

॥ श्रीः ॥

**Devi Māhātmyam**  
**Apr 2020 Discourse Series**  
**Part - 3**

**By**

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9qZuv0LcbE>

**Bhaskara Prakasha Ashram**

॥śrī sadgurucaraṇāravindābhyāṃ namaḥ ॥

॥ श्रीः ॥



śrī vimarśānandanātham satyāmbāsahitam gurum |

hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

śrī prakāśānandanātham vimarśāmbā sahitam gurum |

hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

śrī rāmānanda nātham rāmāmbā sahitam gurum |

hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

<b>Swāmigaḷ's Vardhanti</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Madhyama Caritram (Cont'd.)</b>	<b>5</b>
Fourth Chapter	5
<b>Uttara Caritram (also called Uttama Caritram)</b>	<b>10</b>
Fifth Chapter	10
Devi Sūktam (also called Aparājitā Stuti)	13
Sixth Chapter	19
Seventh Chapter	20
The Significance of Cāmuṇḍā and the Navākṣarī Mantra	21

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śrī gurubhyo namaḥ ||  
śrī māt্রে namaḥ ||

śiva-śakti samārambhām bhāsurānanda madhyamām |  
asmat śrī nātha paryantām vande guru paramparām ||

## Swāmigaḷ's Vardhanti

Dear Devotees,

Today I am very much pleased, because today (June 3rd, 2020) is Pradośam day. In our maṇḍali, [that is,] in our paramparā, one of the rarest things is: everyone conducts Śiva pūjā and Śiva-ārādhana, side by side with the worship of Devi. For us, [as we see in] “**śiva-śakti samārambhām**”, evoking the ārdha-nārīśvara svarūpam is a constant [practice]. When you worship Devi, Śiva will be there. Or [in the] worship of Śiva, Devi will be there. Now, this is the second time I am talking with you all on a Pradośam day. Another very important thing is that yesterday was our Gurunāthā Śrī Vimarśānanda Nāthendra Saraswati's birthday. He was born on June 2, 1902. And yesterday we did the pāda-pūja and you all joined along. We chanted the Lalitā Sahasranāma also, which is very dear to [our Guru's] heart. One day after attending a Mahā-yāgā, I asked him, “Why don't we perform this [yagnā] in our āśrama?” He replied, “What is the necessity?” I said, “All the other people seem to be conducting it.” [Looking back on this, I would say,] we always seem to jump from one tree to another like a monkey in search of fruit-- never quite settling down.

Gurunāthā replied, “You don't have to worship all the 33 crore devatā-s. By simply worshipping Lalitā Mahā-tripurasundarī, you will have all the benefits; and in addition, [worshipping the Divine Mother will ensure that you get] the satisfaction of worshipping all the devatā-s also. You tell me one thing which is not there in Lalitā Sahasranāma or Caṇḍī Pārāyaṇam, that you may find in other forms of worship?”

After that episode, I never asked Swāmigaḷ anything but just followed his instructions. Memories of Swāmigaḷ have been coming up for me over the last 2 days. Yesterday I mentioned you make a point [of noting one of those memories]. I am aware that you are all very busy people. In the course of your daily activities, I recognize that you are making some allowances [in time] here and there, so you can chant the Lalitā Sahasranāma and Devī Māhātmyam and other things as well. [While doing so, please have the text at hand].

Back in the day, we did not have gadgets like audio-tape recorder, video-tape recorder and all of the other things that we have in our present time. I would sit behind Swāmigaḷ, when he would start either a havan or pūjā or pārāyaṇa. Just before he would start, he would turn back and see (a) if I was properly seated, and (b) if I had a book in my hand. If the book was not in my hand, he would not start. So, one day I asked him, “Why do I need the book in my hand even though I know it by heart?” My Guru said, “At anytime [during a recitation] you may miss a line or misplace some words or even mis-pronounce words. And even though you may have done the pārāyaṇam a thousand times before, you do not need to miss a sentence today.” [The goal is to offer our best effort to Devi each time].

So [this was the point I made yesterday]. Please make sure to have the text in your hand when you do a pārāyaṇa. Or, make it a point to have a tape running also. These days, on the Bhaskara Prakasha Ashram website ([www.bhaskaraprakasha.org](http://www.bhaskaraprakasha.org)) we have uploaded a lot of audio, video and tapes for your benefit. It was because our Guru always made the point that, we should try to chant this pārāyaṇa without any mistakes. [In order to chant without mistakes], Guru's upāya was as follows: when you do the pārāyaṇa on any given day, you should think you are doing the pārāyaṇa for the first time. This way, you will feel

the same śraddhā, [dhāraṇa or] concentration [and āścaryam or wonder] every time you do this pārāyaṇa. When you do the pārāyaṇa regularly in this way, you will feel a great fulfillment, contentment and bliss. You will be able to see the Goddess in front of you and you will feel that She is also chanting along with you--this [unique] feeling of satisfaction will come along. [In order to attain this satisfaction,] you require initial patience, followed by faith and bhakti (love for the devatā): “[bhakti vinamra moortibhihi](#)”. You require all the afore-mentioned attributes. And finally, [Guru] said one more thing, when he was about 94 or 95 years of age: “Once you think you can perform in a perfect (flawless) manner, then that is the last day [of pārāyaṇam] for you. You do not need to perform [pūjā or pārāyaṇam] after that. You can put away all of your manuscripts and other book-aids you have used so far, and you can take up retirement.” I can never forget this sentence.

The real meaning of this statement is: every time you chant, you should make the same special effort, and you must engage in the same preparation. You should perhaps even hold a preview meeting to verify if things are in the proper place for the pūjā or not. Only then should you start whatever is planned [pūjā or pārāyaṇa or other ārādhanā for Devi]. I hope with Gurunāthā’s Grace, we all will get that kind of dedication.

Why do we start by chanting “[śrī gurubhyo namaḥ](#)”?  
So that He may guide us in all our endeavors such that we reach our goal.

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## Madhyama Caritram (Cont’d.)

### Fourth Chapter

Now, I will start with the end of Chapter 4. Like I mentioned before, what is the purpose of our chanting? Why do we chant the Caṇḍī? We should ask ourselves this, and state the purpose of our chanting very clearly [to Devi]. I have told you earlier in Chapter 4, that the Devas are ending [the Indrādi stuti of the Divine Mother] with their namaskārams. After that, they chant:

[śūlena pāhi nō devi, pāhi khaḍgena cāmbike |](#)  
[ghaṇṭāsvanena naḥ pāhi, cāpajyānis-svanena ca ||](#)  
(chapter 4 verse 24)

[prācyāṁ rakṣa, pratīcyāṁ ca, caṇḍike rakṣa dakṣiṇe |](#)  
[bhrāmaṇenātmaśūlasya, uttarasyāṁ tatheśvarī ||](#)  
(chapter 4 verse 25)

They are asking Devi to protect them at all times. This is very important.

