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Visions and Revisions of the Hindu Goddess: Sound, Structure, and Artful Ambivalence in the Devī Māhātmya

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Abstract: The Hindu Goddess makes her Brahmanical debut circa 5th century CE in the Sanskrit narrative work Devī Māhātmya, the “Greatness of the Goddess” (henceforth DM). This monumental mythic moment enshrines the first Indic articulation of ultimate divinity as feminine. That she is perennially feminine and ever omnipotent, there can be no doubt. But how do we further characterize this feminine face? This study performs a close synchronic examination of the DM to demonstrate the extent to which it encodes an ambivalence on behalf of the Devī (Goddess) between violent wrath and compassionate care. Preserving paradox as only narrative can, the DM dispenses with neither face of the supreme Goddess—yet it posits her benign visage as ultimately supreme. This paper firstly examines the use of sound throughout the DM as expressive of the Devī’s sacrality and virulence alike. While violent sound is something the Devī *deploys*, sacred sound is something the Devī *is*. It then proceeds to analyze the second of the four hymns within the DM—the *Śakrādi Stuti*, occupying Chapter 4—to demonstrate the artful manner in which the hymn encodes the Devī’s ambivalence through its sophisticated design. This paper ultimately suggests that this ambivalence of the Devī finds an earthly analogue in the Indian king.

Keywords: Devī Māhātmya; Mahādevī; kingship; narrative design

1. Introduction

The Hindu Goddess makes her Brahmanical debut circa 5th century CE in the Sanskrit narrative work Devī Māhātmya, the “Greatness of the Goddess” (henceforth DM). This monumental mythic moment enshrines the first Indic articulation of ultimate divinity as feminine. Primordial power (śakti) is construed as the Great Goddess (Mahādevī) whose might transcends that of the Vedic pantheon, and even that of the Hindu great gods Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahmā. That she is perennially feminine and ever omnipotent, there can be no doubt. But how do we further characterize the Goddess (Devī) based on what we see in her glorification (Māhātmya)? Is she an angry entity? A compassionate mother? Does she delight in destruction? Or is she content in caring for her children, all beings within creation? While either of these divergent descriptions might be apt in any given juncture of the text, what do we see when we examine the vision of the feminine divine in the DM as a whole?

There has been debate as to whether the Goddess’ power primarily expresses itself as grace or wrath. The Goddess of the Devī Māhātmya has, for example, been characterized in scholarship as the paradigmatic “goddess of the tooth” as compared to, e.g., the ever-beneficent Lakṣmī, paradigmatic “goddess of the breast”.¹ All too often, it seems, the Goddess’ dark, wrathful aspect is overemphasized,

¹ The dichotomy of Hindu goddesses existing as either beneficent “goddesses of the breast” versus maleficent “goddesses of the tooth” was primarily promulgated by Wendy Doniger (Doniger 1980, pp. 90–91) and A.K. Ramanujan (Ramanujan et al. 1999, p. 497).

decontextualized from its function as a response to virulent foe. The Devī of the DM is a principle of power, and, harnessing that power for the sake of world welfare, she serves therefore, by extension, as a principle of protection. Despite the devastation the Devī brings, in characterizing her as a goddess of wrath alone, one loses sight of her ultimate beneficence given her cosmic role as a compassionate instrument of order: The Devī destroys those who destroy dharma. Functioning as a royal figure, she is undoubtedly an agent of order. The ambivalence of the Devī might best be understood as the necessary destruction of destructive forces for the sake of cosmic preservation. As such, we find an earthly analogue to the Devī in the Indian king, rendering it all the more fitting a finale that the Devī restores the earthly kingdom of King Suratha in the DM's closing frame. While binary typologies may prove provisionally useful in grappling with various Indian goddesses, they fail to account for the artful ambivalence proper to the vision of the feminine divine we see in the DM: The Goddess' supremacy renders her as a font of tender compassion *and* violent wrath alike. For the Goddess to be supreme, she necessarily manifests as both of these extremes. The DM therefore strives to encode this ambivalence at every turn, through the artistry manifest in its content and its very form.

But how could the DM be said to do anything? This essay invokes the work of the great literary critic and semiotician Umberto Eco, who theorizes that texts are crafted so as to guide interpretation. Texts posit "model readership" by virtue of the world they create (Eco 1994, p. 16). Moreover, the structure of that text can also play a role in influencing exegesis. The opening and closing frame stories typical of Sanskrit narrative literature often comprise but one of several layers of narrative parallelism of any given work. Chiasmic composition is particularly significant with narrative rings, a literary practice pervading the ancient world, present in, e.g., the Hebrew Bible, Beowulf, the Iliad, the Quran, and indeed, the DM. For insight on decoding narrative rings, we look to the work of Mary Douglas (Douglas 2007) which we can fruitfully dovetail with that of Eco to substantiate the extent to which the DM tells us how it wishes to be read, by virtue of the very fabric of its content and its structure.

Drawing from the work of Eco and Douglas outlined above, this essay performs a close synchronic analysis of the characterization of the Goddess of the DM to demonstrate that her wrath is actually in service, and secondary to, her compassion: Her "tooth" function is deployed so as the safeguard her "breast" function. The first section examines the ambivalent use of sound in the DM, showing that it is something the Goddess deploys for the sake of destruction, but that it is equally something the Goddess embodies for the sake of creation. It then performs a close analysis of the form and content of the Śakrādī Stuti to show its elegant encoding of the divergent faces of the Devī. Both menacing and benevolent, the hymn presents the Goddess' violence as subsumed by her benevolence, celebrating an ambivalence at the heart of the DM.

2. Sonic Slaughter, Mantric Melody: Harkening to the Ambivalence of Sound

One of the most intriguing dimensions of the DM is its use of sound. This section examines the references to sound throughout the DM demonstrating its presence as both something potent the DM deploys for the sake of destruction, and something sacred she embodies as essential to creation. One finds deep resonance with the ambivalent nature of the Devī on examining the DM's use of sound as a literary motif. Interestingly, the DM explicitly coopts the use of sound for the sake of warfare, as "military mantra", so to speak, deployed in the sacrifice of battle. This ought to be disambiguated from the prevalence of weapon-summoning mantra throughout Hindu lore, e.g., those Viśvāmitra teaches Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Above and beyond sounds that *summon* weaponry, the DM features sounds that *serve as* weaponry. Sound is depicted in the DM as expressive of wrath—the greater the

Though dated, it holds surprising sway within Hindu Studies at large, beyond Hindu Goddess Studies in particular. For a deconstruction of this theory with respect to the Goddess of the DM see "Breaking Through the Breast-Tooth Binary" (Balkaran 2019, pp. 125–31); see also Katherleen Erndl's dismantling of this theory based on her ethnographic work (Erndl 1993, pp. 153–58).

