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A New Approach to the *Devīmāhātmya*: The Greatness of the Goddess in its Purāṇic Context

Elizabeth A. Cecil
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Elizabeth A. Cecil entitled "A New Approach to the *Devīmāhātmya*: The Greatness of the Goddess in its Purāṇic Context." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.

<div align="right">Rachelle Scott, Major Professor</div>

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Johanna Stiebert, Miriam Levering

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Dixie L. Thompson</div>

<div align="right">Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School</div>

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A New Approach to the *Devīmāhātmya*:

The Greatness of the Goddess in its Purāṇic Context

A Thesis Presented for the Master of Arts Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Elizabeth Ann Cecil

May 2008

Abstract

Although the text of the *Devīmāhātmya* is itself a section of the

Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, recent scholarship has taken a primarily extrinsic approach

to the text and its use by emphasizing the life of the *Devīmāhātmya* (henceforth

DM) well apart from the textual tradition of the purāṇas. A reading of the *DM* in

the context of the *MārkP* is instructive, because it reveals some interesting

thematic connections that are indicative of larger thematic trends within the

purāṇa, which prior extrinsic studies have not explored. Broadly speaking, these

themes glorify women and Goddesses as positive manifestations of some

fundamental female energy and efficacy. These themes occur in the *DM* and also

occur in other narratives within the *MārkP* that praise female actors who restore

order in times of crisis.

An evaluation of these thematic connections will show that the *DM* is best

understood not only as an important text in its own right, but as an important

piece of the *MārkP* as a whole. Conversely, the subject matter of the *MārkP*

should not be viewed as unrelated to that of the *DM*. Therefore, my thesis is a

preliminary effort to situate a text glorifying the Goddess in its purāṇic context

through an analysis of narrative and thematic content.

Table of Contents

Introduction

This thesis is a study of the narrative contents of the *Devīmāhātmya* in the context of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. Although the text of the *Devīmāhātmya* is itself a section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa,* recent scholarship has taken a primarily extrinsic approach to the text and its use by emphasizing the life of the *Devīmāhātmya* (henceforth *DM*) well apart from the textual tradition of the purāṇas. Similar to the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *DM* has a vital life outside of the textual tradition in which it is embedded, and as an independent text, the *DM* plays an integral role in devotional practice for many groups and individuals who worship the Goddess in India today. While the life of the *DM* apart from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (henceforth *MārkP*) has been studied, the *locus classicus* of this text is the *MārkP,* and the significance of this fact has not been addressed in any critical study.[1]

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[1] Certain scholars have addressed the importance of the *DM* as a primary text in traditions of Goddess worship in India (Coburn 1991). Other scholars have studied the *DM* in comparison with other texts of Goddess traditions (Brown, 1974, 1990), in the history of the Śākta tradition (Payne 1933), in historical surveys of Sanskrit literature (Gonda 1977, Farquar 1920, Rocher 1986, and Goudriaan 1981), in comparative analysis (Berkson 1995, and O'Flaherty 1980), and in other ethnographic studies of themes related to Goddess worship in India (see Biardeau 2004, and Erndl 1993). In my research I have found no intrinsic analysis of the *DM* in relation to its context in the *MārkP.*

A reading of the *DM* in the context of the *MārkP* is instructive, because it reveals some interesting thematic connections that are indicative of larger thematic trends within the purāṇa, which prior extrinsic studies have not explored. Broadly speaking, these themes glorify women and Goddesses as positive manifestations of some fundamental female energy and efficacy. These themes occur in the *DM* and also occur in other narratives within the *MārkP* that praise female actors who restore order in times of crisis.[2] An evaluation of these thematic connections will show that the *DM* is best understood not only as an important text in its own right, but as an important piece of the *MārkP* as a whole. Conversely, the subject matter of the *MārkP* should not be viewed as unrelated to that of the *DM*.

Contextualizing the *DM* within the *MārkP* is a necessary first step toward understanding the narrative coherence of the purāṇa that must have existed for certain people in a particular location at a particular time. It is not possible for scholarship to arrive at certainty regarding the intentions of the ancient Indian authors; but I shall show that the text of the *MārkP* was compiled with certain

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[2] In the *DM*, the male Gods are repeatedly involved in conflicts with *asuras* (demons). In these situations, the Gods call upon the Goddess with words of praise and she conquers the *asuras* on their behalf. In the other stories from the *MārkP* that I will discuss, the Goddess and certain powerful women are portrayed in a similar light; female power is requested and praised in crisis situations that the male Gods are unable to correct.

goals in mind. One such goal, as indicated by the aforementioned thematic trends, was the glorification of a feminine power. Therefore, my thesis is a preliminary effort to situate a text glorifying the Goddess in its purāṇic context through an analysis of narrative and thematic content.

      The first chapter explores the *MārkP* and the *DM* within the scope of prior purāṇic scholarship. The debate over the importance of purāṇas within Sanskrit literature and the scholastic importance of purāṇic studies has been the subject of a prolonged debate. Some early studies of the purāṇas viewed the texts as damaged copies of earlier texts and, therefore, failed to see the texts as deserving in-depth study. The fact that a study such as this one has not been undertaken previously may be a result of these early dismissive attitudes towards the purāṇas. A brief overview of this early scholarship will be provided, followed by a more sustained discussion of contemporary approaches to the study of the purāṇas. Also, this chapter includes a section that addresses the history and dating of the *MārkP* (and the *DM* in it) so as to place the text in its historical context— to the limited extent that this is possible.

      The second chapter examines the text of the *DM* in its most immediate context. In it, the three main narratives, the frame-story, and the *stotras* (hymns of praise) of the *DM* are examined in detail. Particular attention will be paid to the important themes that are found throughout the *DM,* the *stotras* dedicated to

the Goddess, and the language that is used to describe her nature as ultimate reality.

The third chapter takes the prominent themes and narrative elements from the *DM* and examines these in the context of three other stories from the second section of the *MārkP* (Chap. 10-44). These are: the story of the Brahmin woman and Anasūyā, the story of Dāttatreya and Lakṣmī, and the story of Sarasvatī and the Nāga king Aśvatara. This chapter will call attention to the important similarities between the portrayal of the female actors and the Goddess in the stories from the second section and the stories of the *DM*. We shall see that these parallels, between the narratives of the surrounding purāṇa and the text embedded within it, are indicative of a larger pattern within the *MārkP*.

Because this paper is only a first step towards a larger and more comprehensive project, the Conclusion outlines plans for future research and possible projects that will extend and enlarge upon what this study begins.

Chapter One: Approaching the Text and its Context

The Purāṇas as a Literary Tradition

The texts of the purāṇas form the most extensive and perhaps the most complex body of Sanskrit literature.[3] Since the purāṇas are texts derived from an oral history, they were committed to writing over an extended period of time and the stories they contain have no clear author or origin.[4] Within the Hindu tradition, it is understood that the texts of the purāṇas serve as complements to the *Vedas* and as a type of *Veda* (*purāṇaveda*) themselves.[5] Despite the fact that they may expand upon the *Vedas*, the purāṇas are quite different from the *Vedas* in both structure and function. The words of the *Vedas* are fixed and memorized with great care so as always to be recited in the same way. Purāṇas, when presented

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[3] Ludo Rocher et al., The Purāṇas, vol. 3 of The History of Indian Literature, ed. J. Gonda (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 2. There are 18 mahāpurāṇas, 18 upa-purāṇas and other miscellaneous texts calling themselves purāṇas that do not traditionally fall into these two categories.

[4] Rocher, 39.

[5] Frederick Smith has addressed this topic in detail. He understands the term *purāṇaveda* as having two different levels of meaning. In the literal sense as "ancient knowledge" and in the sense of a text that contains the message of the *Vedas,* but is dynamic and able to be "constantly renewed" in its transmission to the common people. Frederick M. Smith, "Purāṇaveda," in Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation ed. Laurie L. Patton (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 97.

orally by a *sūta* or *paurāṇika* (Indian bard and storyteller), are recited in

Sanskrit or a regional language with the more important points

accompanied by an extemporaneous commentary.[6] The oral exposition of

the *paurāṇika* might include material from an array of different texts (the

variety of textual sources was a testament to the storyteller's skill and

memory) tailored to fit the specific location and audience.[7] The purāṇas

are now known primarily in their written forms, which emerged from

manuscript traditions that give evidence of a wealth of stories characterized

by a high level of textual flexibility that has allowed for variant readings, and

the addition of stories over time.[8] The purāṇas have also enjoyed mass

popularity since their transmission was not restricted according to caste, as

was the case with other religious texts, such as the *Vedas*.

As the term purāṇa suggests,[9] the texts are records of archaic times

and events that J.N. Farquhar has described as "books of origins."[10] These

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[6] Velcheru Narayana Rao "Purāṇa," in The Hindu World ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 114.

[7] Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa" 114.

[8] Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa" 97.

[9] The word *purāṇa* signifies something ancient and may refer to the literary genre itself, but also to the intentions of the authors to locate the events of the texts in the "primordial" past. The texts themselves are more recent developments in Sanskrit literature and most are thought to have been compiled during the Gupta Empire 320-600 CE.

texts contain accounts of creation, extensive genealogies of kings and

seers, geography, the origin of the *Vedas*, and descriptions of early

history.[11] The purāṇas are also religious texts of great importance: most of

the extant purāṇas are thought to have a direct sectarian affiliation,

although the significance of this sectarianism has been subject to some

debate.[12] Over time, as individual sects devoted to particular deities such

as Viṣṇu, Śiva, and the Goddess began to form, these groups began to

intertwine their own important narratives— in support a certain deity as the

parameśvara (supreme Lord) — with the other elements of the purāṇas.[13]

Thus, the purāṇas could be seen as a useful tool for emerging religious

communities seeking to locate their theologies in the primordial past.

Another consequence of purāṇic sectarian affiliation, and the addition of

narratives over time, is the distinctly aggregative nature of the texts.

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[10] J.N. Farquhar, <u>An Outline of the Religious Literature of India</u> (Delhi: Motilal
Banarsidass, 1920),137.

[11] Farquhar, 137.

[12] Of the purāṇas classified as mahāpurāṇas the majority are identified with Viṣṇu. Śiva
is the second in frequency. Other purāṇas may have multiple affiliations. Sectarianism
was a focus of early scholars who saw it as a relatively recent and therefore negative
development that obscured the character of an older and more valuable text. Ludo
Rocher and Vans Kennedy generally argued that the importance of sectarianism both as
a topic and as a tool in determining the age of a text was exaggerated. Rocher, 21.

[13] Farquhar suggests that this is a trend that began, in much the same way as the epic
Mahābhārata, with sects devoted to Kṛṣṇa. Farquhar, 137.

Despite their popularity or perhaps because of it, purāṇas have long posed a challenge to critical scholars, Western and Indian alike, because they are texts that, as Velcheru Narayana Rao writes, "defy ready description, classification, authorship, or dating."[14] Because of the challenges listed above, Ludo Rocher has said that there has been a "comparative neglect of the purāṇas vis-à-vis other branches of Sanskrit literature."[15] Earlier scholars like R.C. Hazra and H.H. Wilson, who were translating and writing about the purāṇas during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, saw the texts as very poor representations of any sort of serious literature. This early sense of the purāṇas led scholars to conclude that they must be corrupted and damaged copies of the earlier texts.[16] Rocher cites 19th c. scholar Vans Kennedy as an exception to this view. Vans Kennedy argued that the perceived state of disorganization or discordance within the purāṇas was characteristic of early attempts to commit a vast oral tradition to writing.[17] While I do not intend to provide an exhaustive history of purāṇa scholarship and the ensuing academic debates, this early sense that the purāṇas were less than ideal examples of

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[14] Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa" 97.

[15] Rocher, 4.

[16] Rocher, 39.

[17] Rocher, 39.

Sanskrit literature is important to understanding these early studies of the texts.

