THE IMAGE OF THE GODDESS DURGĀ AND HER WORSHIP IN BANĀRAS
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IN BANĀRAS

By

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TITLE: The Image of the Goddess Durgā and Her Worship in Banāras  

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation thick description provides the basis of an interpretive analysis of conceptual images of the goddess Durgā and her worship in Banāras, a city regarded as a microcosm of the Hindu tradition. The exploration begins at the renowned Durgā Kund temple which is studied synchronically and diachronically. During the annual autumn festival (Navarātra), however, the focus shifts to typical forms of Durgā worship throughout the city, and the Durgā Pūjā ritual in particular.

A metaphysical portrait of Durgā is developed by concentrating on formal devotional worship (pūjā), blood sacrifice (bali), and the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage (yātra), three salient devotional acts especially related to Durgā worship in Banāras. The study shows that cosmologically and epistemologically Durgā is envisioned through a yogic science (vidyā) of energy (śakti) and material creation (prakṛti). Ontologically, she provides a model of power, purity, orderly change, and maternal protectiveness from which worshippers may derive security within the cosmos. As a feminine image of the divine, Durgā offers different but complementary visions of reality to male and female devotees. The study suggests that the goddess offers women a model of chastity and strength, particularly in the face of misfortune. Despite the potential of this image to transform the traditional roles of women in Hindu society, this report offers evidence that Durgā sustains the orthodox social structure.

The study’s contribution to scholarship continues with its detailed interpretive description of Durgā temple worship and the Durgā Pūjā ritual. It also connects many of the threads which link the mythology, legend, and history of Durgā worship in Banāras. The interpretations of symbolic clusters and structural patterns (e.g., yantra) deepen our understanding of Śāktism, a major Hindu sectarian tradition. Since the study offers substantial evidence of the meaningful relationship between symbols and worship rituals, it critiques theories which deny such relationships.

(iii)
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A Word on Transliteration

There are mainly Sanskrit and Hindi foreign words in this dissertation. For the Sanskrit words I have followed the standard transliteration currently used by most scholars. The only exception is that for the "guttural nasal," which is generally represented by an "n" with a dot above it, or with an anusvāra, I have used an "n" with a bar above it. Therefore, I write āṅga, not āmga.

The letter "r" represents both the Sanskrit vowel and the Hindi consonant which is pronounced like the "rd" in "hardy." Therefore I write the Sanskrit ṛṣī, and the Hindi bari.

The transliteration of Hindi is problematic because of its silent vowels. Since many Banārasis speak Bhojpūrī, a dialect of Hindi, I have essentially transliterated Hindi phonetically, not grammatically. If a Hindi word had a Sanskrit equivalent with which I was familiar, I use the Sanskrit transliteration when the word is represented in isolation. Therefore, I write kīṃśīṣa instead of kishmīṣ, or kīśmiś. My reasoning is that it is more useful for the reader to trace the word dharmāśālā (e.g., write it correctly or find it in a dictionary), than its numerous Hindi/Bhojpūrī phonetic equivalents, such as dharamsālā, or dharamśalā.

Proper names are represented in a variety of ways. I write place names as they are commonly transliterated. Therefore I write Durgā Kund temple, but refer to a tank or pond as a kunda. I write people's names as they represented themselves in oral or written form. These may but often do not include diacritical marks. Therefore I write Ram Shankar Dubey, and not Rāma Śaṅkara Dubey.

Note: Although I have made efforts to place translations of foreign words at each of their occurrences, a Glossary of many of the Sanskrit and Hindi words found in this dissertation is located before the Bibliography for the reader's convenience.
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INTRODUCTION

Subject of this Study and its General Theoretical and Methodological Framework

When the opera *Padmāvatī* opened in Paris in 1923, Europeans were treated to a vision of Indian culture through the composer Albert Roussel’s curious, sympathetic, but somewhat distorted eyes. In the last scene, as the tragic heroine Padmāvatī in the company of the women of the court, prepares to join her husband on his funeral pyre, four white and two black daughters of the god Śiva emerge out of the flames. One of the black daughters is Durgā, "serpent of perfidious sweetness," who dances sinuously. Together with Kāli, she draws the women to their death.¹

Since Roussel’s time Western fascination with Hindu culture has steadily grown as has our understanding of it. While early efforts to understand Hinduism depended on the accounts of travellers and missionaries, scholarly translations of important philosophical and scriptural texts deepened and corrected our knowledge. The discipline of anthropology has played an indispensable role in rounding out the imbalance which may occur if one tries to understand literate cultures solely through their literature. The anthropologist emphasizes fieldwork, but complements the observations made by close participation in the lives of a social group with information drawn from all available germane sources such as literature and art. Anthropologists seek to understand human culture "holistically" (Peacock 1986:10) and thus try to understand specific human activities and ideas within their widest context. For instance, anthropologists attempt to

¹See, for instance, the libretto in *Marilyn Horne in Padmāvatī (Albert Roussel)*, Pathe Marconi EMI, 1983. Durgā is not generally considered to be Śiva’s daughter. My thanks to Dr. Eric Williams for drawing my attention to the many Eastern themes in European opera.
understand a particular contemporary religious ritual within the culture's world view and cosmological framework. If possible, the ritual's historical roots and its pertinent social, economic, and political dimensions would not be overlooked. Naturally there are limits to this endeavour which is "currently undergoing serious critique and revision," but the "essence of holistic representation (is) . . . to contextualize elements of culture and to make systematic connections among them" (G. Marcus and M. Fisher, 1986:23). Furthermore, efforts are made to understand a foreign culture from "the native's point of view" (Malinowski [1922] 1961:25), or as Clifford Geertz has put it "to figure out what the devil they think they are up to" (1988:58). In his own work on the sense of personhood in various cultures, Geertz says he searched out and analyzed "the symbolic forms - words, images, institutions, behaviors - in terms of which, . . ., people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one other" (1988:58).

My research, on which this study is based, followed these guidelines. I did not focus on personhood but on godhead, specifically the Hindu goddess Durgā, alluring and deadly in Roussel's portrait. Like Roussel, I had a sympathetic curiosity about Hindu culture, and initially, a visceral fascination with certain Hindu images of the divine, which I had seen in my childhood. In particular, the many armed goddess Durgā, often portrayed astride a lion and slaying a human being, captivated my imagination. Here was an image of godhead which was beautiful and majestic, yet dreadful in its power. Particularly intriguing was the image of the divine as feminine, a notion which was, to me, culturally remote. What were the assumptions and values of the culture which created this particular vision of divinity? Why did the Hindu symbolic construct affect me in a manner that hinted at meaning but which was ultimately enigmatic? What were, I wondered, the corpus of symbolic forms through which these people represented Durgā to themselves and each other? What would enable me to understand better my own attraction to and confusion about these conceptual images? Paul Rabinow, picking up on Paul Ricoeur's definition of hermeneutics, suggests that a goal of the anthropological endeavour is to move towards an understanding of human experience, in general, and a comprehension of our own culture, through "the detour of the comprehension of the other [culture]" (Ricouer, in Rabinow 1977:5). In some measure, this is precisely what I have
attempted. I chose to focus on a single, though complex and multivocal cultural symbol, namely the goddess Durgā, deeply meaningful to her worshippers and potentially enriching to ourselves.

In an influential book, Edward Said (1978) has criticized what he terms Orientalism, a tendency in the West to view Eastern culture through pervasive and enduring stereotypes. To quote James Clifford (1986: 12) on Said:

the Orient is "textualized"; its multiple, divergent stories and existential predicaments are coherently woven as a body of signs susceptible of virtuoso reading. This Orient, occulted and fragile, is brought lovingly to light, salvaged in the work of the outside scholar. The effect of domination in such spatial/temporal deployments . . . is that they confer on the other a discrete identity, while also providing the knowing observer with a standpoint from which to see without being seen, to read without interruption.

I hope that my study does not oppressively weave a coherent tapestry of Durgā and her worship if no such coherence exists in the rich variety of her forms and her devotees' behaviours. However, I have striven for intelligibility and accuracy in descriptions, and have tried to discern and elucidate patterns where these revealed themselves. Such coherent systematizations may at times be my structural imposition upon the material, or they may reflect the culture's own categories. For instance, in interpreting the relationship between myth and behaviour, I have used a variety of Western scholarly perspectives, such as Mircea Eliade's notion of cyclical regenerations of the cosmos and Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, which I adapt and apply in my analyses. Often, I have tried to remain with the Hindu culture's analytic categories, Sāṇkhya/Yoga philosophy, for example, which have their own internal consistency.

I did not address such questions as "Does the divine exist independent of its worship, or does Durgā exist independent of her worshippers?" Nevertheless, in my participant observation with devotees in their worship practices, although I inquired into the causes and effects of their need or desire to worship Durgā, I focused on their conceptions of Durgā herself, revealed through her images, through her worship, and through her devotees' reflections on both of these. This dissertation is an interpretive analysis of the myths, legends, and conceptual terms used by Durgā worshippers, the
material images through which she is represented, and behavioral patterns of worship in which her devotees, in groups or as individuals, are engaged. My study therefore contributes to our knowledge of a cultural symbol cluster, loosely termed the "goddess Durgā," which informs the attitudes and behaviours of those in whose symbolic universe she is included. In his discussion of the interpretive approach to the cultural study of religion, Geertz says:

The anthropological study of religion is therefore a two-stage operation: first, an analysis of the systems of meanings embodied in the symbols which make up the religion proper, and, second, the relating of these systems to social-structural and psychological processes (1973:125).

Geertz points out the lack of attention paid to the first stage in much anthropological work. When elaborating upon systems of meaning, he says, "It is a cluster of sacred symbols, woven into some sort of ordered whole, which makes up a religious system" (1973:129). This broad, and now classic perspective, provides the underlying order for my treatment of symbols. I first attempt to uncover, describe, and analyze some of the symbols which, under the rubric of "Durgā," constitute part of the cluster of symbols which inform Durgā worship as a whole. Where possible I try to show how these symbols blend with the larger portrait of Durgā, which is itself connected to a still larger system of Goddess worship (Śāktism) in India, and to indicate relationships and connections to the web of sacred symbols which constitute Hinduism as a whole. The uncovering of the symbol cluster derives primarily from observations of Durgā worship at a major temple and during an annual festival of goddess worship in Banāras. With the symbol cluster identified I proceed to an analysis of its "systems of meaning" and then relate these to social and psychological processes.

An illustration of this process follows. Through examining worship at the Durgā Kund temple in Banāras, I uncover that the goddess thought to reside there, Kuṣmandā Devī, is but one within a symbol cluster of nine Durgās, each of whom resides in separate temples in the city. Each of these Nine Durgās has distinctive aspects which together contribute to the larger portrait of Durgā. These goddesses are considered to be Durgā primarily during the Navarātra festival in autumn, but otherwise function in a
broader universe of symbols of Śāktism, and the Hindu religious tradition as a whole. Through the interpretations offered by devotees orally and by examining the literature (e.g., purānic myths and popular modern pamphlets) to which I was directed by devotees, I offer an analysis of the meanings they attach to these Nine Durgās. For instance, the Durgās are understood to be guardians of the city and to represent the stages of womanhood. Finally, this body of meanings is applied to understanding such social structural and psychological processes as the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage and the sense of strength and security which results from community solidarity and divine protection. The analysis further reveals how variant interpretations of this cluster of Nine Durgās offer differing but complementary meanings to groups of devotees (e.g., male versus female), shaping and reinforcing their worldview.

It is noteworthy that the interpretations of symbols and their social structural and psychological ramifications often reflexively elucidate the activities within which the symbols were uncovered, even though they have broader social implications. The worship rituals and actions of devotees, often the source of the symbols, when interpreted, help to explain the enigmatic structural forms which worship itself may take. To illustrate: accompanying a devotee during worship at a certain temple leads to the discovery that this is but one temple in a larger circuit. When interpreted, the larger cluster of temples provides a meaningful framework in which to understand the devotee’s activities in the temple where s/he was first found. This then is one of my main objectives, to understand better the relationship between forms of worship and the symbol system which informs them. My intended emphasis in this study is more on the objects and forms of people’s devotion than on their sources and implications, although these are not ignored. Put differently, I am concerned with the internal dynamic of Durgā worship, the structure and significance of its rituals, and how the conceptualizations of the goddess informs those behaviours.

But why study Durgā? How has she been studied so far, and in what way is this goddess and her worship a good choice for the examination of the relationship between image and activity in Hindu religion? To begin, Hindu goddesses are disproportionately understudied. If one considers that the goddess worshipping (Śākt) sectarian strand of
devotional Hinduism is the third largest after Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, this neglect becomes obvious. When one considers the relatively short history of modern anthropological studies in Hinduism, it is not unusual to find that the majority of work has been directed to the more prominent sectarian traditions. The Śaṅkta strand of Hinduism is, however, vibrant and complex, and permeates Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism in indissoluble ways. My research joins with the growing corpus of goddess-related literature which is currently emerging. One of the complexities which arises in examining Śaṅkta Hinduism is its multiplicity of goddesses, which for the sake of convenience, are often lumped together and studied as Śakti, the Feminine Power which pervades the universe (e.g., Das 1934), or studied under specific groupings, epithets, or aspects. Thus one has studies of village goddesses in general (e.g., Brubaker 1978) or the goddesses of a particular village (e.g., Beck 1979). There are studies of Lakṣmī (e.g., Dhal 1978), or Gaṅgā (e.g., Sivaramamurti 1976), and other specific goddesses. Under aspect studies one may find examinations of Mother Goddesses (e.g., N. N. Bhattacharya 1971) or the Great Goddess (e.g., Kramrisch 1975).

Choosing Durgā reveals my desire to bridge the broad and pervasive, and the specific. Durgā is essentially a pan-Indian deity. I have seen innumerable venerated lithographs of her from the Himalayas to Kanya Kumari, from Gujarat to Calcutta. Her lion riding image is ubiquitous on buses and trucks throughout the sub-continent. A study of Durgā, then, is a study of a symbol system which has wide ranging commerce in the Hindu tradition. Since it would be overly ambitious to carry out such a study throughout India, I chose Bānāras, renowned as a microcosm of Hinduism, a city which attracts pilgrims and residents from all over India. I further restricted myself by concentrating on Durgā worship at a particular temple in Bānāras through the course of a year, and on Durgā worship in general in the city during a specific time of the year. These selections were not accidental, for the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple in Bānāras is perhaps the most renowned temple to Durgā (under that epithet) in all of India, and the nine night autumn festival of Aśvina Navaratrā is virtually synonymously referred to as the devotional worship of Durgā (Durgā Pūjā). Interestingly, the most visibly dramatic expressions of worship during Navarātra take place outside the Durgā Kund and other permanent temples to
Durgā. Popular attention shifts to temporary places of worship, called *pandals*, where beautiful multicoloured images of Durgā and accompanying deities are worshipped very elaborately. In this study I have restricted my use of the term Durgā Pūjā to refer not to the Navarātra worship of the Goddess, but to the ritual worship of Durgā on the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth days of Navarātra, as well as on Vijayā Daśamī, the day which follows it. *Pūjā* is the quintessential term for "worship" in everyday Hindu religious practice. Durgā Pūjā is one of the most elaborate of the worship rituals commonly performed in Banāras. I thus felt it would be ideally suited to the examination of the relationship between the meaning and dynamics of worship and the symbolic universe which informs it.

The intellectual position of some theorists is to refute the value of such an enterprise. Fritz Staal, for instance, best known for his monumental work on Vedic ritual, has suggested that ritual is essentially "meaningless" (1979:2-22). Staal highlights the purity of action in ritual, and its emphasis on structure and form. Ritual, he argues, is quite similar to grammar, but different from language. In particular, these structured actions are utterly divorced from thought. Thus ritual cannot be "understood" and does not lend itself to theoretical analysis. "Ritual . . . is primarily activity. It is activity governed by explicit rules. The important thing is what you do, not what you think, believe or say" (1979:4). Yet "neither ritual nor mantras constitute a 'language'," since acts and sounds are "related to each other in accordance with rules without reference to meaning" (1989:433). Although I concur with certain aspects of Staal's position on the "meaninglessness" of ritual I will explore and challenge his position through an examination of the Durgā Pūjā ritual.

My own theoretical position on the analysis of religious rituals is somewhat aligned with Geertz who, like Max Weber, feels that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance which he himself has spun" (1973:5). Geertz continues to say, "I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be, therefore, not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (1973:5). Geertz diverges from approaches which seek only to isolate symbolic elements, and proceed by "specifying the internal relationships among those elements, and then characterizing the
whole system in some general way - according to the core symbols around which it is organized, the underlying structures of which it is a surface expression, or the ideological principles upon which it is based" (1973:17). Rather these symbolic webs are "models of" and "models for" reality. Sherry Ortner summarizes this aspect of Geertz's position thus:

The 'model of' aspect refers to how cultural symbols . . . attempt to render intelligible the immediate problems of social structure, economic structure, kinship, ecology and the like - not to mention the more existential dilemmas of suffering, evil, and bafflement - in a given society. And the same symbolic models which 'represent' the complex realities of the group, represent them in such a way - the 'model for' aspect - as to provide for the respondents a reasonable way, a sensible way, a meaningful way in which to deal with them (1975:134).

Ritual is the place where these two functions of the symbol set meet. "In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world" (Geertz 1973:92-93). Staal, incidentally spends twenty pages arguing against Geertz's theory of the interpretability of ritual (1989:326-346). Put succinctly, their divergence of opinions stems from differing assumptions about the way ritual is constructed. For Geertz, ritual is grounded in intention, or at least symbolic action, while for Staal, it is activity which most closely resembles instinct or biological compulsion.

Although essentially aligned with Geertz theoretically, I am not sure if I have successfully fulfilled the interpretive aspect of his agenda. The reasons for my uncertainty are at least twofold. First, I found the array of symbols uncovered in the study of Durgā to be virtually inexhaustible, with connections leading into almost every aspect of the highly complex world of Hinduism. I have made a substantial and necessary effort to contextualize the Durgā symbols within the larger symbolic universe of Hinduism for the benefit of non-specialist readers. Secondly, as Geertz himself acknowledges, interpretation is a matter of degree which has no limit. My hope is that I have struck a reasonable balance between breadth and depth in this study trying to avoid "both of the characteristic crimes of exegesis: seeing more in things than is really there, and reducing a richness of particular meaning to a drab parade of generalities" (Geertz 1988:103).
My objective in this research has been primarily to learn, to discover, and to understand aspects of a culture somewhat opaque to me. This dissertation is a report on those discoveries. If there is a general thesis which I am substantiating through the entirety of this work, it is that a fundamental relationship exists between religious symbols and religious acts (i.e., ritual) and that this relationship is to an extent intelligible and meaningful. By offering evidence in support of the meaningful relationship between ritual and worldview, in the context of Durgā worship, I am arguing against the position held by those who feel no such relationship exists (e.g., Fritz Staal). Yet, I neither wish to frame this study as a polemic against a particular theoretical perspective, nor as a wholesale application of a theory or method in order to show up its strengths or inadequacies. Instead, I approached the study of Durgā worship armed with an unformulated theoretical perspective, within which the influence of Geertz’s definition of religion as a cultural system looms large. But I am also influenced by Wilfred Cantwell Smith whose approach to the study of religion resembles the holism of the anthropological endeavour. Smith says:

a good historian of religion will learn all that he can from any insights that are or can be made to be pertinent: sociological, philological, historical, psychological, typological (sometimes called "phenomenological"), introspective, . . . asking [worshippers] - and many more (Smith 1975: 13-14).

However, "given the uniquely subtle, elusive, [and] volatile quality of the religious," Smith’s attitude to method is that it "should be developed out of the particular problem that one is considering, not vice versa, and it should be ephemeral, subordinate, and fundamentally dispensable" (1975: 15).

As previously mentioned, in interpreting particular symbols and behavioral patterns, I have on occasion selected the methods of many well-known scholars. I find Mircea Eliade’s (1959) notion of the cyclical re-creation and renewal of the cosmos particularly illuminating in the study of the myths and rituals of Durgā worship. Eliade points out how within myths, people in certain societies find exemplary models for their acts. The myths tell these people that "everything (they) do or intend to do has already been done at the beginning of Time, in illo tempore" (1963: 125). Such people are
engaged in a sort of philosophical remembering (*anamensis*), which "does not recover the memory of events belonging to former lives, but of *truths*, that is, the structures of the real" (1963:126). This model is extremely helpful in understanding the relationship between the myths about Durgā and the actions of Durgā-worshipping devotees. Victor Turner's (1966) model of the ritual process as leading participants from a particular status in structured society, through a phase of anti-structure, to renewed and transformed status in a restructured society is also useful, particularly in understanding the psychological dynamics of certain types of pilgrimage. Turner, himself (1973, 1974), and his wife, Edith (1978) applied his model to the pilgrimage process. Although I agree with Sax (1991) that the model's applicability to Hindu pilgrimage is inadequate, it nevertheless, provides useful insights. I will discuss such orientations in the contexts in which they are utilized in the study.

**Scholarly Work on Durgā and Related Goddesses**

Among the clusters of studies of Hindu goddesses, there are few which focus directly on Durgā, although certain goddesses who may have been studied under another epithet or aspect are virtually synonymous with Durgā. These goddess-centred studies may be broadly divided into those which are primarily textually-based and those which are primarily anthropological. Among the textually-based studies one finds the noteworthy works of R. C. Hazra (1963), T. Coburn (1984, 1991), and C. M. Brown (1990) which involve examinations of the goddess in purānic (and upa-purānic) myths. Their work on such topics as the concept of Śakti in the Purāṇas, or on the Devī-Māhāmya and the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, provides us with valuable information on the myths, epithets, and conceptualizations of the goddess in general, and Durgā, in particular, in Hindu religious literature.

Noteworthy anthropological studies of Durgā-related goddesses are W. Sax's (1991) *Mountain Goddess*, which is an examination of the Himalayan goddess Nandi Devī through her pilgrimage, K. Erndl's (1987) *The Lion Riding Goddess of Northwest India*, a study of Simhavāhinī Devī (Durgā) in Punjab, and neighbouring states, and R.

Studies in which Durgā (under that epithet) is the central focus are less numerous or voluminous. There are some works which may be considered more devotional than scholarly such as P. Bandyopadhyay's (1987) *Mother Goddess Durgā*. On temple studies there is the slim work by M. Kandiah (1990) entitled *Śrī Durgā Devī Temple of Tellippalai*, dealing with worship in Śrī Laṅkā. Outstanding general studies are D. Kinsley's (1987) chapter on Durgā in *Hindu Goddesses* and P. V. Kane's (1930-62) chapter on Durgā Pūjā in his *History of Dharmāśāstra*. Kane's discussion of Durgā Pūjā draws on material from ritual texts. Kinsley draws a large portrait of Durgā by using material from his field research and existing scholarship, both textual and anthropological. Kinsley points out how Durgā "represents a vision of the feminine that challenges the stereotyped view of women found in the traditional Hindu law books" (1986:99). He suggests that Durgā "exists outside normal structures and provides a version of reality that potentially, at least, may be refreshing and socially invigorating" (1986:99). In this dissertation I will try to address certain questions which derive from Kinsley's comments. What sort of a vision of reality does Durgā provide to her worshippers in Banāras? What vision of the feminine does she represent? How do men and women relate to these conceptualization of the feminine and of reality? In what manner, if any, is the potential social invigoration realized?

P. Ghosha's *Durgā Pūjā*, although detailed, is now dated, and not easily accessible to the general public, having been published in 1871. It is marred by the absence of scholarly references to the sources of the descriptions and by his interpretive efforts. Ghosha points out how the constellations of Virgo, the Centaur, and Leo appear in the autumnal night sky and represent the goddess Durgā, the demon Mahiṣāsura, and the goddess's lion respectively (Ghosha 1871:v-vi). He continues to develop the interpretation that Durgā is essentially a deification of the dawn (1871:xxii). Ghosha's creative efforts are fascinating and erudite, but belong to a period when it was
fashionable to highlight the Indo-European culture circle, and the near universality of
certain principles, thoughts, sentiments, and forms "in different climes and among
different families of man" (1871:i). My point of departure is different from Ghosha for
I do not begin with a search for universal principles or a singular overarching
interpretation of the Durgā symbol set. Rather, I begin with particulars, with individual
worshippers in specific places. It is through their directed perceptions, their actions, and
their explanations that I try to discern patterns of meaning.

Ákos Östör's (1980) examination of Durgā Pūjā in the Bengāli town of Vishnupur
is excellent. This is because it is fully half of a study where insightful comparisons are
made to a Śiva worship ritual. It treats the dynamics of pūjā and the interaction between
the Śiva and Durgā rituals in their social context with remarkable dexterity. Liturgical
details, however, are missing from Östör's work. The highly localized nature of his
study, set in a temple and in which the king's involvement in the pūjā is great, contrasts
strongly with this study of Durgā worship and Durgā Pūjā. Although the king of Banāras,
Vibhūti Narāiṇ Singh, visits the main goddess temples in the city, especially the Durgā
Kuṇḍ temple, during Navarātra, his Durgā Pūjā is a less public affair. It is held at his
palace in Rāmnagar, on the opposite bank of the river Gaṅgā. His current involvement
in the city's celebrations of Durgā Pūjā is not central. Another contrast to Östör's work
is that the Durgā Pūjā ritual described in this study occurs outside of permanent temples.
It takes place in temporarily erected places of worship and in private homes and is
rapidly growing in popularity in Banāras and other urban centres throughout India. I feel
that my work contributes to our understanding of this pan-Indian phenomenon, which is
of growing importance to Hindus, through a detailed, but judiciously chosen, localized
study.

From this brief, but telling survey of the literature, it is clear that there is a need
for a detailed scholarly study of Durgā worship in a temple and a home, and during the

2The pervasive influence of solar mythology on turn of the century folklorists and its decline is
examined through a focus on the debate between Max Müller, one of its most articulate supporters, and
Andrew Lang, who spiritedly ridiculed it. Ghosha's interpretive work is set clearly within the camp of the
solar mythologists of that period. See Richard M. Dorson (1965).
Navarātra festival. I hope that my work on Durgā worship in Bānāras helps to fill this lacuna. I see it as complementary to Östör and Ghosha’s studies of Durgā Puja in Bengal. Unlike the town of Vishnupur, Bānāras is a non-Bengāli city and far more representative of the Hinduism of the sub-continent. Furthermore, this study (see Appendix) supplies the thick description of the ritual worship of Durgā during Durgā Puja with attention to the content of the Sanskrit liturgy and its interpretation by ritual specialists which is missing from both the Östör and Ghosha studies. In that sense, the work also complements Van Kooij’s (1972) textually based description, *Worship of the Goddess According to the Kālikā Purāṇa*. It joins with C. Humes (forthcoming), R. Preston (1980), and K. Erndl’s (1987) studies in fleshing out our understanding of the forms and symbols of goddess worship in temples. In its treatment of the legends and myths of Durgā which were alluded to by worshippers, the dissertation meshes with the textually based studies by T. Coburn, C. M. Brown and others.

**The Focus of the Study**

I set out with the theoretical assumption that there is a relationship between cultural symbols and human activity. As previously mentioned this position is essentially in accordance with Clifford Geertz’s now classic definition of religion as a cultural system.3 The Hindu tradition is known for its many gods and goddesses, each with distinct personalities, symbolic forms, attributes, and mythologies. The cult of a particular god or goddess could, I thought, provide an ideal medium through which to study an aspect of the highly complex Hindu tradition. In what way, if at all, does the set of symbols which constitute the image of Durgā inform the activities of her worshippers, I wondered? My focus is on religious activities although I recognize and allude to the ramifications of the image of Durgā in other spheres of human action, such as politics. My interest focuses not only upon the enigmatic nature of the image of

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3Geertz’s definition states "a religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." See Geertz 1965:206.
Durgā, but on the equally enigmatic ritualized religious behaviours of devotees. To dismiss these rituals as essentially meaningless is in my mind as extreme as suggesting that one has solved the enigma, for I see the relationship between symbol and sentiment, myth and ritual, or worldview and human endeavour in a constant process of dialectical interaction. All of these aspects of religion feed off and stimulate each other.

Three activities which are central in Hindu worship quite naturally lend themselves to examination in the context of a study of Durgā in Banāras. The first is pūjā, the quintessential act of common worship to any and all deities. When one considers that the Durgā Pūjā celebrations in Banāras last for over four days, and are longer and ritually more elaborate than any of the other popular religious festivals such as Holī or Dīpavali, the relationship between the conception of Durgā and the act of pūjā cries out for investigation. Even the great festival of Śiva (Mahāśivarātri), the city’s patron deity, is but a single night long. The second activity is blood sacrifice (bali), which in Banāras is singularly associated with Durgā. The Durgā Kund temple is the only one in Banāras generally sanctioned as a place for such sanguinary offerings. Why is there such a close relationship between the goddess and blood? The third religious activity is pilgrimage (yātra). In Banāras there is a popular and special pilgrimage performed to the city’s Nine Durgās. Is there some relationship between the conceptualization of the goddess formed by these nine images and the pilgrimage to them? Thus, in Banāras, Durgā is related in particular and unique ways to these three important worship activities. Is there something in the various conceptualizations of the goddess which helps us to understand better these forms of worship? Do these forms of worship, in turn, tell us more about the image of the deity?

In addition to these activities of pūjā, sacrifice, and pilgrimage, which I examine throughout the study every time the opportunity arises, I focus on the interpretation of specific aspects of the image of Durgā. I make efforts to interpret related symbols such as the goddess’s lion, her weapons, the buffalo demon she is most often depicted as

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*I have seen blood sacrifice take place elsewhere in the city (e.g., pig sacrifice at Piśācamocana Kuṇḍa). The occurrence of such sacrifices is not acknowledged by the Banārasi public generally. Furthermore these do not take place on the premises of one of the city’s most famous temples.*
slaying, her specific symbolic forms such as yantras, and her mythological exploits, all of which contribute to a portrait of the Devī which can improve our understanding of her cult. I am not challenging a theoretical perspective or methodological approach in my investigations. Insofar as the observations and interpretations which follow do not conflict with existing theories or methods they probably support them, but that is not my primary intention either. As W. C. Smith suggested, I consider methodology subordinate to the subject matter, and theory still in the process of formulation. My focus then is neither on anthropology nor on the history of religions, but on religious belief and behaviour. My point of departure is religious individuals and groups, worshippers of the goddess Durgā. Who are they? What do they have to say about the goddess they worship? Where do they go to worship her? What do they make or do during their religious activities? What pertinent literature do devotees read? To whom do they listen as authoritative sources of religious precepts? Such simple questions, however, do not always have simple answers. More challenging is the question of meaning, which I attempt to answer throughout this study. Why do worshippers do what they do? What do their symbols mean?

In addition, I try to answer questions which naturally and immediately emerge from the general conception of Durgā as Śakti, the vitalizing energy or power of the cosmos, a power personified as feminine. Does Durgā, the goddess, offer a vision of reality which empowers men and women? And if so, is this empowerment similar for both sexes?

Methodology in Research

I selected Bānāras as the location for the fieldwork to avoid the regional affiliations common to studies on Durgā. Most Bengālis whom I encountered in India would say: "Oh you are studying Durgā, you should go to Calcutta." Similarly, Rajasthanis often told me that I should have done my study of Durgā in their region. It was precisely this variety of possible locations in which to do a study of Durgā, that made me reject the more secure regional study, and choose a site with all-India significance. However, despite my efforts to choose a city more broadly representative
of an all-India Hinduism, I found the Bengāli influence on Durgā worship in Bānāras to be great, although interestingly, not pervasive.

I had spent two years in India and South Asia in the late nineteen-seventies and had then first visited Bānāras and its Durgā Kund temple. Over a decade later, I returned, and from July 1990 to November 1991, based myself in Bānāras where I focused on Durgā worship at the Durgā Kund temple throughout the course of the year. This latter stay constitutes the field-work on which this dissertation is based. My research was funded in part by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the School of Graduate Studies at McMaster University, and the project’s approval in India was facilitated by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. While in Bānāras I was affiliated with the History of Art department at Banāras Hindu University. I am grateful to all these organizations.

I spent all of some days and some of most in or around the Durgā temple in Bānāras, chatting with the priests, owners, local devotees, or visiting pilgrims. The temple owners and priests were cordial and superficially friendly at first, but more reserved as I continued to probe and ask questions. The temple manager, Bans Nath Dubey, was particularly enthusiastic and helpful during this trying period. To my good fortune, I was befriended by Raju, the youngest son of Paras Nath Dubey, the largest shareholder of the temple, who also came to trust me because of my relationship with his son. This friendship gave me excellent access to the temple and its personnel. I was soon initiated into the pleasures of betel nut (pān) chewing, an activity which I had initially found altogether distasteful. Taking a gift of betel nut when on a visit to the temple priests and chewing together with them, was one of the surest ways of having a pleasant and productive conversation.

During the two yearly Navarātras, which occur in the spring and autumn, I found that sites of Durgā worship virtually blossomed like flowers throughout the city. Worship was not restricted exclusively to the Durgā Kund temple or the other permanent Durgā temples in the city. Many people focused on a different Durgā temple on each of the nine days of Navarātra. Furthermore, scores of temporary temples were set up in public places and images installed and venerated there. Special forms of worship also occurred
in private homes. During this time of the year, I tried to examine this spectrum of worship patterns (e.g., in the homes, the temporary temples, and the cluster of nine permanent temples) as best I could. In particular, I did a thorough study of the elaborate Durgā Pūjā ritual as celebrated in a private home, thanks to the generous hospitality of Mr. M. Lahiri and his family. In Pandit Hemendra Nath Chakravarty, student of the renowned Tantric scholar Gopināth Kavirāj, I found a competent mentor and guide through the complexities of the Durgā Pūjā ritual. Pandit Chakravarty is a scholar who has performed the ritual on numerous occasions. He is frequently consulted by and serves as a mentor for several of the ritual practitioners in the Bengali Tola quarter of the city, one of whom is Pandit "Nitai Babu," the ritualist who performs the Durgā Pūjā for the Lahiri family. This is not the place to offer thanks to the many people who helped me in my research. And yet this study would have been quite impossible without their patience and aid.

So much of anthropological theory is based on the notion of the encounter with a foreign culture which at times is portrayed as startlingly different and densely opaque. In certain studies, this cultural unknown finally and dramatically yields to the powerful analysis of the researcher. Fieldwork is said to be able to plunge the researcher into life-transforming experiences through encounter with the Other (Peacock, 1986:55). I can certainly acknowledge the powerful effects of the encounter with a different culture. I was born in Bombay in an English-speaking Christian family with a Portuguese cultural heritage. Since my father was a Forest Officer who was frequently posted to various locations to supervise the conservation of woodlands and wildlife, I spent my first nine years in parts of Maharashtra and in Gujarat. The mythic exploits of Rāma or the Pāṇḍavas, the heroes of India’s great epics, were as much a part of my experience as were Samson’s adventures with Delilah. Although I grew up in an essentially "western" household, shaped by the values and norms of European culture, my encounter with the West was excitingly bewildering. But I was young, still maturing, and so adapted

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5See James Clifford’s (1988 [1983]:21-54) essay, “On Ethnographic Authority,” in which he describes the way anthropologists in the post-Malinowski to the pre-postmodern period established authoritative presence and interpretive power in their reports.
quickly. Later, I spent about five years travelling in various parts of the world. My reencounter with India at that time, sixteen years after I had left it, still affected me tremendously. It was strangely familiar, and yet there was so much I did not understand. It was precisely this combination which fueled my interest to pursue deeper systematic study of the culture. In all honesty, I was still somewhat bewildered when I arrived in Banaras in 1990 for my fieldwork, despite my many extended encounters with India. But this time I had come specifically to learn what I could about certain aspects of its puzzling culture. Unfortunately, I did not arrive with the "advantage" of a singularly Western viewpoint. The circumstances of my birth and travels had already changed that irrevocably. I would not be able to write about my impressions of the Other from the vantage point of the culturally virginal Westerner. As Kirin Narayan has aptly stated, "rather than being a discovery of the exotic, this work is in many ways a deepening of the familiar" (1989:9).

I shared many of the experiences and face many of the concerns so well articulated by Narayan (1989) and Abu-Lughod (1991, 1993). For instance, my "Indianness" in appearance gave me an immediate measure of insider status, although my initially faltering Hindi impaired my work in the early stages. Not only did my language skills restrict my capacity to inquire and understand, but more importantly, the moment I opened my mouth, I stood out as an outsider. Even at this early period of fieldwork, however, I was almost immediately told confidentially about my companions' attitudes to "foreigners" (videsi), which I took as a sign of being accepted as an Indian. My lack of knowledge of Hindu culture, quickly discerned by the nature of my questions and occasional faux-pas (such as drinking water from a common container by placing my lips to the vessel), was generally seen as something unfortunate, owing to my family's departure to the West. I was being helped to catch up and know what I should have automatically absorbed had I remained in the country. In religious matters, I was almost always initially spoken to, by religious specialists such as pandits, sadhus (holy men), and temple priests, as if I knew virtually nothing about Hindu religion, and thus it would often take many encounters before I could reach a sufficiently complex level of inquiry. My rudimentary knowledge of Sanskrit (I can read it with the aid of a dictionary) and
familiarity with the relevant religious literature compensated for some of these difficulties. When groping for a Hindi word, I would on occasion try a Sanskrit equivalent. To my pleasant surprise, very often such words were deemed as pure (suddha) Hindi. Ironically, as my Hindi improved, I became the butt of greater criticisms about my lack of abilities, in dramatic contrast to my Western friends whose improving language skills were greeted with awe and approval.

While most non-English speaking Indians were curious to find out about Western culture through me, I was far less interesting to many of the more educated English speaking Indians than were my Western friends. They were authentic Westerners, while I was not. Despite this handicap, one of my best connections for the study of Durgā worship came about through such a cultural dynamic. Since there are only a handful of families in Banāras which celebrate Durgā Pūjā in an elaborate fashion, I had for the most part, psychologically, ruled out the possibility of witnessing such a celebration which was to occur not long after my arrival in the city. However, one day while my fellow Canadian friends, Christoper Justice and Patricia Seymour, were watching Durgā Pūjā images being made by the craftsmen in Bengāli Tola, a particular quarter of Banāras, they were befriended by some members of the Lahiri family and invited to visit their home celebration. Christopher and Patricia, aware of my research, naturally informed the Lahiris about me and asked if I could accompany them on the visit. I was thrilled to have this valuable door to research opened for me and went along eager to make a suitable impression on my hosts. On that first visit it was clear that although I was cordially welcomed, I was quickly appraised and relegated aside as culturally less interesting. Besides Durgā, my Western friends were the centre of attention, and I, in an almost pushy fashion, had to ask if I could return on the following days to continue to study the ritual. Fortunately, I soon developed an excellent relationship with the Lahiris, who invited me back many times and gave me invaluable help and information over the year and at the following year’s celebration. Yet I am certain that my "Indianness" was not an asset in those early encounters.

Fieldwork in an urban center of religious learning and sectarian plurality raises many of the issues with which the anthropology of modern societies is grappling. I am
an Indian-born scholar with an essentially Western perspective and education, studying Indian culture. Many of my sources of information were highly educated Indians who had read and absorbed Western scholarly treatments of their tradition. Some of my sources of information were people who had written scholarly papers or translated texts into English which I had read prior to going to Bānaras. From what perspective, then, was I asking questions? A Western or an Indian one? Were people I spoke to giving me the pure, unadulterated, Hindu interpretation of their culture, or a syncretic composite, drawn from the East and the West? To whom were they answering: the Indian or the Westerner they perceived me to be? Should I try to sort these out and craft a report which is free from cultural ambiguities and odd juxtapositions, like photographing a primitive village scene, taking care not to include the case of Coca Cola bottles and television antennae in the picture? Or should I highlight these very things?

My decision is to follow the middle way between these extremes, neither highlighting apparent discrepancies, nor avoiding them, neither striving for cultural purity nor making an issue of cultural syncretism. This brief preface, has I hope, provided the reader with some sense of my cultural predicament and philosophical orientation. It is the filter through which my observations occurred, through which I asked my questions, and the screen through which interpretations and understanding arrived. 6

Methodology in the Report

I have adopted a conservative stance in reporting my findings, although I have tried not to exclude evocative elements in my writing. Here, I am referring to contemporary scholarly concerns in anthropological accounts. To whom is the report addressed and how is one best able to transmit the complexities of another culture through the limited medium of a written account? To some extent, every anthropologically based study is an act of cultural translation, where the "language" of the Other’s culture is first understood by the researcher and then translated into the

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6In thinking about the task of cultural interpretation and the act of reporting it I have been influenced by the writings in such works as Clifford Geertz (1973, 1988), James Clifford (1988), James Clifford and George Marcus (1986), and Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (1986).
cultural language of the audience. Heterogeneous aspects in both the other culture and
the audience in a post-modern world make such a task difficult. For instance, this study
is not a literary account about a non-literate culture. Hindu Durgā worshippers may read
this account. Would they readily recognize themselves, relate to the interpretations, and
understand themselves better through the process? I hope so, for it would be a shame if
they did not. A scholarly study should not be essentially Western, although it derives
from a Western educational tradition. I hope that this study is intellectually accessible to
any who share the same language of scholarly discourse, be they from the Hindu culture
or from one which has virtually no knowledge of the Hindu tradition.

The condensation of vastly complex dimensions of culture into a report without
dilution or distortion poses another challenge. In some measure it grows out of the
acknowledgement that despite cultural commonalities widely shared by members of a
society, there are also numerous variations. Certain groups or individuals within that
society may favour particular symbols and ascribe meanings to these which serve their
own needs. In the endeavour to tell the story of a culture, how does one represent the
different voices of these many groups? An extreme position is that one should report only
transcribed and translated dialogues, for every paraphrase is somewhat distorting. Other
scholars favour narrative approaches, or highly subjective accounts, each for compelling
reasons. I am aligned with those who feel that one should attempt to let the voices of
various groups be heard in the most effective means possible. Folklore may demand
narrative and dialogue; philosophical analyses do not. Thus multivocality is achieved
through the use of direct quotations, paraphrased conversations, summarized accounts,
diagrams, photographs and the like, all of which combine to give a multi-faceted picture
of the culture. The "voice" of Durgā image makers is therefore also present in a
photograph of their work. If such multivocality is combined with descriptions of sensory
perceptions (e.g., sights, smells, sounds), if individual stories are woven with broader
generalizations, if the researcher’s presence and effect on the situation is not excised, a
more complete, less distorted, and ultimately more accessible picture of the culture may
be evoked.

My research in Banāras was carried out mainly through observations and
interviews. I also spent time translating sections of commercial printed material on Devī worship. Almost all the descriptive material which follows in this study is derived from direct observations, while almost all of the "first level" interpretations are derived from interviews with worshippers or from popular religious literature on the Devī. I have been careful to indicate where I have inserted my own interpretive or analytic efforts (e.g., the meaning of the Nine Gaurī pilgrimage). Further interpretive efforts on my part stem from attempts to interpret the "first level" interpretations.

I feel justified in reporting summaries of certain "well-known myths" without documenting the sources, particularly if there is no variant in the "telling," or if the nature of the source (e.g., text or oral tale) is not germane to the subsequent discussion. For example, as a child, I "knew" that Rāvana abducted Sītā, and that Rāma rescued her with the aid of the monkey Hanumān, long before I came to know of the existence of the Rāmāyana, either as an oral or a written text. Of course, by the time I had completed my fieldwork, I had continued to hear this myth from scores of others, and had read versions or portions of it in dozens of books ranging from elementary school primers to an edition in Sanskrit. I feel it would be artificial and even inappropriate, to frame the telling of such a myth in the words of "an-Other" individual. My footnote references to texts where a written version of a myth may be found, are not intended to imply that these are the original sources. Similarly, in such cases, I do not wish to give primacy to the oral account, to the individual variant, or to the social or economic status, gender, or political orientation of the source. I am actually implying that the version of the myth, as I have reported it, is a generic account, one which is virtually endemic among the population, shared and told by hundreds of sources. I believe that in citing summaries of such myths I am using an aspect of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, in which, after absorbing numerous variants, the common if not the deep structural patterns within the cycle of myths emerge. Wendy O'Flaherty (1973:30-32), for instance, applied such an analysis to the mythology of Śiva, and discerned a simple story line which forms the basis of all the variants. I have intuitively and qualitatively applied such a method in places.

I have written this account heuristically in the sense that I lead the reader along
the discoveries I have made. The varied assortment of conceptual images of Durgā which are uncovered are interpreted in relationship to the worship activities from which these symbols emerge. I also offer interpretive schemes which connect subsets of these conceptual images (e.g., the Nine Durgās of Banāras; the triad of Mahālakṣmi, Mahāsarasvati, and Mahākāli). These ordering schemes essentially derive from worshippers, either explicitly or implicitly. An explicit interpretation offered by a particular worshipper often serves as the foundation upon which I have continued to elaborate. These so-called second level interpretations (of mine) are based on evidence culled from many other sources, including the comments of other worshippers, the literature, art, and other aspects of Hindu culture. Wherever possible, I have made scrupulous efforts to document these sources. Implicit interpretations, however, derive much more strongly from these multi-faceted sources of information than from the words of any individual. Such interpretations represent an attempt to understand and explain culture from a holistic perspective. Here, by holism, I stress the concept of "synergy," where the nature and qualities of the whole are more than can be deduced by the mere sum of its many constituent parts. The dynamic interrelationship between these many sources of information which derive from the culture studied and the researcher together lead to interpretations (made by the researcher) which cannot be honestly credited to either the researcher or the Other. They derive from neither one, but from the synergetic relationship between both these. If I have neglected to document the sources of an interpretation, it is probably because it of this sort. I have avoided the tendency to snip away or tie up loose ends, to create coherencies or offer interpretations where none were forthcoming. The resultant "untidiness" is strategic in that it is a more accurate picture of the complexities of the culture described. To trim away opaque symbols and (to me) undeciphered acts from a description of ritual would be a form of distortion. Therefore I have grounded my report not in interpretation, but in "thick" description, having said neither the last word on any of it nor some word on all of it.7

7I concur with Steven Tyler's statement that "a post-modern ethnography is fragmentary because, ... life in the field is itself fragmentary" (1986:131). See also Marilyn Strathern's aptly entitled section "Complex Society, Incomplete Knowledge" in Partial Connections (1991:19-27).
My agenda was to write about Durga worship in a city renowned as a microcosm of India. Were I interested in a highly regional study, with a focus on extreme cultural particulars, a village or small culturally homogenous town would have been a better choice. In essence, I was trying to uncover generalized types of spiritual activities in which Durga devotees engaged, and if these behaviours were informed or shaped intrinsically by their conceptual images of the Devi. To my surprise, despite the variations of worship patterns which I observed, I also found a frustrating consistency in the interpretations offered by devotees. Durga is most frequently thought of as a protective maternal deity and as the all-pervading power of the cosmos. These common and previously articulated interpretations of the nature of the Devi did not appear to illuminate satisfactorily some of the forms her worship took, such as the establishment of a jar, the sprouting of seeds, blood sacrifice, or the Nine Durga pilgrimage.

The bulk of my formal interviews and casual conversations with devotees did not reveal anything particularly novel concerning if and how their images of the Devi affected their devotional behaviours. I did find that there was quite a variety of devotional activities in which worshippers could engage, such as visits to Durga temples, pilgrimage circuits, making pledges, and keeping observances. Any given devotee might partake in a selection of these forms, and that selection may vary from year to year. The microcosm of Banaras provides a range of devotional options from which devotees may freely choose. If their families originated from places other than Banaras, devotees may initially adhere to regional styles of worship, especially at home, but are eventually influenced by worship patterns of other groups in public arenas. Bengali aspects of Durga worship are particularly influential in Banaras, but these too are undergoing modifications as they are adopted by non-Bengali groups.