sound, the greater the wrath. The association between sound and warfare in the text affirms the Hindu parity between ritual and battle. The text interweaves sound as mantric praise; sound as menacing laughter, roars, and bellows; sound as the threatening twang of the Goddess' bowstring; and even rhythmic sound occasioning dance during the battle. When she emerges in Episode II and is gifted with weapons by all of the gods, Indra actually gifts the Goddess with a bell as a weapon (DM 2.21). This calls to mind the sound of thunder, befitting the great storm god. The gods request protection with the sound of her bell and the twang of her bowstring (DM 4.23). They ask: "Protect us from evil, O Goddess, as a mother protects her children! Protect us with that bell that destroys the demons' might, filling the world with its sound!" (DM 11.26).²

Immediately following the Goddess' emergence, we notice a crescendo of various types of sound leading up to the engagement in battle, including terrible laughter, the environmental "vibrations" amounting to geological upheaval, to the gods' and seers' praise, and to the angry utterance of Mahiṣa:

She bellowed aloud with laughter again and again.
The entire atmosphere was filled with her terrible noise,

And with that measureless, overwhelming (noise) a great echo arose.
All the worlds quaked, and the oceans shook.

The earth trembled, and mountains tottered.
And the gods, delighted, cried, "Victory!" to her whose mount is a lion.

And sages praised her, their bodies bowed in devotion.

Having seen the triple world trembling, the enemies of the gods,
With all their armies prepared for battle, their weapons upraised, rose up together.

Mahiṣāsura, having fumed in anger, "Ah, what is this?!"
Rushed toward the sound, surrounded by all the Asuras.

Then he saw the Goddess, filling the triple world with her radiance,
Causing the earth to bow down at the tread of her feet, scratching the sky with her diadem,

Making all the nether regions tremble at the sound of her bowstring,
Standing (there) filling all the directions with her thousand arms (DM 2.31–38a).

(Coburn 1991, p. 42)

The Goddess is an instrument of terrible sound from the moment of her appearance and the clamor is echoed during the sonic tumult of her encounter with Mahiṣa. This climactic succession of five verses makes reference to the sounding on the part of both the Goddess and Mahiṣa, in an alternating fashion, and Mahiṣa again bellows in the following chapter while engaged in combat with the Goddess (DM 3.22–24). At this juncture, the Goddess laughs and utters fevered words. What is interesting about this inebriated climax is that the words we hear her utter at the height of her wrath *themselves refer to utterance*. She (sarcastically) commands him to roar and then foretells that the gods will soon roar at this very spot. There appears to be an interplay between the sounding of each combatant, along with an association of sounding and power in general; the gods, who are not combatants, nevertheless partake in the roaring. And yet, as far as we know, they do not actually "roar". It is, however, noteworthy that they make audible outcries at every victorious juncture. The climactic scene is as follows:

Then the angry Caṇḍikā, mother of the world, quaffed a superior beverage,

² Translations such as these—interspersed throughout the body of the text—are my own. Otherwise, for longer passages, I use Thomas Coburn's scholarly translation of the DM (Coburn 1991) throughout.

And again and again she laughed, with reddened eyes.

The Asura, puffed up and drunk with might and power, bellowed
And with his horns hurled mountains at Caṇḍikā.

Pulverizing what he threw with a volley of arrows,
With passion in her face that was flushed with intoxication, she
Uttered fevered words.

The Goddess said:

“Roar, roar for a moment, O fool, while I drink (this) nectar!
When you are slain here by me, it is the gods who soon will roar!” (DM 3.33–3.36).

(Coburn 1991, p. 46)

The association with sound and warfare is corroborated by the inverse: The text associates silence with peace, informing us that once Maḥiṣa is slain “the sacred fires burned peacefully, and the sounds filling the four directions died down” (DM 10.28). Furthermore, sound is indicative of joy as well as wrath: At the end of Episode II, we are told that “the gods and the divine seers together praised the Goddess, the celestial musicians sang, and throngs of nymphs danced about” (DM 3.41).

This sonic theme is even amplified in Episode III; that the Goddess creates śaktis through her breaths might readily serve as personifications of sound, perhaps even of śakti mantras deployed for the sake of pacifying calamity. In the same breath of their emergence, so to speak, we hear of their usage of weapons and their resounding of battle drums, conchs, and tabors, aligned with the idiom of kingly warfare. It is in this passage that we get a more overt glimpse into the symbolic moorings of the parity between sounding and combat: The battle is described as a great festival. The sound here is more overtly organized; indeed, it is rhythmic. While it is obviously not a “festive” affair, I suspect it carries here the more somber connotations of a religious festival—in short, battle is ritual, for which organized sound is required. The sounds further communicate the extent to which battle is orchestrated, ritualized, and perhaps even savored. The passage reads:

The breaths that Ambikā released while fighting in battle,
These immediately became her hosts, by the hundred and thousand.

They fought with axes, javelins, swords, and pikes,
Sustained by the power of the Goddess, destroying the Asura hordes.

Some of her throng caused battle drums to resound, and others conches,
And others tabors in the great festival of battle.

Then the Goddess with her trident, club, and showers of spears,
With sword and the like slew the great Asuras by the hundreds,
And she felled others who were deluded by the sound of her bell (DM 2.51b–55).

(Coburn 1991, p. 43)

Likewise, in the midst of one of the most harrowing passages of the text, which involves the band of mothers, we hear:

Others were cut in half by the Goddess,
having (in each part) a single arm, eye, and leg.

Some, when their heads were cut off, fell (and) rose again.

Headless trunks, (still) grasping the best of weapons, fought with the Goddess,
And others danced in battle, keeping time to the sound of the drums,

Headless trunks, with broken heads, with sword, spear,

and double-edged sword still in hand.

Other great Asuras cried out, “Stop! Stop!” to the Goddess (DM 2.61–2.63).

(Coburn 1991, p. 44)

At the midpoint of Episode III, when they finally succeed in killing Raktabīja, the band of mothers “danced about, inebriated by his blood” (DM 8.62). This refrain is repeated at the end of Episode II: When Mahiṣa is slain (after the mothers have already been reabsorbed by the Goddess), we hear that “the celestial musicians rejoiced in song, while others sounded their musical instruments, and the throngs of nymphs danced about.” (DM 10.26–27), echoing the jubilation described at the end of the previous episode (DM 3.41).

The DM’s third episode also provide passages that reinforce the association of sound with weaponry. Decibel level appears proportionate to ferocity in what can be described as “combat crescendos.” Immediately before the emergence of the Band of Mothers, a din arises which enrages the enemy. The crescendo here begins with the twangs of Devī’s bowstring, as if her bow was a stringed instrument filling the air with piercing sound instead of arrows. It grows with the addition of the roar of Devī’s lion (noteworthy as a royal symbol) and the clang of her bell. Finally, adding to and drowning out these, the snarls of Kālī. The passage reads:

On seeing him approach with his army in fearsome fashion, Caṇḍikā
Filled the space between earth and sky with the twanging of her bowstring.

