

॥ श्रीः ॥

Devi Māhātmyam
Apr 2020 Discourse Series
Part - 4

By

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Bhaskara Prakasha Ashram

॥śrī sadgurucaraṇāravindābhyāṃ namaḥ ॥

॥ श्रीः ॥



śrī vimarśānandanātham satyāmbāsahitam gurum |
hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||
śrī prakāśānandanātham vimarśāmbā sahitaṃ gurum |
hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||
śrī rāmānanda nātham rāmāmbā sahitaṃ gurum |
hṛtpadmakarṇikā madhye bhāvayet sarvasiddhaye ||

Making the Caṇḍī Accessible	4
Who is Caṇḍikā?	5
Devyāh Kavacam	7
Argalā Stotram	8
Kīlakam	9
Why is the Story necessary?	10
Encountering Caṇḍikā as ViṣṇuMāyā in the Prathamā Caritram	12
Rātrī Sūktam	16
Encountering Caṇḍikā as Durgā Mahālakṣmī in the Madhyama Caritram	18
Caṇḍikā's Anger	21
A Most Poignant Prayer	23
Caṇḍikā's Anger (Continued)	26
A Most Poignant Prayer (Continued)	27
Caṇḍikā as Kauṣīkī/Ambikā, Cāmuṇḍā, and Caṇḍikā-Śakti in the Uttara Caritram	28
The Eighth Chapter: Raktabīja Vadham	33
Aṣṭa-Mātrkās	34
Śivadūtī	36
The Destruction of Raktabīja	39
Prelude to the Ninth Chapter	42

śrī gurubhyo namaḥ ||
śrī māt্রে namaḥ ||

śiva-śakti samārambhāṃ bhāsurānanda madhyamām |
asmat śrī nātha paryantāṃ vande guru paramparām ||

Making the Caṇḍī Accessible

When we speak of the Durgā Saptāśatī or Devi Māhātmyam, and elaborate on the text in a very detailed way, how we experience [the text becomes very important]. We can not understand the Caṇḍī in abstract terms. [Even though the Devi Māhātmyam or Caṇḍī is akin to the vedās, and even though it propounds the highest vedānta precepts], if we attempt to explain the Devi Māhātmyam or Caṇḍī the way we would provide the meaning for vedās -- or expound on it through the lens of vedanta, we [are likely to] feel like we are on alien territory.

Remember, our goals are: (1) We must clearly understand the glory of the Divine Mother [Her glories should be accessible]; (2) upon understanding Her Glory, we should feel a desire in us to attempt to take it up in our regular spiritual practice; and (3) after beginning the sādhanā of experiencing the Divine Mother's Glory, we should find the practice easy to uphold. The only *upāya* that will guarantee all of the three goals above is [taking up the] Devi Māhātmya Caritram.

We can experience the Caritram through:

1. Anusandhānam: where we contemplate the Caritram of Ambā;
2. Stotram: where we hear the pārayaṇam of the Devi Māhātmyam;
3. Pārayaṇam: where we chant the Glory of the Devi ourselves; and
4. Ārādhnam: where we follow the prescribed ways of worshipping the Devi as laid out in Her Caritram.

If we do the above, we will certainly be blessed with *sarva aiśvaryam* or every manner of prosperity.

Who is Caṇḍikā?

Before we contemplate this, let us look at the vedās:

Among the vedas, and specifically in the Yajur veda, embedded within a most important part of veda (karma-kāṇḍa), we find the Śrī Rudram, [the hymn in praise of Īśvara as the angry one].

If we need to engage in a *prāyascitta kāryam* or a big oblation that is prescribed in our vedas / scriptures, typically, we will perform a rudra homam: mahārudram or atirudram are performed.

Similarly, if we were to look in the purāṇās for a prescription that would lead us to access divine Grace (*purāṇokta sādhana*)—we see the tantrās recommending ārādhana or worship of the godhead as a means to secure *anugraham* (Revealing Grace) of the godhead. For fulfillment of desires, the only *sādhana* or recommended practice is Caṇḍī pārayaṇam (chanting the glories of the Divine Mother in the Devi Māhātmyam) and Caṇḍī mantra japam (chanting of the *mantram* of the Goddess Caṇḍī).

Let us closely examine both the Śrī Rudram and the Caṇḍī:

Om name bhagavate rudrāya -- so starts the rudram.

The very first prayer to rudra is a salutation (or *namaskāram*) to the angry form of Īśvara.

In the same way, we offer a namaskāram in the beginning of the Devi Mahātmyam with “Om namaścaṇḍikāyai”.

In both instances, the *padam* ‘rudra’ and ‘caṇḍī’ both mean “Angry One” [and so the phrases are: “Salutations to the Angry One”. Caṇḍī and Rudra are the same Divine Principle or *tattva*.]

On the aspect of anger, let us examine the term “Caṇḍī”.

In the *thamizh* (Tamil) vernacular, “Caṇḍī” means one who is an *ati viśeṣamāna parākramaśālī* (one imbued with special strength and valor) and one who is *ati buddiśālī* (one who is highly intelligent).

A “Caṇḍa” is one who is undefeated or invincible in battle. Hence the name “Caṇḍikā” (derived from the *padam* “Caṇḍa”) evokes invincibility, *prākrama* (valor), *buddhi* (intelligence) and other superlative traits [seen in a warrior of sorts].

We saw that the navārṇa mantra contains the *mantram* “**aiṃ hrīṃ klīṃ cāmuṇḍāyai vice**”. [As I mentioned before], this navākṣarī *mantram* incorporates the salutations to Cāmuṇḍā [in the same way that the *padam* “**Om namaścaṇḍikāyai**” offers namaskārams to Mother Caṇḍikā].

So now if we were to look closely at the Devi Māhātmyam, we see all the wisdom that is expounded in it: we will be filled with wonder (*ascaryam*) [at the relevance and timelessness of this story]. Such an exalted wisdom, expounded in such simple terms - we see how the Divine Mother herself offers this Caritram to us.

But even though the Devi Māhātmyam is about the *prabhāvam* of Caṇḍikā Devī, that is not how the story opens in the beginning.

I’ve recounted the stories to you already: Devī, Ambikā, Īśvarī, Caṇḍikā are all the same. These names are all employed interchangeably and alternately by the Maḥarīṣi based on the specific episode within the Caṇḍī.

We see a preponderance of the name “Devi” only in the text. This is the most employed *padam*. The term “devi” implies an entity that is principal or important or chief (*mukhya*) among all the devatās. Just like we address Parameśvara as Mahādeva—that is, the deva of all devās--so too do we call devi as Mahādevi. It is the *padam* we see the most here.

It is important to note that: the *padam* “**Om namaścaṇḍikāyai**” is an invocation of Brahman or Atman.

Brahman is characterized as that (being or) phenomenon:

(1) beyond which there is nothing;

(2) that which gives rise to everything;

(3) that which is all-encompassing (in which all things are contained).

All of the above describe Brahman—and the *paṭṭa mahiṣī* of Brahman is Caṇḍī —
ācāryāḥ (Bhagavatpādā ādi śankarācāryā) says so.

Vyāsa recounts the stories of mahālakṣmī, sarasvatī and pārvatī in the purāṇās - but
if we investigate who the *samaṣṭi rūpam* or composite form of all these devīs is,
Bhagavatpāda states that it is Devi (Caṇḍikā)--She is none other than the *mahiṣī* of
the all-encompassing Brahman [the *vimarśa-śakti* or the reflection of Brahman
itself].

But let us see what happens in the Caritrams of the Devi Māhātmyam.

