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Tales of Endings and Beginnings: Cycles of Violence as a Leitmotif in the Narrative Structure of the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*

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Received: 31 January 2020; Accepted: 4 March 2020; Published: 10 March 2020

Abstract: The *asura's* demise at the hands of the goddess is a theme frequently revisited in Hindu myth. It is the chronicle of a death foretold. So too is the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*, a sixteenth century regional purāṇa from Kerala, that narrates the tale of fierce goddess Bhadrakāḷī and her predestined triumph over *asura* king Dārika. Violence is ubiquitous in this narrative, which was designed with one goal in mind: glorifying the ultimate act of defeating the *asura* enemy. In its course the story exhibits many kinds of violence: self-harm, cosmic warfare, murder, etc. This paper argues that (1) violence comes to serve as a structural aspect in the text. Reappearing consistently at key moments in the narrative, violence both frames and structures the goddess's tale. Yet, it is not only the violent act that dominates, it is its accompaniment by equal acts of regeneration that dictates the flow of the narrative, creating a pulsating course of endings and beginnings; (2) these cycles, that strategically occur throughout the narrative, come to serve as a Leitmotif referring to the cyclic tandem of destruction and regeneration that has dominated post-Vedic Hindu myth in many forms. The pulsating dynamic of death and revival thus becomes a specific narrative design that aims to embed the regional goddess within a grander framework of Time.

Keywords: Hinduism; goddess; regional purāṇa; Leitmotif; violence; Time; Dārikavadham; Kerala; South India

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1. Introduction

In one of his many articles and chapters on the goddess Kālī, Kinsley (1975) quotes John Woodroffe's translation of the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* (Avalon [1913] 1963) to describe the fierce goddess as follows:

> Because Thou devourest Kāla, Thou art Kālī, because Thou art the Origin of and devourest all things Thou art called the Ādya Kālī. Resuming after dissolution Thine own nature, dark and formless, ineffable and inconceivable Thou alone remainest as the One. Though having form; yet art Thou formless; though Thyself without beginning, multiform by the power of Māyā, Thou art the Beginning of all, Creatrix, Protectress and Destructress that Thou art. (*Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* IV 29–34, translation by (Avalon [1913] 1963, pp. 69–70) in Kinsley 1975, p. 111)

Although Kālī has innumerable forms in pan-Indic and regional traditions—bhakti, tantrism, etc.—this idea of an ambiguous force, both destructive and creative, is one that resurfaces persistently among those many forms (van Brussel and Pasty-Abdul Wahid 2018). Her connection to Time (Skt. *kāla*) and Illusion (Skt. *māyā*), as expressed in pan-Indic traditions, is especially interesting in this respect. In iconography and narrative traditions she is often depicted as the slayer of illusion, relieving the devotee of ignorance by death. (McDaniel 2012). Simultaneously, she is called the "Mistress of Time" (Kinsley 1975); the destructive devourer yet also originating matrix of all. By means of her name,

Kālī[1], she is furthermore known as the Black One, dark in her gruesome ways, born from the anger of Pārvatī[2] or from the poison in Śiva's throat,[3] depending on the narrative tradition. As the Black One, she is also connected to the dark transition zone between *yugas*, when one period ends and another begins. In quite a large number of tantric texts, as illustrated by the quotation above, Kālī reigns as a supreme deity. She embodies the terrible, liminal side of reality, confrontation with which offers the *sādhaka* the chance to attain salvation (McDaniel 2012). As such, she becomes "not only the symbol of death but the symbol of triumph over death" (Kinsley 1975, p. 201).

All of these interpretations and envisionings are infused with imagery of violence and birth, of beginning and ending: the end of illusion and the beginning of knowledge, the end of the devotee's life yet the beginning of liberation; the beginning and ending of everything we know as dictated by time; the darkness connected to the transition between an ending *yuga* and the beginning of a new one. Violence, followed by creation, becomes an integral part of the depiction of Kālī and is quite easily discernable in both iconography and myth. This paper, however, argues that cyclic notions of Time could also influence the goddess' depiction on a deeper, structural, level. Case in point for this argument will be the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* (Skt. "On the Greatness of Bhadrakāḷī[4]"), a regional purāṇa stemming from the broader area of present-day Kerala devoted to a local form of Kālī. Systematically recurring combinations of violence and regeneration in this narrative text not only depict the goddess as a fierce yet merciful slayer of *asura* enemies, the trans-narrative combination of these cycles forms a structure which frames the goddess as presiding over Time. Violence thus functions both as a structural marker and a constituent of narrative content.

2. The *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*: Context and Content

2.1. The Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya: Context

As Rohlman (2005) aptly portrays in her article on the legacy of H.H. Wilson, the field of purāṇa studies has been marked for many centuries by profound colonial prejudice. In recent times, however, biased views upon these texts as chaotic, inferior, and incoherent have been traded in for new routes, insights, and appreciation. Among these new aspects of the field slowly emerges the study of the so-called regional purāṇas. These texts, which try to bring together a pan-Indic tradition with a regional one, are interesting testimonies to the ever-unfurling dialectic between the orthodox, Brahmanical, and the local level of Hindu worship. Especially with respect to the Goddess[5], who has always made this distinction seem perhaps rather artificial, they are able to offer us insight into religious dynamics and especially the making of "tradition" and "authority" (Chakrabarti 2001; Taylor 2008).

In this article we focus on a sixteenth century regional purāṇa named "*Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*". Stemming from a regional tradition of Kālī worship in Kerala, this South Indian *māhātmya*[6] narrates the triumph of the goddess over *asura* king Dārika. It is part of the narrative tradition of the *Dārikavadham* ("The Killing of Dārika") that takes on many forms in the broader region of Kerala. There are intricate

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1 Derived from *kāla*, Sanskrit for 'black' (Monier-Williams).

2 This story may be found in the *Vāmanapurāṇa*: "In the *Vāmanapurāṇa*, the goddess Pārvatī is called Kālī by her husband Śiva because of her dark complexion, and Pārvatī is angry and does austerities to rid herself of this dark aspect. She becomes Gaurī, the golden one, while her darker aspect becomes the battle goddess Kauśikī, and later Kālī." (McDaniel 2012).

3 As described in the *Liṅgapurāṇa*.

4 In this article we make a distinction between the pan-Indian goddess Kālī and the regional Bhadrakāḷī. In Malayalam the name of the goddess is written as Bhadrakāḷi, with short –i and retroflex L. The *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*, as a text in between pan-Indian and regional traditions, combines both by taking on a long ī-ending, yet preserving the retroflex ḷ. It is a remarkable yet telling detail that attests to the specific mechanisms at work in a regional purāṇa.

5 In referring to the transcendent principle of Devī, we use "Goddess" capitalized. In referring to individual, anthropomorphic characters we will not capitalize.

6 Ludo Rocher in his famous volume *The Purāṇas* describes a *māhātmya* as follows: "Besides the mahāpurāṇas and upapurāṇas puranic literature also encompasses a large number of māhātmyas. The term māhātmya applies to those texts which are composed with the specific purpose of proclaiming the 'greatness' of a variety of things: a place, an auspicious time, a deity, a ritual activity such as *tīrthayātrā* (pilgrimage) or *dāna* (donation), etc." (Rocher 1986, pp. 70–71)

ritual theatrical performances, such as Muṭiyēttŭ, Teyyam, and Padayani, as well as ritual song recitals, such as Kaḷam Pāṭṭŭ or Tōṭṭam Pāṭṭŭ[7], and various forms of written storytelling, tantric texts, Sanskrit, and Malayalam poetry, etc., all of which are devoted to this story. The way the *Dārikavadham* has become embodied in such a myriad of narrative genres is a telltale sign regarding its historical importance.

