹²⁷ In verses 10 and 11, *rājñī* is inexplicably rendered in the accusative, as are all of the words/compounds describing her.

¹²⁸ I read *uddiṣṭa* from Tarkaratna rather than *ucchiṣṭa*.

¹²⁹ The first *pada* of verse 17 remains unclear.

[Ghora] took up arms and set out with his army, vehicles, ministers, and priests on the date of the full moon. [Having ordered] Suṣeṇa to roar the *hum* sound, he departed the city at midday during the *abhijit* hour¹³⁰ along with all of his most excellent and felicitous roaring warriors: Devala, Vibhu, Dāruṇa, Vāṇa, Keśava, Cāmuṇḍa, Anuhrāda, and Mahāvāra. [15-19]

As they were departing, suddenly a dog appeared before them. A pigeon landed on the banner. On the right was a black jackal, and from the left came a tawny antelope, an iguana, a boar, *kavala* fish, a peacock, a troop of elephants, and an army of monkeys. A snake crossed their path and the water jars shattered. Apes, bears, and wildcats roared fiercely. They saw oil, buttermilk, grass, hair, and heaps of bones fallen on the path.¹³¹ At one place they saw vomit. At other places they saw a mad person, a paralyzed person, a mute person, and an emaciated person. They saw base items such as chaff, cotton, and salt. They saw at other places a bald man clothed in red garments,¹³² as well as meat and fat fallen [on the path]. [20-24]

They saw a rainbow and falling meteors in the sky. They saw burning redness on the horizon, and the earth began to quake. The sky was dirtied with dust and pollen. The sun shone without intensity, and the rivers began to flow backwards. The water of wells and lakes became dangerously warm, and fruits and flowers matured in the wrong season. Hot and cold were transposed. There was violent thunder. Wild creatures moved to the village, and village creatures became forest dwellers. Jackals,¹³³ serpents, hares, ants, and large groups of crows and deer entered the city walls and took up residence. The wind became severe, malodorous, and filled with grit. [25-29a]

The warriors became wretched, their vigor destroyed. The elephants and horses began to produce excrement, while their urine and tears flowed forth. The banner, umbrella, and flags were rent, and the flagstaff snapped. Dark stains appeared on the swords and shields. When the kettledrum was struck, it made no noise. The bow strings snapped, and the war mallets and maces began to shatter and crack, even from light blows. Shoots suddenly sprouted from withered seeds, and there was an eclipse of the sun. Perspiration appeared on icons of the gods. Corpses began to speak. Cows gave birth to asses; women gave birth to multiple children [at once]; animals other than goats gave birth to goats, and similarly sheep arose [from other creatures].¹³⁴ Even children were slain in battle. All of the subjects became merciless. The number of flies, gnats, and frogs increased, and more serpents were seen. Fires burned impotently, belching out smoke and extinguishing. Oh Vāsava, having seen such unusual calamities, Ghora asked Nārada: “What is this oddity, oh twice-born one?” [29b-36]

Nārada said:

“The king of mountains dwelling on earth, [Vindhya] is a portion of Vāsava, the abode of Śiva. Many maiden wives of the gods dwell there, oh Asura lord.¹³⁵ The gods headed by Agni are

¹³⁰ The *abhijit* is the eighth *muhūrta*, occurring at midday.

¹³¹ Though also slightly problematic, I employ Tarkaratna’s version of the first half of verse 23.

¹³² Possibly indicative of a Buddhist monk.

¹³³ Sharma suggests *kṛṣṇasarpa* while Tarkaratna offers *kroṣṭusarpa*; either are equally plausible.

¹³⁴ The first half of verse 34 is uncertain.

¹³⁵ I read the second half of verse 37 from Tarkaratna.

assembled there; by them the world has been bewildered. Go forth! Don't remain here. Any delay is harmful." [37-38]

Thus addressed by Nārada, he set out swiftly with his attendants for the abode of the Vindhya mountains, where the Narmadā descends, its rolling waves singing out melodiously; where the forests of the surrounding mountains resonate with the sounds of rutting elephants; where [the landscape] is adorned by ospreys, ducks, and *cakravāka* birds;¹³⁶ where resounds the peacock, the lion-like goose, the swan, the wind-like heron, the partridge, the turtledove, the parrot, and the soaring myna; where the waters are filled with alligator, fish, sharks, and dolphin, along with water creatures such as *bhramarīśas*, *vicarmāras*, *kalasas*, *indravallikas*, *kālapaṭas*, and *mahāsenas*,¹³⁷ as well as fish such as *pāṭhīna*,¹³⁸ *rohita*,¹³⁹ *gargara*,¹⁴⁰ *siṃhatuṇḍauṣṭha*,¹⁴¹ and *rājīva*. [39-44]

Having arrived, oh mighty one, the army of Ghora encamped there, where the mighty lord of mountains named Vindhya resides; where pearls have fallen from the claws of lions, having slashed at elephants; where there is no fear even amongst groups of boars; where rhino, leopard, elephant, antelope, buffalo, porcupine, hyena, bear, tiger, monkey, jackal, and spotted deer wander at will, always virtuous; where the children of sages are always engaged in bringing firewood [for sacrifices]; where there are wise [ascetics], some who eat only flowers, leaves, and fruits, some only bulbs, roots, and fruits, some only water, grain, or vegetables, and some only once a month or fortnight¹⁴²; where dwell hermits who know the truth of Veda and Vedāṅga, who are continuously engaged in the practice of yoga with meditation and religious rites as their highest aim, who have taken refuge in Śiva and Viṣṇu, who offer commentary on the many branches [of Veda], and who strive for *tapas*. [45-51ab]

There reside the low non-Aryans (*barbara*) of the *veṇu* tribes, as well as the foreign *pulindas*, *śabarās*, *taṅkas*, and *kapālins*, who eat bulbs, roots, and fruits; who wear garments made of bark; whose dark bodies are adorned with berries, dangling garlands, hundred-petal lotuses, and parrot feathers; whose limbs are colored with ore; who are always in a joyful spirit, having incised the temples and trunks of elephants; who delight in the bodies of beautiful women; and who bear blades, darts, spears, staffs, and mallets. [51cd-55ab]

There groups of elephants tamed by handlers dwell in habitations shaded by the branches of ashoka, mango (*cūta*), medlar (*bakula*), hiptage (*mādhavī*), axlewood (*dhava*), and orange pepper (*reṇu*) trees; where elephant calves escape the intensity of the sun amongst the soapberry (*ariṣṭa* and *viṣṭaka*), slow match (*pīlu*), garcinia (*tamāla*), and arjuna trees, reaching to the sky, and where they obtain great joy, satiated by the fruits of the almond (*iṅguda*), fig (*uḍumbara*), date (*kharjūra*), lemon (*mātulaṅga*), and pomegranate (*dāḍīma*) trees; where the unbroken rays of the sun are honored, and where storm clouds gather, releasing a deluge of rain. [55cd-59]

¹³⁶ The *cakravāka*, or ruddy goose, separates from its mate and mourns throughout the night.

¹³⁷ The identity of the six preceding creatures is unclear; I have followed the lead of Tarkaratna's commentary, which suggests that they are distinct types of aquatic fauna.

¹³⁸ A type of sheatfish.

¹³⁹ A type of carp.

¹⁴⁰ A type of catfish.

¹⁴¹ A "lion-faced" fish.

¹⁴² I follow Tarkaratna for the fourth *pada* of verse 49.

There on that great mountain where Ghora's army abided, the numerous cavalry, war elephants, chariots, and foot soldiers assembled. A roar rose up from those multitudes of warriors, immediately filling the mountains with their calls for victory. That roar reverberated through the various valleys, bringing joy to the lions and producing fear amongst the monkey troops. [60-62]

Having heard this, the Goddess appeared in support of the army of the gods.¹⁴³ Bristling with delight, she granted Vāsava his boon. Adorned with ornaments, opulent with the luster of various gifts, she began to frolic with other youthful maidens, and she made her way to the hermitage of Mārkaṇḍa, where floods of sins have been destroyed. Having seen her – she who grants all *siddhis* to sages – approaching, great Dānava warriors headed by Bhāsvara, drawn by the noose of death, assembled for the sake of increasing the might of Ghora in battle with the Goddess, oh Vāsava. [63-66ab]

They roused the lord of mountains [with their roaring]. The guarded army of the Dānavas ascended that lord of mountains on the first day of Aśvina under the constellation of Pūrva Bhādrapāda. A mighty Dānava warrior named Durmukha was dispatched to the head of the army, and the goddess Vijayā also arrived there for the sake of play. Having seen her, the mind of that Daitya leader was afflicted with desire, and he extended his hand to her. When the goddess glanced at him, that sinner fell to the ground, lifeless. Vijayā then approached the Goddess Sandhyā, the original principle, and explained: “Oh Goddess, a Dānava came, possessed by desire for me. I became so angry that when I looked at him, he died.” Having heard this, the Goddess thought: “That sinner Ghora who has assembled here should be slain by me, cursed by a previous oath.” [66cd-73ab]

Oh Vāsava, Ghora then saw visions in dreams at daybreak; listen [to them]. He was smeared with pungent oil, adorned with red garments, and wreathed with flower garlands of the noxious *kurunḍa* flower, appearing as if ready for a wedding. There was cooked fish and meat. All of the Dānavas danced, wearing black clothes, adorned with iron ornaments, garlanded with black wreaths, and perfumed with rank scents. All of the Daityas were embraced by women garbed in black garments. Then they were all conquered by strong men mounted on camels who raised up nooses and staffs, and they were tossed into dark woods or muddy wells amongst piles of chaff, hair, and bones. Some of the departed Asuras were eaten by jackals and dogs, others by crows, vultures, wolves, and monkeys. [73cd-79ab]

Having seen his powerful armies attacked by such mighty creatures, Ghora became unsettled, distressed to the point of vomiting and urinating. A goddess of terrible form descended from the mountain, radiant with hibiscus flowers, mounted on a donkey. Around her neck were garlands of bones. Her face was like that of a mighty boar. She was emaciated, squint-eyed, with her hair piled up – terrifying. Having immediately appeared with noose and hook upraised in her hands, that woman seized the unarmed, smoke-colored [Ghora]. He was then brought along that endless path of sorrow into the jaws of Yama. Having seen such [dreams], Ghora awoke at night's end.” [79cd-83]

¹⁴³ This half verse is only present in the Tarkaratna edition.

**Thus is the thirteenth chapter in the esteemed venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Visions in the Dream,”
in “The Destruction of Ghora.”**

Chapter Fourteen

Indra said:

“Oh lotus-born [Brahmā], did auspicious or inauspicious events occur in the morning after Ghora had seen such dreams? What did his army, ministers, and priests do? Tell me that; I’m quite interested.” [1-2]

Brahmā said:

“Listen, oh Vāsava. I will tell you about everything accurately. When brave [Ghora] arose, he [attempted to] recall the divine mantras, but his memory was impaired, bewildered in a state of delusion. After five days had passed, Kāla approached. He then learned that the courageous slayer of enemies, Durmukha, had been slain by that daughter of the mountain lord, even though he took up no arms against her nor expressed any fury. After some time, Kāla was compelled to speak to those Asuras. [3-6]

Kāla said:

“Where will I find that maiden by whom the courageous destroyer of enemies, Durmukha, was felled? Tell me that, oh virtuous ones. Even if the mountain lord, Śambhu, or Keśava shall protect [her], I will attack today.” Having thus spoken, the mighty Kāla set out. Even though he was opposed by the minister Suṣeṇa, he did not assent. The great and courageous Asuras Kālabhairava, Cāmuṇḍa, and Piṅgalākṣa ascended the mountain and began to threaten the maiden. [7-10ab]

Having seen them – some mounted on camels and others standing in chariots – Jayā climbed onto her horse, which was strong as an elephant. Threatening the massive and powerful Kāla, who knows weaponry well and is proficient in the manuals of war, that one with a sword in her hand fashioned an illusory lion that provoked fear amongst the elephants, and also fabricated a buffalo that was as fierce as the vehicle of Yama. Bhairava seated Vijayā on that [vehicle] and she set out to destroy [the enemy]. Then Ajitā, mounted on a deer, tormented Yamāntaka, Raudra, Vibhu, Prahāda, and Dundubhi.¹⁴⁴ The goddess Aparājītā, bearing scores of weapons, was surrounded ten-fold and hundred-fold by Vāmana, Duṣṭalohākṣa, Halāhala, and Bhayaṅkara. Creatures hid, oh Śakra, and the gods watched anxiously. [10cd-16]

The Dānava army suddenly began to rain down ear-shaped arrows, iron arrows, *bhuṣuṇḍī* weapons, and mallets on the gods. Incensed, Jayā then laid waste with the fall of her own arrows. She hurled a missile at Kāla meant to destroy that lion [of a Dānava]. His armor pierced and shattered by the strike of that missile, Kāla was enraged with fury.¹⁴⁵ He took up a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left, and quickly advanced towards Jayā. Seeing Kāla suddenly descending, sword in hand and filled with rage, Jayā cast a spear at him; [Kāla] struck it down with a blow of his sword. [17-20]

¹⁴⁴ These names are variously declined in the nominative, accusative, and instrumental, but the implication seems to be that Ajitā torments them. The commentaries suggest that these are attendants of Ajitā, but the names would suggest an Asura pedigree.

¹⁴⁵ The meter changes at verse 19, such that each *pada* contains eleven counts rather than eight. This meter continues through the remainder of chapter fourteen and throughout chapter fifteen. The variation is curious since it does not seem to indicate a change in the action of the narrative.

Having seen her spear destroyed, Jayā then rained down a stream of arrows like flowing rainwater on Kāla and his army. Kāla was shredded by hundreds of arrow blows. He sank to the ground, wounded in that attack by the goddess. Having revived and having steadied his mind, with a stormy anger he hurled the terribly painful barbed arrow; but the goddess shattered that approaching [weapon] with arrows, and cast many others at him. With one [arrow] she shattered the chariot of mighty Kāla, with another his horse, and with another his umbrella along with the banner and flagstaff. His fury was increased by her arrows. Then Kāla hurled a mace and proceeded towards the goddess to attack. The goddess threw a discus at the warrior Kāla, and he fell to the ground, dead. [21-25ab]

Having seen Kāla slain, Bhairava was saddened by the death, and then enraged with anger. Taking up a mace, he proceeded toward Jayā, but he died from the strike of a barbed arrow. With Kāla and Bhairava thus slain, Cāmuṇḍa, Piṅgalākṣa, and [the rest of] the mighty army, flaming with anger, approached the goddess in the illusory forms of rutting elephants. Destroyed by the lightning-like arrows of the goddess, those warriors set out along the path of the dead, their life-breaths gone. [25cd-27ab]

When the entire army of Kāla was thus slain, the gods released a shower of flowers from heaven. The clouds began to rain down drops of cool, clear water, and the breeze blew with a divine fragrance. The groups of Vidyādhara, Siddhas, Kimpnaras, and Cāraṇa singers began to dance along with the Apsarases. [27cd-29]

**Thus is the fourteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Slaying of Kāla,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

Chapter Fifteen

Brahmā said:

“When Kāla was thus slain and the might of his army destroyed, the gods were elated. Having seen the wife of Ghora sorrowful and dejected, Śakra began to praise the Goddess. [1]

Śakra said:

“Victory! Victory to you who are the refuge of the gods, whose brilliance shines in the combat of war. Apart from you, there is no other able to protect all those who are afraid. The superior army of the mighty Ghora had conquered Yama and Vahni, but because of you, oh Goddess, Brahmā, Vāyu, the Yakṣas, and myself will once again reside in heaven. All of us frightened ones have honored you; free us from fear without hesitation. Even those attacked by lions and elephants in this ocean [of *saṃsāra*] would be free from fear, having sought your refuge. [2-4]

Having seen that great [Asura army] suddenly increasing like a flood of flames during the conflagration at the end of time, even Brahmā and Viṣṇu were bewildered; but you, oh Goddess, have turned it to dust. It could not be conquered by Yama, Indra,¹⁴⁶ Brahmā, Janārdana, Bhāskara, Vāyu, the Yakṣas, Jaleśa, or the Rākṣasas; they remained afraid. But merely by your glance, oh Goddess, it has been reduced to ashes. You yourself are the earth, wind, sky, water, fire, the ten directions, the ocean, and the cycle of the constellations. We take refuge in that divine Goddess whom all the gods continually honor. [5-7]

Oh Goddess, you are she whom yogīs contemplate as the highest truth; whom teachers always indicate as all things; to whom sacrificers offer in the daily oblations; whom philosophers revere in Sāṃkhya-Yoga as well as that [yoga] of Patañjali; whom mantra reciters honor with mantras of Siddhānta; who liberates all those afflicted by Ḍākinīs, ghosts, or the planets¹⁴⁷; who has no beginning, middle, or end; who bears no form or embellishments; whose hymns could never be sufficient; whom even the all-pervading Śāṅkara praises. Become our refuge, the Goddess of the gods.” [8-10]

Thus Jayā, the destroyer of Kāla, was pleased, and she granted a boon to that king of gods, oh Vāsava. [She said:] “Having destroyed that army of Ghora, oh chief of gods, I will make you prosperous for all time.” Oh Purandara, he who devotedly recites this hymn to Vijayā will regain any lost kingdom or wealth. [11-13]

Brahmā said:

“Having heard that Kāla had been slain along with Bhairava and Piṅgal[ākṣa], Vajradaṇḍa became enraged and rushed to battle with the Goddess. Wielding a noose, mallet, club, conch, spear, arrow, and sword, Vajra[daṇḍa] quickly rained down [weapons] like torrents from a monsoon cloud. Due to the streams of arrows raised up, accompanied by Vajradaṇḍa’s roar, nothing could be perceived – not the directions, the sky, the earth, nor the currents of wind. Vajra[daṇḍa] launched five hundred arrows at the Goddess’s bow; [seeing] her bow shattered by them, the Goddess was inflamed with the fire of rage. She released a Vāruṇa weapon that was

¹⁴⁶ I read *yamendrabhiḥ* from Tarkaratna rather than *yam dundubhiḥ* in the first *pada* of verse 6.

¹⁴⁷ I employ Tarkaratna’s edition for the second half of verse 9.

equal in splendor to a mighty storm cloud, thundering terribly and filling the ten directions with lightning. It then rained down and washed away all of the Dānava army. [14-19ab]

Seeing this, Vajra[daṇḍa] unleashed amongst the clouds a wind raised up from powerful delusion, by which all of the clouds were destroyed. Having seen her clouds dispersed by Vajra[daṇḍa]'s wind, the Goddess's fury was increased. [She created] mountains equal in measure to a garland of Mount Meru, filling all of the directions. They immediately restrained the wind weapon; it then began to rain down stones along with arrows of thunderous lightning. Having destroyed his chariot and charioteer, as well as the staff bearing the umbrella and banner, she slew the mighty and courageous Vajra[daṇḍa] with an arrow feathered with fragments of gold. Having seen Vajra[daṇḍa] suddenly slain, Yamāntaka was angered and he approached the victorious Jayā, quickly casting arrows. But Yamāntaka, too, was destroyed by the Goddess, and set out along the great path of spirits. [19cd-23]

**Thus is the fifteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Slaying of Vajra[daṇḍa],”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

Chapter Sixteen

Brahmā said:

“When the mighty and courageous Vajra[daṇḍa] and Yamāntaka were slain, the tormented army of Ghora lost its strength and bravery. Having seen those valiant ones destroyed, Suśeṇa then spoke [to Ghora]: “I consider your intellect to be unsurpassed even amongst the gods. By you the lord of gods, Acyuta, was previously pleased. You regard all things in the moving and unmoving world impartially. Your nature is not transformed, even by the great excitement of the kingdom. You regard the wives of others as mothers or daughters-in-law. You perceive no distinction between pieces of gold and clods of dirt. You are not troubled even a little by the appearance of the sense objects such as sound and the rest. In your body the host [of emotions], such as desire, anger, etc., does not enter. You always undertake the holy action of beginning the Durgāṣṭaka. Your knowledge of fashioning military arrays is always at hand, like a piece of Amla fruit.¹⁴⁸ In your kingdom there are no mad, rutting elephants. [1-7]

Your staffs for [punishing] thieves are in use for [supporting] umbrellas, not for [disciplining] subjects. Your blows are reserved for horses and camels, not citizens or the lowly.¹⁴⁹ Your messengers are engaged in settling the anger of a beloved, not in war. Your tears flow due to [the smoke of] the sacrificial oblations, not from sorrow. In your [kingdom] spots may stain the moon and swords, but never one’s character. Your dreams may be false, but you never speak falsely. And in your kingdom children’s mouths curve [in a smile], never from anger or fear. Oh lord, you who possess all virtues and know all the sacred texts have merely trifling faults. It would be surprising if any of your enemies remain in battle.”¹⁵⁰ [8-12ab]

When Ghora set out, incited by his minister, Nārada then approached the Goddess, impelled by Viṣṇu and Brahmā. That supreme Goddess is the cause of the triumvirate [Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva]. She is without parts, the granter of peace, and the preserver of the dharma of sages. By the command of Śambhu, she appeared in manifest form along with Jayā and the rest.¹⁵¹ Then Nārada, the great knower of truth, meditated on the great Goddess who is all things and who is known with difficulty, and began to propitiate her with mantras. [12cd-15]

Nārada said:

“Victory! Oh Goddess who is praised by Śambhu. Victory! Oh you who have arisen from the body of Rudra. Victory! Oh you who are the cause of origination, maintenance, and destruction as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Īśa. Victory to the cause of destruction, arising from the body of Rudra. Victory! Oh Goddess who gives rise to dependent existence. Victory! Oh Goddess of auspicious speech. Victory! Oh all-pervading Mother. Victory! Oh giver of boons. Oh Śaṃkharī, be pleased with my [recitation] of all your names. I will glorify those celebrated names of yours by which you are continually praised here in the world. [16-19]

¹⁴⁸ The meaning of *dhātṛija* in verse 7 is imprecise, but the commentaries suggest that it refers to Amla fruit.

¹⁴⁹ The translation of the second half of verse 8 is uncertain.

¹⁵⁰ I employ Tarkaratna’s edition for the first half of verse 12, though the grammar of the verse is slightly problematic in his text as well.

¹⁵¹ The second half of verse 14 is adopted from the Tarkaratna edition.