Then her lion let loose a monstrous roar, O king,
And Ambikā elaborated this noise still further with the sound of her bell.

Kālī, her mouth agape and filling the directions with snarls,
Drowned out even the noise of the bowstring, lion, and bell with her gruesome sounds.

On hearing this din, the enraged Daitya armies
Surrounded the Goddess, her lion, and Kālī on all four sides (DM 8.7–10).

(Coburn 1991, p. 63)

A second relevant description occurs as the demon Śumbha approaches the battlefield just after the fall of the demon Niśumbha. Here, it is the sounding of the bowstring that is ghastly, not the performance of the bow as weapon. Also, sound permeates all directions; this is an interesting correlation to the eight protectors of all directions. The procession commences with the conch (often used to commence ritual and to commence warfare) and her bowstring, and then her bell. Solo becomes duet as the lion roars. Duet becomes trio as Kālī’s pounding overpowers the other sounds. Trio becomes quartet, drowned out by Śivadūtī’s inauspicious cackling. The Goddess then vocalizes. The gods then voice, “Victory!” The approaching Śumbha roars but it is drowned out. Again, sound is power: the louder, the more powerful. That the power of the Goddess is manifest in her sounds is potentially a clever interplay between the DM’s content and its application: It must be sounded aloud—that is, ritually chanted—in order for one to unleash the power of the Goddess.

Having seen him coming forth, the Goddess caused her conch to resound,
And the twanging of her bowstring made a ghastly noise.

She filled the directions with the sound of her own bell,
Which destroyed the radiance of all the demon armies.

Then her lion filled the heaven, the earth, and the ten intermediate directions
With massive roars that sapped the rut of great elephants.

Kālī, too, springing up into the sky, pounded the earth
With her hands, and all the previous sounds were drowned out by the din.

Śivadūti made an inauspicious cackling sound.

These noises terrified the demons, and Śumbha went into a rage.

When Ambikā demanded, “Stop! Stop, you wicked one!”

Then cries of “Victory!” were uttered by the gods from their places in the sky.

The spear that was released by Śumbha as he approached, terrible with its flames,
Coming on like a great fire mass, that spear she hurled down with her firebrand.

The entire interval between the three worlds was filled up by Śumbha’s lionlike roar
But it was drowned out by the dreadful sound of the Goddess’s whirlwind (DM 9.17–24).

(Coburn 1991, pp. 69–70)

More than just symbolically, the Goddess explicitly uses utterance as a means of annihilation. Śumbha’s first dispatch was his general Dhūmrālocana, whom the Goddess destroys with the piercing sound “Huṃ!” (DM 6.9). This same potent sound resurfaces during the Goddess’ climactic encounter with Śumbha, which she deploys to destroy his weapons (DM 10.6–9). Beyond sound as weaponry, the Goddess vocally exchanges with her opponent in both of the episodes where she restores Indra’s throne (Episodes II and III). Just as she launched discursive words at Mahiṣa immediately prior to killing him, she does the same with Śumbha in Episode III, stating: “I now withdraw my many forms, projected by my divine power. I stand alone. Prepare for combat!” (DM 10.5). The Devī even deploys semantic sound for the sake of verbally attacking of her enemy.

The Goddess definitely puts the “laughter” in “slaughter.” In Episode II, she “imbibed an elixir, laughing repeatedly, with reddened eyes” (DM 3.33). This theme is amplified in Episode III where we encounter not only the Goddess’ slaughter-laughter (when she laughs aloud as she commands Kālī to chew to bits and lap up the blood of the demons Raktabīja (DM 8.52–55), and laughs boisterously while decapitating demons (DM 9.34)), but also the cruel slaughter-laughter of Kālī as she picks up the decapitated heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa (DM 7.22), and that of Śivadūti, whose cruel laughter succeeds in shattering demons (DM 8.37). These two most gruesome emanations of the Goddess are equipped with equally gruesome sonic accouterment: The text informs us that “Kālī cackled in fury, and with her terrifying roar, her ugly teeth gleamed against her ghastly mouth” (DM 7.18), and that “Śivadūti cackled inauspiciously” (DM 9.21). Her sonic assaults bespeak her wrath and outrage at the audacity of the enemies of the gods. However the murderous cackles which originate from the Goddess and her emanations bring relief, not fear, to the gods, for it is through these sonic missiles that she asserts her martial supremacy and drowns out the din of her foe. Harkening to ritual recitation, yet coopting it for the sake of battle, the DM details the colossal power indwelling in sound.³

The same Goddess who deploys discord for the sake of destruction—manifesting unsavory sound—is herself the splendid sound of Vedic recitation. While destructive sound is something she *deploys*, sacred sound is something she *is*. The Devī is comprised of sacred sound and thereby associated with Brāhmaṇic ritual. Take for example this inaugural passage from the very first of the DM’s four hymns, the *Brahmā Stuti*, sung by the creator himself at the dawn of the age:

You are Svāhā, you are Svadhā, you are the exclamation vaṣaṭ, having speech as your very soul.

You are the nectar of the gods, O imperishable, eternal one; you abide with the threefold syllabic moment (mātrā) as your very being.

³ This aspect of the DM’s content (the subversive use of sound for the sake of empowerment) parallels its mantric application in the context of tantra. While the efficacy of recitation is retained, nonsemantic seed sound utterances are employed for the sake of destroying karmic residue and empowering the utterer. One of Coburn’s informants, Jani, “suggests that the movement from Puranic to Tantric engagement with the text reflects the discovery of the mantric power of its words, the effort to restrict access to this power, and to maximize its realization through ritual means.” (Coburn 1991, p. 162).

(Coburn 1991, p. 36)

This sentiment is echoed in the DM's second hymn, the *Śakrādi Stuti*, sung by Indra and the gods as follows (translation my own):

You are the essence of the utterance svāhā, Devī,
Whereby the host of gods are satisfied at the sacrifice;
You are the essence svadhā, Devī, uttered by men,
To satisfy the host of ancestors at the sacrifice (DM 4.7).

Since she is sound itself, the DM muses about what (verbal) sounds might be used to please her. Take the following five junctures of the *Śakrādi Stuti* (Chapter 4) which emphasize the unfathomability (and therefore implicit inexpressibility) of the Goddess as follows (translations my own):

May she of matchless majesty,
Beyond description even for Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva,
The Fierce One, set her intent
Towards the protection of the worlds
And the destruction of fearsome misfortune (DM 4.3).

How can we describe
This unfathomable form of yours, Devī?
Or your invincible demon-crushing might?
Or your deeds in battle among the throngs of demons and gods? (DM 4.5)

You are the origin of all the worlds:
Though comprised of the mutable modes of material creation,
You remain unsullied, unfathomable even to Hari, Hara and all the gods;
Yet you are supreme, unmanifest Primordial Matter, untransformed by time;
You are this entire world, with all its moving parts.
You are the resort of all (DM 4.6).