Devyāh Kavacam

On the first day pārayāṇam I told you all to chant the devyāh kavacam. The
kavacam is called Caṇḍī kavacam or devyāh kavacam. But in this kavacam there is
only one place where we encounter the name “Caṇḍikā”:

[dantān rakṣatu kaumārī kaṇṭha deśetu caṇḍikā](#)
(Devyāh Kavacam, Verse 25)

While asking the Mother to protect every organ and part of the body in the
Kavacam, Brahma says:

May the Divine Mother who is Caṇḍikā pervade [my] throat and protect it. Why is
this the case? Because in order to do stotra [pārayāṇam] of Devi’s Glories and to
invoke Her, we want the words to be produced in our throat properly [-- for the
sound to even properly emerge from our vocal cords, we need Devi’s Grace]. So,
may She protect our throats, at the very beginning of the pārayāṇam/sādhana.

There is only one place in the kavacam where we encounter the name “Caṇḍikā.”

Argalā Stotram

Subsequently in the argalā stotram, we see the *padam* “Caṇḍikā” twice. The argalā stotram is where we ask the Divine Mother for all the things we need--we say: give me health and wellness; success in studies and scholarship; a good spouse; good children; comforts (*soukhyam*); health (*ārogyam*); success in everything [and *yaśas* or fame].

Twice in the argalā stotram, we encounter the *padam* “Caṇḍikā”. This is the first time:

natebhyas sarvatā bhaktyā caṇḍike dūritāpahe
(Argalā stotram, Verse 9)

Note: if troubles must leave [us] and go away, we should invoke Mother as Caṇḍikā - if you recite the Caṇḍī, then the troubles will vanish.

What hinders progress? Obstacles.... We need timely resolution [and removal of obstacles]. We need nivāraṇa from the troubles and obstacles we encounter right away: “*dūritāpahe*” refers to this expediency that we seek in the deliverance. (For example: if I have a train to catch today, I need the car or taxi to come *now* to take me to the station. If the car comes tomorrow, it is useless to me as I would have missed my train today).

If we want immediate resolution to the problems, we invoke Caṇḍikā. [Why?] If I need to complete a task or project beautifully, then I must enjoy excellent health and wellness—even if I were very wealthy, and even if I enjoyed a great post, if I were to fall ill—I will not be able to attend to my duties effectively. [This is because] I become a burden to others when I’m ill, and I can not help others or be of any use to anyone either. Therefore,

stuvadbhyo bhaktipūrvam tvāṃ caṇḍike vyādhināśini |
(Devyāh Kavacam, Verse 10)

Thus, the above verse is the second time we encounter the invocation of “Caṇḍika” directly in the argalā stotram: and it is to seek her Grace as the eradicator or destroyer of all diseases and ailments. Do you follow?

Kīlakam

Next let us go to the kīlakam. Here, there is an even more beautiful *padam* or employment of the Divine Mother Caṇḍikā's name.

The Ṛishi says that this is a highly esoteric (rahasya) stotram. The sixth verse in the kīlakam says:

stotram vai caṇḍikāyāstu tacca guptaṃ cakāra saha |
samāptir-na ca puṇyasya tām yathāvanniyantṛaṇām ||
(Kīlakam, Verse 6)

[The saptaśatī given by Lord Śiva himself is so exalted and stands apart from all other “mantras” as the merit or *puṇya* one begets from chanting the saptaśatī is permanent and never fades]. Why [does the Ṛishi] say that the saptaśatī is highly esoteric?

He says this because at this point in the Devi Māhātmyam, we don't know anything [about the *prabhāvam* of Caṇḍikā]: So who is Caṇḍikā? What are her origins (*utpatti*)? Where is She? What is her form, her color, her clothing, her accessories, her vehicle (*vāhanam*)? We don't know any of this. All we know at this point is to chant “om namaścandikāyai” at the beginning of each chapter--we know to invoke Caṇḍikā before we even recite - is this not true?

Therefore it follows that the above *padam* (or employment of the name “Caṇḍikā”) is placed in a very correct and meaningful place [so as to ensure we begin to understand Mother Caṇḍikā's immanence and omnipotence].

Why is the Story necessary?

Next, the Ṛiṣi recounts the story. Why is the recounting of the story necessary? Let me tell you something that is an apparent truth:

Troubles and difficulties are like this COVID [pandemic]: There is no rule that trouble should not find good people. [Good and bad people are all affected].

However, the people on the honest (straight and narrow) path are the ones that seem to suffer the most in this universe.

In the Mahābhārata, Sage Jaiminī (the disciple of Sage Vyāsa) says: ‘Those that are on the path of dharmā seemingly suffer the most: they are caught up in the dharma and therefore encounter the sankāṭa (hardship) that arises as a result of upholding dharma’.

Hence the term ‘*dharmā-sankāṭam*’. Therefore *dharmā* and *sankāṭa* are both (twin) companions to these good souls.

So what then *is* the *mārgam* or path of deliverance from the *sankāṭam* or hardship?

To answer this question, in the Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇa (after many other questions have been put forth), the Ṛishi states: I will offer a way.

Earlier I said everyone experiences difficulties --that is, both good and bad people. And the kind of hardships encountered by human beings can be experienced at home (personally), or outside at work (professionally), or in the society (socially) — hardships can be material, emotional, physical.

[Said in another way], the problems or difficulties could arise from our own kith and kin - relatives and children. Alternately, they can arise as a result of enemies; or from co-workers, neighbors. It is not possible to articulate how (and from where) the difficulties may arise at any given time.

Even those that have been good to us until now, as a result of our *kāla-doṣa*, may turn into our adversaries. Imagine a scenario where a witness who was scheduled to help you, and had agreed to testify for you to fortify your case, turned into a hostile witness on the stand! What a tribulation that would be for you!! [Such curveballs or unexpected hardships can be thrown our way in life sometimes].

So Ṛishi Mārkaṇḍeya could not bear [to see humanity suffer] and hastened to give us the Devi Māhātmyam. He says, “Let me recite the Devi Māhātmyam for you: know this to be a “**sarva-sankāṭa-nivāriṇī**” — this is the one capsule remedy for all manner of *sankāṭa* plaguing humanity.

Therefore, we must: (1) Read this; (2) understand this; (3) follow and practice this; and (4) recite at least one śloka from it.

And if nothing else--that is if you are unable to do anything--think about the *saptaśatī* in your heart and contemplate it in your mind --this is what the Rīṣi says later.

Encountering Caṇḍikā as ViṣṇuMāyā in the Prathamā Caritram

At the beginning of the story, in order to illustrate the exalted truths [embedded in the *Devi Māhātmyam*] in a clear way, the Rīṣi brings in two characters that are relatable to all of us:

We must note something clearly in the ‘casting’ -- in the way the MahaRīṣi Mārkaṇḍeya casts the characters [who are the seekers of knowledge]:

One character is between the ages of 30 and 36. The age of the character is very important. Why?

For me at age 80-84, *rājya bhāram* and governance are not concerns that are relevant to me - I derive no *lābham* or profit from such thoughts. If I am able to find the proper food and proper sleep required at this age, that is like attaining *svarga* (heaven) for me.

But for people within a householder setup, only age-appropriate rewards are meaningful--these attainments must take into account the *laukika* objectives of the person:

At age 20 or 21: success in the form of high marks in competitive exams - followed by a wonderful posting or job opportunity and position --are meaningful.

At age 30 - postings, promotions, *padavi* or social status and respect from others are meaningful. [So you get the idea.]

At age 36--how difficult for a king to lose a *rAjyam* at that young age!

How young his children and wife must be! To be forced to leave them and escape with this life at that age--imagine how much mental turmoil the king would be experiencing!

Imagine how people continue to suffer in the same vein as this king: Sometimes a

person may be in a different country for his work.. with his children and wife separated from him, struggling without him. Who will protect them? If this were us, would we not pray to the Divine Mother - to God - to protect our family? To watch over them? Would we not at a minimum, reach out to a neighbor back home (where the family is stationed) and ask them to check in on the family for us? Because even while we are working elsewhere, our thoughts and worries are centered on the family.