You are Durgā, difficult to approach; nourishing Śākambharī; radiant Gaurī; Varadā, giver of boons; Vindhyavāsini, dwelling in the Vindhya mountains; Kātyāyini, who fulfills desires; gracious Suprasādā; Kauśikī of the sheath; Kaiṭabheśvarī, who lords over Kaiṭabha; the great Goddess, Mahādevī; illustrious Mahābhāgā; Mahāśvetā, dazzling white; sovereign Maheśvarī Tridaśānandinīśānī, who delights the thirty [gods]; her grace, Bhavānī; Bhūtabhāvinī, the essence of creatures; preeminent Jyeṣṭhā; Ṣaṣṭhī, who [protects on] the sixth [day after birth]; Tamoniṣṭhā, rooted in *tamas*; pious Brahmiṣṭhā; Brahmavādinī, the voice of Brahmā; Aparṇā, [who eats] not a leaf; skull-bearing Kapālā; golden Suvarṇā; Ekapātālā, living on a single blossom; Trilokadhātṛī, who bears the triple world; solar Sāvitrī; Gāyatrī of the hymn; Tridaśārcitā, worshiped by the thirty [gods]; trident-bearing Triśulinī; triple-eyed Trinayanā; tripartite Tripadā; Trigunātmikā, essence of the three *guṇas*; Śraddhā, faith; Svāhā, oblation; Svadhā, libation; Medhā, prudence; Lakṣmī, prosperity; Kānti, desire; Kṣamāvatī, patience; Ṛddhi, abundance; Saṃṛddhi, welfare; Buddhi, intellect; Śuddhi, purity; Saṃśuddhi, purification; all-knowing Sarvajñā; auspicious Sarvatobhadra; Sarvatokṣiṣiromukhā, whose eyes, face, and head extend everywhere; Sarvabhūtādimadhyāntā, the beginning, middle and end of all existents; Sarvalokeśvareśvarī, goddess of the lords of all worlds; Mānavī, *śakti* of Manu; Yādavī, *śakti* of Yadu; Yoganidrā, yogic sleep; Vaiṣṇavī, *śakti* of Viṣṇu; Arūpā, who is without form; Bahurūpā, who has many forms; Surūpā, of beautiful form; Kāmarūpiṇī, the form of desire; Śailarājasutā, daughter of the mountain lord; virtuous Sādhvī; Skandamātā, mother of Skanda; Acyutasvasā, sister of Viṣṇu; Jayā, victory; Vijayā, triumph; unconquered Ajitā; invincible Aparājitā; Śruti, who is heard; Smṛti, who is remembered; Dhṛti, constancy; Kṣānti, forbearance; Śakti, power; Śānti, peace; Unnati, prosperity; Prakṛti, nature; Vikṛti, perturbation; Kīrti, glory; Sthiti, abiding; Santati, continuity; Kālarātri, the dark night; Mahārātri, the ultimate night; dark and auspicious Bhadrakālī; Kapālīnī, bearing skulls; Cāmuṇḍā, Caṇḍinī, Caṇḍī, and Caṇḍamuṇḍavināśinī, slayer of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa; Rudrānī, *śakti* of Rudra; Pārvatī, the mountain girl; Indrānī, *śakti* of Indra; Śamkarārdhaśarīrīnī, half of the body of Śaṃkara; Dīkṣā, dedication; Dākṣāyaṇī, daughter of Dakṣa; Nārī, the female; Nārāyaṇī, *śakti* of Nārāyaṇa; Niśumbhaśumbhadamanī, subduer of Śumbha and Niśumbha; Mahiṣāsuraḡhātīnī, slayer of the buffalo demon; thousand-eyed Sahasranayanā; steadfast Dhīrā; shining Revatī; Siṃhavāhinī, with the lion vehicle; universal Viśvāvatī; courageous Vīryavatī; Vedamātā, mother of the Veda; learned Sarasvatī; Māyāvatī, possessing delusion; Bhogavatī, delight; righteous Satī; truthful Satyavatī; Samastakāryakaraṇī, cause of all action; Īpsitārthaprasādhani, granter of desired aims. I take refuge in the goddess Śaraṇāgatavatsalā, who is affectionate to her children who approach for protection; formidable Bhīmā; fierce Ugrā; smoky Dhūmrā; Ambikā, little mother; Tryambakapriyā, dear triple-mother [Ambā, Ambikā, Ambālikā]. Situated in the hearts of those filled with devotion, you destroy their sins. You always grant victory in war, the obtainment of knowledge that is difficult to grasp, long life, and strength, and you always fulfill whatever is desired by kings. By your grace, virtuous sons are obtained, as well as the means to success in all matters. Now be a boon-giver to me.” [20-36]

Thus the Goddess was praised by the great-souled Nārada. Oh Śakra, he suddenly saw her, mounted on her mighty lion; bearing a shield, sword, bow, arrow, spear, and club; wielding a *vajra*, lance, elephant tusk, axe, and mallet; holding a noose, hook, banner, lute, bell, and drum. She was clothed in leopard skin, holding a garland of *akṣa* beads, and raising her hand in a gesture of granting boons. She who gives rise to the devotion of devotees, the pure Mother made an offer,

saying, “Request the desired boon.” Bowing, he said: “Oh Goddess, destroy the enemy Ghora!” Having told Nārada, “Thus it shall be,” she immediately approached Ghora.”¹⁵² [37-42]

**Thus is the sixteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Nārada’s Vision of the Goddess,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

¹⁵² I follow Tarkaratna in reading Ghora as rendered in the accusative case rather than nominative in verse 42.

Chapter Seventeen

Indra said:

“When the boon was given to Nārada and Ghora was approached, what did the Goddess do? And what about the mighty Ghora? Furthermore, how many remained in Ghora’s battered army? Tell me.” Thus questioned by Vāsava, Brahmā reflected on it all and began to tell about the Goddess’s great battle with Ghora. [1-3ab]

Brahmā said:

“Since you inquire about the battle between the Goddess and Ghora, oh Śakra, then I will tell it just as it occurred; however, each and every army could not be described even with hundreds of crores of verses, so I will narrate a little concisely, oh king of gods. [3cd-5]

There were thirty crore, seven lakh, and one *ayuta*¹⁵³ chariots; fifty hundred crore, seventy lakh, a thousand *ayuta*, and sixty-five elephants, oh excellent one; a lakh crore, thirty-two lakh, fifty thousand, fifty-five horses, oh Vāsava; and seventy-two lakh, nine *ayuta* remaining of Ghora’s [troops], oh Śakra, chief of gods. Twice this number had been slain in the battle with Jayā and Vijayā. Yamāntaka, Kāla, Durmukha, Vajra[daṇḍa], and Bhairava had been killed by the Goddess, and many crores of others had been slain in great numbers.” [6-10]

Śakra said:

“Oh Brahmā, were the courageous Ghora and his surviving army frightened for the protection of their lives, or were they caught up in the fervor of battle?” [11]

Brahmā said:

“Oh Śakra, inflamed by the fire of anger, Ghora and his remaining army fashioned illusory troops by the thousands. That army raised up by the *māyā* of Ghora entered the seven realms and densely pervaded the earth with its seven continents, as well as the sky, and the underworlds.¹⁵⁴ Viṣṇu, Śakra the praiseworthy lord of all gods riding on his rutting elephant, the Rākṣasas, Anala, Vāyu, Kubera, and Lord Rudra the lord of earth, along with Soma, Ravi who is chief among the shining, all the Rudras and Viśvadevas, the stars, planets, groups of Nāgas and Siddhas, Vidyādhara, Kimpurāṣas, ghosts, and the ancestors – all were oppressed and set out to compel the goddesses to destroy Ghora and his illusion. Śambhu, his mind bewildered, recalled that supreme [Goddess]. [12-16]

Īśvara said:

“Victory! Victory! Oh you who are honored by Hari, Hara, and lotus-seated [Brahmā]. Honor, oh Goddess! Oh Śivā, who has arisen from the mouth of Śambhu. Oh Caṇḍikā of cruel form. Oh you of beautiful face, eyes, limbs, and dress, whose lips are red as bimba fruit. Oh great *yoginī*. Oh you whose banner is adorned with peacock feathers. Oh you whose face shines like moonlight or a lotus, whose mouth is formidable with its excessively sharp fangs, like that of a lion. Oh fearsome and frightening one. Oh splendid and heroic one. Oh you who wander in the cremation ground. Oh you whose eyes are shaped like lotus petals. Oh you who conquer. Oh Mānasī! Oh

¹⁵³ One *ayuta* is equivalent to ten thousand.

¹⁵⁴ Verses 13-16 switch meter to eleven beats per *pada*.

Mānavī! Oh Mother of mortals. Oh you whose banner is the lion. Oh you who bestow all *siddhis*. Oh you whose laughter resounds louder than the ocean, kettledrums, or storm clouds. [17-19]

Oh Brāhmī, Kaumārī, Māhendrī, Maheśvarī, Vaiṣṇavī, and Vārāhī. Oh you who have arisen as wind, fire, and water. Oh you who dwell on the mountain, though you yourself are the great mountains Hemakūṭa, Mahendra, Himādri, Vindhya, Sahya, and Śrīgiri. Oh you who are surrounded by lakhs of terrible Pramatha attendants, both short and tall, fat with potbellies, and with legs [sturdy] like palm trees. Oh you whose golden splendor radiates like crores of sunbeams or the fire of dissolution. Oh you who are expert in love and passion. Oh you who are beloved as perception, peace, fortune, joy, prosperity, profit, splendor, accomplishment, intellect, activity, satisfaction, wealth, stability, creation, and rain. Oh Mother of the Vedas. Oh you who know proper conduct. Oh you who know prescription. Oh maiden. Oh eternal one. Oh earth. Oh illuminating one. Oh you who gave rise to Sāṃkhya-Yoga. [20-22]

Oh you who have your many weapons upraised – serpent, plough, mace, noose, sword, discus, conch, skull-staff, club, and hook. Oh you who bear Rudra’s trident, garlands of *akṣa* beads, and a bow. Oh you who cause Daityas to flee. Oh you who destroy and you who support. Oh you who fetter and you who liberate. Oh you who destroy all difficulties. Oh you who spread fame. Oh you who animate splendor. Oh you who destroy afflictions. Oh you whose lout-like face is as fearsome as a meteor. Oh Umā. Oh Caṇḍikā. Oh you who burned the triple cities. Oh you who are established in half the body of Hara. [23-24]

Oh you whose face is like lightning or a meteor. Oh you who bear a dark complexion. Oh you whose festivals occur on the ninth, eighth, fifth, full moon, fourth, and eleventh of the dark half of the month. Oh you who are adorned with dark blue sapphires, pearls, rubies, crystals, emeralds, diamonds, cat-eye gems, and gold. Oh you who are ornamented with shining anklets, bracelets, a crown, armbands, and necklaces. Oh you whose garments are made of bark and blue silken threads. Dancing, you always shine with your prominent round breasts, delightful like two golden water pots or collections of sunbeams pressed together, and with your thin waist, slender limbs, and expansive, firm buttocks. Oh Ambikā. Oh triple mothers [Ambā, Ambikā, Ambālikā]. Oh you who move elegantly, like the best of bulls, swans, or elephants. Oh you who are capable of moving Meru, desiccating oceans, or pulverizing mountains. [25-27]

Oh you who are tawny, you are Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, Dhātrī, Vidhātrī, Diti, and Tākṣyamātā. You agitate even those who have conquered the senses. Oh Brāhmī, Vetālī, skeletal Kaṅkāli, skull-bearing Kapālinī, gracious Bhadrakālī, great Mahākālī. Oh you who are the fiery dissolution. Oh you who are the *kali yuga*. Oh you who are the undivided absolute. You are surrounded by great groups of attendant Siddhas who emit roars of the auspicious words, “Victory! Victory!” You are accompanied by divine vehicles, dark elephants, beautifully adorned horses, and large, white umbrellas. Oh you who are covered in red garments and garlands, you are praised by gods, Daitya lords, Yakṣas, Apsarases, and Pramathas. Oh you who are the supreme refuge, you always move about with your tongue lolling and your hair wild. Oh you whose ears delight in the clamor of harsh bells. Oh you who adore the sound of flute and lute, hymns, singing, and the dancing of Gandharvas. [28-30]

Oh you whose two temples display ringlets like coiled snakes. Oh you who are the highest of all creatures. Oh you who are the abode of all creatures. Oh Gaurī, Gandhārī, Mātāṅgī, and Dhūmeśvarī. Oh you who are the lamp of dharma. Oh you who destroy the sacrifice of Dakṣa. Oh you who bestow death on the buffalo [demon]. Oh you who delude Śumbha and Niśumbha. Oh inflaming Dīpanī. Oh you who bestow prosperity. Oh Revatī. Oh you who possess beautiful, dark ears. Oh you who effect creation, maintenance, and destruction of the world. Oh you who are the goddess of yoga. Oh you who are the goddess of all worlds. Oh Khecarī, the power of flying. Oh Gocarī, Caṇḍī, Mātāṅgī, and smoky Dhūmrā. Oh moon-faced daughter of the mountain lord. Oh great embodiment of mantras. Oh all-pervading purity. Oh you who are gracious and honored. Oh you who are virtuous. Oh Gautamī, Kauśikī, Pārvatī, and Kātyāyanī. Oh you who are devoted to the Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma, and Atharva [Vedas]. Oh you who are eternal. [31-33]

Oh you who are auspicious. Oh you of terrific sound. Oh you who move speedily as the mighty wind. Oh Sarasvatī, Arundhatī. Oh you who are unfailing. Oh you who display innumerable arms, bellies, and many mouths. Oh you who bestow various deaths. Oh nourishing Śākambharī. Oh you who always dwell in caves on lofty mountain peaks. Oh you who are formidable, thus you are constantly proclaimed. Absorbed in love, your rolling eyes are like blue lotus petals; [when angered] they flare like shuddering red lotuses. Oh you who destroy death. Oh you who incite desire. Oh you who gaze upon your worshipers. Oh you who grant liberation from heaven, [earth], and the netherworlds. Oh you who bestow supreme sovereignty. Oh you who bear fortune, look upon me as a son. [34-35]

Oh you whose tongue is *kuśa* grass, air, and fire. Oh you who are the three *guṇas*. Oh you who are immeasurable. Oh you who are waves of the ocean and ripples of sunlight. You are balanced *suṣumnā*, *īḍā*, and *piṅgalā* wind channels. You sound out fierce noise with your jeweled bells. You are medicine that destroys deadly illness. You are the Gaṅgā, born of my matted locks. Oh you who make a terribly deep and frightful sound. Oh you who have all weapons upraised. Oh you who are surrounded by all the gods. Protect! Defend me! Oh you with divine garlands and garments. Oh you who are anointed with divine fragrance. [36-37]

You alone are to be called mind. You are the immortal protector. You are the immortal conveyor of truth. You have conquered anger, and you are grounded in anger. You are pervading, and you are manifest. You are the night of dissolution. You are grace. You are the embodiment of desire. You have entered “Svadhā.” You are the destroyer of impediments. You are fame. You are Nārāyaṇā. You are dark and tawny. You are proud. You wander like the wind. You are praised by gods, Daitya lords, Rākṣasas, Uragas, Kiṃnaras, Yakṣas, Gandharvas, and Vidyādhara. You are hymned by the best of sages, oh Goddess, because from singing your praise one attains liberation. [38-39]

Like a mother towards a son, you protect those who are bound by the noose of death, lead by the lord of gods, cursed by the best of sages, caught by the lion lord of beasts, rent by the best of elephants, overcome by the chief of planets, carried off by the lord of birds, bitten by serpents, plunged in water, fainted on the ground, lost in the forest, trounced in battle, wounded by arrows, confronted by strangers, refuted in argument, seized by some mighty grasper, or otherwise defeated. Oh Goddess, even those men who have committed sins due to the impurity of the *kali yuga* will be freed from those transgressions after having recalled your face shining like the full

moon, bright with the three eyes of Soma, Sūrya, and Agni, and both sides resonant with the swaying of your earrings. Those who are plunged into the terrible sea of *saṃsāra*, who have gone amongst enemies, who are addicted to drinking, who are bound by fetters, who are tormented by hunger or thirst, who have gone into the tree branches, who are caught in some machine, or who are surrounded by thieves – you protect all those creatures dwelling in the underworlds, on earth, in heaven, and in the sky, including the gods, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Gandharvas, Nāgas, Vidyādhara, Aśvins, and the planets. [40-43]

Once you have been considered, Great Goddess, there is no doubt; oh Caṇḍikā, [one attains] this eminent *daṇḍaka* meter produced by Śiva, which is the great staircase leading along the supreme path to Śiva's city, and which eliminates atrocities, destroys sins, and bestows all that is desired. Just as ghee is derived from the churning of curds and whey, thus this *daṇḍaka* hymn has been recited concisely with verses of names for the sake of the welfare of worshipers. I will tell what those who recite it will attain; listen. That virtue which is received from the sacrifices such as Rājapeya, Aśvamedha, Agniṣṭoma, Godāna, Ṛg, Somāpāna, and the rest, as well as that virtue which is received from worship of gods, ritual bathing, *homa* sacrifice, fasting, hymns, giving, and vows at all the pilgrimage places on earth, that same result will be obtained by the one who shall recite this *daṇḍaka* hymn. By means of the *daṇḍaka*, he will become a Siddha sporting in heaven. That worshiper will be surrounded by the supreme Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Indra, by divine vehicles, and by celestial beings for many thousands of crores of great eons. [44-47]

Then at the time of dissolution, he enters into the supreme fire of dissolution. Having passed eight crore, one hundred, and twenty ages of Kālāgnirudra, he then becomes one of the fifty-two Rudras when the egg of Brahmā splits into the worlds of Bhur, Bhuvar, Svar, Mahā, Jana, Tapa, and Satya. Having surpassed the natural world of the sixty-eight elements of water, light, wind, the realm of spirits, fate, and time, and then having abandoned the subtle fruits of knowledge, supreme sovereignty, and the rest, he shall proceed to the eternal, highest state, the lord of all existence, the supreme of all existence, the all-pervading unity.” [48-50]

**Thus is the seventeenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Hymn to the Goddess Performed by Śiva,”
in “The Destruction of Ghora.”**

Chapter Eighteen

Brahmā said:

“Thus the Goddess was previously praised by the god of gods, Śambhu, for the sake of the welfare of Viṣṇu, Śakra, and the other gods. Then all of the moving and unmoving [world] that had been clothed in the darkness of delusion was suddenly lit up, just as the sky is illumined by the sun. Roused by their augmented energy, all of the gods headed by Vāsava rained down garlands of flowers at the lotus feet of the Goddess. [1-3]

With exceedingly sharp and pointed arrows, the laughing Goddess began to attack Ghora the Danu lord, who was like a storm cloud during the rainy season. The Dānava army was then tormented by the swift and powerful rain of arrows released by the hand of the Goddess. That Dānava army grew helpless, oh Purandara. Ghora’s military lost their radiance due to the arrows of Kātyāyanī. No strikes were landed by those Dānavas, whose vigor had dissipated. [4-7ab]

Then an angered Suṣeṇa, provoked into a fury, oh Vāsava, fashioned a thousand illusory elephants maddened by rut. The chief of Asuras dispatched those elephants perfumed with the scent of rut towards the goddess Jayā. But Jayā, having seen that Dānava, mounted her shining lion. She crushed all those elephants as if the direction elephants had been shattered. When the troop of elephants had been destroyed, oh Śakra, that Dānava, the destroyer of the gods’ pride, quickly took up a sword and struck the lion of Jayā. Her lion thus attacked, the goddess grew angry, oh Vāsava, and decapitated Suṣeṇa with a discus. [7cd-12]

**Thus is the eighteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Slaying of Suṣeṇa.”**

Chapter Nineteen

Brahmā said:

“When the great Daitya was slain, the Dānava army appeared diminished, like a lotus withered by the fall of snow. When Suṣeṇa was destroyed, oh Śakra, the Daitya [named] Sarvamardaka fashioned by means of *māyā* numerous warriors who appeared just like Suṣeṇa. They were very terrible, with faces like goats, sheep, lions, and boars. They were mounted on elephants, horses, and chariots, with shield and sword upraised in their hands. All of those mighty and courageous ones [set out] to battle Ajitā, who was mounted on a crocodile, noose in hand, club and hook upraised. [1-4]

Having seen Ajitā, they did not tremble even a little. Emitting a howling murmur of “*kalakala*” that was intended to incite the Goddess, they quickly [increased] ten-fold, hundred-fold, thousand-fold, crore-fold. Those best of Danus shattered the bow and discus of the Goddess. Attacked by them all, the Goddess began to release nets of arrows. Having seen the encroaching army, a third goddess, Aparājītā the inciter of fear, [approached] to still the Dānavas with rains of arrows. [5-8ab]

Oh Śakra, that Dānava army including elephants, horses, warriors, and charioteers that had risen up from terrible illusion set out along the path of Yama. Surely the number of the troops’ widows could not be counted.¹⁵⁵ Then Ghora, his army slain, produced great *māyā*, oh Purandara. He fashioned [warriors] in the form of Indra, Candra, Arka, and Viṣṇu. They began to harass their counterpart Indra, Candra, Sūrya, and Viṣṇu. He then dispatched an [illusory] goddess to face the Goddess in the battle of the duplicates. But the Goddess subdued that *māyā* raised up by Ghora, snatching [the troops] with the noose of Jayā, just like lovely lotuses in a pool being plucked by elephants. [8cd-12]

**Thus is the nineteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Destruction of the Illusory Army.”**

¹⁵⁵ I follow Tarkaratna’s edition for the second half of verse 9.