In their evaluations of the purāṇas, early scholars generally assumed that there must have been some better "original" copies of the texts that represented a higher level of cohesiveness and organizational style.[18] Some scholars also made the argument that there had been at one time a single purāṇa (the "Ur-Purāṇa") that contained all the texts of the extant purāṇas.[19] Hazra explains in great detail (esp. in the case of the *Liṅga Purāṇa*) which sections of the text may correspond with the original, as opposed to those sections that represent a "destructive recast to which the earlier purāṇa was subjected."[20] The lack of similarity between the "perfected" *Vedas* and the disorganized purāṇas often relegated the latter to an inferior position and neglect. In fact, Rocher mentions a guru by the name of Virājānanda who described the purāṇas as non-*ārṣa* works (not the works of *ṛṣis*) that should be given no authority whatsoever.

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[18] Rocher, 40.

[19] Rocher, 41. This assumption was also related to the fact that many purāṇas contained sections with similar topics and some quotes attributed to purāṇas in Dharma literature, which have not been located in extant purāṇic texts.

[20] R.C. Hazra, Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publisher, 1940), 94.

One problem with the theory of the Ur-Purāṇa is the lack of any "original" text. Scholars have found no purāṇas that they would consider to be the original text in any of the extant purāṇas.[21] Scholar Willibald Kirfel criticized the idea that there existed some original and undiscovered text; he characterized the assumption that there was an unpreserved Ur-Purāṇa as "arbitrary" since "except for a few secondary verses, nothing points to the possibility."[22] Kirfel cautioned that "to solve the real mystery of the purāṇas, we cannot go beyond the textual tradition, which is the one and only reliable point of departure."[23] His method of textual criticism approached the texts of existing purāṇas as different manuscripts of the same text that emerged from a common source.[24] Therefore, any attempts to reconstruct an earlier text would have to be based upon similarities between existing texts.

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[21] The fact that the concept of one original and undiscovered text persisted was, according to Rocher, the result of Western methods of textual criticism that, while applicable to editions of Greek and Latin texts, were not as successful with the purāṇas. It is the case that certain Indian scholars posited the existence of an original Purāṇa, but they came to this conclusion via a different route. According to tradition, the *Purāṇasaṃhitā* was transmitted by Vyāsa to his five students who then created their own versions of the text. Rocher, 45.

[22] Translation of Kirfel taken from Rocher, 44.

[23] Translation of Kirfel taken from Rocher, 44.

[24] Rocher, 44.

While a discussion of the early scholarly conceptions of purāṇas is interesting and important, it could be the subject of an entire study unto itself. So, the focus will now shift slightly to discuss a perspective on the purāṇas that will aid this study. A view of the purāṇas that sees the aggregative nature of the texts as integral to the function of the texts can be found in the work of Velcheru Narayana Rao, who has described the purāṇas as a reflection of Brahminic ideology.[25] Narayana Rao suggests that while the purāṇas may be "ideologically closed texts," since they promote a specifically Brahminic ideology, they are also "functionally open texts," in their ability to absorb different ideas and mold them to fit within that ideology.[26] According to Narayana Rao, the purāṇas have "accepted into their fold the events, stories, legends and occurrences of many regions and communities, transforming them to conform to a fixed ideology." [27]Another term used to refer to purāṇas is *itihāsapurāṇa* (the ancient events of the world). In this case, it is the world as understood by an elite priestly class of people who interpreted the traditional oral histories of India

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[25] Velcheru Narayana Rao "Purāṇa as Brahminic Ideology," in <u>Purāna Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in the Hindu and Jaina Texts</u> ed. Wendy Doniger (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).

[26] Narayana Rao, "Ideology" 94.

[27] Narayana Rao, "Ideology" 95.

according to their own conceptions of history. Since the purāṇas are written

texts comprised of stories passed down through an oral tradition, they do

not contain new or "original" stories. This does not mean that the texts

themselves do not represent original and important works.

The genre-mark of the purāṇas is the presentation of the

pañcalakṣaṇa— (five distinguishing marks).*[28]* These five marks include:

sarga, the accounts of the creation of the universe; *pratisarga*, the story of

the recreation of the universe after its dissolution; *vaṃśa*, genealogies of

the Gods and other divine beings or forces; *manvantara,* the history of a

Manu (king) of the fourteen *Manu*-intervals in each *kalpa* (vast period of

time); and *vaṃśānucarita,* a history of the kings in the particular

manvantara in question.[29] Narayana Rao points out that these are the

distinguishing marks that designate a text as part of the purāṇa tradition

and thus a reflection of the ideology of the Brahmin elite. The

pañcalakṣaṇa represent Brahmin culture and its understanding of time and

place. To quote Narayana Rao; "All civilizations make their own past to

make sense of the present, to control the present…this is done not just by

altering the 'facts' of the past but by creating a new way of perceiving the

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[28] Narayana Rao, "Ideology" 94.

[29] Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa" 99.

'facts.'"[30] The Brahmin elite reinvented the ancient stories and organized

them within their own historical framework. In this way, the purāṇas

represent the development of a way of perceiving the "facts" that

legitimized Brahmin authority.

The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*

Rocher summarizes general scholarly opinion when he writes that the

MārkP has been classified as "one of the most important, most interesting, and

probably one of the oldest works of the whole purāṇa literature."[31] Horace Wilson

was the first scholar to attempt to assign a date to the *MārkP*.[32] Wilson dated the

MārkP as a 9th century text, a date that was later rejected by scholars such as

N.Y. Desai, in favor of the 7th century.[33] Contemporary scholars, such as Tracy

Pintchman and Thomas Coburn, generally follow F.E. Pargiter and assign the

MārkP a date between 300-600 CE.[34]   The explanation for this range of dates

can be found in Pargiter's introduction and will be explained in the following

paragraphs.

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[30] Narayana Rao, "Ideology" 88.

[31] Rocher ,192.

[32] Rocher, 195. (Wilson 1840).

[33] Rocher, 196. (Desai, 1965).

[34] F. Eden Pargiter, The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Delhi: Indological Book House 1904).

The attempt to ascribe a date to a purāṇa is a complicated task, for the authors had specific intention to locate the characters and events of the early texts in the primordial past; therefore, they eschew overly concrete references to known historic events. To look for clues that will help determine the date of a particular text, scholars usually look for shifts in the narrative (i.e. grammar, verse, speaker, and style) to determine what elements of the text may have been added at the same time. When a certain "section" of the text has been outlined and seems to possess a degree of narrative cohesion, then scholars begin to evaluate that portion for possible clues as to the date of the text. In his edition of the *MārkP,* Pargiter follows the work of K.M Banerjea who divided the purāṇa into five sections. Pargiter describes these divisions as organic divisions that coincide with the shifts in the narrative and shifts of subject-matter within the text.[35] Pargiter explains that his system of arriving at tentative dates for these sections is based upon his own interpretation of the religious content of the text*.* While he cautions the reader that this system may be "more interesting than convincing,"[36] contemporary scholars have not critically revisited these chronological issues.

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[35] Pargiter writes that the *MārkP* is "clearly divisible" into five parts. Introduction, iv.

[36] Pargiter, xiv.

Please refer to Table 1 which outlines the section divisions based on Pargiter's system. To supplement the dates given by Pargiter, I have also included some dates based on the work of R.C. Hazra, a scholar who has also done much work with purāṇas.[37] Dates put forth specifically by Hazra are marked by individual notes. An explanation of the table is contained in the paragraphs that follow.

In his review of the individual sections, Pargiter begins with the assertion that the third and fifth sections of the purāṇa are remnants of the "original shape" of the text; this is because in these sections the sage Mārkaṇḍeya (for whom the text is named) is the central figure and narrator.[38] Also, these are the sections that contain the traditionally archaic elements (*lakṣaṇas*) of purāṇa literature: namely, the genealogies of kingly dynasties, stories of origins of the universe and the Veda, and the detailed geographic information. R.C. Hazra comes to a similar conclusion and considers sections three and five the "original purāṇa."[39] Both Pargiter and Hazra consider the first and second sections to be later. In these sections Mārkaṇḍeya advises one of his students, Jaimini (also one of Vyāsa's

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[37] R.C. Hazra, Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1940).

[38] Pargiter, iv.

[39] Hazra, 12.

Table 1: Pargiter's Section Divisions

Section	Contents	Date
Section 1: Chap. 1-9	Mārkaṇḍeya tells Jaimini to direct his questions to the four wise birds (actually Brahmins in bird-form)	Later than the *Mahābhārata* and prior to 8th century CE[40]
Section 2: Chap. 10-44	Jaimini asks his questions and the birds tell him a related tale of Sumati (Jaḍa) and his father	5th century CE[41]
Section 3: Chap. 45-81	Mārkaṇḍeya gives his student Krauṣṭuki instruction on creation, geography and the account of the *Manvantaras*	The oldest and arguably the "original" section, 3rd century (Hazra)
Section 4: Chap. 82-92	The *Devīmāhātmya* is narrated by the sage Medhas within the *Manvantara* frame	9th century CE *terminus ante quem*--5th or 6th *terminus post quem*
Section 5: Chap 93-136	*Manvantara* resumed	Original section, 3rd century (Hazra)

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[40] Pargiter, Introduction, xvii. In this section Jaimini asks why Viṣṇu assumed a human form in the *Mahābhārata*. The birds' explanation, that Viṣṇu exists in four forms, one of which is without qualities, belongs to the *Nārada-pañcarātra*. Pargiter explains that this section does not show evidence of being aware of the reaction to this philosophical doctrine put forth by Sankara in his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*. Pargiter writes that since Sankara lived in the 8th century this section was likely composed before his time.

[41] Hazra, 11. Assessment based on references to Hindu practices of yoga (Nivṛtti-dharma) and the glorification of the God Brahmā. Hazra writes that in the 7th century Smārta (followers of *smṛiti*) Brahmins began to push worship of Brahmā into the background, thus the fact that he is glorified here points to a time before this shift.

students) to seek counsel from four wise birds. Pargiter believes these

sections to be later because Mārkaṇḍeya is not the chief character in them,

and, most importantly, because the birds themselves make reference to

sections three and five and the authority of the teachings of the text.[42]

Pargiter and Hazra consider the *DM* to be the latest addition to the text of

the purāṇa. Pargiter describes it as the product of a later time in which

worship of the Goddess was popular in Western India (Hazra does not offer

any more specific reasons). Pargiter points to the *tīrtha* Mandhāta, where

the worship of Śiva with his consort Kālī was particularly popular, as direct

support for this conclusion.[43]

Pargiter's method, as described earlier, is to evaluate the religious

content of the text to see if references to certain deities may offer some

clue as to the time period of its composition. Since Pargiter sees the

MārkP as lacking any specific sectarian affiliation, he finds it difficult to

arrive at any firm conclusions as to the dates of the sections.[44] However,

Pargiter points out that the Vedic God Indra and the early post-Vedic God

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[42] Pargiter, v.

[43] Pargiter, xiii.

[44] Pargiter's assertion that the *MārkP* is non-sectarian is not substantial. Farquhar
suggests that the *MārkP* could be affiliated with sects devoted to Brahmā, Durgā, and
Sūrya, respectively. The issue of sectarianism in the *MārkP* may be an interesting topic
for a future study.

Brahmā are mentioned with great frequency in the purāṇa as a whole—

Indra in the first and fifth sections and Brahmā in the third and fifth

sections. According to Pargiter, this frequency indicates that these sections

may be the oldest.[45] The third and fifth sections show a similar tendency to

focus on ancient Gods such as Agni and Sūrya, therefore, he assigns to

these sections a date sometime in the third century.[46] According to

Pargiter, the first section of the *MārkP* is later than the *Mahābhārata* as it

provides answers to some interpretive questions regarding this text.

The *DM* represents the fourth section and is, according to Pargiter a

"pure interpolation"[47] and the last section to be included in the *MārkP*

(sometime in the 6th century). The opinion that the *MārkP* as a whole is

older than the *DM*, and that the *DM* represents an interpolation or

interruption of the purāṇa is an assessment put forth first by Pargiter and

Hazra and by contemporary scholars such as Rocher, Coburn, Pintchman,

and Brown. The estimation of the date of the *DM* is based upon the

opinion that the *DM* interrupts the genealogy of the *Manus* given in section

three— one of the original sections— and continued in section four. Some

evidence for the specific date of the *DM* (as an independent text) is given

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[45] Pargiter, xvi.