In spite of the well-known problematics regarding written historical sources in South India, textual references to a Bhadrakāḷī cult in the region can be found quite early on. The first mention of a goddess battling an *asura* called Dārika (or Dāruka, the spelling varies) can be traced to the *Cilappatikāram*, a Tamil epic that most date to around the 5th century CE (Zvelebil 1974). The *Dārikavadham* tradition can thus be considered as originating quite early on in historical times. After that, the narrative of goddess and *asura* regularly resurfaces in various sources, only to gradually develop into a prolific regional tradition later on. Interestingly, this established time frame means that the cult of Bhadrakāḷī in Kerala has developed alongside the growing influence of Brahmanism in South India. Especially after the fall of the Gupta empire (6th century CE), a gradual but clear increase in Brahmanical influence becomes discernable in the region (Caldwell 2001). It is important to see the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* in light of this development, even though it may be dated to a much later period.

After all, it may be argued that the Śākta worship of fierce, militant goddesses in the Malabar region developed in parallel with a connubial system in which the local caste of Nampūtiri Brahmins played a central role. Rich Freeman sketches a clear image of a medieval Keralite society dominated by three major socio-economic groups that were intricately connected to one another through a complicated marital system called "*saṃbandham*" (Freeman 2016). In this symbiotic system of intercaste relations, there were three major players: on the one hand the royal and military Nāyars, together with the temple serving Ampalavāsis, on the other hand the Nampūtiri Brahmins. The Brahmin caste represented religious authority yet was also a major socio-economic player through the *Brahmādeya* system. Their representatives managed temples and officiated rites, and still do so to the present day. To protect their socio-economic power, a rule was observed which prescribed that only the eldest sons of these families could marry and produce a second generation of Nampūtiri offspring. The younger (male) siblings took part in a much more complicated connubial system with non-Brahmins:

> All the younger siblings had *sambandham* sexual liaisons with lower-caste women of clean, Śūdra grade (temple servants, royals, chiefs, and militia), whose matrilineally reckoned offspring were legitimate inheritors in their own castes, but had no claim against their Brahmān sires or their estates. The women of these matrilineal castes, the politically and socio-economically dominant castes of Kerala, could freely form multiple liaisons with any men of their own or higher castes and thus legitimately reproduce the social identity of their own castes through their matriline. These latter castes fell into the two larger caste-groupings generally known as Ampalavāsi, the temple servant castes, and the Nāyar, which included most royals, political dominants, and soldiery of the land. (Freeman 2016, pp. 146–47)

The system of *saṃbandham* thus resulted in a markedly heightened presence of (part-)Nampūtiri offspring both in temple management and in political and military circles. A symbiosis of military, socio-economic, and religious authority ensued. When reflected back upon the worship of goddesses, it becomes clear how influential this symbiosis was. Each party in the connubial system brought a tradition of mythology and praxis to the table. Historical sources tell us that the Nāyar royal and military castes had a tradition of worshipping fierce, militant goddesses (Caldwell 1999). Nampūtiris, by contrast, lent most of their power from a proclaimed uninterrupted lineage of Vedic knowledge and rite. Both parties could tap into large resources of symbolic capital which merged upon their connubial union. As far as the worship of Bhadrakāḷī goes, this resulted in a fierce and majestic goddess, reflecting the prowess of her royal devotees, yet embedded within Brahmanical authority with roots in the Vedic

7 See (Tarabout 1986; Pasty 2010) for detailed descriptions of these ritual performances in honor of goddess Bhadrakāḷī.

system. The *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* as a sixteenth century text may be seen as the culmination point of the dialectic process that joined these groups two together (van Brussel 2016). It is a Brahmanical representation of a goddess who is quite clearly at home in the world of violence and war, inhabited by her royal and military devotees.

2.2. The Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya: Content

With respect to content, precisely this historically developed balance between the Brahmanical and local thought-world is expressed with fervor in the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*. Being in no way unique to this text, it is a question of authority that frequently occupies regional purāṇas: how to make the regional orthodox and the orthodox regional (Chakrabarti 2001). This genre of text is often composed to consolidate the orthodox character of a certain deity or cult. Yet, it cannot afford to lose sight of the local community that is participating in the day-to-day worship of this precise deity or cult. This results in often multilayered and richly textured narratives, merging various religious traditions through a myriad of narrative strategies (van Brussel 2016).

The dialectic tension between these merging traditions most often finds its expression either in narrative content or form. The *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* abounds in examples of both. With respect to form, one could note the introduction of a chiastic structure or ring composition. Such a structural feature is completely absent in other expressions of the regional tradition. In the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*, however, the central *Dārikavadham* narrative becomes embedded within two levels of frame stories. The outer layer of the structure consists of a dialogue between sage Mārkaṇḍeya and a Brahmin named Śivaśarman. Their conversation leads into the second level of the narrative, where a king named Candrasena is described on a hunting trip in the Daṇḍaka forest. This king encounters sage Sutīkṣṇa, who in turn tells him about Bhadrakāḷī. Enter: the main narrative.

As a widely shared structural aspect among the otherwise quite divergent members of the purāṇic genre, the introduction of this chiastic structure in the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* adds little to the main narrative *an sich*. It does, however, make an active statement about how the text wishes to profile itself: as a formally perfected member of the purāṇic genre (Balkaran 2019). This connection to the purāṇic world is even further anchored into the text by its division into nine *adhyāyas*, each of which is ended with a colophon stating that the text is a part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇa*. The active framing as a purāṇa thus happens in a twofold manner: on a meta-level by framing the entire narrative within a ring composition, on a smaller level by presenting each *adhyāya* as a part of one of the most famous purāṇas of all time.

Apart from formal aspects, the ambiguous nature of a regional purāṇa is also expressed in narrative content. A prime example is the spatial dimension of the narrative. In the case of the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*, the second frame story opens with a king Candrasena from the city of Kāśmīra (sic). Far up in the northern mountain ranges, this city is not further described nor is the kingdom to which it should belong. The mention can therefore be considered as generic, of no further consequence to the story than the phrase "once upon a time far far away" would be in a Grimm fairytale. The second geographic mention one subsequently encounters is the Daṇḍaka forest. Mainly known as the forest where Rāma and his wife and brother spent most of their exile, this geographic location is brimming with narrative authority. The mention of it creates expectancy and possibility. It is a small wonder therefore that the frame story takes a rather exciting turn precisely in this powerful location: all of a sudden, a violent creature emerges from an anthill and starts to chase king Candrasena and his ministers. It is an even smaller wonder, however, that in this Daṇḍaka forest the king and his retinue find refuge in the *āśrama* of the famous sage Sutīkṣṇa, who is able to solve the problem.

Yet, where the frame story resides in mythic places of great renown, the main *Dārikavadham* narrative is almost immediately placed in a more common-place setting: Gokarṇa, a Śiva sanctum on the Carnatic west-coast. In the narrative, it is cast as the place where the future mother of Dārika undertakes *tapas* in order to beget a son, thus transforming this sacred site into the so-to-speak birthing ground of the rest of the narrative. Interestingly, it is also the place described as the northernmost

border of Kerala in the originating myths of the region, the so-called Paraśurāma narratives[8]. According to these stories, Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Paraśurāma threw an axe into the sea and through this action created new land: Kerala. This land was subsequently entrusted to the Brahmins of the region. Gokarṇa figures in these myths, recorded, for example, in the *Keraloḷpatti*[9], as the northernmost border of this God-given land, the sacred landmark signaling the end of Nampūtiri rule.