If we want to do something--either something within your own daily routine, or to help others in some way, or to achieve a [specific goal]--whatever the action or your goal, you should be protected in every way, and by all means. This is very important. And you should specifically ask Devi what you desire. We need to ask. Stating our ask serves to clarify. If you think on this some more, you may feel: Devi is all-pervading, all-knowing; so, will She not know [my heart’s desire without my asking]? [Devi is indeed

all-knowing]. Even then, we should ask Her what we want. Finally the devās say,

**soumyāni yāni rūpāṇi, trailōkye vicaranti te |**  
**yāni cātyartha ghōrāṇi tai rakṣāsmāmsthā bhuvam ||**  
(chapter 4, verse 26)

This means: “It doesn’t matter in which form you are in, O Mother. When you are in your soundarya-svarūpam (beautiful form), may you protect us. When you are in a ghora-rūpa (terrifying form), may you protect us even then. All we ask you is just one thing: “**rakṣa sarvataha**”. Please protect us always. Keep difficulties far away from us. We are not aware of when difficulties will come our way. We realize we are in a difficult situation only after we are in a situation like that. But for a moment let us just see the karuṇa and the immense care of Ambā].

So [as the devās extolled her greatness], the Divine Mother too listened to her praises sweetly. [Here is a segue into an analogy:]

Let us say you are listening to a classical Carnatic concert: the singer is doing a fantastic job of elaborating the rāgā, singing the song and even elaborating on some of the verses with a beautiful improvisational “*niraval*” and *kalpanā-swaram*. [In this manner, here,] the devās are singing all of Ambā’s praises and She is listening to them so happily.

But then comes the point where one need to ask Ambā] what one wants--because [the Divine Mother knows] the sādḥaka also need a few things to be done, do you follow? [Since we intend to ask for something], it follows that it is not just enough to keep praising the person who has appeared in front of us--is this not so? [But before this happens, there are a few more things that are offered to Devi.]

Let us look at another [every day] scenario: let’s say you have a visitor; you welcome them home. You make them sit comfortably. You offer, “Can I get you something to drink or eat?” You bring them water or coffee. You then ask them what they like to eat? Tiffin or some snack? You will give them some options on what they would enjoy. “Is there anything else that you would like?” Wouldn’t we ask a person that has come to our home all of these questions to make them feel comfortable? Isn’t this the right way to do our duty towards a guest? This service is called upacāram (entreaties or courtesies).

When speaking about upacāram to a devatā, it is said there are 5 important upacāra-s. Gandham (sandalwood paste), puṣpam (flowers), dhūpam (incense), dīpam (lamp), and neivedhyam (special food offering).

In the context of the visitor to our home, if we don’t have any food or drink or other conveniences to offer the visitor, then we may ask what the visitor wants with folded hands at a minimum. A good visitor would understand the constraint in our circumstances all on their own and would probably say; “I am extremely happy with all your hospitality; I don’t need anything more, just please sit down here with me”.

The devās praised Ambā] beautifully for so long, and then they realized that they must offer courtesies and hospitality to her. After all, their desire was fulfilled; and now they thanked her. Then they said,

**evam stutā surairdivyaiḥ, kusumair nandanōdbhavaiḥ |**  
**arcitā jagatām dhātrī, tathā gandhānu lepanaiḥ ||**  
(chapter 4,verse 29)

They offered her the upacārams of puṣpam, gandham, dhūpam, dīpam with the stotram.

The minute the devās offer her the upacārams, the Divine Mother asks them:

“You all have offered all this with immense bhakti, and I am extremely pleased. Please ask me for any

boons.” When does the Divine Mother say this to the devās? It is after the devās extoll her greatness, and after they offer her namaskārams and prostrations with folded hands. Thus, [as a sādha seeking Devi’s Grace], you will have to perform the kriya, which here is praising and singing her praises. Then with folded hands do a śāṣṭāṅga namaskāram to her. If you are unable to do that, then at least do a namaskāram through your bhāvana--with hand folded and bowing your head down to her. And then, tell her: “O Mother, please accept this stotram of mine.” It is sufficient that you say this in your mind. Imagine that at that point, the Divine Mother will ask, “What do you need?” We need to have our desire/wish ready and at hand to for the Divine Mother at this point!

Right after the devās offer her upacāram, Devi says directly:

**vriyatām tridaśāḥ sarve, yadasmattō:'bhivāñchitam**  
(chapter 4, verse 32)

“Whatever you need, please ask for it!”, so says the Divine Mother at this juncture.

What this means is, Ambāl has everything that is needed with her, at hand. She can do anything for us. But we need to be able to succinctly and clearly ask her what we want. So, the devās said: “You have slayed Mahishasura for us and that is all we needed. We went hungry earlier and now we will get our havirbhāgams (“our share of offerings placed in oblations”) which will quench our hunger. We were without a place to stay; and we are now able to go to svarga-lokā and are able to live in our abodes. All of our enemies have been destroyed. However, since you asked us what boons we want, we will ask you for some.”

The devās then say: “Whenever we think of you, we want you to appear right then.”

**sañsmṛtā sañsmṛtā tvam nō, himsethāḥ paramāpadaḥ |**  
**yaśca martyaḥ stavairebhiḥ, tvām stōṣyat yamalānane**  
(chapter 4, verse 36)

The devās elaborate: “Whatever problem we may face, however serious or huge they may be, we would like you to destroy all of those for us. We are unable to fully articulate what our problems might be. Whatever is in store for us, whatever may impact us negatively--the minute we face the problem, we will think of you. You please remove the problems for us.”

At this juncture, Swāmigaḷ would elaborate on “**sañsmṛtā sañsmṛtā tvam**” and ask us to split this *padam* or phrase in this way: **sañsmṛtā** means to remember. **asañsmṛtā** means to not remember. So Swāmigaḷ would explain that this verse means: “[We beseech Her Grace] whether we think about her or we don’t think about her”. [Let us meditate on this.]

Don’t we say, “I don’t know if I will be able to say ‘Govinda’ when my life is about to come to an end. So, I am chanting the name ‘Govinda’ right now, O Krishna, so that [this sādha of chanting your name now] can be used in my favor whenever the end comes to me.” So the *padam* “**sañsmṛtā sañsmṛtā tvam**” is uttered in the same vein.

The idea is to tell Devi: “When difficulties happen in the future, I don’t know if I will have the time to think about you Mother. So I am prostrating right now in front of you and I am praying to you to destroy my difficulties then.” Thus, when you pray every day, please put forth the supplication to the Divine Mother in this way: “Ambā, please take this offering of mine that I offer to you today and please remember to take care of me when I am faced with difficulties. I don’t know what I will be facing tomorrow. But be sure to always protect me whether or not I think of you in the moment of great need.”

Remember, this is similar to depositing cash in your savings account today for being able to withdraw when you need the money. The notion of ‘accumulating punya through good deeds’ also works in this way.

So saying, the devās continue to address Ambā: “Oh Devi, we will ask you one more boon.”  
What is this boon?