[46] Pargiter, xv.

[47] Pargiter, iv.

by Pargiter based upon the discovery of a manuscript of the *DM* by Mahāmahopādhyāya Haraprasād Śāstrī in the Royal Library of Nepal. This manuscript, in Newari script,is dated 998 CE.[48] From this, Pargiter concludes that the *DM* could not be later than the 9th century and was likely composed considerably earlier.[49] In addition to the evidence of this manuscript, a stanza which occurs in the *DM* was found carved on the *Dadhimatīmātā* temple in the former state of Jodhpur, dated 608CE by D.R. Bhandarkar.[50] According to Rocher, Bhandarkar took this inscription as an indication that the *DM* was likely popular at this time, however, he does not specify if this means the entire text as it appears in Pargiter's edition or perhaps only some smaller part.

Approaching the *Devīmāhātmya*

Farquhar describes the *DM* as an important step in the development of literature on the Goddess that began in the *Mahābhārata*

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[48] Pargiter, xiii. I have found no further description of this manuscript at this time.

[49] Pargiter, xiii.

[50] Rocher, 195. The inscription is one stanza found in the *DM* text (the inscription makes no reference to the *MārkP*). Rocher does not say if the inscription makes specific reference to its being a part of the *DM*. The line is *DM* 11.11 *sarvamaṅgalamāṅgalye śive sarvārthasādhike / śaranye tryambake gauri nārāyaṇi namostu te //11//* ("O you who are blessed with every hapiness, auspicious, successful in all things, O protectress, three-eyed Gaurī, O Nārāyaṇī, hail to you!").

with the praise of a Goddess, the sister of Kṛṣṇa, who lives in the Vindhya

mountains, drinks wine, favors animal sacrifice, and who "upholds heaven

by her chastity."[51] He views the development of a Devī- worshipping sect

as evident from later literature of the *Harivaṁśa*, *Devīmāhātmya*, and

Bāṇa's *Chaṇḍīśataka*.[52] All three of these texts praise a Goddess with the

same description as that found in the *Dūrga Stava,* which made its way into

parts of the *Mahābhārata* textual tradition, and develop further a theology

centered on this Goddess as a unified reality and source of salvation for

her devotees.[53] Farquhar attributes the development of this sect to the

idea that *śakti* is characterized by energy and activity and devotees would

likely see a Goddess possessing such energy as able to get something

done for them.

The *DM* is regarded by scholars, such as Thomas Coburn[54] and C.

Mackenzie Brown[55], as a critical text in the development of the Indian

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[51] Farquhar, 149. This description can be found in M.N. Dutt's translation of the *Dūrgā Stava* 4.6, but is not found in the Critical Edition. The *Dūrgā Stava* can be found in most of the Devanāgrī manuscripts used for the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*, but is not found in the manuscripts of the Kashmiri, Bengali, and Southern traditions.

[52] Farquhar, 150.

[53] Farquhar, 151.

[54] Thomas B. Coburn, Encountering the Goddess:A Translation of the *Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of its Interpretation* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1991).

Goddess tradition as it is the "first comprehensive account of the Goddess to appear in Sanskrit."[56] They have argued that this text represents the unification of local and regional Indian Goddesses under the canopy of one Goddess, thus, it is described as the "crystallization of the Goddess tradition."[57] The construction of the identity of a unified Goddess as presented in the *DM* is important they say, since, for the first time in the Sanskrit language, the Goddess is described as possessing power that is equal to that of the major *parameśvaras*.[58]

Coburn's most recent work focuses on the function of the *DM* in contemporary India. He suggests that the *DM* is better understood as functioning like the oral text of a *Veda*, rather than as a written text. He explains that, "it is proper and precise recitation, not cognitive mastery nor

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see also *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Columbia MO: South Asia Books, 1985).

[55] C. Mackenzie Brown, The Triumph of the Goddess (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[56] Coburn, The Devī-Māhātmya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984). 4. This comprehensive assessment is based in part on the variety of names given to the Goddess in the *DM*. These names may be indicative of aspects of regional Goddess brought together as one Goddess.

[57] Coburn, The Devī-Māhātmya 4.

[58] Unlike the Goddesses of the *Vedas* (note the lowercase 'g'), Coburn stresses that the Goddess (singular embodiment with a capital 'G') of the *DM* is equal in power and importance to any of the long-standing Gods like Śiva and Viṣṇu.

substantive exegesis that has been the primary concern of the Hindu tradition as it has embraced the verbal tradition of the *Devī-Māhātmya*."[59] In the context of contemporary ritual performance, the text is commonly referred to as the *Durgā-Saptaśatī* (700 verses in praise of *Durgā*).[60] Coburn is largely unconcerned with the place of the *DM* in the *MārkP,* as far as his study is concerned. As he studies the text, its inclusion within a purāṇa has no bearing upon its recitation in the context of a contemporary group ritual, or a personal devotional setting.[61]   While it may not be relevant to the contemporary ritual or devotional uses of the text, the fact remains that the *DM* was included within the text of the *MārkP* and there is presumably some interesting reason for this. As this work will show, the *DM* is not the only section of the *MārkP* in which the Goddess is praised as ultimate reality. This fact may show that the *MārkP* is significant for the Goddess tradition beyond what is contained in the *DM*

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[59] Coburn, Encountering 30. In her study of the Goddess Śerāṅvālī in present-day Panjab, Kathleen Erndl also emphasizes the fact that the recitation of this text is an important practice for the devotees of Śerāṅvālī (who is identified with Dūrgā from the *DM* by her devotees). See Kathleen Erndl, Victory to the Mother (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[60] When the *DM* appears apart from the *MārkP* under the title of the *Durgā-Saptaśatī* it typically includes supplementary chapters known as *aṅgas* (limbs) that instruct the reader or person performing the recitation as to the proper performance of ritual or recitation.

[61] Coburn, Encountering 29.

. Chapter Two: Reading and Interpreting the *Devīmāhātmya*

The Nature and Structure of the *Devīmāhātmya*

  The occurrence of the *DM* within the *MārkP* has been described as
an interruption or an interpolation that occurs while the sage Mārkaṇḍeya is
reciting the genealogies and histories of the various Manus (the *manvantara*,
lakṣaṇa)*.* After Mārkaṇḍeya lists the important deities, sages and kings of the
Vaivasvata *manvantara*, and the coming of the eighth Manu, Sāvarṇi, the
section that is the *DM* begins. After the stories of the *DM* have been told the
genealogical account continues where it left off in the previous section. One
possible reason for the insertion of the *DM* at this point in the text is that it may
have been a way to surprise the audience and to focus attention on the *DM*.
The theme of the *manvantara* would have been familiar to an audience that
was acquainted with the structure of purāṇas. What would not have been
familiar to them is an account of the powers of a great Goddess at work in the
world. In the *DM*, one may find stories that could have been familiar to the
audience through other textual sources;[62] however, in the *DM* the stories have

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[62] The events narrated in the *DM* are also found in other textual locations with different
characters and with narrative elements that vary from version to version. The three main
stories from the *DM* can be found in the *Devī Bhāgavata*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Kālikā*, and
Vāmana Purāṇas. Regarding the slaying of Mahiṣa, Quackenbos cites *MBh* 3.229-231
and 9.44-46. In these stories it is Skanda (the son of the Goddess) who kills the demon

been altered and compiled in a narrative with the stated purpose of praising

and honoring the Goddess. So, while the events may have been familiar to

readers, the style of the text as a *Māhātmya* [63] was something new as a part

of the received text of the *MārkP.*

In a style typical of purāṇa texts, the *DM* is composed in the very

common *anuṣṭubh* (*śloka*) meter and it comprises Chapters 82-92 of the 137

Chapters of the *MārkP.* The text of the *DM* consists of three stories, the last of

which can be divided into three parts, organized within a frame story centered on

a king and a *vaiśya.* All three stories are accompanied by *stotras* (hymns of

praise) to the Goddess. These stories were told to the sage Mārkaṇḍeya by a

fellow sage named Medhas. In these stories the Goddess slays the demon pair

Madhu and Kaiṭabha (indirectly), then the demon Mahiṣa, and finally the demon

pair Śumbha and Niśumbha. Please see Table 2 below.

Mahiṣa. George Payn Quackenbos, The Sanskrit Poems of Mayūra (New York: AMS
Press, 1965), 249.

[63] Jan Gonda defines *Māhātmyas* as texts that "aim at conveying esoteric lore woven into
the narrative background of a discourse between a divine preceptor and a prominent
devotee…who seeks help and intervention." Jan Gonda, Medieval Religious Literature in
Sanskrit in A History of Indian Literature Vol. 11 ed. Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden: Otto
Harrassowitz, 1977), 272.

Table 2: Outline of the stories of the *DM*

Story	Main Events
The Frame Story	Medhas narrates the stories of the Goddess for Suratha and Samādhi. Following the conclusion of the three stories, Suratha and Samādhi worship the Goddess and she grants them boons.
The First Story	Brahmā petitions the Goddess (as *yoganīdrā*) to release Viṣṇu. She does so and Viṣṇu kills the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha.
The Second Story	The Gods create the Goddess from their *tejas* (splendor) and they give her various weapons and ornaments. The Goddess kills Mahiṣa. (the Buffalo-demon)
The Third Story	The Gods call upon the Goddess to slay the demon pair Śumbha and Niśumbha. In the process the Goddess also kills the demons Dhūmralocana and Raktabīja. This story features the *mātṛs* (mothers) as manifestations of the Goddess's power (also called *śaktis*). Kālī is one notable *śakti*.

The frame story presents a narrative background in which the sage

Medhas instructs two devotees seeking spiritual advice. Medhas identifies the

importance of the Goddess as the ultimate reality of the universe and he instructs

his devotees in the details of her worship—a frequent undertaking of *Māhātmyas*

(see note 57). Through the frame story, the reader learns of the tragedy of King

Suratha, who had his entire kingdom and all of his wealth stolen from him by his

advisors. Unable to stay in his former city, the king travels to the forest where he

meets the sage Medhas who permits him to live in his hermitage. Despite his

peaceful surroundings, Suratha cannot overcome the persistent memories of his

stolen kingdom. While wandering in the forest near the *āśrama* and pondering

the state of his former treasury, the king encounters a *vaiśya* by the name of

Samādhi. Samādhi was born into a wealthy family, but his wicked wife and sons

had banished him to the forest and stolen all of his wealth from him. The king

and the merchant, troubled by their persistent thoughts of stolen wealth and

family, then approach Medhas with appropriate gestures of respect. After

listening to their stories, the sage reveals to them that their problems are the

direct result of egoism (*mamatva*) and the delusion that such a focus on the self

produces. Medhas informs them that the source of this delusion is the product of

the great Goddess *Mahāmāyā* and that all existence is created through her *māyā*

(creative and world-constructing power). Medhas goes on to say that *Mahāmāyā*

is the source of the universe, the source of release from *saṃsāra,* and a giver of boons to men. According to the sage, if Suratha and Samādhi desire release from their suffering they should appeal directly to her. Medhas then narrates the three stories of the Goddess.

In each of the three stories that follow, the Goddess is portrayed as a great source of power that must be praised and respected so that she will help the Gods to overcome their enemies. Each of the three presentations of the Goddess differs slightly in its descriptions of her. In the first story of the *DM* the Goddess appears primarily as an ontological reality into which Viṣṇu has been absorbed. She is not so much an actor, but a force that must release the God so that he may act. In the second and third stories of the *DM* the Goddess takes a much more active role. In the last two depictions, the Goddess is formed from the *tejas* (splendor) that arose from the frustration of the Gods after they were unable to conquer the demons who had expelled them from heaven. The final two stories relate in great detail the deaths of the buffalo-demon Mahiṣa, Śumbha and Niśumbha, and their demon armies at the hands of the Goddess who is portrayed as wild and violent as well as gentle and benevolent. Following each of the three stories in the *DM*, there is a *stotra* praising the Goddess. These hymns of praise are offered by the Gods who are the principal beneficiaries of her actions in each story; the Gods praise her fearsome aspects

and her gentle aspects as all united in the exalted being of one ultimate female

reality. After king Suratha and the *vaiśya* Samādhi hear of the power of the

Goddess in the three narratives and the hymns praising all her qualities, they

begin to worship her and each of them is ultimately granted the boon he desires.