Taylor (2007) has argued that space is often an important aspect in the creation of authority. The engagement with settings known from the Rāmāyaṇa lets the text resonate with the powerful influence that the original epic exerts. These locations of pan-Indian renown allow the regional text to engage with a literary world much larger than the region where it circulates. It becomes part of a tradition. The almost immediate reference to Gokarṇa when one moves from the frame story into the main narrative represents an opposite movement. It places the narrative promptly within the regional sacred geography, more specifically, one laden with Brahmin authority.

While these examples of narrative strategy are rather straightforward and operate mainly on the surface of the text, form and content can also work together on a deeper level, for example, through the creation of a Leitmotif.

3. Leitmotif in the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*

Originating in the mid-nineteenth century, the concept of a *Leitmotif* became well-known specifically in relation to the work of Richard Wagner. It can be described as an associative device in which a certain character, place, object, or idea becomes connected with a specific musical theme. The repetition of this theme at key moments allows for music to comment on the main narrative, thereby adding an extra dimension of meaning to it. In his work on Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen*, Bribitzer-Stull (2015) identified three major aspects that define Leitmotifs—they are: 1. Bifurcated, 2. developmental in nature, and 3. they contribute to and function within a larger structure.

While the concept was coined specifically in connection to music, there are many indications that the device itself not only predates the nineteenth century but might also have its roots in a literary context.

> [t]he Homeric epithets and formulae, the refrains and burdens in folk poetry and prayer are direct ancestors of the *Leitmotiv. [. . .]* The quasi-ritualistic repetition of key-phrases in narrative goes back even further, beyond the origins of writing. (Hart, "Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake", Hart 1962, p. 164)

Despite the change in carrier, the analytical definition of Bribitzer-Stull (2015) therefore stands firm in a literary context too.

1. The Leitmotif is bifurcated: a conceptual merging takes place whereby a recurring narrative constituent becomes charged with a trans-narrative emotion or idea;
2. The Leitmotif is developmental: it takes on different nuances according to the context and in relation with past and future instances of its appearance in the narrative;
3. Leitmotifs contribute to and are part of a larger narrative structure, they constitute an associative, trans-narrative entity.

One important conclusion that can be drawn from these observations is the fact that a Leitmotif actively "complicates and interrupts" (O'Callaghan 2011, p. 173) the linear progression of the narrative. By connecting its various occurrences throughout the narrative, it succeeds in creating a sort of a-temporality.

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[8] For a short introduction to these texts, see Amma and Seshan (1980), and Menon (2011).
[9] Mytho-historical account of the origins of Kerala (or the wider Malayalam-speaking region).

> [T]he recurrence of a Leitmotif has an effect on the previous and future instances of its appearance and differentiates it from a straightforward motif. This effect goes beyond the simple act of repetition, and connects the reader to various moments in the text in a trans-linear fashion. [. . .] The literary Leitmotif is further differentiated from a basic motif by virtue of its evocation of simultaneity and its ability, similar to that of music, to draw on the realm of *nebeneinander*. (O'Callaghan 2011, p. 174)

The reader is thus transported back and forth in the narrative guided by the Leitmotif, a trajectory which opens up an a-temporal space in the reading memory, where trans-narrative meaning is created.

Applying this western literary theory to a sixteenth century Sanskrit text may not be self-evident, yet is potentially enlightening. While Sanskrit literary theory deals extensively with narrative structure and poetic adornment, the idea of a trans-narrative motif with the implications of a Leitmotif is not explicitly dealt with.[10] However, as the works of Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta demonstrate, the relationship between plot structure and trans-narrative aesthetic and ethic experience is the frequent topic of theoretical musing (Monius 2014). Furthermore, the creation of trans-narrative meaning through recurrent motifs in both oral and written sources has been uncovered by scholars such as Shulman (2014). In his article on thematic rhythm and deeper meaning in the *Raghuvaṃśa*, Shulman intricately shows how syntax, content, and vocabulary work together to create a pulsating narrative on cycles of kingship, at the same time reflecting an overarching theme of Time.

> The patterns I mean always have an observable integrity and consistency as grid, template, or map–especially when, as is usually the case, we are dealing with complex modular units with their subordinate parts. Such units tend to emerge in a certain rhythm, which we can almost always discern by looking closely. They may even have a process-oriented "structure", although this term may not do justice to their dynamic nature. (Shulman 2014, p. 48)

In particular, this last caution to pay heed to the dynamic nature of recurring motifs is what we hope to do justice to by using the term Leitmotif. As O'Callaghan argues above, the creation of a trans-narrative "realm of *nebeneinander*" (O'Callaghan 2011, p. 174) through the use of a Leitmotif is precisely the kind of space where dynamic meaning might be created. In the absence of a better term backed by Sanskrit literary theory, and for the sake of clarity, we will therefore resort to the theory of Leitmotifs in this article. This will allow us to elucidate the discernible pattern and structure in the text found in a comprehensive and befitting manner.

4. Violence and Regeneration in the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*

4.1. Violent Death in the Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya

Violence and violent acts are ubiquitous in the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*, in a way that is to be expected of a text inscribing itself into the tradition of the *Devīmāhātmya* and many other great purāṇic texts dealing with fierce goddesses. It is a collective brimming with violent encounters, battle scenery, and cosmic warfare. The narratives are diverse, so are the acts of violence performed, and yet all of them collectively advance towards the same goal: narrating the triumph of the Goddess over the *asura* antagonist. This chronicle of a death foretold is understood as the central message of the main narrative, something the title itself already indicates in this case: "*Dārikavadham*", the killing of Dārika. The core position of this violent death, which the whole narrative expectantly progresses toward, is something we might briefly muse upon before proceeding to the smaller individual cycles.

"Violent death is a rivet for religious imagination" (Kitts 2013, p. 358) stated Margo Kitts in her contribution to the Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence. Not only Hinduism but religious

[10] There is a short reference in (Houben 2009) chapter to Renou translating "sūtra" as Leitmotif, yet this would seem to be a rather literal translation of the term rather than an exploration into the world of comparative literary theory.

traditions across the globe incorporate violent death as a key image in their iconography and myth. After all, "[t]he fearsome spectacle of violent death encourages implicit respect for and obedience to supernatural authority" (Kitts 2013, p. 358). While violence is most definitively a relative concept, depending on temporal, cultural, and socio-political factors, it presents indeed a powerful and, in some instances, abhorrent image. Houben and van Kooij (1999) in their introduction to the volume *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, state that violent acts, and especially violent deaths, in the human experienced world are usually connected to evil. Often, therefore, the strategy of rationalization (Smith 1982) is then practiced (Van Kooij 1999).

In the case of the infamous demon-slaying Hindu warrior Goddess, such rationalization is provided in the form of liberation. Shulman (1980) and Doniger O'Flaherty (1980) have described how ardent opponents of the Goddess could actually be identified as her devotees thanks to their dedicated hatred and zealous actions. They practice so-called *dveṣabhakti*. The predictable deaths of these demonic opponents could be interpreted as acts of liberation at the hands of the goddess. The ignorant wrongdoer who, thanks to his spiteful devotion to the Goddess, receives a violent yet merciful ending to his evil existence, obtains a new existence of knowledge and correct conduct. To translate it to the phrasing we have been relying upon: the end of the Goddess's devoted enemy is transformed into a liberated new beginning, inspiring human devotees to undergo a vicarious transformation. The most well-known example of this type of Goddess devotee is perhaps Mahiṣa, whose insolence toward the Goddess led to the blessing of resting at her feet eternally (Van Kooij 1999).