At this juncture, I am going to explain the meaning of devatā or devā. In general, when we are speaking about mankind, [the following is true]: when someone helps a person, they are usually expecting that this favor would be returned to them at some point.

However, what distinguishes the devatās or devās from humanity is: even if the devās are confronted by their enemies, their first impulse is still to do good to them. It is said in *thamizh* (in the Tamil language): “*pagaivanukkum arulvāi nan nenje*”. It means: “Please give me a mind which will wish for good things even for my enemies.” This is something we should pray and beseech Ambā for. This is an important thing to ask.

Going back to the story, remember: this is a dialogue between the devās and Devi. Mankind is not present in this part of the story. In the episode of the Slaying of Mahiśāsura, there is no mankind involved. The devās struggled with miseries akin to human suffering. (The miseries are mentioned in Chapter 2.) Now the devās are praying to the Divine Mother for one more boon -- [this boon that they ask is] on behalf of all of mankind! They ask: “When mankind suffers and when they think of you, we request you to remove their sufferings, Oh Mother.”

**tasya vittarddhi vibhavair dhana-dārādi sampadām ||  
vṛddhaye'smat prasannā tvam bhavethāḥ-sarvadāmbike ||  
(chapter 4, verses 37-38)**

“Please give human beings wealth, knowledge, good family life, good children, happiness... and bless mankind to be content. Please give us this boon to help mankind, when they think of you (and even otherwise), especially when they are faced with misery and sadness. Please do not feel that mankind has not extolled your glory; instead, please note that we are asking you this boon on their behalf. Please give us this boon that you will help humanity.” [It is in this way that the devās pray for all of humanity.]

This is why when we are faced with difficulties--when we offer our pūjās and prayers to the Divine Mother--we get everything we pray for.

Why did the devatās have to pray on behalf of us? The inherited wealth we enjoy today [by definition] is possibly due to our grandfather or our father. Similar to the efforts of our forefathers, the devatās have prayed to the Divine Mother to grant the afore-mentioned boon to us (as an inheritance). Ambā smiles and says “**Tathāstu**” (“Let it be so!”)

If you see the last 2 ślokās in Chapter 4, you will be struck by their beauty. In the next 2 ślokās, the Ṛishi says what is going to happen in Chapter 5 in a very succinct summary.

Let us review: In Chapter 2, in order to slay Mahiśāsura, how did Ambā take a form? She takes powers from all of the devatās--recall that a large brilliant power is formed in the form of a huge flame. This huge flame takes the shape of Mother Durgā and that is the form Devi takes on, in order to slay Mahiśāsura.

In contrast, in the first chapter, [you may recall]: No one has seen Ambā in an anthropomorphic

(personified) form. In the Madhya Caritram (chapter 2), again, all of the Gods give their powers to form a huge flame and Ambal takes an anthropomorphic form and shape. [At the end of the 4th chapter, the Rishi gives a preview of the third story or Uttara Caritram:] In the Uttara Caritram, there would be 2 brave asurās called Śumbha and Niśumbha. Due to these 2 brave asurās, the devās will have trouble. [The Divine Mother] will emerge from the body of Gowri and will protect [the devās] and the 3 worlds. The last śloka in Chapter 4 goes like this:

**rakṣaṇāya ca lōkānām, devānām-upa kāriṇī |**  
**tacchṛṇuṣvamayākhyātām yathāvatkathayāmite || hrīm-ōm**  
(chapter 4, verse 42)

In this śloka, the Rishi tells the King Suratha and the Merchant Samādhi (who have been hearing the Rishi recount the Māhātmyam of Devī throughout):  
“Next I shall narrate this story [of Devi vanquishing Sumbha-Niśumbha] the way it happened.”

To come to think of it, why is there [this aforementioned] summary of what is to come right after Devi grants the devās their boons? [It is to show the sādhakās that Devi does in fact keep her word to the devās.]

Let us say that I have given you a promise of this kind: “Whenever you are facing difficulties, think of me, and I will remove all of your problems.” It is possible that you might have a doubt as to whether or not I will really keep my word to you. It is a very genuine and a common doubt, people have been given false promises innumerable times. The ‘promiser’ says one thing and they do another thing--they don’t keep their word. If you question them as to why they didn’t keep their word, they may even give excuses along this vein: “The day you asked me, I thought I could do it. But I neither have the motivation or the means to help you right now, [even though now is] when you may need the help.” [This is unfortunate but it does tend to happen].

But Ambā is not an entity that breaks her promise. She keeps her word always. She is always filled with compassion [towards her devotees]--this is indeed why she is called Ambā or the Divine \*Mother\*. Still, potentially, anyone could have a doubt as to whether or not She really helped the devās [at some other juncture when they needed the help]. So, in the future, in the place of a Mahiśāsura, two asura brothers Śumbha and Niśumbha are born. Due to these brave asura brothers, the devās faced hardships. Chapter 5 starts very beautifully. [Let us go to the story].

## Uttara Caritram (also called Uttama Caritram)

### Fifth Chapter

**purā śumbha niśumbhābhyām, asurābhyām śacī pateḥ |**  
**trailōkyam yajñabhāgāśca, hṛtā madabalaśrayāt ||**  
(chapter 5, verse 1)

Śumbha and Niśumbha were brothers who were extremely brave and filled with physical strength and valor. They possessed all the *aiśvaryam* (prosperity), *yauvanam* (youth), *dhairyam* (bravery), *vidyā*

(scholarship/knowledge)... and also immense pride at possessing all of the aforementioned blessings; namely, they had: *vidyāgarvam* (pride from possessing knowledge), pride from the fruits of their *tapas* (penance), pride attached to the good merits received from their *dāna-dharmam* (charity). In this way, they were filled with pride related to about eight attributes. They held themselves as the greatest in the three worlds. They were so egotistical that they assumed that there was no one to match them in their prowess anywhere.

Śumbha and Niśumbha were extremely intelligent. They did a SWOT-analysis of all of the asurās that had gone before them: they analyzed the boons those asurās had asked for and how those same asurās met with their ends eventually (they understood all the loopholes). From their analysis, they realized that [in all of the battles between the asurās and the devās,] a God or Goddess came to help the distressed party of devās. Thinking on Mahiśāsura’s destruction at the hands of Ambā, they reasoned amongst themselves that Ambā is not their enemy--and also that they were not planning to go to her at any point in time.

With this in mind, they decided on the boons they would ask for [as their penance came to a close]. They phrased their boons specifically in this way:

1. We shall not meet our end at the hands of a person born normally (i.e., no human being shall be the reason for our demise).
2. We shall not meet our end due to an Asura, Deva, Gandharva, Yakṣa or Nāga (i.e., no celestial being will be the reason for our demise).
3. [Since they must accede to some way of demise, they ask the following:] We can face our end at the hands of a young girl who is not born normally.
4. However, even if there were to be such a girl, there are special conditions that would need to be met before she can kill us (and, we will determine if the conditions have been properly met]. The conditions are as listed:
  - a. If we both do not enter the battle, the girl cannot come and destroy us.
  - b. This girl may not be facing off with us in order to support or help a third party: for instance, Devi killed Mahiśāsura in order to rescue the devās from great peril and hardship.