Chapter Twenty

Brahmā said:

“Thus the Goddess subdued all of that illusion produced by the Daitya lord. Even though he was skilled in *māyā*, [knowledgeable] of good policy and the six acts of warfare, endowed with the three regal powers, possessed of valor, and furnished with armies and vehicles, he was bound by a single fate.” [1-2]

Śakra said:

“When fate is strong, then one can conquer the enemy army alone. Elephants, horses, and warriors are all rendered useless. Neither dharma nor non-dharma, neither minister nor royal priest – fate alone bestows the fruits of good and evil. Sacrifices such as the Aśvamedha and sins such as brahminicide possess neither virtue nor faults; fate alone is the agent. There is no necessity for physicians, astrologers, or ministers; there is no profit in agricultural work or commerce; fate provides all. Now the manifestation of the Goddess has occurred in the narration. Was she created by you lord? *Fate* has produced her. By inference, then, there is no [reason for] obedience and discipline.” [3-8ab]

Agastya said:

“Thus you previously spoke to Brahmā about fate, oh Śakra; and lotus-born [Brahmā] spoke to you about that cause of vitality.”¹⁵⁶ [8cd-9ab]

Brahmā said:

“Fate is the mightiest among the powerful energies. All material objects can be considered, but how shall fate be conceived? All that conforms to fate is set in motion by *śakti* and *puruṣa*. Though rain itself is what makes all the worlds’ crops bountiful, the man who desires the result must engage in human toil, oh Śakra. Thus it is [with fate]. Surely it is not fate alone in the embraces of the mistress lying on the couch. Thus it is determined that the acts of man too are effective, though in conjunction with the power of fate. So one must always strive for the best among the acts of men, oh excellent one. [9cd-13]

Gods, Dānavas, Gandharvas, sages, men, and Asuras are all subject to the will of destiny, oh Śakra. Śivā herself is considered to be fate. It [fate] manifests in the form of Dānavas and in the form of gods, oh Vāsava; it manifests as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva for the sake of creation, maintenance, and destruction. Taking on various forms, it makes and destroys all [things]. By means of this [fate], Ghora produced that terrible Dānava illusion.” Thus Brahmā previously conversed with Śakra, oh Śakra. [14-17ab]

Then that army of the Goddess was being crushed by the Dānavas. When the sun had set and twilight set in, Ajitā was dispatched to remove the fear of the gods. Yogic sleep was called to the minds of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra, and Rudra. She is the supreme protectress as well as the delusion of death. The Great Goddess thus approached at night for the preservation of the gods. When half the night had passed, the mighty Kāla, possessed of great *māyā*, also [approached], having adopted many forms. Though only one, he fashioned crores of buffalo like Yama’s vehicle, appearing like

¹⁵⁶ I follow Tarkaratna’s edition for verses 8cd and 9ab.

dark storm clouds at the beginning of the rainy season and possessing terrifying red-eyed bodies that frightened the gods and Asuras. From his moving about, the earth quaked, creating mountains and canyons. The gods and Asuras became afraid. [17cd-23]

Ghora took on a similarly terrifying form and set out for battle with the Goddess. He saw her, powerfully inflamed with fury like the dissolution fire, seated on the best of lions, creating fear in the Danu lord and allaying that of the chief of gods. Ghora regarded that Goddess who would bring about the death of the Daityas and the reestablishment of the gods. In anger, with his hooves he kicked up mountains that agitated the moon, sun, and stars. [24-26ab]

He quickly began to battle with the lion, but the lion pierced him with his claws. From the blows of [the lion's] claws, blood issued forth from the body of the buffalo like streams of water; it appeared to the gods like necklaces suspended on the body of that injured one. Wearied by blows from [the buffalo's] terrible horns, the lion suddenly emitted a roar. Enraged, he thrust forward with strikes of his claws and fangs that were intended to bring down that Daitya. [Ghora] unleashed an abundance of blows on the Goddess with mallet, noose, club, and arrows. Her lion was unable to restrain him; he fell, struck by the horns. [26cd-29]

When Ghora's Dānava warriors saw the king of lions struck by terrible blows and fallen to the ground, their passion was renewed and they cast superior weapons at the body of the Goddess. Having seen the Goddess with injured limbs, Jayā and Vijayā [came] to hold back the Dānavas. All of the army of Ghora, its vicious form arisen through illusion, was thus hindered. The Goddess threw the approaching [Ghora] to the ground and slit his throat with a sword. Having seen that enemy of the gods slain, the gods scattered flowers at the feet of the Goddess. [30-32]

Arising from his severed head, hundreds of [Dānavas] bearing Ghora's terrifying form came forth, their faces flushed, red-eyed and burning with anger, their hair loosened, and their hands bearing swords. They roared from the sight of the Goddess's face and produced fear amongst the gods. As soon as the Goddess saw this, she bound them with a noose and split their heads with a thrown spear. Caught, they fell, their courage abandoned. Oh lord of gods, that king of the Daityas was thus slain, and he proceeded along the path of ghosts. [33-35]

**Thus is the twentieth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called "The Slaying of Ghora,"
in "The Descent of the Goddess."**

Chapter Twenty-one

Brahmā said:

“When courageous Ghora, who generated fear among gods and Asuras, was slain, the gods, Rākṣasas, and others appeared, worshiping the Goddess. When they saw that buffalo who was difficult to conquer slain, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Sureśāna, Indra, Candra, Yama, Anila, the Ādityas, Vasus, Twilights, planets, Nāgas, and Guhyakas approached. Having assembled, all of the gods pleased that Goddess with their devotion. She granted a boon that she would destroy the fears of all the worlds. [1-4ab]

Among the Bhūtas, they gave a sacrifice of buffalo and goat meat. In the cities, hundreds of thousands of conchs and *bherī* drums rang out, *duṇḍubhi* kettledrums roared, and the *mardala* drum sounded sharply. That day the supreme gods, those devotees of the Goddess, made [the cities] splendid with flags, banners, umbrellas, bells, and flywhisks. On that day all of the gods along with the Bhūtas and Pretas undertook a constant, great pūjā. [4cd-7]

Worshiping the Goddess who destroyed the buffalo enemy, those who devotedly slay [an offering] in the middle of the night on the eighth day in the month of Āśvina at the end of the rainy season will always remain mighty. For as long as an eon, the Goddess Śaṃkarī is pleased with those who present [blood] offerings, which annihilate all misfortunes. For that long, one delights in the various pleasures of heaven, which are won with difficulty. They shall have no anxieties, ailments, nor fear of enemies. No gods, planets, Daityas, Asuras, or Pannagas will oppress those who dwell at the feet of the Goddess, oh lord of gods. [8-12ab]

As long as earth, wind, sky, water, fire, moon, and planets remain, thus worship of Caṇḍikā will always continue on earth. The eighth and ninth days in the month of Āśvina during the autumn season will be particularly celebrated in the world with the designation “*mahā-*.” Oh lord of gods, this [account] grants the fruit of dwelling in heaven. Thus proclaimed, it distinguishes between the higher and the lower by means of the *kriyāyoga* of action.¹⁵⁷ [12cd-15]

**Thus is the twenty-first chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Indicating the Religious Rites of the Ninth,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

¹⁵⁷ The meaning of the last line is unclear.

Chapter Twenty-two

Brahmā said:

“When brilliant Ghora met his end, the [Goddess] as splendid as moonlight, like moonbeams among fresh clouds, went to the supreme place, Kailāsa. Having thus defeated the gods’ mighty thorn of an enemy, oh Śakra, the Goddess, pleased by Viṣṇu and the rest, bestowed a boon.” [1-2]

Indra said:

“Oh sir, I want to hear about the annual fasts, vows, and the rest that are performed on the ninth day of Āśvina, the day Ghora was slain.” [3]

Brahmā said:

“Listen, oh Śakra, I will tell you that which you are asking – the granting of all *siddhis* and virtues; annihilation of all enemies; special gifts to be given for the benefit of all the worlds and the livelihood of sages; special duties of Brahmans, of Kṣatriya guardians of Earth, of Vaiśyas who seek to gain cows, and of Śūdras who desire sons and happiness, oh child; and the great, virtuous vows practiced by Śiva and the rest – all of that is to be achieved by those possessed of devotion for the Goddess, oh lord of gods. [4-6]

When the sun has entered Virgo and the bright half of the month has begun, one who is fasting, who eats only once a day, who eats only at night, or who only takes ghee; one who takes the morning bath; one who has overcome dualism and [distinctions of] past, present, and future; one who worships Śiva; and one who is engaged in chanting and *homa* sacrifice, should often feed young maidens. On the eighth, nine suitable wooden dwellings should be fashioned, or only one by those without wealth, oh chief of gods. There a Goddess [icon] should be prepared of gold, silver, earth, or wood, bearing all the auspicious marks. One may also worship the sword and trident. [7-10]

All of the offerings should be made, including cloth, riches, fruit, etc. The chariot, swing, and the rest should be constructed. The *pūjā* should be performed with a sacrifice to the Goddess. On the eighth one should prepare the various *pūjās* with *droṇa* flowers, *bilva* fruit,¹⁵⁸ mango, white *jātī* flower,¹⁵⁹ white lotus, and *campaka* flowers.¹⁶⁰ A fast should be kept. With the mind one-pointed, absorbed in Durgā, the mantras should be recited. [11-13ab]

For the sake of victory, half-way through the night the highest of kings, while chanting “Kālī! Kālī!” with a sword should sacrifice [a goat] whose body bears all the auspicious marks and which has been properly revered with incense and garlands of flowers. Having gathered the flowing blood along with the meat, it should be presented, accompanied by the Mahākāuśika mantra. Then the king should bathe. He should fashion an enemy from rice-flour paste; having slain it with a sword, he should offer it to Skanda and [Skanda’s son] Viśākha. [13cd-16]

¹⁵⁸ The astrigent *bilva* fruit is also called bel/bael.

¹⁵⁹ The *jātī* is a type of jasmine.

¹⁶⁰ The *campaka* is commonly called the yellow jade orchid.

Then the wise one should bathe the Goddess with milk, ghee, water, etc. and make her fragrant with saffron, aloe, camphor, sandalwood, and *arghya* water. Presenting gold, flowers, jewels, and new garments, abundant [gifts] should be offered to the Goddess by those who are absorbed [in her]. Devotees of the Goddess, young maidens, as well as married women should be worshiped. Brahmans, the poor, and the devoted should be propitiated with gifts of food. Those men who are devotees of Nandā and those who maintain great vows should especially be worshiped, since they are forms of Caṇḍikā. [17-20]

Worship of the Mothers and [other] goddesses should be done at night. One should raise up banners, umbrellas, flags, etc. in temples of Carcikā. Chariot procession, placement of offerings, raising up of recitations, and draping with cloth should be done; by this the Goddess is pleased. With devotion one obtains [the same result as] the Aśvamedha, oh chief of gods. Worshiping on the Great Ninth grants whatever is desired. She is to be praised with devotion among all castes. Having done so, one obtains glory, kingdoms, sons, long life, and wealth. [21-24]

**Thus is the twenty-second chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Prescriptions for the Ninth,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

Chapter Twenty-three

Brahmā said:

“Having commenced Navarātri, the devoted sovereign should drink milk; remain intent upon devotion to the Goddess; eat vegetables and barley, but only once a day; bathe in the morning; remain devoted to Śivā; worship with oblations of sesame, yogurt, milk, ghee, and the rest; and perform the mantras of the Goddess. Listen to the benefits of worship, oh Hari. [1-2]

He who is attached to some great crime or is bound by sins shall be freed from them all; there is no doubt in this, since Śivā is all-pervading. The one bound to devotion, who worships Śivā according to precept, or who causes her to be worshiped by proxy, shall have no ailment, fear of enemies, nor sorrow inflicted by calamities. His kingdom shall not be destroyed. The seasons shall always be pleasant, fortunate, and prosperous. Fame will be achieved. There will be no thieves. Cows will give considerable milk. Brahmins will be engaged in utmost behavior. All women will be devoted to their husbands, and kings will be rid of their enemies. [3-7]

Oh clever one, from worship of Carcikā in this manner, the trees of the forest will bear fruits and flowers; in this there is no doubt. With this mantra – “Jayantī, Maṅgalā, Kālī, Bhadrakālī, Kapālīnī, Durgā, Śivā, Kṣamā, Dhātṛī, Svāhā! Svadhā! Honor to you” – the recitation and *homa* sacrifice should be performed. Oh young one, contemplating and worshipping the Slayer of the Buffalo in the morning immediately destroys sin, just as the rising of the sun dispels darkness. [8-11]

Umā destroys all enemies of the king whose banner [displays] the one seated on a lion. He who worships the guardian, oh young one, shall have no fear of enemies. Mahāmāyā, settled on a monkey [vehicle], destroys all enemies, just as she who is [mounted] on a bull grants whatever is desired, while she who is [seated] on the water pot bestows supreme fortune. She who is [mounted] on a goose bestows knowledge, wealth, and pleasure, while she who is [seated] on a peacock grants desired sons. Mahāmāyā, mounted on the eagle, destroys all disease. She who is displayed on the banner, settled on a buffalo, subdues pestilence. She who bears a trident, mounted on an elephant, performs all the actions of kings. A silver Carcikā settled on a lotus grants dharma, pleasure, wealth, and liberation. She who is seated on a corpse always destroys all fears after the slaughter of an animal. She who is worshiped as supreme with blue lotus in hand, oh lord of gods, effects the desired *siddhis* if she is foremost on the banner. [12-17]

Having made [the banner] heaped up with incense and flowers, spread with cloth and gold, and adorned with purified heaps of fruit, rice, and barley, that radiant [banner] should be raised up along with delightful flags, flywhisks, water pots, conchs, umbrellas, and canopies. [From this] the king is granted fortune and all desired *siddhis*. [18-20ab]

Om. Honor! Oh Goddess of the world. Oh Durgā. Oh Cāmuṇḍā, slayer of Caṇḍa. I will raise this banner for you who bear the Vasus, who bring about all pleasures.” [20cd-21]

**Thus is the twenty-third chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Manner of the Banner,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

• • •

Chapter Thirty-nine

Śaunaka said:

“Tell us those pilgrimage sites where the Goddess was previously worshiped by those best of gods headed by Indra.” [1]

Manu said:

“The Goddess who [grants] desired *siddhis* was worshiped by Brahmā along with all the gods in Puṣkara on the full moon night of Kārttika, oh best of sages. Nandā was worshiped by Rudra in the virtuous Himālaya mountains. Śivā was honored by Viṣṇu in the Naimiṣa forest. The goddess Ambā was worshiped by Sūrya in the Malaya mountains.¹⁶¹ Kāmākhyā bearing sword and shield was praised by Jāmadagnya on Kiṣkindhya mountain. The Goddess is worshiped as Māheśvarī in the hermitage of Kāśī, oh Śakra. [2-4]

The one born of Earth, who reigns among the mountains of Veda, offered to the Goddess in a cave of Kāma mountain for the sake of accomplishing all desires. Kaśyapa worshiped the goddess Śubhā on the bank of the Sarasvatī river. One named Sanaka worshiped the Goddess on the eastern [bank] of the Sindhu river. The one called Vāma worshiped the goddess corresponding with Kārttikeya in the south. The Rākṣasa lord Vibhīṣaṇa worshiped the Goddess in Laṅkā. In the west, the devoted god Varuṇa worshiped with celestial waters. Nandin and Kāla worshiped on Kailāsa in the north. [5-8]

The sages who were pupils of Agastya worshiped the manifest Śivā. In the hermitage of Kaṇva in the virtuous Dharma forest, the utmost of sages named Kaṇva, born of Kaśyapa, has always worshiped Śivā. Worshiped by the best of gods for eternity at crores of pilgrimage sites, the great Mahādevī grants whatever is desired without hesitation. Oh Purandara, at a banyan tree called Bhadra in the third [*manvantara*] the Goddess was pleased by the lord of kings who was praised by the name Māndhātṛ. The Goddess was ingratiated by Dilīpa at the confluence of the Kāverī, by Rājasena at Gokarṇa, and by Ajāpāla at Daṇḍaka. Previously she was gladdened by Dhanvantari at the confluence of the Gaṇḍakī river, oh sage. Ambikā was pleased by Ātreya at the river Mahāśoṇa. [9-14ab]

On Mahodaya mountain, Paraśurāma satisfied that Great Goddess who is celebrated more than Śiva at the pilgrimage site called Koṭimuṇḍā. Oh sage, the goddess named Mahārājī was settled at the Muṇḍi *pīṭha*, where Rāma fashioned a pedestal along with a *śivaliṅgam*. He who worshiped the unsurpassed goddess Khaṇḍamuṇḍā obtained the path to heaven along with the stars and planets. The goddess named Aghorā was worshiped in the Malaya mountains, and Kālikā was worshiped previously on the mountain of Laṅkā by Jāmadagnya. The great Vijayā was worshiped on Śākadvīpa. Caṇḍā was honored by all the gods on Kuśadvīpa. The foremost *yoginī* was worshiped on Krauñca[dvīpa], and she of supreme beauty on Śālmali[dvīpa]. Dhutimā has been famed on Mandara mountain, as has been Jayāvahā on Rāmabhadra. [14cd-20ab]

The Goddess is lauded by the name Nārāyaṇī in Puṣkara. She is praised as Plavāhelā amongst the waters. The goddesses Dhāraṇa, Dharaṇā, and Matā are established high in the mountains;

¹⁶¹ This and the previous sentence are translated from an additional verse included in the Tarkaratna edition.

these ancient goddesses were worshiped by Jāmadagnya. For the sake of the destruction of unrighteousness, the Great Goddess was previously propitiated by Brahmā of boundless splendor in the Badarikā hermitage, where Govinda, honored by lotus-born [Brahmā], had practiced austerities. Furthermore, the Goddess pervades mantras, *vidyās*, and Āgamas; she is established in the preeminent *Māṭṛtantra* and *Bhairavatantra*. [20cd-24]

Previously the bull-mounted lord of gods was questioned by Śukra: “What is the power of mantras and *vidyās*, oh mighty lord?” [25]

Īśvara said:

“Hear about this supreme power of mantras, this preeminent force of *vidyās*. I will tell about it concisely, oh son of Bhṛgu. Long ago it was told by Brahmā. Listen attentively. There was a Daitya named Bala, endowed with great strength and courage. He caused fear amongst the gods Candra, Indra, and the rest, as well as among the Gandharvas and Yakṣas. Viṣṇu, Yama, and Sūrya were incited to battle and were defeated by him. Having advanced, he subdued Anila, Anala, the Yakṣas, and Varuṇa, as well as the illustrious and venomous Nāga lords. Garuḍa was made subservient, always subject to his command. Having pulverized the mountain lord, he fashioned him into the shape of a ball; he cast those mountains to the ground for the sake of sport, oh Brahman lord. [26-31ab]

The heaven-dwelling gods headed by Brahmā were forced by [Bala] to depart. A place in the netherworlds was granted to them for a hundred years. Fearful, they abandoned their pride and went to the guru [Bṛhaspati]. Urged by Śakra, they all inquired modestly: “By what means shall the gods [once again] become heaven dwellers, oh Brahman? You alone among us know the Śāstras. You always desire the well-being of Śakra. Quickly become the boat for us who are submerged in an ocean of mud.” Entreated thus by the gods, the guru spoke these words. [31cd-35ab]

Bṛhaspati said:

“This Dānava cannot be subdued in battle, oh Śakra. All is destroyed by his strength because he is unconquerable in war. You must invoke the rite for undertaking deceit.” Thus allayed, they all went to lord Janārdana. [35cd-39ab]

Seeing those gods afflicted by fear, Mādhava venerated them eminently with a succession of *arghya*, [offering of] seats, and sweet words. Then he asked all of the gods: “Why have you come?” [39cd-40]

The gods said:

“We are all terrified by the mighty Bala, oh lord. You possess [the power] of delusion. There shall be no other means of slaying him.” [41]

Viṣṇu said:

“I will do what you desire. However, this [Asura] possesses great strength, is endowed with virtue, understands proper conduct, is learned in the meaning of all the Śāstras, knows the procedures of esoteric mantras, and has made dharma his single aim. How can one delude him, oh best of gods? The single supreme *vidyā*, which is celebrated by the name Mohinī, was granted to

me by trident-bearing [Śiva]. She is able to generate potent delusion, thus I recall this supreme goddess for the sake of [Bala's] destruction." [42-45ab]

Having remembered this foremost *vidyā*, Janārdana took on the form of a Brahman. He was of moderate size and well dressed; he was reciting the Vedas and associated texts, chanting, and doing penance surrounded by fires. He said: "To whom do I make the request for the sake of the sacrifice? Tell me." Having seen him embodied as a Brahman, equal in brilliance to the sun, the gods spoke: "Bala will undertake a sacrifice to you, oh best of Brahmins. That chief of Dānavas dwells on the great Hemakūṭa mountain." Then that all-knowing possessor of *māyā* set out for the delusion [of Bala]. Chanting the Mohinī Vidyā, which bestows the highest of *siddhis*, and reciting the Veda, Janārdana entered the charming capital city of the Danu king. [45cd-50]

Having approached the gates of the Asura lord, he began to recite. When the guard heard the virtuous sounds of the Veda, he said: "I will grant you cities, jewels, or whatever suitable thing you request. Even if what you desire is difficult to obtain, oh wise best of Brahmins, it will be given." Thus addressed by him, [Viṣṇu said]: "Oh guard, grant me audience [with the king], oh chief of Danus." Directed, he then called upon that mighty king, that Dānava endowed with great strength who had triumphed over the gods. Seeing that blessed one, a gift upraised in his hand, [the king] said with pleasure: "Why have you come here, oh Brahman? What is to be done? Announce this." Reciting the Mohinī [Vidyā], in the form of the Brahman Keśava spoke. [51-55]

The Twice-Born said:

"I have been sent by the gods. Be gracious to me, a son of Kaśyapa. Oh king of Asuras, a sacrifice has been undertaken by the gods and sages. I have come here to you for the sake of completing it. Oh king, grant me the gift by which that sacrifice may be accomplished." [56-57]

Bala said:

"Request that by which the gods' sacrifice may be performed, oh best of Brahmins. I will grant to you today wealth, wives, or even my head." [58]

The Brahman said:

"I shall announce that which will complete the gods' sacrifice, oh Asura lord, and it shall be granted. We both have spoken truthfully?" [59]

Bala said:

"Request that which is to be done. I have spoken truthfully; I will grant it to you, oh Brahman." Recalling the Mohinī Vidyā, the best of Brahmins spoke. [60]

The Brahman said:

"Oh mighty Asura lord, there is no need for wealth, women, land, elephants, horses, or jewels in the sacrifice of the gods. I request of you that by which the sacrifice shall be completed, thereby bestowing happiness to the gods. Let it quickly be granted to me. This is especially needed by the sages and myself for the sake of the gods. That preeminent sacrifice shall be completed by means of your body." When his body was offered by the great-souled Dānava, Viṣṇu struck that Asura on the head with a discus. Having cast off his physical body, he then adopted a divine body. His

limbs appeared, composed of diamonds and gems. Shining rubies arose as his eyes. His body became a mine of jewels because of the donation of that virtuous adept. [61-66]

Thus deluded by the *vidyā*, he was slain by the power of the *vidyā*'s mantras, oh Śukra, not by a weapon in battle. When recalled with devotion, oh Brahman, the power of that *vidyā*, though difficult to bear, shall bestow all *siddhis* and shall grant whatever fruits are desired by the heart. [67-68]

When [Bala] went to heaven along with the gods, his mighty son, Subala, set out from the banks of the northern ocean. Angered and desiring war to bring about the destruction of the king of gods, he mounted an exceptional divine chariot drawn by good, obedient horses. He was accompanied by foot soldiers and was in possession of numerous weapons. He traveled wherever he desired, mightily attacking all of his enemies. The charioteer named Jaya – who knows many weapons, is proficient in the war Śāstras, and who remains difficult to conquer even for gods – became the chariot driver for Subala. The mighty Sumāya, foremost in knowledge of mantras, was his foot guard, while the mighty Daitya lord [named] Rukma became his army general. He had conquered Viṣṇu and Indra in battle many times, but had never been overcome by those gods headed by Indra, Brahmā, and Viṣṇu. [69-74]

The Danu lord was inflamed by [desire for] revenge for his father. Like a fire he consumed those gods, appearing like a *hotṛ* priest provoking the flames. Whomever that enraged Daitya lord glimpsed – Candra, Indra, Pāvaka, the Vasus – he assailed, like one does a sacrificial animal upon the command of Rudra. Having found themselves afflicted by those rage-fueled Dānavas, all of the gods went to Indra for refuge. When Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Purandara, and the rest assembled, the armies of Subala also gathered, reveling in their might. Some Daityas were carrying upraised clubs, and some were bearing swords; others had bow and arrow in hand, while some held discus or spear. Some had the *śataghnī*,¹⁶² *śatacakrī*, or *sahasraghnī*¹⁶³ weapons; others had tree trunks, boulders, spears, maces, tridents, or saws. Displaying great strength, riding on elephants, lions, and camels, those Danus engaged all the gods in battle. [75-81]

Seeing the gods devastated, the great lord of gods [mounted] the trumpeting chief of elephants, who appeared like a well-adorned mountain. He was decorated with red vermillion and ornamented with bells and flywhisks; he was four-tusked, beautiful, powerful, and swiftly moving. That elephant became like a black snake among the Danu army. Seeing Indra standing there, the mighty, blazing [Agni] mounted the best of goats and took up a shining spear. Having noticed him, mighty Dharma mounted his buffalo with staff in hand, accompanied by the dark-bodied Citragupta. His powerful diamond staff was like a cruel fate. The red-eyed Nirṛti, sword in hand and shining with rich black collyrium, was [mounted] on his sheep, while his younger brother was [settled] on a man. Having brought their own manifold army, they assembled with the army of Indra. [82-88ab]

Varuṇa approached along with his warriors, riding a crocodile and bearing a noose, as did Samīraṇa, who was mounted on an antelope and [holding] his hook. The mighty Yakṣa Kubera, bearing a mace and [seated] on the aerial vehicle that moves at will, arrived there surrounded by

¹⁶² The *śataghnī* is a missile-like weapon; it may be a stone or wooden cylinder studded with iron spikes.