Despite the frequent assertions of well-worn interpretations, on occasion, fascinating interpretations emerged which, though they cannot be said to belong in any conscious manner to the majority of Durga worshippers, are part of the corpus of conceptual images of the Devi. Among these interpretations, I found intriguing and telling explanations for common devotional acts and ritual practices. Although the sources of these more rarely encountered interpretations were often the well-educated or sacred
specialists (e.g., priests, religious scholars, renouncers), less educated lay persons also
made many contributions. I recognize that socially and economically disenfranchised
women with little formal education are a potentially rich source of information on Durgā
worship. I would have liked to have been able to have more contact with them.

In writing this account, I have included both the common and the rare
interpretations which I encountered. I have tried not to give unnecessary primacy to the
common and secondary status to the rare. Readers interested in the most frequently
encountered conceptual images of Durgā may refer to Kinsley’s thorough and accurate
treatment in *Hindu Goddesses*. By including less frequently encountered interpretations
I wish to give voice to regional variations, to cultural elements which may be
disappearing or emerging, and to gender, class, or occupationally specific sources, all
of which are likely to be encountered in the cultural diversity which also characterizes
Banāras. By not making a disproportionately serious effort to draw hard historical,
geographical, or sociological distinctions, the report mirrors a devotee’s range of
interpretive options. Said differently, Durgā worshippers in Banāras are likely to
encounter any of the rare interpretations regardless of their sociological position or
regional affiliation, and they may either incorporate these interpretations into their world­
view or reject them. Thus a certain female devotee may adopt the idea that the Nine
Durgās represent various stages of womanhood while a male devotee, although
encountering the idea, may not incorporate it into his conceptual framework. In this study
I have made efforts to indicate if a particularly interesting interpretation came from only
one source. More often than not, at some point while in the field, I offered such ideas
to someone else in order to ascertain their reactions, thus exposing them to what had
been until then, in my experience, a singular interpretation.

I am aware of the cautionary voice among anthropologists such as Roger Keesing
(1987), who have pointed to the need to distinguish the social strata from which cultural
knowledge emanates. Cultural knowledge (and therefore power) may be hierarchically
stratified, and forms of knowledge distributed and controlled. Knowledge holders, sacred
specialists, for example, may manipulate or weave webs of mystification, cultural
ideologies, which serve their own ends at the expense of others. To ignore the
stratification of knowledge and read a social formation purely as a "cultural text" is to run the risk of being dangerously, politically naive. It would be quite absurd to suggest that such a stratification of knowledge and power does not exist in Banāras. Its presence is in fact almost impossible to ignore. In my experience, lay persons almost always deferred to sacred specialists, suggesting I go to them for "correct" answers to my probing queries. Similarly, among sacred specialists, the less educated (e.g., a brāhmaṇa priest at a small temple) deferred to those of greater learning (e.g., brāhmaṇa pandits). "I am just a ritual specialist (karmakāndi)," said Ācārya Purusottama Panditji when I pressed him for an interpretation. "If you want to know what 'the demon' is, a man like Kārpāṭriji at Kedarnath temple could have told you. All I know is what to do." Later in the conversation, however, he suddenly blurted out that demons (rākṣasa) were people who disrupted religious rituals. Nevertheless, in general, women deferred to men, children to elders, and so on. India has been an ideal society in which to study the stratification of cultural knowledge and its dynamics. Louis Dumont's (1970) Homo Hierarchicus, R. Redfield and M. Singer's (1954) work on the interaction of "great" and "little traditions," and M. N. Srinivas's (1965) notion of Sanskritization are early classic examples of the ongoing work on the "sociology of knowledge" within Indian culture.

Yet it is also true that Banāras is something of a melting pot. The city is growing rapidly. People are flooding in from the surrounding villages, but also from cities throughout India especially the northern states. One thus finds a mixing of rural and urban classes, and changing economic and educational statuses among these. Milton Singer's (1972) insightful discussion of some of these processes of modernization in the city of Madras are quite applicable in Banāras. According to Singer, "parochialization" is the process wherein an idea which often emanates from the upper strata of the hierarchy (e.g., brāhmaṇa male) and thus deemed (by them) to be universally true, is

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8I do not have exact figures of population growth in Banāras. This is the unanimous opinion of the residents and coincides with my qualitative appraisal of the city in comparison to when I had seen it in the late seventies. The 1991 Census listed the city's population at 1,026,467, and indicated that the population of the state of Uttar Pradesh had increased by almost thirty million inhabitants in the last decade (110,862,013 in March 1981 to 139,031,130 in March 1991). See the Demographic Yearbook. 1991. 43rd Issue. New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Development, Statistical Division.
adopted by some small group, perhaps lower in status, and gradually transformed into something novel. "Universalization" is the process through which a cultural item from a particular place or group is adopted by the upper classes and deemed (by them) universal and authoritative. Such processes are clearly at work in Banāras where ideas, like items cast in the Gaṅgā, flow in and out, submerge and surface, and though retaining some constancy are transformed. They subvert the notion of "authoritative" interpretation in many areas of cultural discourse.

In a recent study, C. J. Fuller strikes a cautionary note when he concludes his appraisal of such sociological approaches by pointing out that

impatient dismissal of the concepts of Sanskritic Hinduism and the great and little traditions as uselessly distortive, as well as their uncritical adoption, have both contributed to misunderstanding popular Hinduism and its relationship with Indian society (1992:28).

Popular Hinduism, he points out, consists of beliefs and practices in which there are fluid connections within structures of relationships, which vitiate the notion of distinct strata within the religious system (1992:28). Durgā worship in Banāras is particularly vulnerable to the ambiguities evident in all the aforementioned processes.

The term "popular religion" has been ubiquitous in scholarly studies certainly after the seminal paper by Robert Redfield (1956), based on his previous work with Milton Singer (see Redfield and Singer 1954), in which he drew attention to the difference between the "great" and "little" traditions in societies. Singer continued to apply this two-tiered model to his study of Indian society and elaborated upon the dynamics which emerge from their interaction. Popular religion, then, was not merely a contamination or a misunderstood embracing of the religion of the elite upper classes by the lower classes, but a legitimate and complex form of religious belief and practice in its own right. However, the term "popular" still referred to the religion of the lower classes, the less-educated, generally illiterate masses, although it acknowledged a circular interaction of mutual influence on elite religious culture.9

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I have, in fact, grown reluctant to designate this work as a study of "popular" Hinduism because I did not focus exclusively on those aspects commonly considered "popular". Like many scholars (e.g., Brown (1981), Christian (1981a), Badone (1990)), I find the term problematic since it often tacitly denigrates what is considered "popular" and creates a dichotomy between "real" religion and the religion of the people. If "popular" religion is the religion of the masses as opposed to the elite then this is not such a study, not because I have emphasized "elite" elements, but precisely because I have not ignored their significant influence on the religious traditions of Banāras. The same holds for the classic oppositions between the religion of literate, brāhmaṇa males and that of illiterate, caṇḍala females, or between textual traditions and oral traditions, and between religion as prescribed and religion as practiced. It is not that such distinctions do not exist, but that when the focus is not primarily on them, they recede owing to their very interconnectedness. Not unlike the application of a prism to white light, the conceptual category of "popular religion" facilitates and directs perceptions to constituent social and cultural elements which are not always apparent without the inspecting apparatus. If, however, a study of "popular religion" is an effort to understand a religious system of a people comprehensively, holistically rather than fragmentedly, then this may be considered such a study.

I am attracted to the suggestion made by William Christian (1981a) that geography can play an important part in shaping religious styles. Christian points out how certain regions may exhibit a religious style which cuts across social and economic boundaries. "Local" religion then is a term which is, in such instances, preferable to "popular" religion. There is no doubt that Banāras qualifies as a geographical location which has its distinctive style of religiosity. But unlike an isolated valley in rural Spain, Christian's area of research, Banāras is an urban centre with a high percentage of transient traffic, and is a melting pot of Indian society, its cultural values, and religious beliefs. The distinct character of Banāras derives not from its isolation but from its

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10Christian (1981a:178) makes an argument for applying the term "popular religion" to "religion as practiced" rather than to "religion as prescribed."
unique diversity and accessibility. Here "local" religious style is less easily isolated for examination, since it is both a blend and a mosaic of the interacting religious "cultures" of its inhabitants. It is thus ideally suited for a study of the goddess Durgā. Durgā is worshipped in different ways by males and females of both the lower and upper classes. She is also worshipped by rural and urban societies throughout India. It is hardly surprising that in Banāras the interaction between all these groups, each with its own internal dynamic, should result in Durgā worship which is vibrant, diverse, and evolving. This examination of "local religion" attempts to evoke these characteristic qualities of this city's worship of Durgā.

There is a problem posed in interpreting aspects of culture where the hierarchical layering of knowledge is somewhat fractured or fluid, and where "authoritative" interpretations, if not entirely absent are at least diverse and questionable. To cope with such situations, I have relied upon a strategy suggested by anthropologists such as Simon Charsley (1987). Charsley suggests that rare or novel interpretations of an ambiguous or opaque symbol whether emanating from the anthropologist or participant may be tested by playing off their "appropriateness" on other participants in that culture. Interpretations which are tendentious or unwarranted are generally ignored by the group since they have power neither to reinforce nor damage existing practices. Valid interpretations are found acceptable to the group since they reinforce existing practices. They generally remain latent. Valid interpretations may also challenge such practices and, if so, do not remain latent. They are not rejected outright by the group but expounded, defended, or challenged. They often reflect changing or differing cultural values among members of the same society. As an example in this study, the extraordinarily revealing interpretation of the cluster of Nine Durgās as the stages of womanhood, was quickly accepted and developed by other women, but virtually ignored by men, almost leading one to designate the genders as separate cultures (although this is, of course, extreme).

Clearly, then, my objective has not been to find out the single "true meaning" behind the cluster of symbols which constitute Durgā and inform her worship. Rather, I have tried to give voice to a range of meanings, most of which are accepted as "appropriate" if not "authoritative" within the cultural domain of Durgā worship. The
structure of this study is not based on "patterns of meaning" but on symbols and symbolic act. I decided against constructing the account by following a few exemplary individuals on their devotional rounds through the year. Instead, I have chosen the strategy of describing in detail two important foci of Durgā worship. The first focal point is the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple, the most renowned temple to Durgā in Banāras and a significant nexus of her worship. The second focal point is the Durgā Pūjā ritual which takes place not at the temple but at other locations during the autumn Navarātra, the most important nine-night festival of the goddess. These serve as the foci of an elliptical orb encompassing a large array of sacred places, times, and activities which are also discussed. Among these are other permanent Durgā temples, other important times within an annual cycle, and the devotional activities of sacred specialists and lay persons. Interpretations of symbols and behaviours are either woven in with the descriptions or dealt with separately. Where descriptions are detailed and lengthy, I have relegated pertinent information and some interpretation to footnotes to avoid confusion. Detailed interpretations and analyses are then appended to the essentially descriptive material.

The reader should be aware of my efforts to use the terms goddess, Devī, Durgā, and Great Goddess (Mahādevī) with some method. Devotees who worship at Durgājī use these terms, and many other epithets, seemingly indiscriminately, and it would probably be most authentically representative of the culture to do the same. However, I have tried to use the epithet Durgā only when it is almost unequivocal that the goddess in question is known by that name, such as the goddess of Durgā Kuṇḍ temple. I use the terms "Devī" and "goddess" to refer to any feminine conception of deity which may be known as Durgā and by other epithets. Therefore I may talk about the mythological exploits of "the Devī" as they are recounted in a text known as the Devī Māhāmya or the Durgā Saptaśat. I restrict usage of the term Great Goddess to those cases where reference is made to the goddess as the Absolute or the Supreme form of the divine. Durgā, however, is also a goddess whose epithet is most often identified with the Mahādevī.

Note: In citing anecdotes or reporting dialogue, I have on occasion used pseudonyms, especially when referring to people who indicated to me that they did not wish to be
identified. I indicate such usage in a footnote appended to the first occurrence of the pseudonym.

**A Sample Interview**

The following condensed version of part of an interview illustrates the form and dynamics of my relationships with people to whom I spoke in Banaras about Durga worship. The interview was conducted on October 7, 1991 on the eve of the Autumn Navarātra, in Hindi, although Shanti Devi’s Hindi was peppered with the Bhojpuri dialect, and the odd English word (e.g., “hushbaind” for husband), for my benefit. When reproducing Shanti’s words, I have omitted my intermittent questions, particularly where they concerned clarifying points of misunderstanding in language. I had known Shanti casually, as the maid servant of friends, for about a year. The mood of the interview was extremely pleasant. Nevertheless, the interview contains examples of typical tensions in such a process. I was frequently trying to elicit information of a "spiritual" nature. Shanti was interested in educating me, and at the same time taking the opportunity to bemoan her lot, and even solicit employment. Yet there was a quality of carefreeness in her responses, a self assurance and strength, some inconsistencies, and many surprises. This interview is not included here merely to illustrate one form of the information acquisition process. Shanti typifies a woman whose life circumstances demanded that she find a source of personal empowerment in order to survive. Durga was such a source. I will refer back to Shanti throughout the study in arguments I will make concerning some of the roles Durga plays among her worshippers.

**I**: Could you introduce yourself?

**Shanti Devi**: I am Shanti Devi of the Mallāha caste. My father was a boatman who worked taking tourists along the Gaṅgā to see the sights. After his death (gujre), thirty years ago I went to live with his brother’s family. I was two when he died. I am thirty-two now. My mother died twenty-two years ago, when I was ten. I have two older sisters and then there is me, and then one younger. So we are four sisters, each two years apart: thirty-six, thirty-four, thirty-two, and thirty.

**I**: It must have been very difficult for you since your mother died when
your eldest sister was fourteen.

S: Sure it was difficult. When I was eight, my mother arranged my marriage.

I: Did you say eighteen?

I: No. Eight. My uncle (cācāji), who put us up (dekhbhal karte), he arranged the marriage. All my sisters were married, similarly, at eight years of age, two-two years apart.
-My husband was forty years old when I was eight. And he has been dead for four years.

I: What kind of a man was he?

S: He drank. He wasn’t a good man. He gambled with cards (pati/tās).
-After my father’s death, my mother was very ill, and so there was great necessity to have the daughters married. She believed a man who told her a lie (jhūtha bole). He told her that the man I was to marry was alright, that he had seen him.
-We are fisherfolk who catch fish in the Gaṅgā, and we didn’t see him since he was away fishing. When the day of the wedding came and he arrived at the door it wasn’t possible to cancel the wedding. Neither my mother nor I had seen how he was or wasn’t. Bandhā, that was the village where he had been fishing.
-It was a big surprise when he arrived at the wedding ceremony. It was quite a problem (muśkil). Many people said, the wedding will [should?] not take place. But we had spent a lot of money, one or one and a half thousand rupees, in preparation for this wedding. The food which we had bought was already prepared. The rice, vegetables, kacauris would all go bad.

I: What was going on in your head at the time about this marriage and this man?

S: Nothing. I was too young, I understood nothing.
-I went to stay with the husband of my elder sister, until I was old enough to live with him. My husband left after the wedding. He came back now and then, but was away most of the time. He returned to stay ten years later, when I was eighteen. He was fifty when he came back, and that’s why he died so soon.
-Between the ages of eight and eighteen, I cooked and cleaned around the house. I didn’t do anything else. My mother had died two years after the marriage. I was staying with my eldest sister’s husband (jījā). Her
husband (patideva) was alright. In fact all my sister’s husbands were alright. Only mine was a product of a deception (dhoke vale).

-When my husband returned he took me to his house where I currently live in Shivala ghāṭ. I was born near Dasāśvamedha ghāṭ.
-There was no happiness in my life. He drank liquor. He would come home for a few days and be gone for several days. This continued for all those years.
-I have two children. One is twenty and the other is fifteen.
-My husband was not a good lover. He drank a lot and so slept a lot. It was very difficult.

I: So you had your first child when you were twelve!

S: Yes, and the second when I was seventeen. One year later my husband came back to stay.

I: Despite this difficult life you seem to be in good spirits now. Why is that?

S: I don’t know about that. When the children came I was busy with taking care of them. My happiness certainly didn’t come from my husband.
-Both children are good boys. The younger boy is still in school. The older boy will marry after three years. I will arrange both their marriages.
-I too could marry again, but don’t want to. Because I feel that since I didn’t find happiness the first time, why should I find it the second time around.

I: Why don’t you? You aren’t old.

S: (Laughing) It’s not a question of age. But it is pointless (bekăr). If the first love/deed (kāma) was bad, who wants a second?

I: But maybe the second time will be better?

S: When the children are grow up, then I will consider it.

I: Is it easy to get married again? Don’t people not want to marry a widow, or someone who has married before?

S: No, not really. Among our people, remarriage is normal. You can also bring your children if you have them. My elder sister’s husband has told me that he will gladly marry me after her death. He gave me his promise [Literally: He did not disown me (inakār nahiṁ diya)]. My life is good
I: What do you think the condition is among Indian women? Is their life good?

S: In Banaras, there are very few widows (pati/sāī bīnā), very few women who live without men. Money is a big thing. People do all sorts of illegal things to get money. In India there are a lot of people living corrupt lives. People living pure lives are rare. Things aren’t moving ahead (āge nahim barīthe hai).

-It isn’t easy to earn a living. No matter how much I work, I don’t earn enough. I start work for M. at six a’clock and work there till nine. Then I do some work for G. I have another job where I make rotīs, etc. and then go home.

I: But you earn money in these jobs don’t you?

S: Hah. Look how little I get. There is so much work to do and the wages are so low. Before I was very strong (tagōde) but for the last four years I have become quite weak (thuble?). I am very worried. There are all the household chores of cooking for and caring for my children. Washing clothes, and so on. I go to sleep at midnight.

-I get out of bed at half past three in the morning. I make the food. Then I brush my teeth. Then I go to the toilet. Then I bathe (there is a well behind my house). I bring water from there. Then I go to the temple for darśana. Then I come to work. I stop and have a tea along the way. Oh yes, and I eat a pān, and then I arrive at M’s house at six.

-I do the work of two men on three and a half hours sleep. How hard my life is!

I: But you don’t do this every day? Sunday is a day of rest.

S: Yes, I rest on Sunday. But otherwise, I follow this routine regularly.

-Even though there is not much in the way of money left over after my expenses, I stick with this. I think differently from most people. If I have ten paisa in my hand, I stick with this rather than go after something else.

-What I get Mā Durgā gives me. This is why I remain pleasantly intoxicated (mastī rahti hai). If I worked for you, you could trust me with the lock and key.

I: Do you go to the temple daily?

S: Yes.
I: How did you begin?

S: I used to be sick regularly. Daily. Before. After the children were born. I visited a man, some sadhu, but I couldn’t tell you what kind, I don’t know. He told me I should go take darśana of Mā Durgā daily in the morning or evening, anytime, just make sure it is regular.

-Camphor (kapura), incense sticks (agarbatti), cloth scarf (cunn), cardamom sweets (ilayacr dāna), coconut (nāriyala), flower garland (phul ki mālā), these are offered.

-I prefer to go in the morning. It has been fifteen years since I started doing this. I’ve been strong since then. I began to find work and earn money. My children have been healthy. They haven’t been hungry, or suffered from colds and I’ve been happy.

-If I miss taking darśana, I get dizzy (ham ko cakkar āne lagthe hai). I don’t eat. I normally would eat rice, vegetables or rotti, but I only drink water, eat bananas or curd until I take darśana. Then I start to eat normally again. That’s why I go daily. How can I work without a proper meal?

Where better to begin the examination of Durgā worship than at the place where Shanti began hers? As an illiterate widow from a "low" class of Gaṅgā fisherfolk, Shanti comes from a subaltern segment of native Banāras society. Suffering from poor health and forced to be independent for much of her life, she took up the prescription of a holy man (sādhu), which she put into practice. Whatever the sādhu’s original class (he might have been a brāhmaṇa or śūdra), as a person treading the spiritual path he was much higher than her in status. Thus her engagement with Durgā worship began with a precept from a member of an "elite" group. What is so special about this temple where Shanti Devi was enjoined to worship? Who is its deity, the goddess Durgā, and what forms does her worship take? Who worships there and why? These are a few of the many questions I hope to answer in the subsequent chapters.

Structure of the Study

The first chapter of my study deals with a description of the layout of the Durgā Kund temple and its subsidiary shrines. Through this examination of architechttonic and other symbols I uncover and interpret elements and organizational patterns within the symbol set associated with Durgā. I also look at the temple site diachronically, examining
its mythic, legendary, and historical origins. I describe the personnel and structure of the temple's religious and economic management. Incidentally, this chapter provides the most detailed written record, thus far, of one of the city's most popular temples, and perhaps the most famous temple to Durgā, under that epithet, in all of India. Since the temple is expected to undergo major renovations shortly as a result of generous patronage, these descriptions might serve some historical function. I begin my examination of blood sacrifice (bali) in this chapter. Since many subordinate deities (e.g., Gaṇeśa, Kāli) play a part in the conceptual matrix of Durgā, I begin my discussion of their relevant symbolism here. I begin to extract an indigenous goddess-centred (Śākta) metaphysical perspective which, in certain respects, resembles the philosophical science of Sāṅkhya/-Yoga, and which links many of the elements of the Durgā symbol set.

Chapter Two deals with the cycles of worship at Durgā Kund temple and thus is a different type of diachronic examination. It begins with an interpretive description of the daily routine from the perspective of the chief priest who ministers to the Durgā image housed there. The weekly routine highlights the cadences of worship according to solar and planetary patterns. The monthly routine introduces the lunar calendrical cycles which are relevant in Durgā worship. When discussing the yearly worship cycle, which is quite lengthy, I locate the occurrences and significance of the four most important festivals to Durgā, particularly the spring and autumn Navarātras. Just as the subsidiary shrines at the temple site did, the yearly cycle points to the connections between Durgā and other deities through the interrelationship of their festivals. The yearly cycle shows how the Durgā Kund temple functions in the cycles of worship of other deities, and illustrates the waxing and waning of Durgā’s divine presence during the year. The mythic and legendary backdrop to these festivals of Durgā and related deities are also presented here. These are interpreted in tandem with general patterns of worship behaviours since they shed light on each other. The deities and festivals examined in this chapter are selected due to their significance to worshippers during the yearly cycle, and since they provide an opportunity to discuss the relationships between Durgā and other deities. The point of crucial importance is that although Durgā is atypical among Hindu goddesses, especially in her independence, she does not exist in isolation, but derives her image and
character through her association with other Hindu deities. The investigation of puja begins in earnest in this chapter. I continue to describe the Śākta metaphysical system which develops and show how it informs the religious activities of devotees.

In Chapter Three I focus on the Āśvina Navarātra, held in the autumn month of Āśvina, the most important festival to Durgā, describing and interpreting patterns of worship evident in Banāras at this time. Thus the initial focus of the first two chapters, on a particular sacred place (Durgā Kuṇḍ temple), yields to a focus on a particular sacred time (autumn Navarātra) throughout the city. Among the discernible worship patterns are the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, and worship of the goddess in public temporary temples (pañḍal) and in various domestic settings. Interpretations of the Nine Durgās and Nine Gaurīs of Banāras are presented. The relationship between the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple and the larger sphere of Durgā worship in the city is treated here. This chapter also continues the examination of the recitation, by individuals and groups, of the Durgā Saptaśat, the most important text ritually read in Durgā worship. The worship patterns of various types of Durgā worshippers (e.g., devotees, tantrics, healers), are further developed in this chapter. While certain behaviours such as recitation of the Durgā Saptaśat are performed throughout the year, I have chosen to discuss them in this chapter due to the remarkable intensification of these activities during Navarātra. The triad of ritual actions, namely pilgrimage, puja, and blood sacrifice, which are central to this study are examined here in further detail. Further dimensions of the Śākta philosophical framework of the ritual action of devotees are discussed.

Chapter Four is a detailed description and interpretation of the entirety of the Durgā Pūjā ritual as it is performed in certain Banārasi homes and some of the oldest public pāṇḍals. In some sense it is a still more focused continuation of the previous chapter since it concentrates on the last days of Āśvina Navarātra in a particular location. Although the description is drawn essentially from the Bengāli tradition, its elaborateness makes it a good basis against which other Durgā Pūjā rituals in the city and elsewhere in the country may be compared. Important symbolic dimensions of Durgā are uncovered here and interpretations draw upon the symbolic actions of the ritual specialists as well
the Sanskrit liturgy in the pūjā. Both pūjā and sacrifice are examined in greater detail. The ritual contributes substantially to the formulation of the Śākta metaphysical system which I have been developing in the previous chapters. Ideally, this chapter should be read in tandem with the Appendix which provides the reader with a most thorough description of the Durgā Pūjā ritual.

The Concluding Discussion examines the discoveries made in Chapters One to Four and appraises them in the light of the questions asked in this Introduction. The comprehensive metaphysics of Durgā worship which emerged from the study is discussed in its cosmological, epistemological, and ontological dimensions. Here, in particular, the social, political, and gender-related implications of this metaphysics are discussed. Finally, the evidence from the study is used to appraise two divergent theoretical positions on the interpretability of ritual. Although this critique of theoretical perspectives is not central to my study, I feel my work is pertinent and serves as a suitable entry into the discussion on the nature and function of ritual. A Summary of the main findings of the research is included in this section.

The Appendix contains the full description of the Durgā Pūjā ritual, along with the Sanskrit liturgy, as it would be performed by a ritual practitioner (purohita) who was the primary source of information. The form of the pūjā essentially follows the Purohita Darpana (Mirror for the Priest), an influential ritual manual among Bengālis. The description contains interpretive translations of the Sanskrit liturgy which derive from the ritualists. A slightly modified form (e.g., blood sacrifice is omitted or fewer items are offered) of this pūjā is performed in certain homes and public arenas in Banāras. I have closely observed the performance of this particular type of Durgā Pūjā several times and have derived my interpretations from these observations and discussions with priests and worshippers.
CHAPTER ONE

THE DURGA TEMPLE

Location

The Durga temple stands south of Banaras’s busy downtown crossing of Godaulia, on one of the two main roads leading to Banaras Hindu University (please refer to Diagram 1). This road, called Durgā Kund Road, is named after the temple’s landmark water tank (kunda), a one acre large, square structure finished with stone walls. The temple itself is striking because of its location beside the kunda whose waters reflect the tall red spire (śikhara) topped with a copper flag (dhvaja), and pillared rest quarters (dharmaśālā) for pilgrims (See Figure 1). It is built of pink sandstone, probably quarried at a town thirty-five kilometers upriver from Banaras. Chunar, the source of much of the stone which graces the homes and temples of Banaras, is also known for its brickwork, pottery, and brightly coloured Plaster of Paris images of gods and goddesses which are sold as souvenirs at religious fairs. The pink sandstone of the Durga temple (mandira) has been painted with a maroon-red ochre supposed to give greater durability to the stone. Owing to the tall spire (śikhara) on the main structure of the temple sanctum (garbhagrha), and the presence of an adjacent covered porch (mandapa) fashioned with ornate stone pillars, the temple may be seen as belonging to the northern or nagara style of architecture.\(^\text{11}\)

When approaching the temple one is greeted by the fragrance of fresh flowers

\(^{11}\text{This is in contrast to the southern (dravida) style, characterized by tall gateways (gopuram), and the vesara style, with its apsidal and curving features.}\)
which overflow from the baskets of vendors who line the temple’s entrance. The gateway and outer courtyard of the temple is flanked by the circular umbrellas and baskets of these flower vendors who are present daily, and whose numbers proliferate on Tuesdays and festivals. Durgā Mandir (the Durgā temple) is a main distribution point for flowers in the south of the city. One sees yellow marigold blossoms (gendā), a white flower called katua, and red hibiscus (japa or arhul), flowers which are grown in such rural outskirts of the city as Nagwa. They are brought to the downtown flower market in Chauk, and move from there to various distribution points in the city. Devotees may buy flowers for offerings at the temple, but also for worship at their work-place and home shrines. A few people are seen bathing in the tank, whose waters are not especially inviting. A stream of bluish smoke rises from the shelter beside the tank where pilgrims prepare food on cowdung fires. In a small rectangular unpaved section of the outer courtyard a pool of fresh blood sprinkled with flower petals is a tell-tale sign of a recent decapitation of a sacrificial goat. Devotees hurry in and out, touching the floor of the doorway before entering the inner courtyard and then ringing one of the many bells to announce their presence to the Devī. They circumambulate the main structure, often touching a lotus carved in the temple stonework, located on the exterior directly behind the goddess image in the sanctum. Dozens of precocious monkeys inhabit the premises, ready to snatch offerings from the hands of unwary visitors. In one corner, flames rise from the fire pit (havan kunda) and a healer, his body gleaming with sweat, his eyes deep in trance, smears a handful of red powder on the forehead of a female patient. After worship at various peripheral shrines, devotees mount the stairs of the porch (mandapa), move between its ornately sculpted pillars, peer into the inner sanctum, and pay obeisance to Mā (Mother) Durgā. The Devī (goddess), garlanded and clad in a bright sārf, gazes out from behind a golden mask, the face she presents to her devotees.

Writing in 1868, the Reverend M. A. Sherring called the Durgā Mandir "one of the popular and most frequented temples in Benares." He observed that "no Hindu in the neighbourhood, of any pretensions to earnestness in his religion, neglects to visit the temple occasionally. Pilgrims, also, from a distance find their way to it" (1868:158).
Sherring’s observations are still quite applicable today, although the temple services the needs of a much larger population within its nebulous catchment area. Why is this temple special? How did it come to be here? Who is the Devī who commands the devotion of so many and accepts sanguinary offerings?

The Main Structure

The main image of Durgā is located within the inner sanctum (garbhagrha) located within the spire bearing structure of the temple known as the śikhara. This is the structure originally constructed by Rānī Bhavānī, the pious Bengāli queen and generous patron of the post-Islamic Hindu revival in Banāras. A porch (maṇḍapa) adjoins its western face. Although śikhara and maṇḍapa appear to be one continuous structure, they were built in successive stages, eighty to a hundred years apart. The maṇḍapa is a raised square platform accessible by steps from the north, south, and west. It has a large stone canopy supported by twelve ornately sculpted stone pillars. The canopy displays little sculptural ornamentation. It is a square pyramid, whose lines from apex to base appear to curve due to the presence of smaller spires at the four corners. It is fairly obvious that the designers made a cursory effort to emulate the design of the main śikhara. The pillars combine square and circular elements in their design. Sporting numerous decorative floral motifs, they display carved figures of devotees on each of their four faces. The west-facing figures on the four western pillars which form the main entrance onto the porch are most immediately visible to visitors. The inner two depict entrance guardians (dvārapāla), while the outer two depict the monkey deity Hanumān and a club-wielding Bhairava, in their traditional roles as protectors. The marble floor of the pavilion has a small convex swelling, called a lotus, in its very centre. The main entrance to the garbhagrha is blocked by a three foot high marble barricade within which those acting as priests (pājārī) sit. A pair of marble footprints (pāduka) serve as the physical presence of Durgā, which devotees and their offerings can touch. A small indentation contains a paste of red powder (ron) which is applied to the forehead. On either side of the barricade are two magnificently cast bronze winged lions which also receive their share
of devotion.

The \textit{garbhagrha} is an ornate silver structure, said to house the ancient shrine and image of the Devi.\textsuperscript{12} The \textit{sikhara} is multi-spired (\textit{anekānḍaka}), possessing many small spires (\textit{karna śṛṅga}) which culminate in a single, large, central spire (\textit{uralī śṛṅga sikhara}). Each small spire is topped with a gilt point, and the central spire possesses a classic gooseberry/myrobalan capstone (āmalaka), which is crowned by a lotus, and a gilt pitcher (\textit{kalaśa}) and trident (\textit{trisūla}). Typical of eighteenth century C.E. Banāras temples, the Durgā Mandir lacks the profuse ornamentation which again emerges in the nineteenth century C.E.. Nevertheless, a row of small animal figures in full relief (lions, buffalo, elephants, monkeys, etc.) graces the base of the spire. Bas-relief images of Durgā Mahiśāsuramardinī, Kṛṣṇa Gopāla, and Laksī-Nārāyanā are carved in niches the south, east, and west faces, at the base of the \textit{sikhara}, suggesting a Vaiṣṇava orientation on the part of the original builders. The doors to the \textit{garbhagrha} from the north, south, and west are elaborately sculpted and possess inner and outer arches. The northern and southern outer arches are surmounted with bas-reliefs of men (\textit{gandharva?}) seated on birds and playing stringed musical instruments, while the inner arches are ornamented with figures of Durgā and other deities. While figures of men riding lions are carved on the outer arch, the inner arch features Gāneśa and two female figures, probably Gaṅgā and Yamunā.

\textit{Interpretive Observations}

One of the symbolic features of the temple most frequently mentioned by both priests and worshippers concerns the \textit{sikhara}. The five uppermost spires (the central and four subsidiary ones at the cardinal directions) are said to represent the five gross elements (\textit{mahābhubata}) constituting the material universe. This interpretation needs to be explained further for it derives from a metaphysics which pervades this entire study of Durgā. By metaphysics, I mean a philosophical science which encompasses an

\textsuperscript{12}Literally meaning "womb room" or "house of the embryo," the \textit{garbhagrha} is the inner sanctum in which the deity resides. The symbolism of a deity as the creative source of all manifestation, and the entire manifest creation itself as an egg (\textit{brahmānda}), is partly signified by this term.
understanding of how the universe came to be as it is (cosmology), how we comprehend this reality (epistemology), and our place in relationship with the cosmos (ontology). This metaphysics was never systematically and comprehensively described to me by any one person, and thus the system which I will describe as it develops through the course of this study is an amalgam of various viewpoints. For instance, tantric practitioners or puranic scholars may have offered some teachings to the temple priests on particular occasions, which in turn were passed down by the priests to other devotees. The result is that the metaphysical perspective of any individual Durgā worshipper is an incomplete composite culled from many fragmentary sources. Naturally, scholars familiar with particular schools of Indian philosophy will probably recognize elements belonging to these schools in the interpretations which follow in this study.

Despite the nebulous philosophical basis of most people's views, a distinctly Śākta metaphysics with many aspects resembling the orthodox system of Śaṅkhya/Yoga appeared to be most pervasive in a startlingly high percentage of the interpretations offered to me. It is to this "system" that I will most frequently allude. I do understand that the Śaṅkhya/Yoga philosophical science served as a basis for many philosophical systems which developed later in India. It may well be that the composite metaphysics which emerges from this study more closely resembles a particular school of Śākta philosophy with whose name I am unfamiliar.\textsuperscript{13} In traditional Saṅkhya/Yoga, as articulated by Patañjali and Vyāsa, reality is dualistic, being composed of transcendent Puruṣa, which is pure spirit or consciousness, and Prakṛti or Pradhāna, which is pure, unmanifest matter. The intrinsic constituents of Prakṛti are the three guṇas, qualities or attributes which exist in a state of equilibrium when Prakṛti is inactive. When in the presence of Puruṣa, Prakṛti is activated and the equilibrium of the guṇas is disturbed. The sattva guṇa, most closely aligned with pure spirit, is reduced in favour of the rajas and tamas guṇas. The manifest creation grows out of this disturbance of Prakṛti. This evolution of materiality, or the devolution of pure spirit (i.e., sattva guṇa not Puruṣa,

\textsuperscript{13}A helpful discussion of various systems of Śākta metaphysics derived from influential textual sources is found in Kaviraj 1990:46-88.
which is never affected), may be characterized by various constituent elements (*tattva*), each of which consists of the three *gunas* in varying proportions. The Sāñkhya system enumerates twenty-three such elements (plus *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*), which derive sequentially from the purest and most subtle to the grossest. The *mahābhūtas* are the last five of these elements. The Yoga system teaches the method through which one may reverse the process and move from gross diversified materiality back to integral spirit and immortality.¹⁴

Therefore when devotees identify the temple *śikhara* as the five *bhūtas* they are implicitly pointing out that the entire temple symbolically represents the downward manifestation of *Prakṛti* into its gross and subtle elements. Visually moving up the *śikhara*, the structure suggests that these gross and subtle constituent elements merge to form a single entity symbolized by the *śikhara*’s apex. At the apex one finds the lotus, a symbol of the unfolding or blossoming of the cosmos from its single source, the jar (*kalaśa*), a symbol of containment, integration, and immortality (*amrta*), and the trident which carries the symbolism of the three *gunās*. This interpretation meshes with those which follow which indicate that the goddess Durgā, who is identified with *Prakṛti*, is embodied in the temple which in turn serves as a source of yogic reintegration or liberation. One of the many things which distinguish this informal metaphysics from pure Sāñkhya/Yoga is that it is less rigidly dualistic. Durgā, as we shall later see, often incorporates the nature of both *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*.

**The Central Image**

The nature of the central image in the Durgā Mandir is something of a mystery. People either do not know, will not say, will concoct an answer, or are unable to describe what they see. The mystery of the image behind the mask is, in fact, one of its cardinal attributes. M. A. Sherring’s comments reveal that he believed there was an anthropomorphic image beneath the mask.

¹⁴See *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*. Particularly good is the translation and commentary by the traditional Sāñkhya scholar Swami Hariharānanda Aranya (1983). Also see Eliade (1958) and Larson (1969).
The idol within is covered with tinselled cloth, and has a face of brass, or of silver, or of other kind of metal, according to the whim of the priests, who keep a stock of masks on hand, which fit the head of the image (1868:166).

E. B. Havell, writing in 1905 said, "the image of Durgā in this temple is an insignificant doll-like figure of no artistic merit" (1905:165). It is not clear if he was referring to an underlying image or to the decorated mask. It is quite clear that only a privileged few are permitted to see the image beneath the mask, and those persons guard this vision closely. The late owner of the temple, Paras Nath Dubey, told me that the image was an anthropomorphic sculpture of the Devī as Mahišāsuramardini (Crusher of the Buffalo Demon). This is a common answer given to the curious.

Confused by the many differing opinions, but unable to view the Devī behind her mask, I continued probing at every opportunity. After many unsuccessful attempts, I finally received these two answers, both from chief priests (pujari) of the temple, who minister to the Devī most intimately. Ram Prasad Dubey, current chief pujari of the temple, said,

I cannot and will not draw the image behind the mask. It is a yantra. It is a triangular (trikona) yantra, not the Durgā Yantra. Also there are footprints (carana) on the wall. At one time there was a desire to install a mārī there, but people felt that the yantra was adequate. There is nothing written on the wall. No one knows if there is perhaps something installed inside the wall.

Śītalā Prasad Chaubey, former chief pujari of the temple who was expelled from this role partially substantiated this description. According to him,

the Bengāli queen [Rāni Bhavāni] made a Yantra of Twenty (bīṣa yantra) and installed that in the temple. There is no image (mārī). On the wall, there is simply a carved sign. It is very ancient. In such old images one normally finds bits of hand, arm, head, and such, but here there are only vague lines, like a trident (triśūla). These lines are a yantra.

Were I to hazard a guess as to the nature of the image on the wall, I would suggest that the central image of Durgā is a gold and silver mask surmounting a stone image which is concealed by a sārt and decorative garlands (See Figure 3). I believe the image is an obscured instrument (yantra) of Durgā, consisting of vague lines interpretable as a triangle (trikona) or trident (triśūla) and a set of footprints (pāduka) on the wall.
A small well in front of the image carries the water, consecrated (*carāṇa amṛta*; literally, nectar from the feet) by washing the image, to an outlet on the northern side, where it is sipped by devotees. Coconut water from offerings mix with this water, all of which eventually flows into Durgā Kund, continually sanctifying it.

**Interpretive Observations**

It is interesting that secrecy, even deception, concerning the image seem important. There is a real mystery, to which I will allude later, concerning the fate of the original images which were on the site before Rānī Bhavānī built the temple. However, the most compelling reason for the secrecy or deception is that the prestige and reputation of the temple as a place of power and attainment (*siddha pātha*) is enhanced by the mysterious nature of the Devī. Her form at the source, in the core of the inner sanctum, is unknowable, except to her most ardent devotees. By preserving this underlying mystery, the custodians of Durgā Kund temple oblige worshippers to project their own imaginative conceptions of the Devī onto the form behind the mask. I often heard that the image was the *bīsa yantra* (Yantra of Twenty), the Durgā Yantra, or the Śrī Yantra (Yantra of the Goddess Śrī). Other accounts were that the image is a full eight-armed, or ten-armed image of Durgā as Mahiṣāsura-madāini, complete with buffalo demon and lion mount (*vāhana*).

The common Yantra of Twenty (*bīsa yantra*) of Durgā is a design of multiple triangles, symbolic of the female generative organ (*yoni*), containing the numerals one to nine, which add up to twenty (*bīsa*) (See Diagram 3). Here it would appear that the number twenty is important because of the magical potency of the number nine, which is closely associated with the goddess. There is a certain numerological "magic" in the number nine for cultures which utilize the decimal system.\(^{15}\) The origins of the

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\(^{15}\)For instance, the sum of the digits of any multiple of nine adds up to nine (e.g., nine times nine is eighty-one, and eight plus one equal nine).

An interesting paper on the significance of the number three in American culture (which incidentally uses the decimal system) is found in Alan Dundes, 1980. Three times three is nine. Dundes argues that such numerological significances, and "pattern numbers" generally, are shaped by culture and are not intrinsic structures in human consciousness.
association of the number nine with the goddess is not known, but explanations may be offered in some Tantras. The number nine is quite frequently encountered in the Indian tradition to enumerate clusters of items, such as the nine astrological bodies (navagraha). I will refer to such groupings in the course of this study. Interestingly, just as the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are each associated with an aspect of the goddess (as Vāc), making every linguistic creation examples of her diverse creative manifestations, so also, in the symbolism of the Yantra of Twenty, each numeral from one to nine is associated with an aspect of the goddess. Therefore, it is not just the number nine which is significant in relationship to the goddess, but every numeral from one to nine and their combinations. An implication suggested by this yantra is that every conceivable enumeration is a manifestation of the Devī.

Symbolic Key

The temple has twenty corners. It is built according to a yantra, with the use of mantras. Although hundreds of years old, not a brick has fallen. There is some special metal buried under each corner, and a mantra recited for each corner. A havan was performed for each corner during the temple’s construction. Each activity has separate mantras. Because there is metal inside each corner, the entire temple is a yantra (Sitala Prasad Chaubey, May 13, 1991).

These words from Śitalā Prasad Chaubey, former priest (pujārī) of the Durgā Kund temple, articulate certain opinions common among the Devi’s devotees. The Durgā temple is a yantra, a construction which serves as an instrument or tool. Yantras, generally seen in the form of two dimensional drawings, are often intended to be visualized as three dimensional spaces into which a spiritual practitioner is expected to enter. Hindu temples are essentially material forms of these visualizations. Without the aid of highly developed powers of visualization less adept devotees may partake in the yantric exercise through a visit to the temple. As yantras, Hindu temples are also embodiments of the deity, and possess an anthropomorphic form. In the words of Krishna Deva, a resident of Banāras and a renowned scholar of Hindu temple architecture, a temple is basically a foundational plan of the cosmic being (vastupurusa). It is essentially compared to the human body. The lower mouldings are like our feet
and legs. The walls are called the thighs. The largest amount of ornamentation on a handsome lady, garlands, necklaces and so on, is located in the region from the trunk to the thigh, and this is also true of the temple. The sikhara, which means head, is actually the upper part of the torso plus the head. It conveys a soaring feeling. The head itself is represented by the gooseberry capstone (āmalaka) and jar of nectar (kalaśa), which are crowned with a symbol of the deity, such as a discus (cakra), or trident (triśūla). You see, even on the ground level, the temple is a vastupurusa. The ritual of temple construction begins with laying the human form on the ground. The sanctum with its recesses and projections, the wall and the sikhara, these are like the human body with its limbs, and so on. Organic unity or integrity is there. Without these, the structure would be lame (October 5, 1991).

Śītalā Prasad suggested that blood sacrifices (bali) were probably performed in the process of the temple's construction. Without these and the mantras, "which place the power of the Devī inside the bricks and joints of the temple, the building would have fallen apart" (Sitala Prasad Chaubey, May 13, 1991).

Clearly Durgājī, as the Durgā Kunda temple is also called, is to many devotees a visible manifestation of the goddess, not merely an edifice in which she is housed. She inhabits the very matter and space of the sacred site. From this perspective, to equate solely the central image with the Devī would be as erroneous as considering that a deity rests only in the centre point (bindu, bija) of a yantra. The entire temple with its ochre paint is the Devī shrouded in a red sārt. This is precisely why many devotees are often insistent in referring to the temple as Durgājī, not as Durgā Kunda or Durgā Mandir. Durgā is immanent within the kunda and permeates the subsidiary shrines located within the orbit of her influence. It is to these shrines and symbolic elements that I will next turn in an attempt to understand how they supplement the portrait of the Devī Durgājī after a brief interpretive section on yantras.

16From an examination of Tantric textual material, Sanjukta Gupta concludes a similar equation of representation in which the mandala is identified with the cosmos, the deity, and the human religious practitioner. As an example of a mandala, she offers a diagram of the Śrī Yantra. See Sanjukta Gupta (1988).

17Jī is a suffix of respectful familiarity added to people's names.
**Interpretive Observations**

Although there are many examples of yantras used in the worship of male deities in Hinduism, yantras are particularly closely related to the worship of the goddess. For instance, the *Lalitāsahasranāma* (205), a famous text extolling the epithets of the goddess, refers to her as the Essence of All Yantras (*sarvayantrātmikā*). The most famous of yantras is the Śrī Yantra, dedicated to the goddess as Śrī (Honour/Prosperity). Even Borobudur, in Java, the largest Buddhist monument is an enormous yantra or mandala fashioned on the Śrī Yantra.\(^{18}\)

A Durgā Yantra (see Diagram 3) depicts a central point (*bindu*) surrounded by one ascending and two descending triangles which produce a descending triangle in the very centre. This configuration is precisely the inner core of the Śrī Yantra which is composed of several more and larger ascending and descending triangles. The point may represent the first manifestation of the Supreme Transcendent Goddess (Pradhāna, Ādi Śakti).\(^{19}\) In variant forms of this Durgā yantra this *bindu* may be represented by the seed syllable (*bīja mantra*) of Durgā, "Dum." It suggests that the primary manifestation of the goddess is as the most subtle of vibrations. The less subtle vibrational and representational form of this primordial manifestation is sound. The metaphysics which underlies this symbolism is different from classical Sāṅkhya/Yoga since reality thus perceived is not dualistic. The Devī is the singular primordial reality.

The Devī then manifests as male and female principles, whose union is symbolized by the intersecting ascending and descending triangles. The symbolism of the ascending triangle resonates with the symbol of the upright phallus, the sign (*liṅga*) of Śiva, while the descending triangle represents the *yoni*, the female reproductive organ, symbol of Śakti. Some interpreters see this as the relationship between Śiva and Śakti,

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\(^{18}\)See Khanna 1979:148 and Mus 1935.

\(^{19}\)My interpretations are a condensed summary of information derived from conversations with Durgā worshippers (specialists, scholars, and lay persons) and from readings in popular devotional literature such as the *Śrī Durgā Kalpataru.*
or between Puruṣa and Prakṛti. The central downward pointing triangle is thought to symbolize the triadic nature of the goddess, who is pure consciousness (cit Śakti). This triad is either described as the three guṇas, or as the combination of desire or volition (icchā), knowledge (jñāna, vidyā), and action (kriyā). The many triangles which emerge as a result of this union represent the growth of both male and female entities, each of which contains the triad of the guṇas. The circles which enclose the triangles symbolize the outward expansion of this creation which blossoms (lotus petals) into the complex diversified cosmos. The tridents which are sometimes drawn on the tips of the lotus petals reveal the presence of the three guṇās in all of creation.

Most yantras are surrounded by a square wall (bhūpura) with four gateways at the cardinal directions. It represents the barrier which separates worldly existence from spiritual understanding. In order to attain liberation, which is achieved through full understanding of the nature of the goddess, one must penetrate the barrier and travel to the centre. The physical structure of the temple is a three-dimensional manifestation of such a yantra. It provides devotees with an entry beyond the walls of their mundane reality (samsāra), into the divine presence of the goddess.