Who is the one who gives the brothers these boons? Lord Paramaśiva.

Śiva is easily pleased with *tapas* (penance) and therefore he happily nods and gives the brothers all the boons they seek.

Like I have said before, whenever you face difficulties in life, the thing to do is: Pray.

Recall that Brahma faced problems due to the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, and he immediately prayed to the Divine Mother: he appealed to Her in the “Rātrī Sūktam”. Similarly, when the devās faced problems due to the demon Mahiśāsura, they all prayed [they appealed to Lord Maheśvara and Lord Viśṇu]. After Mahiśāsura was slayed, the devās praise the Divine Mother in Chapter 4 with the glorious “Śakrādi Stuti”, which is also sometimes called the “Mahiśa-Mardini Sūktam” or “Mahiśāntakārī Sūktam”.

Likewise, similar to [Brahmā invoking the Goddess with] Rātrī Sūktam, the devās are praying to the Goddess at the beginning of Chapter 5 [with a hymn known as the] “Devi Sūktam”. They recall the fact that the Divine Mother had given them the boon that, whenever [they] face difficulties, and just think of [the Divine Mother], [She] will come to help [them]. So they decide to assemble together and pray to the Divine Mother. However, they do not know where Devi is present.

**punaśca gaurī dehātsā samudbhūtā yathābhavat |  
vadhāya duṣṭa daityānām, tathā śumbha-niśumbhayōḥ ||  
( chapter 4, verse 41)**

It is said at the end of Chapter 4 that, “Ambā will emerge forth from the body of Gowrī to come to the rescue of the devās.” That is what the [Rishi] says.

So where is this Gowrī present? Gowrī is present in Himālayā mountains with Śiva in Kailāsa. So, all of the devās decide that they will assemble at the base of the Himālaya mountain and will pray to Ambā. Let us offer our prostrations to her [as the devās do]:

**namō devyai, mahādevyai śivāyai satataṁ namaḥ  
(chapter 5, verse 9)**

Namaskārams, Namaskārams, Namaskārams.... Like how in the Śrī Rudram, we repeatedly offer [many salutations to the Lord with] ‘Namah’.

**Namah somāya ca rudrāya ca namastāmrāya cārunāya ca....  
(Śrī Rudram, anuvāka 8)**

Just keep doing the namaskārams [and offering your salutations to the Goddess] and then surely, Ambā will appear and bless you. The devās believed this wholeheartedly.

There is one more thing I want to tell you about namaskārams. Let us say we do pradakṣiṇam or circumambulation; or we offer namaskārams: in either case, please offer a minimum of 3. [Why is this so, and] how do we know this? Because the devās will tell us in Chapter 5 the significance of doing just this.

**namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namōnamaḥ**

Again, in a temple if you do a pradakṣiṇa or circumambulation, do it 3 times. If you are doing namaskārams to an elderly person, do the namaskārams 3 times. For starters, if you offer 3 namaskārams, even a hard-hearted person will melt. They will immediately become compassionate towards us and ask us what we want--for sure. The devās [offer repeated sets of three namaskārams with every verse of their beautiful hymn, and by doing this, they] show us [the right way to invoke the Grace of Devi]. [There is a deeper significance for the three-fold prostrations to Ambā as well. The three namaskārams (“namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai”) are counted as three separate verses in the Devi Māhātmyam - this is because the devās offer one namaskāram each to each of the three guṇā-s (sattva, rajas and tamas) aspects of Devi. The Vaikṛtika Rahasyam mentions twice that the Divine Mother’s supreme form contains the three guṇā-s within Herself].

The Devi Sūktam is full of namaskārams--just like the *namakam* in the Śrī Rudram [is full of namaskārams to Īśvarā].

In the Śrī Rudram, we encounter, “Om Namo Bhagavate Rudrāya”. [Right at the beginning of the hymn,] we start with a namaskāram to Lord Rudra.

Here in the Devi Māhātmyam too, we begin with a namaskāram to Devi: “Om Namas Caṇḍikāyai.” The fruits of chanting Devi Māhātmya are verily the fruits of offering our namaskārams to Devi. [We will speak again about this salutation to Caṇḍikā at the end].

So, the devatās sing such beautiful praises of Ambā [in the Devi Sūktam. This hymn is also known as the

“Aparājitā stuti” or “hymn to the Invincible Devi”.]

All of you too recite the hymn so well.

Note that the devās are unaware of where the Goddess is, or from which direction She may come forth. They also do not know what her form will be like. But, they do know the special attributes of Devi. They are aware of Her glory [or mähātmyam]. So, they begin to praise the Divine Mother as twenty-three special characteristics [or experiential phenomena]. Remember that we encountered “Viṣṇu-māyā”, “Yoga-nidrā”, as being among the various forms of “Mahāmāyā” in Chapter 1? Even Brahmā [in his “Brahmā Stuti” or “Rātrī Sūktam”] praises the Mother in this way:

**jñānināmapī cetāmsi, devī bhagavatī hi sā |**  
**balādākṛṣya mōhāya, mahāmāyā prayacchati ||**  
(chapter 1, verses 55-56)

It is her Prabhāvam [or immanence and pervasiveness] that the Ṛishi has been extolling, right from the first chapter onwards.

## Devi Sūktam (also called Aparājitā Stuti)

In the Devi Sūktam, it is Ambā’s *vikśepa-śakti* (or projecting power that sustains the universe as seen in various experiential phenomena) that the devās call out --and offer their complete prostrations (śāṣṭānga namaskārams) to. The devās offer their first namaskāram to Visnu-māyā [or the amazing unmanifest Śakti which results in the progression from the One Absolute to the many].

**yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, viṣṇu-māyeti śabdītā |**  
**namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namōnamaḥ ||**  
(chapter 5, verse 16)

Starting with Visnu-māyā, the devās [first] list each individual guṇa or special attribute [in which Her Manifest Grace resides] and [then they] do the namaskāram to Ambā as that special phenomenon. They list [all the most important experiential phenomena encountered by higher life forms]:

- [Oh Devi] You reside in all life forms in the rūpam or form of intelligence: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, buddhi rūpeṇa samsthitā** (verse 22).
- You reside in all life forms in the form of sleep: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, nidrā rūpeṇa samsthitā** (verse 25). You have to pay attention here. Can anyone work continuously for even a couple of days? Sleep is an essential thing that we all need. We don’t want to overdo [activity]! Rest/reset is an essential [phenomenon] for all living beings. [The Mother is this phenomenon of *nidrā*.]
- You reside in all life forms in the form of energy/strength: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, śakti rūpeṇa samsthitā** (verse 34).
- You reside in all life forms in the form of hunger: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, kṣudhā rūpeṇa samsthitā** (verse 28). We need to feel hungry. Any food eaten when you are hungry will not cause any diseases!
- You reside in all life forms in the form of shadow: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, cchāyā rūpeṇa samsthitā** (verse 31). We should be like a shade for others (protect them just like how Ambā acts as a shade and protects us all). [In addition, we see here that Ambā is both Light and Shadow--she is pervasive in seemingly opposite phenomena].