Samādhi is granted knowledge that will allow him to attain *mokṣa* (liberation).

The Goddess promises Suratha that he will be reborn as the Manu Sāvarṇi at

which time he will regain his kingdom.

The Events of the First Story

In the first story, the Goddess is referred to as *yoganidrā* [64] and also as

tāmasī.[65] In this story, the Goddess has enveloped Viṣṇu as *yoganidrā* while he

is floating on Śeṣa in the cosmic waters that cover the earth at the end of each

cycle of time (*kalpa*). At this time, two demons named Madhu and Kaiṭabha, are

born from Viṣṇu's earwax and they begin to threaten Brahmā who is seated on a

lotus emerging from Viṣṇu's navel (*nābhi*). Brahmā is the God of creation and he

begins the creative process when he arises from the center or central point

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[64] *Yoganidrā* is defined as the sleep of a *yogin,* which is like a state of deep meditation.
Monier-Williams, s.v. *yoganidrā* .

[65] *Tamasī* is the female embodiment of the *guṇa, tamas*. All existing beings are
composed of *prakṛti* (primary substance, original source), which is made up of three
qualities (*guṇas*): *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas*. *Tamas* is described as
heaviness, darkness, and inertia. Monier-Williams, s.v. *prakṛti*, *tamas.*

(*nābhi*) of the Lord Viṣṇu. The pair of demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, arises and

begins to threaten the order of the creative process that Brahmā represents. In

order for Viṣṇu to awaken and slay the demons that are threatening this order,

Brahmā decides that he must petition the higher power of the Goddess with

words of praise so that she will release Viṣṇu's body.

Brahmā's praise of the Goddess is in the form of a *stotra*[66] of fourteen

verses of *śloka* meter in which the God praises the Goddess as sacred speech

(*vāc*)[67] and as the primordial creative power through which all things are

manifested, and which admits of no distinctions within its unified form. In the first

two verses of this *stotra* the Goddess is called *Svāhā, Svadhā*, and *Vaṣaṭkāra,*

which are three of the important exclamations of blessing used during a Vedic

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[66] *Stotras* are generally classified as hymns of praise consisting of "separate eulogistic
stanzas" directed towards a God, Goddess, or some other divine being. *Stotras* have
been popular in many religious schools and sects and have been important in the spread
of *bhakti* traditions. *Stotras* typically praise the divine figure using names, describing
powers, and listing functions of the respective deity with the intention of expressing
devotion. With this display of devotion, the devotee hopes to benefit from this power in
some material or spiritual sense (i.e. *mokṣa*). *Stotras* may also be recited for the purpose
of protection from and victory over enemies. See Jan Gonda et. al. Medieval Religious
Literature in Sanskrit, vol. II Fasc. 1 of A History of Indian Literature, ed. J. Gonda
(Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 232-3.
[67] *DM* 1.54-55. The Goddess *Vāc* is the deification of the sacred Vedic *mantra*. *Vāc* (Holy
Utterance) consists of four parts. Three of the parts are silent and secret and the fourth is
the language that people speak. Since *vāc* is the verbally manifested Brahman
(*śabdabrahman*), she is a supreme power and principle in the universe.

sacrifice.[68] The Goddess is also personified as the threefold *mātrā* (the sound that measures three),[69] the half-*mātrā* (the sound that measures one-half),[70] and the eternal *akṣara* (syllable).[71] The significance of these descriptions is that they are all forms of *vāc*, which is her ultimate reality.

Having recognized and praised the Goddess as *vāc*, in the following verses of the hymn Brahmā recognizes the Goddess as the source of all creation, that which protects all things, and as the source of re-absorption at the

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[68] Monier-Williams, s.v. *svāhā* and *svadhā*.

[69] The *tridhāmātrā* (3-syllables) refers to the expression *oṁ* (*aum*). *Aum* is a linguistic representation of creation (creation is thought to consist of three aspects).

[70] The *ardhamātrā* (half–*mātrā*) is the inexpressible aspect of creation, the part of her that is ever latent. According to Andre Padoux, the whispered word was thought to be a more powerful expression that the loud Vedic chanting. This was the case, he explains, because "silence or indistinct or undefined (*anirukta*) speech represent the innumerable, the unlimited…" This type of speech captures the essential and elemental power of sound (*akṣara*). An emphasis on the great power of the indistinct speech is an idea that was deeply influential in the development of Tantric practices that were centered upon the worship of the Goddess. See Andre Padoux, "Mantras— What are They?" in Mantra ed. Harvey P. Alper (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 298.

[71] *DM* 1.54-55. *tvaṃ svāhā tvaṃ svadhā tvaṃ hi vaṣaṭkāraḥ svarātmikā/ sudhā tvam akṣare nitye tridhāmātrātmakāsthitā//54//* ("You are *Svāhā*, you are *Svadhā*, you are *Vaṣat*, speech is your nature. You are the nectar of the Gods, O eternal unit of speech! You abide in the *tridhāmātrātmaka*.")
ardhamātrāsthitā nityā yānuccāryā viśeṣataḥ/ tvam eva sandhyā sāvitrī tvaṃ devī jananī parā//55// ("You abide in what is whispered, eternal, excellent, which is not to be expressed distinctly. You are the union of the Gayatrī mantra; you are the Goddess, the supreme mother.")

end of the world. In this way, three stages of existence: creation, preservation,

and the ultimate dissolution are all activities of the one Goddess.[72] He also

describes the Goddess as the embodiment of certain abstract qualities including:

vast knowledge (*mahāvidyā*), vast power (*mahāmāyā*), vast mind (*mahāmedhā*),

great sacred tradition (*mahāsmṛti*), and great delusion (*mahāmohā*).[73] Lastly,

Brahmā refers to the Goddess as *mahādevī* (great Goddess) and *mahāsurī*

(great demoness).[74] In this description, the two opposing principles of *deva* and

asura are combined in the Goddess. It is possible that this expression is used to

demonstrate the nonexistence of distinctions in the Goddess who contains all

things (this is one aspect of her that is stressed in the following lines). Another

possible explanation in that the Goddess has many of the same qualities as the

asuras.[75] In particular, the Goddess's powers of *mahāmāyā* and *mahāmohā* are

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[72] *DM* 1.56-57. *tvayaitad dhāryate viśvaṃ tvayaitat sṛjyate jagat/ tvayaitat pālyate devī tvam atsyante ca sarvadā//56//* ("By you everything is supported, by you this world is created, by you it is protected. O Goddess, you always consume it at the end.")
visṛṣṭau sṛṣṭirūpā tvaṃ sthitirūpā ca pālane/ tathā saṃhṛtirūpānte jagato' sya jaganmaye//57// ("In sending-forth you are embodied as sending and in maintaining you are embodied as the staying; so also, in the end of the world you are destruction. O Goddess, you contain the entire world.")

[73] *DM* 1.58

[74] *DM* 1.58

[75] Here "*asura*" basically signifies a being with extraordinary power. In the Vedas the *asuras* were not exclusively conceived of as demons, rather as beings with extraordinary power (*māyā*). Hale rejects the idea that there was an original separation of *devas* and

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especially *asurī*-like. Wash Edward Hale cites one instance in the *Kauṣītaki*

Brāhmaṇa in which Indra is "charmed" by the *asuramāyā* of an *asurī*, but he is

able to evade her power by reciting certain *mantras*.[76] This connection between

the Goddess and "asuric" qualities is important and this is a topic I will revisit in

the following section.

As the *stotra* continues, Brahmā also describes the Goddess as *prakṛti*

(originary matrix)*,* which manifests all of the three *guṇas*.[77] In addition to *prakṛti*,

the Goddess is also personified as time, specifically *kālarātri* (black night),

mahārātri (great night) and *moharātri* (night of delusion).[78] In addition to her

fearsome qualities, the Goddess is also *śrī* (splendor) and as such she

possesses many virtues including: peacefulness, modesty, and beauty.[79]. She

contains all oppositions and subsumes all distinctions in her ultimate unity. The

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asuras. The Gods and their enemies could both be described as *asuras*. The origin of
the separation of the *asuras* and *devas* into two opposed classes of beings is not certain.
Wash Edward Hale, Ásura in Early Vedic Religion (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986)

[76] Hale, 132-133. Hale does not give a definition for *asuramāyā* (a compound in this case)
in this example, but in another example he provides from the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* he
defines *asurī māyā* as "nature." In this second example it is the Goddess earth (*devi
pṛthivi*) who is described as possessing *asurī māyā*.

[77] *DM* 1.59.

[78] *DM* 1.59.

[79] *DM* 1.60. *tvaṃ śrīs tvam īśvarī tvaṃ hrīs tvaṃ buddhir boddha lakṣaṇā/ lajjā puṣṭis
tathā tuṣṭis tvaṃ śāntiḥ kṣāntir eva ca//60//* ("You are *śrī*, you are the lord, you are
modesty, you are insight, which is characteristic of knowledge. You are modesty,
prosperity; you are also satisfaction, peace, and patience.")

Goddess is gentle and extremely beautiful while she is also the demoness *mahāsurī*, the darkest and most fearsome night who possesses many weapons.[80]

In the final verses of the *stotra* (1.63-1.67), Brahmā says that Viṣṇu and Śiva as well as himself possess bodily form only through the power of the Goddess. Brahmā recognizes the fact that even Viṣṇu, a powerful God, is second in power to the Goddess; Viṣṇu's very capacity to act is dependent upon the Goddess. With this concession, Brahmā, a God himself, is prompted to ask how he can adequately praise a power as vast and incomprehensible as the Goddess.[81] Finally, Brahmā requests that the Goddess confuse the two *asuras* so that they may be defeated. When she is satisfied with the praise from Brahmā she releases Viṣṇu so that he may awaken to slay the demons, which he does with some assistance from the Goddess.

In this first story of the *DM* the Goddess appears primarily as an ontological reality as opposed to a corporeal form like Viṣṇu and Brahmā. She is not so much an actor, as she is a releaser. However, the *DM* does say that the two demons were deluded (*vimohitau*) by *Māhāmāyā* and this delusion either causes them to be filled with arrogance or is coupled with it, which leads them to

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[80] *DM* 1.61

[81] *DM* 1.63 *tvaṃ kim stūyase tadā //63//* ("In that case, how can I praise you?")

make a fatal error. They offer Viṣṇu a boon and he chooses that they permit

themselves to be killed. The two demons tell Viṣṇu they are honored to be killed

by him, and thinking they can trick the God, they ask that he not slay them

anywhere the earth (*urvī*) is flooded. Viṣṇu agrees and taking the demons on his

thigh (*ūru*) he kills them both.[82] In this story it is the demons' pride that leads

them to think they can outwit Viṣṇu, but it is their delusion by the Goddess that is

the ultimate source of their arrogance and hence, their destruction.

The first story presents one variation of a common theme that runs

throughout the *DM:* the presentation of the Goddess as a source of efficacy that

can restore order when she is praised. The Goddess's assistance is contingent

upon the devotee or petitioner recognizing and expressing that her power is the

primary force behind the action that is desired. In other words, although Brahmā

wants Viṣṇu to awaken and to slay the demons he must first recognize and

express the fact that the Goddess is the highest reality in which Viṣṇu has been

absorbed. In her analysis of this first story of the *DM*, Kathleen Erndl[83]

expresses this idea. She writes: "In this hymn Brahmā calls her the creator,

preserver, and destroyer of the universe, as well as *prakṛti,* Mahādevī (the great

Goddess) and Mahāsurī (great demoness). These epithets imply that she is the

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[82] *DM* 1.78

[83] Kathleen Erndl, "Śākta" in The Hindu World, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby
(Routledge: New York, 2004).

actual force behind all the activities of the Gods, indeed, all the activities of the

universe."[84] Brahmā's use of these epithets for the Goddess in the *stotra*

describe her as the primary force behind all things as well as show the benefit of

a verbal expression of this truth.