¹⁶³ The *śatacakrī* and *sahasraghnī* are particularly deadly types of weapons.

crores of Yakṣas. The Rudras, Īśāna foremost among them, arrived riding on their bulls with tridents in hand. The Ādityas came in their chariots, and all the Viśvedevas appeared with their vehicles. The two Aśvins came, riding horses. The Nāgas, Yakṣas, lords of planets, various astral bodies, Siddhas, Vidyādhara, and all the rest gathered there. [88cd-92ab]

The two chief gods Brahmā and Viṣṇu then became guardians of that army. When they gathered in that ocean of battle, no boundary was spared. The army filled the directions, from heaven to earth and the netherworlds. That mighty, innumerable army was established there, displaying lotus arrays by the *ayutas*, crores, and *arbudas*.¹⁶⁴ Having seen the chief of gods, Subala began to rain down arrows like a storm cloud. They were covered completely, as if by water in the rainy season. Sounds of bows, [war] cries, and vehicles thundered. [92cd-96ab]

Hearing the Asura roaring, generating fear, Śikhin raised up a blazing spear and ravaged those Dānavas. The great Asura named Rukmin was the leader of Subala's army; having destroyed the chariot of blazing [Agni], he was [intent on] exhausting his flames and took up a gleaming spear which shone amongst the vast collection of various weapons. When he launched that lance at Hutāśana, generating fear amongst the gods' army, then Pāvaka's army grew anxious about those spears. Seeing this, [Agni] threw his own blazing spear at the best of Asuras; it was powerful, flying swiftly, and equal in brilliance to manifold suns. Though being assaulted by sharp arrows, it began to burn up [the enemy] as fire does grass. The gods were being struck with arrows, but they continued to hold back the Asura forces. Then the Dānava hurled a stone spear for the sake of [the gods'] destruction. Seeing his spear destroyed by that stone, the best of gods struck it with blows of a mallet and then felled that Daitya. Seeing that Daitya Rukmin lifeless on his chariot, struck by crores of spears, Śaṅkha attacked with fury. [96cd-105ab]

Śaṅkha said:

“Oh mighty Hutāśana, you receive oblations during sacrifices; even though you have stupefied Rukmin, what place do you have in battle? That spear bestowed by trident-bearing Śiva which scorched the army of Subala shall today quaff your lifeblood. Just like a courtesan who incites desire in her lovers, this spear will come to dwell in your heart.” At the time of that speech, Dundubhi rose up amidst the army of Dānava lords, moved by the wind of Śaṅkha's words. [He said:] “What is the need for childish words [spoken] like those of a courtesan? Take revenge on the enemy, oh Śaṅkha, or you lord shall obtain the same state as Rukmin. Until Bhava, Govinda, Śakra, and Guha are slain, my birth will remain fruitless, like that of a child or the mad.” [105cd-111ab]

Having addressed Śaṅkha, Dundubhi mounted an elephant and ran towards Indra, grasping a blazing weapon. He launched a spear at Indra that was similar to the trident-bearer's, able to challenge all weapons. To oppose that spear, Indra released a fiery lightning bolt, frightening amongst all weapons. That blazing *vajra* of Indra was shattered by the spear; broken in two, it fell to the ground, rendering [the gods'] efforts fruitless. [111cd-114]

When the *vajra* was destroyed, the king of gods went to Gopendra for refuge, accompanied by the wise Bṛhaspati. [Bṛhaspati said:] “Oh lord, Bala was slain by you. By what means shall Subala,

¹⁶⁴ An *arbuda* is equivalent to ten million.

Śaṅkha, Dundubhi, and his four-fold [military] be destroyed? The *vajra* is not [able to oppose] their *vajra*; the staff is not [able to destroy] their staff. The gods' army, weapons, elephants, and vehicles are afflicted. Oh highest of the gods, what means are there for [the Dānavas'] destruction and pacification in battle? Oh you who are affectionate to those who approach for refuge, tell this. All of the gods and their vehicles should be protected in war. Subala, who possesses great strength and who knows well correct policy and means, is difficult for the group of gods to bear, especially Vāsava." Having spoken thus, the wise grandfather concluded. Mādhava, the destroyer of enemies, then spoke excellent words. [115-121ab]

Viṣṇu said:

"She who is the supreme highest power, the auspicious Śaṅkarī, the source of mantras according to the division of *padas* and sounds, the utmost principle that encompasses all, will be favorable to you, oh Vāsava; there is no doubt. Oh faultless one, having pleased Śaṅkara with me, that possessor of the Padamālā may grant you the prosperity that accompanies the eight-part *vidyā*. By the power of the mantras of the *vidyā* that mighty Dānava will be subjugated; otherwise, he will remain unconquered." Then Viṣṇu and Indra, longing for the destruction of the Asuras, went to Śambhu along with Brhaspati and the Marut troops, and began to propitiate him. [121cd-125]

"Victory! May you be victorious, oh preeminent one. Oh you who are the essence of the five [syllable] mantra, though you lack qualities you manifest for the protection of the world. Though you are without form, you embody as *rajas* in origination, *sattva* in maintenance, and *tamas* in destruction. You are beyond words. You pervade all forms; you inhere in all creatures. Protect me, who am Hari, submerged in the ocean of that Dānava army. Look upon the gods, Gaṇas, Ādityas, and Vasus. Establish peace and safety for the world, oh trident-bearer." Thus the slayer of Madhu solicited with stammering speech. Śiva, who bears the crescent moon on his head, was pleased. [He said:] "Request that boon that has settled in your heart, oh Govinda." Delighted, Mādhava entreated: "Slay Subala and Dundubhi." [126-131]

When Rudra was thus petitioned and had promised the boon to Hari, the supreme Śakti endowed with the eight-part *vidyā* was recalled. Manifest before them, Śivā then spoke: "Indicate that which is to be done, oh brilliant lord of gods." She was addressed by the pleased god: "Slay Subala." The Goddess pondered for some time: "He was previously slain by me. This low Asura should not be killed with weaponry, but by some other form." Having abandoned her youthful body, the Goddess then became an old woman. She was covered in veins, emaciated, with sunken eyes and colorless lips. She was bound with serpents. Her two ears were half adorned. She stood stooped over, with her left hand placed on her thigh and her right hand supporting her back. Her mouth hung open and her unequal limbs trembled. She seemed a hundred *ayuta* [years old]. [132-138ab]

Her illusory form guarded by the esoteric eight-part *vidyā*, she appeared on a path of Droṇa, the mighty lord of mountains in the middle of the continent of Krauñca. That eight-part *vidyā* was established in the four cardinal directions and four intermediate points: one was riding a bull, one a lion, one an elephant, one a peacock, one a goose, and one a snake; one mighty one was resting on a strong bear, while another was on a superior, swift antelope. Those *vidyās*, having become hundredfold, were worshiped in the right-handed manner as *kula* deities. They came to earth amongst kings and especially amongst royal women for the protection of the gods. Via the left-

handed path that goes against society, they granted powers to Pulindas, Śabaras, and the rest. Those *vidyās* were specially established among courtesans, cowherding girls, Tuḍas, Hūṇas, and Khasas; in the Himālaya region; among Jālaṃdharas and the people of Vidiśā; in the prosperous Varendra region as well as Rāḍhā¹⁶⁵; in the city of Kośala; in the region of Bhoṭṭa¹⁶⁶; at Kāmākhyā; on Kiṣkindhya, best of mountains; in Malaya, Kolu, and Kāñcī; and in Hastināpura as well as Ujjayinī. Oh Śukra, those [*vidyās*] with luxurious coiffed hair headed by Śivā were settled in every place. Those eight-fold were manifest for the protection of the king of gods. The *vidyās* pervaded the worlds completely; they turned toward the path, established there in order to bring about Subala's destruction. [138cd-149ab]

Having placed Śarabha at the front, Subala then [went] speedily to Droṇa mountain with his army and vehicles in order to slay Vāsava. The sky was filled with the roar of the river of chariots and the yell of war cries; it reverberated with the noise of banners and colorful umbrellas. Seeing that stooped old woman standing there on the mountain, they advanced towards her on the path, like the sun pervading the sky. Then the Dānava leader spoke: "Leave the path, old woman, or else you will be harmed by the chariots and elephants." Having heard those words uttered by the Dānava, she refused and said: "Strive to fulfill that which I desire; otherwise, your well-being shall cease. Whoever does not abide by this old woman has no safety." [149cd-155ab]

That Dānava leader then grasped her and raised her up, but he immediately fell lifeless to the ground. Seeing their leader slain, the matchless Asura Śaṅkha attacked, though he too was brought to the ground by the Goddess. Then Subala became furious. As soon as he took the Goddess in hand, that Asura fell to the earth, dead. Thus all of those Dānavas were overthrown without battle. Witnessing this, the Maruts rejoiced and abandoned their fear, oh grandfather. [155cd-159ab]

Bhūtas began to issue forth from the Goddess, carrying tridents, swords, arrows, and spears, and sounding out bells, *ḍamaru* drums, and flutes. Having seen Śarabha and Śaṅkha slain, Dundubhi, who was drunk with pride and power, proceeded without his chariot to slay Mādhava. Then the Goddess of great modesty and knowledge, the slayer of the gods' enemies, attacked the dreadful Dundubhi and felled him in combat. Having placed his blood in a skull-cup, the Goddess satiated those great Seizers headed by the hawk-like one, as well as Śivā and those others who grant the fruits of desired aims. Having thus slain those Dānavas of great strength and courage who could not be defeated by the gods, she granted safety to Vāsava. Since she brought about the protection of the gods and the destruction of the Daitya lord, the Goddess was addressed by Śiva as peace-making Kṣemaṅkarī, who shall be worthy of worship in the world. [159cd-165ab]

It is auspicious to establish the Goddess at the edge of the city and to worship her as the one endowed with the eight-part *vidyā*, or by some other form. He who shall worship Kṣemaṅkarī within *prasāda*, wall paintings, books, water, fire, or swords will be granted all desired fruits. Those weapons of the goddess Pratyāṅgirā called Damanī, Padamālā, Śrīghoṣa, and Vajraśāsanā should be worshiped. Oh Brahman, if one establishes [the Goddess] seated on the corpse of Śiva along with these [weapons] when the sun has entered Virgo, then he will be granted all that is desired. Since the Goddess shall be aged and because the ancestors bear elderly bodies, therefore

¹⁶⁵ Both are districts in the modern state of West Bengal.

¹⁶⁶ Modern Tibet.

the person desiring good fortune should establish [the Goddess] when the sun travels [southward] toward the fathers. [165cd-170ab]

At the time of establishing the Goddess, gold, jewels, and gems should be displayed for her, and various types of dishes should be prepared for the many Seizers. One should commission [an image] with a hundred [coins]; one should invoke with a thousand; and in its auspicious erecting one must give oneself, one's wife, and all of one's possessions, since none other but the guru are able to elevate from *samsāra*. Thus one should regard the guru who bestows mantras as the Goddess. The best of Brahmins who establishes [icons] of Bhairava and the rest, who grants the aim of mantras, and who benefits all the world is [fit to be] a guru. [170cd-174ab]

He who is adept in the establishment of planets, Nāga lords, and gods, and who knows the special pūjās of animal sacrifice should conduct the invocation of the Goddess. Establishment of goddesses with the best of metals, gold, fish, meat, liquor, etc. is considered auspicious; otherwise, it will generate fear. The goddess to be satiated in such a manner is [known as] Rājasī; the one to be worshiped with *tamas* is Tāmasī; and the pleased one is Sāttvikī. In the supreme establishing of Kṣemaṅkarī there should be no mantras derived from the Padamālā; in her worship, no celibate student is ever approved. The ones who are adept in the *kula* path, the path of ancestors, the path of Mothers, and the left-handed path are approved for the performance of pūjā to the Goddess; the foolish, the celibate student, the one engaged solely in Siddhānta, and the one intent only on [the contemplation of] God are not. [174cd-176]

Since the Goddess is the preeminent female, she should be worshiped with *vidyā* mantras. The one who shall establish and worship the Goddess in such a manner will be the foremost of Brahmins. The man who shall have her established by another and who shall incite her worship will obtain favorable pleasures in this world, oh best of Brahmins. He who shall write and bear [the Goddess armor] on his arms, on his throat, or [elsewhere] on his body shall receive kingdoms, long life, sons, and good fortune without hesitation. From worship of the Goddess, one shall reach the heaven of Bhairava which is praised by Brahmā and Viṣṇu. This is the truth; there is no doubt. Having recalled her, having recited [her praises], or having borne [her armor], the person who is focused shall obtain whatever the heart desires by the efficacy of the *vidyās*. The power of the sixty-four *vidyās* beginning with Vijayā, their great benefits, and their generating of all joy has been celebrated.” [177-185]

**Thus is the thirty-ninth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Efficacy of the *Vidyā* Mantras and the Manifestation of Kṣemaṅkarī.”**

Chapter Forty

Śaunaka said:

“Oh Brahman, the Asura Mahādharmān was intoxicated by war and caused fear amongst all the gods. I’m curious; how was he subdued by Brahmā? I want to hear about this accurately.” [1-2ab]

Manu said:

“That terrible Asura was [previously] named Kṛṣṇadharmān. Having seen him inflicting impediments on the ascetic practices of the sage Sthanumitra and interrupting his *homa* sacrifices, Cāmuṇḍā prepared a great pūjā along with the Bhairavas. Since he was a constituent element in the great pūjā, he came to be thought of as Mahādharmān. [2cd-3ab]

Long ago during a war between the gods and Asuras, the great-souled Tāraka propitiated lord Viṣṇu with the great vow known as the Twelve, that rite performed for the lord that begins in the month of Mārga[śīrṣa]. Thus Vāsudeva was pleased by that one who was desirous of killing all the gods, and thereby granted him a boon. [He said:] “By my command, the Asura Mahādharmān will assist you in battle.” Having received the boon, that great Asura [approached] the one named [Mahā]dharmān according to Viṣṇu’s instruction, and commanded him: “Slay Brahmā and Indra.” Mahādharmān was thrilled by his decree. Taking up the discus and armband, that Asura went to Indra and Brahmā in order to destroy Druhiṇa. Engaged in homage of Rudra, desiring results, they began a great war on the eighth of the dark half of the month. Wishing to slay one another, the gods and Asuras were engaged in battle for a hundred years. [3cd-11ab]

Seeing the great Asura Ugrasena mounted on his chariot, having understood [the Asuras’] might, Brahmā recalled the Goddess. Having manifest a superior form, she who is honored by all the gods immediately approached, desiring the destruction of Ugrasena. Worshipped and appointed to slay the chief Danu, the Goddess began to torment Ugrasena’s general, Muṇḍa. Seeing that Dānava harassed, Ugrasena launched a spear at Indra that was equal in splendor to Yama’s staff. Indra, too, struck Ugra[sena] with manifold *vajras* and iron arrows. [11cd-15]

Furious, Ugrasena then struck Indra with a sword. Injured by that sword, Indra fell from his elephant. Seeing Indra stunned and afflicted by his wounds, the enraged Goddess then launched the Agneya weapon at Ugrasena. Stuck by it, Ugrasena and his chariot were set aflame. He hurled the Vāruṇa [weapon] to repel and pacify the flames; but the Goddess then cast the Vāyavya [weapon] to allay the Vāruṇa. The god appeared, mounted on a deer and bearing noose and hook upraised; he scattered the multitudes of clouds and broke the trees and mountains. He then surrounded Ugrasena of great strength and courage. He slew the army of Ugrasena and snared them with his noose. His bow thus broken, Ugrasena fell, slain. [16-21]

**Thus is the fortieth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Slaying of Ugrasena.”**

Chapter Forty-one

Śaunaka said:

“When Ugrasena was slain, oh elder, what did the great and mighty Asura Kṛṣṇadharman do? Tell me that, oh great sage.” [1]

Manu said:

“When Ugra[sena] was killed, the great Asura Kṛṣṇadharman was angered and began to wage battle. [He said to the Goddess:] “Oh little girl, you protect Brahmā and Indra.” Taunting her thus, he struck the Goddess with a discus. He pierced her lion with five arrows, and then attacked the Goddess once again. [2]

Enraged, the Goddess struck Kṛṣṇa[dharman] with a *vajra*, oh young one. Hit by that *vajra*, Kṛṣṇa[dharman] then quickly rushed towards the Goddess on his chariot with a club raised up in his hand. [Seeing] him approaching, the furious Goddess dispatched Kṛṣṇadharman’s charioteer to the domain of Yama by means of five arrows. [3-5]

When Kṛṣṇa[dharman]’s charioteer was slain, the mighty Kṛṣṇadharman took up a discus and went to face the Goddess on foot. [Seeing] that strong-armed one approaching, she pierced his heart with *saṁnataparva* arrows and knocked off his head with a blow of the discus. Thus that mighty and courageous Kṛṣṇadharman was slain in battle, oh child, while Brahmā and Indra remained protected.” [6-8]

**Thus is the forty-first chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Slaying of Kṛṣṇadharman,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

Chapter Forty-two

Vasiṣṭha said:

“When the fierce and mighty lords Ugra[sena] and Kṛṣṇadharman were slain, the gods were pleased; they worshiped the Goddess and pacified her with sweet words. [1]

“Oh Goddess, you are the supreme protection from the ocean of fear for us [gods] headed by Brahmā. By you the terribly fearsome Kṛṣṇa[dharman] was thrown down in destruction playfully. Oh Goddess, amongst the gods headed by Indra and Brahmā, you are prosperity, purity, prudence, splendor, beauty, mind, glory, and the highest protection. For the safety of kings, oh Goddess, you are worshiped on Earth as the Great Goddess, Śivā, established at the *pīṭha* in Jalamdhara. Oh Goddess, there will be [varied] female forms arisen from your limbs who grant boons, destroy fear, and bestow all desired fruits to devotees. At various places, there will be maidens, seen and unseen, who bestow all that is desired to those who follow dharma as is suitable for the epoch. They will be in the Malaya, Sahya, Vindhya, Himālaya, Udaya, Citragopa, Narakāla, and Nīcākṣa mountain ranges; in Laṅkā, Uḍradeśa, Strīrājya, Kāśikāvana, Kāmarūpa, Kāñcī, Campā, and Vidiśā; at Varendra, Uḍḍiyāna, Manākṣa, Śikhara, Kuśasthala, Jala, Cola, and Hiraṇyakanakākara; as well as in Siṃhala, Veṇūdaṇḍa, and Kānyakubja. Where you are settled as the nine Durgās you will be praised as Trimuṇḍā.” [2-10ab]

These goddesses grant all aims and bestow all desired results. The Goddess riding her lion is settled in the midst of Vidiśa as Ūrdhvajayāvahā. The supreme Goddess who has gone to the fiery portions of Jambukanātha [mountain] is celebrated as Mahākālī, oh sage. And the Goddess recalled on the mountain of Mahālakṣmī is famed as Bhadrakālī. There that *vidyā* is accomplished, the glorious Padamālā whom Nandikeśa obtained from Mr̥tyuñjaya. Oh mighty one, if recited at night during the diminution of the moon, that *vidyā* shall conquer sudden or accidental death; there is no doubt. When the moon enters the orb of the sun bit by bit [during the dark half of the month], one should chant the *vidyā* at night; however, one should chant by day when the moon is increasing. Oh great sage, that chanted *vidyā* no doubt alleviates the terrible fears of old age and death, as well as sins such as brahminicide.” [10cd-16]

**Thus is the forty-second chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Places of Glory.”**

Chapter Forty-three

Śaunaka said:

“How was that *vidyā* obtained by Nandi[keśvara] from bull-bannered [Śiva]? And how did [Paraśu]rāma receive it from Nandikeśvara? Tell me all of this accurately, oh great sage.” [1-2ab]

Manu said:

“After the Great Goddess slew Ghora, that unparalleled *vidyā* was granted by lord Viṣṇu to Candra; thus Candra increased once again. By Candra it was given [to Purūravas], and eventually from Purūravas it was obtained by the sons of Pāṇḍu. Oh mighty one, the Padamālā [Vidyā] that manifest in the battle with Ghora is praised in the world as that which grants all that is desired. The *vidyā* called the Puṣpā, which destroys death, was granted to Nandi[keśvara] for the sake of overcoming death, oh mighty sage. By him it was told to [Paraśu]rāma, and by that great-souled one it was chanted to bring about the destruction of [the Asura] Amaya. [2cd-6ab]

Previously, he had conquered the manifold gods headed by Brahmā in battle. The furious Kālīkā cursed that one who wanted to slay Vighneśa, lord of obstacles. [She said:] “Oh mighty Asura who instills fear amongst the gods, when you torment the army of Vighna, then by his fury you will be struck with an axe. You will be burned up in the fire produced by [Paraśu]rāma’s anger.” Thus the Asura Amaya was previously cursed by this malediction. [6cd-9ab]

Having traveled to the mountain called Jāta, he undertook difficult austerities. He ate only fruit, roots, grains, and leaves. He remained silent. He was engaged in the activities of *homa* and chanting. He was intent upon the worship of Keśava. He observed numerous fasts, and his mind was fixed in intense meditation. He disturbed the gods and Marut troops with his *tapas*, undertaken for many years. Having devoted himself fully to his Kṣatriya vow, he pleased Janārdana. [Viṣṇu said:] “You will be mighty and unconquerable, no doubt causing fear amongst the gods and Asuras; however, you will go to your death in a military array. Having successfully broken apart thirty-five military arrays, oh Asura lord, you should fight no more. Oh young one, you will meet your end in the thirty-sixth.” [9cd-14ab]

Thus previously he conquered the gods and Asuras by means of *tapas*, oh mighty one, and delighted in the forest groves of Earth. Oh young one, he subjugated Brahmans, gods, and ancestors, and began to attack the eminent sages. He moved about at will, unimpeded by the thirty [gods]. He approached Daṇḍaka forest, where dwelled the elephant-faced god, that jovial friend of [Paraśu]rāma who is skilled in military principles, who can guide all manner of weapons, and who possesses foremost knowledge of the cosmos. Having reached there, oh mighty one, he solicited Sumati, the divine daughter of Agastya who had always been dear to the elephant-faced one. Angered, the axe-wielding friend of Gajavaktra swiftly set out along with his army, oh sage. [14cd-19]

[Paraśu]rāma said:

“Stand for battle and annihilation, oh best of Asuras, or else my axe will drink blood from your chest today.” [20]

Pierced by the arrows of [Paraśu]rāma's words, Amaya suddenly released arrows angrily, like a dark cloud unleashes water during the rainy season. Filled by the cloud of his arrows, the lofty sky could not be perceived, just as when it is obscured by mist at daybreak during the waning of the moon. Seeing [Paraśurāma] covered by the darkness of those arrows, Gajānana placed Sumati behind and began to fashion military arrays. Kakṣa, Pakṣa, Urasya, Daṇḍa, Ābhoga, Maṇḍana, and Saṃghāta – these seven successive military arrays are called the Natural. Pradadha, Dṛḍha, Kośadhya, Sona, Ayorasa, Kukṣi, Pratiṣṭha, Supratiṣṭha, Sañjaya, and Vijaya; Sthūṇākarna, Viśāla, Bījābha, Sumukha, Ṛṣa, Sūcī, Kubalaya, and the excellent Durjaya; Bhoga, Gomūtra, Śakaṭa, Makara, Pataṅga, Maṇḍala, Sarvatobhadra, Durghaṭa, and Susaṃyata; Vajragodhā, Samudvāla, superior Kākapakṣa, the great arrays Ardhaacandra, Kaṅkaṭa, and Śṛṅga; Ariṣṭa, Acala and Pratihata – these thirty-six arrays are known in addition to the Natural, oh great sage. The one born of the mountain's daughter fashioned them in battle, oh child. They should be formed hundred-fold and thousand-fold by chariots, elephants, horses, and foot-soldiers, successively according to name and form, on land that is even, uneven, and slanted, in watery and arid places, backwards and forwards. [21-32ab]

Having prepared the flags and gates there, sounding out the war horn and conch, Gajānana incited battle. Angered, Amaya also formed the successive military arrays, properly forming the corresponding array and breaking apart thirty-five of Vighna's. When the thirty-sixth array was being broken by that enemy of the gods, [Paraśu]rāma subdued his bow and arrows with his own arrows. Furious, Amaya [took up] another and struck with return arrows. Having shattered the bow and axe of [Paraśu]rāma with five arrows, he then struck his head with ten arrows appearing like meteors. [32cd-37ab]

Seeing [Paraśu]rāma struck by arrows, the son of Pārvatī roared like a storm cloud and released the Vāruṇa weapon, which abounded with lightning followed by the deep rumbling of thunder. The battlefield hummed with swarms of bees, resounded with cries of peacocks, and became dense with frogs; the *cātaka* bird fulfilled its desire [of drinking raindrops]. [Dark] like poison and [thundering] like elephants, the Vāruṇa weapon veiled all the directions, filling [the sky] with fresh storm clouds flashing blue and red. Noose upraised in hand, that frightening weapon manifest thousands of warring chariots, elephants, horses, and foot soldiers, who then fell upon Amaya. The number of Dānavas slain cannot be known, oh young one. [37cd-42ab]

Then the furious Amaya conjured the Vāyavya weapon, which shattered trees, mountain peaks, palaces, and gates; it was mounted on a chariot made colorful with flags and banners. The wind destroyed that aquatic Vāruṇa [weapon]. Angered, [Paraśu]rāma then conjured the Agneya weapon. It was tawny-eyed, mounted on a ram, dreadful with its seven flames,¹⁶⁷ formidable with spear in hand, and its splendor equal to the fire of dissolution. It burned up that Dānava army, reducing everything to ashes. [42cd-46ab]

The Dānava lord then cast the Nārāyaṇa weapon, which held conch, discus, and mace, and was seated on the back of Khaga.¹⁶⁸ The gods feared that [Paraśu]rāma would be felled by it. Just as praising the gods is never fruitless, whenever this unerring [weapon] is released, the enemy army

¹⁶⁷ The seven tongues of flame are said to be Kālī, Karālī, Manojavā, Sulohitā, Sudhūmravarṇā, Sphuliṅginī, and Viśvarūpī.