**Symbolic Attributes of Durgā at Her Temple**

The interpretive key that Durgājī is a yantra suggests an approach with which to examine the structural elements of the sacred site. I am not using yantra in the narrow sense of a construction fashioned in accordance with rigorous specifications, such as the Śrī Yantra, but in the spirit of the term as conveyed by devotees. The yantra which is Durgājī is an instrument or tool for communing with the Devī. It embodies her presence in a variety of symbolic forms, which when taken together contribute to an elaborate and more profound vision of the Divine. I will begin by examining important Devī shrines and symbols, and then move to male deities and other symbolic associations.
Goddesses at Durgājī

The most obvious subsidiary abode of the Devī at Durgājī is the *kunda*. Although it is nowadays little used for bathing, the pond was likely the original site of the Devī’s presence. The *Kāśī Khanda* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, to which I was frequently referred by temple priests, tells of the merit of bathing in Durgā Kund and worshipping the Devī there.²⁰ Although the dates of this text are unclear, it appears to belong to a period prior to the current construction of the temple suggesting an early sanctity to the site. This is the unanimous opinion of people whose families have long resided in the area. Banvāri Lāl, a devout Durgā worshipper who lives a block from the temple, in nearby Kabīr Nagar, is typical in this regard. He runs a store on the temple site which sells items such as coconuts and incense, commonly used in worship of the Devī. In his words,

four hundred years ago, this whole area was jungle. Few people came to this area since powerful dacoits lived here.²¹ Rānī Bhavānī decided to build a temple based on a dream. In the dream, the Devī told her to locate the place where she was toppled over and lying down here and there. The Rānī sent her servants who found a small image besides a large pippal tree which was growing here beside Durgā Kund. The Devī also lived in this tree. Rānī Bhavānī asked the Devī if she should build the temple here. The tree instantaneously withered and died and the Rānī was able to cut it down and erect the temple. The *kunda* was very deep and she built four deep wells on the four corners to keep it full of water. These have since filled with mud.²²

It is difficult to imagine the condition of the original *kunda* when Rānī Bhavānī, the Bengāli queen who built Durgā Mandir, first arrived upon it. Perhaps it tended to dry out during extended periods of drought. The association of *kundas* with goddesses is quite ancient. D. C. Sircar (1948 [1973]), in his study of the Šākta *piṭhas*, abodes of

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²¹“Dacoit” is the word commonly used to describe bandits and highway robbers who still roam the more lawless parts of the Indian countryside. Dacoity is reputed to be particularly endemic in the Bundelkund and in the state of Bihar.

²²This story is quite typical of shrine foundation legends in India and Europe. The legend of the famous Šrīraṅgam temple in South India, for example, tell how a king while out hunting heard a parrot tell him to unearth the shrine which was buried closeby. See Auboyer (1969). European examples are found in Christian (1981b).
seats of Śakti, the Divine Feminine thought of as power, traces the relationship between kundas and the female generative organ (yoni), which is a symbol of the generative power in nature. He identifies this strand of worship which conceptualized the fecundity of nature as the symbolic union of male and female principles with the non-Aryan people of India (1973:7-8). Whatever their original source, these ideas are also at the root of Tantric philosophy and practice and are still vital today.23 The landscape is sacralized, since it is considered to be the body of gods and goddesses. Hills and mountains, rivers and ponds are the self-existent signs (svayambhū linga) of a deity, or the places from which creation emerges (yonipītha).24 Durgā Kund was and still is one such yonipītha.

The area around Durgā Kund was thickly forested and the quite recent presence of large trees in its vicinity is testified to by many sources. A sketch of the temple site made in 1838, by a certain Sutherland, on display at Bhārat Kalā Bhavan of Banāras Hindu University, suggests that this part of Banāras was then only just outgrowing its epithet as the "Forest of Bliss" (See Figure 2). Similar to rivers and ponds, plants and trees as bearers of sap and providers of nourishment have often been associated with feminine deities. The antiquity of these associations are suggested in certain Indus Valley seals which depict feminine forms merged with trees, but there are numerous contemporary examples. The sacred tulasi plant is considered a consort of Viṣṇu, and the goddess Śītalā is often worshipped as a nīm tree. Durgā herself is worshipped in certain important rituals as a cluster of nine plants (navapātrikā) (see Figure 18), and as a wood-apple (bilva) tree. The pippal is a well known sacred tree in India, since it is the tree under which Siddhārtha Gautama attained Buddhahood. As such it is venerated in nearby Sarnath and Bodh Gaya, as well as more distant Anurādhapura, in Śrī Lanka. It is

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23 After citing some evidence of Tantric elements in Vedic sources, Sanjukta Gupta et al, state that "without doubt, the Tantra is rooted also in very old traditions of unsystematized yoga and body cult, shamanism, medicine, magic white and black, astrology, religious eroticism, and folkloristic ritual which found little or no place in pre-Tantric literature" (Gupta et al 1979:17).

sometimes called the *yakṣataru*, or tree which is the abode of nature deities (*yakṣa/yakṣī*).

An important association of *yakṣīs* with Durgā comes from the Jaina pantheon. The great spiritual teachers in Jainism, called Tīrthāṅkaras, are each associated with a *yakṣī* consort or helper. The *yakṣī* consort of the twenty-second Jaina Tīrthāṅkara, Neminātha, is Ambikā, a lion riding deity, associated with the mango tree and fruit, who suckles an infant. This Jaina Ambikā is rather closely related to the Ambikā/Durgā of Hinduism who appears at some time to have been incorporated into the Jaina pantheon. It is not clear whether the Jainas developed and elaborated upon the conception of Ambikā themselves, or merely adopted and inserted her into a prominent, but appropriately subordinate position in their divine hierarchy.²⁵ What is intriguing, however, is that the Jaina Ambikā is also called *Kusumāṇḍa* or *Kusumāṇḍī Devī*. After Durgā, this is precisely the next most common epithet by which the Devī of Durgā Kūṇḍ is known. Durgājī is renowned as *Kusumāṇḍa Devī* through her association with the cluster of Banaras’s Nine Durgās, but otherwise this epithet for Durgā is quite rare in Hinduism.²⁶

The Devī abandoned the pippal tree, allowing it to wither and die with miraculous rapidity and took up abode in the temple. It is as if the tree yielded its organic form to the stone of the temple. An informant told me that the priests of the original site refused to cut the tree in which the Devī resided, since "iron must not cut living wood." The tree’s natural demise was the sign they sought. As the Devī permeated the pippal tree, so too, she permeates the temple.

Besides the *kunda* and the temple structure, the most popular subsidiary goddess shrine belongs to Bhadrakālī (Auspicious/Gentle Kālī). It is located at the southwest corner of the quadrangle which surrounds the central temple and is accessible from the

²⁵M. N. P. Tiwari argues that the Jaina influence in shaping the image of Ambikā should not be underestimated or unduely dismissed (1987:11-14).

²⁶Although lack of evidence must keep this speculative, it is quite likely that the Jainas adopted Durgā/Ambikā into their pantheon when her worship under the epithet of Kusumāṇḍa Devī was prominent. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore to what extent they contributed to the epithet, or to ascertain whether Durgājī, as Kusumāṇḍa Devī, was a prominent site of worship for Hindus and Jainas. Useful information is contained in Dr. Maruti Nandana Prasāda Tivārī 1981:222-231.
inner courtyard (See Diagram 2). I was told that the image was installed in the temple by a king of Nepal. He also donated a large brass bell which hangs from a stone scaffolding ornately sculpted with lions and other designs. The bell stands besides the shrine of Bhadrakālī who is always shrouded in cloth and represented by a bronze mask with a lolling red tongue (See Figure 3). Despite her name, Bhadrakālī is a fierce form of Durgā, evidenced by her pairing with Caṇḍa Bhairava, a fierce form of Śiva, who shares her shrine.

Several devotees told me, quite insistently, that the goat sacrifices occasionally made in the outer courtyard are for Bhadrakālī, not Durgā. I was told about a purānic myth in which Śiva creates Bhadrakālī and the male demon Virabhadra to destroy the Vedic sacrifice (yajña) of Dakṣa Prajāpati, his father-in-law. Dakṣa had insulted his daughter, the goddess Śatī, Śiva’s wife, and resulted in her death. Dakṣa was beheaded by Virabhadra and Bhadrakālī lapped up his blood with her lolling tongue. Eventually Dakṣa recanted and asked Śiva’s forgiveness. His head was replaced by the head of a goat and he became a devotee of Śiva. The symbols of beheading, blood offerings to the goddess, and the head of a goat are all evident in this myth but its relationship to the kind of goat sacrifice performed at Durgājī is not obvious. In the myth, Śiva (on behalf of the goddess), via Virabhadra, decapitates Dakṣa (the goddess’s father). In temple sacrifice, the devotee sacrifices a goat. In both myth and temple ritual Bhadrakālī drinks the blood but, in the former, Dakṣa’s head is replaced with the head of a decapitated goat. There is no explicit replacement of heads in the temple ritual.

27 A version of this myth is found in the Śiva Purāṇa 2.11-2.42.

28 I have also witnessed this version of the myth reenacted by Kathakali dancers in Kerala.

29 Kramrisch (1981:68-70), from the study of Vedic and Purānic literatures, states that "the goat, as a sacrificial animal, ritually belongs to Agni, and is Agni’s animal." However, she relates a myth in which Śiva slays the goat headed demon Vāstupa. In a gracious act, Śiva then gives the "dimensionless, demonic phantom, tenuously though intimately related to himself, a name of its own, Vāstupa, and allot to this being the plan of the sacred sites on earth, the temples and the houses, as residence. On it the gods will have their appointed stations. They will dwell on earth in the sacred geometry of the vāstu-mandala, the magic diagram and form of the fallen demon, the symbolic architectural plan" (1981:69). The conceptual image of Durgā appears to incorporate this myth in significant ways. Durgā, in her acceptance of goat sacrifices symbolically re-enacts the slaying of the goat-headed demon. The spilling of the goat’s blood onto the
The application of the term "bhadra" to both fierce forms produced by Śiva, suggest that their auspicious or gentle nature stems from where they direct their destruction. Their ferocity is directed towards the destruction of evil, demonic forces, as personified by the arrogant Dakṣa, for instance. In this vein, other worshippers told me that this Bhadrakālī was the same Kālī described in the Durgā Saptasati (Seven Hundred [Verses] to Durgā), the most important text utilized in Devī worship. The Durgā Saptasati, also called the Devī Māhāmya (Glorification of the Goddess), or the Caṇḍi ([Text of the Fierce Goddess] Caṇḍi) still circulates as an independent text, and is included in the Markandeya Purāṇa. Durgā devotees are generally quite familiar with the content of text and frequently provided explanations drawn from its episodes. In one such episode, when attacked by the demons Canda and Munda, Durgā turned black with anger and from her forehead the dreadful goddess Kālī emerged. She destroyed the demons, thus earning the epithet Cāmundā, and continued in the fray. At a later point, when confronting the demon Raktabija, whose drops of blood acted as seeds from which demon clones sprouted, it was Kālī who lapped up the blood which flowed from his wounds and brought about his demise.30

It soon became obvious to me that this Bhadrakālī, like most of the other symbols at Durgājī, was polyvalent, having a variety of meanings or mythic associations. But multivalency is not omnivalency. Thus, in a cultural system with a vigorous dynamic in the fluidity of "meanings," it is necessary, where possible, to highlight the constellation of key interpretations which demarcate the essential character of a symbol, while simultaneously pointing to currents or tensions within that fluid dynamic. The Bhadrakālī at Durgājī is an excellent illustrative example, for she is understood in many ways and associated with different myths. The viewpoint of those who see her as the recipient of

30Durgā Saptasati, Chapters 7 and 8. Versions of the Raktabija myth are also found in the Vāman Purāṇa 44.30-38, Kārma Purāṇa 1.16.123-240, Matsya Purāṇa 179.1-86, and the Padma Purāṇa 5.43.1-95.
all the blood sacrifices offered to Durgā is vigorously contested by others. This conflict in interpretations reveals cultural currents and tensions between social strata. Blood and meat stand in contrast to vegetarian nourishment. In the Sāṅkhya/Yoga philosophical systems, the manifold, hierarchical creation results when the three aspects (guna) of material creation are thrown out of balance and rajas and tamas dominate over sattva. Orthodox brāhmaṇas strive to maximize their sattvic associations, since they identify themselves as a strata of society in which the sattva guṇa is greatest. Blood (rakta) is identified with the dynamic rajas guṇa (they derive from the same Sanskrit root rañj, "to redden" or "to grow excited"). Treatises of orthodox propriety such as the Manava Dharma Śāstra (The Laws of Manu V.26-56) state that brāhmaṇas may eat meat that has been consecrated in sacrificial rituals, but should refrain from meat eating on a regular basis.31 The early Buddhist and Jaina position on not causing harm to sentient beings (ahimsa) is well known. It is not clear to what extent the notion of ahimsa valued by these groups influenced Hinduism but animal sacrifice, once fairly common in Vedic ritual and therefore a significant part of orthodox brāhmaṇical ritual, became rare in this segment of Hindu society. Meat is implicitly linked with the opaque or impure (tamas) aspect of creation and contrasts with fruit and vegetables which correspond to pure, stable existence (sattva guṇa).32 As a result of such Śastric prescriptions, brāhmaṇas who rank themselves high due to their pure sattvic affiliations, would naturally rank deities who accept blood sacrifices, or devotees who offer them, hierarchically lower in purity.

In that conceptual universe, if Durgā were to be the recipient of such rajasic and tamasic offerings as blood and flesh, she could not be a deity of commensurate or superior purity to her sattvic devotees. Such worshippers judge that blood offerings are

31 *There is no sin in eating meat, in (drinking) spirituous liquor, and in carnal intercourse, for that is the natural way of created beings, but abstention brings great rewards* (Laws of Manu V. 56). See Bühler 1886:177.

32 *By subsisting on pure fruit and roots, and by eating food fit for ascetics (in the forest), one does not gain (so great) a reward as by entirely avoiding (the use of) flesh* (Laws of Manu V.54). See Bühler 1886:177.
directed to other, lesser deities. The current head pujari of Durgāji, who considers the Devī to be a power more akin to Viṣṇu (Vaiṣṇava śakti) insists that the sacrifices are for the Yoginīs, a class of fierce female deities. His interpretation is consistent with the above mentioned Śāstric view. Certain Vaiṣṇava sects, in particular, are most noted for their criticism of blood sacrifice. In the rhetoric of the groups which are against blood sacrifice, the act is said to contradict "orthodox brahmanical" values. Nevertheless, blood sacrifice continues to be performed in villages, at the back of temples, and at festivals by a certain segment of members of Śaiva and Śākta sects.

The Vaiṣṇava or alleged "orthodox brahmanical" position was and is not unanimously held among brāhmaṇas and conflicts with certain Hindu attitudes to meat eating. Large percentages of Bengālis and Kashmiri Hindus, brāhmaṇas included, for instance, ate and still eat meat.33 Ironically, some of the more recent criticisms of animal sacrifice came from missionaries and currently come from foreign tourists, most of whom are themselves meat-eaters. These criticisms have nothing to do with dietary concerns or matters of purity. Instead, these groups perceive (in my view, incorrectly) blood sacrifice as an inhumane and barbarous treatment of the sacrificial animal. Also, there is a definite sense of surprise, and some horror or revulsion, experienced by those who are perhaps for the first time seeing an animal slaughtered, and worse, on temple premises.

Another source of criticism derives from modern Hindu reformism which gave preeminence to tolerance and non-violence, in particular, ideas which were said to be rooted in India’s most ancient traditions. Such views, initiated by people such as Mohandas Gandhi and Ram Mohan Roy, reflect an ideological notion of Indian national identity shaped on peace and pluralism through unifying values. These values were not entirely secular but centered on a humanistic spirituality. A classic example of an eloquent and influential voice with these values directed against blood sacrifice to the

33I base this comment not on statistical evidence but on meals eaten with Bengāli and Kashmiri friends who claimed that this was the case.
goddess is found the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's play *Sacrifice*.\(^{34}\) In it, the courageous king Govinda, inspired by the goddess herself, who speaks to him through the pure and innocent love which he discerns in a beggar girl named Aparna, prohibits blood sacrifices in his kingdom. Although he experiences severe resistance from the priesthood, his wife, and his closest subjects, the goddess's will triumphs over dark conspiracies which could have cost him his life. The play ends with the stone image of the Devī discarded, and her presence embodied in the all-embracing love of individual women.\(^{35}\)

Despite efforts to uplift spiritual humanism, Hindu reformism, in its search for a basis in tradition, has also given superior status to what are thought to be orthodox brahmanical values. At present, opposition to blood sacrifice is generally perceived by most Banārasis to belong to orthodox brāhmanism. Moreover, at the national level, C. J. Fuller observes that

> contemporary opposition to animal sacrifice rests on an old foundation, although it also stems from the very widespread influence of reformism, whose antipathy to ritual killing has spread well beyond the self-consciously nationalist political classes. . . . Popular "superstitious" practices, like animal sacrifice, are no longer just devalued as inferior; they are now condemned as wrong and not even a part of authentic Hinduism. (Fuller, 1992:101)

Durgājī is considered by many to be the only sanctioned sacred place in Banāras for the performance of blood sacrifice. I was also told on more than one occasion that the small rectangular plot of earth in the outer courtyard where sacrifices occur is deemed to be "outside the sacred field of Banāras (*Kāśī kṣetra*)." The ongoing disputes as to whether the sacrifices take place within or outside of Banāras, whether Śiva, the city’s main deity condones these sacrifices, and whether or not it is Durgā herself who accepts the blood points to a vital role played by the temple. Durgājī is one of the most visible arenas in this influential city where the polarities generated by blood jostle for

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\(^{34}\)See Tagore 1962 [1936]:501-532.

\(^{35}\)"She has burst her cruel prison of stone, and come back to the woman’s heart" (Tagore 1962 [1936]:532).
hierarchical supremacy. Blood, then, is an extremely important symbol, explicit and implicit, in the temple complex, and quite central to our understanding of the Devī. As a symbol of the rajas guna, it heightens the profile of this aspect of the guna triad within the conceptual image of Durgā.

Two other goddess images share the shrine with Bhadrakālī. One is a small Durgā Simhavāhinī (Durgā who Rides the Lion). The image, which depicts a many handed Durgā atop her lion mount and holding numerous weapons, is relatively newly installed and not much discussed. Far more intriguing is the small and somewhat indistinct figure called the "Tantric Kālī" (see Figure 4). Unlike more common Kālī images, this image appears to be a squatting nude female figure, reminiscent of the so-called Lajjā Gaurī (Shameless White Goddess) found in ancient Chalukyan and other sites throughout the subcontinent (see Figure 4). J. N. Tiwari examined the "nude squatting goddess" cult in his Goddess Cults in Ancient India (1985:182-220). He concluded by saying that "it is not impossible that the cult of the nude squatting goddess had some meeting points with the beliefs and rites of the Tantric religion" (1985:219). The image at the Durgā Kund temple, perhaps of great antiquity, was installed there by one of the members of the royal family of Vijayanagara, from where it was apparently brought. Ram Prasad Dubey, the most elderly pujārī of Durgājī, remembers the frequent visits and generous donations to the temple made by the King of Banāras and the "king" of Vijayanagara. The Vijayanagara empire was the last great Hindu empire, which flourished from the 14th to the 17th centuries C.E. Its capital was located in present day Hampi, Karnataka. After an almost overnight defeat at the hands of the Muslims, at the battle of Talikota, a few surviving members of the royalty fled to Madras. Eventually, some made their way to Banāras, and recent history records their rivalries with the King of Kāśī. Although known as great worshippers of Viṣṇu and Śiva, they left substantial evidence of enduring Devī worship at the ruined imperial capital.

The "Tantric Kālī" cannot have been an ordinary image. There has always been

a close relationship between the power of the royalty and the Devī. While it is clear that this "Tantric Kāli" had a special place in the lives of the royal family of Vijayanagara, the precise nature of this relationship is not known. S. Gupta and R. Gombrich point out that although the kings of Vijayanagara worshipped Narasimha as the family or dynastic deity (kula-devatā), they also identified themselves with Śiva as Pampeśvara, the Lord/husband of the sacred river goddess Pampa (1986:125). It is quite likely that this "Tantric Kāli" was a goddess who served in some special way to sanction and legitimate the power of the Vijayanagara kings. Gupta and Gombrich suggest that

for at least the last thousand years, perhaps longer, the concept of power in its political and social application has been intimately connected with tantric theology - so intimately, one might suggest, that the one cannot be adequately understood apart from the other (1986:123).

With the erosion of the power of the Indian princely states, such socio-political dimensions of the Nepali Bhadrakāli and the Vijayanagara goddess are greatly diminished, although not entirely absent. I was told that the King of Nepal rarely neglects a visit to Durgājī when in Banāras, and I have seen the King of Banāras pay homage to Durgā Devī at least once yearly during the autumn Navarātra.

Although the political dimensions of Durgā worship may have weakened, the tantric theological connection has not. Tantrics and sorcerers (jādū karne vala) who frequent the Durgā temple often worship at the Bhadrakāli shrine. Since all the images are housed behind a wrought-iron door, it is not clear to which deity these practitioners are addressing their worship, but the "Tantric Kāli" is certainly a recipient of secret devotion. Secrecy is essential, I was told, because people might overhear the magical formulae (mantra) or recognize that sorcerers are directing destructive energies at victims. Secrecy is also common at the Bhadrakāli shrine because the worship is often of a private nature, directed toward cures for infertility, impotence and other sexual ailments, or for enhanced fertility and sexual powers.

The "Tantric Kāli" is nude and wears a garland of human heads. She is squatting upon Śiva’s supine naked body holding his long erect penis (līṅga) in two of her six hands. The līṅga extends upward before her to make contact with her (indistinct)
extended tongue. The top of her head has an unusual, rounded shape, reminiscent of the top of most Śiva liṅgas. M. A. Sherring referred to this image as "an immodest figure of a woman in bass-relief (sic)" (1868:164). The common images of Kāli on a bloody rampage, tongue extended, atop the reclining body of Śiva cry out for interpretation. The interpretation generally encountered is that when Kāli was in the grips of an uncontrollable blood-lust and about to destroy the cosmos, Śiva laid down on the battle-field in front of her. When she trampled upon him and realized that this was her spouse, Kāli stuck out her tongue in embarrassment.

This interpretation has always struck me as unsatisfactory since Kāli’s extended tongue is generally associated with the drinking of blood (as in the Raktabīja myth).37 Also, there are not infrequently encountered depictions of Kāli standing or squatting in sexual union atop an ithyphallic prone Śiva. The "Tantric Kāli" image is particularly fascinating and illuminating because it makes explicit a connection between semen and blood.38 The "Tantric Kāli" drinks up the semen which contains the seeds of life just as she drank up the blood seeds of the demon Raktabīja. Her phallic shape identifies her with the liṅga of Śiva which retains its potency without spilling its seed. Kāli is the power, itself within the liṅga, which reabsorbs the seed before it is spilt. She is the power which can hold the spilt semen of Śiva without producing offspring, thus bringing an end to the cycle of creation.39

Durgājī is composed of overlapping spheres of power. This is quite consistent with the notion of a yantra through its symbolic equivalent, the mandala. A mandala may represent a ruler’s sphere of influence. The deities which reside in subsidiary shrines are powerful representatives of kings or sources of spiritual power for certain types of sacred specialists. But all are subordinate to Durgājī herself. When the king of Banāras

37Durgā Saptasatī, Chapter 9.

38O’Flaherty offers substantial evidence from purānic sources that "blood often appears as a metaphor for male semen or as a seed substitute" (1980:33-34).

39The semen of Śiva, once spilt, is extremely difficult to hold due to its immense potency. In a well-known myth, Śiva’s semen cannot be held by a variety of deities, including Agni and Gaṅgā, and finally produces his son, Śkanda. See, for instance, the Śiva Purāṇa, Rudra-saṁhitā 4.2.9-70.
worships Durgājī, he implicitly asserts his supremacy, through her, over the other royal powers present in his kingdom. When people worship a deity at a subsidiary shrine, they indirectly honour Durgā who is at the apex of the hierarchy.

The "Tantric Kālī" also highlights the diachronic nature of the material which constitutes the Durgājī yantra. Durgājī was raised upon the spot of an ancient venerated tree, where old images perhaps lay toppled and scattered. Furthermore through images like the "Tantric Kālī," Durgājī is connected to the distant and glorious past. The prestige of antiquity, which is accorded to scriptures like the Vedas or the Purāṇas is also evident in the worship of images. Newer images, such as the Durgā Siṃhavāhinī, or the Laksī and Sarasvatī shrines on the south-east side of the quadrangle are considered to be of lesser importance. They have not developed a body of legendary associations with miraculous power. A temple draws some of its prestige from its antiquity, and so if the building is new, the sacrality of the site is often considered to be ancient. The installation of ancient sacred images is another way in which the prestige of the past can be transplanted. In addition to the "Tantric Kālī" there are two small temples which flank the main entrance to the inner courtyard. Knowledgable members of the History of Art department at Banāras Hindu University suggested that these temples resembled 12th century C.E. Gāhadvāla temples which, if not fashioned later on those designs, may have actually been transplanted here. These stone shrines are visible in the 1838 sketch by Sutherland (see Figure 2). When viewed in relationship to the inner sanctum of the main temple, they lie somewhat south of the symmetrical ideal where one might expect them to have been placed merely to comply with arbitrary architectural design (see Diagram 2). Their placement suggests that they were erected over previously renowned images or sites. This is quite likely true of the more southern of the two temples which houses the liṅga of Tilaparaṇeśvara (Lord of Sandalwood), considered to be one of Kaśi's twelve Rudras (see Figure 5). Rudra is a fierce deity with a Vedic heritage.

Essentially, the sacred site of Durgājī overlays and incorporates other sacred sites of lesser but supplementary significance. The sacrality of the site of Durgājī draws not only on the antiquity of the explict Devī symbols, such as the kuṇḍa, but on the ancient sanctity of subsidiary shrines. Furthermore, the very material of certain shrines or
specific images may bring with them the sanctity of age. Although the Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī images are relatively new, they too have begun to be associated with tales of power.

Once, when the temple owners were thinking about installing a new image in the main shrine, a man wanted to build a new temple for Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī and install new images there. The old images are quite dirty and even cracked, and normally one does not worship damaged images. That night the man went home and died. This was a message that the Devī wished to remain as she was. Many holy men from Kāśī were asked the reason for this. They said that if an image has been worshipped continuously for over one hundred years, it should not be replaced or moved, but worshipped in whatever condition it is in. This is found in the Dharma Śastras (Ram Prasad Dubey, September 20, 1991).

Like many goddess temple images, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are draped in a cloth and gaze out from metal masks. Ram Prasad Dubey’s comments suggest that masks are often used to present a visible face for goddess images that are extremely worn or damaged. Often goddess images are amorophous blobs (pinda) of stone, outcroppings of the living earth. Such images are also given a mask or equipped with large, eye-catching eyes.40

Ram Prasad’s tale also illustrates a common notion about how the Devī communicates with her devotees. Although it may be through words, it is far more likely to be through an act of power. At the risk of over-simplification, I will suggest that an interpretive strand in Devī worship is that "might is right." When two powers contend for supremacy, they are both essentially manifestations of the Devī’s power at work. Her will is revealed in the outcome. In the above example, she revealed her power and will by restraining the worshipper who wanted to build her a more splendid shrine and image. Unlike Rāṇī Bhavānī, who based her actions on cues given by the Devī (e.g., a dream and the natural demise of the sacred pippal tree), this male devotee’s will contradicted the Devī’s wishes. The following story is a better example.

Once there was a big "miracle" worker (bara siddha) who came regularly to the temple, offered things in the havan, and jumped here and there with his powers. He would push people around when making his circumambulations (parikrama)

40I use the term “eye-catching” precisely because the central act of devotion, often called darsana involves reciprocal viewing. The devotee comes to the shrine to catch a glimpse of the deity, but as Diana Eck (1981) has cogently pointed out, also to be seen by the deity.
and basically was a terrible nuisance for all the worshippers. To verify his power (śakti) some temple workers one day grabbed him and threw him down in front of the Devī and thrashed him soundly with sticks. If the goddess's power was with him, they would not be able to do it. He finally ran away and never returned. (Ram Prasad Dubey, July 16, 1991).

Power is certainly an important component of the Durgājī yantra. It permeates the place and is certainly present on the site and within those who visit it. Durgājī is commonly referred to as a seat of power (śaktipitha) and place of miraculous attainments (siddhapātha).

The foregoing incidents illustrate the volitional aspect of sakta, which is referred to as the Devī's icchā. While Śāṅkhya/Yoga does not allocate a separate element (tattva) to the notion of will or desire, in this Śākta metaphysics icchā is one of śakti's three primary qualities. The goddess acts or creates merely out of her will or desire to do so. Creation is not an automatic process, as in the Śāṅkhya/Yoga system, where Prakṛti begins the process of manifestation when in the presence of Puruṣa. Creation is initiated, and the paths of human lives are animated by the desire of the Devī. This notion is not far afield from the parallel notion of divine playfulness (līlā) attributed to a deity like Kṛṣṇa. Where the Devī's desire lies, there power flows. And human beings can discern the Devī's will through observing the manifestations of power.41

There is an eight petalled (astadala) lotus carved in bas-relief on the exterior of the eastern projection of the main temple structure, in a position located directly behind the main image. When circumambulating the temple, either before or after worshipping Durgā in the inner sanctum, devotees often reach up and touch this lotus. With their fingers in contact with this most sacred spot high on the wall, they pivot around as if this is the centre of their spiral path (See Figure 5). The eight-petalled lotus is a symbol of Durgā. It is found in the Durgā Yantra, as well as the Sarvatobhadra Maṇḍala, another important Durgā yantra (see Diagrams 3 and 4). The ritual act of touching the lotus reinforces the yantric interpretation of Durgājī. Devotees have already made or will make

41It is conceivable that the somewhat unpredictable nature of these manifestations characterize śakti as feminine, for the feminine in the Hindu tradition (e.g., The Laws of Manu) is generally associated with qualities of fickleness and inconstancy. See Jacobson and Wadley 1992:118.
contact with Durga in the inner sanctum, by touching the marble footprints (*pāduka, *carana) placed at the doorway. The lotus is the cardinal contact point of the devotee with the Devi in her entirety as the temple complex. As the *liṅga is the sign of Śiva, the lotus is the *yoni of the Devi, the matrix from which all creation blossoms.

The bas-relief of Durga as Mahiṣaśuramardini (Crusher of the Buffalo Demon) is carved in a niche in the south face of the main structure, above the walls but at the base of the spire (*sikha). The image recalls the extremely important mythic tale of Durga's victory over the powerful and arrogant shape-shifting demon Mahisa, the Buffalo. Rivalled in popularity only by the epic tale of Rāma's victory over the demon Rāvana, Durga's battle with the Buffalo Demon is perhaps the best known of mythic battles between good and evil. The tale, recounted in the *Durgā *Saptaśati follows in the tradition of Indra's victory over the demon Vṛtra.

The items which crown the *sikha, although standard elements in temples to male or female deities nevertheless have significant associations with the Devi. The *āmalaka or myrobalan/gooseberry, though serving as a protective capstone, carries the symbolism of healing. It has a prominent place is ancient Hindu medicine (*āyurveda) for its purifying properties. It is considered an excellent representative of the primary flavour (*rasa) of astringency. The fruit is itself offered to the Devi during elaborate worship rituals (*puja). The jar (*kalaśa), thought to contain the nectar of immortality (*amrta) is another common symbol through which the Devi is worshipped. The trident (*trīśūla), although most often associated with Śiva, is an ancient goddess symbol. The goddess Saṭī, Śiva's first wife in purāṇic mythology, is often depicted as a trident shaped symbol with two eyes placed between the three prongs.⁴² Such a symbol may well be the

⁴²There is a relatively newly constructed temple to the goddess Saṭī in a small park, not far from Durgāji. The central image of Saṭī is such a trident-shaped symbol which resembles the Greek capital letter *psi (*ψ). See Gimbutas 1989:89-97 for evidence of the triline symbolism of the goddess in ancient Europe and West Asia. Often the triline symbols are associated with eyes (1989:53,55,57,89,90,97). Gimbutas also illustrates examples of the trident-like symbols of the goddess in her epiphany as a bee (1989:272). These symbols closely resemble the auspicious marks (*svāsti) used to represent Saṭī, Durga, and other Hindu goddesses in shrines and on sacrificial offerings (\[\text{\&} \], \[\text{\&} \]). Significantly, the *Durgā *Saptaśati (11.50) explicitly refers Bhrāmarī Devi, the goddess's bee epiphany.
yantric diagram behind the mask of the main image of Durgājī. The trident symbolizes the fundamental triadic nature of the Devī. This may be the three guṇas or the energy triad of desire, knowledge, and action (icchā, jñāna, and kriyā sakti). The flag (dhvaja) is a victory banner, and Durgā is often personified as Victory (vijayā). All these symbols work harmoniously to provide an integrated vision of the temple as the Devī.

**Interpretive Observations**

The three main subsidiary goddess shrines within the inner courtyard are to Bhadrakāli, Lākṣmī, and Sarasvatī. This goddess triad is not infrequently referred to as Mahākāli, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī by some worshippers. They are further connected by worshippers with the three guṇas. Sarasvatī represents the pure sattva guṇa. She is the creative principle. Lākṣmī represents the rajas guṇa (but sometimes the sattva guṇa) and is the principle of stability and abundance. Kālī is the tamas guṇa, dark and symbolizing the principle of destruction or dissolution. Durgā encompasses all these three principles. These interpretations by devotees again support the metaphysics of the triad of guṇas. Durgā is the composite of these three principles, each of which is personified as a goddess. Incidentally, Lākṣmī and Sarasvatī appear prominently in the cluster of images worshipped during Durgā Pūjā, where they are sometimes referred to as Durgā’s daughters. Kālī is conspicuously absent but her symbolic associations are incorporated in the Durgā Pūjā ritual, in meditative visualizations, for instance.

**Important Male Deities at Durgājī**

The shrine of Kukkutēśvara Mahādeva is mentioned in the Śrīmat Deī Bhāgavata. He was a brāhmaṇa pūjārī, like me, who worshipped here at Durgājī, long ago. One day early in the morning he went out for his toilet, and was grabbed by some bandits (dacoit). He asked them what they wanted. They said that they had promised the Devī that if they were successful in a particular act of dacoitry they would offer her a human sacrifice. She granted them their wish but now they could not find a suitable offering. He was the best person to offer. Hearing this the pūjārī went to pay homage (prandāma) to the Devī. He prayed, saying, “I have done your service for so long, and now is this to be my fate?” The Devī appeared to him and said, “You cannot escape your fate because in a previous life you performed seven murders. These are the people who are outside
waiting for you. Therefore you must tell them that all seven must kill you at the same time. Then there will be no remaining *karma*.

Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva was then sacrificed to the Devī and cremated here. If *darśana* of his temple is not done, half the merit of the worship is lost. Pilgrims know about this temple and ask where it is. (Ram Prasad Dubey, July 16, 1991).

The shrine of the deified *pūjārī*, Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva contains many small *liṅgas* surrounding a large central one. It is located to the south of the quadrangle on Durgā Mandir property. It is probably the most important shrine of a male deity at Durgājī, certainly from the perspective of the temple priests. Pilgrim guides tell Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva's story to their groups and thus the shrine gets some attention. However, in general, the shrines of male deities at Durgājī are quite peripheral for worshippers.

Most dramatic in the Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva story, of which there are virtually as many variants as people asked, is the element of human sacrifice. From the very mouths of the same people who insist that the substance of animal sacrifice goes not to Durgā but to some other blood-accepting goddess, comes the tale of Durgā's acceptance of a human sacrifice. This remarkable capacity for devotees to carry such seemingly contradictory notions simultaneously is not uncommon. For instance, although death within the sacred perimeter of Kāśi is commonly said to grant one permanent release (*mokṣa*) from worldly existence, rituals for the proper installation of souls in the ancestral realms (*pitr loka*) are routinely performed. Such psychological propensities to hold sets of beliefs which are only marginally based on logical consistency, underscore the need for caution in any oversimplified sociological analysis of religious phenomena. Although ideas may emanate from a particular class and be absorbed by another group, percolation or sedimentation of values are not simple sociological processes. At the level of the individual these processes become psychological. And within the human psyche, contradictory ideas, whatever their sociological source, can co-exist. One idea is not always abandoned for another. Nor is it necessarily justified and rationalized into some

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43A detailed study of the attitudes of people who come to die in Banāras will appear in the forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation by Christopher Justice, Department of Anthropology, McMaster University.
other, larger, syncretic and meaningful worldview. Instead, multiple clusters of symbol sets, each with its own inner consistency may inhabit a worshipper's worldview. A particular symbol set may then generate meaning in appropriate circumstances.

To the brāhmaṇa pūjārī, Kukkutēśvara Mahādeva's fate revealed something of Kukkutēśvara's dedication to the Devī, his purity, his efficient expiation of previous bad karma, and his ultimate deification. These are aspects with which the pūjārī identifies and through which he finds meaning. In a variant version of the tale the Devī offers to restore the life of Kukkutēśvara Mahādeva but he declines, unable to imagine a better fate for himself. A version from the temple owners (mahant) tells how the owner/priest (panda) had a dream that although Kukkutēśvara was beheaded directly in front of the Devī, his shrine should not be installed there, but on the south side.44 I was also told by temple priests that sometimes, late at night, when the temple is closed, a pious pūjārī may hear the footfalls of Kukkutēśvara's wooden sandals as he walks to the garbhagrha to worship the goddess.

Kukkutēśvara Mahādeva's story provides pūjāris in particular with special status. His is the shrine of a deified human, the highest state achievable by any Durga devotee. There is no explicit divine male consort shrine of Durga present at Durgāji. Many Devī temples have some sort of male consort present in a marginal location. This is often a Bhairava, a fierce form of Śiva. There is an important Bhairava at Durgāji, but this Caṇḍa Bhairava, one of eight protectors of Banāras, is paired with the Bhadrakālli whose shrine he shares (see Figure 4). Caṇḍa Bhairava is depicted with his vehicle, the dog. Hardy dogs are often seen prowling the cremation grounds (smāśana) of Banāras where they manage to feed on bits of bone and flesh which escaped the flames of the funeral pyres. It is likely that this contributes to the connection between the dog and Śiva, lord of the cremation ground.

Another divine contender for the role of Durgā's male consort is Tilaparṇēśvara

44It is not uncommon for the chief priest of a goddess temple to be buried at the south side, the place of Yama (Paul Younger, personal communication).

The mahant's tale struck me as more indicative of the special relationship between the Devī and temple owner (whom she graced with a vision) rather than between the Devī and Kukkutēśvara Mahādeva.
(Lord of Sandalwood), one of Kāśī’s twelve Rudras (see Figure 5). His shrine is located outside the main quadrangle and is possibly quite old. This temple is also known as Jaleśvara/i (Lord/Lady of the Waters), causing some confusion with the nearby Jvalesvara shrine to a fever deity. Jaleśvara is so called because during periods of drought village groups worship at the shrine in hope of rain. The central liṅga, which is set in a rectangular well (kunda) a foot or two deep, is slowly submerged by worshippers, who fill up the kunda with sprinkled consecrated water (abhiṣeka jala). The temple also contains a Ganeśa image and two small liṅgas. Jaleśvara is an epithet of Varuṇa, the Vedic deity, whose name and role here appears to be taken over by Śiva. While it might seem extreme to call the liṅga of Varuṇa/Jaleśvara/Rudra/Śiva a Devī liṅga (used here in the sense of "sign"), I am inclined to do so since Durgā seems to have subsumed some of the salient aspects of this group of deities. I develop this idea in the concluding chapter. Not a single person suggested to me that Tilaparneśvara/Jaleśvara was either Śiva or the Devī’s consort, although many referred to the shrine as Jaleśvarī Devī.

Other than occasionally encountered general statements that the Devī was Vaiṣṇava or that she was the spouse of Śiva, the most intimate relationship consistently articulated by worshippers linking any subsidiary shrine to the main image was that enjoyed by Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva. And he was not a consort but a devotee. Therefore, these symbols and their interpretations construe to indicate that the highest relationship one can enjoy with Durgā, at Durgājī, is devotional service in which one’s life is the most sublime offering which can be made. The person who best exemplifies this relationship is...

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45Rudra is a Vedic deity whose name translates as “the Howler.” He is associated with a series of wind deities called the Maruts, and eventually is identified with Śiva, in one of his terrible aspects. The temple was so named by the late mahant of Durgā Mandir. I also found it named thus in Śrī Kāśi Yātra Vidhi, an undated, anonymously authored manuscript (#337.89, page 28) in Bhārat Kalā Bhavan, probably belonging to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

46Although Banāras came close to experiencing a drought in 1991, when the rains were delayed by a month, I have not seen this worship performed. The pujāris who have been at the temple for a long time have seen such ritual performances which have occasionally “worked.” They attribute success or failure to the degree of sincerity of the worshippers, to the exactness of ritual performance, as well as to the discretion of the deity.
relationship is the head temple priest who ministers to the goddess tirelessly everyday. Despite the low status generally accorded to temple priests by the brahmans, who do not perform temple rituals, Ram Prasad Dubey was by far the most respected of persons among the majority of regular worshippers at Durgājī for his spiritual purity and access to the Devī's grace. "If Mā gives me so much for so little that I do for her, how much more must she give Ram Prasadī whose whole life is dedicated to her," said one devotee. This respect, however, is of a different order than that granted to kings or politicians who wield immediate power. Their power is temporal and, although dependent on the Devī's grace, does not indicate spiritual purity. The goddess is thought to grant favours to whomever serves her well. Devotional service to the goddess gives one the spiritual power to influence those wielding temporal power. Although modesty dictates silence, worshippers and priests are easily persuaded to cite examples of this influential power. I was on occasion told how Ram Prasad was graciously received by the former prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi, when he visited New Delhi.47 He has influenced doctors on behalf of the ailing and bureaucrats on behalf of those seeking his help. Nevertheless, his status is low among brahmans who do not value the overt display of such this-worldy powers. His piety and devotional service grant him status and access to power in the next life, and it is primarily from this that he derives his respect.

In Louis Dumont's (1970b:27-31) terms, Kukkutesvara Mahādeva enjoys relational and not substantial divinity. He draws his prestige entirely from his relationship with the Devī, possessing little independent divine substance. An example of a substantial deity would be Gaṇeṣa who, although identified as Durgā's son, does not derive his divinity primarily from her substance but from his own inherent qualities. Gaṇeṣa is certainly represented at Durgājī. On the northeast corner of the site of Durgājī one finds the Mahāmāyā Śītalā Mandir, the temple of the Gaṇeṣa called Durgā Vināyakā, and a small new shrine of Santoṣī Mā (See Diagram 1). The Mahāmāyā Śītalā Mandir was reputedly built by a certain Rānī Bhiṅgā, a benefactress queen, less well known than

47The significance of this reception is increased when one recognizes that Indira Gandhi is often compared to the goddess Durgā due to the manner in which she wielded power.
either Rānī Ahalyabāī or Rānī Bhavānī who were the most renowned benefactresses in Banāras. Rānī Bhīṅgā is also said to have rebuilt the Durgā Vināyaka Mandir and a tantric Śiva shrine on the southeast corner of Durgā Kund. The Durgā Vināyaka is one of the city's important Gaṇeṣas. It is an old and renowned temple, mentioned in the Kāśī Khaṇḍa as the thirty-first spot to visit on the pañcakroṣṭi pilgrimage route. There are one hundred and eight important spots to visit on this famous pilgrimage circuit which circumscribes Banāras. Gaṇeṣa (Vināyaka, "the Remover [of Obstacles]") is highly revered in the city due, in part, to his identity as leader (tīra) of Śiva's gang (gāna) of demonic spirits. Like the city's Bhairavas and Bīrs (literally, heroes), he also functions as a guardian. This particular Vināyaka is associated with Durgā, both by his guarding presence beside her temple and by his identification as her son. Most people relate Durgā to Gaṇeṣa via Pārvatī, Śiva's spouse, when discussing Gaṇeṣa's origins. Pārvatī fashioned Gaṇeṣa from her skin rubbings while Śiva was away and the boy guarded the entrance to her chamber. When Śiva returned and was impeded by the boy, he beheaded him in anger. When the goddess interceded, Gaṇeṣa's head was replaced with that of an elephant. The Durgā-Gaṇeṣa relationship is more explicit in the image cluster worshipped during Durgā Pūjā celebrations where he is often referred to as her son.

There are Gaṇeṣas of little consequence in some of the other shrines on the site of Durgāji. An interesting one is found in the inner courtyard which is paved with marble and allows devotees to circumambulate the temple. The courtyard is surrounded by the quadrangle which is a sheltered platform which houses rooms for pūjāris and workers, shrines, and pillar-supported ceilings over open spaces to shelter visitors. Upon entering the inner courtyard, one is flanked by two large stone lions. Each is unique and they are said to have been donated to the temple by a Mahārāja of Nepal. To the immediate left of the entrance is a small shrine, inset into the wall and protected by a wrought-iron grill. It houses a vermillion Gaṇeṣa, a white marble, multi-hooded serpent deity, called Śesānāga (on occasion identified as Śiva, "Sankara ji"), and a small linga and Nandi (Śiva's bull mount) which are placed in front. The Gaṇeṣa and Śesānāga are said to have

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48 A version of this myth is found in the Śiva Purāṇa 2.4.13.
been installed by a certain Prem Shah, from a shoemaker's (*mochi*) family. Cobbler and leather workers (*cāmara*) are ranked extremely low due to the "polluting" nature of work with animal hide. They are often considered outside the class (*varna*) system. Sherring, writing in 1868, mentioned these images (1868:163, 164). This means that devotees from hierarchically low castes worshipped within the temple more than a century ago. Temple authorities, with classic inconsistency, currently claim that such classless worshippers were only permitted into the temple after 1955, when Parliament passed an Act which permitted these classless groups to enter all temples without discrimination. "Even now these people know their place," says the head *pūjārī* of Durgājī. "They stay in the outer courtyard. If they approach the entrance to the inner courtyard, they often start to shudder and cannot enter." It would appear that accessibility was not an issue at Durgājī until the passing of the government legislation, which made the hierarchical distinction explicit. To preserve the Devi’s purity some pious devotees suggested the construction of a barricade to the inner sanctum. Although both *brāhmaṇas* and untouchables are now kept out of the sanctum, the barrier is a symbol of the potentially polluting presence of certain social groups (see Figure 7).

On the same lines, there is a marble plaque by the entrance to the inner courtyard. It is placed just beside a large painting of Durgā astride her lion, holding many weapons. The plaque, inscribed in Hindi, Urdu, and English, states that people not belonging to the Hindu faith are not permitted to enter the temple. The significance of the sign varies according to the religio-political climate. It is clear that non-Hindu writers such as Reverend M. A. Sherring and E. B. Havell entered the temple over a century ago. Over the years I have noticed a waxing and waning of this policy. Fourteen years ago, when I first visited Durgājī non-Hindus were generally restricted to the outer courtyard and upper terraces of the quadrangle. The increase in tourism over the last decade has seen the temple open up to all visitors. However within the last year there has been renewed opposition to the entry of non-Hindus by a few of the singularly devout. This has been precipitated by the increase in non-Hindu tourists visiting the temple, occasionally with uninformed disregard for acceptable religious etiquette. For instance, unwilling to step
barefoot on monkey droppings, these visitors, despite signs to the contrary, sometimes stroll around the upper terrace with their shoes on, secure in the thought that they are not within the temple. The terrace, however, is the rooftop of several important shrines, making these tourists guilty of the extremely disrespectful act of placing their "highly polluting" footwear on top of deities' heads. The unfortunate result of this practice is that many other innocent visitors with deep respect for the religion and the deities, and who have a genuine interest in learning about their worship, have been hastily ejected from the temple.