So here, the king has left his family so he can escape with his life - and he has taken refuge in the forest. Remember the story? The king has a large army — and his neighbor who invades our king's land has a much smaller army.. shouldn't King Suratha have won then?

But because of *kāladośa* and *kālaviśeṣa* (a special play of time and a twist of events) Suratha was defeated and had to escape, his family and children left behind in turmoil, his people suffering. The king does not know what to do.

The second character is a merchant (*vaiśya*) by the name Samādhi: let's say he is about 60-65 years of age. His sons joined him as partners and grew the business - and did their part of making the business a success. Samādhi has only ever built his business and made his profits for his wife and his sons and his entire *parivāram*. However, by some twist, the same wife, sons and their families suspect that the merchant will bequeath his entire estate to charity leaving the family in financial lurch and ruin - and therefore the family decides to drive the merchant away from his business and position in the family enterprise. [How shocking!] What could he do in this situation? Where will he eat? Where will he sleep? Therefore he also comes to the forest to take refuge.

So as we just saw: whether the hardship came from outside the family and from a neighboring kingdom, as we saw in the case of the king; or the hardship arose from within one's own family or household (as a result of the suspicions and punitive actions of one's own relatives), difficulties are difficulties [and the challenges are inherently dispiriting and disorienting].

Both the king and the merchant are good people. So what is the reason for their difficulties? For their unpleasant and unsettling predicaments? When they pose

these questions to the Maharishi, the great sage utters the name: “Mahāmāyā” as the reason. He states that She is the reason for the difficulty. So then the seekers ask, “Where is Mahāmāyā? Where is She from? What are her origins? [We pray that you] please elaborate on Her stories.”

And so, *that* story — *Her* story is the Devi Māhātmyam. That Mahāmāyā is Caṇḍikā. Mahāmāyā appears / apparates as a “great illusion”. To describe Her or elaborate on Her in abstract terms as “Māyā” or merely as the “power of delusion” or illusory power, or the “Great Veiling Power” does not serve to explain who She is in a clear way. We need to designate this phenomenon by giving it a name: the Ṛishi gives the Grace the name “Caṇḍikā”.

But it doesn’t stop there. In order to elaborate on “Caṇḍikā”, we must create a context for her. Let us look at an example: to illustrate the story of of Śrī Rāma, we will say: there was a king called Daśaratha. King Daśaratha had three wives.. he had four sons. The eldest was called Rāma... etc. Isn’t this the way that we would start recounting the story [of Rāma]?

So there must be a context or background. Here however, in sharp contrast, the Ṛishi does not come close to the name Caṇḍikā or utter this name in the story any time soon. [As a matter of fact, initially, there is no mention of Caṇḍikā in the prathama caritram].

The Ṛishi goes on to describe the story of the king; and after the king asks who all are affected by Mahāmāyā, the Rishi answers that anyone can be affected by Mahāmāyā:

jñānināmapi cetāṃsi devī bhagavatī hi sā |
balādākruṣya mohāya mahāmāyā prayacchati ||
(Chapter 1, Verse 55)

Wow! So everyone may be subject to hardship as a result of the powers of Mahāmāyā--does this mean, even the wise? Yes! Even the wisest can be affected by Ambā’s veiling power (*tirodhāna śakti*) and will encounter hardship as a result of *kāla-deśa-vartamāna dośa* (apparent aberration of the time-space matrix [this too is the result of the *vikṣepa śakti* or obscuration power/*tirodhāna* of the Supreme Consciousness]. If one wants to be released or delivered from the hardship, then he or she must appeal to the Divine Mother for her *anugraham* or (revealing) Grace.

The King is very intrigued and engaged--and begins to feel there is a remedy at hand. So he exhorts the sage to continue on with the story of the Divine Mother. The Sage frames the story in this way:

Even the most senior or primordial personality, Brahma himself, endured hardship as a result of the illusory power of Mahāmāyā. He faced his hardship through the threat of aggression and confrontation by his two brothers!! [While Brahma was born out of the nābhī or navel of Mahāviṣṇu, Madhu and Kaitābha emerged from the ears of the reclining Viṣṇu — hence making the asurās the brothers of Brahma]. Brahma did not know how he would escape from the demon aggressors or how he may be spared. His father Viṣṇu was in deep slumber; and therefore going to him was not a viable recourse or solution — therefore Brahma was bereft of any apparent solution. [Then he realized that] Viṣṇu was in the deep yogic slumber or yoga-nidrā as a result of the power of Mahāmāyā—this mahāmāyā is none other than Viṣṇumāyā who is Caṇḍikā.

Later on, we will see the description of Caṇḍikā as the all-encompassing *samaṣṭi rūpam* or composite form of all the aspects of the Divine Mother — Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī and Mahāsarasvatī--seen through all the stories. The [*samaṣṭi rūpam*] is the basis of the Caṇḍī navākṣarī mantrā's three essential components [--*aim*, *hrīm*, *klīm* denote the seed syllables for Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī and Mahāsarasvatī respectively].

The first story or the prathamā caritram speaks of [the Divine Mother as] Mahākālī.

The second story or madhyama caritram speaks of [the Divine Mother as] Mahālakṣmī.

The third story or utara caritram extolls [the Divine Mother as] Mahāsarasvatī.

Even though the stories of the three aspects were recounted separately in separate stories, when we reflect on who is the composite or *samaṣṭi devatā* here, or reflect on who is all-pervasive (present through all the caritrams/stories) -- we realize that that deity is Candī or Candikā!!

Rātrī Sūktam

So this devatā Caṇḍikā — where does she appear in the first chapter? Let us look at the fifth chapter to understand where in the prathama caritram Caṇḍikā is extolled:

Yā devī sarva bhūteṣu śakti rūpeṇa samsthitā | namastasyai |
(Chapter 5, Verse 32)

In this way Ambā is invoked as:

[Yā devī sarva bhūteṣu] viṣṇumāyā, cetanā, buddhi, nidrā, kśudha, cchāyā, śakti, tṛṣṇā, kśānti, jāti, lajjā, śānti, śraddhā, kānti, lakṣmī, vrutti, smriti, dayā, tuṣṭi (mātā and bhrānti).

Now look at the rātrī sūktam:

tvam śrīstvam-iśvarī tvam hrīstvam buddhir-bodhalakṣaṇā |
lajjā puṣṭistathā tuṣṭistvam śāntih kśāntireva ca ||
(Tantroktā Rātrī Sūktam — Verse 8)

What we see in the rātrī sūktam is a condensation of the entire devī sūktam — all the phenomenal experience states listed in the devī sūktam are presented in a kernel in the rātrī sūktam. In the rātrī sūktam, the sage thus already provides a condensation of and a glimpse into the attributes of Caṇḍikā.

[Restated in another way, the Rīṣi gives us a glimpse into the understanding of Caṇḍikā here in the rātrī sūktam -- as a precursor to the elaboration of Caṇḍikā as the *samaṣṭi devatā* - which we are going to be treated to in the uttara caritram].

Back to the 1st chapter: When Brahma appeals to the divine Mother, he asks: Please wake my father Mahāviṣṇu from his (yogic) slumber - in addition, delude the asurās Madhu-Kaiṭabha the way you are able to delude even the wisest among us. [Through your great powers of obscuriation], I pray you become the instrument that catalyzes the destruction of Madhu and Kaiṭabha!

The Divine Mother complies and enables Viṣṇu to awaken[—we saw how She emerges from the ears and nostrils of Viṣṇu, thereby releasing him from the powerful yogic slumber]. Viṣṇu destroys Madhu Kaitabha after the Divine Mahāmāyā deludes the twin asurās - everything is done per Brahma’s wishes. Remember though this entire [prathama] caritram, Ambā does not emerge in her *formful* aspect at all - She is only apparent to Brahma!

But we can not possibly offer worship or do ārādhana to the formless aspect of the devī that was apparent to Brahma in the 1st story!