¹⁶⁸ Khaga is another name of Garuḍa.

is always destroyed. It could not be destroyed by any of [Paraśu]rāma's ordinary arrows, but only by the divine. Therefore, in order to obstruct and ward off the Nārāyaṇa [weapon], the enraged [Paraśu]rāma conjured [the weapon of] four-faced Brahmā, which bore *muñja* belt, staff, ladle, garland of *akṣa* beads, *durva* grass, and seat of antelope skin. Raising up the roar of the *hum* sound, it came before [the Nārāyaṇa weapon]. Then a great fear rose up among the gods and Daityas. [They thought:] "These two excellent divine weapons born of Brahmā and Viṣṇu are unerring, supernaturally beautiful, unable to be diverted, and powerful. This will be fruitless." Without alerting their leaders, they set out for their own homes. [46cd-53ab]

Seeing the [weapons] born of Brahmā and Viṣṇu engaged in battle, Gajānana conjured the Pāśupata weapon. It was of massive form and incredible beauty, its terrifying splendor equal to that of the dissolution blaze; it bore five faces, ten arms, and three eyes. It appeared both gentle and terrible, its beautiful face dreadful. It was exceedingly frightening, bearing the moon in its mass of upraised matted hair, adorned with elephant hide and snakes, its body supporting Śivā. It filled the battlefield with the sounds of flute, lute, conch, and *ḍamaru* drum. It had multitudes of flames arising from its meteor-like torches, and it was fully adorned with serpents. It had as its belt the swaying Nāga lord, and as its garment soft elephant hide. It was frightening with its squint-eyes, bearing the trident and skull-staff. [53cd-58ab]

That one who consumes all the moving and unmoving triple world appeared before the lord of obstacles, tongue lolling. [It said:] "Tell me, oh child, what is your fear? Why have I been conjured by you? For whose destruction? Tell me quickly." Having propitiated it, [Gaṇeśa] launched it at Amaya. Roaring, it shattered the Dānava army. Having gone amongst the weapons of Brahmā and Viṣṇu, it crushed them and then pervaded [the army]; it brought an end to many crores of Dānavas. Having finished off the Dānavas and broken apart the weapons, it struck Amaya and then returned to the one who had produced it. By the blow of that weapon the mighty one [fell] lifeless. Having abandoned his natural body, he set out for the world of the dead. [58cd-64ab]

The weapons were then honored and dismissed to their own places. When that thorn of all the gods, that possessor of great illusion, was slain, the Goddess was worshiped in Daṇḍaka forest, esteemed as Rudrāṇī. When the sun entered Aquarius, on the ninth day of the dark half of the month, on a Tuesday, in the middle of the night watch, Amaya was felled and the Goddess was worshiped by the troops of gods according to precept. Gods and kings have been freed from all obstacles. Those who worship, bathe, and bestow gifts [at this time] will receive all that they desire. [64cd-67]

**Thus is the forty-third chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called "The Slaying of Amaya,"
in "The Prosperity of the Triple World,"
in "The Descent of the Goddess."**

Chapter Forty-four

Manu said:

“Gajānana returned to his home on Mālavya mountain. [Paraśu]rāma conquered the Earth and took his place amongst the gods and Brahmins. Settled in his kingdom, oh young one, he again invoked the Goddess. He brought the goddess Kālikā, destroyer of Kāla, to the virtuous place called Yaśoda on the shore of the northern ocean and established her there. By him, the Great Goddess was settled in Ayodhyā. The nine Durgās said to have arisen from her limbs were previously discussed. Two other preeminent ones were established in Vidiśa, oh mighty one. There is a virtuous place called Mr̥tyuñjaya near where Śiva abides. The Goddess worshipped by Bhṛgu was regarded by [Paraśu]rāma, son of Jamadagni, as Kālikā for the sake of achieving all desires. Other devotees of the Goddess who worship there obtain unsurpassed knowledge, long life, fame, wealth, happiness, and the rest. [1-7ab]

The goddess Kāmikā shall grant all desires in the Malaya mountains. In Mandākṣa the goddess Ambikā shall bestow whatever is desired. Tārā gives desired fruits on the peak of Mandāra. When [the sun] was half way through Virgo, the goddess who grants all that is desired and who has taken five forms was worshiped by the Danu Vairocana on Candra mountain. Honored as Medhā, Gaurī, Yakṣī, Jvālā, and Vindhyavāsinī, she was praised as the one who bestows all desired fruits, oh Brahman. On Kiṣkindhya mountain, the goddess Bhairavī fulfills all desires; she is worshiped by the name Vindhyāṭavī in the Vindhya mountains. And the goddess worshiped as Pañcāsya in the Saṃvara mountains frightens away untimely death. Thus worshiped in these established forms by the devoted, oh child, she grants all that is desired and brings about all joys.” [7cd-13]

**Thus is the forty-fourth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Great Divisions of the Goddess,”
in “The Prosperity of the Triple World,”
in “The Descent of the Goddess.”**

...

Chapter Eighty-three

Śakra said:

“From the Vedas, Vedāṅgas, Āgamas, Purāṇas, and Itihāsa, we hear about the seven [netherworlds], but never do we hear of an eighth. Previously, however, you told about an eighth that was best among them all. How was it created, and by whom? I want to learn about this.” [1-2]

Lord [Viṣṇu] said:

“The three-eyed lord of gods who is revered by gods and sages is seated on the peak of Kailāsa, Umā residing in half [his body]. Lord Brahmā, Śakra, Bṛhaspati, and I went to see him. There Skanda is always sporting, mounted on his peacock. Brahmā’s mount, the goose, was struck by the peacock with his beak. It yelped out a pitiful sound that was heard by the Goddess. Smiling, she watched Brahmā as he struck the peacock lightly with a staff, which caused the peacock to cry out. When she heard this, the Goddess felt for the distressed. [3-7ab]

Then a terrible one of fierce power, his form like that of a storm cloud, came forth from the mouth of the peacock in opposition to Brahmā’s vehicle. Seeing this, the Goddess suddenly feared an injury to Brahmā. Śaṅkara spoke [to that Asura]: “Praise Brahmā.” Thus addressed by Śambhu, he began to laud that one who is arisen from the lotus, who is the supreme god among gods, and who effects creation, maintenance, [and destruction]. Following the command of the trident-bearing lord of gods, Ruru praised supreme Brahmā with hymns. [7cd-11]

Ruru said:

“Victory to the highest god among gods, who is himself the three *guṇas*, the wise one who is without birth or manifest form, the great-souled cause [of all things]. Though unitary, you manifest in three states to effect origination, maintenance, [and destruction]. Present in the form of *rajas*, you create this moving and unmoving [world]; oh illustrious one, you are the protector as *sattva*; and as *tamas* you annihilate all things. Oh supreme lord, you grant release to those with balanced *guṇas*. I praise you who are the womb of Veda and Vedāṅga. In you Brahmans dwell. From your four mouths the eternal sound of *śruti* issues forth. Emerging are the Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva in successive recitation, as well as teachings, precepts, etymology, meters, Astrology, and Āgamas. You grant happiness to this whole world. You are the three times [of past, present, and future]; you are the three gods [Brahmā], Viṣṇu, and [Śiva]; and you are the three acts [of creation, maintenance, and destruction]. I praise the grandfather. I always praise the god who is venerated by Indra, Candra, Hari, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, and the oblation-bearer. I praise the one who, though unmanifest, is the source of the manifest.” Thus praised previously by Ruru, Brahmā granted him a boon. [12-19]

Brahmā said:

“Oh young Asura lord, request a suitable boon from me. I will make you lord of the seven worlds, unaging, and free from decrepitude.” He entreated that lord: “Oh supreme one, where shall I dwell?” Brahmā then established him in a netherworld. Pleased, he beheld the shining face of the Goddess for some time. Śambhu then said: “This [Goddess] will slay this [Daitya].” When this was spoken, oh best of gods, [we] again abandoned fear. [20-23ab]

He then traveled to his city in the netherworld; it was possessed of all auspicious marks, bestowed all desired fruits, was endowed with the virtues of all the seasons, and was adorned with all jewels. When he was established there, the sons of Kālanemi approached seeking his grace and a home. The daily pūjā of Hātakeśvara was revived. They all promised to help him. In time, the Daityas very happily came under his authority. All of the mighty and well-born granted him their daughters. [23cd-27]

Having become quite powerful, he conquered the Earth with its forests and continents endowed with caves, mountains, and lakes. He made war with the gods, and they were conquered by him. Due to the boon granted by Brahmā as well as the fostered favor of the Goddess, he could not be conquered by the gods headed by Brahmā and Purandara. That mighty one wished to conquer all the gods, oh Indra – even me! Defeated, oh best of gods, Vāsava and Brahmā went where I had entered into meditation of truth on Trikūṭa, king of mountains. Abiding there, I was praised by Brahmā, Śakra, Candara, and the rest. [28-31]

The gods said:

“Honor to the lotus-eyed Viṣṇu; honor to the victorious one; honor to the highest god of gods; honor to the most powerful amongst the gods. Honor to you who are the hermitage of dharma; honor to the destroyer of impediments; honor to the one able to accomplish all, and the one engaged in all dharma. Oh eminent one, you are the protector of gods, Dānavas, Yakṣas, and Rākṣasas. We are frightened by Ruru, oh lord; you are our refuge. You, lord, are the only [means] for us who are drowning in a great ocean. Ruru is that terrible ocean, the Daityas are sharks, and their arrows, discus, and swords are alligators. Be our ship, oh imperishable one!” [32-36ab]

As soon as I arose to grant them freedom from fear, that Daitya lord suddenly appeared there. Fighting with me, oh Vāsava, that chief Danu began to battle with all the gods. Those mighty Asuras, puffed up with pride in their strength, were slain with discus, sword, and arrows. Being struck, some fell into the great ocean, and others went to the shore; some entered Pātāla netherworld, while others retreated to Rasātala. Thus that great Dānava army was destroyed by my discus. Witnessing this, oh Śakra, the Daitya lord fabricated great illusion by which Daityas, Maruts, Vasus, Vāsava, Candramā, Yama, Nirṛti, Dharma, and the rest were subdued in merely a moment. [36cd-41]

Then Brahmā along with Śakra, the wise Bṛhaspati, and myself quickly went to the three-eyed god. Along with the Goddess, he delightedly took on many [forms]. No reasoning, source, nor cause of this were perceived. He was endowed with the forms of all the śaktis; because of them, he was [able to] fashion the forms of Brahmā and myself. Thus we understood that this whole world is Śiva and Śakti. Brahmā and I then began to praise them. [42-45]

Brahmā and Keśava said:

“Honor to you, lord, the naked mendicant whose only garment is a hide; I proclaim that [the Goddess] bestows all happiness. Victory! You, [Goddess], are all things auspicious, the cause of all causes; honor to you, oh lord of gods, the homeless one who dwells in the cremation ground. Honor to the lord who bears skull in hand, whose ornaments are made of skulls; honor to you, oh Goddess of all things, the foundation of all the worlds’ creatures, the victorious creatrix of the world, the ruler over all beings. Honor to you, the lord of great destruction whose garlands are

made of skulls, the eternal one to whose forehead the moon is affixed, the hide-wearing, perpetually beloved. Honor to you, oh Goddess of existence who is benevolent in past, present, and future, who is yoga, the essence of yoga, and the bestower of all yoga; honor to you, oh god of the fierce roar who is clothed in elephant hide, who always bears trident in hand, the three-eyed lord of the thirty [gods]. Honor to you, oh divine Goddess of yoga, the divine source of yoga. You are Raudrī, Mahāraudrī, the eternal energy of Rudra; honor to you, oh chief god among the triumvirate, the destroyer of Tripura. Honor to the lord of all, the omnipresent, all-knowing one who faces all directions; honor to you, oh Goddess who is the essence of Rudra as Rudreśvarī. [46-54]

Victory! Oh Goddess who is supreme among the gods, who is worshiped by all the gods; honor to you, oh gentle [lord] who is established everywhere, who is all-pervading. All things exist in you, all things arise from you, you are all things, and you are everywhere; honor to you, oh Goddess of the gods, oh ruler of the gods. Victory! Oh you who are the *vidyās*, the essence of *vidyās*, adorned with the ornaments of *vidyās*; honor to you who are the essence of all things, the lord who contains all things. By you the moving and unmoving [world] is pervaded as the division of the gross and the subtle; honor to you, oh Goddess of *vidyās*, the bestower of *vidyās*. You are hymned by the thirty [gods], oh divine Goddess who resides in three-eyed [Śiva]; honor to you who are the eternal and primal Rudra, who are beyond manifestation. Honor to you, the eternal husband of Umā who is infinite, perpetually in the world, and constant; honor to you, oh Goddess, overseer of the *gaṇa* troops, trident in hand. Honor to you, oh one with the beautiful blue throat, the bearer of fortune, the lord of welfare whose body contains the *vidyās*, who established all former *vidyās*; honor to you, oh Goddess of the *gaṇas*, leader of the *gaṇas*. [55-62ab]

You are Durgā, of great courage and power that is difficult to obtain; honor to you [lord], who are undivided unity, who are beyond time. You are lord of yoga, access to yoga, essence of yoga, origin of yoga; honor to you, oh Goddess of the unattainable, who abides in that which is difficult to access. You are fierce, formidable, the destroyer of the egg of Brahmā; honor to you, oh lord of yoga, who always supports great yoga. You are acknowledged in the triple world as *brahman*, and are celebrated in the single syllable of Om; honor to you, oh Goddess of the cruel, the great *vidyā* of fierce form. Oh Goddess, you roam in a terrible form, engaged in fierce vows; honor to Śiva, who has given half his body, the eternal Sadāśiva. Honor to you, oh terrible Goddess, who is supreme though bearing only half [a body], whose half is superior to the best, who holds the terrible trident in hand. Honor to you, oh Goddess who is the essence of anger, who is established as the passion of anger, who is the supreme peace, and who is beyond death. Honor to you who are the supreme seed syllables of a, u, m, and who are the Goddess of anger for the sake of slaying Dānavas. [62cd-69]

Honor to you who are the goddesses Nārāyaṇī, Kaumārī, and Brahmacārīṇī; honor to you [lord] who are extinction, beyond superlatives, and beyond eternity. You are the knower of thought and the known thought; you transcend thought. Honor to you who are victorious Jayā, triumphant Vijayā, unconquered Ajitā, and unsurpassed Aparājītā; honor to you [lord] who are true thought, false thought, and beyond thought. Honor to you, oh Goddess of *siddhis*, who are the accomplished powers of practitioners. You are majesty, beauty, loveliness, renown, and faith; honor to you, oh Śiva, who are tranquility and unparalleled brightness. You are infinite, the perpetual universe, both manifest in form and free from form; honor to you, oh Goddess, who are Medhā, Sarasvatī, and

Śrī. You are yourself rain and creation; honor to you, oh Prajāpati lord of creatures, who are settled in the heart of all creatures but who dwells in the sky. You are not perceived by the senses, being devoid of all colors. Honor to you [Goddess], who are the merchant farmer, the furrow, the bearer of the earth, and the boundaries of the oceans. Honor to you, oh cave-dweller, whose essence and power are concealed, who are beyond obscurity, who are the essence of the esoteric, and who are the hidden field of perceptions for secret [initiates]. Honor to you [Goddess], who are the directions and the intermediate points, who are the twilight; you are the Mothers, oh Goddess of the gods, adorned with the syllables of sound. Honor to you, [oh lord], who always dwell in the cave for the sake of worship, the great-souled supreme God whose great *māyā* is utmost; you are praised in all the Śāstras and Vedas. You are the goddess Gāyatrī, the self-arisen mother of the Veda; you are the eternal supreme knowledge as well as that by which knowledge is attained. [70-82]

Honor to you. You are the supreme lord; you are *brahman*; you are Śiva and Sadāśiva; you are continually praised by the gods, sages, and ancestors. Honor to you. You [Goddess] are seated on a lotus, four-faced, with four arms and a garland of *akṣa* beads in hand; you are beyond the five [elements], always self-supported. Honor to you. You [lord] are always pleasant and gentle; you are Puruṣa and Īśāna. You [Goddess] are Brahmāṇī mounted on the goose vehicle; you are three-eyed, with trident in hand, displaying a diadem in your matted hair. [Oh lord], you are beyond the five aspects of *brahman*; you are the sixth [aspect of] *brahman*; honor to you. You are Kāla and Kālāgnirudra, merciless to the Ādityas. [Oh Goddess], you are Rudrāṇī, mounted on the shoulders of the bull; honor to you. You bear three locks; your form is that of a maiden; you keep the trident in hand and are clothed in red garments. You [lord] are always established in the five [elements] of earth, water, fire, wind, and ether; honor to you. [Oh Goddess], you are Kaumārī, mounted on the peacock vehicle; honor to you. You bear conch, discus, and mace in hand, and are adorned in yellow clothing. You [lord] are pure, beyond supreme extinction; honor to you. You are liberated from the perishable and the imperishable; you have abandoned vowels and consonants. You are the Goddess Vaiṣṇavī, seated on Garuḍa; honor to you. [83-91]

Oh you [Goddess] who have a fearsome, dark form with red eyes and fangs, honor to you. You [lord] are spotless, free from the stain of the material world; honor to you. I do not know your form, means, or origin. Oh Vārāhī, you are frightening, the color of storm clouds; honor to you. Oh thousand-eyed [Indrāṇī], you keep the *vajra* in hand and possess a beautiful umbrella and banner. Oh excellent lord, you great-souled one are self-arisen; honor to you. You bind the world with attachments, and liberate it once again with truths. Oh you who are Indrāṇī, mounted on Airāvata, honor to you. Your great body is emaciated; you adore offerings of meat and rice. Your essence [lord] is the innate state and you give rise to origination; honor to you. You are origination and destruction; you are fear and the absence of fear. Oh Cāmuṇḍā with skull-bowl and skull-staff in hand, honor to you. Oh Goddess, you shine forth as one, as seven, as many. You lord are approached through meditation for the sake of truth. [92-98]

This hymn is for you, oh Goddess of the gods, as well as for the great-souled Śiva. You are to be pleased, oh Goddess, oh destroyer of all Asuras. You are splendid, surrounded by umbrella, banner, and the deep toll of bells, accompanied by your lion vehicle; honor to you. You instantly traverse the worlds of Earth, the intermediate realm, and heaven; oh mighty Goddess, honor to you. Though unitary, oh Goddess, you bear various forms and are contained in all syllables from *a* to *visarga*; honor to you. Oh Goddess, you yourself are established in the manifestation of *śakti*.