What is quite ironic is that the definition of what constitutes a Hindu is rather vague. Westerners who have married Hindus and practice the religion may be confronted and expelled because of their colour. Some female western friends of mine, who had been in Banāras for several months and who dressed in traditional Hindu female attire such as sārīs told me of incidents in which they were rather randomly confronted by temple personnel and asked to leave. If they refused on the grounds that they had come to worship, and if they showed a familiarity with the process of worship, they were no longer bothered. Non-Hindu Indians on the other hand are allowed unchallenged into the temple because their appearance does not distinguish them from Hindu Indians. The growing popularity of the ideology of Hindu"ism" (Hindurva) as a viable possibility for Indian national identity definitely underlies this policy of segregation. The problem of identifying Hindus, and distinguishing Hindus from other Indians, revealed in the implementation of the temple policy mirrors the difficulties faced nationally by ideologues who hold simplistically formulated notions of Hindu sectarianism.

Other Sites and Shrines at Durgāji

The outer courtyard of the temple is paved with marble and contains the following structures: the sacrificial plot and pillar, the lion pillar, the naubhat khāna, two large temples flanking the main entrance to the inner courtyard of Durgā Mandir, and a Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa shrine. The naubhat khāna is an impressive two story structure which used to house an enormous kettle drum. It stands directly in front of the main entrance to the temple. The drum used to be beaten three times daily, from the open upper pavilion, in
honour of Durga. The naubhat khâna is no longer used for that purpose, since the drum broke some twenty five years ago. "Monkeys jumped on it," I was told. The front of the naubhat khâna which faces Durga Kûnd Road now houses a small pân stall, a favorite meeting place for the owners (mahânt), priests (pûjârî), workers, and devotees.

Pân, also called tâmbûla, is a preparation chewed with addictive relish throughout Southeast Asia, and especially in India, where the Banâras style is famous. Plain (sada) pân consists of a leaf of the betel vine, originally cultivated by the barât caste (jâtî), and sold by the tamboli jâtî. Onto this is spread a liberal amount of catechu (katthâ), a thick, whitish liquid extracted from any of several trees, such as the acacia. Finally, pieces of the hard areca nut (also called betel nut) are folded into the leaf, and the quid placed in the mouth between the cheek and the teeth, from where it is slowly masticated. On contact with saliva, it oxidizes to a blood red colour whose tell-tale stains on lips and tongues is the subject of some poetry. The majority of Banâras men prefer their pân with some tobacco and slaked lime (cunâm). The resulting headiness (nasâ) contributes an acceptable, even commendable, trait in the character of the Banârasi male, called masit.49 It is characterized by a easy-going, heavy eye-lidded, mildly euphoric intoxication associated with the city’s patron deity, Śiva. Pân is also chewed by Banâras women, although in smaller numbers and more privately. I have observed women of all classes chewing it, although I sense that it is chewed more by those of village than urban origin, and more by the "traditional" than the "modern" women. Not unlike blood sacrifice, tâmbûla is an offering which, from the sattvic perspective, can diminish the status of the deity who accepts it. Hanumân and Durga are among the deities who accept it. Hanumân, at the immensely popular Sankata Mochana temple, is offered tâmbûla daily, while Durga is offered tâmbûla during parts of the Durga Pûjâ worship rituals during Navarâtra.

Although it is purely coincidental, the pân stall is located in the naubat khâna, directly in front of the Durga image in the inner sanctum allowing everyone who comes

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49The trait is also acceptable, although the practice is less common, among Banârasi women. See, for instance Shanti Devi’s interview in the Introduction.
to purchase the preparation a glimpse (darśana) of the Devī. There is undoubtedly an implicit connection between the blood-red colour of the saliva when chewing pān and the Devī’s association with blood, but no one offered such an association explicitly. The Devī’s connection to blood is most explicit in the presence of the sacrificial plot, a four by five foot unpaved rectangular area which is located directly in front of the main entrance and Durgā image (see Figure 8). On one end of the plot is a metal, tuning-fork shaped yoke into which the necks of sacrificial goats are secured. In front of the plot, also facing the main entrance and image is a small stone pillar, about two feet high, with a concave depression at the top. This cup catches the blood from the severed heads placed in offering upon the pillar.

A larger stone pillar is set off to one side, on the south of the outer courtyard. It rises perhaps twenty feet high, and is topped with a sculpted stone lion. Some say it was a gift from the King of Nepal. There are other lions at Durgāji, two carved in stone just within the entrance to the inner courtyard (see Figure 10), and two brass images flanking the entrance to the inner sanctum. The lion is the mount or vehicle (vāhana) of Durgā and is a symbol of royal power. A king’s throne is called the simhāsana (literally, lion seat). The Devī reigns from her cosmic throne. The lion is the seat (pītha) and symbol of her power (śakti). The Devī’s great power is illusion, māyā, with which she envelops the world. The lion is the symbol of māyā and bondage to worldly existence. Although this is not the case at Durgāji, certain temples such as those at Khajuraho, have numerous and ubiquitous depictions of the Devī’s lion on the body of the temple. These leoglyphs or sārdūlas are each different, symbolizing the magical transformations of māyā. Human warriors battle against the sārdūla in what appears to be inevitable defeat. The placement of leoglyphs on the temple walls testify to the presence of the Devī’s sakti within the structure itself, giving it strength and stability. In its association with royalty and vital energy, the lion symbolizes the active rajas guṇa.50

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50Stella Kramrisch makes similar identifications of the sārdūla and lion with śakti through evidence drawn from Vedic sources. “The sārdūla, an animal of perfervid ingenuity, composed of rhythm, is an embodiment per artem of the Lion, the Lordly Power of the wild beasts, who is Prakṛti, Śakti, Māyā. This image, composed of Rhythm, is Vāk. Vāk is life” (1974:337). The High Altar (uttara vedi) in Vedic ritual
The more northern of the two Gahadwala styled temples which flank the entrance to the inner courtyard has no name. It houses three central lingas on the floor and an assortment of other images most in great disrepair. These include a Laksmi-Narayana murti, a Ganesa, and an image of the solar deity, Surya, after whom it is occasionally named. Flush with Durga Kund, in the outer courtyard, is a newer Radha-Krishna temple, housing a līṅga in an outer right alcove, with central murtis of Radha and Krishna. There are two shops located in the outer courtyard. The larger of these belongs to Om Prakash Agarawal, a Śākta merchant (baniya) who was extremely helpful and informative. A good friend of the mahant, he has run the shop for about two decades. Such shops sell toys for the children of visiting pilgrims and worshippers, and trinkets, such as bangles and ornamental forehead stickers (bindu) for the ladies. The outer courtyard, which is never closed, is also frequented by a few mendicants, male and female, who make their living from alms (dana). These people never enter the inner courtyard (See Figure 7). The large square structure diagonally situated at the southwest corner of the temple, is a stone-pillared shelter (dharmaśālā), which contains a well, the drinking water source for visiting pilgrims (yatna).

To the immediate right of the main western entrance is an enormous brass bell, suspended with a few other bells from a wood scaffolding. This may be the large bell which originally hung from the porch, described by Sherring (1868:165). Further to the right, near the southwest corner one finds the fire-oblation pit (havan kunda), the scene of much activity on Tuesdays, when it is frequented by healers (ojha) (see Figure 6). A is called a lioness, and the presiding priest when sanctifying the four corners of this earthen altar says, "through thee may we worst our enemies" (Satapatha Brāhmaṇa. III.5.1.33). Even today, table legs carved in the shape of the legs of lions are a ubiquitous design in Indian carpentry. The lion symbolism conveys regal power and gives firm support to a structure.

A 1930 manuscript in Bhārat Kalā Bhavan in a listing of one hundred and twenty six hierophanies (śrītha) to be visited during the month of Śravaṇa (śravaṇa masa snana prārambhāḥ), enumerates ten (#50-60) in the Durgā Kund area. These are #50 Durgā Kund, #51 Durgā Vināyaka, #52 Durgā Devi, #53 Kālarātri (this would likely be the Bhadrakāli in Durgāmandir), #54 Canda Bhairav (also in Durgāmandir), #55 Dvāreśvarajī (this is Jvalharesvara/ri or Jvaresvara/ri), #56 Sūrya Karṇeśvarājī (possibly the Sūrya temple at Durgājī), #57 Kukkuteśvarājī, #58 Jaigūlājī (Lord of Jungle People; Location: unknown), #59 Tilaparnesvarajī, and #60 Muktesvarajī (Lord of Liberation; Location: unknown). See Pandit Sudarsanlal Trivedi Vaidya Šāstri (1930:116/117).
metal grating in the ceiling above it, permits the sanctified smoke to be ventilated to the upper terraces.

To the south of the main quadrangle of Durgāji, not far from the shrine of Kuṅkūṭēśvara Mahādeva is the small temple of Jvalaharesvara/ṛi and a Lākṣmī-Nārāyaṇa Mandir. The Jvalaharesvara/ṛi temple contains two signs (liṅga) of the generative power of Śiva in the centre of the floor in front of a sculptural image (mūrti) of what appears to be a goddess on the back wall. The image faces east. Besides the goddess mūrti is another obscure image. Jvalaharesvara/ṛi means "The Deity who Removes the Heat of Fever (jvala)." The deity is also called Jvālesvara/ṛi (Lord/Lady of Fever) or Jvaresvara/ṛi, and Dvāresvara/ṛi (Lord/Lady of the Portal). Actually it is rather difficult to ascribe a gender to the mūrti, possibly the reason for confusion. I have heard that the deity is a form of Viśṇu, but the central positions of the liṅgas make this questionable. My feeling is that, whatever the origins of the images may have been, it is the liṅga/mūrti combination which currently gives the devotee a sense of worshipping either a male or female deity. The relationship of goddesses such as Śītalā (She who is Coldness) to the chills and fever of diseases such as smallpox is well-known, making Jvalaharesvarī or Jvālesvarī more likely. The role of male gods in fever is less common, but Śiva’s association with the inner heat (tapas) of ascetic practice is well known. He is known as jvalī. The Lākṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple is managed by the pūjāri, Ram Khelawan Tiwari, and his wife. Besides the deities after whom it is named, it houses other Vaiṣṇava images, including Hanumān.

Hanumān, the monkey deity, son of Vāyu (the Wind) is associated with Viṣṇu through his seventh incarnation, Rama, whom he helped in the war with Rāvana. He is also known in Banāras as an "incarnation of Śiva" (saṅkara suvan) through the famous lines of the Hanumān Cālīṣa (Forty Verses to Hanumān), composed by Tulsidas. The avadhi dialect of Hindi, used by Tulsidas, in composing the highly popular, Rāmacarita-mānasā (The Lake of Rama’s Acts), and the Hanumān Cālīṣa, makes the translation of saṅkara suvan, ambiguous. The colour, or radiance of Saṅkara are other possible

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translations. This "incarnation" interpretation perhaps raises the status of Hanumān through his identification with Śiva, associates the Vedic deity Vāyu with Śiva, and subordinates Śiva to Rāma and Viṣṇu through Hanumān's absolute service to them. It reflects ongoing Śaiva/Vaiṣṇava sectarian tensions. The sacrality of monkeys, through Hanumān, bears on their presence in large numbers at the Durgā Mandir. They are fed by devotees, and given relative freedom in the temple unless they are directly engaged in molesting visitors. Perceived as "devotees," "servants," "guardians and soldiers" of Durgā, it is not clear whether this Śākta dimension has Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva associations.

For most visitors, it is the monkeys at Durgājī which are the temple's most memorable characteristic. For this reason it is often called the Monkey Temple and thus sometimes mistaken for a Hanumān temple. Although the presence of monkeys at Durgājī originated from the temple's location within their forested habitat, their presence is not discouraged and they can find ample food and shelter at the temple. It is interesting that another temple noted for its animal population is the Devī temple of Karnī Mātā, located near Bikaner, Rajasthan, which is home to thousands of rats. At Karnī Mātā I was told that the rats would reincarnate as religious sages (muni) in their next lives, but I heard no such interpretations about the monkeys at Durgājī. The monkey is a well known symbol of the restless mind in the Hindu and Buddhist tradition. The monkey mind is capricious, easily distracted from concentration, and quickly pulled in many directions by sense desires. Monkeys thus represent the antithesis of yogic control over the mind and the senses. It is my feeling that the monkeys at Durgājī also serve as living icons of the Devī's power over human consciousness. They embody, in the extreme, our "animal" or "sensual" nature which can only be overcome by the Devī's grace. Of course, the grasping, animalistic "monkey" mind, is itself an element of human consciousness. It is often associated with aspects of the ego (aḥaṅkāra), which is a manifestation of Prakṛti, and which keeps us enmeshed in worldly existence. Epistemologically, the Devī's power manifests both as our deluded consciousness (moha), as well as the elevated

53See Dunnigan 1989:65-66, who also notes a spousal relationship between Hanumān and the Mother Goddess. "Whenever a hamlet was founded in Western Bengal, the villagers' first duty was to erect an image of Hanumān, protector of crops and cattle, and virile consort of the Earth Mother" (65).
consciousness which spiritually liberates us. Therefore, the monkeys in the Durgā temple yantra tacitly convey to visitors qualitative attributes and powers of the Devī which rule the physical senses and the subtle aspects of consciousness.

Santoṣī Mā (Mother of Complete Satisfaction) is a new resident in what was a tiny, dilapidated shrine (near the Durgā Vināyaka and Mahāmāyā Śītalā temple), whose original inhabitant was no longer identifiable. Santoṣī Mā is a goddess gaining rapid popularity in India. Her worship is easy. In a classic reversal of the norm, devotional vows (vrata) to her which involve fasting permit the eating of sweets (mithāl). Some feel that this is because her worship was introduced from Sind, and Sindi merchants (baniyā) are often sweet merchants. She was referred to as a "goddess of the Kali Yuga." There is good reason to believe the local tales that her shrine was originally a Nāga (snake deity) temple. Nāga temples are often located beside Śītalā shrines. The presence of the kunda gives good reason to expect a Nāga shrine close by since snakes frequent such water sources during the hot season. Quite typical in spiritual economics, the original sanctity of the site is not ignored (or wasted) but used as the location of the new shrine.

The Mahāmāyā Śītalā, and Durgā Vināyaka Mandirs are essentially independent of the Durgā temple and do not pay rent, however, the chief pujāri of the Śītalā temple, Śītalā Prasād Chaubey, was a pujāri at Durgājī until his expulsion some years earlier. Also the chief pujāri at Durgā Vināyaka, Hrdaya Narayan Dubey, a self-described practitioner of tantric ritual arts (tantrika), is a shareholder in the Durgā Mandir (see Chart 1). The Śītalā shrine’s main image consists of seven small golden masks, facing west, emerging from a single cloth garment. The garment is said to be spread over seven distinct images. According to the temples’s pujāri, this Śītalā is not one of the city’s nine Gaurīs or nine Durgās, but is a form of Pārvatī. "She is not different from Durgā." In the words of the temple priest: "women generally perform devotional worship (pujā), while men come to exchange glimpses (darśana) with the goddess." She is mainly worshipped by women for their children’s health. "Her worship is difficult (kathin)." During an epidemic, the entire village may gather to perform a fire oblation (havan), and a male sheep is released at night. I was told that if it is not performed properly, the
goddess can become very angry.

Śītalā does not bring problems (kaśṭa), but takes them away. Demons enter the bodies of children, and the goddess enters also to protect them. So whenever a demon appears in a house or body, so does the goddess.

There are many important implications in the above account for the relationship between illness and health, demons and the Devī, and Śiva, as heat (tapas), and Śakti, as coolness (śītalā). The alternation of heat and cold, as fever and chills, in the experience of diseases like malaria and small pox, may also be interpreted as the battle between demon and the goddess (devī). This contributes to an interpretation of Mahiśāsuramardinī (She who Crushes the Demon Buffalo), in which the goddess is depicted engaged in the process of vanquishing the demon. The identification between Śiva and the demon, in these images, is not remote, and will be discussed later.

*Interpretive Observations*

The numerous deities and symbols uncovered in this examination of subsidiary shrines at Durgājī and structural elements in the temple architecture are not incidental but pertinent to our understanding of the Devī. When viewing the temple as a yantra of Durgā, every element within that instrument must be recognized as contributing meaningfully to the whole. The goddess is not merely housed at the centre, within the inner sanctum, but permeates the entire temple and its environs. Every deity (e.g., Bhadrakālī or Śītalā) should be understood as subordinate to Durgā, or as an aspect of her. I have illustrated in detail earlier how conceiving of deities as subordinate to Durgā satisfies sectarian, political, and social needs. Thus Vaisnava and Śaiva groups may identify with particular images (e.g., Kṛṣṇa Gopāla or Caṇḍa Bhairava) or view Durgā within their sectarian framework (e.g., as Vaisnava sakti or as Śiva’s wife). Members of royalty (e.g., the kings of Nepal and Banāras) may assert their position on the hierarchy of power by identifying with particular images (e.g., Bhadrakālī or Durgā herself). Those orthodox brāhmanas who abjure any form of meat-eating may worship Durgā, comfortable in the idea that blood sacrifices are offered by lower classes to subsidiary deities (e.g., Bhadrakālī).
Those adhering to a predominantly Śākta metaphysics are likely to see the entire yantra of Durgājī as a integral manifestation of the Devī. The subsidiary deities are not subordinate to Durgā; in fact, they are her. This is why the priest at the remote Mahāmāyā Śītalā Mandir said his goddess is "not different from Durgā." This identification of myriad forms with Durgā does not extend only to the female deities but includes the male deities and the other presences in the yantra. Even the diagramatic Durgā Yantra possesses male and female elements. The bells, the sculpted lions, Gaṇeṣa and Hanumān, even the monkeys who frequent the temple are constituent parts of the yantra, and therefore of the Devī herself. Variously conceived of as her ornaments, her vehicles, her children, or her helpers, all such elements ultimately also represent her manifest form. This embodiment of the Devī, which is Durgājī, further reveals itself in such subtle forms as the beauty of its sculptural work, the capriciousness of the monkeys, and the mystery of its main image.

The Origins of Durgā Worship in Banāras and at Durgājī

To continue with the interpretive key of Durgājī as a sacred instrument (yantra) for communing with the goddess or realizing her in a psycho-spiritual manner, we must turn to the construction of the yantra, for this is an important component of yantric practice. Again, I stress that I am using the term yantra broadly, but not inappropriately. Durgājī is not a yantra built according to a formal design. Only the śikhara bearing structure was so constructed. Durgājī developed organically and as tradition tells us, the current structure is only the latest in a series of manifestations. The development of a shrine, especially if it is perceived as the embodiment of a deity, is a process of some significance to worshippers. To them, it reveals something about how power and the sacred make themselves manifest. Eliade refers to manifestations of power as kratophanies, and manifestations of the sacred as hierophanies (1958:14). Kratophanies, by virtue of their association with power, often generate in people the ambivalent feelings of fear and veneration, both of which are attributes of the sacred (1958:14-37). In the
case of the Devī, who is perceived as the awesome power which underlies the entire creation, all her hierophanies are kratophanies. Every manifestation of Durgā is a manifestation of sacred power. This is why the very fabric of the temple is attributed with strength and durability. Later, I will illustrate how Durgā’s presence in armour, in weapons, in fortified constructions, in the human body, in the family, and even among communities is thought to imbue these diverse items with an unassailable strength and irresistible power. In particular, every Durgā shrine is an altar of sacred power (śakti pīṭha). When myths allude generally to the presence of Durgā in Banāras, the custodians of Durgājī infer that that presence is embodied in the temple. This section on the origins of Durgā worship in Banāras although overtly describing myths, legends and history, is covertly telling the story of Durgājī in Banāras.

In Banāras, the worship of ancient male and female nature deities, often associated with trees and pools, predate the worship of the great gods and goddesses like Śiva and Durgā.54 These female deities were referred to variously as yakṣīs, yoginīs, and devis (Eck 1982:51). Buddhist Jātaka tales tell how such tree-dwelling yakṣīs were propitiated with offerings of flesh (bali) (Eck 1982:54). As we have seen, Durgājī, who accepts flesh sacrifices and who is still associated with the sacred kuṇḍa, has her origin and abode traced to a sacred pippal tree. Such associations connect her with the earliest strands of worship in Banāras, even prior to the great god Śiva.55 Just as Śiva rose to prominence in the ensuing centuries "incorporating many of the yakṣa deities into his entourage" (Eck 1982:69), the cult of the Great Goddess (Mahadevi) also developed "gathering together the powers and the domains of countless devis into a grand theistic vision of a single Mahādevī" (Eck 1982:75). It is not easy trace this development of the worship of the Great Goddess in Banāras but ringstones found in the earliest layers of archeological excavations at Rājghāt, the city centre of ancient Banāras, suggest the


55According to Eck, as early as 2,500 years ago, in the Gṛhyasūtras of Hiranyakesin (II.7.10.6) Śiva is referred to as the Lord of Kāśi (Kāśīvara Śiva) (1982:68).
protean forms of the *yoni* and the *yantra*, which are important symbols in Devī worship. However, as Eck points out, one could not meaningfully talk about the Great Goddess until about Gupta Period (4th to 6th century), because prior to that there were thousands of goddesses (1982:74). The *Devī-māhāmya* or *Durgā Saptasāt*(, now the most renowned text to the Great Goddess, which appeared in perhaps the sixth century, is one of the earliest examples of the emergence of the Mahādevī (see Coburn 1984:1). In it the Devī is called by such names as Caṇḍikā, Ambikā, and Durgā, which are virtually synonymously applied to the Great Goddess (See Coburn 1984:95,99,115-116).

The advent of Durgā worship in Banāras is not as yet traceable, but there is evidence from the sixth century of worship of a goddess whose fierce nature and weapon vaguely suggest a similarity. A seventh century image on display in Rāmnagar Fort depicts Umā-Maheśvara, the goddess as the consort of Śiva, equal in status. Although Durgā is now identified by many worshippers with Śiva’s wife, Umā is more often an epithet for the goddesses Šatī or Pārvatī, who are not unequivocal representations of Durgā (see Kinsley 1986:36). Similarly, the eight century images of the dreadful Cāmundā or the tenth century weapon-wielding Vaiśṇavī are related but essentially different goddesses (see Eck 1982:75n). An image of Durgā as Mahiṣamardinī (Crusher of [the demon] Mahiṣa), from the Chaukhamba quarter of Banāras, is on display in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan of Banāras Hindu University. It is dated at the eighth century and is the earliest iconographic evidence of Durgā worship in the region which I encountered. Other Mahiṣamardinī images from the eleventh century on display at Bharat Kala Bhavan confirm Durgā’s presence and continued worship in the city up until the Muslim

56 See Banerjea 1974:168-73. Diana Eck, referring to the studies of P. Kumar (1974), and J. N. Tiwari (1985), says "it is clear to scholars who have studied the emergence of the Great Goddess, that the primary source of her worship was non-Vedic and non-brahminical" (1982:158).

57 An inscription describes an image of a goddess, covered with serpents, with a necklace of human heads, holding an axe (*paraśu*) in her hand, installed in a temple erected in her honour. According to Altekar, the iconographic description indicates a goddess resembling Kāli or Caṇḍī. See A. S. Altekar 1937:27 in which he refers to *Epigraphica Indica* IX:69.
Jayachandra, the king of the Gahadvalas, the dynasty which ruled Banaras in the twelfth century was defeated in 1193/4 by the Muslim armies of Muhammad Ghūrī. A thousand temples in Banaras were destroyed and mosques erected on their foundations (Eck 1982:82). Muslim rule by the Delhi Sultanate dominated the city for the next five hundred years. The temples of Banaras were plundered and destroyed at least six times in those five centuries (Eck 1982:82,83). As a result, "there is no major religious sanctuary in all of Banaras that pre-dates the time of Aurangzeb in the seventeenth century" (Eck 1982:84). Had there been any major temples to Durgā in Banaras in those years, they undoubtedly would have met the same fate as the other Hindu shrines. It was only in the mid-eighteenth century, when Muslim rule began to wane in North India, owing, in part, to the rise of British power, that Hinduism began a revival. It was then that wealthy patrons began to rebuild temples in order to reestablish the contours of Hinduism that had been surpressed for almost half a millenium. The Bengāli queen, Rānī Bhavānī, is one such benefactress. She is credited with building the current structure of the Durgā Kund temple, but according to local legend this construction is merely a reestablishment of an ancient temple which stood on the site.

When Reverend M. A. Sherring wrote his account of Banaras in 1868, a hundred years after Rānī Bhavānī had built the Durgā Mandir, he said,

formerly, a small shrine was situated on this spot, in the midst of what, it is asserted, was then wild jungle; but it seems to have been very little resorted to; and far from clear when, or by what means, the shrine began to become famous. (1868:157-166).

This view is consistent with the legends told by most locals and worshippers at the shrine. However they claim that the site, although neglected when Rānī Bhavānī revitalized it, enjoyed great prestige in the past. In order to explore the origins of the ancient sanctity of the site we must refer to the purānic sources to which devotees and temple officials point.

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58 Some examples are found in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan (Nos. 153, 177) at Banaras Hindu University. A photograph of an eleventh century image is found in Eck 1982:73.
During fieldwork it soon became obvious that oral accounts would not provide a suitable history of Durgājī since the dates given to me, even for historical persons like Rānī Bhavānī, varied from two hundred to five hundred years. In fact, Rānī Bhavānī’s time was most often cited as "four hundred years ago." My initial ambition to find out the "true story" of the temple, based on facts, yielded, after some frustration, to the realization that this was of little consequence to the worshippers at Durgājī. Their "history" of the temple was woven from myth, legend, and historical fact seamlessly connected. The current temple is only the latest in a series of re-creations following the earlier activities of divine and semi-divine beings as recounted in the Purāṇas. What follows is the worshippers’ story of the origins of Durgājī. Its seamless flow is intruded upon by my attempts to nail down "facts," particularly concerning historical dates.

The Purānic Mythological Background

Diana Eck points out how detailed geographical descriptions may constitute portions of glorifications of place (sthalamāhātya). These exist, in part, owing to the importance placed on sanctified space, and in a more practical vein, to provide information for wandering pilgrims. Ultimately, they also serve to identify sites which have been cast into obscurity. For instance, many of the ancient temples in Banāras had been obliterated, often after several attempts at reconstruction, during the Muslim rule from the 12th to the 17th centuries C.E. The 18th century C.E., Rānī Bhavānī’s period, saw a strong spirit of Hindu revivalism, in which many of the city’s forgotten temples were restored to prominence. In those efforts, the Kāśī Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa has proved indispensable. It is the text most often referred to by priests and pandits as the authoritative source for identifying the locations of the city’s ancient shrines.

Although the date of the Kāśī Khaṇḍa is uncertain, as part of the Skanda Purāṇa,

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59 Portions of this section are taken from my article entitled "Some Purānic Myths of the Durgā Temple in Banāras," forthcoming in Purāṇa, Kāshīrāj Publications.


61 A good example, in print, of such efforts is found in Kuber Nath Sukul (1977).
it is considered to have timeless authority. The Kāśit Khaṇḍa unequivocally states that the person who performs the worship of Durgā through her pilgrimage in Banāras, is freed from thousands of afflictions, and more specifically, that bathing in Durgā Kūnd cleanses one from the sins accumulated in nine rebirths (navajanma). Furthermore, the Devī is particularly pleased with sacrificial offerings, which, although not stated explicitly, are most likely construed as blood sacrifices (mahābali). These two references strongly link the Devī of the Skanda Purāṇa to Durgājī, for there is no other goddess temple in Banāras which currently is so obviously associated with both a kuṇḍa and with blood sacrifice.

The Kāśit Khaṇḍa also recounts how the Devī got her name. Once, when a great demon named Durga (or Durgama) threatened the gods with the power he had acquired through the performance of asceticism, they approached Śiva for help. He passed the task onto the Devī who sent Kālarātri, one of her energy manifestations (śakti) as a messenger to tell the demon to desist. However, when Kālarātri (Black Night) approached, the demon tried to catch her. She burned the demon’s attendants with her breath, returned to the Devī who dwelt in the Vindhyas (vindhyacakkilayam), and prepared for war. The Devī produced thousands of energy manifestations (śakti) from her body which defeated the demon’s armies. Ultimately he engaged her in combat, but she destroyed all his weapons. He began to change shapes, but she injured each of these,

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62 Scholars suggest that it is later than the twelfth century, since there is no mention of it in the Tīrthavivechana Kānda of the Kriyakalpataru by Lakṣmīdhara, a twelfth century digest (nibandha) with extensive coverage of Banāras.

63 durgākunde narah snātvā sarvadurgārthārāstinim/
   durgāṃ sampūya vidhivannavajānmaṅgamuṣrjet/// 87///

64 nāśayisyatī vighnaughañsumatiśca pradāsyati
   mahāpūjopahārāścā mahābālīvedanaīh/
   dāśayabhāstādāśīdūhim durgā kāśyāṃ na samśayah
   pratisamvatsaramityāh kāryād yātā prayatnateh/85.
See Kāśit Khaṇḍa (Skanda Purāṇa), (1961: 520-21). The term bali is used almost synonymously with blood sacrifice in the later purānas. See, for instance, Van Kooij 1972:21, 52-54.

65 The story is told in great detail in Chapters 71 and 72 of the Kāśit Khaṇḍa.
finally killing him while he assumed the shape of a buffalo (*mahāmahiṣarūpa*). She took the name Durgā (the Unassailable) from the demon she had conquered.

The *Kāśī Khanda* goes on to say that the very same Durgā, with her *śaktis*, Kālarātrī and others, always protects Banāras.66 Since Kālarātrī is the name of the sixth of the city's Nine Durgās, the *Kāśī Khanda* reinforces the role of these Nine Durgās as city protectors. The text also seems to imply that the prime residence of the goddess is Banāras, specifically at Durgā Kuṇḍ. Also noteworthy in this story is that the Devī dwelt in the Vindhyas. The most prominent temple to the goddess under the epithet of Vindhyavāsinī Devī in those mountains is located near Mirzapur, some eighty kilometers upriver from Banāras. A local legend says that after slaying the demon Durga, the Devī rested at Durgā Kuṇḍ, thus sanctifying the place. When the great sword (*asi*) slipped from her hand, it split open the Asī river, which lies just south of Durgā Kuṇḍ in the direction of Vindhyacal.67 Thus this legend links the cult of Vindhyavāsinī Devī to the Devī of Durgā Mandir. The purānic tale suggests that although the Devī may have had her abode in the Vindhyas she is ever-present in Banāras as Durgā with her *śaktis*.

The *Kāśī Khanda* myth expands upon a passage found in the most important Śākta devotional scripture, the *Durgā Saptaśatī*, which is contained within the *Markaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. There where the creation myth of the goddess is recounted, the Devī foretells of her future incarnations.68 One of these is as the goddess Durgā, a name she will assume after slaying the demon Durgama. The *Kāśī Khanda* myth therefore elaborately documents the fulfillment of this prophecy. It forges a strong connection between the goddess of the *Durgā Saptaśatī* and the Devī of Durgā Kuṇḍ.

Another well-known myth which is only occasionally cited to account for the ancient sanctity of the site of the Durgā Mandir concerns Sati, the spouse of Śiva. When

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66 śā durgāśaktibhiḥ sārdham kāśīn rakṣati sarvataḥ/ 
 tāḥ prayatnena sampūjyāh kālarātrimukhā naraiḥ//88//


67 This legend is also noted in Eck 1982:167.

Sati killed herself after being insulted by her father, Dakṣa, Śiva carried her corpse wherever he went in the heavens. To rectify the cosmic imbalance caused by Śiva’s mourning, Viṣṇu entered the body of the goddess in the form of an insect and slowly caused her limbs to break away and fall to the earth (in most accounts, he severed her limbs with his discus). Where each body part fell, the earth was sanctified, and these spots have come to be known as seats of the Devī, or the Śākta pūthas. Some worshippers claim that the Durgā Mandir is built on the site where Sati’s right thigh (janghā) fell.69 There is, however, no written support in any purāṇa to confirm this identification, even though the listed locations and numbers of the Śākta pūthas vary considerably. Most Banārasis familiar with the Sati myth hold that the Viṣālākṣī temple in the city rather than Durgā Mandir is such a Devī pūtha since it is listed in many compilations including the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa (VII.30.55-84) and the Matsya Purāṇa (XIII.26-56).

The Purānic Version of how Durgā Worship Came to be Established in Banāras

I found that although the Kāśi Khanda is cited by temple priests to authenticate the ancient sanctity of the temple site, identified through the demon Durga myth, the kunda, the blood sacrifices, and the Nine Durgā pilgrimages, these officials prefer another purānic myth to identify how the Devī came to take up residence in Banāras. This tale is found in the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa and is worth recounting in some detail.70 It is frequently told by pūjāris around Durgājī.71

The king of Ayodhyā, Dhruvasandhi, had two beautiful wives Manorāmā and

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69The association of this myth with the Durgā Kund temple is given in Vidyarthi, et al (1979:300-301).

70See Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Skanda III, Chapters 14-25 which is the source of the following myth.

71I have reverted to the purānic version of this story rather than an oral account due to a classic field work "experience." I did not have any recording device handy when Ram Khelawan Tiwari, the temple priest at the Lakṣmī-Nārāyana temple adjacent to Durgājī, began to relate the story to me. I listened fascinated and afterwards asked him if he would retell the story when I had my tape recorder with me. He agreed, but some days later when I showed up with my recorder, he produced a written account which was a Hindi summary of the purānic account, which he proceeded to read despite my protests. The marvellous spontaneity of his oral account, with any personal embellishments or omissions, was forever lost. Concerned that I would be making a record of his tale, he reverted to an "authoritative" account.
Līlāvatī, each of whom gave birth to a son. When Dhruvasandhi died in an unfortunate hunting accident, Sudarśana, Manorāmā’s son, although a minor, was expected to ascend the throne. However, Līlāvatī’s father, Yudhājit saw this as an opportunity to install his own grandson, Śatrujit, on the throne. He hurried over to Ayodhyā accompanied by his allies and their armies, only to confront Manorāmā’s father, Vīrasena, and his armies. War eventually broke out and when Vīrasena was slain by Yudhājit, Manorāmā fled with her son and legitimate heir, Sudarśana, towards Banāras. En route, she took refuge at the hermitage of the sage Bharadvāja, who dissuaded the pursuing armies of Yudhājit from killing Manorāmā and her child.

Sudarśana began to grow, and one day, mistaking a term he overheard his older playmates say, began to repeat the seed syllable (bīja mantra), "Kliṃ." This spontaneous initiation (dikṣa) into the bīja of Kāma, also sacred to the Devī, enabled him to master quickly the martial, moral, and political sciences. He began to get frequent visions of the Supreme Goddess, who one day gave him a chain mail armour and weapons. Meanwhile, Śaśikalā, daughter of the king of Banāras (Kāśī), who was fast coming of age, secretly fell in love with the young prince through stories she had heard about him. One day she too had a dream in which the Devī appeared and granted her the boon of marriage to Sudarsana.

The king of Kāśī, Subāhu, sensing his daughter’s maturation, arranged for her marriage (svayamvara), and invited all the eligible neighbouring princes. Among these came Śatrujit, accompanied by his father, Yudhājit. Choosing the icchā svayamvara, where a bride may select her husband by her own free will, Śaśikalā told her father that she wanted Sudarśana, and sent a message for him to come to Kāśī. When Sudarśana arrived in Kāśī on a chariot which had been given to him by kings who were former allies of Yudhājit, it created a stir among the princes. Yudhājit threatened to kill Sudarśana and Subāhu if Śaśikalā persisted in her decision. Subāhu tried in vain to get his daughter to reconsider her choice, but she remained adamant. She told him not to fear, since the outcome of the confrontation was in the hands of the Devī.

Subāhu finally conceded and secretly married Śaśikalā to Sudarśana. He gave them a small retinue of soldiers and servants, offered Manorāmā the throne of Banāras,
which she declined, and himself prepared for certain war. Inevitably, when the kings heard of the marriage, they were enraged and waited to ambush Sudarśana when he set out from Kāśī, accompanied by Subāhu. Unperturbed, despite knowledge of the upcoming ambush, Sudarśana repeated the Kāma bija, and took refuge in the Devī’s protection.

A horrific battle broke out and as it grew more dreadful, the goddess, beautiful, and holding many weapons, appeared, mounted on her lion. Subāhu and Sudarśana bowed to her in devotion as her lion roared and the quarters began to assume a dreadful appearance. Although the rival kings lost heart, Yudhājit did not, and he launched an attack at Sudarśana. Enraged, the goddess Durgā joined the fray and slew Yudhājit, Śatrujit, and several other of their allies. Thus the battle ended in favor of Sudarśana, and Subāhu, the king of Kāśī, began to sing the praises of Devī Durgā.

Pleased with Subāhu’s praises, the Devī appeared to him and granted him a boon. He asked that she remain always in Banāras being worshipped under the name of Śrī Durgā Devī and that she protect the city and make it renowned for as long as it stood on the face of the earth. She granted his wish. Subāhu established an image of the Devī in Banāras, had temples built, and encouraged her worship. The inhabitants of Kāśī grew in love and devotion to the Devī and began to worship her with the same zeal as they did Śiva in the Viśvanātha temple. Sudarśana was successfully restored to the throne in Ayodhya where he, too, established and encouraged Durgā worship.

This myth is well-known and regularly referred to by the sacred specialists of

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72 nagare 'tra ivyā mātah shāhyam mama sarvadā/
 durgādevitā nāmnā vai tvam śaktirīha saṃsthitā//5//
 raksā ivyā ca kartavyā sarvadā nagarasya ha/
 yathā sudarśanastrāto ripusamghādanāmāyah//6//
 tathā 'tra kartavyā vārānasyāstvayāmbike/
 yāvatpurī bhavedbhūmāu supratisthāh susamṣhitā//7//

See Devī Bhāgavatam Mahāpurāṇam.3.24.5-7 (Pandita Pustakalaya 1969:168).

73 su baḥurapi kāśyam tu durgāyah pratimām śubhām/
 kārtyivā ca prāṣādam sthāpayānāsa bhaktaḥ//41//
 tatra tasyā janāḥ sarve premabhaktiparāyanāḥ/
 pañjām cakrurvidhānena yathā viśvevarasya ha//42//

See Devī Bhāgavata Mahapuranam.3.25.41-42.
Durgā Mandir and the surrounding shrines who identify the Durgā Kuṇḍ Mandir as the original site where Subāhu established his temple. It is certainly a very compelling identification. The only temple which can adequately stake the same claim in modern day Banarās is the Annapūrṇā Mandir which is visited by most Banarāsīs and pilgrims who take the darśana of the Śiva liṅga at the nearby Viśvanātha temple. However, the Devī of Annapūrṇā temple is best known by that name (despite her identification as Mahāgaurī, one of the city’s Nine Durgās during the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage) or as Bhavānī. There are a series of independent myths which link her to the nurturing role suggested by her name, Annapūrṇā (She who is Replete with Sustenance). The Durgā temple at Rāmnagar does not qualify since it is outside the sacred perimeter of the city.

**Interpretive Observations**

The personalities and actions of the prince Sudarśana, his beloved Saśikalā, his widowed mother Manorama, and the king Subāhu are quite significant for they serve as models for Durgā worshippers (of both high and low classes). Adverse circumstances have befallen them all. Manorama is widowed and thus has lost her power and prestige. She fears for her own life as well as that of her son, Sudarśana, is young and thus weak. He has lost his rightful place on the throne and is without wealth and position. This makes it difficult to win his beloved, the princess Saśikalā who, although she loves him, has to face angry suitors. Her father Subāhu is also faced with dealing with the armies of her powerful suitors. Noble in character, but in positions of weakness, this father and daughter, and mother and son, provide excellent paradigms for understanding many aspects of the motivations behind Durgā worship. I suggest that it is in recognition of such mythic accounts, in which Durgā interceded on behalf of Manorama and her son, that a person such as Shanti Devī, the boatman’s daughter whose interview is found in the Introduction, worships Durgā to maintain her strength and for the welfare of her children. Manorama, the widowed queen who worshipped Durgā and set upon by enemy forces, is also the model for Rānī Bhavānī whose story follows.

If one were to summarize the mythological account of Durgā Mandir it would be that the Devī, after her creation by the gods in order to slay Mahiṣa (as recounted in the
Second Episode of the *Durga Saptasati*, was again called upon to slay Śumbha and Niśumbha (the Third Episode). After slaying this pair of demons, the Devī tells of future incarnations. Among these she recounts how she will appear to slay the demon Durgama, and become famous under the name of Durgā. This "prediction" comes true in the *Kāśi Khanda* myth, which further tells us that the Devī came to reside in Banāras at Durgā Kuṇḍ.

The question which arises concerns the place of the Sudarśana and Subāhu myth, for if the Devī already resided at Durgā Kuṇḍ, why did her worship need to be re-established there? A possible answer lies in the conception of reality as cyclical. The Devī’s slaying of the demon Durga took place at a time in the mythic past when the battle between good and evil was essentially cosmic. It was fought between gods and demons, and had divine proportions. The site of the Durgā Mandir was chosen and sanctified by the Devī, in *illo tempore*, during some earlier Manu-cycle (*manvantara*). The Sudarśana story is a connection between the events of that divine period and what appears to be a cycle of human history. It reenacts the perennial battle between good and evil, but with human players, for Sudarśana and Subāhu are worshippers of the Devī, while the arrogance of Yudhājit and Šatrujit link them with the demons. Thus when Subāhu, the king of Kāśi, establishes Durgā worship at Banāras, he is actually setting a human precedent, but merely re-establishing her presence there.

It is to this mythic history that the near legendary deeds of Rāṇī Bhavāṇī are joined, for she continues the chain of cyclic reconstructions of the temple, and the revival of Durgā worship in Banāras.

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74 I have desisted from repeating the myths of the *Durga Saptasati* here since they are extremely well-known and do not pertain specifically to the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple.

75 Even this battle is a re-enactment of the earlier battle between the Devī and the demon Mahīśa. It is noteworthy that the demon Durga himself also takes the shape of a buffalo (*mahīśa*) before he is killed.

76 Here I am using an analysis of myth which incorporates two of Eliade’s (1963) paradigms. The first is the cosmogonic element in some myths which refers back to a sacred primordial time when divine beings first performed important deeds. The second is the element of remembering (*anamnesis*) found in certain myths wherein human or semi-divine heroes recall the divine precedent and engage in reenacting them (1963:115-125).
After close scrutiny, R. C. Hazra concluded that the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was composed by a "Śmārtā Śākta brāhmaṇa of Bengal and . . . he migrated to Benares (probably because it was the best place of residence for a Devī-worshipper), lived there for a long time, and then wrote the *Devī-Bhāgavata*" (1963:353-359). Hazra based this on an appraisal of the author's intimate familiarity with the countryside of Banāras and Bengal, and supposed that the Vaiśṇava rulership of Bengal and Orissa in the twelfth century would make Banāras a more favorable place for Śāktas. Were this true, we could surmise a sizable Durgā cult in Banāras at that time for which there is some evidence. Was there an ancient temple on the site of the Durgā Mandir at that time, where this author worshipped? Did Rāṇī Bhavānī, who experienced the discomfort of British and Islamic power under Warren Hastings and Siraj-ud-daulah in Bengal, rebuild this Durgā temple which was previously an important devotional centre for Bengāli Śāktas in Banāras like herself? Although hard evidence prevents an unequivocal answer to these questions, devotees have little doubt about the sacred antiquity of the temple and its site.

### Rāṇī Bhavānī

Durgājī was constructed by a pious Bengāli queen in the 18th century C.E., a heroine of the Hindu revival at that time. Rāṇī (or Mahārāṇī) Bhavānī, daughter of Atma Ram Choudhury, was the wife of Rāja Ramkata Roy. On his death, she inherited in 1710, the fiefdom ( zamīndārī) of Natore, a vast tract taking some thirty-five days to travel, the most extensive in all of Bengal and perhaps all of India. It earned her the epithet Ardha Bangleśvarī (Mistress of Half of Bengal).

Rāṇī Bhavānī of Natore, whose name has become a by word for charity and generosity, was the most prominent figure in the history of Bengal in the 18th century among that class of women who could take serious and prominent parts

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77 C. M. Brown points out the possibility of multiple authorship ("a small group of Goddess devotees from Bengal") for the initial *purāṇa* (Brown 1990:10).

78 Much of the information in this section derives from conversations with Dr. N. Dasgupta of the History of Art department at Banāras Hindu University, members of the Bengāli community in the Bengāli Tola district of Banāras, and from Dr. Raghunath Bhattacharyya (1986). See in particular, Bhattacharyya 1986:1-2.
in politics as well as in general administration of the estates entrusted to their care (A. C. Roy 1968:361).

When her beautiful daughter Tārā Sundarī, widowed at fourteen, was abducted by the young, arrogant Siraj-ud-daulah, Nawāb of Bengal, and subsequently released due to pressure from the indignant Hindu citizenry, Rānī Bhavānī left with her for Bānārās.79 She appears to have spent substantial amounts of time and money in the city, re-establishing the holy places of Bānārās which were obscured and lost after the destructive purges of Aurangzeb. A learned and literate woman, familiar with religious texts, Rānī Bhavānī is well known in Bānārās for her construction of the temple of Durgā, the goddess she worshipped with royal grandeur during the celebrations of Durgā Pūjā.80 Rānī Bhavānī is said to have constructed about three hundred and eighty temples, guest-houses, and dharmaśālās in the city, among these the Omkāresvar temple, Bhavānīśvara temple (which bears an inscription dating her deed at 1735 C.E.), Lāt Bhairav temple, and the Jai Bhāvānī Bāri of Bengāli Tōlā. She is known to have "built" or paved the Pańcakrośī pilgrimage route around the city, establishing numerous rest-stops with shade trees and wells along the way. She is also credited with renovating the Kapal Mochan Tīrthā, Kuruksetra, Pushkara, Shanku Dhara, Piscach Mochana, and Durgā kundas among others. An inscription testifies to her renovation of Kardameshvar Kund, the first overnight stop on the Pańcakrośī pilgrimage route, in 1802. She is also known for her generous donations, such as providing twenty-five maunds (1 maund = 37.32 kg) of rice daily for distribution to pilgrims at Annapūrṇā Temple, and for the donation of

79This is the story told by certain Bengāli residents of Bānārās. R. Bhattacharyya claims that Bhavānī held no hard feelings towards Siraj-ud-daulah, and even supported him against the East India Company’s conspiracy against him. It subsequently led Warren Hastings, in his efforts to appropriate her zamīndāri, to suggest that she and her son, Raja Ramkrishna, had “sided with the last administration” (1986:14).

80See K. T. Kumar 1986:121. These renovations likely refer to the act of making a kunda pakka from its kaccha state. Kaccha (literally, "raw") may refer to the unfinished, natural state of a sloping river bank (ghat) or pond, while pakka (literally, "cooked"), refers to the construction of walls and steps, to facilitate access.

The Rānī’s contribution to the revival of Sakti worship in Bānārās is obvious, although it is also clear that her piety was non-sectarian. Her beneficence extended to Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, and Śāktas, and to Muslims as well, as evidenced by land grants to Islamic Educational Institutions (e.g., in Khosh Bangal in Rajshahi). See R. Bhattacharyya 1986:15.
a home to brāhmaṇa families every day for a year. For some reason, Bengali brāhmaṇas did not accept her generosity, and the homes were accepted by South Indian brāhmaṇas of the Kumar Svāmi sect. The entire muhallā of Tripurabhāra came to be known as "brahmapuri" due to the large number of brāhmaṇas living there.