The Events of the Second Story

After he narrates the first story, Medhas immediately begins to narrate the

second story. In the second story, the Goddess does not give the Gods their

bodily form (as in the first story); in this case she is formed from the *tejas* (vital

power and splendor)[85] of the Gods. Furious after being expelled from heaven by

the demon Mahiṣa, who had taken Indra's place as chief, the thirty Gods

gathered to devise a solution to their problem. They traveled to the place where

Viṣṇu and Śiva were to explain to them how the Gods (Sūrya, Indra, Agni, Vāyu,

Candra, and Yama) had been displaced and were forced to wander the earth as

mortals. The brilliance and splendor that arose from the great frustration of the

Gods came together into a mountain of light and from this the Goddess was

formed. From the *tejas* of each of the Gods, different parts of her body were

formed and they each gave her different weapons, beautiful garments and

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[84] Erndl, 148.

[85] *tejas* is a principal component of *śukra* (semen). Monier-Williams, s.v. *tejas*.

ornaments, a cup of wine, and a lion as her mount.[86] When the Goddess has

been sufficiently armed and ornamented, she lets out a great laugh that fills

every space and that shakes even the mountains. After they witness this display

of her power, the Gods, sure of their victory, praise the Goddess.[87]

The text then relates in detail the death of all of Mahiṣa's generals and

armies at the hands of the Goddess, who is portrayed as wild and violent. She

fights all of the *asuras* and defeats them single-handedly. When the *asura*

armies have all been slain, one surviving general, Cikṣura, approaches to attack,

but is struck down by the Goddess. Another, by the name of Cāmara comes

forward and he too is struck down. At the climax of this episode, the Goddess,

after drinking wine (one of her traits as a *āsurī*), finally conquers and beheads

the buffalo-demon Mahiṣa.[88] The process of killing Mahiṣa is somewhat delayed

due to his ability to alter his form. The demon becomes a lion, human, and an

elephant before finally succumbing to the Goddess. The story ends with the

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[86] The text describes the Goddess as being honored (*sammānitā*) by these gifts from the
Gods.

[87] *DM* 2.33-34. *cukṣubhuḥ sakalā lokāḥ samudrāś ca cakampire/ cacāla vasudhā celuḥ
sakāś ca mahīdharāḥ//33//* ("All the worlds shook and the oceans trembled, the ground
quaked and all the mountains were agitated.")
*jayeti devāś ca mudā tām ūcuḥ siṃhavāhinīm/ tuṣṭuvur munayaś caināṃ
bhaktinamrātmamūrtayaḥ//34//* ("The joyful Gods proclaimed "Victory" to her whose
mount is a lion. And the sages praised her, their bodies all bent over in devotion.")
[88] *DM* 3.36-39.

Goddess granting the Gods a boon. This boon ensures that whenever the Gods

require her services in the future, she will come and destroy whatever or

whomever is troubling them.

Although this story emphasizes the fearsome power of the Goddess, who

accomplished something the Gods could not in killing Mahiṣa, this episode is

followed by a *stotra* of twenty-six verses praising the Goddess in her more

gentle form (perhaps as an effort to calm her after the violence of battle). The

stotra begins with the Gods and other heavenly beings praising the Goddess as

vāc, *prakṛti*, and knowledge, in a manner similar to the *stotra* from the first

episode.[89] She is called Dūrga, Śrī and Gaurī.[90] The Gods continue to praise her

beauty and poise, but they also emphasize the power of her wrath as displayed

in her victory over Mahiṣa.[91] The *stotra* attempts to reconcile the violent actions

of the Goddess in battle with her goodness and benevolence by expressing that

even though the Goddess did slay the evil *asuras,* she did so wishing that they

go to heaven.[92] Along with her marvelous feats of strength, it is the combination

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[89] *DM* 4.1-10.

[90] *DM* 4.10-11. She is Dūrgā (difficult, impassable) because she provides assistance in crossing the difficult waters of existence. She is Śrī, who resides in the heart of Viṣṇu. Finally she is Gaurī, who is Śiva's wife Pārvatī.

[91] *DM* 4.11-13.

[92] *DM* 4.17-18. *ebhir hatair jagadurpati sukhaṃ tathaite kurvantu nāma narakāya cirāya pāpam/ saṃgrāmamṛtyum adhigamya divaṃ prāyantu matveti nūnamahitān vinihaṃsi*

of this terrible power with compassion that is stressed in the verses. The *stotra* concludes with the Gods requesting the protection of the Goddess in all of her forms, both benevolent (*saumya*) and violent (*ghora*).[93] The Goddess, pleased by the praise she has received from the Gods, grants them a boon.[94] The Gods request her presence whenever they are troubled and she agrees to grant their request.

The second story of the *DM* has become one of the most well-known and popular myths of the Goddess. It is not, however, a story unique to the *DM.* In the *Mahābhārata* (3.221) it is Skanda, the son of Śiva and Parvatī, who succeeds in killing Mahiṣa. Erndl suggests that scholars using textual sources alone have concluded that the story of Durgā and Mahiṣa was adapted from the Skanda

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devi//17// ("With these slain foes, the world attains happiness; although they have committed enough sin to remain in hell a long time. With the thought, "having met death in battle let them go to heaven," you assuredly slay the enemies, O Goddess!")
dṛṣṭvaiva kiṃ na bhavati prakaroti bhasma sarvāsurānariṣu yatprahiṇoṣi śastram/ lokāṇ prayāntu ripavo'pi hi śastrapūtā itthaṃ matirbhavati teṣvapi te' tisādhvī//18// ("Having surely seen them, why do you not make all the *asuras* into ashes, since you throw your weapons in enemies? "Let even enemies, purified by my weapons, attain heaven." Such is your most kind intention towards even those hostile ones.")
[93] *DM* 4.22-26.
[94] *DM* 2.29. *vriyatāṃ tridaśāḥ sarve yadasmatto' bhivāñchitam/ dadāmyahamatiprītyā satvairebhiḥ supūjitā//29//* ("All of you thirty Gods, whatever is desired from us let it be chosen. I will give since I am well-worshipped with these hymns of praise.")

myth, perhaps by worshippers of the Goddess.[95] The image of the Goddess

seated on her lion mount (the most popular image of her in the *DM*) is one that

likely achieved folk popularity before it was incorporated into the Sanskrit textual

tradition. Erndl mentions terracotta images of a Goddess riding a lion and killing

a buffalo that were found at Nagar in the Tonk district of Rajasthan and that date

between the first century BCE and first century CE.[96] In their history of India,

Kulke and Rothermund mention the founder of the Vakataka Empire in the third

century CE was named Vindhyashakti after the Goddess of the Vindhya

Mountains.[97] They also mention that the coins of this empire had an image of a

Goddess riding a lion.[98] This archeological evidence suggests that the image of

the Goddess in the *DM* may have a history that precedes textual accounts. Also,

the association of the lion-riding Goddess with the Vindhya Mountains and the

nearby Tonk district (Eastern region just south of the Jaipur district) of Rajasthan

may provide some useful clues regarding the regions in which the *DM* was

composed. It is interesting to note that the Tonk district of Rajasthan generally

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[95] Erndl, 149.

[96] Erndl, 149.

[97] Herman Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, <u>A History of India </u>(Barnes and Noble:
Totowa, New Jersey, 1986), 89.

[98] Kulke and Rothermund, 89.

corresponds with the location, near the Narmada River, where Pargiter believes the *MārkP* was composed.

The Events of the Third Story

The boon promised by the Goddess in the second story is granted in the third. Once again, the order of nature and the cosmos is threatened when a pair of demons steals the power of the Gods and their rights to the sacrifice. The Gods remember the boon promised them by the Goddess and begin to praise her.

The third story of the *DM* has a similar theme to that of the second; it relates the story of the Goddess slaying the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha. In this story the Goddess is portrayed not only as a fearsome warrior, but also as a beautiful woman who is desired by the demon brothers. Śumbha sends a messenger named Sugrīva to offer a marriage proposal on his behalf. Sugrīva tells the Goddess that if she chooses one of the wealthy and powerful demons as her husband she will obtain supreme power. The Goddess tells the messenger that she is unable to accept because of a previous vow that she had made. According to this vow, the Goddess could only marry a man who conquered her in battle. Sugrīva is offended by her response and threatens her, saying that if she refuses he will drag her by the hair to the feet of the demons. The Goddess

again refuses and Sugrīva returns to Śumbha. Śumbha first sends his general Dhūmralocana ("Eyes of Smoke") to drag the Goddess back, but he is reduced to ash by her menacing growl (*humkāra*).[99] Two other generals, Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and their armies meet a similar fate. A battle then ensues, and the Goddess slaughters the armies of the *asuras*.

In this story the Goddess is aided by the *mātṛs* (mothers); these Goddesses are the *śaktis* (active principles, *prakṛtis*) of the Gods Brahmā, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Skanda and Indra and each of them possessed the weapon and mount of their respective male counterpart. The Goddess also produces from her forehead a *śakti* by the name of Caṇḍikā or Kālī, who was the most violent of the *śaktis*. It is Kālī who slays Raktabīja ("Blood-Drop"), a demon with the ability to produce new demons from drops of his blood, by lapping up all of his blood with her long tongue. The climax of this story occurs in the final battle between the Goddess and Śumbha. Śumbha taunts the Goddess for relying on the Mātṛs for aid at which point she absorbs all the *śaktis* into her body and kills Śumbha.

This third story adds new dimensions and attributes to the personality of the Goddess that were not present in the second story. The first of these is an erotic element that, while not emphasized to a great degree, does for the first time, present the Goddess as a desirable woman. However, this erotic element

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[99] *DM* 6.9.

is abandoned once the fighting commences and this story relates the details of her exploits in battle in much more gruesome detail than did the second story, especially the description of Kālī and her violent, bloodthirsty nature. The inclusion of the *Mātṛs* is also unique to the third story. While the narrative describes the *śaktis* as produced by the Gods, they are absorbed into the body of the Goddess before her final battle with Śumbha. When Śumbha accuses her of relying on the power of others to win her battle, she replies, "I alone exist in this world, what other than I is there? O Wicked one, see these are my manifestations of power entering back into me!"[100] After this announcement she conquers Śumbha alone.

This third and final myth of the Goddess is unique not only in the description of the Goddess and her *śaktis:* this story contains two *stotras.* The first *stotra,* which consists of thirty verses, occurs at the beginning of the story. The majority of this *stotra* is characterized by a highly repetitive style. Each of these verses of the *stotra* isolates one quality[101] of the Goddess that should be

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[100] *DM* 10.5. *ekaivāhaṃ jagat yatra dvitīyā kā mamāparā/ pasyaitā duṣṭa mayyeva viśantyo madvibhūtayaḥ//5//* This is similar to the scene in the *Bhagavadgītā* in which Kṛṣṇa reveals his divine form, with all it aspects, to Arjuna. See J.A.B. van Buitenen, The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 33[11].5-15.

[101] These are qualities that should be familiar to the reader from the previous *stotras* including: *māyā*, *cetana*, *buddhi*, *nidrā*, *śakti,* etc. *DM* 5.12-34.

praised. After a particular quality has been identified the refrain "Hail to her, hail to her, hail to her, hail, hail!" is repeated.[102]

Following the slaying of all of the *asuras*, the Gods begin to praise the Goddess again with a *stotra* of thirty-five verses. Here the Goddess is praised as fierce towards her enemies and loving towards her devotees, as the ultimate reality, as universal truth, and as the source of liberation. With the Goddess, her *matṛs* and *śaktis* are also recognized as parts of her and are praised. This hymn also describes the benefits of worshipping the Goddess. Devotees who praise her will be blessed with knowledge, prosperity, sons, and an understanding of *dharma*.