You are the eminent, unparalleled Great Goddess; honor to you. Oh Goddess, you are night and you are day; you are the seasons and the years, the moments and the instants, as well as the astrological transitions; honor to you. You are Kālī and Kālarātri, the dark night, the dreadful destruction. You are the formidable Mahāraudrī, Mahākālī; honor to you. You are the one who interrupted Dakṣa's sacrifice; you are the one who cut off the head of Yama; you, oh Goddess, are the mother of heroes, the gracious Bhadrakālī; honor to you. [99-106]

Oh Goddess, you dwell in the sky, in the netherworlds, and in heaven. At the end you grant liberation; honor to you. You are the essence of all things, oh Goddess. You are established in all material forms according to division of the gross and the subtle. You are *yoginī*; honor to you. You pervade all that I see in the moving and unmoving world, oh Goddess. Oh Kātyāyanī, honor to you. You are stillness and you are action, oh Goddess. You produce the soft hum that is the seed sound. You are the superior Śivā, the animation of knowledge; honor to you. Be pleased, oh Goddess; appear before me. Grant the capture of Ruru, oh Śaṅkarī. May the trident-bearing Goddess become the boat for Vāsava, Brahmā, and Sūrya, who are drowning in an ocean of Daityas." [107-112]

Thus previously we praised Śambhu and the Goddess who dwells in his body, pleasing them both, oh Śakra. Śiva Śaṅkara granted that boon just as desired. If one endowed with faith recites the hymn of the God and Goddess as did Brahmā and the rest, all desired fruits will be fulfilled. Thinking, reciting, hearing, or writing the hymn grants all desires arisen in speech, heart, body, or mind. It protects the afflicted, those in whom fear has arisen, those surrounded by enemies, those who are in forests, rivers, or mountains, and those who have come among tigers, lions, boars, or thieves in the forest. Just from remembering the hymn, great misfortunes fall away. From reciting it, one who has committed brahminicide, who has murdered a guru or ancestor, or who has become a drunkard shall be liberated and will receive the same benefit as [performing] the Aśvamedha, oh Śakra." [113-118]

**Thus is the eighty-third chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called "The Hymn of the God and Goddess as Means for the Slaying of Ruru."**

Chapter Eighty-four

Śakra said:

“Oh lord, I want to hear accurately how the charming and attractive maiden famed as Bhavānī brought down the enemy. How was the mighty and courageous Daitya lord who had been unconquered by all the gods slain by Bhavānī? Tell me.” [1-2]

Lord [Viṣṇu] said:

“Listen; I will tell you. The slaying of Ruru by the Goddess will be reported just as you have asked, oh Śakra. I will inform you. Having granted the *śakti* from his own body, oh Vāsava, the god of gods [said]: “All of you headed by Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Purandara should depart along with the *gaṇa* troops.” Due to his command we all went to the Asura lord; however, we returned, conquered once more. [The Asura lord] was seized by anger and approached to slay Śambhu. Seeing him, Śambhu immediately directed the *gaṇa* troops: “Desiring the welfare of the gods, battle with the Dānava lord.” Though surrounded by the *gaṇa* troops, oh Vāsava, [the Asura] quickly defeated them and set upon Śiva. The god then took on his terrible form [and said]: “I will crush you.” [The Asura] raised up a horrific battle with Śambhu that frightened the gods and Dānavas. [3-9]

Somehow, oh Vāsava, the courageous [Asura] succeeded in cutting the throat of [Śiva], and a stream of blood fell to the ground. Countless red Bhūtas issued forth there from the surface of the earth, bearing red ornaments, armor, and the *uttaracchada* upper garment. They were enshrouded with cloth of a deep red color; they held in hand swords gleaming like lightning, as well as their shields. Shaking their heads and holding ivory bows, their appearance was formidable. They shone red so brightly that even the sun was distressed. Some had extremely long noses or eyes; some had teeth protruding from their lips. They were bearing banners, iron clubs, and tridents in hand, and were powerful with upraised spears blazing like fire. Some kept iron hooks in hand, while others held noose and hook; some shone with *bhalla*, *karṇika*, or *ardhacandra* arrows, while others were splendid with axe in hand. [10-15]

They released streams of weapons, jumping about and drunk with pride of strength. Their minds had abandoned fear and modesty; they were filled with valor, courage, and strength. Some were mounted on chariots, others were seated on lions; some rode elephants, horses, or bears, while some went on foot in unfailing courage. [The Asura lord] was surrounded by lakhs of crores of those mighty warriors of Śiva, but they were attacked and split apart, and began to flee. Being pierced by raised up arrows, they rushed forth. The Earth was filled with the blood and fat that poured from their bodies. Then the gods headed by Brahmā and Vāsava became afraid. If the god were to be defeated, then all of the gods would be destroyed. [16-20]

Then Brahmā thought of a means [of victory]: “Having taken on the form of a woman, I will assist Maheśvara. [The *śaktis*] will quickly complete their task in Viśveśvara’s battle.” Then Brahmā generated his own *śakti*. That goddess was luminous like sunbeams. In one hand was a water pot, and in the other was a bow. Though one, she was established in crores of manifestations, bearing all the weapons. They killed, but were not struck; they felled [Asuras] by the thousands. [21-23]

Though bearing the form of Brahmā, her body appeared as that of a woman. She was mounted on the goose vehicle and was bearing her own appropriate weapons. Threatening, she terrified the floods of Dānavas. Having seen her frightful actions, Śiva was amazed. [He thought:] “This *śakti* of the creator is always victorious over the opposition. I will create a second *śakti* of my own, the unconquered Aparājitā.” [24-26]

**Thus is the eighty-fourth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Arising of Brahmāṇī,”
in “The Slaying of Ruru.”**

Chapter Eighty-five

Lord [Viṣṇu] said:

“Seeing the battle between Brahmāṇī and the Danus, Śaṅkara entered meditation in order to conjure his own *śakti*. Having thus recalled her, the lord of the thirty [gods] established [a *śakti*] of his own form. He thought of the one who was present in the lotus of his heart, splendid as a hundred moons, mounted on the shoulders of the muscular [lion], and bearing the spear and skull-staff. Seeing that one praised by the gods calling out the terrible words, “Kill! Seize!” all the enemies fled, afflicted by fear. [1-4]

Having seen this, the six-faced Kārttikeya also thought of the radiant one situated within himself, and that mighty heroine arose, seated on a peacock. That fearsome one was holding a spear and bell, as well as a bow and arrow. The directions were filled with a sound like that of a goose. She fell upon the Daityas like an agitated streak of lightning in the forest. Then, oh Śakra, wanting to generate [my own *śakti*], she arose from my *tejas*. That fearsome one was mounted on Garuḍa, luminous with armband and bracelet. With the terrible roar of the lion, the sound of the conch, and the frequent cries of “Kill!” and “*hum!*” she began to slay the Dānava lords. [5-9ab]

Yama, with unbreakable sword and terrible staff, praised [his *śakti*] and established her according to his own form. That fanged one was mounted on a mighty buffalo, her weapons of noose and staff upraised. [She filled the sky] with a rumbling sound like that of clouds at the time of dissolution; she was difficult to look at, like black-tongued [Yama] or the resplendent flames of destruction. Then Śakra [conjured] his own ray, the goddess whose splendor is like that of refined gold, who is seated on the rutting elephant, who bears a thousand lovely eyes and holds *vajra*, hook, bow, and arrow in hand. [9cd-11]

One by one, the Goddess was made present with crores of forms, bearing all weapons. They attacked but were not struck. They brought down [Asuras] by the thousands. The Dānava troops were quickly broken apart with their great weapons; however, as many troops as the gods’ army was able to destroy, oh Śakra, that many once again surged the Earth like ocean waves against the shore. The Dānava lord could not be conquered. The leaders of the gods were highly vexed; pained by fear and disappointment, their swords and maces drooped in their hands. [12-13ab]

Oh Śakra, all of the rays began to praise Śiva. The gods headed by Brahmā became quite alarmed, and also began to praise the lord of gods, Kālarudra. Śambhu heard those words of the *śaktis*, imperishable [Viṣṇu], [and the rest]. A great anger arose [in him], and from that anger a fire issued forth. The flames of that fire shone brilliantly, alighting across, above, and below. Situated amongst the rings of flames, her brilliance equal to myriads of suns, the *śakti* of Kālarudra was manifest for the assistance of Śiva. Her mouth was fearsome, black as night, as if ready to devour the triple world. She had large fangs and red eyes, and sounded like storm clouds at the time of dissolution. That goddess carried the *vajra* and hook in hand, and also had club, sword, and noose upraised; she held the mace and spear, and bore the trident along with other weapons. [13cd-23]

Frightening all the directions, she came before the lord of gods and said: “What shall I do? Oh lord of gods, tell me quickly.” The unconquered Aparājitā was addressed by the pleased god: “If you are lovingly devoted to me, oh Goddess, you must attack Ruru.” [She replied:] “Oh lord of

gods, I will do as you have spoken.” Then Śambhu created a great ocean of wine. [He said:] “Drink this along with the [other] *śaktis*, and come under the control of anger.” [24-27ab]

By then, the Dānava army had once again increased by the crores. All of the courageous, frightful [*śaktis*] longed for food. [They said:] “We are ravenous, oh lord of gods. Give us food.” Śiva told those ones of unimpeded *tejas*: “Quickly slay Ruru as your meal.” Then the goddess Kālī made a dreadful lion-like roar, and vigorously descended upon the four-limbed Dānava army. The sky was filled with the sounds of battle cries, the trumpeting of war horns, the terrible roar of swiftly moving chariots, the grinding of axle and nave, and the striking of reigns. A terrible, deafening cacophony reverberated throughout the entire egg of Brahmā. [27cd-33]

Rutting war elephants, appearing like mountains adorned with gold and rubies, descended to pulverize one another. Though struck by their drivers with hooks, they could not be controlled, maddened by the scent of the enemy. The sky was darkened by their dense sprays [of rut], as if it were a stormy day. Oh Śakra, the warriors were not able to discern who was friend and who was foe. Trying to locate one another, the warriors called out in confusion. They seemed as a single army, dense with fear. Laughing, their hairs bristling with the thrill [of battle], they began to lash out indiscriminately with severe blows. [34-38]

Crying out the *hum* sound, some among the armies were struck in the chest by fashioned weapons; some were violently pierced with spears; many were pulverized under elephants and chariots, while those on foot began to dash about, their eyes darting with fear. Protecting one another, those skilled in weaponry released fast-moving arrows. The sounds of scores of arrows striking body armor rang out. The mountain resounded with the thunder-like roar of battle. [39-42]

Some of the elephants fell, rent by well-dealt blows. The limbs of some of the horses were broken, and some of the chariots were shattered. Some [warriors] were split apart by staff, discus, mace, trident, spear, or skull-staff. Some were slain by the hatchet of the mighty *gaṇa* lords; some fell unconscious, their heads struck by swords. Some of the fallen arose, and some were seen biting their lower lip. Some of the elephants were felled by the tusks of Airāvata. Others of the elephant troops were felled by the horns of buffalo or bull, or were struck down by spikes. Some [of the warriors] were shred by the diamond[-sharp] claws of soaring Garuḍa. Some succumbed to the kicks of bulls and fell to the ground. Some were eaten by jackals, while some were set aflame. Some were unable to move and some danced about, while some chanted garlands of mantras. [43-49ab]

In this manner their army was torn asunder by the *śaktis*. Having attached two lotus petals to their fiery arrows, knitting their brows to site the arched bow, they released scores of arrows. [They battled] with lance, camphor, cudgel, *bhuśuṇḍi* weapon, plough, mallet, *vatsadanta* arrow, spade, javelin, *śalaka* weapon, *śilīmukha* sword, trident, spear, club, dreadful conch blows, formidable shield, various kinds of all-resisting weapons, noose, hook, *mṛgāṅka* sword, iron arrows, armor, bow, trees, mountains, stones, lumps of clay, skulls, *vajra*, pike, mace, skull-staff, axe, saw, and pervading discus. [The battlefield] shone with multitudes of weapons, fluttering banners, chariots, and warriors. It seemed as if the dissolution fire at the end of the *yuga* had spread. [49cd-56ab]

That terrible battle taking place instilled fear amongst the gods. Some [warriors] who were struck by blows of the sword abandoned their bodies. Some were struck by scimitars gleaming like rays of the sun and fell to the ground. The bows were all tautly curved, like rainbows. The battle was resonant with the clanking of successions of arrows. The deceased continued to battle, aiming their barbed and half-moon arrows, and striking with the *candrāsi* scimitar and sword. Though fallen with severed arms, hand, throats, heads, or chests, they arose and were seen attacking once more. They advanced, desiring to kill and refusing to abandon their lives. Though divided in two, many rose up, blazing like the sun. [56cd-62ab]

Skin-flaying swords were seen flashing about like lightning amongst dark rain-clouds. Fierce cries pierced heaven and earth. Struck by so many arrows, bodies were divided in half and were seen falling, like the mountains when their wings were severed. A sulfurous stream of blood flowed forth like the Jambu river, sweeping along the large umbrellas as if they were white, red, and blue lotuses. The chariots were like alligators, the elephants like crocodiles. The dead bodies floated past like idle tortoises. The surface of the Earth was flooded by the blood from their bodies. [62cd-68ab]

The guardians of the directions manifest with various forms. By the wish of Śiva, the terrifying Sugrīva, Kumbhakarṇa, Nandin, and Mahābala set out for battle. Those guardians of the directions departed to the east, and quickly arrived there. Seeing them there, the gods honored them as is customary. The fearsome Piṅgalākṣa, Nandika, Gajānana, and Bhrūkuṭīmukha gathered in the south. Those four who could drive away all afflictions were honored by Dharmarāja. The mighty guardians Karāla, Tālajaṅgha, Kailāsa, and Gokarṇa, longing for blood and liquor, set out for the western direction, surrounded by crores [of attendants]. Having seen them, Meghavāhana honored and praised them. Dantara, Lohajaṅgha, Ūrdhvakeśa, and Mahāmukha, those cruel eaters of blood and meat, went to the north. Soma honored them for the sake of protection. [68cd-75ab]

Three-eyed and four-faced Bhūtas came as assistants to the goddesses. Headed by Āmardaka, Agnimāla, and Ekapāda, they blazed with vigor like fire, holding skull-staff and spear in hand, their heads garlanded with skulls. The twenty-four *yoginīs* were present in the four directions, surrounded by crores of female attendants. Oh Śakra, attendant Seizers rose up from Rudra's thought, bearing his same form and endowed with equal power; they pervaded the moving and unmoving world all the way to the edges of Brahmā's egg. [75cd-79]

Oh Śakra, now I have briefly described to you all that was done by the self-formed, great-souled Bhairava for the assistance of the gods and the slaying of the Asuras. Previously it was told in detail by Skanda to Brahmā. Śiva told it to the Goddess, oh Śakra. It has been passed down by Skanda. [80-82]

**Thus is the eighty-fifth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called "The Arising of the Seizers,"
in "The Slaying of Ruru."**

Chapter Eighty-six

Lord [Viṣṇu] said:

“All of those executors of Śiva’s command subdued the horses, elephants, chariots, and armored warriors. The entire Dānava army was then devoured by those mighty ones and the unerring *śaktis* were strengthened by Śiva’s *tejas*. The Dānava lord then appeared on the surface of the Earth, at the superb golden city of Citravatī, where Hāṭakarudra was surrounded by lords skilled in *vidyā*, and where the illustrious Goddess was also present, surrounded by the Mothers of the netherworlds. She came forth threateningly, speaking harshly and snapping her bow string, her aimed arrows pulled back to her ear on her taut bow. [1-5]

Seeing this, [the Daitya lord] entered the city of Tala, where Śaṅkara was worshiped. The Goddess was also there, joined by Atharvarudras and surrounded by yogic Mothers. When he saw her, that frustrated [Asura] then went quickly to the brilliant fortress named Sūryavatī, which shone forth everywhere with a coppery luster. There too the Goddess was seen, surrounded by Kimpuruṣas and the rest, radiant with skull-staff in hand and joined by the skull Mothers. Having seen her, trembling he went to a place called Śrītāla, where there was a fortress named Vidyunmayī, remarkable for its funeral mounds. There the Goddess was surrounded by tawny Piṅgarudras and emaciated Mothers. Seeing her threatening and very cruel, he descended below to a crystalline world named Sutala, where there is a splendid fortress named Kāntimatī in which fears are vanquished, oh lord of gods. There too, oh Śakra, the Goddess was surrounded by troops of Rudras and accompanied by Mothers, bearing sword, noose, and hook upraised. [6-14ab]

That enemy abandoned his vigor and might, retreating to a place called Ābhāsa, where there is a city named Bhasmavatī, filled with the crackling of flames. [The Goddess] stood before him, joined by fire-sizzling Mothers. She tormented him with harsh, cruel words, saying thus: “Stand! Stand, oh great fool! The bearer of the Pināka bow is angry with you. Where will you go that I am not present? Oh sinner, what such place is there? I am the root cause of this world; it exists in my gaping mouth.” [14cd-17]

Having heard these formidable words, he once again raised up to battle, casting off fear for his life and taking up his bow and arrows. He began to rain down arrows, the snap of his bow string resounding like thunder. He then produced great illusion, fashioning a four-limb military made up of thousands of chariots, horses, elephants, and troops. They struck with many crores of iron-shaft arrows, piercing [the gods] and causing them to fall due to their fierce blows. The army was deafened by the sound of bells and *ḍamaru* drums. Her eyes shining forth from her youthful face like crores of lightning bolts, [the Goddess] quickly struck down his *māyā* and shattered his weapons. With his bow snapped along with his arrows of unmatched strength, the prideful Dānava lord was made bereft of weapons. The Great Goddess wounded that one whose courage and might had been destroyed, drawing out a stream of blood, fat, marrow, and bone. The Mothers gathered up his head and skin, and departed; they assembled together and began to dance wildly. [18-25]

Observing this inclination of theirs, all of the gods were alarmed. They said: “Oh Rudra, what shall we do? The rays have taken on terrible forms.” Śiva then addressed those gods headed by Brahmā, oh Purandara: “Delight in being the husbands of those intoxicated ones. Be their leaders, and guide them away.” Thus the eminent gods quickly did. Brahmā responded, saying: “Oh

Ambikā, grant me my own *śakti*.” In this manner Śiva and the rest of us requested, present before [the Goddess], oh Śakra. Then Śiva took up a lute adorned with the seven tones, and began to perform the *rāga* of passion, filling all of the world with scales, modulations, and time measures. The supreme lord danced along with us, oh Vāsava. I began to sing, while Brahmā and the rest commenced a hymn. [26-31]

[They said:]

“With my head and body placed at his feet, I eternally praise the fierce lord Śiva, on whose matted locks the Ganges falls, whose limbs are smeared with ash, whose body is adorned with serpents and the moon, and who always praises the lotus-like faces of the wives of the thirty [gods]. Praise to Paśupati, who maintains the well-being of submissive creatures, who destroys the armies of the Asuras, who is the terrible lord of the thirty, who is the husband of the mountain girl, and whose vehicle is the bull. I praise the lord of gods, the giver of boons, the granter of man’s happiness or unhappiness, the lord of the Earth, the father of Guha, the one whose eyes are Hari, Ravi, and Śaśi. Victory to the one detailed by Vedic mantras, who is highly praised with various hymns, whose virtues are sung by gods, accompanied by lute, flute, *mṛdaṅga* drum, conch, and the roaring kettledrum, whose measure is equal to hundreds of palm trees, and who dances with lovely ladies. Victory to the fierce lord Śiva!” [32-38]

**Thus is the eighty-sixth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Excellence of the Fierce Lord,”
in “The Slaying of Ruru.”**

Chapter Eighty-seven

Lord [Viṣṇu] said:

“Then the Goddess arisen from Sadāśiva suddenly appeared there on Earth, oh Śakra, lovely, peaceful, and shining forth like crores of moons. With lute in hand, she began to dance with Śambhu, expressing the various moods. [She danced] according to the numerous movements beginning with the lotus. She darted her eyes and arched her lotus-like brows. The movement of her limbs was graceful, at times quick and at other times languid. Her rotating feet rose upwards, and then descended once more. Her hands wandered, fashioning the shapes of lotuses and displaying the many other poses. [1-6ab]

Oh Śakra, her dancing filled up the cloud-filled sky, and her rising arms and feet obstructed the course of the sun’s horse-drawn chariot. Due to her gesticulations and the stamping of her feet, the serpents dwelling on Earth contracted their hoods and began to vomit venom and blood. The eight Nāga lords abandoned their homes. Frightened and in a bewildered mental stupor, they wandered here and there. Overcome by the heavy burden, Śeṣa fell unconscious again and again. [6cd-11ab]

The many clouds, stars, and planets moved from their locations. Delighted by the sight of her, the sky-dwellers released garlands of flowers by the thousands. Beginning to dance, everyone obtained utmost joy. The shining rays frolicked by various kinds of amusements along with the troops of Rudras, *yoginīs*, ghosts, Rākṣasas, and Guhyas. They came before Rudra and honored him. Then the *śaktis* were revered by that pleased god, who addressed them thus: “Oh goddesses, you are the Mothers of all the world. You are to be worshiped in all actions by the gods headed by Brahmā, as well as by the people. You were fashioned by will for the protection of the world. That *śakti* who is foremost among you is the supreme cause [of the universe].” [11cd-17]

Oh Śakra, she emitted Brahmā, Rudra, and myself, and has impelled us for the successive origination, maintenance, and destruction. Just as the rays of the god Sūrya unintentionally bring about the awakening and subsequent contraction of lotus flowers, so she brings about the arising and ceasing of all actions. She is without beginning, middle, or end. She abides in all elements. [The *śaktis*] were once again addressed by Śiva: “You will be worshiped on Earth, and you will grant whatever wish your devotees desire.” [18-21]

Then each *śakti* was praised by the one from whom she had arisen, oh excellent one. The goddesses were honored by Brahmā, Śiva, Skanda, Vivasvat, Indra, and all the gods. They were worshiped by the guardians of the worlds, the planets, the serpents, and the Dānavas. Thus a hymn to the Mothers was performed by those gods headed by Śakra. [22-24]

“I praise the exceedingly horrifying three-eyed Mahābhairavī seated on a bull, whose earrings are composed of formidable jewels; whose face is both radiant and terrifying with arched brows; who is dreadful and frightening, with strange and monstrous adornments; and who bears flaming axe, lute, *ḍamaru* drum, skull-bowl, and skull-staff. I lower my head in reverence to the Mother who arose from Brahmā, who is always seated on the expansive goose above a bright white lotus in full bloom; who resounds with the hum of swarms of bees; and whom sages always serve. I honor the one who is arisen from the body of the Pramatha lord; who is luminous as a hundred

autumnal moons and pale as snow, conch, or water pot; whose speech is like wavering moonbeams; who is seated on the bull vehicle; who bears the crescent moon in her twisted, matted hair; and whose weapon is the trident. I praise the one arisen from Guha who travels on the best of peacocks; whose color is pure; whose feet are adorned with jingling bells; whose hand holds upraised a sharp spear; whose garment sparkles from the glistening rays of her sword; and who destroys the enemies of the thirty [gods]. [25-28]

I revere Vaiṣṇavī, risen from Viṣṇu, whose complexion is the same as the rising moon or heaps of flax blossoms; who bears weapons of mace, club, bow, conch, and discus; who is seated on Garuḍa as her vehicle; whose eyes are extended like lotus blossoms; and who grants numerous *siddhis*. I respectfully honor the boar whose color is like multitudes of dense clouds; whose face is that of a boar, who is radiant with sword in hand, with iron club and noose of death upraised; whose deep sound is like the rumbling of clouds at the time of dissolution; and whose vehicle is the mighty buffalo. I honor the one born of Śakra who shines like pure gold, quaking lightning, or meteors; who rides the excellent elephant of Indra; who is adorned with various ornaments; who bears the quivering *vajra*; who is worshiped by the groups of gods; and who grants boons and bestows numerous enjoyments. [29-31]

I honor the one established in Śiva whose radiance is like a hundred suns; who wears a garland of white skulls; whose face displays gaping mouth and protruding teeth; whose eyes are red as the sun at the time of dissolution; who exhibits a superb figure; who loves blood, meat, and fat; who grants refuge; and whose weapons are extraordinarily terrifying. I honor the one arisen from the body of Gaṇeśa whose flapping ears drive away insects like fly-whisks; whose rut flowing from the cheeks perfumes the ten directions; whose splendid face is that of the best of elephants; who destroys all obstacles; and who leads the *gaṇa* troops.” [32-33]

Having praised those Mothers who possess unequalled power; who are respected as protectors of all the world; who destroy the enemies of the gods; who remove all sins and sorrows of devotees; and who are revered by all the gods, one shall obtain abundant prosperity and will proceed to the highest world of Mothers. [34]

**Thus is the eighty-seventh chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Hymn to the Mothers,”
in “The Slaying of Ruru.”**

Chapter Eighty-eight

Lord [Viṣṇu] said:

“These [Mothers] should be worshiped by those seeking liberation with recourse to the Vedas, Āgamas, Gāruḍatantra, Bhūtatantra, and Kālatantra. Like a thought-gem, Śivā will effect all [desired] actions. Whether Jain, Buddhist, or Gāruḍavādin, those engaged in their own dharma should worship [the Mothers] in their own fashion, oh young one. Whatever manner in which devout people worship shall grant results, to Brahmans and low-castes alike. They are worshiped by gods, Gandharvas, and Kīṃnaras with the aim of auspicious marriage [with them]; they are worshiped on Earth as well, by those seeking results both seen and unseen. [1-5ab]

Whatever consists of speech, whatever is visible or invisible in the world, and whatever is moving or unmoving – all of it has arisen from the *śaktis*, oh Śakra; there is no doubt. They are celebrated as the origin of gods, ancestors, and men, oh Vāsava. From her all things issue forth – origination, maintenance, and destruction; effecting ensnarement and liberation; heaven, emancipation, and hell. From the beginning, the *śaktis* have pervaded all things, just as water by a drop of ghee. [5cd-9ab]

Thus you also must worship with a sacrifice, oh lord of gods. Whether fashioned from gold, silver, sprouting shoots, pictures, wood, or stone, they will bestow all desired fruits when worshiped according to precept. Listen to the virtuous results obtained by the one who shall devotedly proclaim the arising of the divine Mothers, the manifestation of Śiva and Śakti, and the destruction of Ruru, lord of Daityas, or who shall hear or recite [this *purāṇa*]. He will be freed from all impediments and will obtain whatever is desired. He is victorious here [on earth], oh Śakra, and will attain the highest position upon death. Just from hearing this, one obtains the same results achieved by the performance of religious observances such as vows. [9cd-13]

**Thus is the eighty-eighth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Conclusion of the Slaying of Ruru.”**

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Chapter One Hundred Eleven

Manu said:

“How was Khaṭva, highest of Asuras, slain by the god of gods, by whom Āyurveda had been illumined? Tell that to me, oh eternal one.” [1]

Brahmā said:

“Mahādeva was roaming¹⁶⁹ about on Mālavya mountain in the form of an elephant. Viṣṇu was standing in part of the sky, blocking his path. Incited by the immense fury of those two in battle, a mighty one of vast and variable forms arose. He was red-eyed, possessed of endless *tejas*, and endowed with the quality of great *māyā*. He shone like a thousand suns, his splendor equal to the dissolution fire. [2-4]

The sun and moon were the eyes of that fierce one. The netherworlds were his toenails. The gods and Nāgas abided at his shanks, while the mountains were at his knees. Bhūrloka and Bhuvārloka became his navel; Maharloka was his chest; Janaloka was his throat; Taparloka became his mouth; and Satyaloka was his head. Thus was his body. [5-6]

He began to obstruct the ascetic practice of Viṣṇu, who was striving for extinction (*nirvāṇa*). Having approached that base Asura,¹⁷⁰ Viṣṇu began to battle him. Possessed of might and illusion, [that Asura] fashioned a subtle body, but when attacked by Viṣṇu and Rudra he increased in size once more. From his own body he poured forth millions of weapons such as arrow, spear, mace, staff, and axe. Though surrounded by those [weapons] arisen from the body of Khaṭva, which were enlivened by *māyā*, the mighty Viṣṇu and Vighneśa continued battling. [7-10]

When the mighty Viṣṇu and Vighneśa had been subdued, oh young one, he rose up to battle the gods headed by Indra. Having conquered the divine Indra, Candra, the Vasus, Brahmā, Yama, the Rākṣasas, and Sūrya, he assailed the netherworlds. Having thus overcome the gods, Asuras, and Nāgas, and having made them subject to his will, he once again established them in their previous positions. [11-13]

Then he undertook harsh [asceticism], eating only one grain or subsisting only on water. He ate only cow urine and dung, or sometimes only air. He stood for millions of years with his face turned down, eating only smoke. Thus the triumvirate god, himself the form of the world, the one whose head is marked by the moon, was compelled to grant him a boon.” [14-16]

**Thus is the one hundred eleventh chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Arising of Khaṭvāsura.”**

¹⁶⁹ I read *aṭan* from Tarkaratna’s edition rather than *vasan* in verse 2.