One last aspect that should be discussed when it comes to violence in the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* is the idea of *Chaoskampf*. Referring to the creation of order out of the destruction of chaos, Kitts (2013) described it as one of the instances where violent death is considered as "right": "violent death is cosmically right [...] in mythic feats of supernatural strength that devastate chaos figures and refashion life on earth" (Kitts 2013, p. 354). Whereas in the strictest sense, this motif consists of the creative battle between god and sea monster, it has come to represent a much wider spectrum of cosmogony myths dealing with battles against chaos. Such narratives are, after all, prevalent in the mythology of most religious traditions. Kitts stated: "Nearly all world-religions have entertained eschatological visions in which waves of violence culminate in peace. A quest for cosmic order would seem ubiquitous in religious imagination" (Kitts 2013, p. 412). This same quest for order was identified by Douglas (1966), who has stated that evil is essentially "matter out of place", an instance where socially and culturally contrived notions of order have been crossed (Aho 2013, p. 201). Battling evil would thus directly result in restoring order. In the case of *Chaoskampf*, however, the focus is upon the role of violent death in creating order. The brutality of the act becomes secondary to its effect.

Such a motif seems easily transferrable to the *Dārikavadham* narrative. After all, Kālī is a goddess thoroughly at home in liminal spaces (Kinsley 1986). Either in local form by protecting from dangerous disease and evil spirits, or as a pan-Indian goddess dealing with death and bloodshed, she is one of the divine characters par excellence in Hindu religious traditions to deal with chaos. Kālī's connection to all things dangerous, evil, liminal, and disorderly makes her just as frightening as awe-inspiring to her devotees. As our analysis of the narrative will demonstrate hereafter, the existing order of the world quickly vanishes after Dārika's rise to power. The *asura* is the personification of chaos. His role is that of disruptive agent, transgressing all kinds of moral, religious, and societal codes. Eventually, his anticipated demise will be the creative matrix through which goddess Bhadrakāḷī restores order in the world. Violent death becomes creative death in *Chaoskampf*.

We may conclude that the harshness of violent death is often softened by its enshrinement in a smoothing, comprehensive framework; a strategy identified as rationalization by Houben and van Kooij (1999). Both the idea of liberation through death and *Chaoskampf* offer a way out, so to speak, for the Hindu warrior Goddess who brutally defeats her *asura* opponent. This is the first conclusion that we can derive from analyzing the outermost layer of narrative violence in the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*. However, if we dig a little deeper, it becomes clear that there is more than meets the eye at first glance:

beneath this overarching theme of *asura* death, different types of violence occur, defining the narrative in an unmistakable manner.

4.2. The Leitmotif of Violence and Regeneration

When perusing the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*[11], one is struck by the diversity and opulence of violent acts: grotesque demonic characters chase people to devour them, entire families are erased by the gods, messengers are tortured, gruesome battle scenery is described with much gusto, the horrific goddess is adorned with skulls while her terrible attendants dance on bloody battle ground with the entrails of their victims swaying around their necks. Upon a closer reading, a pattern emerges which connects this excessive violence with successive regeneration. In the following paragraphs, we will describe these cycles of violence and regeneration as they appear chronologically in the narrative. Thereafter, we will identify how they function as Leitmotifs structuring the narrative and creating trans-narrative meaning.

4.3. Cycle 1: The Frame Story

As mentioned, the frame story of the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* starts with the introduction of king Candrasena from Kāśmīra. After a full day of hunting tigers and lions in the Daṇḍaka forest, Candrasena decides to take a rest together with his followers. He sits down to a game of dice and ties his hunting mounts, two big elephants, to a tree nearby. The beasts get uneasy, however, and trample an ant-ill in their restlessness. Then, all of a sudden, a horrible creature emerges from the destroyed anthill, tall as a palm tree, grey like smoke, and laughing terribly. He devours both elephants in one go and then sets out to chase the king and his retinue. Luckily, the king and his company find refuge in the *āśrama* of Sutīkṣṇa, who manages to contain the demonic creature by praising it as a servant of Bhadrakāḷī. Thereupon, the king demands to hear the story of the origin of the honorable goddess ("*bhadrotpatti*"). Such a narration of the "birth story" ("Bhadra-utpatti" skt: "origin of the honorable one") of a deity is quite common in contemporary Hindu worship in Kerala. Both in Muṭiyēttŭ performances and Teyyam rituals such birth narratives are included under the form of *Pāṭṭŭ* (songs).

Although comedy and humor are elusive creatures, and their interpretation is very much dependent on time and place, one could argue that there is a certain light-footed playfulness perceptible in this whole fragment. The rather generic king-figure is described as running for fear of his life, devoid of royal dignity while being chased by a huge (note: "size of a palm-tree"), grey creature laughing like mad, all because his great mounts accidentally destroyed an anthill. Quite ironically, the hunter thus becomes the hunted; violence is used against the instigator of violence.

This first type of violence encountered in the narrative could thus be denoted as some sort of "comical violence". Just like the contemporary Tom and Jerry story lines, the grotesque violence occurring in them is used to demonstrate the ignorance and/or incompetence of the initiating character. In this case, the king is relieved from this ignorance by the telling of the *Dārikavadham* narrative. This is in line with the so-called *phala-śruti* (Skt. "fruits of hearing") of the text, a feature often included in the purāṇic genre, which states the ability of the text to provide certain boons to its audience: be that fortune, good health, . . . or in this case knowledge and insight (Taylor 2008).

Lastly, it is important to note the structure of this first fragment: an outing filled with killing leads to the creation of a terrible creature, who in turn is characterized by grotesque violence. This excessive violence leads to the telling of Bhadrakāḷī's "birth story". Violence and regeneration are thus linked for the first time in the narrative progress.

[11] My findings and translations of the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* are based on two Sanskrit versions of the text: manuscript T697 of the ORIML and the Visalakshy and Girija (1999–2000) edition (see bibliography).

4.4. Cycle 2: The Great War between Sura and Asura

After moving from the frame story into the main narrative, the reader/audience is again confronted with an abundance of violence: this time one is thrown in the midst of a cosmic war.[12] Good and evil are battling in the forms of *sura* and *asura*, a frequently recurring theme in Hindu mythology. The opening lines of the main narrative are as follows:

> A long time ago, when a great war arose between the gods and the *asuras*, the venerable Viṣṇu joined the army of the gods and smashed the skulls of all Dānavas with his discus. (BhM n.d., 1.24–25)[13]

The gods unleash their terrible powers and manage to eradicate the entire *asura* race, except for a few females hiding underground. Two among them, Dānavatī and Dārumatī, take it upon themselves to save the *asura* lineage and manage to propitiate Brahmā through rigorous tapas at Gokarṇa. As a result of their strict ascetic practices, Brahmā grants each of them a son, one of whom will turn out to be Dāruka, *asura* king and the goddess's capricious adversary. His birth is suitably announced by the most inauspicious omens, which shake the world and heavens.

> Frightful jackals with frenzied faces cried out in all directions,
> Winds gray with dust circled around their bodies,
> The clouds rained blood and big trees fell,
> The earth with its mountains, forests, and oceans shook,
> The three fires of the Vedic priests were blown out. (BhM n.d., 1.40–41)

After the opening cosmic war between gods and *asura*s, the world is thus once again subjected to utter chaos. Yet, both war and omens are actually nothing but a prelude to the actual objective of the narrative: the birth of *asura* king Dārika. The seeds of his birth lie in the battlefield drenched with the blood of *sura* and *asura*, a thought that recurs in the actual boon that he obtains later on in the story: to procreate whenever his blood mingles with the battlefield ground. As such, the second type of violence we encounter, cosmic warfare, introduces the second cycle of death and regeneration culminating in the creation of the *asura* king.