Rānī Bhavānī’s actual deeds are legendary in Banāras, and her legendary deeds equally numerous. Her power, beneficence, and piety led her to be identified with the goddess Durgā. Rānī Bhavānī’s generous donations of food, shelter, and alms for the pious, earned her the title of Second Annapūrṇā, and Lokamātā (Mother of the People). Her power, and her determination to revive Hindu dharma by her own deportment and her religious philanthropy earned her the title, Daśaprāharāṇadhārinī (She who holds Ten Weapons), an epithet of Durgā (R. Bhattacharyya 1986:1-4). Her equally pious daughter, Tārā Sundari has come to be identified with the goddess Tārā. Tārā Sundari is said to have spent most of her time in worship at the Jai Bhavānī Mandir in the Bengāli Tolā section of Banāras, and to have disappeared there one day. Legend has it that she was bodily absorbed into the goddess Tārā. Nevertheless, a tomb (samādhi) is located in that temple below an image of Kāli/Tārā. The shrine is infrequently visited, except by the extremely devout, often young women, who blur the distinction between the goddesses Kāli and Tārā, and the princess.

Rānī Bhavānī died on September 12th, 1802 (R. Bhattacharyya 1986:15). Her birthdate is not recorded but her widowhood in 1710 and death in 1802, point to a long life and early marriage. This is reasonable in the light of the Bengāli tradition of early marriage as evidenced by her daughter's widowhood at fourteen.

Both Rānī Bhavānī and her daughter Tārā Sundari were married young and widowed early. According to A. C. Roy, in medieval Bengāli society of the 14th to the 16th century C.E.,

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81 Among the legendary tales, I heard about a secret underground passageway which led from the Rānī’s residence to the inner sanctum at Durgā Mandir, enabling her to worship the Devi in privacy. She is also supposed to have died soon after the construction of the Durgā temple was completed.

82 This information derives from conversations with some temple priests and worshippers at the Jai Bhavānī Mandir.
Early marriage was very common. A man who remained unmarried till twenty
five was regarded an old bachelor. The girl was normally given in marriage at
the age of seven. The parents had to suffer great social opprobrium if they failed
to give their daughters in marriage within the age limit of twelve (1986:356).

Such practices are still common today, not just among Bengalis but among Banarasis as
well, as evidenced by Shanti Devi's family. Shanti, whose story is contained in the
Introduction, and her three sisters, were married at the age of eight. When Shanti's
husband, who was forty years old when she was eight, died, he left her as a young
widow who was forced to fend for herself and her children. Roy continues to say that
widow remarriage was not allowed in the upper classes of Hindu Society. The
Hindu widows were not even allowed to take part in social functions as their
presence was considered inauspicious. The lot of the widows was miserable and
they were not only deprived of all the privileges enjoyed by a woman but also had
to pass their lives in austerities (1986:356).

For Rani Bhavani and her daughter, coming as they did from royal families, sati,
death by joining their husbands on the funeral pyre was an acceptable option, one which
was not infrequently practiced (Roy 1986:356) and even considered a pious act.83 In
fact, there was an alarming increase in sati among the brahmanas of Bengal, from the
period of 1680-1830, due in part to the laws which gave inheritance rights to widows.84
Based on a close study of the Stridharmapaddhati, an eighteenth century manual on the
religious laws pertaining to women, Julia Leslie extracts two acceptable categories for
women who, after the death of their husbands, have ceased to be wives (stfr). They may
either choose to be widows or satis (1989, 1991). To choose widowhood "implies that

A pertinent and prominent debate concerning sati which took place at this time is related by the
historian S. Roy. A leading Hindu nobleman in Bengal society, Rajballav Sen had given his daughter, who
was a child, in marriage according to the custom of the time. When the child was widowed he did not want
to let her perform sati, by burning on her husband's pyre. He called an assembly of brahmanas to
determine the possibilities of remarriage. The brahmanas said it was permitted by the scriptures. Raja
Krishnachand Ray, however, a powerful landholder in the district of Nadia, called another council of
brahmanas who overturned the decision, saying that widow remarriage was forbidden (S. Roy 1991:11).
Raja Krishnachandra Ray was a contemporary of Rani Bhavani and an extremely influential figure in
Bengali culture in the eighteenth century. He is credited with being one of the first to institute the
grandscale celebrations of Durga Pujia during the autumn Navaratra in 1757.

A detailed discussion of the practice of sati is found in Datta 1988. Nandy (1980) suggests that it was
Bengal's encounter with British colonialism which led to the increase.
a woman has chosen to follow the difficult ascetic path of the widow-renunciate (*pravrajā, *vidhavādharma*)" (Leslie 1991:189). While *sati* would probably have been the more pious option, both Rānī Bhavānī and her daughter chose widowhood and lives characterized by piety, purity, and generosity to the devout and the needy. The capacity to disseminate wealth derived from the Rānī’s fortunate inheritance, and it is conceivable that she chose widowhood in order to care for her children, particularly her son, Rāja Ramkrishna.

Both mother and daughter exemplified the virtue of chastity accorded to the goddess Durgā. Both remained widows and lived independent lives, not unlike Durgā, who in the mythological portrait of the *Durgā Saptasati* is free from connections with male consorts. Tārā Sundarī resisted the advances of the Muslim Nawāb, Siraj-ud-daulah, who mirrored the role of the demons Mahiṣa, Śumbha, and Niśumbha who strove to win Durgā’s hand in the same mythological account. Both women exhibited tireless energy: the mother in the giving of boons and the daughter in her spiritual zeal. Both women were eventually identified with the Devī Durgā through one of her subsidiary epithets. The Rānī was called Daśapraharadhārinī (She who Bears Ten Weapons), an epithet which conveys the image of exercising beneficent power in a variety of arenas. Her daughter, Tārā, is identified with the goddess Tārā, linked to Durgā through the set of goddesses known as the Ten Great Knowledges.

Rānī Bhavānī’s life and deeds are sufficiently distant in the past to allow them to be remembered in a manner which parallels that of the mythic heroine Manorāmā. Disempowered after their husbands’ deaths, both women fled the persecution of political rivals and both exhibited piety, determination, and chastity while caring for their offspring. Furthermore, Rānī Bhavānī’s construction of Durgā Mandir was, in the minds of worshippers, merely a re-establishment, or re-enhancement of the presence of Durgā at Durgā Kūnd. The Devī already abided there since she defeated the demon Durgama, and was re-established there by king Subāhū after she helped him to defeat his enemies.

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85A main theme of the *Durgā Saptasati* is the Devī’s resistance to the amorous advances of various demons and her subsequent slaying of them in battle. A variation of this myth, which elaborates on the sexual desire between the demon Mahiṣa and Durgā is found in the *Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.16.46-65.
I have attempted to distinguish the facts of Rānī Bhavānī’s life from its growing legend. In the following section, I attempt to reconstruct the history of the temple after Rānī Bhavānī, up to the present day.

The Subsequent Chronology of the Temple

The exact date of construction of the Durgā Mandir is not known by the temple owners (mahant) or priests (pūjārī), and there is no inscriptive plaque. We know that Rānī Bhavānī’s constructional work in the Banāras area extends from at least 1735, the construction date of Bhavānīśvara Śiva Mandir in Khalsipura, till her death in 1802, the date of completion of the kunda at Kardameshvara temple in Khandwa on the Paṅcakrośī pilgrimage route. On cursory examination, due to its color, size, shape, and spire, Durgājī resembles the Kardameshvara temple at Khandwa located a few kilometers away. Kardameshvara is thought to be one of the oldest temples in the Banāras area. Obviously rebuilt several times, it clearly has Gāhadvāla temple elements, and thus belongs to about the 12th century C.E. Since Rānī Bhavānī is reputed to have paved the Paṅcakrośī pilgrimage route, and to have made pakka the kunda at Kardameshvara, it is obvious that she was familiar with the temple there. I am tempted to suggest that its building material and structural elements were significant in influencing the architectural style of the Durgājī, which surpasses it.

A legend told around Durgājī is that the Rānī died the moment the temple was completed, although Dr. Awadh Behari Khare, whose recent dissertation was on Banāras temple styles, suggests an earlier date of about 1768, some ten years before the completion of the city’s most holy shrine, Kāśi Viśvanātha. Professor Krishna Deva, renowned for his monumental work on the nagara Chandella temples of Khajuraho,

86There are inscriptive plaques testifying to her involvement in these projects.
87Personal communication. Kāśi Viśvanātha, also called the Golden Temple because of its gilded śikhara, is a temple of Śiva as Lord of the Universe. The original temple underwent a series of destructions and rebuildings. The current edifice was built in 1777, by another pious queen, Rānī Ahalyabāī of Indore (Eck 1982:135). Ahalyabāī and Bhavānī are often confused in the minds of locals, who place them both at some three to five hundred years ago.
suggests that Durgājī would have taken fifty stone workers (i.e., four to five families) some ten years to complete the original structure.\textsuperscript{88}

A map of Banāras, made in 1822 by the British scholar James Princep, shows numerous natural clay banked (kaccha) ponds.\textsuperscript{89} In this map, the Durgā kūnda and nearby Kurukṣetra kūnda have already been converted into bathing tanks, testifying to Rānī Bhavānī’s work. The earliest graphic depiction of the temple is found in the 1838 sketch by Sutherland (See Figure 2), showing the main sikhara-bearing structure, the pakka kūnda, and a wall and pillared pilgrim rest-house (dharmaśālā) area surrounding the back half (east) of the courtyard around the temple. In front (west), there are two smaller temples, which appear to be those currently identified as Tilapameśvara, and the Sūrya temple. A tall stone pillar, topped by Durgā’s lion mount (vāhana), is also visible. Large trees surround the site, giving it an atmosphere of forested tranquility which sharply contrasts with the modern temple, now engulfed by the sprawl of suburban dwellings.

The temple had reached close to its current shape by the mid 1860’s. Reverend M. A. Sherring, writing in 1868, refers to the claim that a large brass bell was given “about 40 years ago” to the temple by an “European magistrate of Mirzapore” (1868:165)\textsuperscript{90} He talks of the construction of the porch (maṇḍapa) by “a Subahdar, or superior commissioned native officer, a few years ago,” and points out that the brass bell hung from the centre of the maṇḍapa (1868:165). Sherring mentions the quadrangle which now as then surrounds the temple fully. It is not visible in Sutherland’s 1838 sketch (see Figure 2), indicating that it was constructed in the intervening thirty years. The quadrangle houses some rooms accommodating the temple workers, and serves as

\textsuperscript{88}Personal communication. Raja Jai Narāin Ghosal of Bhūkailasa in Bengal, a contemporary of Rānī Bhavānī, is reported to have praised the Durgā Mandir, then estimating the worth of its stonework alone at Rs. 50,000. See R. Bhattacharyya 1986:5.

\textsuperscript{89}A copy of Princep’s map is included inside the back cover of Kuber Nath Sukul’s (1974) Vārānasi Down the Ages. See Eck 1982:49 for a biographical sketch of the cartographer.

\textsuperscript{90}Sherring expresses scepticism about the claim, but since such donations (as evidenced by the patronage of the Kings of Nepal, Vijayanagara, and Banāras) to the temple secured both religious and political benefits, the Magistrate’s gift does not seem unreasonable.
a dharmaśālā, a protective shelter for visiting pilgrims and worshippers. Writing in 1905, E. B. Havell, refers to the temple as being constructed "at the end of the 18th C.E," and the pillared porch "dates from the middle of the 19th" (1905:165).

The small shrines of Gāṇeśa and the white marble Śeṣānāga and Nandi, symbols of Śiva Mahādeva, are still located as described by Sherring. So are the stone lions which flank the main entry (west) through the quadrangle, and the image of Bhadrakāli in the southwest corner. Sherring also mentions the naubat khāna, a building "contiguous to the road" ((1868:163) facing the main entrance (west) of the quadrangle, which houses a kettle-drum. This kettle drum was beaten three times a day in honour of the goddess. He also describes the sacrificial plot and pillars in the outer courtyard, between the naubat khāna and the western wall of the quadrangle (1868:163).

The brass lions which flank the entrance to the garbhagrha, were donated by the brass merchants of Thaṭheri bazaar. According to Rāma Prasad Dubey, the chief pūjāri of Durgājī, "each took six months to cast." He also stated that the dharmaśālā was built by that group of merchants long before his arrival. His comments reinforce the observations made by scholars that certain caste groups, particularly metal workers, have a close relationship with Durgā (Östör 1980:34, Kumar 1988:58) Some twenty years ago, the ordinary wash paint used on the temple, was replaced by a more durable lacquer-like paint. The government also had a fountain built in the centre of the kunda,

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91 Sherring refers to this image as the golden-faced goddess Bāgeśwari, and his description of the shrine's door as "an iron grating in front, looking like a cage or den for the abode of some wild beast" is descriptively appropriate (1868:164). There are, however, two such iron-grating doors, one facing east and the other north. The Bhadrakāli image faces east.

Sherring then says, "a short distance from this shrine is an immodest figure of a woman in bass-relief" (1868:164). He appears to be referring to the small obscure bas-relief image of a squatting six-armed goddess in the Bhadrakāli shrine room. This image is occasionally referred to as a "Tantric Kālī." It is surprising that he does not mention the Canda Bhairava also located in the same shrine room and of larger proportions. He also makes no reference to the Laksṇā and Sarasvatī images.

92 Nita Kumar 1988:57-60 describes the metalworkers of Banāras as belonging to either the Kaserā or Thātherā caste. Although Ram Prasad referred to them as Thātheras (thātherā log), Kumar points out that most do not like this designation. They claim to belong to the warrior class ( ksatriya) since they were armourers for Ksatriya warriors (Kumar 1988:58). This supports my argument about the close relationship between Durgā and warfare, but also her special relationship to the strength and mettle of weapons and armour.
and had the stone slabs which paved the interior courtyards of the temple overlayed with marble. 93

The Personnel and Management of the Temple

Owners

The Durgā temple is privately owned and managed by a large brāhmaṇa family, named Dubey, who currently live in a quarter of Banāras called Bhadaini (near Lolārka Kund). It is not clear how the Dubeys came into ownership of the temple. The Dubeys themselves do not remember how ownership came about and feel they may have been the inherent priestly family which cared for the goddess’s shrine before the current temple was built.

Among some local shopkeepers and residents the story is that Rānī Bhavānī entrusted the temple to three Bengālis, who in turn hired the Dubeys to serve as priests (pājārī) and caretakers. Proceeds from the temple went to the Dubeys to pay for their livelihood and for temple maintenance. With time, when interest in the temple by the Bengāli trustees waned (about 100-150 yrs ago), the ownership passed into the hands of the Dubeys, who became the mahants. The original owners of temples may be wealthy patrons like Rānī Bhavānī, or the modern day Birlas one of India’s wealthiest families. Such owners either obtain some revenue from their many temples, or bequeath them entirely to others. It is likely that the Dubeys were bequeathed Durgā Kund temple directly by Rānī Bhavānī or at a somewhat later date by the temple’s appointed

93 According to Ram Prasad this was done during the ministry of Kamalapati Tripathi, a renowned freedom fighter and former editor of the Banaras newspaper, Āj. His popularity in the city was evidenced by the large numbers who turned up for his cremation at Manikarnikā Ghāṭ in 1991. Among those who came to pay their respects were the then prime-minister, V. P. Singh, and the leader of the opposition, the late Rajiv Gandhi.
It is also not uncommon for pujāris to inherit a temple in the absence of the owners (mahant). For instance, certain temples are cared for by a single pious pujāri who performs service (seva) for the deity. The trickle of worshippers who pass by may leave scarcely enough food or money (dakṣina) for the pujāri's subsistence. As a result, the owners (mahant) will rarely visit the temple since there are little or no proceeds to be collected. On occasion, perhaps for a single festival day in the year, that temple's deity may be the focus of attention, and the mahant may then make a visit to the temple to collect revenue. However, if family members are away, or if the mahants have too many other temples to visit on that day, such a temple may be overlooked entirely and even forgotten. In time it may pass into the hands of the pujāri and his family, who assume "squatting rights" to it. Sherring (1868:158) tells us of the steady growth in popularity of the Durgā Mandir since Rānī Bhavānī's construction of it, making it unlikely that it was "forgotten," or "overlooked" by its original owners.

Technically there is only one mahant of a temple, appointed by the senior owners. However in practice, all the owners are called "mahant" by devotees, tenants, and friends. The head mahant of the Durgā Kund temple was Paras Nath Dubey, who owned a forty percent share in the Durgā Mandir. He died shortly before my departure from Banāras at the end of 1991. His father was Śri Nath Dubey and his grandfather was Raja Panda. No one remembers any names prior to Raja Panda, but the original Dubey (perhaps a generation before Raja Panda) had four or five sons to whom ownership passed after his death. Paras Nath Dubey died at the end of 1991, and thus his forty percent share will be divided between his five sons.$^{94}$ Twenty percent share belongs to Krṣṇa Prasad (Lallan) Dubey, who is Paras Nath’s brother-in-law. Another ten percent belongs to Mitthan Nath Dubey, Paras Nath’s paternal uncle’s son (cācā ke larke). Another twenty percent share belongs to a group of five family members and the last ten

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$^{94}$These sons are named Mohan, Bholu, Raju, Sanjay, and Vikas. If they stay united, they will still maintain majority ownership of the temple, otherwise, their individual shares will make them less influential than Krṣṇa Prasad Dubey who owns a twenty percent share. Percent distribution through inheritance appears to be somewhat arbitrary, according to the will of the deceased. Thus one cannot assume that Paras Nath’s five sons will inherit equal eight percent shares.
percent to a group of seven members. The twenty percent belongs to Hausala Prasad Dubey, Durgā Prasad Dubey, Chilbil Dubey, Girja Shankar Dubey and Rama Shankar Dubey. The seven members who control the last ten percent are subdivided into three groups: 1. Ram Nath Dubey; 2. Rajeshvar Dubey and Vishvesvar Dubey, and 3. Bans Nath Dubey, Hriday Narayan Dubey, Rang Nath Dubey, and Sailendra Dubey. See Chart #1 for a scheme of the ownership inheritance.

Each of these owners has numerous sons who work occasionally at the temple. These children are potential inheritors of gradually decreasing percentage shares in the ownership. Percentage of ownership is not proportionately connected to revenues. Rather it is related to the number of days per calendar year that an owner controls the temple and is entitled to its revenues. Thus some of the Dubeys, who live in villages scattered around Banāras and in northern Uttar Pradesh, may come to work at the temple only a few times per year and collect the revenues and offerings given at that time. If, however, those few days occur during periods of high attendance, such as Tuesdays, or during the month of Sravaṇa, when a yearly festival (mela) is held around the temple, revenues can be substantial. By taking initiative and organizing devotional singing or music performances, an owner can boost his revenues by encouraging attendance, but this is rarely done at present at Durgāji. The large number of owners, and the relatively small income for each group inhibits the motivation to invest money in the temple. Virtually all owners hold or seek full-time jobs for their livelihood. Nevertheless, they are constantly teased, in a good-natured manner, by local merchants and politicians about their sizeable earnings from the temple. The disproportional and decreasing earnings from the temple for each owner are facts recognized even by devotees, who are more concerned about the resulting neglect suffered by the temple structure. For instance, while it was virtually unanimously pointed out that Durgāji was badly in need of a painting, by worshippers and owners, no owner would initiate such a costly project. In order to solve these financial and maintenance problems the owners are currently taking steps to restructure the management of the temple.

There is a management committee which makes decisions concerning temple policies (e.g., the entry of non-Hindus), and the distribution or allocation of larger
revenues which are obtained from private or government donations, and rental revenues from storekeepers, and others on temple land. The manager, who heads the committee, although not necessarily the largest shareholder, wields power and respect. The current manager is Bans Nath Dubey who, owing to his military experience, has organizational skills. There is momentum underway to create a trust committee which would collect all revenues and distribute them proportionally to the owners. Joint decisions to perform constructive maintenance or enhance the temple could be made, with mutually beneficial consequences.

Such restructuring is deemed essential in the face of government or private takeovers of temples. If owners bicker among themselves, impairing the devotees' capacity to worship, the government is likely to step in and set up a management committee of its own. At Durgājī the case of Kāśī Viśvanātha temple is often cited as a recent example of a government takeover. Most devotees do not see such a takeover as a bad thing since corruption and self-serving interests on the part of the mahants, they feel, affects the quality of worship at the holy place. As the potential share in the temple decreases with expanding inheritances, most of the mahants are in favour of some kind of committee management, where profits would be distributed equitably among them without government intervention. Private corporations are ever anxious to build dharmāśālās or market complexes around popular temples for publicity and revenues. The highly efficient organizational infrastructure of such corporations, and their substantial financial investments in the temple can usher them into the dominant decision making role in temple affairs. The Durgā Mandir is currently entertaining such overtures from the Birla Corporation.

**Priests**

Although the owners, being brāhmaṇas, are capable of performing the ritual worship of the goddess, they are uninterested in such intensive dedication. Thus there are currently three main pūjāris (all brāhmaṇas) who serve the goddess on behalf of all the owners. The eldest and chief pūjāri, Ram Prasad Dubey, is not related to the owner Du-
beys. Ram Prasad is now eighty and his hand is no longer steady in performing the flame (ārati) worship of the goddess. His nephew, Rajendra Prasad Pandey, was ill with tuberculosis for most of the year, but returned cured and in good spirits a few months ago. Gurucaran, another pujārī, substitutes for either of them if they are away sick or settling family matters in their village.

In 1932, Ram Prasad came from the village of "Velava Vishnupur, district Ajamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, near Gazipur, about three and a half hours away from Banāras," when he was in his early teens. He had been sent to Banāras to live with his uncle and to study Sanskrit. Being inclined to worship the goddess, he would visit the Durgā Mandir periodically and began to enjoy his time there. On occasion he would pick up a broom and do other chores. At that time, the late head mahant Paras Nath Dubey's father, Śrī Nath, was the mahant. There were two pujāris, and another boy about his own age, named Keshava Prasad, who later became senior pujāri. Keshava Prasad and Ram Prasad became fast friends. Ram Prasad had learned to recite the Durgī Saptasati through repetition and practice at an early age, and prayed to the goddess that he be allowed to stay at the temple. One day, his prayers were answered, and the opportunity arrived for him to perform the daily worship service (pujā) for Durgā. He slowly took on other duties at the temple, leaving no time for other work or study. He has continued his duties to today. Ram Prasad's life reveals much about the process of the making of such temple pujāris. There are five other young men, most from Ram Prasad's village, who currently work at the temple, cleaning, preparing food, and so on. They vie for the opportunity to make some extra money from devotees' small donations (dakṣiṇā).

A former pujārī at Durgā Mandir, Śītalā Prasad Chaubey, who now manages and performs the worship at a small temple to the goddess Śītalā, tells how his grandfather, Sobha Chaubey, and granduncle, Kishore Chaubey, were pujāris at Durgājī. No doubt, they were the two pujāris mentioned by Ram Prasad on his arrival at the temple. According to Śītalā Prasad, these pujāris were also the managers of the temple. A conflict soon arose over the management of funds, and the Dubeys took over the temple management. Eventually Śītalā Prasad Chaubey was also ousted from his role as pujārī
at the Durga Mandir.

There is something in the preceding account to suggest that the Chaubeys were the traditional pujāris of Durgājī, and also enjoyed the management rights and revenues, but not the ownership. According to Śītalā Prasad, the management revenues were either put back into the temple, or made their way into the pockets of the pujāris. With the growth of the owners' families, it became necessary for the Dubeys to get control of the management revenue, and this resulted in the expulsion of the Chaubeys as managers and pujāris. It is speculative to suggest that the Chaubeys (or preceding pujāris) were the traditionally ordained (by Rāṇī Bhavānī) managers of the temple. Yet temple management is often left in the hands of the pujāri. It is equally speculative to suggest that the Dubeys were the traditionally ordained (by Rāṇī Bhavānī) owners of the temple.

Workers and Other Sacred Specialists

Subhas Pandey is a twenty-three year old worker at Durgā Mandir. He comes from the same village as the head pujāri, Ram Prasad, to whom he is distantly related. He was a farmer in his village, raising rice, wheat, and vegetables. He left home to make money in the city. This is his first job. He prepares the cooked food offering (bhoga) for Mā Durgā, and performs the ārat, on occasion.55

Surendra Jha, is a worker at the temple. He suffers from a polio-like paralysis withering the limbs on the left half of his body. He performs cleaning chores and helps to drive the monkeys away if they are harassing people.

Shiv Prasad (Balli Guru) and Anand Mishra are two other workers. Besides cleaning and other such chores, they accept the offerings made to Durgā, crack the coconuts, and apply the forehead mark of sandal paste (caṇḍana tilaka) or red powder (rōrt) on devotees.

Ramji Tiwari maintains the fire-pit (havan kuṇḍa) at the temple. He is thirty-three. His recently deceased father maintained the havan kuṇḍa before him. He learned

55Subhas's cousin, Shyamprita Pandey, works in Sampurnanand Sanskrit University as a clerk. He visits the temple often, and was a good source of information. According to him the temple was built in 1774, but the mūrti is much older.
the \textit{Rāmāyanā} and \textit{Durgā \textit{Sapta}\textit{śat}it} from his father's elder brother, but his father taught him the \textit{havan pūjā}. The offerings which go into the \textit{havan}, he says, are mentioned in the \textit{Durgā \textit{Sapta}\textit{śat}it}, and particular \textit{mantras} from there are uttered with each offering.

A few other workers around the temple tend to the shoes, or perform the decapitation of goats offered to the goddess.

At the northeast corner of the spired structure within the inner courtyard of Durgājī used to be the golden-masked shrine of Rudra Bhairava, which was maintained by Vindhyacal Tiwari, whose father managed it before him. Vindhyacal Tiwari's father was known as Bhavānī Panda, who is famous for having been empowered by the goddess one day during his spiritual practice (\textit{sādhana}). He left Durgā Mandir and started the Kōdīmaī Mandir. Kōdīmaī is supposed to be the sister of Viśvanātha, and her temple is visited in great numbers by South Indian pilgrims who offer her cowrie shells. She is also worshipped with liquor and skull offerings.

Vindhyacal formerly paid a percentage of his earnings to the temple \textit{mahants}. Towards the end of 1991, he was expelled from the temple on charges including the corruption of youth by selling them "brown sugar" (i.e., heroin). He took the Rudra Bhairava shrine with him when he left. Although I have seen him smoke \textit{cannabis} (\textit{gaṇja}) with elaborate preparatory rites in worship rituals to Durgā in his home shrine room, he refutes the charge of heroin trafficking, stating that he does not use any narcotics and is not in need of money. After his mother's death a few months before his expulsion, he came into a large inheritance. He boasts of his great wealth which includes gold and cowrie shells acquired from offerings at his late father's goddess temple. He had ostentatiously displayed this new found wealth in a vast array of flamboyant clothing, a new camoflauge-colored canvas umbrella for his shrine, and other paraphernalia, such as an ornate walking stick. His expulsion was no doubt in part because of his growing influence (perceived as pernicious) on the atmosphere and workers at the temple. He plans to open a small temple on his home premises. He has nine daughters, which he says are his nine Durgās.
Interpretation of Pertinent Symbols at Durgājī

Certain important motifs emerge from this examination of the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple that further our understanding of the symbol cluster which is Durgā, and her worshippers. The temple itself is considered to house a yantra or actually be a yantra. A yantra symbolizes a deity and, in fact, to worshippers also embodies the deity. The ritual construction of the yantra is an act of piety and, upon completion, the yantra is the object of worship. S. Kramrisch (1946) and others have drawn attention to the intended construction of temples on the principle of the maṇḍala, (e.g., the vastupuruṣamaṇḍala), and the phallic (liṅga) form of certain temples (e.g., in Orissa) which house Śiva liṅgas is quite obvious. The identification of the temple with the Devī is further reinforced by the red ochre paint which "clothes" the edifice, like the blood red sārt of the goddess. Sculptural decorations on the śikhara and pillars adorn her body. The temple’s large bells and drums are the items she carries. The sculpted lions are her vehicles (vāhana).

The ancient sanctity of Durgā Kuṇḍ and the former pippal tree, and the commonplace identification of such ponds and trees with female deities, suggests that the Devī’s presence is not solely restricted to the image behind the mask, but actually pervades the entire space of kuṇḍa and temple. I feel this is why the image behind the mask is left mysterious. It is the site itself and presence of Durgā here which is of more consequence than any particular image. The sacrality of place is also suggested by the location of the sacrificial plot and pillar, for blood offerings are allowed to spill onto the unpaved earth rather far from the Durgā image. While such sacrifices occur in the direct line of sight of the goddess, it is normal for offerings to make contact with some material which embodies the presence of the deity (e.g., the mūrī or pāduka). The flow of blood into the earth of the sacrificial plot (kṣetra) accomplishes the desired contact.

If the space itself embodies the Devī, then the many shrines on the sacred premises contribute to the set of elements which constitute her symbolic matrix. The Devī of Durgā Kuṇḍ temple is thus also Bhadrakālī, Lakṣmī, and Sarasvātī, whose images reside within the temple quadrangle. The goddesses who reside outside the quadrangle, such as Jvareśvarī Devī, and even goddesses located off the official temple
property such as Mahāmāyā Śītalā are definitely considered to be part of Durgājī. Male deities, too, are included in this symbol system which links Durgā to Ganesa (e.g., Durgā Vināyaka), Bhairava (e.g., Cānda Bhairava), Śiva/Rudra (e.g., Tilapānesvara), Sūrya, and even human devotees who reside there (e.g., Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva). The interpretive framework which connects these deities is common to most temples. Durgā is to be seen either as the supreme deity, to whom all others are subservient, or as the deity of whom all are a part.

Lest one surmise that the Devī of Durgā Kuṇḍ temple is an amalgamation only of the principal female deities and primarily Śaiva male deities, this is not the case here. Although Durgā is often referred to in the literature and by many worshippers as the spouse of Śiva, from the majority of the devout Śāktas who frequent the temple I heard no such dependent identification. There are Lakṣmī-Nārāyana and Krṣṇa Gopāla sculptures (nothing Śaiva) which grace the śikhara, suggesting a Vaiṣṇava connection if anything in the early period of the temple’s construction. The main entrance to the temple (west) is flanked by the newer Rādhā-Krṣna temple by the kuṇḍa, and a Lakṣmī-Nārāyana temple to the south. By balancing both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava elements, the Devī seems to transcend them, her status undiminished by being paired with either of these important male gods. In fact it is enhanced by these associations since she draws devotees from both of the male gods’ sects. A further example of this balance between Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava elements is found in the bas-reliefs on two of the mandapa pillars which face the stone lions in the quadrangle. One depicts Hanumān and the other Bhairava. It is not unusual for these two guardians to be depicted with the Devī in popular lithographs. Hanumān is most strongly linked with the Rāmaite and thus Vaiṣṇava sectarian tradition, while Bhairava is linked with Śiva. Both serve Durgā.

Durgā’s presence is further attested to by the power (śakti) which permeates the site and her devotees. I have alluded to the idea, offered by a pujārī and others, that not only does Durgā reside in the material of the temple, but it is her powerful presence which gives it structural strength. Similarly, it is her śakti in devotees which give them devotional vigour and protects them. The significant conception here is that Durgā as
Śakti is not solely a dynamic energy which is the feminine half of a male/female bipolarity, but is both static and kinetic. She is the power which binds or bonds things together, residing there, semi-dormant, potent and protective. But that potential can also be released. When dynamic, this śakti animates her worshippers into remarkable feats of power and devotion. Rānī Bhavāṇī and her daughter Tārā Sundarl exemplify this dramatic behaviour. Rānī Bhavāṇī’s strength of character, independence, and amazing acts of philanthropy highlight the maternal qualities of Durgā’s śakti which is protective and nurturing. In Tārā Sundarl one sees the same energy given over to remarkable acts of devotional piety. The strength of both widows did not come from their spouses but from the Devī herself.

This empowerment of people derives from the action principle in the goddess, whose kriyā śakti gives them the endurance and energy to live successfully. Thus, it is to the Devī that the temple officials attribute their good fortune. It is Durgā who has provided the mahants with revenue through custody of the temple, and Durgā who drew Ram Prasad and the other workers to the place and enabled him to earn a livelihood by serving her. Also, every shopkeeper and vendor, barber, and beggar who earns a living through the commerce which arises from temple worship, attributes their fortune to Durgā’s beneficent grace.

A noteworthy dimension to the economic and spiritual benefits which derive from the Devī’s presence comes in the development of a shrine related to the Durgā Mandir. Its existence is something of a secret and its location really only passed on by word of mouth. Set in a room off a courtyard on the property of the late mahant of Durgājī, it houses nine stone Durgā images, some of which appear to be quite old. The mahant himself did not tell me about the existence of this shrine for almost a year, although I had heard about it from one of his acquaintances and first visited it without his knowledge. The stories concerning this shrine and its images vary considerably. Certain worshippers at Durgā Mandir said that these were the original images which sat on the premises of Durgājī prior to the coming of Rānī Bhavāṇī. They were hidden away by the mahant’s forefathers to avoid desecration at the hands of the Muslims, and never
returned to the temple site. According to the mahant himself, when he finally took me to the site not long before his death, it was his grandfather who started this shrine over a hundred years ago with ancient images belonging to his own family. The images had sat out in the open for quite some time, he said, but the family was recently able to construct a room to shelter the goddesses. According to him the Devīs did not come from the site of Durgājī. But this version of the story is his alone, for according to many of those who worship at this shrine, it is the actual abode of the Devī of Durgājī. A female devotee summarized the lore commonly held by worshippers:

The owner of the house once had a dream. The Devī appeared and said that she was under the ground and wanted to come out. He unearthed her and set her up there. That Devī got up and took up her seat at Durgājī. The real place where the Devī lives is in the ground underneath those images. It is a very dangerous place to go late at night or early morning. Mā could be sleeping, or taking her bath, and would be very angry if she was disturbed.

It is clear that in her mind this nine-Durgā shrine is more intimately connected with the Devī’s actual presence. To her and other such worshippers “all nine Durgās are there” and so they are able to avoid the crowds at Durgājī during Navarātra and do the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage by just visiting that single temple. Whatever the historical truth may be, this nine-Durgā shrine is growing in its function as a source of spiritual power for devotees and revenue for the owners. It derives its spiritual prestige from the more renowned Durgājī, but not in a subordinate way. Rather, its devotees claim greater antiquity for its images and their greater proximity to the Devī. Both attributes heighten the shrine’s sanctity. It also enjoys mystery, secrecy, and dangerous power, necessary elements in the nature of the Divine Feminine.

This nine-Durgā temple is a choice example of a site of "popular" religious practice since it is neither mentioned in authoritative texts nor does it cater to the upper classes. In fact, it is favoured by lower class worshippers. Whether or not the "grassroots" lore concerning this temple will percolate upwards with time to be incorporated into the legends of the purānicly authenticated Durgājī is difficult to say. But already, early in its development, the nine-Durgā shrine’s lore is linked to Durgājī by worshippers at both sites.
Blood is an important element in the portrait of Durgā gleaned from the examination of the temple's origin myths and structural elements. The Devī came into being to slay the Buffalo demon, Mahiṣāsura. She gained her name through slaying the demon Durgama and rested at Durgā Kuṇḍ after the battle. She took up her abode in Banāras on the request of the king Subāhu after she had slain his enemies. Durgā rests and abides at Durgāji. Is the red paint of the temple her blood soaked sārī after the fray of battle? Durgā accepts blood sacrifice, of both animals and humans, although the latter is only alluded to in the visible presence of the shrine of Kukkuṭeśvara Mahādeva. The symbol of blood, particularly the spillage of it, generates hierarchy both at the social and divine level. To those (from whichever class of society) who are aligned with what are perceived to be brahmanic (and therefore upper class) values which reject blood sacrifice, deities who accept blood offerings and those who make them are ranked low.

This attitude, in part, grows out of the deeper rooted and pervasive theory of cosmological creation in which the principle of pure spirit, Puruṣa, is engulfed in materiality, Prakṛti (Sānkhya/Yoga), or in which pure spirit or consciousness (cit sakti) begins to manifest (a Śākta metaphysics). Blood is a symbol of the dynamism within this process. To others, blood is the symbol of the dynamism in the reversal of this process, the movement away from materiality back to spirit. This dynamic principle which leads both to the creation of matter and its return to pure spirit is either called sakti or is conceived of as the rajas guṇa. It is the rajas guṇa which is the active principle in the cosmological framework of the devolution of Prakṛti into material existence, as well as the principle through which this process is reversed. The rajas guṇa activates and carries the gross, diversified materiality back towards its most subtle integral state. Sacrifice is a process of creative disintegration and reintegration. When a deity is sacrificed (as in the case of the Vedic Cosmic Being, Puruṣa), it moves from unity and integrity to diversity. In a devotee's sacrifice, this material existence, life and its various constituent elements, are reintegrated back to the source. Although this may not be a conscious idea, it is implicit in devotional practices, and will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

Durgā, it becomes evident, is not just dynamic sakti or the rajas principle, but
embodies a static dimension. I have called this static śakti a type of bonding or binding energy which gives stability and form to the creation. In this respect it parallels the power of cosmic preservation normally attributed to Viṣṇu. Due to its stability and unchanging nature, it is more akin to the satrva guṇa. But if inherent power is sattvic, and flowing power is rajasic, then material existence is tamasic, and this too is a dimension of Durgā. She is the manifest creation, heavy with the tamas guṇa.

Finally, Durgā and related goddesses such as Śītalā function in the life and health science of Śāktas. Śakti, a power accessible to all, is intimately connected with life. It is vital energy, or the energy of life. Structures which would be considered inanimate in the conceptual framework of modern science have life-spans in the Śākta worldview. Buildings, bridges and temples and so on "live" and have strength in accord with the śakti within them. The same holds for human life which can exude degrees of power. Illness arises from a conflict of powers, not unlike the seige of a fortress. When discussing the illness of a friend, a devout worshipper told me, "Durgā is visiting him." Drawing upon my previous readings about goddesses of small-pox, cholera, and so on, I asked if Durgā was the source of the disease. He explained that Durgā battled the power which was causing the illness. While this disease-causing power is often attributed to other goddesses such as Śītalā, the priest at the local Śītalā temple was adamant in arguing that Śītalā cured disease rather than causing it. The logic which appears operational here is that although the Devī is the underlying source of all situations, disease, or other such damaging afflictions, when they strike devout Śāktas, are attributed to different minor goddesses or demons. These entities derive their power from the Devī and can be vanquished by her.

Having examined the form and construction of Durgā Kuṇḍ temple, certain significant elements have been uncovered. Among these is the extremely important observation that the temple is a yantra, and thus a manifestation of the goddess. The interpretive key of the yantra provides an ordering structure enabling us to study the wide array of symbols and activities which are related to Durgā. The yantra reveals that it is composed of numerous spheres of influence. Durgā presides at the centre and her
power pervades and supersedes all other powers within the yantra. I discussed the importance of the dimension of power (śakti) in the Durgājī yantra, as well as the symbolism of blood. The flow of blood animates the yantra. It makes the symbolism of the manifestation of the Devī as material creation a dynamic cosmological process. Blood, the symbol of the rajas guna, also suggests the process through which devotees may return to a state of union with the goddess.

Through the myths, legends, and deeds of divine figures, human heroes, and pious devotees, the story of the temple has been described. Some of these myths sketch portraits of Durgā herself. In the mythical and legendary actions of other figures, one finds models of piety and devotion for human worshippers. The idealistic worldview which is generated by the symbols and myths of Durgājī is contextualized and grounded in the realities of life in Banāras. Therefore I have provided information about the ownership and management of the temple, about its priests and workers, and I have broadly sketched the types of people, such as healers and tantrics, who frequent the temple seeking intimate contact with the goddess. I next turn to the forms and cycles of worship at Durgājī. I wish to see if additional symbols are discernable through such an examination, but more importantly, I hope to discern what "moods and motivations" (Geertz 1965:206) are generated by this yantric symbol set when it is animated by worshippers through the course of time. Also, what do these symbols and worship practices tell us about the worldview of which they are a part? And how does this worldview function to provide worshippers with a sense of order and meaning in an otherwise bewilderingly chaotic universe?
CHAPTER TWO

Utilizing the interpretive key of Durgājī as a yantra, one soon realizes that time is an important component in the multi-dimensional nature of this divine instrument. The diachronic dimension in the creation or fashioning of the yantra (i.e., its mythico-historical origins) was discussed in the previous chapter. However, the entire complex is animated through a series of temporal cycles in which the activities of ritual specialists and worshippers are like the vitalizing energy which pulses through this instrument for achieving intimate contact with the goddess. In this chapter, I examine these vitalizing worship patterns which take place at the Durgā Kund temple in Banāras. The daily routine is described through the activities of the most senior priest (pājāri) at the temple. The weekly routine reveals the cadences of worship orchestrated by the solar calendar and planetary influences, while the monthly routine draws attention to the influence of the lunar calendrical system on Durgā worship. Finally, I describe the yearly cycle by discussing temple festivals, such as the annual decoration (srṅgāra) which are specifically for Durgājī, along with major festivals to other deities in the city which are related either to Durgā or to worship at her temple. For example, during the festival of Mahasivaratri, dedicated to Śiva, devotees may visit some of the Śiva liṅgas at Durgājī.

By examining these worship patterns, which I view as symbolic acts, we can discern other elements within the set of symbols which constitute the image of Durgā. These conceptions of the goddess, in turn, facilitate our understanding of the worship activities themselves, as well as their complex relationship to social processes. I have used the yearly cycle of worship to introduce pertinent myths. I have summarized well-known myths, rather than assuming familiarity on the part of the reader. These myths
were often related to me by Durgā worshippers, or I was referred by them to particular
texts, especially the Purāṇas, for details. In reporting, I have chosen not to give primacy
to either the textual or devotees’ versions. In gathering the information, however, I
always strove to find out what worshippers did and said. Only when they sent me off to
a text, since they wanted to say no more, did I consult these sources (if I was not already
familiar with them). Despite the many variations in mythic accounts, at times the textual
and oral versions were remarkably similar. This was particularly true with the Durgā
Saptasatī, whose essential mythological content was very well known to worshippers.
Also, although any individual devotee may not have been familiar with all the myths that
I allude to in this section, some of the more learned Durgā worshippers were familiar
with most of these myths and probably many other ones. While most devotees do not
celebrate all the festivals described in the yearly cycle described in this chapter, every
one of these festivals is certainly known by a few people, especially the owners and
priests of Durgājī.

WORSHIP AT DURGĀMANDIR

The Daily Routine

The night is quiet when Ram Prasad rises for the day. It is about half past three
in the morning. He leaves his room, exits from the south of the quadrangle, and drawing
water from the well, bathes and performs his morning ablutions. There were periods
when he went down to the Gaṅgā for these rituals (nityā pūjā), which are obligatory for
all brāhmaṇas.\(^6\) Now he is older, and the distance to the Gaṅgā is far. Outside, the
only figures on the move are some temple priests, a few pious devotees, and a handful
of workers pasting new movie posters on walls surrendered to that purpose.

When his ablutions and purifications are complete, Ram Prasad moves to the
sanctum (garbhagṛha). It is now about four o’clock. He unlocks its north door and rings

\(^6\)The elaborateness of these rituals depend on the orthodoxy and zeal of the brāhmaṇa. Nowadays,
many brāhmaṇa priests perform their morning ablutions simply, like most other people but are quite likely,
however, to recite the Gāyātrī mantra while making a water offering (tarpana) to the sun.
the bell as he enters, waking up Mā Durgā.77 He lifts up the simple rope bed (carpai) which he had laid down the night before for the goddess to sleep, and places it upright in a corner.78 Next, sitting to one side, he grinds sandal paste (caṇḍana). He washes or sprinkles the yantra on the wall with water from the Gaṅgā (gaṅgā jala), and then dries it off with a towel. He anoints the yantra with the freshly ground sandal paste, and then offers flowers (puspa) and perfume (itra). Today, he is happy that there is jasmine (cameli) perfume to offer Mā. He sprinkles red powder (kuṅkuma, ror) on the yantra, and then offers Mā sweet, uncooked food. This consists of small cardamom seeds encrusted in sugar (ilāyaci dāna), raisins (kiśamiša), or a slightly larger flat candy (badasa).

In the meantime, some of the temple workers have awakened. The main door (west) to the inner courtyard is opened, and a handful of devotees stream in. They have already purchased flowers and offerings from the few stalls which have opened early, and now stand in the porch waiting for the sanctum’s main door to open. Ram Prasad, unseen within the sanctum, proceeds to dress and decorate (srñglira) Mā. He attaches a sārī and the gold mask of Durgā over the yantra on the wall.79 The mask’s aquiline nose is ornamented with a large nose-ring through the left nostril (see Figure 3). Next he affixes decorative flower garlands (phul ki mālā) around the mask, producing an overall visual effect of a sārī-clad, gold-masked, flower-garlanded goddess with a penetrating gaze.

It is almost five o’clock in the morning, and the main door of the sanctum is now opened with a flourish, offering pious devotees the first glimpse of Mā Durgā. It is an image of regal beauty which greets their eyes. They surge up to the marble barricade for

77Ram Prasad, the other pujāris, and the majority of devotees most commonly referred to the goddess as Mā (mother). I use the term in this text as one technique through which the voices of devotees may be heard. Rather than say Ram Prasad or so and so said such and such, the familiar epithet, Mā, indicates that the descriptions of activities or their interpretations come directly from devotees.

78Larger temples may have a special chamber, serving as a bedroom, where the deity is put to sleep. Married deities, like Śiva and Pārvatī, may be put to sleep together.

79This requires some skill since no iron nails may be affixed to the stone, to serve as pegs. On occasion, a wandering mouse might cause the mask to fall from its position.
the auspicious sight (*maṇgala darśana*) and make their offerings which may include flowers, incense sticks (*agarbatti*), red scarves (*cunri*) and coconuts (*nāriyala*). The *pūjārī* attending at the barricade takes their offerings, touches the flowers to the marble footprints (*pāduka*) just within the barricade, and may or may not return them to the devotee. He will smash offered coconuts giving some of the coconut water to the devotee to drink, and returning one or both halves of the coconut as *prasāda*, offerings which have been blessed through contact with the deity.

When all of the awaiting crowd, between five and twenty-five people generally, have made their offerings, Ram Prasad who is still within the sanctum continuing his decorations with offered flower-garlands (*puspamālā*), lights a multi-wicked *ghi* (clarified butter) lamp. This flame-worship (*ārati*) of Durgā is riveting, for devotees, *pūjāris*, and workers have manned positions by the bells around the porch, which they ring constantly while the flames are passed before the goddess. Everyone stands frozen in the porch while the *ārati* is occurring, hands pressed together and held close to the heart in a respectful gesture of salutation (*namaskāra*). Ram Prasad changes lamps, now using one with a single large cup, in which camphor (*karpura*) is lit. The flame jumps high and produces aromatic smoke which fills the chamber. The bell-ringing reaches a fever pitch. A few *mantras* are inaudibly uttered inside the sanctum, precipitating the climax in which devotees collectively emit a sigh and yell out cheers such as "Jai Mā." Some fall to the ground in respectful prostration (*pranāma*), while latecomers toss their flowers into the sanctum in offering. Then all hurry to the side, where a *pūjārī* has brought out the smoking camphor flame, to pass their hands over the sanctified flame and through its smoke. They then pass their hands over their own heads and bodies in a gesture of self-purification: "The flames and smoke cleanse us of previous sins."

It is not long after the *ārati* that the first light of dawn begins to appear, and the
city begins to wake up. Street-sweepers are busy clearing the gutters and moving debris into piles to be carried away or scavenged by cows and dogs. The first stalls to open are those selling sweet milky tea (chai), pān, and breakfast items such as discs of deep-fried, whole wheat, unleavened bread (pūrī), and chick-peas in spicy gravy (canna sabji). Deep-fried vegetables in batter (pakora), pastry stuffed with spiced vegetables (samosa), and sweet, syrup-filled spirals (jalebi) are inexpensive, energy-producing favorites of the city's cycle rickshaw drivers.

Men and women continue to stream into Durgājī for early morning darśana prior to their work, the numbers peaking between eight and ten o'clock in the morning, after which the business day in the city begins. The temple is visited by approximately equal numbers of men and women who arrive singly or in groups. Often a party of five to twenty pilgrims will enter, take darśana, circumambulate and leave, rarely lingering in the temple for fear of being separated from their group and guide. The groups which come from nearby villages, specifically to satisfy a pledge (manautī) to Durgā, stay longer at the temple, spending perhaps the whole or several days (see Figure 9).