¹⁷⁰ I employ Tarkaratna’s reading of the third *pada* of verse 7.

Chapter One Hundred Twelve

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“Who is this elephant-faced god? How did he arise? How did he oppose Viṣṇu? I want to know this.” [1]

Manu said:

“The eminent mountain celebrated in the world as Meru is an adornment of Earth, arisen from the golden egg. In its eastern region there is a peak famed as Mālavya, which is inhabited by sages, gods, Siddhas, Kīṃnaras, Gandharvas, Apsarases, and *gaṇa* troops; which is covered by various trees and vines and enveloped by fruits and flowers; which is filled with lakes and streams, and garlanded by ponds and rivers; which is delightfully charming, continually filled with the cries of numerous birds, resounding with the goose, duck, *cakravāka* bird, and partridge. [2-5]

There on that lord of mountains dwelled Keśava, robed in yellow garments, the lord of the world, the essence of truth, the possessor of *māyā*, lord of Earth. Having made the resolve for the sake of the maintenance of life, he abided there in manifest form, constantly engaged in amorous delight, sporting with Śrī.¹⁷¹ So great was his power of activity and his endless might, the other gods embodied there and entered into ascetic practices. By means of that tapas Vidyā was established there in the form of the Vedas. Prakṛti was also settled there, summoned by Viṣṇu. [6-9]

Then by his utmost wish, the essence of *rajas* arose there. Rubbing it in his hands, he created the one who possesses the body of a man but an elephant face, who abounds in purity and is foremost among all gods. Candra, Āditya, and Anala became the three eyes; Brahmā resided at his head, while Vanaspati became his hair and the Rudras assembled at his throat. The teeth were the planets and heavenly bodies; Dharma and Adharma were his two lips; Sarasvatī became the tongue, while the ten directions inhabited the two ears. Indra came to his nose, while Hara was called amongst the two brows; the oceans became his stomach and the sages entered the pores. [10-14ab]

The Gandharvas, Kīṃnaras, Yakṣas, Piśācas, Danus, and Rākṣasas were situated in the abdomen, while the rivers assembled in the god’s two arms. His fingers were the serpents, and the stars were considered his nails; the goddess Śrī, who moves about on the peak of Meru, was established in his heart. Yama and Dharma became the navel, and the Earth was established at the hips¹⁷²; Sṛṣṭi was observed at the phallus, and the Aśvins were situated at the two knees. The mountains were established as the shanks, while the netherworlds were considered his two ankles; the hell realms became his two feet, oh best of sages. Kālāgnirudra himself inhabited the toes. The measures of time – *yuga*, *manvantara*, *kalpa*, day, *kāṣṭha*, *kalā*, and *lavā* – were all visible there. Thus he contained all the gods. [14cd-19]

Having seen them all as the essence of that elephant-faced one, Viṣṇu honored him joyfully and devotedly, and pleased him with various praises. [20]

¹⁷¹ I read *śrīyā* from Tarkaratna in the fourth *pada* of verse 7 rather than *kriyā*.

¹⁷² Rather than *kaṇṭe tu* in the fourth *pada* of verse 16, I read *kaṭyāntu* from Tarkaratna.

**Thus is the one hundred twelfth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Origination of Vināyaka.”**

Chapter One Hundred Thirteen

Viṣṇu said:

“I praise the one who destroys the enemies of the gods; who brings an end to rogues and adversaries; whose tusks gleam on his elephant face like jasmine, snow, conch, or moon; whose lovely body shines a brilliant coppery red; who appears like Meru fixed on Earth, obstructing the paths of the moon and sun; who slays the enemies of the gods. Oh lord, I honor the one born of the chief of Pramathas; who threatens and instills fear amongst the enemies of the gods; who destroys the pride of the Danus. [1-2]

I honor the one whose throat is garlanded with pearls shining like stars; whose boar-like face bears solid tusks gleaming like rays of light; whose cheeks flowing with rut attract bumblebees; who grants boons and who bestows blessings. I honor the one who as lord of gods is like an elder brother; whose delightful form is like a second body of Śambhu; who is beautifully dressed; whose lovely necklaces shine forth in various forms and colors; whose elephant face is greatly expansive. [3-4]

[I honor] the one whose head is crowned by the coils of Nāga lords; whose lovely tail dangles; who acts courageously in battle; who is praised and honored by the Mothers, yogīs, and *gaṇa* troops.¹⁷³ [I honor] the one whose roaring *hum* reverberates like a sounding bell; whose tusk points pierce rival elephants; whose color is like pollen or lotus flowers; who is attended with a golden fan inlaid with emeralds. [I honor] the one whose ears droop, broad like leaves of the *parṇa* tree and winding like a conch; whose red-rimmed eyes extend prominently towards his ears; whose deep resounding roar rumbles like storm clouds; who bears the staff, hook, and axe; and who wears the girdle and sacred thread. [5-7]

I honor him whose anklets fill all the mountain ridges with fierce ringing when he roams about; who always acts for the benefit of the world; who is the lord of obstacles, the granter of boons, and the bestower of blessings. [I honor] the one whose left hand always holds *laḍḍuka* sweets; who is perfumed with pleasant fragrances; who is praised by Brahmā, Indra, Candra, the Vasus, and Śaṅkara; who bestows gifts [as abundantly] as the water of the Ganges flows. You grant the sought results just as desired; thus I have praised you. Grant me well-being and the well-being of the gods. Slay Vighnāsura, enemy of gods and Siddhas, and remove the afflictions of Śakra.” [8-10]

Thus Viṣṇu affectionately praised that child of Śakti. Pleased, he granted him the desired boon. [He said:] “Oh Viṣṇu, for your sake and for the destruction of Purandara’s enemy, I have been dispatched to this best of mountains by Hara. Tell me; what should I do? I shall subdue any enemy of the triple world.”¹⁷⁴ Thus he consented to slay Vighna, having been praised and pleased by lord Viṣṇu. [11-12]

**Thus is the one hundred thirteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Hymn to Vināyaka.”**

¹⁷³ The meaning of the third *pada* of verse 5 remains unclear.

¹⁷⁴ I read *dadāmi* from Takratna rather than *vadāmi* in the second *pada* of verse 12.

Chapter One Hundred Fourteen

Manu said:

“Oh Brahmā, when they learned that Viṣṇu had been granted the boon, Hara, Brahmā, Vāsava, Āditya, and Candramā approached.¹⁷⁵ Having worshiped [Vighneśa] devotedly in the proper manner and in proper succession, they pleased [him with gifts]. First Īśvara offered that preeminent one the half moon. By Brahmā a white belt was given, and by Bhānu a ruby; Viṣṇu presented a conch and bow, while Vāsava gave an excellent *vajra*. [1-3]

Yama gave a lovely staff and Dhanada presented a mace; the Rākṣasa lord gave hook, noose, and sword. By the serpents a girdle was given, and by the heavenly bodies a garland. The Goddess Umā presented knowledge, and Śaṅkara gave the utmost yoga; strength, power, and *siddhis* were offered by yogīs. Sages, rivers, and mountains presented gifts, and the oceans duly granted their depth.¹⁷⁶ [4-7ab]

Having done thus, Śaṅkara and the rest presented to the splendid one divine weapons, mantras, and vows. That lord was anointed by Śiva as leader of all. [He said:] “Oh lord, you are worshiped foremost in all actions; in the world and amongst the gods, you will be celebrated as Vināyaka, remover of obstacles.” [7cd-10]

**Thus is the one hundred fourteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Granting the Boon of Vināyaka’s Consecration.”**

¹⁷⁵ I read *āyayuh* from Tarkaratna in the first *pada* of verse 1.

¹⁷⁶ The grammar of portions of verses 4-7 is problematic, and thus the translation is uncertain.

Chapter One Hundred Fifteen

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“Once the elephant-faced Vināyaka had been pleased by Viṣṇu and consecrated, what did the divine lords Indra, Śaṅkara, and Keśava do?” [1]

Manu said:

“Having placed the mighty elephant-faced god in the front, they set out toward the eastern mountain¹⁷⁷ for the destruction of Vighna. There dwelled that tiger among Danus who produced fear amongst all the gods, who extended for *yojanas* and touched the sky. He was accompanied by his seventy-nine armies, [arranged] into ten divisions. Having seen those Dānavas, the elephant-faced one immediately fabricated myriads of illusory opponents, equal to him in valor and knowledgeable of all weaponry. [2-5]

Once he made those warriors, a great battle began. All of the elephant’s army was conquered by Vighna’s Dānava warriors. The gods watched, trembling with fear. [They said:] “If Vināyaka is defeated, then how do we know Śakra will be protected in battle?” Then the gods bearing trident, *vajra*, and discus launched their divine weapons, thereby restraining [the enemy]. [6-8]

His wrath increased, Vināyaka the elephant lord was incited to rise up once more; angered, he grasped the weapon of Śaṅkara and pierced the throat¹⁷⁸ of Vighna, and hindered the opposing sinners. Having restrained all of Vighna’s [armies] with a noose, he destroyed them. Thus he slew that mighty and courageous enemy of Indra, shattering his rising vitality. He granted the gods freedom from fear and bestowed the kingdom upon Indra.” [9-11]

**Thus is the one hundred fifteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Slaying of Vighna.”**

¹⁷⁷ Sharma’s edition reads *arbudācala*, which may refer to a mountain in western India that remains a Jaina pilgrimage site. I’ve followed Tarkaratna’s edition which reads *udayācala*, referring to the mountain behind which the sun rises, i.e., an eastern mountain.

¹⁷⁸ I follow Tarkaratna in reading *kaṇṭha* in the first *pada* of verse 10.

Chapter One Hundred Sixteen

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“Oh excellent one, how was Brahmā’s asceticism interrupted, subsequently giving rise to Vighna who prompted fear amongst the gods?” [1]

Manu said:

“Desiring creation, Brahmā was engaged in asceticism at the beginning of the eon, from which a great delusion was produced. Because of this delusion, he was bewildered, oh Brahman, and all of his purity was destroyed. He disrespected Śiva and Viṣṇu, saying: “I alone am God. I alone create, and I alone rule; there is no other.” [2-4ab]

Then the lord of gods laughed dreadfully from his southern-facing mouth; a dreadful flame arose, from which a terrible and mighty [Asura] came forth. He appeared black as collyrium; his eyes and brows shone red [with anger]. Bearing discus and trident, he began to threaten the grandfather. He generated fear among the gods and gave rise to happiness for the Dānavas. Brahmā and the Daitya battled for a thousand years, but the enemy could not be subdued by Brahmā, who is himself the essence of purity. [4cd-7]

Then Nārāyaṇa went to the lord, the husband of Umā. For the sake of destroying the enemy Khaṭva, he was giving rise to a mighty goddess, a pleasant one bearing the trident, a great Raudrī holding the skull-bowl, a tawny-eyed maiden whose face was extraordinary with gaping, toothy mouth. Seeing his devotee, the lord Janārdana, approaching, he welcomed him. Worshipping Śiva, [Viṣṇu] raised up a Gandharva song. [8-10]

Viṣṇu said:

“I praise the one who abides in the sound of Om, adorned by the three beats [of a, u, m]; who brings about the end of time; who grants whatever boon is desired; who is praised by the best of cowherds. I praise the one who is Om, Ṛg, and Sāma¹⁷⁹; who knows the true meaning of all mantras; who is the well-spoken word, the prepared *soma*, and the recitation during sacrifice; who is the sacrificial fire, the offering, the oblation, the *kuśa* grass, and the auspicious vessels; who is the benefactor, the lord of sacrifice. [11-13]

I praise the one whose western face shines bright white like the moon or jasmine; who travels on a bull white as moonlight; who abides with the white-bodied Rudrā, with trident, matted hair, and three bright eyes. I honor Śiva, who pervades the triple world and to whom the triple world bows; who is the abode of earth, water, wind, and fire; who bears a variety of forms and many names; in whose hand the *pināka* bow rests. [14-15]

I praise the one whose northern face is beautiful and bright, with lovely brows and sideward-glancing eyes, a place of enduring refuge; whose arms are adorned with reflective armlets; whose complexion is yellow like flames; whose body is adorned with a crown and gem-studded bracelets,

¹⁷⁹ The first half of verse 12 has not been translated due to a lack of semantic clarity.

and covered with various blossoms. May boon-granting Rudra¹⁸⁰ always protect. I praise the one whose placid eastern face gives rise to Ṛg, Yajur, and Sāma Vedas, appearing like the orb of the sun, shining like gold or the oblation fire. [16-17]

I am always bowed to Rudrā, who has red body, red lips, and red eyes; who bears a dreadful crown and who is garbed in red garments; who holds trident, axe, mallet, *bhuśuṇḍi* weapon, sword, and discus. I honor [the Goddess] who travels on a chariot; whose many forms pervade all directions; whose body in all forms is adorned with golden rings and bracelets; who manifests for the benefit of the world; who is praised by the multitudes of Pramathas, surrounded by groups of Bhūtas, and celebrated by Siddhas and Yakṣas. [18-19]

I always bow to the eternal Rudra, who abides in the third heaven; who has black mouth, tawny hair, poisonous fangs, sloping brow, frightening roar, and a dreadful flaming tongue in his mouth. I always bow to the terrific Rudrā, of fearsome form like foreboding clouds, who has blazing eyes, an upraised trident, and an extraordinary roar. [20-21]

Thus is the second portion of the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*.¹⁸¹

Om̐. I bow to Śiva, the foremost god and unparalleled protector, the supreme, primary principle.¹⁸² Om̐. I honor the one who bears the skull bowl; who fulfills whatever his devotees desire; who grants *siddhis*; whose form shines. Om̐. I propitiate the one who is the origin of the elephant lord; who is the foremost force in the triple world; in whose hand is a gleaming trident; whose greatness is proclaimed by the multitudes of the triple world. Om̐. I propitiate the one whose commands are devotedly followed by Rākṣasas, Piśācas, and Dānavas; whose formidable roar resounds like the ocean; who is the supreme divine truth. [22-25]

Om̐. I honor the one who is covered in green serpents, beaming like gems; whose chest and throat are smeared with ash; whose virtues are detailed in the Vedas, recounted by Brahmā and the rest. Om̐. I propitiate the one whose body is anointed with the fragrance of sandalwood; whose crown is draped with divine flowers; who is adorned with heavenly garments and ornaments. I propitiate Hara, who bears the splendor of the moon; who fulfills the desires of the world in his various forms; who is the storehouse of multitudes of virtues. [26-28]¹⁸³

Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐.
Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐. Om̐.

¹⁸⁰ The publications name Rudrā as the boon granter (*-varadā*), but the shift to feminine gender seems curious. While Rudra's female counterpart is subsequently praised, the inclusion here would disrupt the flow of the verses.

¹⁸¹ This sudden break in the text is curious and remains unresolved; however, since all the published versions include it, I've retained it as well.

¹⁸² The meaning of the first portion of the first and second verses is unclear. The publications present conflicting accounts, and the commentators gloss over them.

¹⁸³ Several of the descriptions in this section were left untranslated due to ambiguities in the meaning. The Bengali and Hindi commentaries also omit these problematic epithets.

Oh god of gods, it is stated in Vedāṅga that your brilliance is extolled even by the orbit of the sun and moon. Rām Maṁ Eṁ Om. I propitiate the one who remains engaged in dance; the mighty one who grants happiness to the world; who is the divine army's mighty and frightful leader, possessed of unworldly power; whose force is the greatest amongst all powers; whose single syllable of Om is supreme among mantras; who renders knowledge efficacious; who bears various forms; the one with matted locks who's engaged in amorous play. [29-31]

Rām Jñam Eṁ Om. I honor the one whose face is terrifying, with fangs and gaping mouth; whose terrible laughter shakes the world; who bears the half-moon; who adopts whatever illustrious form he desires without thought; who abides in the date, season, and lunar mansion; who removes troubling afflictions and fulfills the wishes of all creatures. I propitiate the one who grants welfare, desires, strength, and prosperity; whose mighty arms are like the trunks of elephants; who dwells in the cremation ground; whom the Kimpuruṣas praise in song as the illuminator of the world. I propitiate the one who is the minute and the massive; whose two attractive eyes brighten the face; who is fanned with a lovely flywhisk by divine maidens. [32-34]

Rām Jñam Eṁ.¹⁸⁴ Mantra: Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā. I praise the one of divine body, the lord of all gods. Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā Ā. I honor the one whose beauty is unsurpassed, who bestows boons and fulfills *siddhis*.” [35-36]

Thus concludes Viṣṇu's hymn to Gopendraka.

Manu said:

“When the Slayer of Madhu had thus sung in the Gandharva manner, Śaṅkara was pleased [and granted] that which he desired. [He said:] “Request a boon, oh Viṣṇu, best of gods. I am pleased with you, faultless one. You are my dear devotee. What do you desire; tell me.” [37-38]

Viṣṇu said:

“Oh great lord, slay that [Asura] who arose when Brahmā established creation; he has become a thorn of an enemy to the gods.” [39]

The god of gods said:

“Request another boon, oh Keśava. [That Asura] arose from my anger and cannot be destroyed. However, he will be settled on the best of mountains, where there are milk-giving cows and streaming moonbeams. In time, he will be delighted by them, oh child. Thus pacified, he will no longer torment the creatures of Brahmā. Go to that mountain peak along with the goddess Lakṣmī, that illustrious portion of yourself. Having reached there, she will bring forth Vighneśa for the destruction of that obstacle of creation.”¹⁸⁵ [40-43]

Having received the boon, Viṣṇu further asked Śaṅkara: “Oh best of gods, how long should I remain on the mountain? And how will that embodiment of truth develop from the Goddess?” [44]

¹⁸⁴ The meaning of the first portion of verse 35 is uncertain.

¹⁸⁵ The use of cases is quite fluid in this section of text, necessitating greater interpretation.

The god of gods said:

“Go to Mālavya mountain along with Lakṣmī, oh Viṣṇu. Keeping in mind that Śaiva goddess by the name of Sarvamaṅgalā, you should remain there one night, oh best of gods. Then the Goddess who is the cause of all causes shall approach. She will produce one who is equal to me, oh young one. He will have the face of an elephant and the body of a man. He will destroy all obstacles. He will contain all the gods, oh best of gods. He will be a leader to all the gods, but himself shall be without a leader, a self-arisen one. [45-48]

He will be established amongst the Mothers, attendant upon me, a compliant son to Indra, and will bring wealth to you. Looking at him compassionately, he should be praised with various hymns. He should then take up the mace as his weapon, which will subdue Vighna. As soon as the Daitya Vighna sees him, he will proceed to the mountain. When the elephant-faced one has killed Vighna on Mālavya, he will proceed to slay the Asura Jambha, first killing the Daitya Suloma who had been fashioned from Jambha’s *māyā*. Oh Janārdana, once those Asuras have come before Vighneśa, they will no longer prosper.”¹⁸⁶ [49-54]

Manu said:

“Having granted the boon just as Keśava desired, and having taken the *vidyā* into his body, he disappeared. Thus, oh tiger among sages, I have told about the origin of Vināyaka, the means of destroying Vighna, the hymn performed by Viṣṇu, and the manifestations of the Goddess. This shall destroy all sins. [55-57ab]

The man who arises in the morning and intones [this] devotedly shall have no obstacles to his virtue, pleasure, prosperity, or liberation. The man who shall recite this foremost hymn about the destruction of Vighna will be freed from impediments and illnesses, and will obtain divine pleasures. The sage, Siddha, or man who accurately recites the Gopendraka hymn or sings it with music and dance shall not be bound again [in *saṃsāra*]; he will take on a virtuous body and will delight in Śiva’s heaven, where the lord dwells with Umā. Hearing it [once] immediately destroys the sins committed in a year; hearing it three times removes the amoral deeds such as brahminicide; from hearing it continuously, one becomes divine; in this there is no doubt. [57cd-62]

Oh mighty one, thus previously it was told by Viṣṇu to Brahmā and Dakṣa due to their inquiry; then it was heard by the best of sages Manu and the rest. Oh Vaśiṣṭha, I received it from Kaśyapa, and now I have told it to you, oh tiger among men.” [63-64]

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“Oh Brahman, what manner of harsh austerities did Khaṭvāsura perform, by which the gods headed by Brahmā were made subject to his dominion? I’m very curious; I want to know this. Tell us, and remove the doubts of these inquiring sages.” [65-66]

Manu said:

“The Goddess who previously granted the boon to Viṣṇu went to heaven and established a friendship with Indra. She was then dispatched by the great-souled Śiva for the protection of

¹⁸⁶ Portions of verses 52 and 53 have been left untranslated due to grammatical ambiguity.