[For most of us devotees of the Mother], we need a place —at least a picture or a small idol of ambā in our hands —unto which we can offer our worship—the reason being, in order to focus our awareness onto Her and meditate on Her with *dhāraṇa*, we [usually] need a *nāmarūpa* or a formful aspect (*svarūpam*) of the Divine Mother.

Note: [It is for our benefit that] the Ṛishi provides a name and form to the Devi next.

Encountering Caṇḍikā as Durgā Mahālakṣmī in the Madhyama Caritram

The Sage says, the same Yogamāyā who is Mahālakṣmī in the 2nd/3rd chapter of the Devi Māhātmyam, is the Viṣṇumāyā in the first chapter:

In the 2nd story or madhyama caritram, the devās have fought for hundreds of years with Mahiśāsura and his demon hordes — and have lost to the latter.. There is no other way than for all the devās to convene, meet up to discuss what they can do—it is obvious to them that they can not defeat Mahiśa on their own — but they know that they each possessed a divine power or *śakti* within themselves. [Now let us recollect a verse from the *aparājitā stuti* in chapter 5 again]:

[Yā devī sarva bhūteṣu śakti rūpeṇa samstithā \(Chapter 5, Verse 32\)](#)

Now imagine and cognize this *śakti* as Caṇḍikā: that is, [know] the innate divine power within each of us [to be] Caṇḍikā. Let us look at an example: take ‘fire’ for instance. Why don’t we touch fire? Because fire contains the innate power or attribute of heat [which has the ability to burn us. Fire has the innate ability to warm, to heat, to burn.] Thus, possessed with certain innate powers like fire possesses heat, each of us is able to fulfill certain tasks. If we don’t have any power whatsoever, we would not be able to do anything. An individual’s talent can only be measured or appraised by the *śakti* in him or her [because it is the *śakti* that allows for the expression of the talent].

Now imagine the combined powers from the [physical/subtle/causal] bodies of all the devās — “*devī deva śarīrebhyo*” refers to this coming together of all the devās’ powers. The combined power of all the devās is set forth and assumes a radiant form! This form that spans the skies and the earth has a female form: this is Caṇḍī Mahālakṣmī! “Let us pray to Her to rid us of our hardship (and protect us from peril) by destroying Mahiśāsura.”

The Divine Mother too agrees to destroy Mahiśā per the devās’ request.

Now see: I said that the names enumerated in the rātrī sūktam are the names of Mother Caṇḍikā, did I not? [However, the name Caṇḍikā is implied, and not uttered overtly].

Here in Chapter 2 (which starts to elaborate *Mahiśāsura-vadham*) the Ṛṣi extolls the Divine Mother as Candikā:

[sāpi devī tatastāni śastrāṇyastrāni caṇḍikā |](#)
(Chapter 2, Verse 49)

First, Ambā dismantles and destroys Mahiśā’s *sainya* or army —and his generals one by one —the reason being: these big asurās only send their armies and commanders out to the battlefield first—they do not go to the battlefield themselves at first or until the very end. Because if the chief asurā is defeated right at the get-go, then there is no more work for the army or generals of the big

asurā! Hence the chief asurā sacrifices his ‘sidekicks’ and their forces first.

sāpi devī tatastāni śastrānyastrāni caṇḍikā |
(Chapter 2—verse 49)

In the 2nd chapter, this (above verse) is the sole place where the Ṛishi employs the name Caṇḍikā: “sāpi devī tatastāni śastrānyastrāni caṇḍikā”

Why does he employ this *padam* in this segue in Chapter 2?

Actually in the Devi Māhātmyam (not just in madhyama caritram, but the whole māhātmyam, up until this point) this is first time where the sage employs the name “Caṇḍikā”. Why?

The reason is: The Ṛiṣi gradually starts to build the story of [the Devi as] Caṇḍikā] and extol the prabhāvam of Caṇḍikā from this point on!

[The first chapter deals with Caṇḍikā as the more abstract Viṣṇumāyā, which is the latent or *tamasic* aspect of the Divine Mother--hence the name “Caṇḍikā” too is not apparent. Whereas, here in this second story, the Mother’s active or *rajasic* aspect is highlighted -- and her prabhāvam is not cloaked or veiled or abstract as it is in the first story. Hence the name “Caṇḍikā” too is mentioned directly, openly, and a few times in this caritram].

Recall what I said earlier about Caṇḍi being the composite or *samaśṭi rūpam* of Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī and Mahāsarasvatī — please remember this well. As you can see, here in this second story too, the sage only intermittently mentions the name “Caṇḍikā” —but the work (of revealing Caṇḍikā’s prabhāvam more obviously) is carried out by other characters at play. [In this second story, the Ṛiṣi does employ other names for this active aspect of the Devi: Durgā being the name that is used most frequently].

Caṇḍikā’s Anger

Now, an important attribute of Caṇḍī is anger: meditate on why anger occurs, especially in this context.

Let us look at a real-life example:

Two boys are fighting on the street--one is my son, the other being the neighbor's son. When I see this, I become angry that my son is fighting on the street— whom do I scold? Whom do I punish? I drag my son inside and I scold and punish *my* son--not the other boy! I do this because I have a responsibility towards my own child: I need to correct his erroneous ways - if I don't correct him now, this [bellicose and confrontational] trait will become an obstacle for his growth later. So the later *anugraham* is preceded by this *nigraham* and severe reproach now, if you will— but if don't correct him now, a pattern of behavior will be set up which is likely going to alter the trajectory of his life.

But while I may have dragged him in to give him a severe scolding, if he heeds my advice and is remorseful, then I am pleased once more--and buy him a shirt and presents, etc. thus my anger disappears as soon as it appears - and only the love remains.

Just as the anger in the parent is fleeting, and there is always an undercurrent of love — so too the quality of anger in Paramaśiva, and the quality of anger in Caṇḍī'.

Anger as a necessary condition to right the wrongs, to correct one's own offspring —is anger that is [justified]. The parent has “every right” and prerogative to teach the child a lesson, in order to ensure proper growth of the child and to support his progress along the right path. Even if the other child was the instigator of the skirmish, we only have the right to scold and correct our own child —as scolding the other child carries with it unpleasant ramifications, and is not our dharma-- therefore not justified.

Caṇḍī's anger is a prerequisite to the act of *samhāra* or destruction of Mahiśāsura. [She punishes the asura, but dying at the feet of the Divine Mother by Her hands is also going to result in mokśa or liberation for Mahiśa.]

Let us look closely at the third chapter:

driṣṭvā sā caṇḍikā kopam tadvadhāya tadākarot |
(Chapter 3, Verse 28)

Anger is a precursor to Caṇḍī's "destroyer" mode. Only if there is consternation, will there be the appropriate meting out of the punishment. So Ambā decides to invite the anger unto herself. She makes herself angry [I will come back to this point later].

A Most Poignant Prayer

So Ambā invites anger into herself; destroys Mahiśa per the devās' plea, and thus resolves their problem—then the devās extoll her glory:

Their stotra of Devi is in the fourth chapter. [In their exquisite hymn known as the indrādi stuti or śakrādi stuti,] the devās say:

Yasyāh prabhāvamatulam bhagavānananto
Brahmaharaśca na hi vaktumalam balam ca |
Sā caṇḍikā(a)khilajagatparipālanāya
Nāśāya cāsubhabhayasya matim karotu ||
(Chapter 4, Verse 4)

The name Caṇḍikā is employed in this context (in the above verse) beautifully yet again.

What do [the devās] say to Ambā and what do they ask her?

"I don't know how to praise you - as even Brahma Viśṇu and Īśvarā don't know how to adequately praise you.

I don't possess the intelligence to cognize you fully and to praise you appropriately.

I don't have the time to do so either. But, I know what I want. [Let me ask you this]."