Your very countenance, Devī, calms the conduct of the vile;
Your unfathomable form is unparalleled, unequalled anywhere;
Your might destroys those who would rob the gods of their power;
Yet you show compassion even towards the enemy (DM 4.20).

With what may this prowess of yours be possibly compared?
Where exists so beautiful a form?
Yet one striking such fear into its enemy's heart?
Who else exhibits such heartfelt compassion?
And such resolve in battle, Devī?
You bestow boons upon the three worlds (DM 4.21).

In the *Brahmā Stuti* (Chapter 1) we hear several successive contemplations upon such unfathomability, as follows:

Whatever and wherever anything exists, whether it be real or unreal, O you who have everything as your very soul,
Of all that, you are the power (śakti); how then can you be adequately praised?
By you the creator of the world, the protector of the world, who (also) consumes the world (i.e., lord Viṣṇu)
Is (here) brought under the influence of sleep (nidrā); who here is capable of praising you?
Since Viṣṇu, Śiva, and I have been made to assume bodily form
By you, who could have the capacity of (adequately) praising you? (DM 1.63–65)

(Coburn 1991, pp. 37–38)

Similarly, in the *Nārāyaṇī Stuti* (Chapter 11), we hear:

All the various knowledges, O Goddess, are portions of you, as is each and every woman in the various worlds.

By you alone as mother has this world been filled up; what praise can suffice for you who are beyond praise, the ultimate utterance?

When you, the Goddess who has become everything, granting heaven and ultimate freedom, Are praised, what fine words could suffice for the eulogy?" (DM 11.5–6)

(Coburn 1991, p. 74)

The DM muses about what sounds suffice to laud sound itself. The primacy of sound within Hindu cosmology is harnessed here as an analogue to the supreme śakti that is the Hindu Goddess. While that sonic śakti can certainly be harnessed for slaughter, in its innate form it is essential for creation, not destruction. As the gods themselves harness sound to call forth the Goddess of the DM, so, too, is that Goddess the source and support of all things. In order to further examine this ambivalence between destructive and creative aspects of the Goddess (and sound), let us look to perhaps the most exquisite of the DM's hymns: the *Śakrādi Stuti*, the praise from Indra and the gods.

3. Praising Both Faces of the Goddess: Artful Ambivalence in the *Śakrādi Stuti*

The DM contains four hymns: two hymns of invocation, found in Chapters 1, and 5; and two hymns of thanksgiving, found in Chapters 4 and 11 (see Table 1 below for context). This section decodes the sophisticated structure of the first of the hymns of thanksgiving, the *Śakrādi Stuti*, to show its centrality (both structurally and thematically) in showcasing the wrathful and compassionate faces of the Devī.

Table 1. The content of the *Devī Māhātmya*.

Section	Ch.	#V	Main Content
Initial Frame	1.1–44	44	King loses kingdom, enters forest, encounters merchant and sage
Episode I	1.45–77	33	Devī invoked (<i>Brahmā Stuti</i>) at <i>pralaya</i>
Episode II	2	68	Devī invoked; slays Mahiṣa's army
	3	41	Devī slays Mahiṣa, restoring Indra's kingship
	4	36	Devī praised by gods (<i>Śakrādi Stuti</i>); grants boon
Episode III	5	76	Devī invoked by gods (<i>Aparājitā Stuti</i>)
	6	20	Devī slays Dhūmrālocana
	7	25	Devī manifests Kālī, who slays Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa
	8	62	Devī manifests Saptamātrkas, Śivadūtī, Kālī, all key in slaying Raktabjā
	9	39	Devī slays Niśumbha
	10	28	Devī slays Śumbha, restoring Indra's kingship
	11	51	Devī praised by gods (<i>Nārāyaṇī Stuti</i>); grants boon
12	38	Devī declares benefits of reciting her glories	
Terminal Frame	13	17	King and merchant worship the Devī and receive boons: The king regains kingdom, merchant attains supreme knowledge

The *Śakrādi Stuti* (reproduced in Appendix A, translation my own) is arguably the greatest of literary gems within the DM. It is the only portion of the text composed in the ornate *vasantatilaka* meter, befitting its exalted content. Sung by Indra and the gods after the Devī's triumph over Mahiṣa in Episode II, it serves as the first of the two more ornate hymns of thanksgiving. The hymn adorns Episode II (occupying Chapter 4), the central episode of the work, both structurally and thematically with respect to the DM's chiasmic ring composition (Balkaran 2019, pp. 88–123). As shall be made clear, the attentiveness to form evidenced throughout the DM equally pervades this, its central hymn.

Moreover, this conscious craftsmanship is crucial for encoding an ambivalence at the heart of the text: the dual faces of the Devī. Let us first examine the hymn as a whole.

The hymn consists of 26 verses which can be grouped as 4-6-6-6-4, yielding three sextets (together comprising a group of eighteen verses) framed by two quatrains. This form itself mirrors the structure of the DM: three exploits (the three sextets) couched between preceding and antecedent narrative segments (the two quatrains). For the sake of ready reference, the hymn is produced in Appendix A. While the gods actually begin hymning during the second verse of the chapter, it is clear from the symmetrical patterning that the hymn commences with the first verse, setting the stage for the gods to speak. This is corroborated by the fact that the first verse begins with the “śakrādi” after which the hymn is named. Let us first examine the framing quatrains prior to the sextets showcased in the hymn.

The initial quatrain consists of a verse which sets the scene for the hymn, informing us that “when the exceedingly brave (and) wicked (Mahiṣa) and the army of the enemies of the gods were slain by the Goddess, throngs of gods, led by Indra,/Praised her with their voices, their necks and shoulders bowed in reverence, their bodies made beautiful by shuddering in ecstasy” (DM 4.1) (Coburn 1991, p. 48). This is followed by a group of three verses each containing a third person singular imperative, calling that goddess “who manifests this world through her own power” to bring about auspiciousness through protection of the entire universe (DM 4.2–4). It is significant that the introductory quatrain entails a call to protect the word, and destroy evil to do so; this theme is emphatically embellished in the final quatrain, which is highlighted insofar as it consists of the only four verses of the hymn composed in anuṣṭubh meter; the previous 22 verses are in the more ornate 14-syllable *vasantatilaka* meter. The hymn cleverly calls our attention to the abrupt shift from the ornate *vasantatilaka* prosodic pattern by interjecting the Sanskrit word for spear—śūla—to inaugurate its anuṣṭubh portion, itself a call for help on behalf of the gods. In the final four verses the gods beseech the Devī thus:

Protect us with your spear, Devī.
Mother, protect us with your sword.
Protect us with the clang of your bell,
And with the twang of your bowstring too.

Guard us in the East, Fierce One,
Guard us in the West as well.
Wield your spear to guard us, Queen,
In the North, and in the South.