4.5. Cycle 3: Dārika's Sacrificial Self-Harm

While the youthful Dārika and his brother grow up, they are frequently reminded of the terrible injustice that befell their race. Hate grows in their hearts, as well as a desire for revenge. Eventually, the boys follow in the footsteps of their mothers and proceed to the sanctum in Gokarṇa. There, Dārika submits his body to extreme forms of penance.

> In the hot season, Dārika stood in the middle of the five fires;
> in the cold season, he stood immersed in water;
> in the rainy season, he stood exposed to the elements,
> with a vow to take only air as food.
> He hung from the branch of a tree with his head down,
> heated by the smoke rising up from a big fire,
> and at other times he assumed a difficult position
> touching the earth with only one foot.
> Yet, the venerable Brahmā
> did not appear. (BhM n.d., 44–46)

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[12] Juergensmeyer (2016): A "cosmic war" is an imagined battle between metaphysical forces—good and evil, right and wrong, order and chaos—that lies behind many cases of religion-related violence in the contemporary world.

[13] Unless indicated otherwise, all translations of the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* (BhM n.d.) are my own.

Eventually, Dārika loses his patience and angrily reaches out for his sword, willing to sacrifice his own head to attract the attention of the gods. He swings the sword at his throat and at the emergence of the first drop of blood, Brahmā appears at last.

> Dārika the *asura*, his eyes red with anger, fuming at Brahmā, seized his sword and spoke: "I will cut off my head and sacrifice that!". Yet when the sword touched his throat and the first drop of blood appeared and fell on the earth, Brahmā finally appeared. (BhM n.d., 47–48)

This bold move of self-sacrifice is not exceptional, especially in the context of South Indian Śākta traditions, as Van Kooij (1999) illustrates in his chapter on Chinnamastā iconography. The image of this goddess carrying her own severed head is part of a much larger assemblage of motifs relating to self-immolation. Hiltebeitel (1988) has described in detail how the tableaus of Māmallapuram depict a kneeling warrior offering his head to Durgā. He conducts the ultimate sacrifice for the violent patron goddess (Van Kooij 1999). The *Cilappatikāram*, an early medieval Tamil epic, includes a scene in which warriors offer their heads to the goddess. Furthermore, one of the key scenes in this narrative depicts Kaṇṇaki, the main heroine, mutilating herself to take revenge for the injustice done to her husband. She single-handedly rips off a breast, symbol for her sacred power as a chaste wife, and uses it to burn the city of Maturai (Parthasarathy 2004).

In each one of these examples, and many more that are to be found in literature from all over the Indian subcontinent, the body becomes "an agent of expression in the public space" (Wilson 2013, p. 242). It carries the mark of utter devotion, or becomes the canvas for violent revolt. Either way, these acts achieved through the body are of the performative kind. Juergensmeyer (2013) has dealt with the performative nature of certain types of violence, in specific suicide in contexts of terrorism. Following Bourdieu in that all statements are given credibility by their social context, Juergensmeyer has discussed "how the drama of violence can be a means of attracting attention and producing a symbolic vision of global or cosmic struggle" (Reader 2011, p. 315).

In several contemporary studies on public self-harm, such as the cases of self-immolation among Buddhist monks in Tibet (Terrone 2017) and Vietnam (King 2000), it is described too how these acts are connected to the creation of legitimacy. They attest to the sincerity of belief in the cause and how this belief legitimizes such sweeping measures.

> Impulses toward violence that might be directed toward those who oppose one's goals can instead be fruitfully focused on the resistant body, turning the resistant body into an agent of struggle. (Wilson 2013, p. 248)

Often, these beliefs are connected to ideas of cosmic war; a greater divine battle of order versus chaos, of good versus bad (Juergensmeyer 2016). As I have argued elsewhere (van Brussel 2016), the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*'s specific depiction of the *asura* and his developmental trajectory result in a very humane and recognizable character. The portrayal of his youth and his final decision to resort to self-immolation are part of an unusual character study which highlights his motivations and background. His is a battle against the eradication of his race by the arrogant gods, as part of an eternally evolving cosmic war between *sura* and *asura*. Dārika's tendency towards violence becomes more credible as revenge enters the picture; his body as an agent of struggle reflecting this feeling.

What makes the whole episode even more telling, however, is the final reaction of the gods to this self-sacrifice.

> Brahmā spoke: 'Oh great hero, whenever a drop of your blood falls from your throat onto the earth, a thousand *asura*s will be born in your image: excellent, of utter strength and heroism. Now tell me, what boon should I grant you besides this? (BhM n.d., 47–50)

Dārika thus obtains a boon from Brahmā, which allows him to procreate whenever his blood mingles with the earth. Sacrificial self-harm, stemming from what Doniger O'Flaherty (1980) has called "*dveṣabhakti*" (devotion out of hatred or anger), thus results in the most important plot-twist of the

story: birth through violence. The boon's specific connection of creation with bloodshed is not new either. Eliade (1960) has described how in some parts of India the dead bodies of warriors were either left behind on the battlefield or their ashes were strewn over it. According to Eliade, such acts could be interpreted as a symbolizing (re)fertilization of the earth. Many more examples of this connection are found all over the Indian subcontinent: classical Tamil poetry abounds in poetic parallels between agriculture and warfare, whereby the shedding of blood on the battlefield is compared to the sowing of a field, while the *Devīmāhātmya's* famous Raktabīja (lit.: "blood-seed" in Sanskrit) episode equally revolves around blood generating new demonic life (Coburn 1991).

In this third cycle, self-harm is the third type of violence that we encounter in the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*, this time serving within a sacrificial context. Interestingly, the weakening of the body through violence takes on an exactly opposite role, as it eventually becomes the source of (military) virility.

4.6. Cycle 4: Dārika's Triumphant Conquest

Apart from the boon to procreate through blood, Dārika also manages to obtain several other blessings: he receives Brahmā's staff, which provides him with military supremacy; he is protected by two tantric mantra goddesses; and he receives the promise that he is invincible to any man, sage, or god. When giving out this last boon, Brahmā reminds the *asura* king that he has failed to mention women, an argument that is dismissed as ludicrous by the arrogant *asura*.

> Brahmā said, "O hero, so be it! All this, whatever you desire, I will give you gladly because of your terrible penance. I ask you, though, lord of the Daityas, why do you make no stipulation for women? Have you forgotten that the boon is about invincibility in battle?"
>
> Dārika said, "What?! The suggestion of it alone is ridiculous, Brahmā! Will women slay me? Merely laying eyes upon me, they tremble like reed! The gods would laugh at such a stipulation should they hear of it. Even a lesser Dānava than I would not ask for such a boon!". (BhM n.d., 54–58)

This arrogant dismissal would ultimately result in his death, yet blissfully ignorant of his fate at this stage of the narrative, the *asura* king simply enjoys his newly obtained invincibility. He soon starts to terrorize world and heavens, humiliating the gods in a myriad of ways. Eventually, Indra and his companions have to flee and hide in mountain caves out of fear for the almighty *asura* army. In the meantime, Dārika sacks Indra's celestial palace and gardens, robbing the god of his garments, treasures, wishing trees, and more. He then goes on to torture the earth:

> The *asuras* destroyed sacrifices, brutally attacked virtuous women, burnt the homes of gods and Brahmins, and took away their riches and grain. With axes the Daityas cut down the heavenly trees. Ponds, pools, and wells with pure water were filled with big rocks, and fountains were reduced to nothing but rubble. They set a blazing fire to stables in which they had previously locked up herds of cows. It flared up on all sides, while the herds within, with bodies burned by the fire, cried out. As they stood watching, the *asura* hordes laughed and applauded. (BhM n.d., 2.16–18)

Dārika and his army subsequently proceed to enslave the heavenly *apsaras*es. Abducting them forcefully, they make them into servant girls. These refined heavenly creatures are henceforth compelled to massage the feet of the *asura*s, fan them with palm tree leaves, and feed them morsels of food. They also tend to royal spouse, Manodarī, washing and drying her clothes, sprinkling them with their sorrowful tears. They bathe, dress, anoint, and decorate her with sublime jewels, all the while being nothing but a laughing stock (Skt. *hāsyāspada*), and it does not end there:

> In the world of men, Dārika ruthlessly stole the wives of *śūdras*, *vaiśyas*, *brāhmaṇas* and kings without distinction. The beauties among them he made his own, while the rest he dismissed as female slaves. Equally fond of women and liquor, he loved to gamble and hunt too. He was

> prone to violence in word and deed, corrupt and deceitful, difficult to manage etc. In the grip of the seven vices, he defiled his own possessions with harsh violence. (BhM n.d., 2.30–33)

As the text itself accentuates at various occasions, the *asura* king has become increasingly defined by his propensity for extravagant and brutal violence. The excerpt quoted states that he is "prone to violence" (Skt. *daṇḍapāruṣya*) and "undertaking harsh violence" (Skt. *dāruṇārambha*). He respects no boundaries, obeys no societal mores. Eventually, this terrorizing of world and heavens leads the gods to desperation. Bearing in mind his one weakness, they decide to create six maidens and equip them with suitable weapons and armies. As such, Brāhmī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, and Indrāṇī are born from the *śakti* of the respective gods. Once again, scenes of violence directly lead to creation.

This fourth cycle mostly revolves around provocative violence. The arrogant display of power by Dārika is described in terms of grave violations: abducting and abusing virtuous women, dishonoring Brahmins, burning cows, robbing gods, defiling celestial gardens, and creatures, etc. The violence portrayed is brutal and intends to shock. Its clear goal, as presented from a purāṇic, orthodox Hindu point of view, is to disrupt existing order. As such, it can rightly be denominated as terrorizing or disruptive violence.

4.7. Cycle 5: Cosmic War against the Six Mothers

Only after the creation of the six mothers does opulent and epic warfare, as expected in a narrative about Goddess and *asura*, take over the narrative. The imagery is vividly descriptive. Dārika is described as dozing lazily in his luxurious inner chambers, "his mind dazed by his firm embrace of his wife's breasts" (BhM n.d., 3.43), when a messenger alerts him to the arrival of a large female army. The mothers have surrounded his fortress with their spectacular armies. Dust whirling up from under the thousands of marching feet eclipses the sun, and the surroundings are filled with the incessant pounding of war-drums.

Confronted with the arrival of the army of the six mothers, Dārika decides to send out one of his chief commanders, Mahākapāla. The latter, however, is not able to endure the force of the six mothers. Before long, they eradicate him and large parts of his army. With anger mounting rapidly inside him, Dārika resolves to send out his brother, Dānava, next. Yet, he too must succumb: Māheśvarī pierces the Dānava's chest with her trident. Roaring with anger, Dārika finally enters the battlefield himself. He assembles his great army and with his power over illusion (*māyā*) enters the fight with an overwhelming might. The battlefield becomes submerged in total chaos. As blood oozes from Dārika's wounds inflicted by the mothers, thousands of new warriors emerge. With innumerable new enemies to fight, the situation slowly becomes untenable. In the end, the mothers must recognize their defeat and, retreating to Mount Kailāsa, they appeal to lord Śiva for a solution to the unending terror of Dārika. Upon hearing their pleas, the god creates Bhadrakāḷī out of his third eye, while terror and disruption spread alongside.

> Śiva manifested himself in his form of destroyer in a body tall as Mount Kailāsa, laughing loudly. His third eye, that had incinerated Kama and the three cities, located on his forehead which was wide, prominent and black as smoke, grew unsightly with terrible dense fires, sparks and flames. And out of that fire suddenly Bhadrakāḷī manifested herself, deafening the universe with her loud, crude laughter. Her body, huge like great mount Añjana, resembled a storm cloud. Her faces and arms numbered thousands. She had a hundred thousand eyes, like unsightly beads gleaming cruelly. As she, Caṇḍikā, came down in all her terror, born from the fire of the eye on Śiva's forehead, Mount Kailāsa shook vehemently. Its mighty lions ran about abandoning their caves. The oceans were violent, sharks and sea monsters disturbed. The seven mountain ranges shook. The cardinal elephants, their ears filled with the terrible sound, shrieked and shook their heads. (BhM n.d., 5.1–6)

In this fifth cycle of violence and generation, the cosmic war that was in full motion at the very beginning of the main story is now continued. *Sura* and *asura*, in a never-ending balancing act, are battling for dominion over the world and heavens. This capricious conflict between order and chaos, ever present in Hindu literature, is a straightforward representation of the passing of Time: never-ending, fluctuating, unpredictable, ambiguous. After initial eradication, the *asura* clan has regenerated itself with the (rather involuntary) help of the gods. While the first part of the cosmic war spawned Dārika the *asura* king, the second part of it leads up to the creation of goddess Bhadrakāḷī. Parity and proportion are thus quite present in the narrative structure.

In this fifth cycle, the signs of decay in the character of the *asura* king become more and more visible too. His drowsy character, for example, unwilling to resort to action personally when the army of the mothers comes charging, costs him a commander and a brother. The theme of a sleepy, passive king, unable to keep focus on the welfare of his kingdom, is recurrent in Sanskrit literature (Shulman 2014; Hens 2020). It is usually a prelude to the undoing of both king and kingdom. This downfall is even anticipated by Dārika's war council. The king's ministers warn him of over-confidence and rashness in taking decisions now that he has conquered all:

> Ministers—Do not act with too great a haste, my great-minded king. An inconsiderate deed will surely lead to defeat. After all, Rāvana who went to fetch Sītā by force for himself too hastily, he, with friend and son, was then burned by the fire of Rāma's arrows. (BhM n.d., 4.34)

The turning point in the narrative is quite obvious. At the end of *adhyāya* four, Dārika's mounting arrogance leads even his own men to desperation. The beginning of *adhyāya* five, which describes the creation of the goddess, announces a change of tide.

4.8. Cycle 6: The Destruction of Dārika

Emerging fiercely out of the black smoke rising from Śiva's third eye, the goddess Bhadrakāḷī is now finally entering the narrative. Śiva suitably equips his daughter with special weaponry, an army of *bhūtas*, and a special demonic vehicle (*vāhana*) called Vetālī. Thereupon, Bhadrakāḷī and her retinue are taken to the battlefield on the back of bloodthirsty Vetālī, who longs for a war-feast to still her hunger. They are furthermore joined by the six mothers, who recognize the goddess as their seventh and foremost member. Backed by a huge army, Bhadrakāḷī calls out to Dārika, who is resting on a rooftop, and challenges him to war: the onset of a mighty battle.