The devās continue along this vein:

‘What is the reason for all the hardship I encounter? Isn’t the reason [my individuation from You in the form of] this birth (this *janmai*) ? [It is clear that] if I were to have no more births (i.e., were I to become disindividuated and unified with you), I shall not endure any hardship or duality. My troubles will be at an end and I will be liberated. [But there is a caveat--we will see this later].

This state of liberation is known as Mokśa. All who are born must die—this is *niyati* (this is an axiom or law of nature). But the idea is to not be reborn upon our physical demise. [“I want total unification with You, Ambā.”]. I have endured enough suffering (as a result of the duality). Enough. From this point on, please cut the cycle of birth and death for me—and give me freedom from this loop—give me *Mokśam*.

I do not have regrets about my life so far. I do have a fear of the life that lies ahead of me. [Everyone has this worry]. For example: Will the milk delivery happen on time tomorrow morning? Will my car service be on time so I can get to where I need to go tomorrow evening? Will the monies that I lent to so-and-so be repaid to me? Mundane, everyday worries will gnaw away at us constantly, every day. As the day ends, the concerns of the day too recede and change — new concerns grip us with the start of each new day.

The Rishi does allude to the one important chronic worry in the last phrase of the aforementioned verse:

[Nāsāya-ca-aśubha-bhayasya matim karotu](#)
(Chapter 4, Verse 4)

What does this mean? As far as fear goes, is there such a thing as ‘good’ fear and ‘bad’ fear?

The answer is: there are less significant fears which plague everyone [that do not threaten our very existence or threaten our notion of being --and in this context, we would do well to examine our inappropriate responses to everyday concerns]. And then there is the overwhelming overarching concern about what happens at the end of this birth: at the end of this *janma* or birth: the goal is *mokśa-sādhanā* — this is a state of no birth and no death - where we would be at the Lotus Feet of the

Divine Mother.

[We have ultimate fear of repeating this cycle forever. We are worried about a great calamity befalling us that will cause us to be reborn. We do not want to be reborn]. THIS is the concern—and therefore, while *mokṣa* is the main ask, we seek the Devi’s Grace in ensuring our safety so that we may carry out *mokṣa-sādhana* without any hindrance. And let us examine how to ask this:

The phrase “*matim karotu*” refers to the “only” overarching or most compelling prayer: please cut the cycle of *samsāra* and grant me liberation. Do this alone for me. [Because all the other associated prayers are encompassed in this one main prayer].

When we conclude śata-caṇḍī yāgña, sahasra caṇḍī yāgña, or ayuta caṇḍī yāgña, the prayer recited in the concluding *prārthanā śloka*m is only this:

Yasyāḥ prabhāvatulāṃ bhagavānananto
Brahmaharaśca na hi vaktumalam balam ca |
Sā caṇḍikā(a)khilajagatparipālanāya
Nāśāya-cāśubha-bhayasya matim karotu ||
(Chapter 4, Verse 4)

This is the prescribed prayer. That is, [may no inauspicious peril befall us and may] all of humanity be rewarded with *mokṣa* or liberation! What an amazing prayer to Ambā this verse is! And see what an amazing opportunity [this prayer represents] for Ambā’s assurance for our joyous, fulfilling, all-encompassing, all-auspicious (*sowkhyamāna*) path to ultimate liberation!

All we have to do for this ultimate reward is a little ārādhana or worship of the Devi—a small pūja perhaps, or pārayāṇam to the extent possible, and ambā’s mantra japam. The number of times [you would want to repeat the mantra or number of repetitions of pārayāṇam] is all up to you. The Ṛishi says only this much (above).

Caṇḍikā's Anger (Continued)

There are some things that were skipped in the third chapter. I want to return to the third chapter to resume the point about Candikā's "anger".

In order to incite anger in herself, Ambā consumes libations:

tatah kruddhā jaganmātā caṇḍikā pānamuttamam

(Chapter 3, verse 34)

[In an earlier session when we saw the devās gifting various things to Ambā in the madhyama caritram, I spoke about how Kuberā gifted her with a pot of sweet nectarine libation]. Ambā partakes of the spirits necessary to become angry. In fact while she partakes of the libations, she orders everyone to “wait”. She says, “Go ahead and continue to roar [and make noise], ignoramus (*mūḍha*) - while I consume my libation. Afterwards, my devatās will all raise an uproar in their elation!” :

Garja garja kṣaṇam mūḍha madhu yāvat pibāmyahaṃ |

Mayā trayi hatetraiva garjiṣyantyāśu devatāha ||

(Chapter 3, verse 38)

[At times, during war, partaking of drinks/libations was a tradition embraced with the express purpose of inciting anger and for an instant infusion of strength and aggression. Here Caṇḍikā uses the spirits to incite anger in Herself as part of Her Sport or her līlā].

Will Mahiśā remain silent? Never! He uproots a mountain and throws it at Ambā. His power is that of an [aggressive] beast [and then some!]. Ambā handles him like she is playing a sport—She blows the mountain to smithereens! She then destroys Mahiśā in the iconic way described in the story.

A Most Poignant Prayer (Continued)

Now back to fourth chapter:

At the end of the fourth chapter, please remember an important segue: This is something that is especially important for us:

The devās sing 4 ślokās:

Śūlena pāhi no devī pāhi khaḍgena cāmbike | ghaṇṭāsvanena nah pāhi cāpajyānih
svanena ca ||

Prācyāṃ rakṣa pratīcyāṃca caṇḍike rakṣa dakṣiṇe | bhrāmaṇenātmaśūlasya
uttarasyāṃ tatheśvari ||

Sowmyāni yāni rūpāni trailokye vicaranti te | yāni cātyarthaghorāni tai
rakṣāsmāṃstathā bhuvam ||

Khaḍga sūla gadādīni yāni cāstrāni tembike | karapallava saṅgīni tairasmān rakṣa
sarvataha ||

(chapter 4 verses 24-27)

“Oh Mother! You need to protect me in all places” [“You and your armaments need to protect me from peril which could arise in any direction, anywhere and at any time].

It is irrelevant to us that Ambā saved the devās from mahiśāsura. What matters is that we have a remedy from our day-to-day problems and hardship. We need protection from all peril. We don’t know what troubles or hardships will arise and from where they may originate. Hence the aforementioned prayer.

These 4 ślokās are addressed to Mother Caṇḍikā directly: therefore we must invoke Caṇḍī directly with these verses. Do you follow? “Whether you assume a beautiful benevolent form or your terrifying form, you must protect not only me, but my place of residence and the earth!” The idea is: *sarve janāha sukhino bhavantu* — I may be in Chennai today, Delhi tomorrow—but wherever I go, wherever I’m stationed, you need to protect me in all those places, and also protect all *those* places as a result.

Look at what an articulate and beautiful prayer this is: we don’t even need to elaborate the details to Ambā. If we are in India, She has to protect us. If we are

in America, She must to protect us. Even if we go on expedition to Antarctica, She needs to protect us. It is Ambā's job to protect us. It is our duty to pray and invoke Her. The only requirement is that we must possess the faith that She will indeed protect us.

So, these four verses speak of Caṇḍī's glory.

Caṇḍikā as Kauśikī/Ambikā, Cāmuṇḍā, and Caṇḍikā-Śakti in the Uttara Caritram

Moving onto the fifth chapter (uttara caritram), we see the following: Yet again, the devās find themselves driven out of their homes and without sustenance — and when they think about what they can do next, they decide they must propitiate Ambā—for Devi did after all tell them (after destroying Mahiśā) that their difficulties will be removed when they think of Her and invoke Her Grace. Did She not?

So they decide to invoke her: “Let us think of Her—pray to Her with hymns and folded hands—let us repeatedly offer our salutations (namaskārams) to Her over and over again.”