Protect us with your gentle forms,
That roam about the triple world,
Protect us with your dreadful forms;
Protect us, and the earth.

Protect us from all sides, Mother,
With club, and sword, and spear.
Protect us with all manner of weapons
That lie within your tender hands (DM 4.23–26).

This call explicitly implicates the use of weaponry, and the presence of ferocity, with the work of protection. That the function of the Indian king is implicated by this model of protection is evidenced by a call for protection from all four cardinal directions. Furthermore, that the *Śakrādi Stuti* is framed with a call for protection, befits the function for which the Devī manifests, mirroring the opening enframement of both Episode, and the DM itself. Let us now turn to the sextets themselves, the meat of the matter.

The entire eighteen-verse midsection of the hymn responds to that midsection’s opening verse, which poses three questions, each of which are systemically addressed by one of the three sextets. The questions comprising this first verse are:

How can we describe

- (1) This unfathomable form of yours, Devī?
- (2) Or your invincible demon-crushing might?
- (3) Or your deeds in battle among the throngs of demons and gods? (DM 4.5)

The first of these questions addresses the Devī's cosmic supremacy as cause of all worlds, beyond unfathomable to even the gods, as primordial prakṛti itself (DM 4.6).⁴ It further equates her with ritual utterance and the supreme knowledge that grants final emancipation (DM 4.7–10). Even amid the rather ethereal praise, this first sextet addresses the Devī as the refuge of all beings (sarvāśraya). The content of this sextet then, keeping in line with the hymn being modeled after the DM as a whole, is reminiscent of Episode I and the Goddess's primordial nature featured therein. It is significant that the Goddess is only named at the conclusion of this sextet which reflects upon her ethereal nature. Her naming solidifies her more abstract aspects into a powerful force, flowing into the second (and central) sextet which celebrates her prowess. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the hymn names her at this crucial juncture as Durgā (4.10), the "impassable," for the first time in the text, underscoring the supreme centrality of this epithet to her supreme nature. The Devī manifests as Durgā in order to defeat Mahiṣa, whom no other could defeat.⁵

The middle sextet—addressing the question, "How can we describe your invincible demon-crushing might?" (DM 4.5)—is structurally central to the hymn. Its formal centrality functions to highlight its thematic centrality: It is unsurprising therefore that the center this hymn mimics the very same mythic moment at the center of the text itself (Chapter 2), one captured in countless artistic renditions over the centuries: the Devī's triumph over Mahiṣa. To invoke the Vaikṛtika Rahasya, once the sage describes the essential forms of the Goddess, he proceeds to elucidate to the king "how one performs the worship of the separate forms of the mother of the universe" (Vaikṛtika Rahasya 17), wherein he declares that "One who invokes her as the She-who-slays-Mahiṣa masters the universe" (Vaikṛtika Rahasya 26). It appears, given the iconographical and textual evidence, that the significance of this mythic moment as emblematic to the Goddesses supremacy cannot be overemphasized. The *Śakrādi Stuti's* central sextet is obviously divisible into two constituent triplets, the first of which serves to conclude the first half of the hymn, and the second of which serves to inaugurate the hymn's second half. Therefore, this sextet encapsulates the central pivot of the text as a whole: Each of these three verses of the first triplet mentions Mahiṣa, who is mentioned nowhere else in the hymn. This first triplet lusciously juxtaposes the Devī's wrathful and benevolent visages (DM 4.11–12), prior to appealing to the Devī to be gracious to life on earth, given the potential destruction presented by her wrath (DM 4.13). This verse paves the way for the turn to occur within the sextet, moving from the Goddess' martial prowess in dealing with Mahiṣa (in the first triplet DM 4.11–13) to her salvific prowess in dispensing grace to her devotees in the form of progeny, partnership, prosperity, heaven, tranquility, and the kind-hearted relief of worry, poverty, misery, and fear (in the second triplet DM 4.14–16). That her two faces cohabit this pivotal juncture suggests a profound interplay between these two aspects of the Devī: Her colossal martial wrath is ultimately an instrument of compassionate protection and salvation. This interplay is central to the core of the text, formally and thematically, and so we need to guard against the impulse to polarize the interplay. Furthermore, that she is named in the closing verse of this central sextet as "the Devī" is significant, bespeaking the ascription of this identity to her

⁴ The Sāṃkhya school of classical Indian philosophical posits a dualistic cosmology comprised of the interplay between consciousness (puruṣa) and matter (prakṛti). The reference in this verse—paramā prakṛtiḥ, supreme prakṛti—evokes the Sāṃkhya notion of "mūla prakṛti", the precosmic essence underlying all of material creation. The DM reframes this principle as tantamount to the Devī herself. See DM 1.59, 4.6, 5.7.

⁵ For a rationale for electing "Durgā" as the DM Goddess' primary epithet (as opposed to, e.g., Caṇḍikā or Ambikā occurring on twenty-nine and twenty-five occasions respectively), see (Balkaran 2019, p. 4). This rationale hinges upon an important exchange in the text between the Goddess and the demon Śumbha where the source of all of the Goddess' many manifestations is explicitly referred to as "Durgā" (DM 10.2–3), discussed below.

supreme form; no other name of the Goddess occurs in this sextet, and her other supreme aspects Ambikā and Caṇḍikā, each occur once in the hymn's closing quatrain.

The hymn's terminal sextet is comprised of a moving medley of the aspects of the Devī emphasized in the last sextet: her martial prowess and her salvific grace (mirroring the function of the DM's third episode itself). It describes the Devī as a blessing to the demons: She sends them to heaven, slaying them in battle, purifying them by her weapons, despite their deserving a lengthy stay in hell (DM 4.17–18). This sextet elegantly juxtaposes her mildness and her martial prowess (DM 4.19) before marveling at that prowess, which has the capacity to calm evildoers in battle (DM 4.20–21). In light of this, the final verse of this final sextet (and thus of the eighteen-verse midsection) paves the way for the call for protection which serves as the hymn's finale, as follows:

You have rescued the triple world
By destroying its enemies;
Slaying them at the height of battle,
You led the host of them to heaven,
Dispelling our fear of this frenzied foe (DM 4.22).

The primary impetus for the Devī's wrath here is not revenge, or even punishment (which, arguably, might be appropriate), but is the rescue of the world, and with it, the pacification of the terrified gods.

The Devī wrath is celebrated as wholesome throughout the DM, because it is subsumed by her motherly compassion: It is only the demons who incur her wrath, never the gods. Moreover, that wrath is ultimately construed as a blessing to the demons, serving as their route to heaven. Let us examine the artful pair of verses (both rhetorical questions) framing the center of the *Śakrādi Stuti* (DM 4.11–12), whereby Indra and the entourage of gods praise the Goddess for defeating the demon Mahiṣa:

Slightly smiling, your face is pleasing
As the splendor of the finest gold,
As spotless as the full moon's orb.
How wondrous that Mahiṣa suddenly struck it,
His anger aroused at first sight!