- You reside in all life forms in the form of desire: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, tr̥ṣṇā rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 37). So, the way that desire works is: in the case of certain things, as you enjoy those things more and more, you never feel like you've had enough! For example, you keep drinking water to quench your thirst; your tummy is full but you may still feel thirsty! [Desire too is like that]. So while a desire for things is important, [it is equally important to have restraint]--the Ṛishi also cautions us later: “Do not desire things that are not needed. There are many many men who have taken [the path of greed, gluttony or uncontrolled desire] and have gotten nowhere”. So the Ṛishi cautions us to only desire for the [appropriate] things in life.
- You reside in all life forms in the form of shyness/hesitation: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, lajjā rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 46). This attribute is actually Ātma Svarūpam (a manifestation of the Enlightened State of Brahman). *Lajja* is that guṇa of our heart which causes us to hesitate to engage in unethical acts. When we think of engaging in such acts, our heart should reject it automatically and outright.
- You reside in all life forms in the form of peace: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu śānti rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 49). Whatever activity we engage in, we should feel peace at the conclusion of that activity. If the mind keeps wandering [and can not be still], there is no sense of satisfaction/contentment.
- You reside in all life forms in the form of faith, firm belief or conviction: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, śraddhā rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 52). Whatever is stated in the Vedās as our responsibilities, we need to do engage in these duties with *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* is a beautiful Sanskrit word and I cannot think of an equivalent word in other languages. We pray to Ambā to give us that sense of firm conviction, resolve, faith and deep dedication when we engage in all our activities.
- You reside in all life forms in the form of brightness or lustre: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, kānti rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 55). We all want to have that *tejas* or lustre [in our appearance, our health, and our whole being].
- You reside in all life forms in the form of Lakṣmī or prosperity and auspiciousness: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu lakṣmī rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 58). We want Lakṣmī kaṭākṣam on us so we have all the things we need in our houses [for sustenance, and moreover for a prosperous life].
- You reside in all life forms in the form of growth: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, vṛtti rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 61). There is a saying Tamil: “*seyyum thozhile deivam*”. Or, “Your occupation is God”. [We want] all the work we do to result in growth [and positive change].
- You reside in all life forms in the form of memory: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, smṛti rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 64). All the memories of good deeds of ours; memory of past religious events where we did āraḍhanā (worship/prayer) for God; recollection of lessons taught by our elders; memory of assistance rendered to us in a timely way by others -- these are all memories that we should never forget. [Memory is also an instrument for survival. The Goddess is in the form of this important phenomenon].
- You reside in all life forms in the form of compassion: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, dayā rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 67). The very word “dayā” is synonymous with “Ambā” or “Mother”. We pray to the Divine Mother to bestow us with dayā, so we will radiate compassion.
- You reside in all life forms in the form of contentment: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, tuṣṭi rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 70). We desire contentment in all things--without the feeling of contentment, we can not carry on our activities [in a sustainable manner].
- You reside in all life forms in the form of Mother: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, mātr rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 73). Bhāskararāya Makhīn gives us three different meanings for the *padam* “mātr”: One is “Mother”. The second is “mātr gaṇa”s [the Divine Mother’s sentinels who are the Devi’s own amśās or aspects.] The third meaning offered is that the Goddess is verily all the “mātrikā akṣara”s or vowels and consonants (in the sanskrit alphabet) from *am* to *kṣam* [in sound form]. In all cases, [my namskārams to Devī; and may the Mother always protect us all].
- You reside in all life forms in the form of delusion or confusion: **yādevī sarva bhūteṣu, bhrānti rūpeṇa saṁsthītā** (verse 76). Sometimes, we feel deluded. That too is verily Ambā’s [Play].

[This *padam* also refers to the delusion of duality -- another aspect of the Veiling Grace or Tirodhāna Śakti].

indriyāṇām adhiṣṭhātrī bhūtānām cākhileṣu yā |  
bhūteṣu satatam tasyai vyāpti devyai namo namah || (verse 77)  
citirūpeṇa yā krutsnametad vyāpya sthitā jagat |  
namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah || (verses 78-80)

- The meaning of this above verse is: You are the form of our jñānendriyās and karmendriyās [i.e., You are the One who governs our organs of sensory perception, and all functional processes.] [You are the causal principle for everything]. You are this world. You pervade everything--i.e., You exist everywhere, and in everything.  
The above verses 77-80 clearly expound the doctrine of Advaita [and the nondual nature of Consciousness].

If you notice carefully, all that the devas have done so far is salute (offer namaskārams prostrations) to Devi, while recalling her various manifest and unmanifest forms. Remember [from the previous chapter] that I have also told you: [once you have offered the namaskārams] you have to ask Devi what you want. This is exactly what the devās do in verses 81 and 82 in Chapter 5. These are very beautiful verses:

In particular, the phrase “**tathā surendreṇa, dineṣu sevītā**” means: Our King Indra is offering his salutations to you every day, mainly so we don’t get into any [perilous situations].

The phrase “**yā sāmpratam cōddata daitya tāpitaiḥ**” means “situations caused by whomsoever [whichever daitya]”.

In verses 81 and 82, the devās pray: “Mother, whatever perilous situations we may encounter, may you shatter all those situations in an instant!” [**yā ca smṛtā tat kṣaṇameva hanti naḥ**]. The phrase “**sarvāpadō bhakti vinamra mūrtibhiḥ**” means: “We offer this stotram to you with vinaya (humility) and bhakti (devotion).” [Please protect us always].

That is the gist of it.

Ambā is never late when responding to her devotees’ prayer. In chapters 5,6, and 7 of the utara caritram, you will see how she acts so swiftly. Now that the devatās are done with chanting the ślokās and offering their namaskārams to Devi, Mother Pārvati appears and walks towards them [The Ṛishi says that the Divine Mother comes to bathe in the River Gaṅgā]. Divine Mother Pārvatī asks the devās, “For whom did you chant these stotrams?” Hearing this question, the devās are taken aback and do not know how to respond! It is almost as if they are shocked and too dumbfounded to encounter a Goddess out there matching the characteristics or gunās that the devās had just described in their hymn!

Just then, a whitish [auspicious śiva form] emerges out of the body of Pārvati: It is a lovely manifestation of Ambā in the form of a Young Girl--she is known as Kauśikī [so called, as she came forth from the bodily form or *kośā* of Pārvatī]. Kauśikī says to Pārvati: “The Devās appealed to me; [I am here] mainly so I may fight against the asurās Śumbha and Niśumbha.”

stōtram mamaitat kriyate, śumbha daitya nirā kṛtaiḥ |  
devaiḥ sametaiḥ samare, niśumbhena parā-jitaiḥ ||  
(chapter 5, verse 86)

You need to pay attention: never in that stotram [or the devī sūktam] do the devās so much as mention Śumbha/Niśumbha. All that the devās asked Devi for, was that She should remove their troubles and dangers in an instant. [No specific danger was mentioned]. So, you can always chant this stotram. Ambā

knows why you are chanting the stotram!