> Then the battle of both armies, of Dānavas and *bhūtas*, took place. So violent that it caused hairs to stand erect, it was unequalled and utterly tumultuous. It filled every space between heaven and earth with rains of arrows and other missiles, and deafened the earth with loud and cruel laughter. The battlefield was soiled with blood that gushed out of slashed throats, while heads rolled on the ground being cut off by swords. Rushing and stammering streams of watery blood gushed down from fallen elephants that lay on the battlefield resembling tall mountains. These streams flowed forth in every direction, with torrents of missiles, while the hair of hundreds of fallen warriors floated in them like duckweed. The battle resembled a gathering of horrible *piśācas* and *piśitāśas*, feasting on brains, flesh and blood, with headless corpses dancing around and rows of horses, slashed to pieces, laying submerged into the reddish water of a river of arrows. (BhM n.d., 5.42–45)

After incredible turmoil and setbacks on both sides, Bhadrakāḷī eventually manages to eradicate large parts of Dārika's army. Understanding death to be imminent now, the *asura* king rides into battle one last time, his arrogance dissipated by now. He is met by the goddess, who launches a final attack so fierce that it frightens the *asura* king out of his wits. In total terror, he flees and manages to hide in a chasm. Bhadrakāḷī searches the surface of the earth mounted on her ferocious *vāhana*, yet somehow, she is unable to find the *asura* king. She then tries to lure him out of his hiding place by obscuring the sun with her great bush of thick, black hair. Believing it to be nightfall, the *asura* king emerges and is

immediately grasped by the goddess, who pierces him to the ground with her trident.[14] Blood streams from his side, but because it falls upon her great tongue that is stretched over the earth . . . it loses its generative power.

And then, when all would expect the goddess to finish this epic battle, she hesitates. Compassion comes over her as the *asura* king pleads for his life.

> Dāruka, sprinkled by streams of blood flowing from the side of his wounded side suddenly emitted a lament, his eyes wide and hands closed tightly, with a pitiable voice: "No, no, no, please don't kill me". After beholding him thus, the goddess was overcome by feelings such as compassion, and she rose a little, letting go of her anger. (BhM n.d., 8.19)

Immediately however, the gods and sages, who are watching the fight, admonish her for having such a foolish, soft heart. Bhadrakāḷī repents and scolds herself for dishonoring the request of her father. She rids herself of all doubt and proceeds to behead the enemy.

> After flinging the wicked *asura* Dāruka onto the earth, she, daughter of Śiva, cast the trident into his chest. Breaking it open like a wall of rocks, she caught the fresh, foaming blood that came oozing out of it in her skull-cup and drank it with much delight. She also tore out his heart like a lotus, as if she were the wife of a hunter pulling out a root. She roasted it in the fire of her third eye and consumed it at once. Around her neck, arms, wrists and loins she tied a garland of entrails, deep-red like *Bandhūka*-flowers, with drops of blood trickling down. Then she cut off his head with her sword, seized the enormous thing and rose up furiously, roaring over and over like a lion. (BhM n.d., 8.31–35)

Frenzied with the bloodshed of battle, Bhadrakāḷī heads to Mount Kailāsa to demonstrate Dārika's defeat to her father. In her untamable anger, however, she threatens to destroy the worlds and heavens. Śiva foresees the danger, and transforms Nandin and Gaṇeśa into crying babies, placing them on her path. When Bhadrakāḷī storms over and sees the two infants lying on the ground, her maternal instinct immediately takes over. She suckles them at her breasts, and with the milk, her anger flows away. Thus, the universe is saved, both from the terror of Dārika and from the anger of the ferocious goddess.

In this sixth and final cycle, we encounter the most intense expression of the cycles of beginning and ending as they have occurred at regular intervals throughout the narrative. The anticipated death of Dārika and the creation of two infants crying for a nurturing mother represent the end and beginning of life in its purest form. They are the archetypes of the cycles of violence and creation, and as such merit a little extra attention here. Quite conspicuous in this last part is the transformation of Bhadrakāḷī from violent war goddess to lactating maternal figure. The categorizing of Hindu goddesses into Tooth goddesses and Breast goddesses by Ramanujan (1986) may be slightly outdated, yet it does represent two poles that define the spectrum of divine female beings in the Hindu pantheon. In the case of Bhadrakāḷī, these are two paradoxical poles that she unites: the maternal figure on the one hand, breast feeding, nourishing, and protecting her devotees and, on the other hand, the ferocious figure, a violent warrior goddess that demolishes *asura* enemies; baring her breast versus baring her teeth. This duality is present not only in textual sources, yet also very clearly in the living experience of contemporary Malayali devotees.[15] Ritual performances such as Muṭiyēttŭ, for example, combine maternal and fierce aspects of the goddess, stressing the complementary duality of violence and recreation. The red coconuts representing female breasts that the male impersonator wears as part of the Bhadrakāḷī costume are just one of the many aspects expressing this duality. Fiercely female and distinctly blood-red, they are the prominent hallmarks of the goddess.

In a related manner, David Shulman, in his work *The Hungry God* (Shulman 1993), has dealt with the link between fierceness (*raudra*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) in the character of Śiva. He states that "the

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14 This episode in a different version of this text is described as well by Caldwell (2001).
15 See the ongoing work of (Pasty-Abdul Wahid 2016).

revelation of the former is always an enactment of the latter" (Shulman 1993, p. 33). At the beginning of this chapter, we briefly touched upon the idea of rationalization and the representation of the *asura*'s death as an attainment of liberation. Following Doniger O'Flaherty (1980) formulation of the idea of *dveṣabhakti*, the *asura* king who is plagued by arrogance, hatred, and envy attains salvation from his faults through his death at the hands of the merciful goddess. As such, he becomes an example for the less perfected devotee who may be plagued by similar vices. The compassionate and maternal yet fierce goddess is key to the devotee's transformation with her ability of violent liberation. According to Shulman, "the narrative deliberately structures itself around the interplay of contrasting semantic and emotive elements" (Shulman 1993, p. 34), in order to facilitate the "transformation in awareness that dynamic paradox can achieve" (Shulman 1993, p. 34). The brusqueness of Dārika's horrific death after the goddess's brief moment of compassion could be understood in this light. It intends to shock, through its display of the brutally violent yet endlessly merciful power of the goddess. The vicarious religious transformation of the faulty devotee who recognizes him or herself in the *asura*'s vices could thus be triggered, following Shulman's line of thought, by what Margaret Trawick has called "sequential contrast" (Shulman 1993, p. 46).

5. Conclusions: Kālī, Mistress of Time, and the Endless Narrative of Beginning and Ending

The narrative of the *Dārikavadham* as represented by the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* begins with death and ends with birth. From cosmic war to crying babies, its beginning is an end and its end a beginning. In between, many smaller cycles of ending and beginning take place: the narrative vivaciously moves along through circuits of death and birth. All grand events in the narrative course are marked by it; the presence of it structures the narrative, and endows it with an unmistakable pulse.

In his 2014 chapter "Waking Aja", David Shulman describes the pulsating rhythm that runs through Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*. In his elaborate and beautifully crafted argument, he dissects the poem from its smallest constituent in syntax to the progress of its meta-level narrative and comes to a remarkable understanding of the text's deeper structure. Shulman sees the careful workings of a thematic rhythm at work in the text, whereby passing sequels of kingship are described in terms of cycles of fullness and emptiness.