More wondrous, still, Devī, is that Mahiṣa,
Beholding your wrathful face—
With knitted brow, red in hue like the rising moon—
Did not give up his life at once!
For who can live, having beheld the enraged face of Death?

If one were to focus on only the second verse in isolation, one sees only a dark and wrathful face, indeed the "enraged face of death." However, when one contextualizes the verse, one realizes it is an inextricable part of a greater whole. This verse is the first of a dovetailed pair of rhetorical questions, both drawing on lunar imagery: The second is framed by the first, and must be received as such for one to glean its full meaning. The face of death, properly understood, is akin to the natural nadir of the waning moon, which, once reached, instantly gives way to the moon's waxing cycle. The nadir of death is therefore represented as no more than a counterpart to the zenith of life, with waning and waxing cycles functioning as two wings of time's pendulous flight from episodic break in the light to the full moon's orb, pleasing as the luster of the finest gold. Unsurprisingly, the annual festival (Durgā Pūjā) most auspicious to the Devī "pays homage to the cycles of dark and light upon which the cosmos is founded, cycles expressed through the rhythms of nature, oscillating between night and day, summer and winter, full and new moon" (Balkaran 2018, p. 23). The festival occurs near the autumnal equinox, one of the two points of the year where there is balance between dark and light, a fitting juncture to invoke the Devī representative of both.

This bifurcated sentiment is vital: It occurs in the center of the *Śakrādi Stuti*, which itself is part of Episode II occurring at the episodic center of the three-act work as whole.⁶ The hymn goes on to inform us that the world is made happy by the Goddess's conquest of these demons, and that her doing so sends them to heaven, despite their deserving hell (DM 4.17). It proceeds to indicate that she purifies them with her weapons (DM 4.18), calming the activity of such perpetrators, showing compassion to her enemies (DM 4.20), affirming that she is indeed a being in whom coincide "heartfelt compassion and resolve in battle" (DM 4.21). However, this rich paradox too often gets lost in the shuffle: In dissecting narratives such as the DM, scholars have tended to polarize the tensions they masterfully interweave. Owing to a legacy of reading Hindu mythological texts as fragments and not as wholes (Balkaran 2019, pp. 7–13), an unfortunate scholarly trend is to dwell on the darkened and frightful face of the Goddess, rather than viewing it in accordance to its portrayal as merely the waning aspect of an oscillating, and ultimately resplendent full moon.

4. Conclusions

One of the most unfortunate oversights of portrayals of the Devī as an agent of wrath⁷ lies in the fact that she not only strives to protect her children, the gods themselves, but that she takes a stand to protect her own dignity from the demonic impulse to objectify, and dominate the feminine. Her most wrathful manifestations (Kālī, Śivadūtī, the Seven Mothers) arise in tandem with the demons' attempt to possess her as a "jewel among women" (strīratman), since—as they reckon—they already possess the most valuable possessions, such as gemstones, horses, elephants, etc. (DM 5.46). They demand that she submit as the bride of either of the demon overlords (Śumbha and Niśumbha), else suffer the indignity of being forcibly dragged by her hair into submission (5.71–74; 6.7; 6.18–19). Annihilating embassy after embassy of demonic forces, the mother of the universe prevails, restoring heaven's throne to Indra, and with it order to the universe.

The delusion of the demonic forces is apparent: They mistake the mother of the universe for an object to be possessed. In failing to recognize the dignity of the divine mother, the demons attempt to commodify her "breast", and are met with her "teeth", bared in proportion to their insolence. There are two faces to the Devī, to be sure, the fierce face of the warrior and the gentle face of the contented mother. However, one would be mistaken to accord them the same status, for her wrathful aspect remains volatile and unpredictable, while, by contrast, her benevolent face betrays composure and control. The impotence of binary heuristics to measure the potency of the Goddess of the DM should by now be all too apparent; so too should the even more problematic practice of regarding her as a paradigmatic goddess of wrath. For the Devī to be the supreme Goddess, her controlled face must implicitly prevail at all times. Just as she ultimately governs her own wrath, she quashes her own foe in order to govern the universe, bearing her teeth only towards the disruptors of dharma.

The DM, therefore, extols a Goddess wherein devastating martial prowess coincides with compassionate care. While wrathful violence is quintessential to the Devī's capacity to safeguard the universe against the most virulent of demons, we must note that it is her heartfelt concern for worldly welfare that ironically occasions that wrath. Our Goddess of the DM is therefore described as "ever tender-minded" (DM 4.16b). Why else would the Devī be depicted as ever composed, youthful, and amiable? The DM simply does not paint the picture of a goddess who relishes bloodshed for its own sake, if at all. Hers is a violence of necessity, reserved for the destruction of destructive forces, and thus ultimately functions as an aspect of cosmic preservation, not destruction. In this manner, the Goddess

⁶ For a full discussion of the extent to which the DM is crafted as a narrative ring for the sake of highlighting its middle episode, see (Balkaran 2019, pp. 124–46)

⁷ Take, for example, David Kinsley's overstatement of the extent to which the Devī of the Devī Māhātmya represents antistructure and taboo, conflating the feminine figure we see in the text with representations of Kālī seen elsewhere (Kinsley 1978, 1989). For a thorough deconstruction of his characterization see (Balkaran 2019, pp. 126–28).

of the DM embraces the ethos of preservation, the essence of avatāra, as does her earthly analogue, the Indian king,⁸ sworn to benevolent protection of the collective through means of colossal force.

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Appendix A

Śakrādi Stuti (DM 4.1–26)

Sanskrit Text & English Translation⁹

4.1. śakrādayaḥ suragaṇā nihate 'tivīrye
tasmin durātmani surāribale ca devyā |
tām tuṣṭuvuḥ praṇatinamraśirodharām sā
vāgbhiḥ praharṣapulakodgamacārudehāḥ ||

When the Devī¹⁰ struck down the vile and valiant Mahiṣa,¹¹
Along with his army of the enemies of the gods,¹²
Śakra¹³ and the multitude of immortals raised their voices in praise,
With heads and shoulders in reverence bowed,
Their bodies made beautiful by rapturous thrill.

4.2. devyā yayā tatam idaṃ jagad ātmaśaktyā
niḥśeṣadevagaṇaśaktisamūhamūrtyā |
tām ambikām akhiladevamarṣipūjyām
bhaktyā natāḥ sma vidadhātu śubhāni sā naḥ ||

“We bow down in devotion to the Devī
Who unfurled this world through her innate power,
Who embodies the powers of all the gods.
We bow down in devotion to the Mother,¹⁴
Worthy of worship by seers and gods alike.
May she bestow blessings upon us!