[In the first and second caritrans, the Divine Mother manifested herself in her *tamasic* and *rajasic* forms. In the utara caritram, She manifests herself as Kauśikī in her *sattvic* form. However, as soon as Kauśikī emerges from the body of Pārvaṭī, Pārvaṭī darkens (“**kṛṣṇābhūtsāpi pārvaṭī**”) and becomes the emaciated and fierce form of Kālī (“**kāliketi samākhyātā**”).]

**tasyām vinirgatāyām tu kṛṣṇābhūtsāpi pārvaṭī |**  
**kāliketi samākhyātā himācala krutāśrayā ||**  
(chapter 5, verse 88)

The Divine Mother’s all-pervasive dual nature of bright auspiciousness and dark terror become highlighted through Kauśikī and Kālikā both emerging from the kośā of Pārvaṭī. Recall that in the Devī Sūktam, we saw the description of the Mother as being both the form of Kānti (lustre or brightness) as well as the form of Chāyā (shadow or darkness).] Mother Kālī plays a major role in the course of events in this story.

[Kauśikī bids Kālikā good-bye for the time being]. The very next minute, we see Goddess Kauśikī wandering in the Himālayās. We also see a Lion here (--note that the Ṛishi does not mention the lion here but mentions it later in the sixth chapter).

Two Asurās, Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, who work in Śumbha’s administration, spot Kauśikī. Remember, Śumbha runs his kingdom with strict orders and regulations -- nothing happens in the world without him knowing or learning about it. Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa head off straight to King Sumbha and tell him: “Oh King, you have everything. But we saw this beautiful girl who is precious like a *diamond among women* (“**strī-ratnamaticārvaṅgī**”). It is our desire that you marry her--she who is wandering in the Himalayas now. [Marrying this girl] will add to your greatness.

Now you may ask, “Why did Caṇḍa/Muṇḍa not try to marry Kauśikī?” You see, in those days, all things--and all people in a kingdom-- in general belonged to the King. A desire to marry someone, without the knowledge or express permission of the king, can result in a punishment. Caṇḍa/Muṇḍa did not want to incur the wrath of their king, one who had a reputation for being ruthless and severe. Instead, they figured that the king may reward them for their reconnaissance, once they let him know about Kauśikī. So, they talk to Śumbha enough to create the impression in his mind that the king’s very reputation (of greatness) may be at stake if he does not marry Kauśikī.

Śumbha then calls on his minister Sugrīva and tells him to go to Kauśikī: he orders his minister to talk to the girl in a most nuanced way, and cajole her with offers of precious gifts, so as to convince her to come to Śumbha’s kingdom with Sugrīva. Sugrīva reaches the Himālayās and meets Kauśikī. He begins his monologue in superlative tones, and goes to lengths to explain the greatness of his king Śumbha. (Remember, when you are a messenger, you need to explain who you are, and whom you represent, etc.) Sugrīva goes on to describe Śumbha as equal to Lord Śiva in his valor and strength. Finally he puts forth the request, “Please accept our king’s wish to marry you. If you accept his hand, I can take you with utmost comfort and respect to our king”. Note that Sugriva does in fact also talk about Niśumbha to Kauśikī--and tells her, that she may choose to marry either one of them [or she may choose to marry both of them]!

Now, remember, Ambikā (Kauśikī) is just waiting for this cue! She tells Sugriva, “Uh oh! That’s too bad! I wish I had known about the beautiful and valorous Kings Śumbha and Niśumbha, and their greatness earlier!”

Ambikā (Kauśikī) continues: “I am a young girl. Just sometime back, I made a *pratigñā* or vow (without thinking about the consequences) that I will only marry someone who defeats me in war, and thus curtails my pride. Isn't it wrong to go back on a vow? I request you to pray tell your king(s) to take me after winning me in battle!” Sugrīva, worried about the safety of Kauśikī, warns her thus: “Lady, you don't know the greatness of our king Śumbha. Instead of accepting his hand in marriage and allowing me to take you to him with respect, do not get yourself into a state where you may end up being dragged by your hair”. While Sugrīva may have made this statement out of concern for Kauśikī, it is important to know if Sugrīva made the additional (violent) statement regarding having to “drag [the devi] by the hair” on his own volition, or based on specific inputs from his king or based on history. Let us say someone hurts another person. It is important to know if there was an intent to hurt or if the assault were unintended. Remember there is a difference between accidental injury and premeditated injury. If there is a clear intent to hurt, the punishment is harsher. In this instance, Devi infers that the threat put forth by Sugrīva has been motivated by his king's (historically) ruthless ways. You see Ambikā is in the form of MahāSarasvatī in this Caritram. Intelligence just bubbles forth and sparkles in every one of her words! [She is also the embodiment of compassion, and therefore does not retaliate against the messenger]. She tells Sugrīva:

“You please do not worry. Please just go back to your king and tell him as I told you. I am ready to face the consequences”. With this, we reach the end of the fifth chapter. Note her beautiful words:

**satvaṁ gaccha mayōktaṁ te, yadetat sarva māḍṛtaḥ |**  
**tadācakṣva asurendrāya, sa ca yuktaṁ karōtu tat ||**  
 (chapter 5, verse 129).

“Now go and tell your king what I have told you. Let him do as he desires. May things take their course based on what he does.”

Now you may have this doubt: Ambikā mentions that she has made the vow “to marry someone who can defeat her in battle” --and further admits to doing this “without thinking”. How is this possible? Usually, is it not human beings that do this sort of thing: Remember at times, when we realize, “Oh I did that. without any clear thinking”? How can the Divine Mother, who is *sarva-vyāpi* (omni-present); *adhipati* or repository of all vidyā (knowledge); *adhipati* of all manner of prosperity, possibly make mistakes like that?

To find the answer to this question, we have to go to the *Tiruviḷaiyāḍarpurāṇam* [the purāṇa of the divine Play or līlā of the Divine Parents, Pārvatī-Parameśvarā]. [The Divine Mother's avatāram as Mīnākṣī will provide the clarification to the doubt regarding her vow “to marry someone who can defeat her in battle” in the utara caritram of the Caṇḍī]:

In Madurai, Ambā is born as Mīnākṣī (*aṅgayarkkaṇṇi*) to the Pāṇḍya King Malayadhwaaja and his wife Kāncanamālā, who perform a yagñā seeking a son for succession. They are blessed instead with a daughter [who is already three years old], and has three breasts. The king is very worried to see this unusual phenomenon in his daughter. However, Lord Śiva Himself apparates and tells Malayadhwaaja that he should treat the daughter as a son; and that on the day Ambā meets her husband, and bows her head in *lajjā* or shyness, her third breast will disappear. This is the divine play through which her *bhartā* (husband) will be revealed. When the Princess grows up, the king crowns her as his successor; and she embarks on a *digvijayam* (a military campaign of victory), defeating kings. When she arrives in the Īsāna or North-easterly direction, she sees Lord Śiva--overcome by the very sight of him, she bows her head in *lajjā* --and the divine prophecy is realized. The Goddess then assumes her true form as Mīnākṣī. That is why the 10-day *utsavam* or festival for Goddess Mīnākṣī (in Madurai) includes two very special highlights: a *paṭṭābhishekam* (crowning ceremony) is conducted for Ambā on the eighth day of the *utsavam*; and the divine wedding of Mīnākṣī and her Sundarēśvara (Śiva) is conducted on the 10th day of

the festival. Ambā Mīnākṣī is the ruler of Madurai, and Madurai is actually historically called Mīnākṣī Paṭṭinam.