As noon approaches, the numbers of visitors drop off, and about half an hour later the sanctum doors are shut for about fifteen minutes. Durgā is offered deep-fried bread (pūrī) and curried vegetables (sabji), and boiled rice sweetened in milk, sugar, and raisins (khīra). The afternoon hours are relatively quiet. It is a time when mainly a few pilgrim groups and tourists visit the temple. Other visitors and workers find a quiet, shady spot, perhaps by the kunda, and rest or nap on the cool stone floors. Even the temple's usually rambunctious monkeys are relatively inactive. It is at this time that Ram Prasad usually retires to his room to perform his daily recitation of the Durgā Saptasatī, after which he takes a short nap (see Figure 11).

The number of visitors pick up again from about four o'clock in the late afternoon, when the sun's rays are less potent, till the evening āratī at eight o'clock. This āratī is often accompanied by the beating of large, hand-held swing drums (damaru) and

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101 Many temples have their garbhagrihas closed for several hours in the afternoon; a period of rest for the deity and attendants, which unfortunately frustrates the opportunity of visiting pilgrims to have darśana. The long, open hours at Durgā Mandir, make the goddess highly accessible to all visitors.
has a much larger audience than the early morning pūjā. Before and after the evening āratī, devotees are scattered around the temple’s inner courtyard chatting with friends, or engaged in private worship. Some may be reciting the Durgā Saptaśatī in a corner, while others are perhaps making offerings at the fire oblation pit (havan kundā). Just after āratī, Mā is offered her evening meal (bhoga), which may consist of baked, unleavened, whole wheat bread (rotī), leafy vegetables like spinach (sāg), and some sweets (mithāl). Mā eats chilies, but does not eat garlic and onions (pyāj). She is fond of sweets such as sweet balls (lādū) and hunks of unrefined cane sugar (jaggery, gur). She eats such fruit as bananas and oranges, but does not eat fish and meat. The doors are not closed during these offerings.

At ten o’clock in the evening the last stores and restaurants begin to close as the city prepares to sleep. People are on their way home and the streets are quickly deserted. Shortly before eleven o’clock, there is a final flame worship (śarana āratī) for the goddess. The doors to the garbhagrha are closed and Ram Prasad lays down the bed. He puts Mā to sleep and exits from the sanctum, which he locks behind him. When the last worshippers have departed, the courtyard doors are closed. Ram Prasad lies down to rest. Four hours later he arises to repeat his devotional service to the Devī. Few sounds penetrate the silence within the inner courtyard of Durgā Mandir at night. On rare occasions a pious pujārī may hear footsteps and sounds within the locked inner courtyard and locked inner sanctum. It is thought to be the spirit of Kukkutesvara Mahādeva, the temple priest of impeccable devotion who was sacrificed to the Devī, as he makes his way from his own shrine to worship Durgā in the garbhagrha.

Interpretive Observations

Ram Prasad’s devotional service to Durgājī is extraordinary. He is likened to the most intimate servant of the Devī and tends to her every need. He prepares himself prior

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102Mā’s food is prepared by the pujāris or workers who eat it after it has been offered and consumed by her. Leftovers, normally considered polluted, are sanctified by the deity’s action. The selection of foods points to a preference for pure (suddhaisattva) items, and reveals as much about the pujārī’s culinary capabilities and preferences as it does about Durgā’s.
to her awakening and only sleeps after she has gone to bed. He also enjoys an intimacy of contact with her unavailable to the most pious of lay devotees who do not bathe, clothe, or feed the goddess. The devotional service paid to Durgā by lay devotees is, in effect, some fraction of Ram Prasad’s service (seva). The parallel between a deity and monarch has frequently been pointed out, and Durgā resides in her temple like a reigning queen in her palace. Devotees visit to worship her and perhaps ask for favours much as subjects would approach a ruler for an audience.

To be in the Devī’s presence is to enjoy some of the pleasures of royal/divine life. This is precisely the manner in which the temple functions. "When I am there, I enter another world," said one devotee. "It is peaceful and I can forget about my daily problems." Durgāji offers her devotees one such peaceful environment, although the precocious monkeys can remind devotees that the Devī’s generosity extends even to her more mischievous subjects. She is generous with her time, available from early morning to late at night and throughout most of the afternoon. Incidentally, this accessibility to her devotees is also advantageous to all those who gain economically from the temple.

The food offered to Durgā by the temple personnel essentially reflects their preferences and spiritual orientation. Ram Prasad, the dominant figure in defining the spiritual direction of the temple calls himself a Vaiṣṇava Śākta and considers the Devī to be a Vaiṣṇava śakti. Thus she is offered sattvic or pure foods instead of rajasic and tamsic foods which are designated as such because of their stimulating or impure qualities. It is mainly tradition, often as it is reputed to be stated in the "Śāstras" which dictates which foods are sattvic or not. Since chillies entered India relatively recently (from the New World via the Portuguese), they are not catalogued in the classic Śāstic literature and so add spice to the somewhat bland sattvic diet. Durgāji’s diet was not always as it is now for I have heard that in the earlier years she was offered rajasic and tamsic food by temple priests. Such offerings, which were also made by devotees in front of the inner sanctum, are now prohibited by Ram Prasad. At present, blood sacrifice is permitted in the outer courtyard. But offerings of alcohol and cannabis, and the consumption of these items when consecrated must be made outside both courtyards. On occasion, a form of blood sacrifice is made within the inner courtyard. This occurs
when a goat is released rather than killed. A devotee or worker makes a cut in the goat’s ear to spill a little blood and the animal is then set free.

The late mahant, Paras Nath, related a story of how, a decade or so ago, a group of powerful tantrics once came to Durgājī. They had liquor and meat from a goat they had sacrificed to the Devī and they encouraged him to eat this sanctified food. Ram Prasad, the priest, had apparently left for his village and the mahant was about to partake of this food, when the elderly priest suddenly returned. Seeing what was about to take place he immediately told them to stop or they would have to face him. Despite the tantrics’ power and the fact that the pūjārī was outnumbered, they desisted, afraid of the priest’s power through the Devī’s grace. Ram Prasad then made the mahant swear before the Devī that he would not eat meat or drink liquor, even if it was consecrated, on the temple premises, a promise the mahant said he kept. Paras Nath died recently, and Ram Prasad is in his eighties. It is quite conceivable that Durgājī may receive more non-sattvic food from devotees, and revert to her earlier greater popularity among tantrics, after the priest’s influence wanes.

The story about Paras Nath and Ram Prasad illustrates a significant hierarchical order within the appropriation of power. Even the immense power which can be acquired by spiritual adepts, such as tantrics, is of lesser magnitude than that accessible through sincere devotional service. The likely explanation is that while the adept acquires some of the Devī’s power, the true devotee benefits from the Devī’s grace. In a contest, it is the Devī herself, on behalf of the devotee, who confronts the power holder. Her power is without a doubt superior. The buffalo demon Mahisa’s contest with Durgā mythically relates precisely this futile struggle, for acquired power must succumb to the source of all power. Tapas, the power acquired through ascetic practice, must submit to Śakti. The classic image of Kāli atop the passive, reclining Śiva, conveys this message. Śiva, the greatest spiritual practitioner (sādhaka), must himself yield to the source and culmination of his power.

And yet the Devī entertains both types of worship. While lay devotees have often expressed fear of the consequences of disturbing Durgā at inopportune times such as
when she is asleep, the disembodied pūjāri Kukkutesvara Mahādeva has no such fear. While all, including the Devī, sleep, he may make his way to the shrine to worship. Similarly, I was told how a powerful tantric (a certain Lal Baba), when Ram Prasad was young, wanted to worship Durgā one night when the doors to the inner courtyard were locked. "He took a single leap from the outside, over the walls and landed in front of the porch." Both pūjāri and tantric display supernormal powers which emanate from the Devī. Both disdain convention since their need or desire for worship is great, as is their devotional commitment. The average lay person may want something from the Mother but be unwilling to pay the price which goes with disturbing her. Her most sincere devotees, however, are undaunted. They know that Mā’s grace extends to them at all times. She is always available for her children although she may be annoyed if disturbed unnecessarily. The precedent for such behaviour is contained in a myth wherein the divine hero Rāma invokes the Devī at an untimely period of the year. His devotion is so great that she appears to him and grants him victory.103

I will open the discussion on the meaning of pūjā here, and continue with it throughout the subsequent chapters. Pūjā is clearly an act of devotional service (seva) and adoration (pranāma) of the deity. It consists of awakening, welcoming, or visiting the deity, making offerings symbolic of cleansing, clothing, adorning, and feeding the deity, and finally adoring the deity with a flame (āratt), a statement of homage, and a gesture of obeisance. Pūjā suggests several hierarchies. The deity being worshipped is superior to the worshipper in purity (sattva) and power (śakti). Yet the worshipper’s sense of his/her own status is also high. However humble the devotee’s social and economic status, s/he approaches the deity with a sense of great purity and nobility. Ideally, devotees cleanse and purify themselves before entering for worship. They bathe and put on clean clothes. "I do not enter the temple to worship if I have been to the bathroom (to defecate)," said one regular worshipper at Durgājī, "until I have bathed and put on a freshly washed dhoit." Hands are washed before handling the flowers used for

103 Versions of this myth are found in the Kalikā Purāṇa 62.24-27, 30-32, 41-43, 49. Also in Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa 36-38 and Brhadāranyaka Purāṇa 1.18-22.
offerings, and devotees remove their shoes before entering the temple. These simple symbolic gestures reconfirm the notion of purity on the part of the worshipper. Furthermore, devotees strive to offer the best they can, commensurate with their economic status or personal energy. This may mean performing a service at the temple (e.g., cleaning) or making costly offerings (e.g., expensive flower garlands, scarves, and fruit). Devotees, hierarchically elevated by their purity, honour and serve the deity who is higher still. Just as a king might honour a high ranking subject in his palace, the deity receives the noble devotee in the temple. Hierarchically high (worshipper) honours hierarchically higher (deity) and in so doing, and in being so received, is elevated. Puja essentially induces a transformation of status in the devotee. It is in these upward currents that friction occurs.

A brahmana with strong sattvic affiliations, for instance, needs to see the deity as hierarchically superior, and thus ensures that all offerings, especially food are sattvic. These offerings, including the food, are transformed through divine contact and ultimately transform the devotees who participate in them. By eating the blessed food (prasada), devotees actually incorporate consecrated matter into their bodies. The sattvic brahmana faces a problem when seeing the deity accepting flesh and blood offerings, which are considered non-sattvic. To a tantric brahmana, or to devotees who may consume and thus offer flesh and blood (often from the warrior or lower classes), such non-sattvic offerings are transmuted into pure, consecrated substance by virtue of the deity’s acceptance of them. But the deity’s acceptance of these offerings forges an identification with tantrism or with low status, both problematic to the sattvic brahmana. The deity’s status would thus diminishes from such a brahmana point of view.

Durgā manages to function as the deity of sattvic brāhmaṇas, tantrics, and the lower classes, but not without difficulties. Denial and distancing are two strategies commonly used at Durgāji, where all classes and types converge to worship. As cited earlier, certain devotees deny that Durgā accepts non-sattvic offerings such as blood. I have also heard people claim, "Durgā is not a tantric deity." Such denials of the facts are facilitated by the process of distancing. If blood sacrifices are made outside the inner
courtyard, other non-sattvic offerings (e.g., liquor, cannabis) forced further afield, and if low class worshippers are also pressured to keep their distance from the inner sanctum, an effective ambiguity is generated. Within this ambiguity, personally meaningful portraits of the Devī may be maintained. The sattvic brāhmaṇa may contentedly worship Durgājī as a deity who receives sattvic food and whose status is not diminished by intimate contact with lower-class and unorthodox worshippers whose non-sattvic offerings go to subsidiary deities such as Bhadrakāli or the Yoginīs. In effect, Bhadrakāli laps up any spiritual "pollution" which might have accrued to Durgā through her contact with less-pure devotees.

Clifford Geertz has pointed to the danger of oversimplifying the relationship between social and cultural processes as merely mirroring each other (Geertz 1973:143). We can see from the discussion above that the tensions present among social classes are only partially reflected in the religious vision of Durgā. In fact, the individual worshipper appears to stand at the junction between a complex social and religious dynamic. High class, low class, orthodox, and unorthodox worshippers each find meaning in the worship of Durgā which supports their spiritual needs and social situation.

Returning to the gestures of purification which precede any performance of pūjā, I would suggest that pūjā initiates a movement, on the part of the worshipper, away from tamasic materiality towards sattvic purity. The devotee may bathe and put on clean clothes. According to orthodox tradition, menstruating women are not supposed to enter temples. While no such explicit prohibition exists at Durgājī, I suggest that the underlying rationale for this prohibition is that menstrual blood, which marks a woman's reproductive capabilities, is associated with the "downward" dynamic of rajas guna (i.e., towards manifest existence). Thus, it is contrary to the implicit purpose of temple pūjā, which is an "upward" dynamic towards spiritual transcendence. Furthermore, in the substances offered by both priest and devotee to Durgājī, which are the common items used in most pūjās, one sees symbols of the five gross elements (mahābhūta) reintegrated with the source (i.e., the Devī). The five gross elements are earth (prthivi), water (jala), air (vāyu), fire (agni), and space (ākāśa). I have been told explicitly on numerous
occasions that these *mahābhūtas* are symbolized (although not in a simple one-to-one correspondence) by such items as the fragrant sandalwood paste ground and mixed with water, the flowers, the burning incense sticks, the camphor flame, and the coconut fruit. This is a theme to which I will return in the following chapters where I illustrate how the activities of *pūjā* are grounded in the metaphysics of cosmic reintegration.

The Weekly Routine

The weekly cycle at the Durgājī is not particularly significant to the *pūjāris*. Ram Prasad performs his daily service (*seva*) to Durgā no differently. The only things that vary are the *sārīs* and decorations for the goddess, which he chooses randomly during most of the year. There are noteworthy changes to the routine only at four points in the year: during the autumn and spring Navarātras, during the annual decoration ceremony (*srñgāra*), and on the festival of Annakūta.104 To the *mahāntas*, worshippers, workers, and shopkeepers, however, there is a difference, because Tuesdays (*mañgalavara*) and to a lesser extent, Saturdays (*saniwara*), see a substantial increase in the number of people at the temple. The reasons for this increase are not completely clear. It is traditionally held that Tuesdays and Saturdays are auspicious for goddess worship, just as Mondays are sacred to Śiva.105 Astrologically, Tuesdays and Saturdays are ruled by Mars (*mañgalā*) and Saturn (*sani*), both dangerous, inauspicious planets. Durgā is

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104 During those periods (which will be discussed in detail in the section on the yearly routine) Durgā may wear a special mask, be dressed in *sārīs* of particular colours, and the hours during which the Devī is available to her devotees increases dramatically.

105 Śiva's association with the moon, evidenced by his epithets Candrasekhara (He who is Crowned by the Moon) and Somaśambhu (Happiness of the Moon), suggests the connection with Monday, which is called Somvara. While Tuesdays appear to be universally favored for goddess worship in Banāras, the same cannot be said for Saturdays. For instance, the popular temple of Sankata Devī (Goddess of Oppression), whose icon is Mahisamardini, commonly associated with Durgā, is visited in large numbers on Fridays when she is offered coconuts.
propitiated to subvert such pernicious astrological effects.¹⁰⁶ I was told by devotees that Mā Durgā, who is a protective mother, is inevitably present when inauspicious elements (e.g., planetary influences, demons, disease) arise. Where danger is, Mā is also close at hand. If inauspicious planetary influences wax large on certain days, it is necessarily true, they implied, that Mā’s presence is commensurately intensified, especially in the vicinity of her abode.

**Healers (Ojha)**

Healers (*ojha*) frequent Durgājī, particularly on Tuesdays. They serve as living loci of the Devī’s manifest presence. Highly receptive to the subtle forces at play within a patient, they are occasionally susceptible to possession by both the agent of distress and the Devī, allowing the battle to be waged within themselves. A healer of some renown in Banāras, named Mithāī Lāl, dominated the activity on Tuesdays at Durgājī. He would work close to the fire pit (*havan kunda*), letting the flames lick up at his body. These and other dramatic demonstrations of power supplemented his striking appearance and contributed to his popularity and success as a healer. Unfortunately, he died shortly after my arrival in Banāras, creating a vacuum in the healing activities at Durgā Mandir. His wife, Sukha Devī, who continued to be consulted by patients, has begun to assume his role more thoroughly as her experience and proficiency grows. She oversees and guides the activities of another young male healer, whose apprenticeship appears to be

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¹⁰⁶ *Maṅgala*, the name of the planet Mars, means “auspicious.” Nevertheless, according to the science of astrology (*jyoṭiṣa*), Mars produces inauspicious effects. So do the Sun, Saturn, Rāhu, and Ketu. Actually the word for planet is *graha*, derived from the Sanskrit root, *grah*, meaning “to grasp” or “to take hold of.” It suggests the powerful effects of these heavenly bodies. These influences are generally held in disfavour, for *graha* is a synonym for Rāhu, a distinctly unfavourable “planet.” Actually, the Sun, the Moon, Rāhu and Ketu are not technically planets, and the term *graha*, would be better translated as “celestial force.”

The nine planets (*navagraha*) are often associated with the goddess. Many goddess temples have prominent *navagraha* shrines (e.g., Viśālakāśī temple in Banāras) and *navagraha* worship is part of some goddess centred rituals (e.g., mass recitations of the *Durgā Saptasati*). The numerological significance of nine, so closely related to the Devī (e.g., *navadurga, navagaurī, navapatrikā, navaratra*) no doubt also figures in her association with these nine heavenly forces.

Incidentally, Durgā is also called Maṅgālī or Mangalī, and Maṅgalacandikā is the name of one of her nine fierce forms (*Cāndī*) worshipped during the Durgā Pūjā ritual.
progressing successfully (see Figure 6). The presence of healers naturally draws patients to the temple.

Sorcerers, Tantrics, and Śāktas

Durgā’s intensified presence and accessibility on Tuesdays and Saturdays attracts a wide variety of worshippers; the majority are from villages in and around the greater Banāras area. Among these are sorcerers (jādū kārne vala), tantrikas, and Śāktas.

The term Śākta is normally used to refer to persons to whom supreme divinity is a conscious energy (śakti), conceived of as feminine. Some form of Śakti, personified as any of numerous goddesses, such as Durgā or Kālī, is the prime deity of their family (kula devatā) or of their own choice (iṣṭa devatā). A large number of people who visit Durgāji, refer to themselves as Śaivas or Vaiṣṇavas, recognizing Śiva or some form of Viṣṇu as supreme. Nevertheless, goddesses like Durgā, play important roles in their understandings of divinity, and are worshipped with as much zeal on certain occasions or for particular purposes as by those who would call themselves Śāktas. Such devotees often think of the goddess as a consort of the male deity (e.g., Durgā is Śiva’s wife), or as an embodiment of the male deity’s energy (Durgā is Vaiṣṇava śakti). For the sake of convenience, I use the term Śākta for anyone who worships at Durgāji, unless their sectarian affiliation is relevant to the discussion.

Among the people who worship at Durgāji, a small percentage are sorcerers and tantrics, but they cannot be easily distinguished from other devotees. These sorcerers and tantrics rarely identify themselves as such, but are so designated by others. They may perform certain of their ritual practices (sādhana) in plain view, but generally keep their goals secret. These practices may include fire oblations or particular forms of recitation of the Durgā Saptasat. If secret incantations (mantra) are to be used, they may choose a secluded spot in the temple, or an appropriate time of day (see Figures 6 and 10). A busy period is often better for they are less scrutinized amid the crowds. Sorcerers are concerned with directing forces (generally destructive) at victims, with the aid of Śakti. Thus healers are often engaged in remedying, with the power of the goddess, the harm
that was originally caused by her power. It is the Devī’s power (śakti), I was told, which is directed by sorcerers to satisfy the malicious intent of their clients. Illness is sometimes due to the pernicious action of śakti or śaktis (the goddess’s energy or female deities) directed by sorcerers at a victim. Healers or devotees’ prayers may, in turn, invoke a curative or protective energy through the presence of the Devī, resulting in a battle between the Devī and the destructive power within the body of the ailing person. The patient may die while the battle is waged. This is why, I was told, bodies of victims of certain diseases such as smallpox, are sometimes disposed of into the Gaṅgā, uncremated. Since the Devī is still present in the body of the deceased victim, it would be inappropriate to burn it. When I expressed surprise that the Devī’s power could be used for harmful purposes, I was told that if propitiated, the Devī looks favorably on all her devotees, granting whatever they wish. "She is the Mother of all her children." I was told that in the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa the demons Madhu and Kaitabha gain their power by praying to the Devī. "It isn’t Mā who is good or bad, it is people." The moral dimension in the use of the Devī’s power is a human responsibility.

Tantrics are mystical in orientation. They seek understanding and control of power, ultimately through union with the goddess. Often, among tantrics, the mystical union is envisioned as a sexual union with the deity. Durgā does not yield to this conceptual framework, which accounts for her ambivalent status as a tantric deity. She slays her suitors. Durgā tantrics seek to appropriate some of her power, but ultimate union is envisioned as sacrificial submission to the goddess. Union is the reintegration or reabsorption of the adept, a material manifestation of the Devī, back into the undifferentiated wholeness of her unmanifest essence.

Śāktas are generally engaged in devotional acts to the goddess. Of these, many, perhaps most, are engaged in fulfilling obligations for favours received, or are making requests of the Devī. It is not uncommon for these general requests to overlap the specialized activities of ojha, jādā, and tantrika. Thus Śāktas may request the cure of a sick child, or the punishment of an enemy, or personal empowerment for success in aspects of their lives (e.g., exams, musical skills). Word of repeated success in a particular area may unwittingly earn them the reputation of healers or sorcerers.
Pilgrims

Groups of people visit the Durgā temple throughout the year. The most distant visitors are foreign tourists and Indians living abroad. Members of both these groups, upon visiting Banāras, inevitably make a trip to Durgājī, since the temple is mentioned in virtually every tourist guide book. In these books, the temple’s reputation derives from its monkeys and its association with blood sacrifice. Although these tourists cannot be considered to be true pilgrims, in the narrowest definition of the term, since they generally lack a marked religious motivation, their visits to Durgājī are often memorable, particularly if they witness a goat sacrifice or encounter an aggressive or playful monkey. As a result, the temple has a certain notoriety and its reputation is enhanced by their tales. 107 The next discernable type of pilgrim belongs to groups which leave towns and villages from all over India and travel *en masse* to various pilgrimage sites. Gold (1988) has admirably described a journey of this type of pilgrim, who often travels by bus to several pilgrimage sites on a single trip. Such pilgrims are likely to visit Banāras primarily to bathe in the Gaṅgā, or to take *darśana* of the Śiva linga of Kāśī Viśvanātha. As one of the important temples in Banāras, Durgājī is included on their agenda. Such groups are often led by their guide quite rapidly through Durgājī. They do not linger long for fear of being separated from their group and left behind. These transient groups account for a sizeable percentage of visitors to the temple.

An important type of pilgrimage that is made specifically to Durgājī is performed by devotees from beyond the immediate environs of Banāras, near the outer perimeter of the temple’s main catchment area. These pilgrims generally come from the villages on the outskirts of Banāras, but may also be drawn from more distant districts in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. These pilgrims often take up shelter in one of the temple’s rest quarters (*dharmaśālā*) and their visits may be several hours or days in duration. I shall discuss the motives and nature of their visits in greater detail in Chapter Three. Durgājī is also one temple on numerous pilgrimage circuits which occur in the city. The most

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107 Turner (1978) has pointed out the touristic nature of all pilgrimages. It could therefore be argued that these tourists are pilgrims since their religious sentiments are revealed both in their choice of the sacred city of Banāras as a destination, as well as in their decision to visit a temple.
famous of these is the Pañcakroṣī Pilgrimage which encircles the city of Banāras. In recent years, however, the majority of Pañcakroṣī pilgrims have been bypassing Durgājī since it and a few other temples are somewhat off the main circuit. Durgājī, under her epithet of Kuṣmāndā Devī is also one of Kāśi’s Nine Durgās and is thus the object of veneration during the Navarātras when that pilgrimage is performed. I will discuss the Nine Durgā pilgrimage in detail in Chapter Three.

The increased number of visitors to Durgājī on Tuesdays is a boon to all the shopkeepers in the area. Flower vending stalls, which normally flank the entrances of the temple, are found all along the western side of Durgā Kund, and makeshift stalls selling pūjā items (i.e., coconuts, scarves, camphor, cardamom sweets (ilāyactī dāna), incense sticks (agarbatti), and thread (mauli)) compete with the established shops. The mahants collect rent from these stalls, and there is no discernable or admitted conflict between vendors, all of whom feel grateful for the livelihood provided them by Mā Durgā. Even the number of barbers (nai) increase on Tuesdays, since there are more ritual first-tonsures (mundana) of children to be performed on those days.

Tuesdays of every waxing fortnight are also sacred to the monkey god, Hanumān, and visitors are encouraged to feed monkeys on this day. Many visitors to Durgājī on Tuesdays also include a visit to the popular Hanumān temple of Sankata Mochana (Release from Oppression). The presence of monkeys at Durgājī and Sankata Mochana, and the popularity of Hanumān and Durgā among village residents plays a role in the significance of Tuesdays at the temple.

The temple floor and shrines are washed on Wednesdays, and sometimes again on Sundays to clear away the debris of ashes, flowers, food, animal droppings, and dirt which have built up on previous days. This cleansing of the temple is a cleansing of the yantra, of the goddess herself. Generally water which has been used to clean a divine image is considered to be consecrated. Indeed water used to wash the Devī yantra behind the mask in the inner sanctum is distributed as a material blessing (prasāḍa) to devotees. The overflow from washing the yantra in the inner sanctum, along with the water consecrated by washing the yantra which is the temple, both flow into the hallowed
Durgā Kund. Indeed the Devī, symbolized as flowing water is a purifying force. The sanctifying power of holy rivers like the Gaṅgā is well-known in the Hindu tradition.\textsuperscript{108} I was told how once a young man was found hanged within the inner courtyard of Durgāī on the morning after Dīpavali (Kālī Pūjā). No one knew how he got inside the temple which was locked for the night. The circumstances of his death were also unknown. Was it murder, or suicide, or a sacrificial offering? Such ambiguity surrounded the temple with an aura of inauspiciousness. Also, here was an example of a death or human sacrificial offering within the inner courtyard, polluting the sacred space. To remove any defilement which may have accrued, the temple was scrubbed down with sacred water brought directly from the Gaṅgā, water which in turn flowed into Durgā Kund.

The Devī Durgā is not just an instrument of cleansing and purification, she is also the very debris from sacrificial offerings. In the verses of the \textit{Durgā Cālīṣa} (Forty Verses) to Durgā a popular devotional hymn in the style and language of Tulsidas’s \textit{Hanumān Cālīṣa}, she is worshipped as Mātaṅgī.\textsuperscript{109} This goddess, one of a cluster of goddesses known as the Ten Great Knowledges (Daśa Mahāvidyā), is often portrayed as an outcaste (cāṇḍala) woman, the type that work as cleaners of polluted spaces (e.g., toilets). Just as a human mother cleans the polluted remains of her offspring, the divine mother cleans the pollutions produced by her devoted children. In the Sāṅkhyya-based Śākta cosmological framework, through her identification with the wholeness of material creation, the Devī is the debris itself. However, such an identification of the Devī with normally polluted matter, although it may be considered sanctified by some, is problematic to those who aspire to orthodox forms of sattvic purity. Of importance here, we again note the part played by epithets in the "denial" and "distancing" alluded to

\textsuperscript{108}See Sivaramamurti 1976:45 and Eck 1982:174. The Purāṇas abound in tales about the purifying power of flowing water, especially the Gaṅgā. Examples are found in the \textit{Agni Purāṇa} 110, and the \textit{Padma Purāṇa} 5.60.1-127.

\textsuperscript{109}Matamgi dhūmāvatu mātā/ 
\textit{Bhuvanesvarī bagalā sukha dātā}//15
The entire \textit{Śrī Durgā Cālīṣa} is carved on marble slabs which surround the Bhdrakāli shrine at Durgāī.
earlier. If certain aspects of the Devī are allocated to a particular epithet (i.e., a subsidiary goddess and her characteristics) the epithet may be disregarded by groups that find it disagreeable or inconsistent with their particular symbol system.

The Monthly Cycle

The Hindu calendar is attentive to both solar and lunar cycles, the latter constituting the monthly rhythms. Thus the month is made up of two fortights (pakṣa), one in which the moon waxes bright (śuklapakṣa), and the other in which it wanes darkly (krṣṇā pakṣa). Added to these waxing and waning wings are the days of full moon (pūrṇima) and new moon (amāvasyā).

Tradition holds that the eighth (aṣṭamī) and eleventh (ekadāśī) lunar days (tīthi) of either the dark or bright fortnight are favored by the goddess. So are pūrṇima and amāvasyā. The eighth day of the waxing fortnight (aṣṭamī śuklapakṣa) is favorable for Durgā worship, while the eighth day of the dark fortnight (aṣṭamī krṣṇā pakṣa) is special for Kālī. I was unable to discern any difference in worship activity at Durgāji during these days, although this does not mean that they are insignificant. I could not estimate slight numerical increases, nor distinguish subtle shifts in the psychological attitudes of devotees. Certainly, a few devotees said they visited the temple on aṣṭamīs in fulfilment of a promise, or as a form of devotion.110 It is apparent that certain days in the solar...
week are now more significant to the majority of worshippers at Durgājī than such days in the lunar month. This may be the result of "modern" accommodation to the globally standardized work week. Nevertheless, particular lunar cycles play important roles in the course of a year. Specific *tithis* in the lunar months of Śrāvana, Bhādrapada, Āśvina, Kārttika, and Caitra figure in the yearly worship cycle of Durgā at Durgā Mandir and these will be examined in the discussion of the yearly cycle.

The Yearly Cycle

I have decided to start the discussion of the yearly cycle at Durgājī with the festival of Durgā's birth, which I feel is an appropriate beginning. I am not discussing the festival cycle from a larger sectarian perspective, where perhaps a particular New Year's day would have been a better starting point. I wish, in this section, to illustrate the cadences of worship as they occur throughout a year in the life of Durgājī, giving particular attention to those festivals which are most important at the temple. These are the Srṅgāra, the Āśvina Navarātra, Annakūṭa, and Caitra Navarātra. However, I locate the discussions of these four festivals within discussions of other sacred days and festivals in the yearly cycle, all of which are pertinent to Durgā worship in Banāras and to worship at Durgājī in particular. Therefore I briefly discuss the festival of *Hoī* since some devout Durgā-worshipping tantrics perform a special ritual with Sākta themes on that day, although not generally at Durgājī. I also use certain festival days to discuss myths which are pertinent to the conceptual image of Durgā. For instance, Hari Utthāna Ekādaśī celebrates Viṣṇu's awakening from the sleep induced by the Devī who is envisioned as the great deluder (*mahāmohā*).

I wish to stress that the yearly cycle expands the dimension of time and space as it figures in the yantra which is Durgājī. The yearly cycle at Durgājī intersects with the

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system, see Freed and Freed 1964).
temporal cycles of other deities in Banāras. This is of course significant, for the goddess does not exist in isolation. Rather, she has a fundamental relationship with the other inhabitants of Banāras, human and divine. In the yearly cycle, one sees how strands of mythology weave connections between Durgā and other gods and goddesses, and how the cadences of sacred time move worshippers who frequent other parts of the yantra which is Banāras into the orb of the Devi’s presence.

One method of imagining the process which occurs during the course of a year is to visualize the Durgājī yantra as one of many yantras to other deities all of which are located within the yantra which is is the city of Banāras. During the festival days of a particular deity, the yantra of that deity expands. An appropriate image in the Hindu symbol system would be that the yantra blossoms, like a lotus flower, overlapping with the yantras of other gods and goddesses. The Āśvina Navarātra, in particular, is clearly the most important of the festivals to Durgā, and celebrations blossom far beyond the perimeter of Durgā Kund temple to encompass the entire city. I suggest that during this period of time, the yantra of Durgājī expands until it is identical with (or superimposed upon) the yantra of Banāras. The next two chapters of this work are a detailed account of the activities which take place at that time throughout the city, which is the true sphere of the Devi’s influence. In this section, I discuss the Āśvina Navarātra celebrations as they occur at Durgājī, saving broader discussions of worship patterns throughout Banāras during Navarātra for Chapter Three. Since the Caitra Navarātra (spring) is distinguished from the Āśvina Navarātra primarily by its lack of public communal worship of Durgā in temporarily constructed shrines, the locus of worship during that festival is at homes and temples. I essentially discuss the Caitra Navarātra in my treatment of the Āśvina Navarātra in the next chapter, distinguishing it from the autumn celebration wherever it is pertinent.

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111On the sacred city of Banāras as a yantra or mandala, see Eck 1982:146-147. Also see Rana P. B. Singh 1986:303-311. I am grateful to Rana Singh for the general form of Diagram One.
Durgā’s Birth
[Second of the Waning Fortnight of Bhādrapada (August/September)]

In northern India, a lunar month begins after the full moon (pūrṇimā) with the waning or dark fortnight (krṣṇā pakṣa). In the month of Bhādrapada (which falls in August or September), the second day of the dark fortnight (dvitīyā krṣṇā pakṣa) is considered, according to the head pūjārī, to be the birthday of the Devī at Durgā Mandir. There is no special celebration on this day, except that at eight o’clock, at the time of the evening ārati, a red scarf (cunri) is placed on her head. One and a quarter kilograms of sweets and numerous flowers are offered to her, a gesture, originally, but no longer performed by the king of Banarās (Kāśi Naresh). The symbolism of the red scarf in this context is unknown, but devotees frequently suggest that the red scarf used in offerings is a substitute for the symbol of blood. It could represent a blood sacrifice in honour of the Devī’s arrival, menstrual blood symbolizing an arrival into womanhood, or the blood-smeared body of a newborn infant. The pañcāṅga, a calendar which lists the religious activities prescribed for particular days, cites the second of Bhādrapada as a day for an all night vigil (rātri jagarana). Such rāt jaggas, as they are known in Hindi, are occasionally organized by private groups, involve night-long singing, and are often held in honour of the goddess. No such arrangement is now made at Durgā Mandir on this day, although rāt jaggas did take place a few decades ago and consisted of kajalī singing.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{112}Kajalī is a type of love song sung by women during the rainy season. Kajalī means lamp–black and refers to the eyeliner (also called kājjal) worn by women. It is not clear whether the term refers to the ornamental quality of the eyeliner in amorous expectation or to the tear-induced running of it because of the sorrow of amorous separation.

According to the older pujāris, Vindhyacal temple in Mirzapur is the site where this tradition still continues. A three-night rātri jagarana is held at Durgā Mandir, however, during the annual decoration (srīgāra) twelve days later. Vindhyacal temple’s tradition of the rātri jagarana on the Second of Bhādrapada is perhaps related to the connection between Vindhyavāsini Devī and the Krṣṇa myth cycle suggested by C. Vaudeville 1982.

Diana Eck (1982:266) mentions that the third of Bhādrapada is called Kajalī Tij, "Black Third." It is the yearly celebration (srīgāra) of Visālākṣī Devī in Banāras and known as the birthday of Vindhyavāsini Devī. She also mentions that women in the villages surrounding Banāras place fresh barley sprouts behind their brothers’ ears. Interestingly, this gesture of health and fertility also occurs in certain communities in Banāras during the Durgā Pūjā celebrations on the Āsvina Navarātra.
Sṛṅgāra

[Fourteenth of the Waning Fortnight of Bhādrapada (August/September)]

Twelve days later, on the fourteenth of Bhādrapada, Durgā’s greatness is eulogized (barāṭ) in the form of a three day celebration termed the sṛṅgāra. Most devotees consider this to be her birthday celebration, stating that her birthday is either on this day, or a few days earlier on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of Bhādrapada. That day is celebrated, not for the dark form of the goddess, (e.g., Kālarātrī, Kālī) as would be expected, but as Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī (The Eighth which is the Birthday of Kṛṣṇa). When asked what the circumstances of Durgā’s birth were, devotees alluded to either of two myth cycles: her birth to Yaśodā, a myth related rather sketchily, and her creation by the spiritual effulgence (tejas) of the gods, a myth known in much greater detail by the majority. Their accounts did not in any discernable way dramatically diverge from the purānic accounts, as I remembered them. They seemed to be partially remembered versions of these myths. It is worthwhile to examine these myths cycles, briefly.

Mythic Background

The first myth tells of Kṛṣṇa’s birth and his escape from death at the hands of his demonic uncle, Kaśyapa. Kaśyapa had heard in a prophecy that one of the children of his sister, Devakī, would kill him, so he decided to kill each child born to her. To disrupt Kaśyapa’s plan, Viṣṇu asked Durgā for help. Kaśyapa killed the first six of Devakī’s offspring.

Viṣṇu was born as the eighth child who was Kṛṣṇa. At the same time Durgā was

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{113}}\] The close relationship between these two deities (Kālī and Kṛṣṇa) is examined at length by Kinsley (1975).

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{114}}\] The account which follows is a paraphrased summary given jointly by Prakash Sabarwala (pseudonym) and his father, shopkeepers in the Durgā Kund area. Father and son occasionally disagreed over certain details and volunteered to take me to see some pandits to get the “proper” story. Textual versions of this myth are found in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and in the Harivamśa.

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{115}}\] There was some confusion in their account concerning the fate of the seventh child, Balarāma.
born to the cowherd Nanda’s wife, Yaśodā. Vāsudeva, Devakī’s husband, secretly exchanged the baby Krṣṇa with Yaśodā’s child, the baby Durgā. The baby Durgā was taken out at night and her head smashed upon a rock. After the baby was killed by Kamsa, a bright, terrifying form of Durgā, beautiful but with many weapons flew up into the sky and cursed Kamsa. She said he would be killed by Krṣṇa and then went to stay at Vindhyacal.

According to Ram Prasad Dubey, the head pujari of Durgā Mandir, who has a strong Vaiṣṇava orientation, the red scarf (cunri) placed on the Devī’s head, on the second of Bhadrapada could symbolize Durgā’s birth when the baby goddess’s head was dashed on the rock by Kamsa. Ram Prasad offered this explanation after some probing, since he rarely explained the meaning of symbols, choosing instead to follow ritual traditions as he had been taught. If Durgā was born in this manner on the second of Bhadrapada, then why was Krṣṇa’s birthday celebrated six days later, I asked? Krṣṇa Janmāśtami, as the name suggests, is celebrated on the eighth of the waning fortnight of Bhadrapada. One answer offered by a devotee was that although Krṣṇa was born before the Devī, Krṣṇa Janmāśtami is Nanda and Yaśodā’s celebration of his birth. They missed celebrating his original birthday, when he was born to Vāsudeva and Devakī.

Significantly, the festival of Rakṣa Bandhana (Protective Knotting), occurs on the last day, i.e., full moon (pūrṇima) of Śravana, just two days before the Devī’s birthday at Durgā Mandir. On that day sisters tie charms on their brother’s wrists affording them protection. This ritual enhances the perception of a brother-sister relationship between Krṣṇa and Durgā. On Rakṣa Bandhana, the pujari Ram Prasad visits the king of Banāras and ties the protective thread on his wrist. This tradition could lead one to suggest a brother-sister relationship between Durgā (whose representative is the priest) and Śiva (whose representative is the King of Banāras). Residents of the city often state that the

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116 In accounts from other devotees, I was told that she slipped out of his hands and flew up into the sky.

117 The renowned temple of Vindhyavāsinī, in Vindhyacal, near Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, is now generally considered by devotees to be this residence.
true ruler of Kāśī is Śiva. The respected king, Vibhūti Narāin Singh, is generally considered a representative of Śiva. However, I never encountered the interpretation of a brother-sister relationship between Durgā and Śiva among Banāras residents. If they offer interpretations based on social relationships, Durgā is either considered to be independent or is represented as Śiva’s wife or Kṛṣṇa’s sister. The pājāri’s gesture here is best understood as a sign of the protective relationship between brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas, or between Durgā and royalty. Durgā is a symbol of royal power. The pājāri’s gesture implies that Durgā’s power is conferred upon the royalty by members of the brāhmaṇa priesthood, who are the necessary intermediaries between Durgā and the king.

Despite the remarkably detailed knowledge of the myth cycle by a few, the majority of the devotees with whom I spoke were unconcerned with the detailed sequence of events in the Durgā-Kṛṣṇa-Kamsa myth cycle. They interpret symbolic activity fluidly. Those who see Durgā in terms of Vaiṣṇava themes can read much into the time of her birth as celebrated at Durgā Kund temple and the Kṛṣṇa myth cycle. These interpretations do not conflict with the perceptions of those who worship the independent goddess, Durgā, and who refer to the other mythic cycle for their explanations of her birth.

In the second myth, the demon Mahiṣa had risen to great power and had overthrown the gods and seized the throne of Indra. Mahiṣa had been granted a boon of vulnerability only to a woman superior to him in battle. The gods gathered and in a joint effort pooled their spiritual effulgence (tejas) to produce a mountain of light which

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118 Divine kingship is best symbolized in the figure of the hero god Rāma. The king of Banāras reinforces his association with Rāma through his sponsorship of the month-long Rāmālī celebration in the city. Śāktas tell of Rāma’s dependence on Durgā’s power by recounting a myth in which he invokes the goddess in order to defeat the demon Rāvana.

119 All Śākta devotees are quite familiar with the Mahiṣa myth as it occurs in the Durgā Saptāsati (Chapters 2 to 4), not necessarily from reading or listening to the recitation of the text. This is because only a small percentage are able to perform recitations, and fewer still can understand Sanskrit, the language of the text. Their knowledge of the myth is derived from oral and written accounts which they have encountered from a very early age. These sources are often vernacular versions, summaries, or commentaries on the extremely popular Sanskrit scripture. Other textual versions of the myth are found in the Vāmana Purāṇa 28.6-25 and in the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa 5.2-20.
coalesced into the Devī. The goddess is armed with the weapons of the gods, given beautiful ornaments and a lion as her vehicle, and sets out to defeat Mahiṣa. The Devī’s appearance in the Mahiṣa myth cycle is significant since almost all devotees consider this to be her first manifestation, her very creation. Thereafter she appears in subsequent epochs to destroy demons like Kaṃsa and others. The resplendent beauty of the Devī, most dramatically visible after her birth in both myth cycles is the focus of celebrations in the three-day srīgāra festival which takes place on the thirteenth to the fifteenth of Bhādrapada. Whichever myth cycle devotees cite, they stress the Devī’s beauty, power, and glory.

Textual versions of the Mahiṣa myth, as found in the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa, emphasize the irresistible sexual attractiveness of the goddess. In certain passages in the Durgā Saptasatī (12.2 and 12.3) the Devī promises her protection to those who recite her māhāmya with devotion and "proclaim" (kṛtayiṣyanti) the destruction of Madhu and Kaitabha, Mahiṣāsura, and Śumbha and Niśumbha on the eighth, ninth, and fourteenth days of the lunar fortnight. Now the eighth and ninth days are acknowledged days for Devī worship (especially during the Autumn and Spring Navarātras), but here, during the Durgā Mandir srīgāra we see a clear example of Devī worship on the fourteenth (of Bhādrapada). There is recitation of the Rātrī Sūkta and other appendages (anga) of the Durgā Saptasatī and thus "proclamation" of the Devī’s demon slaying exploits. Here therefore, calendrical timing more strongly links the srīgāra to the second myth cycle

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120 Devotees often told me that the collective sakti of the male gods produced Durgā. Those familiar with the text quoted a verse from the Durgā Saptasatī. There the term used is tejas. It is closely related to the potent essence of heat and light, and can stand for the radiant beauty of a person. It also means "semen" in early Vedic literature (Apte 1957:785). "The Purānas use tejas, fiery energy, as a euphemism for semen" (O’Flaherty 1980:55). The god Skanda, whose name literally means "semen" or "that which oozes" was created by the seed of Śiva (O’Flaherty 1980:55). In some Epic (e.g., Mahābhārata 3.221.52ff) and Purānic (e.g., Vāmana Purāṇa 31.1-32.11) literature Skanda is credited with the slaying of Mahiṣa. Unlike Skanda, Durgā is created not just from the "semen" of Śiva, but from the collected potencies of all the gods, again reflecting her supreme, all-encompassing nature.

121 The celebrations begin on the night of the thirteenth and progress through the fourteenth of Bhādrapada (the twelfth day after Durgā’s birth) to the fifteenth, which in fact is the day of the new moon (amāvasīyad). It is worth noting that these days celebrating her arrival take place, not during the bright fortnight, as is customary with Durgā, but during the darkest part of the waning fortnight.
than to the first.

The Sentiment behind the Srṅgāra

The term srṅgāra has come to mean the annual decoration ceremony performed for deities, understood to be awakening from their sleep, although its original meaning is the sentiment of erotic love. The srṅgāra at Durgā Mandir appears to be a sort of "coming out" celebration, affirming a maturation of the Devī, from her birth to a point of sexual potency. Perhaps the twelve days which have elapsed from her birthday celebration symbolize the passage of twelve years, at which point a girl is expected to have begun her first menstruation, passing into womanhood. She is a sexual being, capable of allure and reproduction. The radiant beauty of Durgā is central to the sentiment of the srṅgāra at the temple. This dimension of captivating beauty and sexual allure resonates strongly with the themes of the second myth cycle, because the demon Mahisa, and later the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha, are drawn irresistibly to the Devī. The attraction is sexual. They are smitten by her beauty, but unlike Rādhā and the gopīs' equally uncontrollable desire for Kṛṣṇa, the demons seek domination of, rather than loving union with the Divine. To the demons the goddess is a prize, a symbol, whose acquisition would mark their superiority over and alliance with the gods.

The erotic element in the srṅgāra is further substantiated by the presence, in the not-to-distant past, of numerous prostitutes (veśya) and dancing girls who visited the

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122 In Sanskrit poetics, srṅgāra is one of eight to ten rasas, aesthetic sentiments. It is the erotic mood which corresponds to the basic emotion (sthāyi-bhāva) of love pleasure (rati). See Seigel, 1978: 446-48. V. S. Apte (1986 [1957]:1566) points out that the term also refers to beautiful clothing worn especially for the purpose of love play.

123 The Laws of Manu (IX.94) states that a man of thirty should marry a maiden of twelve years of age while a man of twenty four should marry a girl of eight. From a study of Manu and other Dharmaśāstras, U. Apte (1987) concludes that the orthodox Hindu tradition recommends that a girl be given in marriage shortly after the onset of her menstruation. Such practices endure even today. Shanti Devī, the daughter of a Gāṅgā boatman in Banāras, was married at eight, and had her first child at the age of twelve. See the Introduction, which contains a transcript of an interview with her, for more details.

124 The term srṅgāra also means the kind of clothing which is suitable for amorous purposes (Monier-Williams 1986 [1899]:1087).
temple at this time. They came precisely because this flavour (rasa) of eroticism, this capacity to generate feelings of sensual pleasure, is thought to be highly accessible at the time of the srīgāra in the person of the Devī.

But sexual allure is closely related to temporal power in Indian culture. In the tradition of the Rajputs, the desirability of the king’s daughter is a central symbol of his power. When she reached marriageable age, the father would send out notices to powerful monarchs to try to win her by force. Most kings of lesser power would decline, leaving the challenge open for those of near equal or superior power to the princess’s father. A suitor would set out with his armed entourage of allies. A battle would be waged until the bride was won or the suitor killed. If the suitor succeeded, he would be allowed to enter the fortress (durga). After his first night with the princess, he would again be attacked by a small entourage of the king’s men, at which point his bride would defend him. The father and bridegroom would be allies thereafter. Politically, this convention would ensure alliances with desirable or stronger partners.