4.3. yasyāḥ prabhāvam atulaṃ bhagavān ananto
brahmā haraś ca nahi vaktum alaṃ balaṃ ca |
sā caṇḍikākhilajagat paripālanāya
nāśāya cāśubhayasya matiṃ karotu ||

May she of matchless majesty,

⁸ The theme of preservation pervades the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, and may account for why the Devī Māhātmya is couched therein. This theme is all the more amplified given the Goddess’ resonance with both the Indian king, and mythologies of the Sun found within the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. See (Balkaran 2017). David Kinsley, too, notes the Devī’s avatāric semblance to Viṣṇu (Kinsley 1978) and her subsequent role as cosmic queen (Kinsley 1989, p. 12).

⁹ While faithful to the original text, this translation takes syntactical and dictional liberties for the sake of producing an idiomatic English rendering, one moreover befitting the elegance of the Sanskrit verses. For the most stringent and accessible translation, see (Coburn 1991). Additional English translations consulted are as follows: (Wortham 1885; Pargiter 1904; Agrawala 1963; Shankaranarayanan 1968; Jagadisvarananda 1972; Saraswati 1998; and Kali 2004).

¹⁰ This feminine form of the Sanskrit deva (“god”) connotes devī as “the Goddess”, not merely “a goddess”.

¹¹ The Buffalo Demon usurping Indra’s throne, the same that is depicted in the most popular iconographical depiction of the Devī, wherein she pins down the demon while piercing him with her spear.

¹² The Sanskrit here is sura used interchangeably throughout this hymn with deva, referring to the host of divine beings residing in heaven under Indra’s rule—the same who were saved by the Devī from Mahiṣa’s tyranny.

¹³ Literally “powerful, mighty” this is an epithet of Indra, leader of the gods of heaven, one resonating with even more might Devī who is śakti, power itself personified.

¹⁴ Ambikā, literally mother; used three times in this hymn.

Beyond description even for Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva,¹⁵
 The Fierce One¹⁶, set her intent
 Towards the protection of the worlds
 And the destruction of fearsome misfortune.

4.4. yā śrīḥ svayaṃ sukṛtināṃ bhavaneṣvalakṣmīḥ
 pāpātmanāṃ kṛtadhiyāṃ hṛdayeṣu buddhiḥ |
 śraddhā satāṃ kulajanaprabhavasya lajjā
 tāṃ tvāṃ nataḥ sma paripālaya devi viśvam ||

We bow down before you, Devī,
 Who abide as good fortune within the virtuous,
 Who abide as misfortune within the wicked,
 Who abide as intelligence, faith and modesty
 In the hearts of the wise, the good, and high-born souls.
 Protect the universe!

4.5. kiṃ varṇayāma tava rūpam acintyam etat
 kiṃ cātivīryam asurakṣayakāri bhūri |
 kiṃ cāhaveṣu caritāni tavādbhutāni
 sarveṣu devy asuradevagaṇādikeṣu ||

How can we describe
 This unfathomable form of yours, Devī?
 Or your invincible demon-crushing might?
 Or your deeds in battle among the throngs of demons¹⁷ and gods?

4.6. hetuḥ samastajagatāṃ triguṇāpi doṣair
 na jñāyase hariharādibhir apyapārā |
 sarvāśrayākhilam idaṃ jagad aṃ śabhūtam
 avyākṛtā hi paramā prakṛtis tvam ādyā ||

You are the origin of all the worlds:
 Though comprised of the mutable modes of material creation,
 You remain unsullied, unfathomable even to Hari, Hara and all the gods;
 Yet you are supreme, unmanifest Primordial Matter, untransformed by time;
 You are this entire world, with all its moving parts.
 You are the resort of all.

4.7. yasyāḥ samastasuratā samudīraṇena
 tṛptiṃ prayāti sakaleṣu makheṣu devi |
 svāhāsi vai pitṛgaṇasya ca tṛptihetur
 uccāryase tvam ata eva janaiḥ svadhā ca ||

You are the essence of the utterance svāhā, Devī,
 Whereby the host of gods are satisfied at the sacrifice;
 You are the essence svadhā, Devī, uttered by men,
 To satisfy the host of ancestors at the sacrifice.

¹⁵ Above and beyond the pantheon of Vedic gods, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śivā are the “great gods” responsible for the cosmogonic functions of universal creation, maintenance, and destruction respectively.

¹⁶ Caṇḍikā, an epithet of the Devī derived from caṇḍī, “fierce, hot, impetuous”; used twice in this hymn.

¹⁷ Asura, sometimes translated “anti-god”, refers to a class of beings who are ever at odds with the gods of heaven. In this case, the asuras refer to the buffalo demon Mahīṣa and his army, who have usurped the throne of heaven. The original Sanskrit term (asura) is retained in verses 4.18 and 4.19 for the sake of alliteration in the English.

4.8. yā muktihetur avicintyamahāvratā tvam
 abhyasyase suniyatendriyatattvasāraiḥ |
 mokṣārthibhir munibhir astasamastadoṣair
 vidyāsi sā bhagavatī paramā hi devi ||

You are that blessed insight, Devī,
 Which occasions liberation.
 You are the object of immense penance:
 Truth-seeking sages repeat your holy name,
 Senses restrained, freed of flaws, intent on liberation.¹⁸

4.9. śabdātmikā suvimalargyajuṣāṃ nidhānam
 udgītharamyapadapāṭhavatāṃ ca sāmnam |
 devī trayī bhagavatī bhavabhāvanāya
 vartā ca sarvajagatāṃ paramārtihantrī ||

With sound as your essence,
 You are the repository of the spotless Ṛg and Yajur hymns;
 And of the Samans, too, delightfully recited with the Udgītha;
 You, Devī, embody the three Vedas;
 You are the supreme destroyer of pain,
 Supporting the welfare of the worlds.

4.10. medhāsi devi viditākhilāśāstrasārā
 durgāsi durgabhavasāgaranaur asaṅgā |
 śrīḥ kaiṭabhāriḥṛdayaikakṛtādhivāsā
 gaurī tvam eva śāśimaulikṛtapraṭiṣṭhā ||

You are that very wisdom, Devī, whereby
 The essence of all scriptures is known;
 You are Durgā, that vessel—untethered by worldly attachments—
 By which men cross the turbulent oceans of life;
 You are Śrī, whose abides in the heart of the Kaiṭabha-Conquering Viṣṇu;
 You are Gaurī, established alongside the Moon-Crowned Śiva.

4.11. iṣatsahāsam amalāṃ paripūrṇacandra-
 bimbānukāri kanakottamakāntikāntam |
 atyadbhutaṃ prahr̥tam āttaruṣā tathāpi
 vaktraṃ vilokya sahasā mahiṣāsureṇa ||

Slightly smiling, your face is pleasing
 As the splendor of the finest gold,
 As spotless as the full moon's orb.
 How wondrous that Mahiṣa suddenly struck it,
 His anger aroused at first sight!