Having heard of the power of the Goddess and the benefit to those who worship her, Suratha and Samādhi thanked Medhas for his instruction and traveled to the banks of a river where they began to worship the Goddess. The two sculpted an image of the Goddess from the clay of the riverbank and offered it incense, flowers, fire, and water along with blood from their own bodies[103] for a period of three years. After three years had passed the Goddess appeared before the king and the *vaiśya* and granted each of them a boon. The king was

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[102] *namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namaḥ//* (Repeated in *DM* 5.12-34).
[103] *DM,* 13.5-10.

given an imperishable kingdom and the *vaiśya* was given the knowledge that

leads to *mokṣa*.

The Goddess as *Mahāsurī*

Despite the differences between the three stories, these narratives share

a fundamental conception of the Goddess as a source of energy and efficacy

who, when praised correctly and sufficiently, will champion the cause of her

devotees. And, as the reader learns through the frame story of the king and the

vaiśya, the Goddess hears and responds to the praises of Gods and humans

alike. As regards this great potential for action against demon foes, the question

as to what makes the Goddess especially adept at overpowering forces that the

Gods cannot deal with still remains. This interesting question could be addressed

from a number of perspectives, but Hale's work on the figure of the *asura* in early

Vedic religion provides the most promising approach.

In this paper the word "*asura*" has been used interchangeably with the

word "demon" as is common Indological practice and acceptable in such

contexts. In his work on the subject, Hale points out that in the "Family Books" of

the *Vedas* many of the Gods are referred to as *asuras;* specifically Agni, Mitra,

and, occasionally, Indra. Hale suggests that in this context, *asura* is best

translated as a "lord" (divine or human) who has power that commands respect

and often a fighting force.[104] Besides military power and respect, an *asura* may also possess a power called *māyā*.[105] It is also worth noting that in this context *asura* refers to particular beings rather than to a class of beings as it is used in later epic and purāṇic literature. At this stage, it is accurate to say that the term *asura* does not indicate a demon or a figure opposed to the Gods, rather a being that is known for its *māyā*.

That the Goddess possesses *māyā* in abundance is evident in her epithet *Mahāmāyā* . While *māyā* is often defined as the power of illusion and hints at some sort of trickery or subterfuge, this association is heavily influenced by Vedāntic philosophical ideas and is not applicable in all cases. In reference to the Goddess and her *māyā*, a better definition is that of "creative power," which I have used earlier in this discussion. Jan Gonda suggests the following definition: "Incomprehensible wisdom and power enabling its possessor, or being able itself, to create, devise, contrive, effect, or do something," which may include "phenomenal realization, display of a (wonderful) creative ability." [106] The use of

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[104] Hale, 52.

[105] Hale occasionally defines *māyā* as a sort of magical power, but most often he does not translate the word. He does suggest that *māyā* could be related to the powers of nature or the power to create a natural phenomenon like the rain.

[106] Jan Gonda, Change and Continuity in Indian Religion (The Hague: Mouton and Co. Publishers, 1965), 166. Wisdom in ancient times, according to Gonda, was of a practical nature.

māyā to denote cunning and deception is evidence of the fundamental

ambivalence associated with power (i.e. power in the Gods is good and in those

opposed to the Gods it is bad).[107] In the case of great displays of *māyā,* such as

those of Mitra and Varuṇa who produce rain by their *māyā*, there is an evident

connection with forces of nature and *māyā*.[108] In such displays of *māyā*, Gonda

suggests that there was a level of incredibility—that such an act defied what was

understood as reality (perhaps hinting at the later uses of the term to define

illusion or artifice). *Asuras*, as powerful beings or lords had a great deal of *māyā*.

In the Goddess there is the power of *māyā* and also a power of a similar kind,

that of *śakti*. In the case of an *Iśvara,* his *śakti* was his spouse and the active

principle of his power. Gonda cites the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* as one important

text in which the application of the Lord's *māyā* is called *śaktiyoga* (application of

śakti).[109] So, the ideas of *asura*, *śakti* and *māyā* are closely related in ancient

times and also in the *DM*, in which the Goddess is referred to as *Mahāsurī* and a

great source of both *māyā* and of *śakti*. The discussion above is far from

exhaustive and the link between the Goddess and the *asura* (or the powers of

the *asura*) merits further inquiry.

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[107] Gonda, 167. *sumāyā* and *durmāyā.*
[108] Gonda, 167-8.
[109] Gonda, 171.

Chapter Three: A Comparative Discussion of Narratives

The Story of Anasūyā and the Brahmin Woman

One of the most distinct and arguably most important characteristics of

the *DM* is its frequent valorization of *śakti* (female creative energy and power)*.*

In my reading of the *MārkP* I have found that there are three stories that portray

the female characters as sources of energy and efficacy in what Pargiter and

Hazra have titled Section II Chap. 10-44. Both of these scholars have suggested

that this section, along with Section I, may have been affixed to the original

MārkP in the 5th century. Based on my own reading I see little that would

thematically link these two sections, but I see much similarity between Section II

and Section IV, which is the *DM*. The following chapter is an evaluation of the

stories of Section II in relation to themes of the *DM*.

The second section of the *MārkP* extends the narration of the birds from

the previous section (Chap. 1-9). Now the focus has shifted from a discussion of

the *MBh* to a conversation between a young Brahmin Sumati (Smarty)

nicknamed Jaḍa (Dummy) because of his previous ignorance, and his father.

Sumati, after a discourse on hell and the various punishments for certain sins,

tells his father a story centered on the theme of female power in a time of crisis.

In this story[110], a Brahmin woman saves her husband from a curse of death. The woman's husband, though a Brahmin, was a leper due to sins of his past life. He is exceedingly cruel to his wife, who bears his abuse without complaint. When her husband demands to be taken to visit the young courtesan he covets, his wife lifts her husband onto her shoulders and carries him to the courtesan's house. Along the way, her husband accidentally brushes Māṇḍavya[111] with his foot and the insulted Māṇḍavya curses him to die with the following sunrise. At this curse the Brahmin woman announces that, by her power, the sun will not rise again.[112] The announcement holds true, and for many days the sun does not rise. At this point, even the Gods have become a bit frantic with the fear that no daylight will result in no offerings of sacrifice from the Earth's humans. In their desperation, the Gods call upon Brahmā who explains to them that it was the power of the chaste and virtuous wife that had prevented the sun from rising. They would have to petition an equally powerful (i.e. virtuous)

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[110] *MārkP,* 16.

[111] Māṇḍavya is a sage whose hermitage was on the Narmada River. He was falsely accused of theft by the ruling king of the region and impaled on a pole. In the *Mahābhārata* (Ādi Parvan, 107) he is known as Aṇimāṇḍavya. In the *Mahābhārata*, he is impaled on a trident and although the trident was later removed by the grace of Śiva, the tip (*aṇi*) remained in his body. Purāṇic Encyclopedia, s.v. Māṇḍavya and Aṇimāṇḍavya.

[112] The power of truth (*satya*) is a common characteristic of faithful wives. For this reason, a virtuous wife may be known as a *satyavatī* (one who possesses *satya*).

wife if they wished to see daylight again. The Gods petition Anasūyā,[113] the

powerful wife of the sage Atri. Anasūyā tells them that the power of a faithful wife

may not be broken under any condition. She advises them to honor this Brahmin

woman until she is appeased and agrees to let the sun rise as before. The Gods

tell Anasūyā that she is the most virtuous and thus the most powerful woman

they know. Because of her power, the Gods suggest that she should petition the

Brahmin's wife as she is best suited to the task. Anasūyā appeases the Brahmin

woman by praising her virtue and by promising that she will restore the woman's

husband to her in a healthy condition if she agrees to allow the sun to rise as

before. Anasūyā fulfills her promises and the sun is allowed to rise again.

In this story, we may observe some parallels to the stories of the *DM.* The

first of these is the obvious importance of the two women in the story. Both the

Brahmin woman and Anasūyā are sources of power and, in this case, their power

is derived from their great *tapas* (pain, suffering) as virtuous wives.[114] In the case

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[113] Anasūyā was well-known for her *tapaśśakti* (power that is possessed by women who undergo some sort of suffering, pain or austerities). By her *tapaśśakti*, Anasūyā made the Gaṅgā flow and trees bear fruit during a drought. In the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, Anasūyā taught Sītā that devotion to a husband is a woman's greatest *tapas* (pain, suffering). Purāṇic Encyclopedia, s.v. Anasūyā.

[114] In the text, Anasūyā refers to her own power as *bala* (power, strength, force). Both of the women are addressed by the Gods, address each other, and are described with the following words: *bhadraka* (auspicious, blessed, fortunate), *kalyāṇī* (virtuous and

of the Brahmin's wife, the display of her power has a decidedly negative impact

on the Gods and they are not able to correct the disorder that she has caused.

Brahmā recognizes the woman as a source of great power that can only be

challenged by an equal power. Anasūyā honors the woman by addressing her

respectfully and by restoring her husband to health. The similarities to the *DM*

are seen in the recognition of a feminine power and the praise of that power.

In the first story of the *DM*, Brahmā recognizes that the Goddess is the

highest reality and he honors her as a way to release Viṣṇu and preserve the

process of creation. In the second story of the *DM*, the Goddess is given

weapons, ornaments, clothing, and a lion mount by the Gods, who give these

gifts as a way to honor (*sammānita*) her. In all three stories of the *DM* the Gods

also offer hymns of praise to the Goddess in order to secure her assistance.

Also, much like the situation in all three of the stories of the *DM,* the Gods face a

situation that they have no power to resolve for themselves. With the restriction

of the sunrise, the Brahmin woman created a cosmic disorder; the *devas* (the

shining celestial beings) have been denied their share of the sacrifice. Similarly,

in the second and third stories of the *DM* the Gods have been exiled by the

asuras and this cosmic disorder forces them to wander the earth like mortals. In

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auspicious woman and wife), *āryā* (respectable and honorable woman), *mahābhāgā*
(fortunate, illustrious), and *pativratā* (devoted and virtuous wife).

this textually prior story in the *MārkP*, the sun, also a *deva*, has been exiled and

not allowed to shine in the sky and this exile affects the Gods in a most direct

way. Because the humans will not be able to perform the sacrifices in darkness,

the Gods will not be able to eat. Deprived of food, they may be rendered

emaciated if the situation is allowed to go too long. In this situation, the disorder

was caused by a virtuous wife, so it is best undone by Anasūyā (the most

virtuous wife and most powerful wife). In all three of the stories of the *DM*, the

Gods are dependent on the Goddess as a source of energy that is capable of

action when they are not; a theme that is present in this story of the Brahmin

woman and Anasūyā as well.

As this narrative comes to an end, the Gods grant Anasūyā a boon to

thank her for her assistance. She requests that Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu be born

(incarnated) as her sons.

The Story of Dattātreya and Lakṣmī

The next story that contains striking parallels with that of the *DM,*

concerns Dattātreya who is Anasūyā's son and an incarnation of the God

Viṣṇu.[115] Dattātreya is portrayed as a *yogin* who has attracted a group of young

munis who wish to be his followers. Dattātreya does not wish to have followers,

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[115] *MārkP* 17.18-25.

so he attempts to get rid of them by first immersing himself in a lake for one hundred years. When he emerges from the water, he brings with him the beautiful Lakṣmī. When he sees that the *munis* are still waiting, he attempts to get rid of them by engaging in intercourse with Lakṣmī, drinking liquor in their presence, and playing musical instruments. Dattātreya's behavior, which is uncharacteristic of renunciation, does not repulse the *munis*, who see his actions as a demonstration of his dispassion. Also of interest, is the fact that Dattātreya engages in his practice of austerities in the abodes of the *cāṇḍālas*, the lowest and most polluted people in the social hierarchy, who often work in cremation grounds.[116] Furthermore, the term *cāṇḍāla* may also refer to women who are menstruating, or women who engage in *kaula* rites (i.e. the practices of left-handed *Śāktas*). It is unwarranted to conclude that Dattātreya is a *Śākta* or is engaged in the practices of left-handed *Śāktas,* but it is safe to say that he seems to anticipate certain *Śākta* practices. The text does indicate that Dattātreya's behavior should be seen as socially-inverted— the *munis should* be repulsed by it and *should* abandon Dattātreya after witnessing his behavior.