Although we have but barely scratched the surface of the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* in this article, and more detailed micro-textual research such as Shulman's might uncover so much more, it is possible to discern a similar notion of rhythm in this text. It might not be dealing with circuits of emptiness and fullness in courses of kingship, but, in a parallel manner, the text obtains notable structure by its recurring cycles of violence and generation. "What repeats demands attention" (Shulman 2014, p. 47), Shulman states in that same chapter. Indeed, these cycles of violence and regeneration claim attention with their unequivocally central space in the narrative. The described violent acts are playful, intriguing, brutal, recognizable, and horrifying. They are, moreover, diverse and multifaceted. Comical violence, self-harm, cosmic war, *Chaoskampf*, and (ritual) death are all emphatically performed by various characters throughout the narrative. Though often grotesque and dramatized, the violent acts exhibited are motivated and embedded within apprehensible and often nuanced context. Violence is unequivocally followed by regeneration and, last but not least, it appears invariably at turning points in the text.

Pinpointing these recurring motifs at intermittent intervals and at key moments in the text has led me to identify them as functioning Leitmotifs. These persistent cycles of violence and regeneration serve a higher function than mere actions in the course of narrative progress. They structure the narrative and interconnect strategic moments across on a meta-narrative level. Seeming but swirls on the surface of a monumental river, they are expressions of an encompassing turmoil in its deepest waters.

> Clearly, something much deeper is at work; if we listen well, we can detect a rhythm or pulsation that regularly recurs. Its thematic transposition may take the form I suggested—the repeated movement of emptying and filling, contracting and dilating, the seed or impulse of each such vector always lying ready within the other. But the rhythm itself is perhaps more important than any such translation. I think it is the pulse of time itself. (Shulman 2014, p. 62)

The image of a rhythmic movement of a narrative whereby the impulse of each cycle is already present within the other provides us with an excellent way to describe narrative structure in the Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya. In each instance of violence described by the text, an act of regeneration is already inherently present, emptying and filling, contracting and dilating as Shulman describes. Destruction followed by regeneration ad infinitum: it is the epitome of post-Vedic Hindu conceptions of Time. So, we are brought back to the beginning of this article now that we have come near the end.

> Because Thou devourest Kāla, Thou art Kālī, because Thou art the Origin of and devourest all things Thou art called the Ādya Kālī. Resuming after dissolution Thine own nature, dark and formless, ineffable and inconceivable Thou alone remainest as the One. Though having form; yet art Thou formless; though Thyself without beginning, multiform by the power of Māyā, Thou art the Beginning of all, Creatrix, Protectress and Destructress that Thou art. (*Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* IV 29–34, translation by Avalon [1913] 1963, pp. 69–70 in Kinsley 1975, p. 111)

In his translation of the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, Woodroffe (1963) captures the image of Kālī as she is frequently constructed in pan-Indian religious and philosophical (as opposed to local) traditions. She is associated with Time: a relentless, all-devouring principle that absorbs and produces, destroys and creates, ends and begins.

This link between ending and beginning, between death and (re)birth is probably as old as Indian narrative itself. The Vedic *Puruṣasūkta* ritual describes a primeval man being sacrificed and divided in pieces to create the four *varṇas* (Das 2013). Classical Tamil poetry, also known as *Caṅkam* poetry, draws frequent parallels between agricultural processes and war, connecting battle with harvest, bloodshed with sowing, blood with seed (Hart and Heifetz 1999). These are some of the earliest literary sources found on the Indian subcontinent and attest to the early conception of a dual theme that consistently resurfaces in Hindu thought. Eventually, it will find its most well-known and articulate expressions in the orthodox triumvirate of Śiva, Brahmā, and Viṣṇu: the destructive, restorative, and maintaining forces that keep on creating, preserving, and shattering the universe in an endless cycle of violence and (re)generation. They are represented as the three performers of Time. Yet, in Śākta traditions Kālī has come to embody much of the same thought in one divine persona.

At the very beginning of the paper, we discussed how the great Goddess Kālī is envisioned as the beginning and end of all; how this ambiguity has infused her iconography and myth in the diverse pan-Indian traditions which honor her. We also touched upon the profound and far-reaching intertextuality that defines regional purāṇas in their quest for authority and legitimization. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (2016), the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* is distinguished by an utterly fragile balancing act between the expectations of its regionally rooted audience of devotees and the intentional design of an orthodox Goddess by its Brahmanical authors. It could thus be argued that the specific narrative design of the Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya, being structured by cycles of violence and regeneration, is part of an active strategy to embed the regional goddess Bhadrakāḷī within authoritative, pan-Indian envisionings of the great Goddess Kālī. To profile Bhadrakāḷī as both central heroine of her regional narrative, and as presiding over cycles of Time is to create a Foucauldian "regime of Truth" (Taylor 2007) whereby two portrayals of the goddess are strategically brought together.

Such a connection is made on more than one level. On the surface, *adhyāya* six of the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya* proves to be quite valuable in this respect. This subchapter, which stands disconnected from narrative progress, is quite reminiscent of the *Devīmāhātmya* in its effort to synthesize various goddess traditions. In a little over seventy verses, it celebrates the goddess in a very formal and encompassing manner. Here, Bhadrakāḷī is literally described as the goddess "who terrifies and nourishes the universe, who is the cause of resurrection, destruction and continuance of the universe, as having form and being without it, as born and unborn at the same time, as providing shelter yet being without it herself, as with and without qualities, ruling power over Māyā'" (paraphrase of (BhM n.d., 6.6–16)). The connection to the previously cited fragment of the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* could not be more obvious.

Yet, in my opinion, the text's conscious engagement with the role of Kālī as Mistress of Time, ruling over all beginnings and endings, does not cease there. It goes much deeper than that. A delicate

structure is discernable to the attentive reader. By presenting the narrative of the regional goddess in cycles of beginning and ending, cycles which moreover appear invariably at strategic moments in the narrative, the author(s) are creating a dynamic Leitmotif structure.

As we have indicated in the paragraphs on Leitmotif workings, the strength of this specific narrative strategy is its ability to create trans-narrative meaning through a-temporality. A Leitmotif actively "complicates and interrupts" (O'Callaghan 2011, p. 173) the linear progression of a narrative. Its ability to function as a dynamic actor through and above the narrative course, irrespective of context and temporal progress, allows for it to do two things: (1) comment on the main narrative at its every occurrence and (2) create a "realm of *nebeneinander*" (O'Callaghan 2011, p. 174). The recurring cycles of ending and beginning eventually allow for much the same. Rather than a linear progression, these cycles complicate the advancement of the narrative, reminding the reader of the ubiquitous presence of the forces of death and birth, of violence and regeneration, which are presided over by the exact goddess to whom this text is devoted. In their diversity, they represent the pervasiveness of violence and regeneration in life. By recurring time and again, in a dynamic and rather unpredictable manner, these cycles infuse the reader with a sense of infinity and contingency, a feeling that transcends the understanding of the actual narrative's progress. They offer an alternate structure, diffusing the linear progression of the Dārikavadham narrative. Their structure adheres to the all-pervading and whimsical meanderings of Time. It intersects with the main narrative, yet at the same time reflects its unrestrained and unruly nature by doing so on its own terms.

All of the cycles we have described are different to one another in their type of violence, motivation, circumstances, and objectives. Yet, as Leitmotifs they become invisibly interconnected. As a whole, they represent the dynamic pulse of Time that runs through all parts of the Universe: a relentless, all-devouring principle that absorbs and produces, destroys and creates, ends and begins. As a whole, they work together discretely and minutely to embed the regional goddess into an all-pervading grand framework. They present a soft second voice that does not obscure the main lead of her regional narrative, yet which nevertheless infuses her story with the unmistakable pulse of Time.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: My gratitude goes out to my supervisor, Eva De Clercq, for her kind and thorough help with my translation of the *Bhadrakāḷīmāhātmya*, as well as to my husband Jeroen for his patient endurance of my academic pursuits.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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