4.12. dr̥ṣṭvā tu devi kupitaṃ bhrukuṭīkarālam
 udyacchaśāṅkasadr̥śacchavi yan na sadyaḥ |
 prāṇān mumoca mahiṣas tad atīva citraṃ
 kair joyate hi kupitāntakadarśanena ||

¹⁸ Mokṣa, liberation from the wheel of saṃsāra characterized by incessant birth, death, and rebirth. This liberation is accompanied by self-realization, or direct knowledge of supreme truth indistinguishable from ultimate selfhood (ātman).

More wondrous, still, Devī, is that Mahiṣa,
Beholding your wrathful face—
With knitted brow, red in hue like the rising moon—
Did not give up his life at once!
For who can live, having beheld the enraged face of Death?

4.13. devi prasīda paramā bhavati bhavāya
sadyo vināśayasi kopavati kulāni |
vijñātam etad adhunaiva yad astam etan
nītaṃ balaṃ suvipulaṃ mahiṣāsurasya ||

Be gracious to creation, supreme Devī;
You destroy whole nations when enraged.
We witnessed this the moment you annihilated
Even Mahiṣa's colossal power.

4.14. te saṃmatā janapadeṣu dhanāni teṣāṃ
teṣāṃ yaśāṃ si na ca sīdati dharmavargaḥ |
dhanyāsta eva nibhṛtātmajabhṛtyadārā
yeṣāṃ sadābhyudayaḍā bhavati prasannā ||

You are gracious:
Those whom you bless with prosperity are
Honored among peoples, enjoying riches and esteem;
They are blessed with devoted children, servants, and spouses;
Their virtue does not wane.

4.15. dharmyāṇi devi sakalāni sadaiva karmāṇy
atyādṛtaḥ pratidinaṃ sukṛti karoti |
svargaṃ prayāti ca tato bhavati prasādāl
lokatraye 'pi phaladā nanu devi tena ||

The pious man, Devī, performs good deeds,
Daily, with diligence, attaining heaven by your grace:
Are you not therefore the bestower of boons
Upon the three worlds, Devī?

4.16. durge smṛtā harasi bhītim aśeṣajantoḥ
svasthaiḥ smṛtā matim atīva śubhāṃ dadāsi |
dāridrayaduḥkhabhayahāriṇi kā tvad anyā
sarvopakāraḥkaraṇāya sadārdracittā ||

When called to mind in times of distress, Durgā,
You remove fear from all creatures;
When called to mind in contentment,
You bestow an exceedingly resplendent state.
Who other than you—the dispeller of poverty, misery, fear—
Is ever tender-hearted, intent on the welfare of all?

4.17. ebhir hatair jagad upaiti sukhaṃ tathaite
kurvantu nāma narakāya cirāya pāpam |
saṃgrāma mṛtyum adhigamya divaṃ prayāntu
matveti nūnam ahitān vinihaṃ si devi ||

The world rejoices when its enemies are slain.
Though their misdeeds merit them a lengthy stay in hell,

You are sure to slay your enemies, Devī, with this sentiment in mind:
'Meeting death in battle, may you go straight to heaven'.

4.18. dr̥ṣṭvaiva kiṃ na bhavati prakaroti bhasma
sarvāsūrān ariṣu yat prahiṇoṣi śāstram |
lokān prayāntu ripavo 'pi hi śāstrapūtā
itthaṃ matir bhavati teṣv api te 'tisādhvī ||

Why does your mere glance
Not at once reduce the Asuras¹⁹ to ashes?
You hurl your weapons towards them thinking:
'May even my enemies attain heavenly realms, purified by my arms.'
So gracious is your intent, even towards adversaries.

4.19. khadgaprabhānikaravisphuraṇais tathograiḥ
śūlāgrakāntinivahena dr̥ṣo 'surāṇām |
yan nāgatā vilayam aṃ śumad indukhaṇḍa-
yogyānanam tava vilokayatām tad etat ||

Despite the blinding flash of your luminescent scimitar,
Despite the profuse luster of your pointed spear,
The eyes of the Asuras were not put out
Since they gazed instead upon your soothing face,
Radiant as a portion of the moon itself.

4.20. durvṛttavṛttaśamanaṃ tava devi śīlam
rūpaṃ tathaitad avicintyam atulyam anyaiḥ |
vīryaṃ ca hantṛ hṛtadevaparākramāṇām
vairiṣv api prakāṭitaiva dayā tvayettham ||

Your very countenance, Devī, calms the conduct of the vile;
Your unfathomable form is unparalleled, unequalled anywhere;
Your might destroys those who would rob the gods of their power;
Yet you show compassion even towards the enemy.

4.21. kenopamā bhavatu te 'sya parākramasya
rūpaṃ ca śatrubhayakāry atihāri kutra |
citte kṛpā samaraniṣṭhuratā ca dr̥ṣṭā
tvayy eva devi varade bhuvanatrāye 'pi ||

With what may this prowess of yours be possibly compared?
Where exists so beautiful a form?
Yet one striking such fear into its enemy's heart?
Who else exhibits such heartfelt compassion?
And such resolve in battle, Devī?
You bestow boons upon the three worlds.

4.22. trailokyam etad akhilaṃ ripunāśanena
trātaṃ tvayā samaramūrdhani te 'pi hatvā |
nītā divaṃ ripugaṇā bhayam apy apāstam
asmākam unmada surāribhavaṃ namaste ||

You have rescued the triple world

¹⁹ Sanskrit for 'demon'. See footnote 9 for clarification.

By destroying its enemies;
Slaying them at the height of battle,
You led the host of them to heaven,
Dispelling our fear of this frenzied foe.

4.23. śūlena pāhi no devi pāhi khaḍgena cāmbike |
ghaṅṭāsvanena naḥ pāhi cāpajyāniḥ svanena ca ||

Protect us with your spear, Devī.
Mother, protect us with your sword.
Protect us with the clang of your bell,
And with the twang of your bowstring too.

4.24. prācyāṃ rakṣa pratīcyāṃ ca caṅḍike rakṣa dakṣiṇe |
bhrāmaṇenātmaśūlasya uttarasyāṃ tatheśvari ||

Guard us in the East, Fierce One,
Guard us in the West as well.
Wield your spear to guard us, Queen,
In the North, and in the South.

4.25. saumyāni yāni rūpāṇi trailokye vicaranti te |
yāni cātyarthaghorāṇi tai rakṣāsmāṃs tathā bhuvam ||

Protect us with your gentle forms,
That roam about the triple world,
Protect us with your dreadful forms;
Protect us, and the earth.

4.26. khaḍgaśūlaḡadādīni yāni cāstrāṇi te 'mbike |
karapallavasāṅgīni tair asmān rakṣa sarvataḥ ||

Protect us from all sides, Mother,
With club, and sword, and spear.
Protect us with all manner of weapons
That lie within your tender hands."

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