The theme of a suitor’s need to overcome a challenge is found in the earliest epic literature (e.g., Arjuna’s feat of archery to win Draupadī in the Mahābhārata, and Rama’s winning of Sītā in the Rāmāyanā). It is a central theme in certain popular oral epics sung by bards in North India, an example of which is the story of the brother heroes Ālhā and Udal, who win their brides through blood battles. The symbolism of winning the bride persists in modern wedding ceremonies where the groom, surrounded by his friends, rides up on a white horse to the bride’s home. The Mahiṣa and Śumbha-Niśumbha myths of the Durgā Saptaśati are framed on precisely this story line where Durgā, collectively “fathered” by the gods, is a symbol of their joint power and

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125 Prostitution in Banaras was commonplace until a few decades ago when it was strongly suppressed. The Dīl Māndi alley (gali) off Chauk, now full of stores selling household goods was one of the main areas of prostitution. Prostitution now occurs in peripheral quarters of the city, and around the Diesel Locomotive Works (DLW), a large industrial complex.

126 I derive the description which follows from the Sir George Grierson’s Introduction to The Lay of Ālhā: A Saga of Rajput Chivalry as sung by Minstrels of Northern India. Ālhā, incidently, who is the protagonist of the above mentioned ballad, is celebrated for his devotion to the Devī Saradā, to whom he finally offered his life, by self-decapitation. The lengthy oral ballad, parts of which are well-known among Banārasi Śāktas, abounds with episodes of battles fought to obtain brides.
suzerainity over the cosmos. The desire of Śumbha, Niśumbha and Mahīśa for the
goddess is a metaphor for their lust for the power of all the celestials. Durgā would be
the most precious jewel in the crowns of her suitors. The messenger of Śumbha and
Niśumbha refers to them as enjoyers of jewels (rātvabhujā).127 Durgā challenges the
demons to overcome her in battle, which they are unable to do. They are slain in the
process and she lives up to her name as the unassailable one (durgā). Durgā therefore
represents the culmination of spiritual and temporal power, which is simultaneously
irresistible as an object of desire and yet unconquerable. In this sense she is the ideal
symbol for the strength and wealth of a kingdom and its fortress-like impregnabiltiy.

It is clear that the Durgā of Durgā Mandir is a multivocal symbol, meaningful and
recognizable in varying ways to each of her worshippers. While the Krṣṇaite, post-
Kamsa, resplendent form of the Devī is easily "recognized" by those familiar with that
myth cycle, the powerful glory of the goddess is "evident" for others who are familiar
with the Durgā Saṭaṭāta stories. The now-diminished but significant former presence of
prostitutes at the temple acknowledges the erotic allure of the Devī, a notion developed
in the later purāṇic literature such as the Devī Bhāgavata. However, the absence in the
main image at Durgājī of the swords, bells, armaments, conches and so on, which are
normally associated with glorious demon-slaying goddess images (e.g., Mahiśāsura-
mardini) in those purāṇic accounts is noteworthy. Clearly, the Durgā of Durgā Mandir
is more than just the alluring demon-slaying Devī of purāṇic fame.

**Ritual Activity during the Srṅgāra**

From the standpoint of the mahants, pūjāris, and workers at Durgā Mandir, this
is clearly the event of the year to which they give the most attention in effort and
financial outlay. The temple is scrubbed from top to bottom for several days prior to the
srṅgāra. Its silver and brass is polished, the ṣikhara is strung with electric lights and
Aśoka leaves and flower garlands are lashed to the pillars of the inner courtyard. The
atmosphere is one of festive sacredness. A joyful and expectant feeling fills the air.

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127See Durgā Saṭaṭāta 5.60-65.
At about six o’clock in the evening on the thirteenth of Bhādrapada, the sanctum is closed and the bells are stopped from ringing, their clappers held. The crowd of devotees grows in number, filling the porch, part of the inner courtyard, and the upper terrace facing the front door of the sanctum. Those who stand under the porch sway gently, waiting for the doors to open giving them their first sight of the Devī. Revered world renouncers (sādhu) have gathered around the temple knowing that they will get charitable donations from worshippers departing after they have performed darśana. The expectant tension builds up for about three and a half hours. At around nine-thirty in the evening devotees begin to beat kettle and large swing drums (damaru). The rhythm of the drums grows faster and as the pounding reaches a frenzied climax the doors of the sanctum are suddenly thrown open revealing the Goddess, resplendent: Durgā, in all her glory; her face, a mask of shimmering gold; her eyes, clear and piercing; her sārī, blood red. She is adorned with numerous garlands of red and white flowers, and gold necklaces.

The crowd erupts in a single exclamation of awe, and then cheers. Chants of praise and bell-ringing begin and continue with ecstatic fervour. Devotees who are seated in the upper terrace rise to their feet, while others fall to their knees or lie prostrate before the awesome spectacle of the Devī. They jostle each other, twist and crane their necks, tiptoe or crouch to get a view of her and to be seen by her. The pressing crowd in the porch holds their hands high with offerings of flowers, coconuts, small flame lamps, coloured thread, and incense. The pounding drums and bells sound until all those present make their offerings and receive the blessed remnants from the priest at the marble barricade.

Inside the garbhagrha, the pūjārī, Ram Prasad, waves a large censer of one

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128 The mask used for srīgāra is different from the one normally used in the temple. It was donated by the king of Nepal some twenty five years ago, specifically for this event. It is only used during the srīgāra and on Annakūta. According to temple officials it is not crafted with any distinguishing characteristics (e.g., more youthful features, etc.), but it is special because of its select usage and the materials (i.e., a substantial amount of gold) with which it is made.
hundred and eight ghi-burning lamps in the flame worship of Durgā. 129 He moans out undecipherable invocations of praise and the devotees respond in kind as the drumming and bell-ringing reaches a second, higher crescendo. The deep tones of his voice, reverberating inside the garbha-grha, sent the crowd into higher levels of ecstasy and in climax they cry out, "Jai Mā ki Jai," "Durgā Māyā ki Jai," and other slogans of victory.

The drumming and cheering comes to an end after about fifteen minutes of this adoration, and the floor of the garbha-grha is, by this time, awash with flowers and offerings thrown to the goddess. Devotees leave the porch, rushing to partake of the ārati flame’s light, smoke, and heat. 130 Meanwhile a stream of world renouncers (sādhu, sannyāsi, or dānadvāmi) now pass in front of the sanctum, take darśana, and receive prasāda. Some devotees prostrate themselves fully in front of the Devī, their arms stretched out over their heads. 131 After ārati-lena, devotees make a circumambulation (pradaksinā) of the temple, within the inner courtyard, taking darśana of Ganeśa, Rudra Bhairava, Śrī Lakṣmī and Sarasvati and Bhadrakāli. At the back of the temple, they often reach up and devoutly touch the centre of the eight-petalled lotus (astadala kamala) at the back (east) of the sanctum (see Figure 5). They then pivot (clockwise) around that point (bindu) without breaking fingertip contact, as if the spiral of circumambulation was centred and most focused there.

The cleansing and decoration of the temple supports the notion that the Devī is embodied in the entire structure. Neither the temple nor the central image will be as resplendent through the rest of the year, even during the larger celebrations such as the Navarātras. Durgā’s red sārī on this occasion identifies her with blood and the passionate

129 Camphor is often used as the fuel in flame worship. Ghi, which is more expensive and considered a highly pure (suddha/sattva) substance is preferred at special occasions.

130 The process called ārati-lena, literally "receiving the flame" is said to remove the "bad insects" (bure kitana) in your eyes. This metaphorical interpretation probably derives from the word for emotional afflictions, vikṛti, which are cleansed by the purifying flame.

131 This is called dānadvat praṇama, literally "salutation like a staff."
energy of the rajas guna.\footnote{132Significantly, I was told by a brāhmaṇa, according to his understanding of orthodoxy, that the dandasvāmis and other sannyāsīs should not be present at the temple to attend the srīgāra celebration. Their renunciation of worldly existence is supposed to include freedom from the worship of the divine in manifest forms. Carrying the staff (danda) of renunciation and having already undergone the rituals of their own death, they are supposed to seek the formless Brahma with whom they will realize identity. Their presence in Durgājī serves as a reminder of the difference between such religious precepts and religion as it is practiced, or of how little is known about these rules and their exceptions.}

Devotional Performance during the Srīgāra

It is now about eleven o’clock in the evening. The porch is cordoned off with a rope and a carpet is laid down. Eight brāhmaṇas sit down in the porch, facing the Devī, and begin to recite the Rātrī Śūkta parts of the Durgā Sapaṭātī.\footnote{133Technically, this is not part of the main body of the Durgā Sapaṭātī, but is merely appended to most recitations. Most devotees who are familiar with the Durgā Sapaṭātī only through hearing it being recited consider this Vedic hymn to belong to it.} These brāhmaṇas are commissioned by the temple management to perform this recitation and received a gratuity.\footnote{134These reciters (pātha karnevala) are generally competent brāhmaṇas who may serve as pujāris in other small temples in the city, or specialist technicians of ritual worship (karmakāndā).} Although recitation of this text is a daily practice for some of the temple priests, and is read with great fervour by devotees on certain occasions, this is the single instance institutionally linking the Durgā Sapaṭātī text to the goddess of Durgā Mandir.\footnote{135By commissioning the recitation of the Rātrī Śūkta, the temple affirms the prestigious identification of the Devī with the Vedic hymn and deity.} All other recitations are performed on the initiative of devotees, and are not commissioned by temple authorities.

The recitation does not receive much attention from devotees, who drift out of the inner courtyard for tea and pān or engage in conversation with chance-met and new acquaintances. Other devotees position themselves comfortably in expectation of the musical performances which will last the whole night. Essentially, the srīgāra at Durgājī is renowned for the beauty of the Devī’s decoration and for the excellent music and dance performances which take place on these three successive nights. The temple remains open continuously on these days and the all-night performances could qualify as...
night-long vigils (rātrījagarana). Not even during the Navarātras does the temple remain open for twenty-four hours, although it is common for certain devout Śāktas to try to stay awake during all those nine days. I encountered no devotees who tried to stay awake during the srīgāra. No one stated that they were trying to do so. Nevertheless the temple personnel and most of the audience that remained at the temple for the whole night did not sleep. A few devotees, however, did allow themselves to drift in and out of slumber to the music. I, unaccustomed to such vigils, did the same on the second night. I felt remarkably secure and could not help but think these feelings of warmth and security were shared by the others, whose moods and appearance resembled infants intermittently dozing in their mother's arms.

The musical program at the yearly Durgā Mandir srīgāra is one of the best temple music events in Banāras. Many devotees claim it was the best in bygone days and they bemoan the general decline in the quality of such events in the city. In the past the srīgāra attracted a royal audience as evidenced by the Devī's mask, donated by the king of Nepal, for use during this celebration. The srīgāra attracted the best musicians, film stars such as Madhu Mishra, and renowned groups of itinerant singers of devotional songs (bhajana) in vernacular languages. So it is the decrease in pomp, artistic quality, and devotional passion which characterize the loss felt by the public. Many of the men mentioned the decrease in the glamorous presence of beautiful women. Now the srīgāra at Durgājī is only surpassed by a five-night musical program at the Hanumān temple of Sankata Mochana, which is unanimously considered to have a higher percentage of musicians and dancers of all-India fame. At Sankata Mochana recent programs have included such stellar performers as Kumar Gandharva, Pandit Jasraj, and Laccu Maharaj. But what Sankata Mochana gains in popularity and numbers, it loses in intimacy and devotional feeling, for at Durgājī, all performances are clearly directed to and for the Devī. Musicians sit in the porch, facing Durgā in the sanctum; they sing and play with passionate sentiments of yearning or adoration directed to her. The audience is peripheral. This is a command performance, paralleling those which would be held for royalty.
By contrast, at Sankata Mochana the performances take place in a pavilion set off to one side of the Hanumān image, primarily for the audience that can squeeze into the spacious courtyard. Numerous television monitors are strategically located throughout the sprawling temple grounds permitting groups to watch the concert from other locations. Many Banārasis, afficionados of classical music, now bemoan the numbers and noise of the large audience which diminishes their enjoyment of the performances. A special television monitor is set up in front of the garbhagrha for Hanumān to watch the performance. However this consideration for the deity does not alter the implicit emphasis that the concert is primarily for the people.

Performers at Durgāji’s srṅgāra are not paid, but only provided with transportation and accommodation costs, if they come from outside the city. Since the audience is not particularly large, consisting of a few hundred visitors at any one time, the motivation for performance has a spiritual dimension. Nowadays, Durgāji mainly attracts local artists and thus remains one of the few centres of uncommercialized cultural performance. Typical performances include śehnai, sitār, and tabla recitals, male and female vocals of classical rāgas, and dance (normally kathaka). The performances reveal the dominant strain in Banāras music which is typically North Indian or Hindustani (as opposed to South Indian or Karnatic) displaying instruments and styles which were influenced by the preferences of the Mughal court. My friendship and apprenticeship with some of the the musicians who performed at the Durgā srṅgāra allowed me a better understanding of their relationship with the Devī. Performers come to Durgā’s srṅgāra to give thanks, to offer praise, to gain or recover proficiency and fame, or merely to delight the Devī with the virtuosity which she herself has bestowed on them.

A broad spectrum of the Banāras community is drawn to the srṅgāra, and families who rarely frequent the temple might make a visit during the early hours of the festival. It is, for these visitors, a social event, an opportunity to listen to music, to meet and socialize with friends. The presence of beautifully dressed young women naturally attracts young men and highlights the year-round function of the temple as an arena of subtle and preliminary amorous rendezvous and courtship. The well-known performing
musicians draw an audience of appreciative musicians making artists a surprisingly large percentage of the late night audience at the srngāra. Music professors and students from Banāras Hindu University, poets, and professional performers familiar with the city’s night life brush shoulders with sādhus, sannyāsins, and ordinary music lovers. An event far less publicized than the program at Sankata Mochana or the Dhrupad Mela which occurs during Mahasivaratri, the Durgā srngāra attracts almost no foreign tourists. Foreigners in the audience are generally scholars or musicians who have resided in the city for some period of time.

Worshippers who dance at Durgājī are generally (although not exclusively) women. I often saw small groups of village women who had come to Durgājī as part of a devotional pledge (manauti), dance for the Devī or other deities at the temple.136 Apparently, only female dancers are encouraged to perform at the srngāra. At other times of the year, however, male transvestite or eunuch (hijara) dancers frequent the temple as part of troupes of entertainers and musicians.137 If one discounts the “masculinity” of hijaras, I cannot admit seeing any male dancers within the inner

136See Chapter Three for a discussion of manauti.

137For a detailed discussion of hijaras and their communities, see Nanda 1990. Hijaras are not performers at the srngāra, where Durgā’s female sexuality is being celebrated. However, as the mother of all creation, Durgā is connected to a complex and all-embracing sexuality which includes the orientations of minority and marginal groups. The presence of hijaras at Durgājī reinforces the connection between the Devī and the eroticism of prostitution, to which I alluded earlier. Hijaras “widely engage in prostitution; indeed it may be their major source of income” (Nanda 1990:52). Female prostitutes and hijaras are the most visible symbols of liminal sexual orientations and practices which are “betwixt and between,” to use Victor Turner’s (1977) classic terms. Their nature and behaviour are but examples of the Devī’s manifest form and animating power. Significantly, hijaras worship at all goddess temples and their major object of devotion is the goddess Bahuchara Mātā whose main temple is located in Ahmedabad, Gujarat (Nanda 1990:25). According to a legend, Bahuchara, a pretty young maiden, was attacked by thieves in the forest. Concerned for her modesty, she cut off her breast with a dagger offering it to the bandits in exchange for her virtue, and died in the process (Nanda 1990:25). Bahuchara’s act of severing her breast resembles similar mythic deeds by other goddesses. The goddess Mīnakṣī, who had three breasts and was a great warrior, severed or lost her third breast when she encountered her future spouse, Śiva (See Harman 1989:44-46). The loss of Mīnakṣī’s breast transformed her from a virile male-like conqueror to a bashful, docile wife. Similarly, Bahuchara’s severing of her breast, symbol of her female sexuality, changed her sexual status while elevating her in spiritual status. She became a goddess. In the surgical emasculation undertaken by some hijaras, they mirror Bahuchara’s removal of her breast, and are themselves transformed in sexual and spiritual status. Their castration, which mirrors the act of self-sacrifice through beheading, represents a complete surrender to the Devī, with whom they become identified and from whom they derive their powers (Nanda 1990:32-37).
court yard of Durgājī at any time. I have, however, observed males dance spontaneously before the goddess at other Devī temples in India. At Durgājī, no mention was ever made of a prohibition for male dancers. The performances by renowned female dancers attracts both men and other female dancers to the srīgāra. The erotic dimension of dance performances cannot be dismissed. It is true that dance, as with music, classically understood within the tradition, conveys a wide range of moods and sentiments (rasa), of which only one is erotic. Nevertheless, a proper performance is perhaps expected to convey all of these rasas, including the erotic. For this reason, no female dancers are allowed to perform at the Hanumān temple of Sankata Mochana, since Hanumān is a celibate wayfarer on the path to the Divine Absolute (brahmacarya). Thus the sexual stirrings inevitably provoked by dancing women are prohibited at his temple. Here at Durgājī they are encouraged. It draws attention to another power of the Devī, the ability to arouse sexual feeling, which can break the yogic control of gods and sages, and which certainly has led demons to their destruction.

**Interpretive Observations**

While it is not wise to over-interpret a phenomenon which has become commonplace in Banāras, my discussions with worshippers pointed to important aspects of the night vigils which pertain to Durgā. It is true that night is a good time to hold performances. It is cooler, and almost all people have finished work by ten o'clock in the evening. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the close relationship between the Goddess

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138 In 1990, at the temple of Avari Mātā, a goddess identified with Durgā both by some devotees and by the Devī's sword and lion symbols, I saw men and young women dance for the goddess. Avari Mātā has her abode in a village near Chittaurgarh, Rajasthan and is renowned for her healing powers.

139 There are ample examples of heavenly dancing damsel (apsard) shaking the sense control (pratyahāra) of gods and ascetics in the scriptural literature.

140 Sumbha and Niśumbha, Madhu and Kaitabha, and Mahisa are obvious pertinent examples of demons falling prey to the Devī's sexual attraction. The cause of Śiva's sexual attraction for Pārvatī is attributed to Kāmadeva (a male god), and Śiva's uncontrolled sexual attraction for Mohini was due to Viṣṇu's (a male god) transformation into a woman. Of course Brahmā's incestuous relationship with his daughter is an example of the almost unconquerable allure of women, and by extension, of the Devī.
Night (Rātrī) whose praises are sung in Vedic literature and the Goddess Sleep (Nidrā). Night is a time of potential danger from darkness and wild animals for forest-dwelling peoples. It is also a time of danger for warriors and those under siege. Both groups of people, jungle-dwelling tribes (e.g., Śabarās) and warriors (kṣatriyas), traditionally, are strongly associated with Durgā worship.141 Sleep, when one should be awake, can be perilous. For instance, in the Mahābhārata the heroic Pāṇḍavas discovered to their horror that after their victory celebrations their sons were slain while they slept. Wakefulness is an expression of power. But if the goddess is capable of putting even Viṣṇu to sleep, what power have mere humans? The capacity to stay awake and the tendency to fall asleep are both in the hands of the Devī. Night long vigils are efforts to praise and propitiate her power over darkness and sleep, as well as to appropriate for oneself the supernatural power (siddhi) to stay awake when necessary. A common epithet of Durgā is Siddhidātri (She who is the Giver of Supernormal Powers).

For those who do remain awake throughout the vigil, the eerie beauty of the night reveals itself as does the remarkable transformation of darkness at dawn.142 The transformation of Kālarātrī to Mahāgaurī, dark Pārvatī to fair Gaurī, Pārvatī/Kālikā to Ambikā/Kauśikī all echo this process.

The relationship of Night (Rātrī) and Dawn (Ūsas) to Sleep and Wakefulness is particularly rewarding when thinking about the philosophical notions of sleep (yoganidrā) as delusion/illusion (māyā) versus enlightened wakefulness (buddh, bodh, buddhi). There are numerous examples of an association between the Divine Feminine and awakened intellect (buddhi), transcendental knowledge (brahmā/mahā vidyā), and, in the Buddhist context, wisdom (prajñā).143 The bipolar cluster of attributes which emerges here is

141See Kinsley 1986:117 who refers to the Durgā worship (under the related epithets of Candī and Vindhyavāsī) among the tribal Śabarās mentioned in Bānabhaṭṭa’s Kādambarī and Vākpati’s Gaudavarh, dramas written in the seventh or eighth century.

142The powerful effect of this transformation from night to day on the human psyche led solar mythologists to find it at the root of almost all Indo-european mythologies and religions (Dorson 1965).

143See for instance C. M. Brown 1974:154, where he cites evidence from the Markandeya Purāṇā (LXXXV.11ff) where Durgā has long been identified with a series of feminine nouns, such as cetanā (consciousness), nīdrā (sleep), kṣudhā (hunger), and chayā (shadow). He also refers to her association with
Night/Sleep/Māyā as opposed to Dawn/Wakefulness/Enlightened Awakening. Both poles refer to qualities of the goddess. This is crucial to our understanding of Durgā, for in her the Divine is conceived of not merely as the object of spiritual liberation, or the power which leads one there, but as the power which keeps one ensnared in worldly life. The Śākta world view, therefore, is holistic and non-dualistic, with the Devī as the source of both illusion and liberative insight. This "knowledge" dimension of her nature is encompassed in the terms jñāna sakti, or vidyā sakti, one of the triad of qualities of the supreme sakti.

The knowledge (jñāna/vidyā) conveyed by Durgā is towards a full understanding of her nature. Thus it is not only a knowledge of transcendent spirit, but of matter and its transformations. It is a knowledge of the power of illusion as well as the power of discriminative insight. Naturally, the supernormal powers which the Devī confers on her devotees extend into the area of intellectual and artistic abilities. This is why the artistic community and intelligenzia of the city pay their respects to Durgā. The talents of dancers and musicians are the most visible artistic expressions of the goddess's powers, but she is also present in the inspiration of poets and philosophers. "When I write (poetry), this is the gift of the Devī," said a young poet at the temple. In an uncannily perceptive understanding of her total power over such endeavours he continued, "When I cannot write, this too is the Devī’s gift (dana)."

In the terminology of the Sāṅkhya/Yoga-based Śākta metaphysics, the Devī manifests in human consciousness as discriminative intellect (buddhi), the most subtle of her constituent elements (tattva). Buddhi, when it is most highly developed or refined enables human consciousness to understand the Devī’s nature most completely. However, buddhi further manifests as ego (ahaṅkāra) and the inner mental sense or mind (manas). These two elements (tattva) of human consciousness are grosser, and thus heavier with the rajas and tamaḥ guna. Manas processes the perceptions of the five senses as they

*buddhi* (intellect) several times in the *Markandeya Purāṇa*. He points out that throughout the *Brahmaṇvaivarta Purāṇa*, Durgā is closely associated with buddhi where often the intellect is singled out as one of her chief characteristics. She is referred to as buddhirūpa (She Whose Form is Intellect) and as the presiding deity of intellect (1974:155).
interact with the other gross elements. *Ahaṅkāra* creates the sense of individuality and is the most subtle locus of false understanding. The Devī's illusory power operates in the creation of the feelings of limited individuality and possessiveness. Several Śākta pandits pointed to passages in the first chapter of the *Durgā Saptasatī* which tell how the king Suratha and the merchant Samādhi found themselves attached to the very kinsfolk who betrayed them. They consulted the sage Medhas who told them that it is the Devī as Mahāmāyā and Yoganidrā who deludes human beings, plunging them into a vortex of egoism (*mamatāvaṁte*) and attachment (1.40). The sage tells them that the Devī is also the source of release from bondage to worldly existence. An overpowering attachment to worldly existence, according to the *Durgā Saptasatī*, is that human beings crave offspring (1.39).

"Many young women come to pray to the Devī for a good husband," explained a temple priest. Although he was speaking about a year-round concern of young female worshippers at Durgājī, the *srīgāra* is an opportunity for this relatively cloistered group to appear in public and to be seen by potential male suitors. Although an unmarried daughter is sometimes seen as the most precious jewel in the family, it is also true that daughters may be economic liabilities in traditional Banāras society. A daughter who is beautiful, artistically talented, educated, and fair skinned is quite likely to acquire a husband of high status. But if these traits are lacking in a young woman, it may be more difficult to find her a suitable husband. Larger dowries may be demanded by the groom's family as a material compensation for this less precious jewel of a girl (*kanyāratna*). Young women therefore pray to Durgā to acquire some of that irresistible beauty (*kāma*) and power which she has in abundance. Naturally, Durgā's mythological portrait as the slayer of her suitors, does not serve as a model for them, for if it did they would never find a husband worthy enough for them. Sītā, the loyal wife of the divine hero, Rama, is by far the most common model for young women seeking marriage, because Sītā won the husband of her choice from among an array of highly acceptable suitors.

Similarly, young men also pray to the Devī to acquire the power (*arthā*) which will enable them to win a jewel of a woman (*strīratna*). Since they should, ideally,
surpass such a woman in status, the quality of the wife they are able to have depends on their acquired status. The circumstances of birth, of course, dictate their class status, which, in turn, traditionally limits their choices to women of equal or lower status. But a young man may seek the Devī’s power to increase his educational and economic status, perhaps winning for himself the best wife he possibly can. If popular films serve as any indication of the fantasies entertained by the Banārasi populace, these films and fantasies abound in themes of love between young men and women of drastically different classes. Durgā, who resists the courtship of demons, sets an example for young women to preserve their chastity and resist unsuitable (e.g., lower status) suitors. The fate of the demons, at the hands of Durgā, reminds young men of the consequences of striving after a bride from a higher class.

In contrast to the worldly goals of the householder’s life, there is the ultimate goal of liberation (*mokṣa*), which the Devī also has the power to grant. One might suggest that the world renouncer should be supremely detached from the Devī’s charm, which is revealed in the allure of worldly existence. If a male can "resist" this attractive power of the goddess he would not be drawn into the cycle of manifestation, and would be liberated. Mythologically, only Śiva would have been capable of sexual restraint, but he too succumbed, through Kāma, the god of love’s arrow. The heat of asceticism (*tapas*) is cooled by the goddess. This is exactly what happens to the demons. They have acquired power through *tapas*, assumed the office of the gods (i.e., the throne of Indra), but are ultimately destroyed by the great deluding power (*mahāmohā*) of the Devī. This delusion and attachment to worldly existence is often symbolized in the Hindu tradition as a sexual attraction and the desire for offspring.

Śiva and Mahiṣa are symbolic parallels in this regard but with a significant difference. Śiva is the ascetic par-excellence (*mahātapasvin*), and thus serves as a model for all spiritual asceticism. He is domesticated into the householder’s life by marriage to the goddess Pārvatī, who won him with her own spiritual austerities.144 In this he serves as a model of the need for moderation in the acquisition of power, for without

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144See, for instance, the Śiva Purāṇa, Rudra-samhita 3.30ff.
moderation the cosmic order would fall apart. Pārvatī exemplifies the acquisition of womanly power, which does not surpass that of the male but which matches it. She wins the ultimate husband. Mahiṣa, on the other hand, moves beyond the boundaries of propriety. He seeks a transformation of status which would reverse the cosmic order. He desires to acquire power through marriage with a woman superior in status to him (the "offspring" or power of all the gods). His destruction offers a moral to humans of the social consequences of such behaviour. A woman, mirroring Durgā, should resist suitors of inferior status (i.e., class) despite the power such suitors may wield, and through chastity and perseverance (like Pārvatī), win the husband of her choice. A man, mirroring Śiva, should enter into the householder’s life but retain his ascetic propensities. Unlike Mahiṣa, he should not strive to acquire a wife of higher status than himself.

Durgāśtami

[Eighth of the Waxing Fortnight of Bhādrapada (August/September)]

Between the srṛgāra at Durgājī and the autumn Navarātra, which is the most celebrated festival to Durgā, there are three days of goddess worship which have some relevance to worship at Durgā Kund temple. These are Durgāśtami, Jīvat Putrikā, and Mātr Navami. During Durgāśtami, which is also known as Rādhāśtami, women may take special vowed observances (vrata). In Durgā worship, these vrata(s often involve refraining from solid and cooked foods for the duration of the tithi. Fruit, juice, and curd are normally consumed if needed. The observance generally includes worship (pūjā) at a Durgā temple. The eighth day of either the waning or waxing fortnights of lunar months are sacred to various forms of the Devī.

Jīvat Putrikā

[Eighth of the Waning Fortnight of Āśvina (September/October)]

Also called Jūṭiya Vrata, Jīvat Putrikā is an elaborate ritual performed by women for the longevity (jīvat) and well-being of their daughters (putrikā) from where it derives its name. Some say it is for male children (especially the youngest son) as well. It marks
the last day of the Vowed Observances for the Great Goddess Lakṣmī (Mahālakṣmī Vrata) which begins sixteen days earlier. Numerous groups of women gather primarily beside Lakṣmī Kuṇḍ near downtown Banāras, but a few groups may be found by the banks of the Gaṅgā and at such places as Lolārka Kuṇḍ and Durgā Kuṇḍ, where I first encountered them. During the ritual each woman in the group offers the Devī a miniature pair of silver shoes (jiutiya), probably symbolizing the child.

**Mātr Navamī**

*Ninth of the Waning Fortnight of Āśvina (September/October)*

Mātr Navamī is a day for worship of the maternal ancestors (*matr*), and occurs on the ninth day of the fortnight for the paternal ancestors (*pitr pakṣa*). It is another example of the association of the number nine with feminine deities. The term *matr* also refers to an ill-defined category of female deities who are perceived as either benevolent or malevolent. Sometimes they are thought to seize infants, but they may also nurture them.145 From my observations, clusters typically number seven, eight, or sixteen.146

In the *Durgā Saptaśati* (Chapter 8), the Matrs are the feminine energy manifestations (*sakti*) of the male gods and include Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumarī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Nārasiṁhī, and Aindrī. Candikā (Durgā) herself produces a *sakti* of horrifying appearance who is called Śivadūti, since she enlists Śiva as her messenger (*dūt*).

The mythic episode is interesting for several reasons. The Devī herself produces a *sakti*, indicating that the entities known as *saktis*, although mostly derived from the male gods are not merely aspects of *their* power. The Devī’s *sakti*, Śivadūti, ends up commanding Śiva, effectively subordinating the male gods to this feminine power. Finally, when the demons protest that the Devī is fighting unfairly with the help of all these feminine deities, she points out that they are all part of her and draws them back into herself. The implication of this episode is that the powers (*sakti*) of all the male gods

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146See also Kinsley 1986:151.
emanate from the Devi.\textsuperscript{147}

The great festival of the goddess, which is known as the Āśvina Navarātra, is fast approaching. Some people commence their worship of Durgā for that festival on this day by establishing a jar (kalaśa, ghaṭa), which embodies the goddess, in their home.\textsuperscript{148}

The Āśvina Navarātra  
(First to Ninth of Waxing Fortnight of Āśvina (September/October))

The autumn Navarātra occurs on the first to the ninth tithi of the waxing fortnight of Āśvina. Due to the relationship between lunar and solar calendrical systems, Navarātra may take place on eight or ten solar days. The word navarātra means nine nights, again affirming the relationship of the goddess to the number nine and to night, although much of the ritual activity at present takes place during the daylight hours. Navarātra is without doubt the most important festival for goddess worshippers (Śaktas) and has gained pan-Indian popularity with virtually all Hindu denominations.

During Navarātra, Durgājī serves as but one locus of widespread worship of the goddess in Banaras. Visually, the most dramatic celebrations take place during the last days of Navarātra, outside the permanent temples, in temporary shrines which are established for Durgā worship. In each of those locations, an elaborate cluster of images, brightly coloured and decorated, consisting of Durgā at the centre surrounded by accompanying deities, are worshipped in a complex ritual which lasts for several days. For the purpose of this study, I have termed this form of worship "Durgā Pūjā," since the goddess worshipped there is unequivocally Durgā. I will discuss Durgā Pūjā in great detail in Chapter Four and the Appendix. The wide assortment of other worship practices which occur throughout the city during Navarātra, such as the chanting of the \textit{Durgā Saptaśati} by groups of brahmans, and the establishment of the Devī in a jar (ghaṭa) are discussed in Chapter Three. What is particularly noteworthy is that during Āśvina

\textsuperscript{147}See \textit{Durgā Saptaśati}, Chapters 8.11 to 10.5.

\textsuperscript{148}The procedure of establishment and worship of the jar (ghaṭa) is described in Chapters Three and Four, and the Appendix.
Navarātra, the orb of Durgājī’s influence expands to cover the entire city. Despite the flowering of Devī worship throughout the city of Banāras (what I call the superimposition of the Durgā yantra on the Kāśi mandala) Durgājī plays important roles in many of the various patterns of ritual worship which occur during this religious festival. The temple functions as a connecting, stabilizing, and invigorating plexus among these numerous strands of worship.

The Āsvina or Śaradīya Navarātra (or navarātrī) occurs in the month of Āsvina (September/October) which is one of the two months of the autumn (śarada) season. Autumn marks the end of the rainy season in India and is characterized by an increase in the kinds of activity which were impeded by the heavy monsoon rains. Primarily, movement resumes since swelling rivers have subsided and roads are negotiable. It is a period marked by the upheaval of roots laid down during the rains. Renowned along with spring (vasanta) for its beauty, both seasons are thought to be dangerous due to the changing climatic effects and are occasionally referred to as the "Teeth of Death" (yama damśrā). The two Navarātras which occur in autumn and spring are said to be the most important of the forty Navarātras which occur throughout the year. They are said to be special festival times (parvana or mahāparvana), when those who cannot perform the preferable constant or daily worship (naitika) of the Devī can at least participate in this special worship (naitikīa).

149The other autumnal month is Kārttika.

150Even wandering mendicants were encouraged to take up fixed residence during the rains, and thus the season is sometimes credited with playing a role in the formation of monastic communities. "This ‘rain-retreat’ seems to have been a universal customary observance among wanderers of all sects" (Dutt 1962:53). This four month period of non-movement is known as caturmāsa. Eck discusses how the rains bring an influx of wandering mendicants to Banāras (1982:261).

151Banārasis point out with a mixture of amusement and seriousness that illness is often attributed to the weather. Trying to discern which seasons were considered dangerous, I found that the rainy, the hot, and the cold season were all considered culprits, as were the periods of seasonal change. Any pronounced change in climate, however, was one of the most frequently cited reasons for illness.

152This is according to the Durgā Kalpataru. I am inclined to suggest that this system of counting sets of nine lunar days (navarātra), rather than sets of seven solar days (week), represents an ancient and alternate form of dividing the lunar calendar. Two other Navarātras of negligible importance at Durgājī are in the winter month of Māgha (January/February) and the summer month of Āśadha (June/July).
The Mythic Background

Devotees told me that the Āśvina Navarātra celebrates Durgā’s slaying of the demon Mahiṣa. Some said that the eighth day (aṣṭami) of the nine day festival commemorates the goddess Sati’s destruction of Dakṣa’s sacrifice in her form as Bhadrakālī. Others said it was held in honour of Rama’s celebration of the Navarātra ritual to gain Durgā’s aid in defeating Rāvana. In the Sātī myth, Sātī’s father, Dakṣa, held a large Vedic sacrifice (yajña) to which all the gods were invited.153 Sātī and her spouse, Śiva, were not invited due to Dakṣa’s unfavorable appraisal of Śiva, a deity whose demeanour and habits were repugnant to the Vedic gods. Sātī, in her innocence, thought the absence of an invitation was an oversight, and against Śiva’s advice, attended the yajña. There she was ignored or spurned by her father and returned to Śiva at his abode on Kailāsa, humiliated.154 To atone for this humiliation, Śiva, from a lock of his matted hair, created the auspicious hero, Virabhadra, and Sātī created Bhadrakālī (Auspicious Kāli). They descended on the sacrifice, destroyed it, and beheaded Dakṣa. Bhadrakālī lapped the blood that flowed from Dakṣa’s severed neck. Eventually Dakṣa’s head was replaced by a goat’s head.

According to the Rāma myth, Rāma was ready to battle Rāvana, the great demon devotee of Śiva, who had abducted Śītā.155 On the advice of the rṣi Nārada, Rāma performed the worship of Durgā, although not at its traditional time in the spring. This

153 My telling of this myth is an opportunity to make a methodological statement concerning sources. I had heard this myth in many forms from devotees and had read it in equally variant forms in purāṇic and other textual accounts. To report the myth as it was told by a particular individual, or from a particular textual source would be one option in presentation. Instead I have chosen to tell “my version" of the myth as I interpreted the actions of Kathakali dancers whom I observed performing it in Kerala. Unable to understand much of the Sanskritic vocals which accompanied the dance, I received few clues from there and essentially extracted (or "projected") my understanding of the story onto the performance I observed. The dancers "told" one version of the myth, and my "telling" is an interpretation of their performance through an amalgamation of all the accounts, oral and written, which I had previously encountered.

154 In many devotees’ versions of this myth, Sātī killed herself and Virabhadra, created by Śiva, was the only agent of retribution.

155 I paraphrase this version of the myth which was told to me in a casual conversation with a Bengālī priest and his adult son (also a priest), who were visiting Durgāji and Banāras while enroute back to Calcutta from Almora where they had vacationed. They said that this story is found in the Kālikā Purāṇa.
could have been a serious error, because the Devī can be angered if called upon insincerely. Rāma’s dedication was tested when he discovered that he was short of one lotus flower among the one hundred and eight he was in the process of offering. Without hesitation, he moved to pluck out his eye as a substitute, but the Devī appeared, told him to desist from the action, and assured him of victory.\textsuperscript{156} Certain devotees told me that the first ritual worship of Durgā by human beings was performed by King Suratha and the merchant Samādhi during the spring Navarātra. Rāma’s act of invoking (bodhana) the goddess at an untraditional time (akāla) set a precedent, and this akāla bodhana Navarātra has now surpassed the spring Navarātra in popularity.

**Durgā Kund Temple during Āśvina Navarātra**

Most remarkable amidst the excitement which prefigures and characterizes Navarātra is the paucity of special ritual arrangements at Durgā Mandir. Unlike the srṅgāra no lights or decorations are strung up; no special mask is used; no musical program or scriptural recitation is commissioned by the temple authorities; no jar (ghaṭa) embodying the Devī is established. Everything seems to remain just as it always is at the temple, except for the perception and remarkable activities of the devotees, who flock to take darśana in unprecedented numbers. It is as if the Devī’s presence is far more palpable than normal during these nine days anywhere that her image is established and worshipped. The underlying sense conveyed to devotees is that the goddess does not need to be established at Durgājī. She is always here. This is where she resides. This is where she is permanently seated (pūtha), holding court, and entertaining the pleas and praises of her devotees. It is from here that her munificence emanates to those other locations where she is invoked (bodhana) and established (sthāpana).

In logistical preparation for the large numbers of people who will be visiting, the temple authorities construct a wooden barrier dividing the porch in half, separating males and females from experiencing the crush of bodies together. Also, a small entourage of police establishes itself in the drum pavilion (naubat khāna). The police keep an eye out

\textsuperscript{156}Incidentally, this myth links Durgā through Rāma to Hanumān’s and his monkey helpers.
for pickpockets and jewellery grabbers, and facilitate movement of the crowds. The temple priests do make a few ritual alterations at this time. Most important among these special acts is the selection of sārīs of specific colours for Durgā during each of the nine days of Navarātra. This selection is made because each day corresponds to a different aspect of Durgā, each form bearing its own name and character. The nine forms of Durgā (navadurgā) most commonly known and worshipped in Banāras are those named in the Devī Kavaca, an appendage of the Durgā Saptaśati. The Durgās are not merely listed but, a fact whose significance should not be overlooked, they are sequentially ordered from Śailaputri (Daughter of the Mountain), the first, to Siddhidātri (Bestower of Attainment), the ninth. There are nine temples in Banāras which correspond to each of the Nine Durgās. Durgājī is known as the fourth Durgā, Kuśmāṇḍā. However, the sārī change on each of the nine days, implies that Durgājī is the embodiment of all of the nine Durgās.

**Daily Worship at Durgā Mandir during Navarātra**

At about two o’clock in the morning of the first day of Navarātra, a few people have begun to gather in the inner courtyard of Durgā Mandir, entering through the south doorway. I had never as yet felt the temple so charged with atmosphere as on this night. I thought it emanated an aura of sacrality which, I felt, would actually grow in intensity over the next days. If as W. C. Smith (1962:153,176), paralleling Durkheim (1954 [1915]) in certain respects, has suggested, religiosity is found in persons, not things, then perhaps this feeling was generated by the deep sentiments of those who had gathered to worship. In front of the south door of the sanctum, stands a woman shrouded in a red sārī, almost motionless, gently rocking on her feet waiting for ċarasana. In another place, dressed in brilliant monocolour silk lungās, sits a group of men, relaxed yet expectant. Ram Prasad, the pujārī, has entered the garbhagrha and has begun the morning pūjā for the goddess. Other devotees have gathered, men and women, waiting on the porch.

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157 Durgājī’s place in the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage (navadurgā yātra) is significant. Its role in this strand of Durgā worship in Banāras will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.
Suddenly the door is flung open and the expectant crowd surges forward, tossing flowers into the sanctum, calling out praises. Then almost as quickly, the sanctum door is closed. This was maṅgala darśana, the first auspicious sight of the Devī, particularly sought after by certain groups of devotees.\textsuperscript{158}

About fifteen minutes later, the garbhagrha opens again and worship continues through the day with tens of thousands of devotees surging through the temple, taking darśana and making offerings. On occasion, they arrive in groups with musicians and dancers. Some bring a goat for a sacrificial offering of blood. Others bring offerings of flags or bells. Many people are engaged in reciting the Durgā Saptatatt\textsuperscript{ī} either for themselves or on behalf of others (see Figures 10 and 11). Healers and other ritual specialists are present by the fire oblation pit (havan kuṇḍa), engaged in channeling or pooling the Devī's power (see Figure 6). The number of devotees drop off in the afternoon and again increase at dusk, reaching a maximum during the evening āratt.\textsuperscript{159}

By the end of the day twenty to fifty thousand people have visited Durgāji. The range reflects the devotional rhythm during Navarātra. Thus the first day (pratipada) sees large numbers of devotees at Durgāji. The numbers are again large on the fourth day when Durga Mandir is highlighted as Kuśmāndā Devī. The number of visitors again peaks on the seventh, eighth, and ninth days, when the celebration of what has come to be known as Durgā Pūjā, characterized by the worship of clay images of the goddess, occurs.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{158} For instance, the men in the silk/satin luṅgās belong to a family whose now-deceased patriarch (a grandfather) started the tradition of taking maṅgala darśana. They adhere to the notion that partaking of this most auspicious first darśana of Durgā, at Durgāji, during every day of Navarātra (autumn and spring) is a fully-accomplished spiritual practice (sādhana) or propitiation. Maṅgala darśana is all that is necessary to praise the goddess and to receive her blessings. Members of this group strut around the temple after taking darśana, displaying an attitude of acquired power, helping with cleaning chores and driving away bothersome monkeys before they leave.

\item \textsuperscript{159} I sense that there is a relationship between the notion of Navarātra (nine nights) and the peak visiting times of devotees which are during the main āratt\textsuperscript{s} at the temple, before sunrise and after sunset. Yet if such a relationship exists, it is not expressly stated or considered important to most devotees. Those involved in the urban work routine are obliged to make visits before or after work.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Vijayā Daśamī
[Tenth of the Waxing Fortnight of Āśvina (September/October)]

The day following Navarātra is called Vijayā Daśamī (The Tenth for Victory) which in the minds of devotees is a celebration recalling numerous events. It celebrates victory, but is not a commemoration of victory in a specific historical battle. Rather it marks every victory of the gods over the demons, of dharma over adharma, and of order and righteousness over chaos and moral turpitude. More specifically, to most Banārasis it marks Rāma’s victory over Rāvana, while to most Śāktas, it marks the mythological events of Durgā’s slaying of Mahiṣāsura. These two victories are the most dominant demon destruction myths currently in the Indian consciousness, better known, or certainly more celebrated, than Śiva’s destruction of Andhaka, Kārtikeya’s of Tāraka, Indra’s of Vṛtra, Kṛṣṇa’s of Kaṁśa, or the deeds of any of the other incarnations of Viṣṇu.

The Rāmaite mythic strand is enacted alongside the Durgā strand of worship during the month long Rāmālīlā which takes place with much pomp and grandeur in Banāras. Various neighbourhoods stage their own Rāmālīlās (Play of Rāma), reciting the adventures of Rāma as told in the Rāmāyanas and enacting certain well-known episodes in the mythic accounts. Of all the Rāmālīlās, that of Kāśī Naresh, the king of Banāras, held in Rāmnagar is most renowned. The king himself attends at the diverse locations in Rāmnagar where each day’s drama is enacted. But although the Rāmnagar’s Rāmālīlā is considered best overall, the Bhārat Milāp event of Nāt Imli is famous throughout Banāras. It reenacts the meeting between Rāma and his faithful brother Bhārata after years of separation. It is attended by hundreds of thousands of people. Also well known are the Nāk Katayas of several neighbourhoods in the city. They enact the episode in which Lakṣmana cuts off the nose of Rāvana’s sister, Śūrpanakhā. The Rāmnagar

160 My use of the term "recalls" is a tacit reference to some aspects of Eliade’s approach to myth analysis. Paradigmatic myths such as the myth of cyclical return involve the re-enactment of certain primordial events. Paradigms of anamnesis allow one to "remember" that which was "forgotten." Yearly festivals are often celebrations which recall, through both remembering and re-enacting, a single event or series of events which took place in that murky past (illo tempore). See, for instance, Eliade 1963:115ff.
Rāmīḷā terminates on Vijayā Daśāmī with the celebration of Rāma’s defeat of Rāvana. A large paper and wood effigy of Rāvana is built and it is set ablaze. Everywhere during the previous month toy bows and arrows were on sale and young boys now take pot shots at the demon image.\textsuperscript{161}

In many ways, Vijayā Daśāmī is a celebration not of one or the other mythic episode, but of Victory herself, personified as the Devī.\textsuperscript{162} I was told that in the not too distant past, kings set out to wage war after this day, which served as the trumpet call after the previous months of mobilization and psychological preparation. Attendents of the king of Banāras, told me that he celebrates the Āśvina Navarātra with great devotion, and I have seen him make a visit to the Durgājī on the eighth day (aṣṭāmi). Although kingly warfare has all but disappeared, and seasons play a smaller role in dictating the periods suitable for armed conflict, both these great festivals, Rāmīḷā and Navarātra, which occur simultaneously, psychologically mobilize the population for a struggle in which they desire a victorious outcome. The festivals elicit and nurture sentiments of courage in the face of injustice and oppression, and culminate in a jubilant gala celebrating certain triumph over their enemies.

There are many indications that the popularity of Rāmīḷā is waning in Banāras. People, perhaps correctly, attribute this trend to the advent of television in the city. The televised serialization of the Rāmāyanā was one of the most popular shows produced in India. Other successful religious and historical productions such as the Mahābhārata, Tippu (on the life of the famous Sultan), Cānakya, and Kṛṣṇa appear to be slowly outshadowing the tradition of live recitations which flourished in the city. But while Rāmīḷā is waning, the Durgā Pūjā celebrations in Banāras are clearly growing. While there were only a handful of clay images made for public worship at the turn of the

\textsuperscript{161}I have seen how in certain towns in Maharashtra the Rāvana image is set ablaze by shooting flaming arrows into it.