As this narrative continues, the reader learns that the Gods have been expelled from their heavenly abode yet again and this time by the Dānavas (*asuras*). A terrible battle ensues led by Jambha on the side of the Daityas

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[116] Monier-Williams, s.v. *cāṇḍāla*.

(*asuras*) and Śiva on the side of the Gods. They Gods are defeated and in their

desperation they flee to the sage Bṛihaspati[117] who advises them to seek a boon

from Dattātreya, someone who has obtained lordly powers through yoga

(*yogeśvara*) and who is engaged in improper and degraded conduct

(*vikṛtācaraṇa*). When the Gods reach Dattātreya's abode they find the yogi in the

presence of his consort (*vanitā*), Lakṣmī (the Goddess and Viṣṇu's wife) and they

find him busy drinking liquor. The Gods then approach Dattātreya and bow down

at his feet. At first Dattātreya seems to be shocked and a bit amused by their

behavior. He asks why they would think to bow down to a drunk who spends his

time consorting with women, but the Gods insist that he is faultless (*anagha*) and

worthy of their respect. Furthermore, the Gods insist that Lakṣmī must not be

considered impure (*na duṣyati*) for she is the mother of the world, omniscient

(*sarvajña*), and resembles the sun by having rays that bless the *dvija* and the

cāṇḍāla equally.[118] As soon as the Gods acknowledge the importance and

power of Lakṣmī, Dattātreya agrees to aid them in their battle and tells them to

bring the demons forth so that they may be burned by the fire from his eyes.

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[117] In the *Vedas*, Bṛihaspati is the son of Aṅgiras who is the son of Brahmā. He is the Lord of speech and the teacher of the Gods as well as their advisor in battles against the *asuras*. Purāṇic Encyclopedia, s.v. Bṛihaspati.

[118] *MārkP* 13.54. *yathāṁśumālā sūryasya dvija cāṇḍalasaṁginī//54//.*

As the narrative comes to a close, it happens that the Dānavas and

Daityas are not destroyed by Dattātreya, but by Lakṣmī. The demons desire the

beautiful Lakṣmī and take her onto their heads, presumably with the intention to

steal her away. They act as if in entranced by her beauty.[119] At this point

Dattātreya explains to the Gods the "seven stations" of Lakṣmī and the fact that

at the station of the head she forsakes the man and leaves for another abode. In

a literal sense, the demons have let this woman "go to their heads" and she ruins

them. With the Gods defeated by Lakṣmī, this section of the narrative comes to

an end.

This story from the *MārkP* is complicated and interesting in a number of

ways. First, it makes use of a familiar frame, which is the displacement of the

Gods, but makes the story more complex by the inclusion of the figures of

Dattātreya and Lakṣmī. That Dattātreya may anticipate the description *Śākta*

practitioner engaged in what are often referred to as "left-handed" practice (the

eating of meat, drinking alcohol and illicit sex) is possible and made even more

likely by his presence in the abode of the *cāṇḍāla*. When the Gods approach

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[119] This is not the first time that the *asuras* have been overcome by their desire for the
Goddess. In the *Amritamanthan* episode from the Ādi Parvan (18.32-47), Lakṣmī
emerges from the waters during the churning of the ocean and the *asuras* begin an
argument with the *devas* over who will possess *Lakṣmī* and the *amṛita* (nectar of
immortality). Viṣṇu, by the power of his *māyā* take the form of a beautiful woman and the
asuras, distracted by her beauty, hand over the *amrita*.

Dattātreya and he attempts to put them off, the fact that they avidly endorse

Lakṣmī as the pure mother of the world seems an explicit stamp of approval on

Dattātreya's practice. Such approval leads one to question the motive of the

author of this section of the narrative. At one level it seems a clear endorsement

of these arguably Śākta, but certainly unconventional and traditionally polluting

practices. Also, the text clearly states that Lakṣmī gives her grace to the *dvija*

and *cāṇḍāla* alike.   To come to a more complete understanding of this section of

the text a more in-depth discussion of the figure of Dattātreya is necessary.

Dattātreya's Historical Importance

Antonio Rigopoulos has completed a detailed study of the figure of

Dattātreya. Rigopoulos traces Dattātreya's development from the earliest

accounts of his birth, purāṇic accounts of him as a yogin and an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu,

and finally into a God in his own right.[120] In the early accounts of Dattātreya's

parents in the *Vedas*, and in some accounts from the *Mahābhārata*, it is Atri who

is described as having restored the sun after the demon of eclipses, Svarbhānu,

had covered the sun with darkness.[121] Rigopoulos cites multiple variations of this

story from the *Vedas* and the *Brahmā* and *Liṅga Purāṇas* and in each case,

though by somewhat different means, Atri is able to restore the sun to its rightful

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[120] Rigopoulos, 7.

[121] Rigolpoulos, 19.

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place in the sky even at one point becoming the sun himself. [122] This type of

action, according to Rigopoulos is characteristic of Ṛṣis in purāṇas: they often

appear as "savior-figures."[123] In the *MārkP*, the textual matrix produces a

different version of the story in which, as was explained above, it was Atri's wife

who, by the intense power of her own chastity and virtue (*satyabala*), restored

the sun to the sky. And it is from this feat that she receives the boon that results

in her three sons. It seems an unlikely coincidence that the figure of power

associated with this version of the story is female (Anasūyā) and that the

following narrative concerning her son prominently and importantly includes the

glorification of a female and her power. This section of the purāṇa has included

two important instances of the glorification of females as sources of power that

are able to solve problems that the Gods are unable to solve.

Rigopoulos cites the *MārkP* as the *locus classicus* of Dattātreya in all of

purāṇic literature. In the *MārkP,* Dattātreya is an incarnation of Viṣṇu and a

yogin influenced by practices that come to be associated with Śāktism, which

represents the most "assimilative phase in the deity's early development."[124]

Rigopoulos goes on to explain that in the centuries following his appearance in

the purāṇas, a variety of religious communities, particularly in the Marāṭhī

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[122] Mahabharata 1.114.39-42.

[123] Rigopoulos, 3.

[124] Rigopoulos, 27.

speaking regions of India, worship Dattātreya as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, a powerful

yogin, and a wise guru.[125] Because he is regarded by such a variety of

communities that focus on different aspects of his being, Rigopoulos cautions

that a clear knowledge of this figure's *svabhāva* (essential personality) is difficult

to ascertain, if not impossible.[126] So, as the worship of Dattātreya develops, he

becomes an important figure who is appropriated by different communities.

Therefore, Dattātreya is not always associated with *Śākta* practices or with the

Goddess in every literary account; however, he is portrayed in this way in the

MārkP, which as was noted above, is a text of central importance for his

development.

In further support of this understanding of Dattātreya as associated with

some kinds of left-handed practices found in certain *Śākta* or *Tantra* circles are

certain *Tantras* [127]ascribed to Dattātreya. In his study of *Śākta* and *Tantric*

literature, Teun Goudriaan mentions the *Gandharvatantra*, revealed by

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[125] Dattātreya is an important figure in the *Mahānubhāva* texts (13th c.), and the Vārkarī
Marāṭhī Sant tradition, which demonstrates his importance in the Marāṭhī speaking areas
of India. He has also been a popular figure in the Śaiva ascetic orders of the Nāthas.
Dattātreya also has some importance for Jainism and at Mt. Abu (sacred Jain center)
there are sacred places reserved for Dattātreya *pūjā* and a shrine dedicated to his
mother, Anasūyā. See Rigopoulos Chaps. 4-6.
[126] Rigopoulos, 29. Because certain communities may focus on Dattātreya as a *yogin*,
while others emphasize his importance as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, etc.
[127] Tantric ritual texts (*Tantras*) provide instructions for ritual practice (*sādhana*).

Dattātreya to Viśvāmitra, which contains sections on Tantric *pūjā.*[128] Goudriaan

also mentions a *Dattātreyatantra* of about 700 *ślokas* on *Ṣaṭkarman* rites.[129] In

another Tantric text (also classified as an important Śrīvidyā*[130]* text), the

Tripurārahasya text of 12,000 *ślokas* in which the figures, Sumedha (narrator and

student of Paraśurāma, who attributes his enlightenment to Dattātreya), and

Nārada engage in a dialogue concerning the mythology of Tripurā and the

underlying philosophy behind her worship.[131] Worthy of note in this text is the

Māhātmyakhaṇḍa, which details the exploits of the Goddess and her slaying of

various demons including a buffalo demon.[132] The association of these Tantric

texts with Dattātreya, as having been written by him or his disciples, is one more

indication of his place of importance within certain strands of the textual tradition

of the *Tantras*. Taking into account the description of Dattātreya in the *MārkP*

and his identification of Lakṣmī as the origin of the world, it does not seem

surprising that he would be an important figure in later texts glorifying the

Goddess.

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[128] Goudriaan, 73.

[129] These rites are instructions on the "six acts of magic" that are discussed in certain texts. Goudriaan, 117.

[130] In South India, especially in the state of Tamil Nadu, the Śrīvidyā School of Śākta Tantrism is devoted to the benevolent form of Tripurā (also known as Lālitā).

[131] Tripurā is an important Tantric form of the Goddess Lakṣmī and is worshiped in this form in Kashmir and other parts of Southern India.

[132] Goudriaan, 166-167.

The Lakṣmī Section

In the third narrative from Section II of the *MārkP* in which there are pronounced similarities with the *DM,* the Goddess is shown as a source of energy and efficacy for those devotees who worship her in earnest.

This narrative begins (Chap. 30-33) as the hero Kuvalayāśva is in pursuit of Pātālaketu ("He who carries the standard of Hell"), a demon who has been terrorizing the sages of his kingdom. While riding in the forest, Kuvalayāśva falls into a deep chasm in the earth and, when he regains his composure, he sees that he is in front of a vast underground city. As his eyes begin to focus in the dim light, he sees a beautiful woman. This woman, Madālasā, was kidnapped by Pātālaketu, who had taken her to the underground city to hide her. Madālasā is accompanied by a maidservant named Kuṇḍala. Kuṇḍala informs Kuvalayāśva that she wishes to retire to the forest to practice austerities, but will not be able to do this until she is sure that her friend, Madālasā, is married to a noble man. Kuvalayāśva is happy to oblige, and after Kuṇḍala performs the marriage ceremony for the two of them he takes his bride back home to his family. The couple lives happily until a day comes, when the brother of Pātālaketu, Talāketu ("He who carries the standard of Hell"), exacts his revenge. Posing as a *muni* in the forest, Talāketu sees Kuvalayāśva riding and asks him to stand guard at the hermitage while he leaves to perform some sacrifice. Kuvalayāśva agrees and

remains at the dwelling. Meanwhile, Talāketu proceeds to the palace and informs

the king, queen, and Madālasā that Kuvalayāśva has perished in the forest.

Talāketu shows the family a ring that he managed to steal from Kuvalayāśva.

This ring was very dear to Kuvalayāśva, and, seeing that Talāketu has it, they

are convinced that Kuvalayāśva is dead. The family is grief-stricken and

Madālasā, unable to bear the thought of life without her husband, falls dead.

When Kuvalayāśva finally returns home, his family and the entire kingdom is

filled with joy at the realization that he is not dead, but this reunion is bittersweet

when he realizes that his wife died as a result of Talāketu's subterfuge.