They invoke Her in this way:

Yā devī sarva bhūteṣu śakti rūpeṇa samsthitā

Śakti here refers to the innate power in everyone and everything. The meaning follows that *that Śakti* is indeed Caṇḍikā. Why am I emphasizing this phenomenon of śakti? You will know why when we go to the eighth chapter. For now, remember that I called special attention to the padam *śakti*.

So when the ślokas are concluded, the Mother should come, isn't it? Recall that (at the end of the madhyama caritram) the devās had asked Ambā specifically for her assurance that She would destroy the dangers/hardships plaguing them, the second they prayed to Her to do so.

Therefore Mother Pārvatī apparates in front of them — She asks the devās, *to*

whom they were addressing their exquisite hymn (aparājitā stuti). The devās don't know how to respond—imagine a scenario where: I'm at your doorstep hoping to get a few Rupees (or dollars) from you — and you show up asking “Why are you here?” What can I do? What can I say? I can only remain mute and stand there... similarly the devās don't know what to say.

At that moment, however, thanks to their good fortune at that moment [in and of itself a blessing of the Devi herself], a little girl emerges from the body or *kośa* of Pārvatī. Her names include, Śivā, and Kauśikī — Kauśikī because she has emerged from the *kośa* (physical sheath) of Pārvatī - like a snake emerges from shedding its skin This is because of the boons begotten by the asurās Śumbha Niśumbha: [Lord Paramaśiva] has given a boon to Śumbha Niśumbha that they will not be killed by anyone or anything other than a little girl born of special circumstances. Other boons received by the asurā pair include: (1) unless Śumbha-niśumbha were to engage with the girl of their own volition, they may not be defeated by the girl; and (2) she should not have any *samsarga* or involvement with anyone else; i.e., —she can not face off with the asurās under the express behest of someone else. These boons have been given already—so they must be honored now. So now, Ambā must emerge (“be born”) in this way:

[Punasca gowrī dehātsā samudbhūtā yathābhavat |](#)
(Chapter 4, verse 41)

So a little ambā emerges from the *deha* or body of Gowrī. Remember her names? She is called as Śivā or Kauśikī — but you will not see many places where these particular names/*padam*-s are employed. What *are* the *padam*-s or appellations that *are* employed? Ambikā, Īśvarī, Devī are the *padam*-s that we see employed more frequently.

And so, ambā Kauśikī has emerged. She tells Gowrī or Pārvatī at that point that She (Kauśikī or Caṇḍikā) was invoked by the devās and that She will be on her way to attend to the duties She is here for. She does not directly address the devās about Śumbha-Niśumbha [or she would be in violation of the conditions of the boons sought and received by the asurās].

The *rūpam* or form of ambā Kauśikī is absolutely beautiful—*ati manoharam*—this type of beauty is unparalleled in the entire universe. She is described as “*strī ratnam*” or a “jewel among women” — so no one equivalent to her beauty—ambā is the standard for beauty.

Immediately thereafter (in the next verse), Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa spot her — and right away, they report back to their king and liege Śumbha, saying: “What is the use of possessing all the most auspicious things in this world? There is a dazzling beauty in the foothills of the Himālaya *parvata*—you should enjoy this ‘jewel among women’ as *your* consort! Your wealth, comforts and acquisitions including the Pārijāta *vrukśa* (tree) and the great elephant Airāvata and magnificent horse Uccaiśravas (all of which you took from Indra), exquisite *vimāna* or aerial car (which you have taken from Brahma) and other acquisitions, be they [as great] as they may, can not hold a candle to your possessing this woman!” So saying, they fan the desire in Śumbha for Kauśikī. Śumbha for his part, feels a desire he has so far not felt building inside him—hearing about the great beauty of this girl, and learning that she is ‘all alone’, with ‘no one by her side’, he sends two people on his behalf.

He instructs a minister by the name Sugrīva to go to Devī and get her to agree to come to Śumbha in a most comfortable and posh manner. Approached by Sugrīva on Śumbha’s behalf, Ambikā replies: “Wow —it appears your king is a great parākramśālī —however, as I am a very young girl, without thinking things through, I made a pratigñā (took on a vow) that I will only wed a person who defeats me in battle and thus subdues my ego. So please go back to your king and relay my message; and may he then proceed as he wishes.” So after a little back and forth, Sugrīva goes back to Śumbha with Ambikā’s message—annoyed and feeling disrespected and affronted by Ambikā’s response, Śumbha then sends his general Dhūmrilocana with his army comprised of 60,000 soldiers. Please note that Ambikā is initially alone and by Herself. But before Dhūmrilocana arrives, a magnificent lion comes from the forest and joins her side. [Simha or Lion was gifted to Durgā devī in the previous caritram by Himavān]. So now let us recalculate: how many are there with Ambikā? There is exactly one more entity on the side of Devī (Caṇḍikā or Śivā or Kauśikī) now, acting as her assistant: and that is her lion.

Dhūmrālocana advances towards Ambikā with his army, and what happens? Ambikā utters one syllable: “Hum” — and lo and behold! Dhūmrālocana is reduced to ashes!! Then Ambikā’s arrows spring forth from her hands and stop the army on its tracks—paving the way for her vehicle Simha or the lion to fall on the soldiers like a weapon and decimate them, one and all.

Why does Mother Caṇḍikā not engage the army or Dhūmrālocana in battle? Because She is here to fight Śumbha and Niśumbha—not his minions!! Śumbha keeps sending emissaries—Ambikā can not keep answering every emissary being sent her way! She has no interest in engaging the infantry of Dhūmrālocana—and so she lets her lion do the work. In fact, all of the sixth chapter is filled with the *prabhāvam* of the lion of Ambikā! Devi’s lion does not spare any of the asurās: it kills all of them and consumes many of them heartily!!

Learning of this disastrous turn of events, Śumbha is beset with the doubt that maybe Dhūmrālocana and his army may have gone off somewhere else erroneously and possibly faced off with another adversary! So he beckons Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa and orders them to go face off with the girl and drag her back to Śumbha. He gives his henchmen permission to kill anyone who may stand in their way—and in the worst case, Śumbha even gives Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa permission to kill ambikā if it comes to that—with the caveat that, if at all possible, they must try to drag her back to his court alive.

When Caṇḍa-Muṇḍa return to Ambikā, and Ambikā lays eyes on them, she is filled with anger—and her face darkens intensely. (Don’t our faces darken when we are angry?) With her darkened countenance, Ambā knits her brows in consternation—and from her furrowed brows springs forth the terrifying form of Kālī!! [As I’ve told you before,] you should recall the form of Mother Kālī of Calcutta! Kālī tells Ambikā that She will handle the asurās Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa. [Kālī’s form is ferocious—emaciated, with her giant tongue lolling, and with fierce paraphernalia evoking death], She proceeds to decimate Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa! She beheads them both in no time, much to the great delight of Ambikā!! Kālī [presents the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa to Ambikā and says to Ambikā: “I’ve killed Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa [they are like the sacrificial offering in battle]; now you yourself will kill the big

paśus Śumbha and Niśumbha!”

Ambikā Caṇḍikā is so pleased that She tells Kālī: You were magnificent in battle! And from this moment onwards, you will be known everywhere as “Kālī Cāmuṇḍā”!

The Eighth Chapter: Raktabīja Vadham

Now Śumbha is faced with a great dilemma. He ponders: “What is this? Not one of my emissaries has been able to return! All of them have been totaled by this girl!! Did we underestimate this girl?” Thinking in this way, and incensed beyond imagination, he calls a meeting: he orders that (wherever they may be stationed), every one of his asura commanders and their armies must assemble at the side of Śumbha and Niśumbha in the shortest amount of time!! Thus armies amounting to hundreds of crores of soldiers are summoned to his side in literally no time!!