Recall that the words uttered by Ambā to the dūta Sugrīva are:

**yo mām jayati saṅgrāme yo me darpam vyapohati |  
yo me pratibalo loke sa me bhartā bhaviṣyati ||**  
(chapter 5, verse 120)

These words come true in Madurai, as part of the “Thiruvilaiyāḍal” (Sacred Sport or Līlā) of the Divine Parents. So remember, Ambikā will never do anything without proper thinking and decision. Her pratigñā (which She mentions to Sugrīva) is in fact true, but the pratigñā referred to Ambā being won over by Lord Parameśvarā during her reign as Mīnākṣī in Madurai and to her wedding to Sundareśvara (Lord Śiva). [In the uttara caritram, one of the conditions of the boons received by the asurā brothers was that both parties (in this case, young Ambikā and the asurās) must willingly enter into battle with one another. Ambā’s response to Sugrīva is to catalyze Śumbha’s instigation of a battle with her--without violating the conditions in the boons he and Niśumbha received from Lord Śiva.]

## Sixth Chapter

You can imagine how angry Śumbha must have been, upon hearing Ambikā’s answer (relayed to him by his messenger Sugrīva). He summons his commander-in-chief, Dhūmralocana and orders him, “Go to the Himālayās, and bring the girl back here! If she does not cooperate, drag her by the hair on her head! I hereby give you permission to kill anyone who comes in the way, be it a Yakṣa, Gandharva, or Deva!”

**tat paritrāṇadaḥ kaścīd yadi vōttiṣṭhate-aparaḥ |  
sa hantavyō-amarō vāpi, yakṣō gandharva eva vā ||**  
(chapter 6, verse 5.)

Remember, at this juncture, Śumbha still has not given his generals permission to kill Kauśikī herself. Now Ambā knows the real intent of Śumbha: [he intends to have her dragged by the hair if she fails to comply]. Our Dharma Śāstrās recommend capital punishment for anyone who forcefully drags a woman by her hair. This horrific act of *balātkāra* or violation is why asurās like Duḥśāsana, Kīcaka and Rāvaṇa had capital punishment meted out to them [Duḥśāsana and Kīcaka violated and humiliated Draupadī by dragging her by her hair, while Rāvaṇa kidnapped Sītā by *balātkāra* or violent force]. However great or meritorious one’s acts may be, however great the puṇya or merit one may have accumulated, dragging a woman by her hair and humiliating her in this violent way is a capital offense. Of course here, the violent offense has not been inflicted on Ambikā here (nor will Śumbha or his minions come close to inflicting the offense on her at any point); but Śumbha’s very intent to drag her by her hair is punishable by death--as Ambikā will demonstrate to us in no uncertain terms.

Now the story progresses in a most interesting way. Dhūmralocana comes with an army of 60,000 soldiers against Ambikā (Kauśikī). You must note that Ambikā is all by herself. All we know is that she is a very young girl, about ten years of age. Her only apparent lakṣaṇa or laurel is that of her great beauty or soundarya--she does not appear to even have bodyguards at her side, much less an army or other arsenal. As Dhūmralocana begins to charge towards her with his massive army, the Divine Mother Ambikā just utters the syllable: “Hum” -- and lo! Dhūmralocana is burnt to ashes!

Dhūmralocana’s army, although leader-less now, is nevertheless still advancing towards Ambikā. The Divine Mother stops the advancing army with her arrows--the arrows spring forth from her arms like rain.

Now, Ambikā does not want to fight against these boys! So She lets her Lion take charge. The lion falls on the army like a weapon wielded from all the directions and decimates the soldiers effortlessly. The army is unable to stand up to Ambikā's vāhanam: they are no match for the fierce lion, who shreds the soldiers to bits and consumes them. The soldiers who manage to escape with their lives go running back to Śumbha and recount the shocking events of the battle with Ambikā. Śumbha is surprised to hear that a young girl defeated Dūmralocana and his entire army--and begins to wonder if the army may have ended up going somewhere else and fought with someone other than the young girl!

## Seventh Chapter

He then summons Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa as they have seen Ambikā before and would know her. Śumbha instructs them: "Take as much of the army as you need. Get the girl! If she rebels and gives you a hard time, I give you the authorization to kill her! But before you resort to killing her, do try your best to bring her back alive." Śumbha tells his minions this as he is still intrigued by Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa's original description of Ambikā as a 'diamond among women' ("**stri-ratnamaticārvaṅgī**") and is thinking it may still be worthwhile to bring the girl to the palace alive.

Again, what were Śumbha's orders? He authorizes Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa to seize Ambikā by force.. [Earlier], he asked Dhūmralocana to seize Ambikā by her hair and drag her to his court. Just watch the events that are going to unfold: the story will ensue in a most unexpected manner. It will be the exact opposite of what Śumbha envisions.

On seeing Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa advance [with Śumbha-Niśumbha's fourfold army of elephants, charioteers, cavalry and infantry brandishing weapons], Ambikā becomes furious. [In wrath, her face turns black as ink, she scowls angrily and] knits her eyebrows in consternation. From her furrowed brows emerges the emaciated, dark form of Mother Kālī!

You all know about the form of Kālī: She is Dakṣiṇa-Kālī [Śyāmā] -- very very dark in complexion. She is so incredibly thin like a skeleton: "**śuṣka māmsātibhairavā**" (chapter 7, verse 7) means her abdomen is concave, stuck to the walls of her back.. giving her a most emaciated ghoulish appearance. She has a long throat and terrifying tongue. The verse "**ativistāra vadanā, jihvā lalana bhīṣaṇā**" refers to Kālī's gaping mouth and giant lolling tongue. She bears a terrifying countenance and wears an imposing garland of skulls. She has a noose and sword on one hand and a long, strange staff covered with a skull on the other hand. Just visualize Mother Kālī of Kolkata. If you can do that, you will be able to approximate Kālī's form here beautifully.