Kuvalayāśva, out of respect and admiration for his deceased wife,

promises to live a life of celibacy and refuses to remarry. In the meantime, two

Nāga princes who are his best friends relate his tragic story to their father, the

Nāga king Aśvatara. Aśvatara is very disheartened to hear that Kuvalayāśva,

who has been so kind to his sons, has met with such a tragedy. Aśvatara then

decides that he will do all he can to restore Madālasā to life. In order to

accomplish this goal, the Nāga king travels to a place of pilgrimage in the

Himālayas called Plakshāvataraṇa (the source of the Sarasvatī river) to propitiate

the Goddess Sarasvatī. There in the mountains he practices rigorous austerities,

and performs his ablutions morning, afternoon, and evening. He praises the

Goddess with a *stotra*, the focus of which is her embodiment as sound and

speech. The entire universe and all things are said to be found in the syllables

and vowels that are the Goddess herself. Aśvatara requests that the Goddess

make him and his brother, Kambala, conversant with sound. Aśvatara is

successful, the Goddess responds to his praises and bestows upon him and his

brother Kambala the power of sound. With this power, the two brothers are able

to awaken (or get the attention of) Śiva who dwells in the mountains.

When the Nāgas have the attention of the God, they pose to him their

formal request. They ask that Madālasā be restored to life and that she appear

just as she did before her death. Śiva agrees to grant them their request and

instructs them to perform the *śrāddha* ritual, which is a ritual that is performed for

a dead family member. When the ritual is completed, Śiva instructs them to eat

the middle *piṇḍa* (a ball of rice and meal that is offered during the ritual). If these

tasks are completed, Śiva tells them, Madālasā will rise up from Aśvatara's hood.

The Nāgas complete the rituals, restore Madālasā to life, and return her to the

overjoyed Kuvalayāśva.

The Sarasvatī Stotra

To understand better the role that Sarasvatī plays in this narrative it will

be useful to examine the Sarasvatī *stotra* in closer detail. In this *stotra*, the Nāga

king praises various aspects of the Goddess Sarasvatī, with special attention

given to her embodiment in sound, specifically song and mantra. It is her gift of

sound that allows the Nāgas' to get the attention of Śiva and bring Madālasā

back to life.

As the *stotra* begins, the Nāga king announces that he about to worship

the great Goddess Sarasvatī Jagaddhātrī (worldnurse).[133] He then describes the

Goddess as "*brahmayoniṃ*," which is a *śleṣa,* a word or phrase that has two

levels of meaning. On one level, the formless Brahman is the source of all things;

therefore, she has Brahman as her source.[134] On another level, as Sarasvatī, the

form of speech and wisdom, she is actually the source of the *śabdabrahman*. In

the next verse, the *stotra* continues to praise the Goddess as the basic and

indestructible syllable that is the source of language (*akṣara*). In this way she is

contrasted with the rest of the world, which is perishable by nature.[135] The next

verse expands upon this metaphor by likening the energy of the *śabdabrahman*,

which is present in the Goddess, to the fire that lies concealed in wood. Precious

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[133] Monier-Williams, s.v. *jagaddhatrī.*

[134]*MārkP* 33.31-2. *jagaddhātrīm ahaṃ devīm ārirādhayi ṣuḥśubhām/stoṣye praṇamya śirasā brahmayoniṃ sarasvatīm//31//* (" I am about to begin worshipping the auspicious jagaddhātrīm whose source is Brahman (who is the source of Brahman). I will praise (celebrate with songs or hymns) Sarasvati with a bowed head.")

[135] *MārkP* 33.33. *tvam akṣaraṃ paraṃ devī yatra sarvaṃ pratiṣṭitam/akṣaram paramaṃ brahma jagac caitat kṣarātmakam//33//* ("O Goddess! You are the highest indestructible syllable, the place in which all things are grounded. Highest and indestructible is Brahma, and this world is perishable by nature.")

speech is held within her just as fire lies hidden in wood. In the same way as the

many atomic elements that make up all things are all made up of the one

substance earth, so all of the things of the universe consist of her nature.[136] In

the lines that follow these, there is a repeated emphasis on the fact that the

Goddess encompasses all things that are permanent and eternal; as well as, the

more transitory and impermanent things. All things, regardless of their nature,

come from her.

In the following verses, the focus shifts to emphasize the essential nature

of the Goddess as a trinity. What follows is a list of triads that are contained

within the Goddess. She is the three types of vowels[137] (*mātrātrayam*), the three

worlds (*triloka)*, three Gods (*trayo devā*), three Vedas, the three *varṇas*, the three

guṇas, and the three times (evening, midnight, and daybreak). After the list is

complete the author concludes "*etan mātrātrayaṃ devi tava rūpaṃ sarasvatī*"[138]

The Goddess, as the eternal *śabdabrahman,* is emphasized again when the

author explains that all of the different kinds of sacrifices: the seven

somasaṃstha sacrifices, *haviḥsaṃstha* sacrifices, and the seven *pākasaṃstha*

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[136] *MārkP* 33.34. *dāruṇy avasthito vahnir bhaumāś ca paramāṇavaḥ /tathā tvayi sthitaṃ brahma jagac cedam aśeṣataḥ//34//* ("Fire is contained within wood and the tiny atoms are made up of earth. In the same way, in you resides Brahman and the impermanent world, without any left out.")

[137] Long, short, and prolated

[138] *MārkP*, 33.38. ("O Goddess Sarasvatī! These measures of three are your form.")

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sacrifices are performed with the utterance of her name. With these lines, the author is identifying the figure of the Goddess with older categories such as *vyakta* (manifested) Brahman. In the following lines the author stresses that while the speaking of her "name" is the power at the heart of the sacrifice, her form is impossible to describe. She is without beginning and without end and within her all opposites, contradictions, and distinctions are dissolved. With this description, the author describes her origination from the highest, *avyakta* (formless) Brahman.

After the Nāga king has praised the Goddess, she grants him and his brother Kambala the power of song, or what could be interpreted as the power of knowing all possible *mantras*, or all possible combinations of sounds. It is then that the two Nāgas use their newly acquired powers to attract the attention of Śiva who resides on Mt. Kailasa.

A Possible Śrīvidyā Connection

This emphasis in this *stotra* fits within the thematic trends that have been previously examined within this work. These are: the emphasis on the Goddess as the power of speech, the emphasis on the Goddess as an essential unity that admits of no differences or distinctions, and the emphasis on the Goddess as ultimate reality. The presence of Śiva and his role in the narrative is something

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that is unique to this section. The following discussion of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism provides one possible way in which to explain the presence of Śiva and his significance to this narrative.

Śrīvidyā is a school that has been popular in South India (especially Tamil Nadu) and Kashmir since the sixth century.[139] It is generally classified as falling within the Śrīkula[140] category of Śākta Tantrism. Śrīvidyā is a highly developed tradition with its own important texts, theology, and ritual practices that are centered on the worship of the Goddess, known as Lalitā, Śrī, and Tripurasundarī (a phrase which signifies "the beauty of the three cities"), who is the active principle at the source of the entire universe. The Goddess is seen as one half of supreme reality, the other half is her consort Śiva, who is eternal and passive consciousness. In this school the Goddess is understood as a trinity, the three manifestations of which represent different aspects of her existence. These three manifestations have their clearest and most authoritative explanation in the work of the popular theologian, Bhāskararāya.[141] These manifestations are: physical

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[139] Douglas Renfrew Brooks, Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), preface.

[140] Śākta Tantrism is generally classified as having two fundamental categories. The Kālīkula tradition emphasizes the *ghora* and *raudra* (violent, fearsome) aspects of the Goddess, while Śrīkula emphasizes the *saumya* or *aghora* (not violent, peaceful) aspects of the Goddess.

[141] Brooks, 14.

(*sthūlā*), subtle (*sūkṣmā*), and supreme (*parā*). The *sthūlā* manifestation refers to the physical and later to the iconic representations of the Goddess. Although she is primarily a gentle and benign Goddess, she does take on terrible and violent manifestations; most notably in her victory over the demon Baṇḍa.[142] As a beautiful Goddess who is famous for her victories over demons and who is often portrayed seated on a lion, the similarities between her iconic representation and that of Dūrgā in the *DM* are strong.

Her second manifestation, the *sūkṣmā* (subtle aspect), is the Śrīvidyā-mantra. With this fifteen (according to some authorities sixteen) syllable mantra, a properly initiated devotee is able to access a tremendous amount of power that will, according to Kathleen Erndl, result in "the attainment of all desires, the conquering of all worlds, achievement of unity with Śiva, breaking through the illusion of Viṣṇu, and obtaining the supreme Brahman."[143] According to Douglas Renfrew Brooks, the power of the *mantra* lies in the fact that it is a potent stringing together of pure seed syllables (*bījākṣara*), thus the mantra is an expression of the ultimate reality and the linguistic form of the absolute Brahman.[144] Brooks explains the mantra in this way.

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[142] Erndl, 155.

[143] Erndl, 155.

[144] Brooks, 112.

The mantra's power stems from the combination of its inherent capacity

as an emanation of the Goddess with the acquisition of grace through

diligent self-effort. Since the mantra is a concentrated form of the divine

power it has the capacity to bring about events that defy all normal and

conventional modes of understanding.[145]

The final manifestation of the Goddess according to the Śrīvidyā School is

her *parā* aspect, which is represented by the *śrīcakra*. This *yantra* is a

geometrical representation of the Goddess in the form of five downward-facing

triangles (representative of Śakti) and four upward-facing triangles (Śiva). At the

center-most point of the forty-three triangles that are formed from the intersection

of Śakti and Śiva is a dot (*bindu*) that represents the union of the two. Brooks

describes the function of the *yantra* as occurring on three levels. The first level is

as a visual map of the powers that are at the center of creation; the second level

is a source of power for those practitioners who have been initiated and trained

to use it; the third level is as the presence (*sadbhava*) of the divine that is worthy

of worship and respect in itself.[146]

I have not found any clear evidence by means of primary or secondary

sources, which claims that the *Sarasvatī stotra* from the *MārkP* is a Śrīvidyā text

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[145] Brooks, 112.

[146] Brooks, 118.

and it is not my intention to make such a claim. In fact, there has been little to no

attention paid to the *stotra* in secondary scholarship at all. However, I do see in

the Śrīvidyā conceptions of the Goddess as a trinity and in the importance of her

manifestation in speech (specifically *mantra*), some similarities that may be

helpful in making sense of the *Sarasvatī stotra*. There is a strong resonance

between the presentation of the Goddess in the *Sarasvatī stotra* and that of the

Srīvidyā school; the depiction of the Goddess as a trinity, the power of her

speech, and the role of Śiva in restoring Madālasā to life.

<u>Conclusion</u>

This work has explored in detail one thematic link between two sections of the *MārkP*, but this topic is far from exhausted. This study has opened the door to a plethora of options for continued research. On an historical level, the question as to how the text of the *MārkP* developed as a purāṇa is still largely unknown. Pargiter's system of dividing and dating the sections of the *MārkP* has been a very important development in the study of this text, but it may be the case that Pargiter's conclusions could be reevaluated. It is possible that the publication of a Critical Edition would advance the understanding of the development of the text, but this remains speculative. In the absence of a Critical Edition, perhaps the best approach is the one I have adopted in this work; specifically, to read the text for connections that may offer clues as to how the narratives are related.

The logical and necessary next step in the study of this text is to examine the entire *MārkP* for further evidence of narrative and thematic continuity. The *MārkP* is a very extensive text, so it is very likely that subsequent readings will bring to light other important connections that need to be explored.

The relationship between the *MārkP* and the epic *Mahābhārata* is another subject that is important. That the authors of the *MārkP* were aware of and

concerned with the epic is evident in the first sections of the *MārkP*, which address directly certain issues from the epic. The *Mahābhārata* has also been an important text in the development of the Goddess tradition. A comparative study of the presentation of the Goddess in the *Mahābharata* and the *MārkP* has not yet been completed.

The possibilities for continued research are not confined solely to textual studies. Thinking about the *DM* in the *MārkP* is relevant in terms of it oral and liturgical history as well. The emphasis on speech as an essential aspect of Goddess devotion is clearly illustrated in the *DM* and Section II of the *MārkP*, where the Goddess is repeatedly praised as *vāc* and other units of sacred utterance. The emphasis on the proper recitation of the *DM* seems fitting if we consider each verse of the text is like a *mantra*. However, questions as to how the text came to be thought of and used in this way still remain.

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