Brahmā, who was striving to create. Seeing her, all of the chief Danus were overcome by delusion; but Khaṭva, aspiring to attain heaven, began to practice austerities.” [67-68]

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“Oh best of sages, if Khaṭvāsura was always troubling Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and the rest, then why did he undertake austerities for the sake of pleasing the Goddess?” [69]

Manu said:

“That Goddess who grants pleasure, prosperity, and liberation is unequalled among all the gods and Dānavas. She should be praised and honored. If worshiped properly, oh Brahman, Śivā quickly grants whatever is desired. Therefore, Khaṭvāsura continually chanted to Śivā.” [70-71]

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“When the Danu lord was practicing austerities, what did Śambhu do to hinder him, and how was Māṇḍavya protected? How was Śivā quickly placated by the god of gods? I want to hear this; please tell it exactly as it occurred.” [72-73]

Manu said:

“Seeing the shining splendor of that great-souled Asura who had undertaken severe asceticism, all of the gods became afraid. Wanting to propitiate the Goddess, the gods headed by Brahmā and Viṣṇu approached Śiva. The wise Brhaspati, who is proficient in the meaning of all Śāstras, spoke sweet words to Śiva with a humble demeanor. [74-76]

Brhaspati said:

“Oh lord of gods who is honored by all the gods, protect the divine king who is drowning in a sea of enemies. Oh god, slay Khaṭvāsura, the enemy of the gods, and restore to Indra the heaven that brings him joy.” The god said, “Do not fear,” when he heard these words of the lord of planets, oh king.” [77-79]

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“How did Śaṅkara destroy the Asura Khaṭva in battle? That Danu army was prideful of their strength, and possessed much *māyā* and considerable courage. Furthermore, what did Māṇḍavya do when the kingdom had been utterly destroyed after Hariścandra’s untimely death?” [80-81]

Brhaspati said:

“At that fearful and ruinous time, Māṇḍavya that tiger of a sage apprehensively went to Earth, to an auspicious pilgrimage place called Someśa situated on the bank of the Sarasvatī. Having been worshiped by Brahmā, the five Mothers Ambikā, Rudrāṇī, Cāmuṇḍā, Brāhmī, and Vaiṣṇavī had become present there. [82-84ab]

When the divine sage worshiped them eloquently at night, those illustrious *śaktis* were pleased and manifest before him. [They said:] “Request the boon that is settled in your heart, oh best of sages.” Then he fell to the ground and bowed his head, [saying]: “If you are pleased with me, oh Ambikā, protect Hariścandra.” [84cd-86]

Kaumārī said:

“Oh Brahman, the means of your king’s protection is present on the Vindhya mountain, where there is a completed *maṇḍala* which is the eternal essence of Śiva. Long ago, untimely death arose from the extraordinary power of Rudra and Viṣṇu during the performance of Dakṣa’s sacrifice, oh king. At that time the kingdom was shattered, and there was drought for twelve years. The illustrious circle of Mothers was then invoked by Viṣṇu. [87-89]

Worship them, oh best of sages, and the well-being of Hariścandra shall be granted. If worshiped for some time at morning, midday, and night, Śivā will bestow joy, oh best of Brahmins. If worshiped devotedly with perfume, flowers, fruits, shoots of fresh grass, lamps, incense, and other such gifts, then welfare will be assured. If worshiped with meat, animal sacrifice, etc., oh tiger among sages, then death and misfortunes will cease, while afflictions and sadness will be hindered. Śivā will protect the Earth.” [90-93]

Thus abiding by Kaumārī as instructed by the five [Mothers], he went to the peaks of the Vindhya mountain where the waters of the Narmadā flow. There he worshiped the Goddess for the preservation of Hariścandra’s life. After a week of eating only once a day, or eating only at night, or fasting, or eating only unsolicited food, the Goddess granted the boon to that sage, oh Brahman. Having continued to practice asceticism for seventy-two thousand years, he obtained the boon of seeing all things, thereby perceiving the pure light [of *brahman*].” [94-96]

**Thus is the one hundred sixteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Preservation of Hariścandra.”**

Chapter One Hundred Seventeen

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“Oh best of sages, in the kingdoms of those Brahmins, kings, merchants, and servants who are faithful and who worship the Mothers devotedly there will be no fear; cows will produce quantities of milk; Brahmins will be engaged in many sacrifices; and kings will turn away from hostilities; there is no doubt. There will be an abundance of food, great tranquility, and freedom from disease. Clouds will produce the desired rain. From worship of those divine Mothers who have dwelled on impassable mountains since ancient times, crops shall continually be produced. Oh best of sages, worship those [goddesses] who grant the prosperity of kings’ dominions. [1-5ab]

Even the orphaned, soiled, and wretched who worship with offerings of flowers only once shall immediately be granted all desired results, oh sage. Those who devotedly worship for just one day when the sun is in Virgo, or who kindle lamps on the *śivācakra*, shall receive good fortune, food, long life, freedom from disease, and wealth. Whoever worships the Mothers at twilight, offering ghee lamps accompanied by heaps of sesame sweets, shall not have any difficulties, oh best of sages. [5cd-9ab]

Rudra, Brahmā, Īśa, Skanda, Viṣṇu, Yama, and Hari – these seven are established in the form of women along with Vighn[eśa]. Thus from worship of the Mothers, oh sage, all the gods are honored. If one shall worship even once, three times, five times, or seven, the sun shall never traverse the position of Virgo. There is nothing better than this in the triple world. Just as the decrepit are restored, thus you shall prosper in the world, oh king.” [9cd-12]

**Thus is the one hundred seventeenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Worship of the Mothers.”**

Chapter One Hundred Eighteen

Vaśiṣṭha said:

“Oh best of Brahmins, listen to the virtuous benefits of moving the Mothers, Bhairavī, or Durgā from a decayed dwelling into a newly constructed temple made of brick, wood, or stone. Brahmā, Indra, Rudra, Viṣṇu, Bhairava, and the Mothers should not be moved when the path of the sun veers to the north, oh best of Brahmins; however, Durgā may be moved at any time. Among the Mothers, nine delineations are celebrated. Of them, one is the Mātṛkā goddess Cāmuṇḍā, the slayer of Ruru. Moving her should be performed by the accompaniment of pleasant mantras, oh Brahman. [1-5ab]

Nine syllables are prescribed in the moving of Kālikā, the slayer of Vajra[daṇḍa] and Ghora. Having bathed [her] with water sanctified by one hundred repetitions [of the mantra], a sacrifice should be conducted. Presenting red cloth, blood, wine, meat, and unhusked barley in all directions, one should then move Carcikā. When the one intent on the mantra shall cause Śivā to be relocated, then tranquility shall arise and the king shall protect the kingdom. The moved [deity] should be brought from the south and established in the north; until the temple is resolved, [the deity] should be worshiped continuously, oh young one. At the appropriate time, it should enter [the temple] according to the proper manner of establishment. [5cd-10ab]

When the image or the pedestal have become decayed, they should be removed; they should be moved having first conducted a *homa* sacrifice with appropriate mantras. A plough of gold or some other favorable [material] should be fashioned for the observance [of the move]. [The old image] should be fastened to the shoulders of a bull with hempen rope, oh Brahman. If it is fashioned out of wood, it should be burned up in a fire of milk and kindling, oh illustrious one. If made of stone, it should be thrown into a large body of water. Then the new [image] should be brought in and settled, having employed all the proper manners of establishing, oh best of Brahmins. The deity should be established in accordance with its own manner, along with the mantras appropriate to them, such that for the establishment of the Mothers, the manner appropriate to the Mothers should be employed, oh young one. [10cd-14]

Those who repair decayed temples of goddesses, oh Brahman, will become mighty and beyond reproach, their sins destroyed. The one who repairs what has decayed obtains virtue a hundred-fold from the origin; thus the maintenance of the old should be observed with every effort. Oh child, in a region where there is a deserted temple, fear, famine, and thieves will arise there. Just as the embodied soul leaves the decayed body and inhabits another, thus the deity must travel to another place once the deteriorated temple is abandoned. Ghosts and the like take refuge in a vacant [temple] and generate fear among men; they drive everyone from that place, and in time destroy it. The people settled there lose all virtue, oh young one; there is no doubt. Even a great man when afflicted by the Seizers becomes odious and falls into destruction. [15-20]

Thus it must be repaired, oh child, and must remain there for the sake of worship. Whether the deity or the temple are decayed or not, [an image] should be installed. In this way worship continues and duties remain observed. Oh great sage, the one who accepts the expense shall obtain virtue in accordance with the share of wealth. The agent shall immediately obtain [virtue] a

hundred times greater than the expense. The king receives a sixth portion [as tax]; the subjects and the kingdom remain prosperous.” [21-23]

**Thus is the one hundred eighteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “Remedy for a Decayed Deity.”**

Chapter One Hundred Nineteen¹⁸⁷

Indra said:

“Oh Brahman, what were the deeds of the skull-staff bearing Khaṭvāsura, the one of great strength and courage who was slain by the mighty lord?” [1]

Brahmā said:

“Oh Vāsava, when the lord of Danus had conquered those headed by Brahmā, he went to Kailāsa, lord of mountains, to battle with the trident-bearing god. Having approached along with all of his armies, he was quickly slain by the wrathful Rudra, who sported with the spear. Having made him lifeless, the lord of creatures stood there, holding a skull-staff in his left hand, worshiped by the gods. In his right hand he held a skull as a begging bowl. [With his head adorned] with garlands of skulls, he bore the half-moon and the flowing Ganges. Serpents were his numerous ornaments. Mighty serpents were his necklaces, waistbands, and sacred thread – all of his adornments were snakes such as Ananta, Vāsuki, and Takṣa. [2-6]

Thus the honored god of gods took up a terrible and frightful form for the pacifying destruction of the enemies of all the gods. Oh child, Brahmā and the rest became afraid and bewildered; they asked: “Who are you? Do you sport here on earth amicably? No rival, boundary, or higher god is known.” Laughing, the lord of gods then [said]: ‘Oh Brahmā, previously your head was cut off [and fashioned] along with crores of others – including that sprung from Viṣṇu – into a garland of skulls. I wear this garland of human heads, arisen from you and bestowed upon me.” [7-10]

Nṛpavāhana said:

“When and where did the lord take up such a fierce manner? How did he come to bear the skull and garland of Viṣṇu’s heads? This I want to know; let it be told accurately, oh excellent one.” [11]

Agastya said:

“Oh child, I am telling you just what the supreme god of all gods made with the body parts of Brahmā and Viṣṇu. Oh one of good vows, this very virtuous, utmost of accounts regarding the origin of the skull-bowl and skull-staff is not even known by the gods. [12-13]

Īśvara said:

Oh [Goddess] of peerless beauty, I am eternal, the supreme lord. I am proclaimed as the highest truth of *saṃsāra*. I am the ultimate cause of desire; oh noble woman, you are desire. The world is produced by me; you are the production, oh lovely-faced one. You pour forth language, from which you are known by the name of action. You are the origin of lotus-born [Brahmā] in the form of the primordial principle. Oh dear one, having been established for merely a hundredth of one of my moments, [Brahmā] once again goes to destruction and is reabsorbed. Having taken up his skull, I sport on an extensive road. In this manner that garland of mine shines forth with crores of skulls

¹⁸⁷ The usage of grammar and language throughout this chapter is especially fluid, thereby rendering a loose translation that follows the Sanskrit text, but which also relies on the Bengali and Hindi commentaries. I have chosen not to footnote every grammatical or linguistic anomaly in this chapter due to their abundance.

and innumerable limbs, oh beautiful one. When all goes to dissolution in the womb of *māyā* at the end of time, then I am joyful and I delight in the supreme principle, oh Bhavānī. [14-20]

Having put on that very frightful garland [fashioned] from the countless skulls of Brahmā, and having adopted an exceedingly terrific and horrifying black form with twelve eyes, I alone cavorted in the sky, joined by the Mothers who abound in might and valor. Oh Maheśvarī, when many billions of years had passed in sporting with all of the *śaktis* in their terrible forms, having placed the universe, dense with its existent elements and principles, in my belly as if its countless villages were food, and having eliminated any obstruction, I happily took refuge in Yogic Sleep, lying down on the couch of Śakti. [21-25]

When the divine eye had once again arisen and the multitude had been destroyed, the thought of creation was raised up by me, roused by my own *śakti*. The Earth possessed of existents, principles, and elements once again arose from *māyā*. The borders of the great world originated together from my yoga. All that goes to dissolution in my body is said to arise there once more. Having taken up the perspiration from my own body and placed it in my hands, by my own accord I stirred that pure, cool, nectar-like water with my thumb until it became something else. Its form was like that of a bubble with circumference of hundreds of crores. It shone there in my hands, oh great-souled Goddess, and was hardened by my power, its appearance golden as hundreds of beams of light. It was known as an egg, ascertained as the universal egg of Brahmā. [26-32ab]

Agitated by the desire for existence, I produced the cause of the manifest from the unmanifest. The seven worlds, the netherworlds, the hells, time, fire, earth, and many other such forms became present. Having fashioned the forms of the universe, I disappeared. The great, foremost guru Brahmā was produced there simply due to my desire. He was independent and established in truth; nothing else could be found. That [water] remaining in my hands was determined by *rajas*. Viṣṇu manifest there, very courageous and consisting of *rajas*. Oh dear one, *sattva* was said to have arisen as Brahmā. Roused, Brahmā shone forth by his own might. Seeing this, I quickly bestowed an increase in *rajas* with my mind. [Viṣṇu] also shone forth with a thousand arms, a thousand faces, a thousand feet, and a thousand heads, emitting an intense illumination raised up by his own might. [32cd-38]

Bearing all the weapons in their hands, the two began to battle with one another. Seeing those two, the foremost of ancient men trembled with fear. Clouds of dissolution began to fill the skies; terrible, dreadful roars howled in the ten directions. Deadly flames of destruction rose up and forks of lightning flashed; violent winds lashed the mountains, causing them to tumble. All of the surface of the Earth was seen trembling. Waves of water quickly extended across the seven oceans. Smoky flames rose up everywhere, intensely blazing with a terrible sound. Everything trembled as the direction elephants escaped from their enclosures. Staggering with intoxication, those elephants let loose guttural sounds; very terrible thundering began to resound. [39-44]

Ill-omened, fierce cyclones roamed, whirling branches about. The guardians of the sky began to fall in multitudes. Rains of flaming charcoal arose, exceedingly bright. Dense rains of viscous flames were unloosed. Violent blazes of fire in the shape of lions set out to destroy; other dense flames roamed about in the form of snakes, darting out their tongues. The world was inundated in dissolution by terrible jackals with fiery faces, desirous of the end of the *kalpa*. Oh Goddess, all

the creatures of Earth, agitated by fear, were destroyed. All was disordered by the multitude of Brahmā's weapons, as well as those of Vāyu, Agni, and Varuṇa. All was submerged in the blazes of formidable flames. All of this world, oh Great Goddess, was brought asunder. [45-50]

Oh Pārvatī, all that appeared within this egg of Brahmā, this utmost of locations including the gods, *gaṇa* troops, Gandharvas, Kimpnaras, Uragas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Piśācas, and all the immovable things – all of the universe with its moving and unmoving components – was seen approaching annihilation. Though everything was destroyed by the mighty waves of the one terrible ocean, those two remained bound [in battle], roaring and threatening one another. Governed by pride and power, impelled by exceedingly powerful darkness, their rationality destroyed, endowed with rolling eyes, red-eyed with anger, the two prepared for the clash of great battle, oh Pārvatī, their weapons of destruction upraised. Though not perceiving my own form, the two were deluded by my power of illusion. With the desire to bring about the source of the Mothers as well as personified Wisdom, and for effecting these two, I recollected the Goddess of creatures, oh great sage. I deliberated on the means of calming their arrogance. [51-57]

With great *tejas*, I took on my form of the *liṅga*, the cause of manifold creation, the cause of all activity that brings about creation and destruction. Established thus, I overcame them with collections of lapping flames. Oh one of beautiful complexion, they were alarmed by my excessive might and darted to and fro. Deluded, they were unable to know my auspiciousness or make out the height of my form. Afraid, they praised me and were resolute in devotion to me. [58-60]

Pleased by Ṛg, Sāma, and Yajur hymns for a thousand divine years, I valiantly displayed my true form. It was frightful, garlanded with skulls and resplendent with skull-staff in hand, shining with serpents hanging down, displaying a gaping mouth of countless lightning-like fangs. Seeing this mouth of mine inlaid with fangs, their minds were afflicted by fright. I said: "Don't be frightened." They inquired with great resolve: "What is this extraordinary form, oh excellent one? What are these ornaments? What is this triple-pointed staff luminous in the bright sky? Whose fair head is settled in the palm of your hand?" [61-65ab]

Then I responded with these words intended to destroy their pride: "This garland that gleams with many crores of skulls, oh Brahmā, is composed from your bodies, which have perished again and again. And those many others established around my neck, hands, and hips are from the bodies of Nārāyaṇa, repeatedly deceased. And this skull-staff in my right hand is celebrated as Khaṭvāṅga. Listen with concentration, oh eminent one; I will account for its origination. [65cd-68]

Oh Janārdana, I said: "Go now into the sky, mighty one. Having become a great impediment to the lord of obstacles, you will attain liberation." Roaming about in the sky, that one was known by the name Khaṭva.¹⁸⁸ Filled with pride of strength, he was slain. Oh beautiful one, thus is the origination of the skull and the skull-staff.¹⁸⁹ This concise telling shall remove all sins." [69-73ab]

¹⁸⁸ The commentators explain that the meaning of the Asura's name derives from *kha* (sky) and *aṭ* (to roam, wander), thus rendering *khaṭva*.

¹⁸⁹ The skull-staff is called *khaṭvāṅga*, the commentators explain, because it is a body part (*aṅga*) of Khaṭva.

Agastya said:

“The attributes of the skull-staff were previously related by me in the section on creation. Oh best of kings, it was told how the supreme lord, having cut off the head of Brahmā, placed it down on the bank of the Gandhavatī. The flood produced by the streams of blood from Brahmā and Nārāyaṇa delighted the Goddess and she appeared there.” [73cd-75]

**Thus is the one hundred nineteenth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Destruction of Khaṭva.”**

...

Chapter One Hundred Twenty-eight

Brahmā said:

“This Śāstra, which fulfills all aims, issued forth from the mouth of Brahmā and was accordingly received by Indra. Then [from Indra] it reached Agastya, who then told it to that tiger among kings, Nṛpavāhana. Śiva related to Brahmā ten lakh *ślokas*, but that god of knowledge only told one lakh to Śakra. [Among these] are the arising and slaying of Ghora, the best manner of worshiping the deities, as well as the actions and yoga appropriate to the four classes. He who proclaims or hears about the supreme manifestation of the Goddess will be liberated from *saṃsāra* and will attain the highest position [in heaven]. [1-4]

One should hear or recite this knowledge, having first placed it on a pedestal adorned with cloth, flowers, etc., and having worshiped Śiva. The pedestal should be fashioned from gold, silver, copper, brass, wood, ivory, or cane. It should be covered with gold or copper-plate and adorned with various jewels, gold, conch, crystals, and pearls. It should be enveloped in beautiful threads. The four legs should be carved by artisans. It should be two measures in height, and should shine like the full moon. On this [pedestal] should be spread fine cloth dyed a golden color like saffron, on which should be painted images of the gods and goddesses as well as beautiful mountains, peaks, and ramparts in the five colors. At the four corners should shine forth circles and squares in the five colors and there should be excellent bells attached. The borders there should be cloth of various colors, and there should be clusters of jasmine hanging down. Having placed on this the great Śāstra named the *Devī[purāṇa]*, it should be worshiped. [5-13]

The reciter engaged in the bestowal of knowledge should make himself splendid with fine garments. His hand should be made fragrant with incense before he sits at the esteemed pedestal. At that time, the supreme lord honored by the gods as well as the Goddess abide within the text. It should be recited in one's own home, in palaces, and at the pilgrimage sites of Bhāgīrathī, Kāśī, and Kāmapura. Listeners are justly worthy of hearing it once they have properly contemplated Śiva, possessed of supreme knowledge; worshiped daily with fragrant flowers, incense and other provisions; bowed with the hands cupped; sat tranquilly on low seats, successively according to seniority; and refrained from conversation. [14-19ab]

At the beginning of the text and at the end, the listeners and reciter should utter the Goddess's mantra known as Śivā for the sake of all accomplishments. The listeners and the reciter of the text's verses should each bring incense, flowers, etc. for all of the *sādhus*. Once the listeners have sipped water from the hand for purification, the reciter should give them each three flowers, with which they should worship the book at the beginning, middle, and end. He who, having devotedly worshiped with offerings according to ability, brings about the recitation of the Goddess's text for the benefit of all creatures and for his own liberation will obtain virtuous results for himself, the listeners, and the reciter. I will tell about them. [19cd-24ab]

Having received abundant wealth, life, children, glory, wisdom, intellect, beauty, and happiness here [on earth], at death he shall obtain peace. He who prompts recitation of this great text in an unconsecrated place shall go to hell; thus recitation must be done only after consecration. Oh sage, the wise person may prompt recitation without first worshiping only in the presence of gods, fire, and teachers, for the benefit of transmission of dharma. So that dharma will be set in

motion and non-dharma abandoned, this Śāstra of the Goddess, which is itself the essence of Śivā, should not be recited confusedly. Know that at the end of recitation, the world will remain peaceful day after day. Everyone should go to gather *kuśa* grass and flowers for the worship of Śiva and Umā. [24cd-29ab]

At the end of the recitation, after having specially worshiped the Goddess, *vidyās*, gurus, and Śaiva ascetics with devotion, the wise one should distribute food to many maidens, Brahmans, associates, friends, relatives, *sādhus*, the poor, outcastes, and servants. To the guru one should gift a favorable bull and suitable cow, a set of clothing, rings, and food full of ghee. The gifts just mentioned should also be granted to the reciter. To the guru who does not speak [but is there to correct recitation mistakes], half the gift should be given. The wise one should give to the remaining Śaiva yogīs according to his means, and afterwards should light one hundred and eight lamps. [29cd-34]

Also, a glorious awning and banner should be offered to the God and Goddess. Having abandoned parsimony, one should worship according to one's means. One should present endless flowers, water, etc. to Śiva and the Goddess. From hearing the text, one obtains knowledge, virtue, and utmost peace; there is no doubt. Having devotedly fallen before the text of the Goddess and having presented lamps to Śivā, one dispels heaps of sins and purifies the body; there is no doubt. All those who are devoted to the God and Goddess are liberated from countless sins. Listen to the results one shall obtain. [35-39ab]

Having mounted a great vehicle endowed with all that is desired along with his wife, sons, relatives, friends, and servants, he shall proceed to the supreme heaven of Śiva, where he will enjoy great pleasures for as long as there are moon and stars. Then he will be liberated by the grace of the Goddess; there is no doubt. Thus one should devotedly recite each day the learned text of the Goddess, which grants the results of both pleasure and liberation. One shall have no fear of death, distress, injury, or ailments. The king who always listens to the dharma of Śiva will not die an untimely death, and shall not be slain by enemies. Merely from hearing the recitation only once, the king's enemies shall be destroyed on a joyous day. That king will enjoy all pleasures along with his family here on Earth. At death, he will travel to the supreme abode of the Goddess, where he will delight with Śiva and Viṣṇu in endless enjoyments as long as there are moon and stars. [39cd-50]

If heard in the spring, the Goddess Umā, who grants all happiness, will be pleased. If heard in the summer, one will travel to the heaven of Brahmā, which is endowed with all that is desired; having enjoyed all pleasures there, he will then ascend to the heaven of the Goddess. Oh best of kings, if heard with devotion during the rainy season or in autumn, the earthly king shall obtain all the pleasures mentioned. He who devotedly listens to this three times will be freed from all sins; his subjects will be pure and will achieve all of their desires. Even the divine Sarasvatī is unable to describe with words the benefits of his fate. Having enjoyed happiness here in this world, at death he will travel to the heaven of Śiva. [51-56ab]

Having heard about the slaying of Khaṭva and the birth of Vināyaka, he will attain the world of the Mothers, where he will delight happily for a long time. Having worshiped the Goddess properly, oh best of kings, Śivā shall manifest and effect her grace. He who is virtuous in conduct

and pure in action, and who is freed from all worldly attachments, shall attain all that is desired from the recitation of this *purāṇa*.” [56cd-60]

**Thus is the one hundred twenty-eighth chapter in the venerable *Devīpurāṇa*,
called “The Manner of Recitation.”**

**Thus concludes the *Devīpurāṇa*
Śrī.**

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