Now let us take a look at how many are at Ambikā’s side: the lion, and Cāmuṇḍā Mahākālī are now two more entities at the side of Ambikā—making a total of 3 entities in Ambikā’s army! How many are Ambikā’s potential adversaries? Crores and crores of asurās! These asurās come with and form part of *caturanga sena-s* or four-fold armies made of elephants, horses, chariots and infantry! We must note carefully that this time, these armies advance with Śumbhāsura!! Śumbha’s presence is precisely what the Divine Mother wanted!

Remember, the Divine Mother Caṇḍikā will engage in battle only if Śumbhā is present on the battlefield! Now the story takes on a very interesting turn!

Aṣṭa-Mātrkās

Who is Ambikā fighting Śumbha Niśumbha for? For [the upakāram of] the devās! The devās are restless and anxious to assist the Divine mother in some way — they know She is fightiing Śumbha - Niśumbha and his overwhelmingly large army at

their behest—and therefore want to help Ambkā. But by the conditions of the boons begotten by Śumbha-Niśumbha, the devās are not allowed to enter the battle. But they want to help “behind the scenes” and in an invisible way if they can.

Therefore they offer up their individual powers or *śakti*-s to the Divine Mother, to assist her in her epic face-off with the asurās Śumbha and Niśumbha:

Brahmeśaguhaviṣṇūnām tathendrasya ca śaktayaha |
Śarīrebhyo viniṣkramya tadrūpaiścaṇḍikāṃ yayuhu ||

yasya devasya yadrūpam yathābhūṣaṇa vāhanam |
Tadvadeva hi tacchaktirasurān yoddhumāyayau ||

(Chapter 8, Verses 13 and 14)

So the devās offer the power of their intent and śakti-s —and these śakti-s emerge as a multitude of Devīs:

So the śakti from Brahma becomes Brāhmī.

The śakti of Maheśvarā becomes Māheśvarī.

The śakti of Skandā becomes Kaumārī.

The śakti of Viṣṇu becomes Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Nārasimhī.

The śakti of Indra becomes Aindrī.

In addition, Śivadūtī results from Caṇḍikā’s own śakti (and Śiva’s divine intent) later. [Śivadūtī serves a special role later.]

These *śakti*-s or powers are *mātr̥ gaṇa*-s —meaning, they form the divine battalion (military entourage) of the Divine Mother. With the addition of Śivadūtī, this collective of *śakti*-s comes to be known as the *aṣṭa mātr̥kās* or *the eight primordial forces*.

So note that each devā corresponding to the *aṣṭa mātr̥kā* figure offers up not only his *śakti*, but also his vehicle or *vāhanam*, as well as the armaments or *āyudham* to the corresponding *mātr̥ gaṇa*.

Thus Māheśvarī bears a *triśūlam* and is seated on a bull (*vṛṣabha vāhanam*) like

Īśvarā or Śīva.

In the same way, Brāhmī bears a *kamaṇḍalu* (pot of water) and *akṣamālā* (rosary of beads) in her hands; and is seated on a swan (*haṃsa-vāhanam*)—like Brahma. Kaumārī bears a spear (*vel* or *śūlāyudham*) in her hand and is seated on a peacock (*mayūra vāhanam*)—like Skanda or Subrahmaṇya.

Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Nārasimhī bear the various armaments of Viṣṇu (including the *sudarśana* discus, *shārṅga* bow and arrows, *kaumodakī* mace), and are seen seated on an eagle or *garuḍa vāhanam*.

[Aindrī arrives with the thunderbolt or *vajra* of Indrā and with a thousand eyes or *sahasra nayanā* like Indra!]

The form of Śīvadūtī is awesome! She springs forth [from Divine Mother Kauśikī herself] in a very special segue later on in the battle. [Note again that Śīvadūtī is Devi’s own *śakti* and *viśeṣa-amśa*. She is called Caṇḍikā-Śakti. I will describe her in detail later].

The (seven) *mātrkā-gaṇās* that result from Brahma, Viṣṇu, Maheśvarā, Skanda and Indra arrive to help Mother Ambikā, Cāmuṇḍā and the *simham*. While we may expect these *mātrkā-gaṇās* to come by themselves, they are not the only ones to arrive. Lord Śīva too arrives!

Śīvadūtī

Maheśvarā arrives and tells the Divine Mother Ambikā/Caṇḍikā this:

[hanyantāmasurāḥ śīghram mama prītyāha caṇḍikāṃ ||](#)
(Chapter 8, verse 22)

“Oh Devī, for my pleasure, please destroy Śumbha-Niśumbha expediently!” Note again that it is Lord Śīva himself who makes the above request to Ambikā.

[But the ever-compassionate Ambikā has her own way of doing things.]

When Śīva tells Ambikā this, a most amazing thing happens: A most awesome and terrifying power emerges from Ambikā/Kauśikī/Caṇḍikā’s body. [Recall once more the reference to “[yā devī sarva bhūteṣu śakti rūpeṇa samsthitā](#)” — so from

the body of Devi or Caṇḍikā or Kauśikī, Devi’s own śakti emerges in a terrifying and formidable *svarūpam*: this form is described as “Caṇḍikāśaktiratyuḡrā” [where the “*uḡra*” *padam* is a reference to her truly frightening and ferocious bearing].

The fearsome form emerging from Caṇḍikā is actually called Candikā-śakti — she howls ferociously and makes a sound equivalent to that of hundreds of wolves (“*śivāśataninādinī*”)! This is a most terrifying sound, which shakes up and alarms everyone on the battlefield. Again, note that this fearsome śakti is a new player in the battle scene.

Tato devīśarīrāttu viniṣkrāntātibhīṣaṇā |
Caṇḍikāśaktiratyuḡrā śivāśataninādinī ||
(Chapter 8, verse 23)

The Mahāṛiśi describes this awesome form of devi as “Aparājitā” or “The Invincible One”. Caṇḍikā-śakti (Aparājitā) responds to *jaṭādhārī* Śiva with his reddish, smoky matted locks in this way: “Oh Lord, please become my messenger and take a message to Śumbha-Niśumbha (on my behalf).”

[Sā cāha dhūmrajaṭilamīśānamaparājitā |
Dūta tvam gaccha bhagavan pārśvam śumbhaniśumbhayoho ||
(Chapter 8, Verse 24)]

What is the message that Ambikā wants Īśvarā to deliver to the asura regents? It presents a choice with two options [clearly outlined]: “Oh Śumbha-Niśumbha, if you wish to survive, take your asura entourage and relocate to the nether worlds (*pātāḷa-lokāś*) where you will be allowed to live comfortably. Let the devās go back to their homes; and let them once again enjoy the food and sustenance (*haviṛbhāgam*) that have been offered to them in sacred oblations everywhere [remember that the asurās have been forcibly taking away all the offerings meant for the devās and keeping them for themselves during Śumbha-Niśumbha’s reign]. If you would rather remain arrogant and egotistical, and fight with me (Ambikā), then prepare for the raw flesh of your bodies to be served up to all my *śivā*(s) (meaning wolves or alternately *yoginī-gaṇas*) that lie in wait behind me, hungry and eager to tear

into you!”

[Though this message is a very harsh ultimatum, and meant to invoke fear, this warning from Mother Caṇḍikā-Śakti reveals Her abundant compassion (dayā) for all. She sends the same devatā Maheśvarā who gave the asurās their special boons, to deliver one last warning message to them--as they are more likely to hear what the Lord Maheśvarā has to say. The great Bhāskaraṛāyā says the Goddess sends Īśvarā in a final act of diplomacy--so great is her compassion and adherence to dharmā that her overtures are incredibly righteous even to the most egotistical and unreasonable adversary].

Once again, it is the form of Devi that is “Caṇḍikā-śakti” who asks Śiva to take the above message to the asurās: remember that this form of Devi is the newest player in this battlefield. Why do we have this new player?