Kālī tells Ambikā (Kauśikī) that she will deal with the asurās Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa. She [fills the four quarters of the earth and sky with her terrifying roars, and] swiftly falls upon the great asurās. She decimates the army, and swiftly rids the earth of the hordes of asurās. [She flings the elephants and horses into her mouth, and grinds them furiously between her teeth. Caṇḍa engulfs the glowering Kālī with his massive deluge of arrows, while Muṇḍa hurls his discuses at her by the thousands--all their weapons vanish into Kālī's mouth where they are promptly ground down and consumed.] Kālī lets out a terrifying laugh in all her fury, and beheads Caṇḍa with her sword! She does this as punishment for Śumbha ordering Dhūmralocana to "seize Ambikā by her hair and drag her to him" and subsequently for instructing Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa to seize Ambikā by any force necessary.

Seeing Caṇḍa slain, Muṇḍa rushes at Mother Kālī, only to also be promptly beheaded by her. Kālī then presents the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa to Ambikā-Kauśikī, saying: "I hereby present Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa's heads. But this is a small matter, akin to slaying animals and presenting offerings or *bali* for the battle. You yourself will slay the great asurās, Śumbha and Niśumbha!"

When she sees the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, the auspicious Ambikā (Kauśikī) is immensely pleased with Kālikā's offering: She tells Kālikā playfully that from now on She (Kālikā) will be known in all the worlds as "**Cāmuṇḍā**".

Remember, what is the contract? Ambikā had specified: were Śumbha to come and fight her.. and defeat her, she would marry him. But Śumbha does not face off with her himself. He sends Dūmralocana, then Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa... but that was never part of the deal. Do you recall who fights Dūmralocana's army in the sixth chapter? It is Ambikā's vehicle, her Lion, who swiftly decimates the army. It is all over in a matter of minutes! Again, in the seventh chapter, Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa (and their armies) are killed in no time at all by Kālikā! Both these battles are over in an incredibly short amount of time! After these battles, the next chapter in the story--Ambikā's encounter with Śumbha--takes place in an elaborate way in the eighth chapter.

## The Significance of Cāmuṇḍā and the Navākṣarī Mantra

The important lessons to takeaway from the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters are: Rules of engagement must be followed precisely and properly—Shortcuts will only spell disaster. Śumbha employs shortcuts through his minions, only to be dealt disastrous blows by his formidable young adversary, Ambikā. Even when Ambā had specifically told Śumbha that he would need to fight Her himself, Śumbha was not willing to come to Her. He could have at the very least sent his brother--remember that in Śumbha's message to Ambikā he had offered Her a choice of marriage to himself or (marriage) to Niśumbha, or (marriage) to both himself and his brother! And yet, while generals and commanders are sent in their place, neither Śumbha nor his brother Niśumbha have engaged Ambikā in battle so far!

Let us look at Kālī who is later named Cāmuṇḍā! She emerges from the angry, furrowed eyebrows of Ambikā! At the end of the fierce battle with Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa, Kālikā brings the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa to Ambikā as her offerings. Ambikā is so greatly pleased at this, that She tells Kālī that from that point on, Kālī will be known as "Cāmuṇḍā". [From this point on, Ambikā-Kauśikī Herself is known as Cāndikā.]

Remember we chant the Navārṇa Mantra (also known as the Navākṣarī Mantra) before starting the Devi Māhātmya pārayānam. In that nine-syllabled Mantra, we chant, "Aim Hrīm Klīm Cāmuṇḍāyai Vicce". [Śrī Bhāskararāya Makhīn considers the navārṇa mantra to be as important as the Devi Māhātmyam itself in the worship of the Divine Mother. He explains that the bījās (seed sounds) aim, hrīm and klīm together identify the Devī as the embodiment of pure being (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ānandā*).]

Bhāskararāya also gives an amazing, elaborate explanation for the phrase "Cāmuṇḍāyai Vicce". He says: There is not that much of a difference between Cāmuṇḍā and Caṇḍikā especially since Cāmuṇḍā comes forth only to help Caṇḍikā in battle. Remember, we say "Om Namas-Caṇḍikāyai" at the beginning of every *adhyāya* or chapter: we offer our namaskārams to Caṇḍikā with this very important phrase at every important juncture in the Devi Māhātmyam. The reason being: Caṇḍikā is hard to describe in words and beyond our basic understanding. Mother Caṇḍikā represents brahma swarūpam (Transcendent Brahman or the Absolute) which is beyond our imagination. Cāmuṇḍā is the Immanent Power that severs the knot of ignorance and paves the way to the Absolute. Together, both Cāmuṇḍā and Caṇḍikā represent the "immanent-yet-transcendent" Devi. Note that Cāmuṇḍā is in the navākṣarī mantra for Caṇḍikā in the *padam* "Cāmuṇḍāyai Vicce"!

According to Śrī Bhāskararāya, anyone who recites the navākṣarī mantra will be rewarded with *sakala-soukhyam* (all kinds of comforts) in this life and will attain *sāyujyam* (unity with Brahman) after their physical demise. [This is because: Cāmuṇḍā Kālī delivers us from the constraints of Time (kāla) and space—She cleaves the illusion (*bhrānti*) of duality and therefore reveals the Absolute.]

Remember that Cāmuṇḍā is the name Ambā Herself (as Ambikā) gives to Kālī at the end of the seventh chapter. The beauty here is that Devi Herself tells Kālī (who is another form of Herself!) that Kālī would be henceforth be widely known as Cāmuṇḍā. That is like me saying playfully, “I will be known as the \*famous\* Yegnarathnam \*Deekshidar\*!” Therefore, this is Devi giving divine assertion that She Herself will attain great renown as Cāmuṇḍā! [How playful of Her, indeed!]

Just imagine the reverence that the name “Cāmuṇḍā” evokes in the hearts of devotees--such a great name uttered by Devi Herself! Just imagine its power! This is exactly why we include this special name of Devi in the navākṣarī mantra, as the name Cāmuṇḍā is the Devi’s own divine utterance. If you read the first 10 pages of the Guptavatī by Śrī Bhāskararāya, you will see how Bhāskararāya keeps switching back and forth between Caṇḍikā and Cāmuṇḍā. Remember I told you about the mantra śāstra hidden in the verses of the Devi Māhātmyam? Just as SwāmigaL Śrī Vimarśānandanāthendra Saraswatī has told us: there is nothing that is not included in the Devi Māhātmyam.

Yes, the Devi Māhātmyam reads like a story. But it is a beautiful and wondrous story of the Divine Mother. When hardships arise, just pray to Devi with the simplest pūjā: [all you need are] one flower, one lamp, one incense stick. If you do not have these items, just offer Devi three namaskārams. When you do this regularly, [you will come to feel] Ambā sitting right next to you. She is waiting to be of assistance to you. She will come right in that instance and help you with whatever you need. All you need is one overarching thing: firm conviction and faith (śraddhā) that Devi will help you. One final analogy: when our mothers make snacks at home, aren’t those for us children to partake and enjoy? Very similarly, all that Ambā has created, she is ready to offer to us. All we need is bhakti, śraddhā and vinayam (humility).

All of you will be well and will prosper.  
Sarve Janāḥ Sukhino Bhavantu.