Remember now, there are no armaments or *āyudham* in Ambikā’s hands — as she is just a little ten year-old girl! How can she possibly engage the mighty asurās in battle? [The little Ambikā is Mahāsarasvatī who destroyed Dhūmrālocana with mantra-śāstra; her lion destroyed Dhūmrālocana’s army. Cāmuṇḍā, who emerged from little Ambikā’s body, destroyed Caṇḍā and Muṇḍā.

And yes, while the mātrkā-gaṇās may be at her side now, she can not count on these allies [for the ultimate battle]. They are merely playing a supportive role in the whole war. It is Ambikā Herself that needs to face off in her climactic battle with Śumbha-Niśumbha.

And on that note, a word about support staff: oftentimes, those that show up for support themselves become a liability and a burden: for example, if someone helps you with your luggage to the train station, you will then want to return the favor by buying them coffee, tiffin, etc. And if by chance, the luggage is dropped, that will also be a problem. And should they drop and damage something, we can not in good conscience tell them off for damaging the luggage either. They become more of a hindrance in this way. [In a similar sense, here on the battlefield, the mātrkā-gaṇās that show up for support can not be relied upon especially given the conditions of the boons begotten by Śumbha and his brother. Should they enter the foray, the conditions of the boons would make the battle null and void —and the asurā kings could escape on a technicality. Later on in the eighth chapter with the

arrival of Raktabīja, this point about support staff becoming a hindrance becomes evident].

Please note: Just as she begot Kālikā in the seventh chapter, in the same way, Caṇḍikā or Kauśikī (little Ambikā) begets the terrifying Caṇḍikā-śakti from her own body again. This Caṇḍikā-śakti who springs forth from Caṇḍikā's own body is not only of a *bhayankara svarūpam* (terror-invoking), but She is also a *parākramaśālī* [i.e., she is a most valorous warrior, who is unbeatable on the battlefield (hence the name “Aparājitā”)]. It is *this prabhāvam* of Devi that we see from this point on, front and center. Additionally, from this point on, and through the end of the uttara caritram, Devi herself is known only as Caṇḍikā. And the generic name for Devi, for pārayāṇam purposes, is also Caṇḍikā.

This [*bhayankara-ghora-rūpadhara parākramaśālī*] Caṇḍikā-Śakti is the one who asks the mighty Maheśvarā to be her messenger. It was little Ambikā-Kauśikī's immanent power ‘Caṇḍikā-Śakti’ that sent Śiva to the asurās as a messenger. So one can imagine Caṇḍikā-Śakti's awesome power and bearing. Her *prabhāvam* is so glorious that She asks Lord Śiva himself to be her messenger. This aspect of the Divine Mother therefore comes to be known as “Śivadūtī”.

So Paramaśiva takes Caṇḍikā's (Śivadūtī's) message to Śumbha-Niśumbha — but this is the result: In response to Śiva's message, an enraged Śumbha immediately begins the most aggressive part of the battle. Imagine if he were to order his armies to attack the Divine Mother and shout: “Charge!” That's what happened here!

Śumbha-Niśumbha advance with all their caturanga-senā /four-fold vast armies— and the aṣṭa-mātrkāś battle the armies of the asurā brothers and subdue them—and for a time, all the fighting was progressing in a manner that was pleasing to the mātrkā-gaṇās and Caṇḍikā.

The Destruction of Raktabīja

Let us now take a closer look at the 40th verse of the eighth chapter where things take a turn:

This is the point where the asurā Raktabīja enters the foray: Raktabīja is the protagonist of this entire (eighth) chapter. He is verily the trump card for Śumbhāsura. Seeing his armies suffer defeat at the hands of Caṇḍikā and her gaṇās, Śumbha sends Raktabīja forth.

From the 40th verse to the 62nd verse of this chapter, from this point on, we do not hear about any other asurās—we encounter only the story of Raktabīja in this chapter.

[What is special about Raktabīja?]. Raktabīja had received a special boon that if he were to be injured in any way and even one blood from his body were to fall and met the ground, another Raktabīja would spring up from the spot where his blood touched the earth.

So now watch what happens: What ensues next is that the aṣṭa-mātrkās all face off with Raktabīja one by one—Aindrī attacks Raktabīja with her *vajrāyudha*; Vārāhī and Vaiṣṇavī attack the formidable asura with the discus and mace and what not... and the blood of Raktabīja starts flowing from these attacks.... And lo! From the spilled blood of Raktabīja sprang up millions and millions of Raktabīja—until finally there was not even standing room on the battlefield!! The entire battlefield was blanketed with Raktabījas!!

All the devās watching the battle unfold from the astral spheres are aghast and mortified! They are thinking, “Oh dear! How did our good deed end up in such a hardship? With every blow of each of the aṣṭa-mātrkās, Raktabīja is multiplying into so many more Raktabījās —What to do now?” The devās become filled with fear once more. They start to worry that Devi may be defeated and that they may lose their homes and sustenance permanently!

Ambāl responds to the devās’ fear with a gentle smile and says: “Oh devās.. have you still not understood my immanence and omnipotence? Do you believe that I

have entered the battle with these asurās, depending or relying on [your *śaktis* in the form of the *gaṇās*]?”

So saying, Ambikā summons Kālī Cāmuṇḍā —whom we encountered in the seventh chapter. Cāmuṇḍā arrives, with her *muṇḍa-mālā* or garland of skulls, giant sword or *khadga*, a noose at hand or *pāśa*, and her giant lolling tongue! Caṇḍikā proceeds to instruct her: O Cāmuṇḍā! Please elongate your tongue further—and grow your mouth and tongue into gargantuan proportions. May your tongue and mouth be so large as to cover the entire length of the battlefield. When I start my assault on the Raktabījas, you use your giant tongue and mouth to catch every drop of blood falling from every Raktabīja — Stop him from multiplying further by drinking his blood!!” [And Kālī takes on this task most enthusiastically!]

So now, whether Aindrī hits Raktabīja, or Vārāhī beats Raktabīja or Vaiṣṇavī hurls a discus at the asura, they can do this without concern that they may be making matters worse: For Kālī Cāmuṇḍā has begun to consume the drops of blood falling from the asurās’ bodies! [She consumes the river of Raktabīja’s blood!] Those Raktabījās that found a way to spring to life on Mother Cāmuṇḍā’s tongue were ground up by Cāmuṇḍā by the gnashing of her terrifying teeth and swallowed up! [Imagine the blood-soaked teeth of Mother Cāmuṇḍā!]

It must be mentioned that Raktabīja is not so easily defeated—he does not give up. His valor and bravery is such that he is unafraid to face off with Caṇḍikā herself! Verses 53-57 elaborate the details of Ambikā Caṇḍikā’s brilliant duel with Raktabīja. This is quite an involved battle. But at the end, with all of his blood dried up (from being wholly consumed by Cāmuṇḍā), Raktabīja is beaten by Caṇḍikā’s mace — and falls to the ground bloodless and dead.

[Nīraktaśca mahīpāla raktabījo mahāsuraha ||](#)
(Chapter 8, Verse 62).

And *thus* is Raktabīja destroyed, and finished off.

Prelude to the Ninth Chapter

When the eighth chapter is concluded, the two main characters that have been listening to the story so far (the king and the merchant) have different reactions. The *vaiśya* or merchant is not quite so [reactive] as the king in listening to some of the parts of the story, [their personalities and *guṇās* being different]. The king of course is fueled by a sense of urgency regarding being able to regain his kingdom—and is therefore very very engaged in the story. Much as a very involved audience member may applaud and stand up and celebrate a play, imagine that the king too stands up in excitement and remarks, “What a very engaging and interesting tale! When Raktabīja was thus defeated, what did Śumbha do afterwards?” He asks this question and goes on to beseeching the Maharishi to tell him what happens next in an elaborate manner.

I will recount the story of the ninth chapter elaborately to you next week. The beginning of that chapter is so engaging and wonderful to listen to.

Śrī Gurubhyo Namaha

Śrī Māt্রে Namaha

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