\textsuperscript{162}One of the epithets of Durgā is Vijayā (Victory). See Mahābhārata, Virāta Parva, 6.16. Vijayā and Jayā, which both mean victory, are also considered to be Durgā’s attendants. They are also said to be the special magical warrior skills taught to Rāma by his spiritual mentor Viśvamitra, for the destruction of demons such as Rāvana.
century, and perhaps fifty or so in the early seventies, now twenty years later there are over one hundred and fifty.\footnote{It is not possible to give an accurate count of the number of these public celebrations. Although the municipal authorities have tried to restrict the number by issuing permits, many communities go ahead with collecting money and organizing celebrations while their application for a permit is still in process. If a permit is not issued, they may continue with the celebration, and run the risk of being shut down by the police. More often, the authorities ignore the disobedience, particularly if the community pūjā appears to be well organized, since disrupting it would cause unnecessary turmoil and violent reactions. My estimate of the numbers is derived from conversations with the main image-makers located in the Bengāli Tōlā district of the city.}

Lakṣmī Pūjā

\textit{[Fourth of the Waning Fortnight of Kārtikeya (October/November)]}

With the exception of Annakūṭa, the religious festivals which take place between Vijayā Daśāmī and the spring Navarātra are tangential but related to Durgā worship. For instance, I discuss festival days, such as Holi, which are not clearly directed to a particular deity, but during which Durgā-worshipping Śāktas may perform special rituals to Durgā, and in which a visit to Durgājī may be included. I particularly discuss festivals of the gods and goddesses who have representative shrines at Durgājī. Because of these shrines, worshippers sometimes visit the Durgā Kund temple on days sacred to those deities. My discussion of their festivals illustrates how the yearly cycle orchestrates the waxing and waning of the \textit{mandalas} of other deities as well as Durgā. The Durgājī \textit{yantra} experiences its peak expansion during Navarātra, when devotees who worship at any goddess shrine, permanent or temporary, in the city are actually worshipping Durgā. Yet, when the Durgājī \textit{yantra} contracts, after Navarātra, it is not isolated from the religious activity which is occurring in the rest of Banāras. Durgājī’s \textit{yantra} is intersected by the expanding \textit{mandalas} of other deities, to whom Durgā is related in significant ways. The festival of Lakṣmī is such an example.

Lakṣmī Pūjā is held in honour of the goddess of wealth, good fortune, and prosperity (Śrī Lakṣmī). People purchase small (foot high) clay images of the goddess or worship her in their household shrine images. Often she is worshipped in a flat earthen plate (\textit{lakṣmī paṭṭā}) on which the goddess and her mount, the owl (\textit{ullā}), are
She is worshipped with the standard sixteen item devotional service (*sodasa upacara*) and fire oblations (*havan*), or some simplified form of these, after which the image is delivered to the waters of the Gaṅgā. The relationship of Lakṣmī to Durgā is acknowledged at Durgājī by the presence of a Lakṣmī shrine there. As previously mentioned, Lakṣmī is often conceived of as the embodiment of the *rajas guna*, one of the triad of qualities of Prakṛti. The *rajas guna* balances the flow between the *sattva* and *tamas gunas* in two directions. Prakṛti, through it, moves from unity, via creation, to diversity and eventually to dissolution. The *rajas guna* also animates the opposite movement towards sattvic integrity. Through this harmony between the forces of integration and dissolution, Lakṣmī represents the power of preservation of the cosmos. Durgā is often conceived of as the Supreme Goddess, of whom Lakṣmī is one part. In the context of the Durgā Pūjā ritual, where her clay image accompanies Durgā, many devotees think of Lakṣmī as the daughter of Durgā, as the sister of Sarasvatī, and as the wife of Ganeśa.

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164 Lakṣmī, through the earthen plate, appears to be identified with the earth and its resources. There is a close relationship between the Earth goddess (Bhū Devī) and Lakṣmī, both of whom are often identified with each other or are represented as Viṣṇu’s consorts. Perhaps the empty plate, a symbol of hunger, represents the desire for bounty.

The symbolic relationship between deities and their mounts is hardly clear and Lakṣmī’s owl is no exception. While in the West the owl symbolizes wisdom, in India the term “ullī” means stupidity. This serves as a cautionary reminder about the dangers of mistakenly projecting what are thought to be “universal,” or “archetypal” meanings onto symbols. I was told that the white owl is the keeper of wealth because it is the harbinger of death, although I did not understand the connection. Perhaps it refers to the inheritance of wealth on the death of family members.

165 It is beyond the scope of this study to explore fully the relationship between Lakṣmī and Durgā. The so-called Gaja-lakṣmī images which appear very early in India depict the goddess Lakṣmī being showered with water sprayed from the trunks of two elephants. This imagery offers one connection between Lakṣmī and elephants, and is suggestive of her subsequent connection with Ganeśa, the elephant-headed god. Lakṣmī is almost always associated with Ganeśa in the Durgā Pūjā image cluster. However, I was told that certain Bengali castes such as the vaidyas associate Kārtikeya with Lakṣmī, and Ganeśa with Sarasvatī in the Durgā Pūjā image cluster. One explanation lies in the ambiguous spousal relationships of Ganeśa, who is sometimes considered to be a “bachelor,” although he is often thought of as having two wives, Rddhi (Accomplishment) and Siddhi (Attainment). These female deities may be identified with either Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning and the arts, or Lakṣmī, the goddess of prosperity. Durgā embodies the traits of both these goddesses.
**Bhūta Caturdaśī**
*[Fourteenth of the Waning Fortnight of Kārtikeya (October/November)]*

Bhūta Caturdaśī is held on the day before Kālī Pūjā. It is a day for worship of the bhūtas, disembodied elemental beings who can be malevolent. Since Durgā is sometimes called Bhūta Nāyikā (Leader of Ghosts), clandestine worship may be performed at Durgājī for the bhūtas on this day. Such worship is primarily performed by healers, sorcerers, and tantrikas. Durgā’s association with such malevolent beings as disembodied spirits is in keeping with her dreadful and fierce nature. Just as Śiva is associated with his frightful cohorts (gaṇa), Durgā is connected to a host of fearsome beings such as the yoginis and the māitrkās. Her identification with the gross and subtle elements of creation, in Śākta metaphysics, also give her governance over all elemental beings (bhūta).

**Dīpāvalī and Kālī Pūjā**
*[New Moon of Kārtikeya (October/November)]*

Dīpāvalī (or Dīvālī) is held on the amāvasyā (new/dark moon) of Kārtikeya. It is the festival of lights and is celebrated with visits to Lakṣmī temples, and fireworks. For many Banārasis this is like a New Year’s celebration. Homes are freshly painted and new clothes are purchased. To some Dīpāvalī is a celebration of Kṛṣna’s defeat of Narakaśura, but to most Banārasis it commemorates Rāma’s victorious return to Ayodhyā after his defeat of Rāvana (which was celebrated on Vijaya Daśamī). For the Bengāli community in Banāras, however, to whom Durgā Pūjā was most like a New Year’s celebration, this day is Kālī Pūjā, and marks the end of the festive mood which began during Durgā Pūjā. Large clay images of Kālī, naked and voluptuous, her skin black as night, garlanded with human heads, and holding a severed head in one hand and a bloodied sword in the other are produced by the same artisans who make the images for Durgā Pūjā. Kālī stands atop the prone body of Śiva. These images are commissioned by a few community clubs, installed in temporary shrines (pūjālaya), imbued with life, worshipped, and finally led in procession for submersion (visarjana) in the Gaṅgā. Devout Kālī worshippers take darśana at their favoured shrines on this day and the
BhadraKalî at Durgâji gets her share of attention, particularly by tantrics. The Laksmî shrine in Durgâ Mandir being much newer, gets far less attention on this day.

The mythic relationship between Kâli and Durgâ as told in the Durgâ SaptaSatî was described in detail in the previous chapter. In the Durgâ SaptaSatî, Kâli emerges as a wrathful emanation from the forehead of the Devî, and drinks up the blood of the demon Raktabîjâ. I often heard that Kâli is an embodiment of the tamas guṇa, one of the three components of Durgâ's nature in the Sâñkhya/Yoga-based Sâkta metaphysical system. Since Kâli Pûjâ is celebrated a little over a fortnight after Durgâ Pûjâ among members of the Bengâli community, Bengâlis perceive a more vivid difference between the two goddesses. Kâli, for instance, is not included in the cluster of images worshipped during Durgâ Pûjâ. However for most Banârasis, Kâli is "one" (eki hai) with Durgâ and embodies certain of her aspects. Although identified with the tamas guṇa, Kâli is linked with blood (in the Durgâ SaptaSatî mythology, and in her most pervasive imagery), the symbol of the rajas guṇa.

**Annakûta**
*First of the Waxing Fornight of Kârtikeya (October/November)*

The day following Dîpâvalî is the festival of Annakûta, which is sometimes said to continue for three days. It is another example of a festival whose significance stems from the overlapping myth cycles of various sectarian traditions. The term Annakûta, means "mountain of sustenance" and is linked primarily with Krśnaite and Sâkta myth cycles. The first myth recalls the incident when Krśna, who had produced a bounty of food on the hill, Govardhana, in Vrîndâvana, aroused the jealousy of Indra. While Krśna and his friends were enjoying a sumptuous meal on the mountain, Indra caused a

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166 Annâpûrnâ is the name of one of the tallest and most visible peaks in the Himaîlayas.

167 This is a composite of a few versions I heard in casual conversations with visitors at Durgâji on the festival day.
storm to rage.\textsuperscript{168} Kṛṣṇa protected his cowherd friends by holding up the mountain with a single finger.\textsuperscript{169} He was then treated to a banquet on the mountain by his grateful friends. It is a story of the production, protection, and sharing of bountiful sustenance.

The second myth, most popular in Banāras, is the tale of the Goddess Annapūrṇā, who after an argument (takarāra) with her spouse, Śiva, left Kailāsa for Kāśi.\textsuperscript{170} Here she began to distribute food in vast quantities to the needy of the whole world. Finally, Śiva himself, starved of food (annā hīna) and love (kāma hīna), arrived in Banāras as a naked (vāstra hīna) mendicant and had to beg his food from the Devī. They both took up residence in the city and from that day no one remains hungry in Kāśi. Lithograph images of the goddess feeding the wandering mendicant Śiva abound and the festival is celebrated most dramatically at the Annapūrṇā and Viśvanātha temple in Banāras which are situated beside each other.\textsuperscript{171}

At Durgājī, Annakūṭa is also celebrated but on a much smaller scale than at the Annapūrṇā temple. Two types of food are distributed: cooked (pakka) food, which is mainly boiled rice and lentils (kichiri), and uncooked (kaccha), consisting mainly of nuts and dried fruit (kīsamīṣa). An afternoon ārati is held after which children, mendicants (mainly itinerant sādhus and dandaśvāmis), and devotees collect the blessed food distributed by the temple (prasāda). Disgruntled devotees point out how two qualities of

\textsuperscript{168}One visitor said Indra caused it to rain for seven days and Kṛṣṇa held the mountain aloft for seven days.

\textsuperscript{169}This act is well-known throughout India and frequently depicted in sculpture and painting. A fine example is the large sculpture which is prominently on display in the Bhārata Kalā Bhavan museum (No. 147). See photograph in Eck 1982:66.

\textsuperscript{170}I paraphrase a version of the myth told by an elderly street vendor of colourful lithographs of deities. I had been rummaging through his collection of prints not long after my arrival in Banaras and pointed to a picture which depicted the Devī handing out sweets to Śiva, who was clad in a leopard skin. When I asked him what the picture represented he was only too glad to tell me what I discerned to be a myth of central importance in Banārasi culture. In time I began to notice numerous other images of what appeared to be normal housewives giving food to religious mendicants. I recognized an implication that in the extremely important act of charitable giving (dāna), every woman is an embodiment of the goddess and each world renouncer is Śiva.

\textsuperscript{171}One of the best known sculptural images depicting this myth is found in the relatively new Tulsi Manas temple located beside Durgājī.
prasāda are prepared by temple officials. The higher quality food, consisting of sweets made with large quantities of milk and pure ghi is given to temple officials themselves and to favoured devotees.

When asked, most worshippers locate the goddess Annapūrnā at her temple at the end of Viśvanātha lane (gali). However, it is clear that Durgājī is also identified with Annapūrnā. During Annakūṭa, the Annapūrnā temple uses a special gold mask for the goddess which is only visible at this time of the year. Durgā Mandir also uses the special gold mask which is only otherwise used during the srīgāra. It suggests that the goddess "born" at the srīgāra is the same one worshipped during Annakūṭa. The Durgā Kūṇḍ and Annapūrnā temples are linked as numbers four and eight, respectively, in the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage circuit, making them merely different aspects of the same deity, Durgā. Finally, Durgājī's epithet, Kuśmāṇḍā Devī, links her strongly with the nurturing and nourishing nature of the Devī. The kūsmāṇḍā is a pumpkin gourd which provides both solid and liquid nourishment.

Within the three days of Annakūṭa, and held on the second of the bright fortnight of Kārtikeya, is the festival of Bhrātr Dvīṭyā (The Second for Brothers). It is considered auspicious for brothers who receive a red powder mark (tilaka) of blessing on their forehead from their sisters to whom they may give a sārī or some other gift. Just as Rakṣa Bandhana provided a brother-sister protective motif, Bhrātr Dvīṭyā provides another brother-sister motif, one of mutual generosity. It is possible that the timing of this festival, like Rakṣa Bandhana, allows the Vaiṣṇava/Kṛṣṇaite strand of worshippers to see a meaningful connection between Śiva, Durgā and Kṛṣṇa. Durgā, the sister, blesses Kṛṣṇa, her brother, who provides her with gifts (e.g., food). She, in turn, feeds her mendicant husband Śiva.

There are some important elements in the portrait of the Devī which emerge from an examination of the festival of Annakūṭa. Durgā's body, which by implication is the temple, the kūṇḍa, and the earth which constitutes her yantra is a bounteous source of life-giving nourishment. In compelling ways, the festival of Annakūṭa indicates that the entire earth is envisioned as the Devī yantra, which is a source of nourishment.
Mountains such as Nandi Devī and Annapūrṇā are named after the goddess. From their melting snows flow rivers such as the Gaṅgā, also known as a goddess, which form the fertile basin in which life flourishes. A Devī temple, such as Durgājī or Annapūrṇā Mandir, is a microcosm of that planet-wide Devī yantra. The festival of Annakūṭa, particularly through the myth of the Devī’s nourishing presence in Banāras, expands the yantras of Devi temples to encompass all of Kāśī. On this day several temples, Annapūrṇā and Durgājī in particular, actually provide food for visitors. In these temples the "miracle" of the superabundant creation of food which results from the generous sharing of food takes place. The food provides sustenance for everyone who comes to take darśana, and provides a model for the year-round enactment of this miracle in Banāras, through acts of charitable giving (dāna). In the deeds of Rānī Bhavānī, for example, who donated hundreds of kilograms of rice daily for distribution to pilgrims at Annapūrṇā temple, we see a striking example of such year-round nutritive sharing (dāna) in action.172

Annakūṭa also causes us to focus on the centrality of food and feeding in the rituals of worship which are collectively called pūjā. The offering of food items (naivedya) such as fruit (phala) or sweets is virtually an indispensable part of every pūjā to any deity. I have alluded to how, in pūjā, items which correspond to the gross constituent elements (mahābhūta) of the cosmos are offered back to the deity. Offerings of food, highlight two important dimensions of pūjā. First, food suggests that the manifest cosmos, which is the body of the Devī, is imbued with life and is a source of nourishment to all other life forms. In offering food to the Devī through pūjās to her, devotees are in effect offering to the Devī a living portion of her own body.173 By accepting the offering, the Devī, by implication, eats of her own flesh, further sanctifying it. Devotees then partake in the thus consecrated food, the Devī’s own body, which is called prasāda. Second, one notes that ritual worship in general, and pūjā in

172 Such actions earned Rānī Bhavānī the title "Second Annapūrṇā."

173 A form of union between god and goddess is implied when such offerings, envisioned as the body of the goddess, are made to male deities.
particular, is more than merely having *darsana*, mutual viewing, with the deity. I will later explain how all the senses (*indriya*) are involved in such worship. In the symbolism of the food offerings, one sees how devotees not only merge with the Devī, through feeding from her, but significantly, taste what she has tasted. Furthermore, what they have mutually tasted is itself part of the Devī’s manifest being.

**Jagaddhāトリ Pūjā**

*Ninth of the Waxing Fortnight of Kārtikeya (October/November)*

This *pūjā*, in honor of the Devī in her aspect as the Nurturer of the Universe (Jagaddhāトリ) is mainly celebrated in Bengāli homes. The goddess is worshipped three times on a single day at the traditional juncture periods (*saṇḍhya*), dawn, high noon, and dusk with simplified versions of the elaborate Durgā Pūjā rituals which are performed on the seventh (*saptami*), eighth (*aṣṭami*), and ninth (*navami*) days of the autumn Navarātra. Ideally, families should establish the full image cluster (*pratimā*) of the type used during Durgā Pūjā, with central images of Durgā Mahiśamardini flanked by Ganeśa, Lakṣmī, Kārtikeya, Sarasvatī and their mounts. I did not locate a home in Banāras where this kind of celebration took place. Most often, among those who perform the worship in Banāras, only meditative visualizations (*dhyāna*) of Jagaddhāトリ and the other deities are performed along with a fire offering (*havan*). Some devotees make visits to their preferred Durgā temple on this day. I was told that this *pūjā* is a celebration of the wealth and vitality felt after the hot season and the rains.

**Kārtikeya Pūjā**

*Last day of Kārtikeya (October/November)*

This *pūjā* is held on the last day (*saṅkranti*) of Kārtikeya in honor of the god Kārtikeya. Kārtikeya, also called Skanda (and Murugan in South India where he is very

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*174* was told by several Banārasis of Bengāli background that the most famous centre of Jagaddhāトリ Pūjā is in Bengal, at Cândanagar, near Calcutta. The following description of the celebration comes from these sources. The Jagaddhāトリ Pūjā appears to be a Bengāli equivalent of the harvest celebrations of Annakūṭa.
popular), is thought to be the son of Śiva and Pārvatī/Durgā. He is called the god of war, the leader of Śiva’s army (senāpati), and rides a peacock (maurya vāhana). Some of the earliest myths, as found in the Mahābhārata for instance, attribute the killing of the buffalo demon (mahīśāsura) to Skanda. This mythological deed is eventually attributed to Durgā whose mythological exploits in the Durgā Saptaśatī also depict her leading armies, which destroy the demonic enemies of the gods. Skanda is often portrayed with many heads. However, because of the way he is depicted in the cluster of images worshipped in the Durgā Pūjā ritual, as an extremely handsome prince (kumāra), it is this form which is growing in the popular imagination of North Indians. There is no Kārtikeya image at Durgājī, suggesting his still diminished popularity in Banāras. Devotees generally worship him in their home shrines.

Bhairavaṃśa
[Eighth of the Waning Fortnight of Mārgaśīrṣa (November/December)]

The Eighth of Bhairava marks the end of a pilgrimage circuit to Banāras’s eight Bhairavas, fierce forms of Śiva, who are guardian deities of the city. The second of Kāśī’s eight Bhairavas, Caṇḍa Bhairava, is located at Durgājī within the Bhadrakālī shrine. This Bhairava is visited and worshipped during all of the eight days, but especially on the second day.

Since both the Eight Bhairavas and Nine Durgās are thought of as guardian deities of Kāśī, the presence of Caṇḍa Bhairava and Kuśmāṇḍa Durgā at Durgājī makes it a significant protective outpost in the city. Located, as it is, just within the sacred perimeter of Kāśī bounded at the south by the Asī river, the temple’s protective role would seem appropriate. Given the characteristic designations of the Bhairavas as gatekeepers or portal guardians (dvārapāla), one might also suggest that Durgājī is a

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175 See, for instance, Mahābhārata 3.221.52 ff, the Vamana Purāṇa 31.1-32.11, and the Matsya Purāṇa 147.28.

gateway into the sacred city.

Hari Utthana Ekadaśi
[Eleventh of the Waxing Fortnight of Mārgaśīrṣa (November/December)]

Viṣṇu (Hari) awakes (utthāna) on the eleventh (ekādaśī) of the waxing fortnight of Mārgaśīrṣa (November/December), almost exactly four months after he went to sleep in the month of Śravaṇa. Ascetics who have stayed in monastic retreat during the rains are now encouraged to resume their wanderings (Eck 1982:272). A pandit told me that Mārgaśīrṣa used to be considered the first month in the New Year. Evidence of this tradition lingers in the activities of people who make new cane sugar (gur) and harvest fresh potatoes.

A myth told in the Durgā Saptaśati (Chapter One) and Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa (I.6-9) recounts how Brahmā, the creator god, when threatened by the demons Madhu and Kaitabha, propitiated the Devī who as Yoganidrā had put Viṣṇu to sleep. The demons (asura) had grown strong through propitiating the Devī and now it was only through Brahmā's devout prayer that Viṣṇu could be released from his slumber to perform the task of preserving the universe. The Devī complies and Viṣṇu awakens. However his fight is long and at first unsuccessful since the asuras have been granted a boon to die at their own request. The Devī Bhāgavata tells how the Devī's charm dupes the demons into ill-placed egotism, and they magnanimously offer Viṣṇu a boon. He chooses to kill them. Thinking fast when realizing that they have doomed themselves they ask to be killed on dry land, seeing only the infinite spread of cosmic waters in which they reside. Viṣṇu complies by placing them on his lap. They expand immeasurably to overflow this patch of land, but Viṣṇu's thighs match their expansion and they are slain.

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177Kinsley discusses the role of such goddesses as Gāṅgā and Yamunā as threshold deities, which mediate between the human and divine realms (1986:191-193). These goddesses are often found on the portals of temples which are considered to be realms of the gods. In a similar fashion, the entire temple of Durgājī may be considered as the southern portal to a larger divine realm, namely, the sacred mandala of Kāśi.

178Also see the festival of Hari Ekādaśī, below.
During the Rāmālīlā period of festivities, the Durgā Kūnd is occasionally used to enact the classic image of the pralaya, the period between regenerations of the cosmos, in which Viṣṇu, asleep upon the serpent Śeṣa, floats on the cosmic waters. His consort Lakṣmī or Bhū Devī (Goddess Earth) massages his feet and Brahmā sits atop a lotus which grows from Viṣṇu’s navel. Several devotees while seeing this drama, explained to me how Lakṣmī or Bhū Devī is actually Durgā who, as Mahāmāyā or Yoganidrā, is the source of Hari’s slumber.

Durgā, therefore, plays a central role in orchestrating cosmic creation and dissolution, which comprise a cyclical pattern which repeats itself endlessly. The unending (ananta) nature of this cosmic cycle is symbolized by the serpent upon which Viṣṇu sleeps. The myth suggests that since the Devī can put Viṣṇu himself to sleep, what power have mere mortals to resist her actions? While Viṣṇu sleeps, the process of creation begins, but from its very inception this creation is twofold (See Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa, I.6-9). From the lotus which emanates from Viṣṇu’s navel, Brahmā, the creator god begins what one might designate the pure, or sattvic creation, but from the wax, which falls from Viṣṇu’s ears, a tamasic creation of demons develops. The demons are empowered by the Devī, to whom they pray, and they soon threaten to destroy the incipient creation. Brahmā prays to the Devī, who releases Viṣṇu from his sleep. His battle with the demons is futile, until he is aided by the Devī, who rectifies the potential cosmic imbalance which would result if the tamasic nature of the demons dominated the sattvic nature of Brahmā. In this myth, the Devī is completely in control. She initiates the creation by putting Viṣṇu to sleep, empowers the demon’s destructive power, and preserves the cosmos and the creation by awakening and aiding Viṣṇu.

Sarasvatī Pūjā, Vasanta Pañcamī
[Fifth of the Waxing Fortnight of Māgha (January/February)]

This pūjā for the goddess Sarasvatī (She who is Ripe/Full of Juice) takes place over two days beginning on the fifth of the waxing fortnight of Māgha. It is also called the Fifth of Spring (Vasanta Pañcamī). It is celebrated in most Bengāli homes in Banāras
with clay images whose size varies from a foot to life size. The images, prepared by the same artisans who construct the Durgā Pūjā mūrtis, vary somewhat according to the particular descriptive meditative visualization verses (dhyāna śloka) utilized. Generally, Sarasvatī is white in color and has the disc of the moon at her crest. She stands on a white lotus and holds a book. A swan is seen at her feet. On occasion she is portrayed with four hands. She may or may not be depicted with her characteristic stringed lute-like musical instrument, the vīnā.

The image is placed on an altar and decorated with flowers and ornaments. Then the tools of scholarly and artistic learning such as an inkpot, fountain pen, note and text books, and musical instruments are placed all around her. She is worshipped with a sixteen part devotional service (sodāsa upacāra) and fire oblation (havan). Typical food offerings include fried rice with yoghurt, bananas, and sweets. No writing, reading, or playing of musical instruments is done on this day. The next day, the image is approached and her name is written three times with a wood apple leaf (bilva patra). While touching her feet, the leaf is placed in a book. Devotees may then read a line or two from each book in their collection.

Sarasvatī Pūjā is occasionally held in public. I did not determine if such public worship is growing in popularity although I was told that the once common celebrations in institutions of learning is disappearing. In the public pūjā, flower salutations (puspānjali) are elaborate and numerous allowing greater devotee participation. Public celebrations include more cultural performances, such as music and scriptural recitations and the reading of hymns of praise (stotra). The new Sarasvatī image is kept in the house (or institution) for a full year. After the new image is worshipped, the previous year’s image is given a final pūjā with flame worship (ārati), paid reverence (pranāma), and delivered (visarjana) into the Gaṅgā.

Sarasvatī is generally connected with the male creator deity Brahmā. Thus she is the vital energy (sakti) behind creation. She is also identified with the goddess Vāk, who

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179 She may also be worshipped with sodasīopacāra and no havan, or a ten-part devotional service (dasopacāra) and a thrice-repeated flower salutation (puspānjali). These modifications may also be used for Lakṣmī Pūjā.
is Speech or the Word, sound vibrations through which conceptions are made manifest. According to certain devotees at Durgājī, Durgā is identical to the Absolute Formless (nirguṇa) Brahman, the sole reality. This Absolute, however, manifests into the diversified creation, which is not different from it. In the eloquent words of one worshipper, "as a fruit is not different from the seed which produced it," so also the Absolute Durgā is intrinsically identical to her manifest form. At a certain level of manifestation Durgā may be conceived of as embodying tripartite qualities (triguṇa) which are personified as Mahāsarasvatī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahākāli. Mahāsarasvatī is identified fully with the creative principle, and thus linked with either brilliant activity (rajas guṇa) or with pure stasis (sattva guṇa). People may visit the Sarasvatī shrine in Durgājī on this day.

There is an obvious and noteworthy contrast between the duration of residence of Sarasvatī images during this pūjā and the clay images of deities during other pūjās, which are kept for only a few days at most. It is true that Lakṣmī images (purchased during the Mahālakṣmī Vrata) are also kept for a year. Some devotees told me they keep the images to ensure prosperity, and intellectual and artistic creativity throughout the year. Deities such as Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī represent purely benevolent and positive qualities of which one can perhaps never have too much. Other deities, who are invited, propitiated, and dismissed quickly, embody different qualities. A deity like Viśvakarma (Maker of the Universe) needs only to be propitiated periodically, as one would the architect or builder of a home. Gaṇeṣa, for instance, needs regular propitiation and is supposed to be worshipped at the commencement of any pūjā. However, at the end of his major annual festival, which is celebrated with great pomp in Maharastra, his clay image is disposed of into nearby waters. Perhaps this disposal owes to his ambivalent nature, for Gaṇeṣa is a deity who not only removes obstacles but may also create them. Thus it might be too dangerous to have Gaṇeṣa around always. Durgā, as this study reveals, embodies a surprising array of qualities among which is included a dangerous fearsome nature like Gaṇeṣa. Her stay, during the Durgā Pūjā, is also short.

\[\text{180}A\text{ comprehensive discussion of Gaṇeṣa is found in Courtright (1985).}\]
It is possible that this is because she is envisioned as a powerful protective presence or a family member one would love to have nearby always, but who cannot remain because of cosmic and dharmic principles. Cosmologically, protection must cease for destruction and new creation to occur. According to the social dictates of dharma, the daughter must leave her family home and return to the home of her husband. Durgā’s departure is thus seen as an occasion for both joy and sorrow.

Mahāśivarātri Vrata
[Fourteenth of the Waning Fortnight of Phalguna (February/March)]

This great night of Śiva (mahāśivarātri) is hardly considered a pūjā, and is better known as a pledged devotional activity (vrata). Devotees normally fast and visit Śiva liṅgas throughout the day, everywhere in the city. The most popular liṅga in Banāras is at Viśvanātha temple, but Kedar Nath and Ādi Viśveśvara are also visited in large numbers. Naturally Bhairava temples are popular darśana destinations, since Bhairava is a fierce form of Śiva. The presence of Canda Bhairava, one of the city’s eight guardians, at Durgājī draws people there. So does the liṅga of Kukkutesvara Mahādeva. Inevitably people also take darśana of the Devī on this occasion.

I heard from Banārasis on several occasions that Śiva is the easiest deity to please. He does not demand much attention or elaborate rituals. Thus offering a flower or wood-apple leaf (bilva patra) or sprinkling the liṅga with a little water from the Ganges (ganga jala) is more than enough, and such acts are not even mandatory. However if one wishes to follow a more elaborate vrata, it is prescribed that one remain awake for the entire night. During each of the four three-hour long divisions (prahara) of the night one should worship as follows. In the first prahara, Śiva is worshipped with a particular sacred utterance (mantra), a respectful offering (argha), a reverential obeisance

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181 The distinction between these two is not easy to make. The Durga Pūja is also referred to at times in authoritative texts as a vrata. There is generally a dimension of austerity, like fasting, in the vrata.

182 I was given this information by a Śākta priest (purohita), when I asked him what is commonly prescribed on this day.
(pranāma), and the liṅga is bathed in milk (dugdha). In the second prahara, the process is repeated and the liṅga is bathed in yoghurt (dadhi). In the third and fourth, it is bathed in honey (madhu) and clarified butter (ghṛta/ghi) respectively. If one cannot stay awake the whole procedure may be condensed into the first prahara.

The fast may be total, with the devotee refraining from both food and water for the whole day and night. However if this is inappropriate (for reasons of health, age, etc.) pure food (śuddha bhoga), consisting of fruit, may be prepared at home. Also a sweet syrupy beverage (śarbat) with lemon, or ground hemp (bhang) may be consumed.\textsuperscript{183} The practice is not restricted to males, although women consume less bhang and prefer to partake of it in the privacy of the home. The Śivarātri fast may be broken by taking a sip of water and reciting the fast-breaking (parana) mantra. Recitations of stories (kathā), or songs of praise (stotra) such as the Mahimana Stotra or Śiva Sahasranāma may take place.

Śiva is still as always the prime deity of Banāras. The identification of Durgā as

\textsuperscript{183}The consumption of hemp (cannabis sativa indica) is closely associated with Śiva, who is often depicted in a domestic scene, grinding the substance, while his wife Pārvatī is casually engaged in stringing a necklace of severed human heads. Afficionados of bhang jokingly interpret the very name of the city, Banāras, as meaning "preparing bhang" (banā rasa). In Banāras, the hemp plant is consumed in a variety of ways. The resin, hasish (caras), hand rubbed by sādhus who have gone on pilgrimage into the Himalayas during the hot season, is smoked in a funnel-like clay pipe (cillum). The flowering heads of the hemp plant (gaijja) may also be smoked in this manner. Several sādhus, both in Banāras and in the mountains near Badrinath, told me that the hemp plant, which grows abundantly and wild in the Himalayas is the Devī. This, they explained, is the meaning of the epithet Śailaputri (Daughter of the Mountain) and Pārvatī (She who is of the Mountain). The trident (triśūla) associated with Śiva is the hemp leaf which has such a shape and which is identified as the goddess. The goddess’s association with the decapitation of human heads and even her own decapitation (e.g., Chinnamastā) was explained as the harvesting of the hemp plant and its effect on human consciousness. There are frequently encountered images of Śakti, who is dynamic and often depicted with a decapitated human head, astride the supine and physically passive Śiva. This, I was once told, represents the dynamic interplay between the sādhu (Śiva) and his consciousness (Śakti).

Hemp in Banāras is most commonly inhaled in a mixture of other pure foods. The ground hemp leaf (bhang) is often eaten in a little sweet ball (lādā) where it is ground together with black-pepper, sugar and cardamom, and covered with a thin silver leaf. Or it is mixed into a beverage called a thandhat (a "coldie"), which is an extract of nuts like almonds, spices like black pepper and cardamom, rose water, milk and sugar. Heavy consumers drink the ground bhang, mixed with water, straight up with a squeeze of lime juice. Other preparations such as bhang almond biscuits (nanketai), sold in discreet locations, are also available in the city. On the recreational uses of bhang among the artisans of Banāras, see Kumar (1988).
Siva's spouse solidifies her importance among Śaivites.

**Holi**

*Full Moon of Phalguna (February/March)*

Holi vies with Dīpavali as the biggest festival in Banaras among the non-Bengāli Hindu community. On Holi huge bonfires are lit all over the city. Boys and young men cavort around the fires and move in groups, yelling obscenities (gālli) and rough-housing with whomever they encounter. The mood is mischievous and the result is mayhem. Copious quantities of *bhâng* may be consumed. Festivities continue the next day when colours are splashed on any available target with cathartic benefit for all. By the afternoon the liberal splashing of colour ends. People bathe and put on clean clothes. Women come out on the streets and people visit friends and distribute sweets. Even though the licentious application of colour has ended, people still smear the foreheads of acquaintances with coloured powder. The pervasive sexual dimension of the festival is best evidenced in the number of special publications (newspapers, booklets, and magazines) available at this time. They include photographs, cartoons, poetry, and prose, all with sexual themes. These are passed around by the men and also make it into the hands of women. There are also poetry recitation gatherings (*kavi sammilini*) where political satire and sexual humour is order of the day.

Holi is often referred to as a festival of the lower classes or a festival of the Kali Yuga. It seems connected to a tribal festival called Śabarotsava which a few centuries ago was linked with Durgā Pūjā. On the day following Navarātra, men and women were enjoined to dress in bark and leaves, and to revel with explicit sexual gestures and language, when the goddess was being dispatched back to her husband's abode.

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184 Some of these publications are extremely explicit sexually, and might qualify as "pornography" in the West. See, for instance, Veda Prakāśa Miśra, *Cūta Darśana* (Banāras: Šatarudra Prakāśa, n.d.).

185 These are generally attended by men and any unprepared woman chancing by risks an inordinate excess of sexual jibes or even a manhandling.

186See Kane 1930-62:177 who refers to these aspects of the festival of Śabarotsava in relationship to Durgā Pūjā. If people neglected to do this they would displease the goddess and earn her wrath.
Perhaps something of the revelry of Śabarotsava is still visible in the visarjana processions of Durgā Pūjā, but there is no obvious sexual dimension nowadays. This is quite the contrary during Holi.

Certain Durgā-worshipping Śākta tantras, who perform private ritualized spiritual practices (śādhanā) on Holi, admitted that they include the five element (pañcātattva) pūjā normally associated with what is called the left-hand (vāmācārī) tantric path (mārga). This pūjā involves the ritual participation in five things which are normally considered impure or prohibited. Since Holi typically is a festival of reversal, or of anti-structure, when the traditional hierarchy of values is temporarily dissolved before being reconstituted anew, the pañcātattva ritual seems appropriate.187 In this ritual, activities associated with the qualities of darkness and inertia (tamas guṇa), and therefore shunned, are given importance. These acts are the consumption of meat (māṃsa), fish (matsya), intoxicating beverages (mada), and parched grain snacks (mudra), and sexual intercourse (maithuna). The pañcamākāra/pañcātattva ritual may be performed within a circle (cakra) of practitioners (śādhaka), but the tantras with whom I spoke said they performed the ritual privately. When I asked one tantric, whom I knew quite well, in the presence of other, more senior members, how he managed to perform the maithuna portion alone, since he had no partner, he listed several kinds of permissible maithuna including self-induced orgasm, homosexual union, heterosexual union, and divine union. None of the other practitioners present objected to his statements. He has since married and now performs the maithuna rituals with his wife, whom he is instructing. More traditional (right-hand path) Śākta tantras expressed disgust when I asked them about this interpretive elaboration on the varieties of the maithuna tattva. In this ritual, substantial amounts of bhang are consumed, quite in keeping with the public celebration of Holi. The bhang is called Vijayā (victory), which is an epithet of Durgā, reinforcing her

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187 A classic description of the festival of Holi is given by McKim Marriott (1966). According to Victor Turner (1977), social structures periodically yield to "anti-structure" within which the traditional norms are held in abeyance. Anti-structure may foment creativity, or serve as a transitory phase from an old to a new order. In the festival of Holi, the anti-structure is essentially cathartic. Tensions created by the rigid demands of one's class status, or by sexual and behavioral restrictions, are temporarily released. However, once the pressure is dissipated, the social structures return to a renewed, but essentially original order.
association with consciousness-affecting substances.

**Caitra Navarātra**

*First to the Ninth of the Waxing Fortnight of Caitra (March-April)*

The Caitra or Vasanta (spring) Navarātra is the first festival of what is generally considered the New Year in Banāras (Eck 1982:258). Although many other days are designated as New Year’s Day by various communities in North India, the first of the waxing fortnight of Caitra is designated as the official beginning of the North Indian Hindu calendar. That the Devī festival marks the beginning of the New Year, plainly suggests the important place she plays in the entire annual festival cycle and hints at her role in the larger cosmological cycles of time. Caitra Navarātra is celebrated at Durgājī in almost identical fashion to Āsvina Navarātra, except that this festival seems to draw many more devotees from the surrounding villages. At present, it is the second largest festival to the Devī. Unlike the autumn celebration, in Caitra Navarātra, Durga is not worshipped with the colourful clay images established by communities in public, temporarily constructed shrines.

**The Mythic Background**

The Caitra Navarātra is thought by many devotees to be a reenactment of the first account of human worship of Durgā by the king Suratha and the merchant Samādhi during the Svārociya Manvantara. This myth, often called the frame story for the

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188 This lunar calendar is called the Vikramaditya system, which commences counting Year One, fifty-six or fifty-seven years before the solar-based Gregorian calendar. Thus 1990 C.E. is the Vikramaditya year (samvat) 2046 or 2047.

189 This myth is also attributed to the Āsvina (autumn) Navarātra celebrations. Those who subscribe to that viewpoint (the minority), sometimes refer to verses 12.12-13 from the *Durgā Saptasattī*, in which the Devī states that those who have heard her praises (māhāmya) during the great annual autumn worship will receive her grace.

śaratkāle mahāpajā kriyate yā ca vārsīkī/  
tasyāṃ mamaiianmāhāmyaṃ śrūṇā bhaktisaminvitaḥ//12  
...  
manusyo matpratādeṇa bhavisyati na samsayaḥ//13
demon-slaying exploits of the Devi, is contained in the Durga Saptasati (Chapter 1). It recounts how the righteous emperor Suratha, who was reduced to being a mere king in his land after a defeat by the Kolavidvamsin kings, eventually had his kingdom usurped by his ministers (1.3-5). While out hunting, he slipped into exile and ended up taking refuge in the forest hermitage (āśrama) of the sage, Medhas (1.8-10). He encountered the merchant (vaśya) Samadhi, who had also been deprived of his wealth and banished by his wife and sons (1.16-22). The merchant and monarch brooded on their fate, unable to understand their enduring feeling of affection for those who had betrayed them. When they approached the sage (ṛṣi) Medhas for help, he revealed to them the nature of the goddess Durga, as the source of delusion who if propitiated grants pleasures (bhoga), heaven (svarga), and ultimate fulfillment (apavarga) (1.34-44).

In order to obtain a vision of the Devi, leaving the sage, they went down to a river bank, and practiced austerities (tapas) (13.5-6). At times they fasted completely or restricted their diet, and recited the Devī Sūkta, a Vedic hymn to the goddess (13.7). They built an earthen image of the goddess on the riverbank and worshipped it with flowers, incense, fire, and water (13.7-8). Keeping their mind firmly fixed on her, they offered blood extracted from their limbs, and after three years of such worship obtained a vision of the Devi, who granted them their wishes (13.8-10). Suratha chose the return of his kingdom and subsequently a longer enduring kingship. He was granted both sides of his request, the latter through his incarnation as the Manu Sāvarni (13.11-12, 13.14-15). Manus are semi-divine beings who rule over the cosmos for large cycles of time, called Manvantaras. The merchant Samādhi chose release from dualistic attachment and was granted the knowledge which leads to perfection (13.12-13, 13.15-16).
Another myth concerns Rāvana’s worship of Durgā. Rāvana, the demon king of Lāṅka, was a brāhmaṇa and great worshipper of Śiva and Durgā. He had reestablished the worship of Durgā in the spring which, at the time, was the only annual pūjā for the Devī. Since Rāma needed to defeat Rāvana he had to gain the favour of Durgā and so invoked her at a different time (the autumn) and asked Rāvana to preside as the priest (purohita). This myth of Rāma and Rāvana’s rituals tells of divine precedents for Durgā worship, both in the spring and the fall. However, the myth suggests that the form of Devī worship associated with the spring (Vasanta), the South (Lāṅka), the brāhmaṇa (Rāvana), and the god Śiva was supplanted or supplemented by Devī worship associated with the autumn (Śarada), the North (Ayodhyā), the kṣatriya (Rāma), and the god Viṣṇu (Rāma).

Worship Patterns

During Caitra Navarātra, the stronger village participation in the festival seems to account for the slightly more pronounced healing activity and an increase in the number of possessions by the Devī in the temple. More women than men appeared to be worshipping during this Navarātra (especially during the early hours, when there were twice as many women in attendance than men). Also, more worshippers at this Navarātra are involved in fulfilling some kind of devotional pledge (vrata) involving, for example, ritual circumambulation (parikrama) and recitations of the Durgā Saptaśatī.

Notably absent during Caitra Navarātra are the public altars (pandal) where large straw and earth images of the goddess are established and worshipped. In the few Bengāli homes which still celebrate the Āśvina Navarātra elaborately, there is no elaborate pūjā during the spring festival. Devotees (Bengāli and other) who do perform home worship of the Devī at this time restrict themselves to establishment of the goddess

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190I was told this myth on various occasions by devotees at Durgājī. See also, Östör 1980:18-19, who discusses this myth.

191A notable exception is the Ānandamayī Mā śārma in Banāras, where the Durgā Pūjā ritual is celebrated in identical fashion during both Navarātras with a large image of Durgā as Mahiśāsuramardini.
in an earthen jar (ghata) and recitation of the Durgā Saptāsattī. The virtual absence of public, community organized, pandal worship shifts the visible focus of the location of the goddess to the temple where she resides, and to the home shrine, where she is established without pomp.

While the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage is prescribed and performed by tens of thousands during the autumn Navarātra, the Caitra Navarata is said to be a special period for the pilgrimage circuit to the Nine Gaurīs of Banaras. However, the number of people (mainly women) who perform this Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage (navagaurī yātra) is infinitesimally small compared to those (male and female) who persist in performing the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage (navadurgā yātra) during this festival. This phenomenon has led many pilgrims to identify the Nine Gaurīs with the Nine Durgās, and even to think that Sṛṅgāra Gaurī, the fourth of the Nine Gaurīs, is the same as Kuśmāṇḍā Durgā of Durgā Mandir, the fourth of the Nine Durgās.

Interpretive Observation

Relative to the present manifestation of the autumn Navarātra, the spring Navarātra appears more oriented to elements of fertility as evidenced by its popularity among the rural villagers. During the spring Navarātra, the Devī is worshipped either at her temples or in the earthen jar. Although these dimensions are just as prevalent during the autumn celebrations, which indicate that it too is a celebration of fertility, the autumn celebration is overlain with other, more dramatic characteristics. The autumn Navarātra, in contrast to the spring celebration, mobilizes communities, accentuates the martial dimension of worship, and induces a totally different "pilgrimage" circuit, namely the movement of huge crowds to see the public images which have been established in temporary temples. Returning to the element of fertility in both festivals, one notes that the earthen jar is set atop a low earth altar, which is sowed with seeds. The jar is filled

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192 The newspapers of Banaras are among the sources which promulgate this tradition. They publish photos from their archives of the Nine Gaurīs and give the locations of the shrines of these goddesses. See Chapter Three for a detailed discussion of the Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage.
with water, and crowned with leaf-bearing twigs and a coconut fruit. At the end of the nine days, the grains in the earth altar have sprouted and these sprouts are sometimes worn behind the ear.

The rural participation in Durga worship in the city could, in part, be attributed to the attractive appeal of the Gaṅgā during this month. The weather is warming after the cold season, and therefore the river waters are just ideal for bathing. It is thus an highly suitable time to visit the sacred city of Banāras, and take darśana of the goddess Gaṅgā. For people with agriculturally based occupations, the oncoming dry season is a dreaded event. If the rains do not come, there will be great suffering. This fear perhaps encourages rural devotees to re-establish their relationship with the Devī, the fecund and fertile earth, the source of their livelihood and life-giving nourishment.

Although this idea is speculative, there is reason to suggest that the spring celebration is the older of the two Navarātras and originated with strong agricultural themes. As an agricultural festival, it would have primarily involved the class of cultivators (śūdras, according to Basham 1954: 240-241) and the brāhmaṇa class who would have served as priests in certain aspects of worship. The establishment of the Devī in the earthen jar, which is laden with the symbolism of vegetative fertility, is the primary ritual in all special forms of Devī worship performed during both Navarātras. In the myths of the Durgā Saptaśati, the protagonist worshippers, Suratha and Samādhi, are kṣatriya and vaiśya, respectively, members of essentially non-agricultural, urban classes. Although they received the advice of a brāhmaṇa sage, Suratha and Samādhi appear to have worshipped the Devī without the intercession of the priestly class. They

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193 The establishment and worship of the Devī in the jar is discussed in detail in Chapter Three, Four, and the Appendix.

194 I was told that in villages, the sprouts are examined to predict the quality of the following year's harvest.

195 See Kumar 1988:93, who points out how the beauty of the river is especially appealing in Caitra.

196 These two classes often formed the bulk of agricultural village society. According to David Mandelbaum, "in much of South India, there seem to have been few indigenous Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, the martial and the mercantile categories" (1970:23).
worshipped Durgā by reciting a Vedic hymn, by performing austerities, and by making offerings (including their own blood) to a clay image which they themselves had constructed. If we acknowledge the great influence of the Durgā Saptasati, which is evidenced by its central place in Devī worship, it is highly probable that Durgā worship in the period after the composition of the text (6th or 7th century) would have involved all of the classes of Hindu society. It would have expressed itself in a combination of private, lay worship, as well as in rituals with priestly involvement. Its agricultural origins would have been overlain with rituals of personal empowerment in political and economic arenas, for these are the concerns of the warrior and merchant classes. This is still visible in the Caitra Navarātra of today. Devotees visit temples, places of brāhmaṇa-conducted rituals, but also perform personal worship through austerities such as fasting, keeping vigils, and doing circumambulations, and through recitation of the Durgā Saptasati.

The Rama-Rāvana myth of the origin of the Aśvina Navarātra festival, supports the suggestion that the spring festival preceded the autumn celebration. Just when the autumn festival began is also unknown, but the martial element of the festival dominates the origin myth. The autumn festival follows the rainy season, and coincides with the period during which kings traditionally waged war. The martial dimension of the autumn celebration was most strongly accentuated in the form of worship which originated among the kingly classes in Bengal in the seventeenth century. Large clay effigies of Durgā as the Demon Slayer, wielding many weapons, became the central devotional image.197

Ratha Yātra
[Second of the Waxing Fortnight of āśādha (June/July)]

Ratha Yātra is renowned in Puri where an enormous chariot (ratha) is pulled around the temple of Jagannātha (Lord of the World), a form of Viṣṇu. In Banāras, too,

197A detailed description of the origins and form of the autumn Navarātra worship is found in Chapters Three and Four, and in the Appendix.
a large chariot slowly transports the three deities along a wide road permanently named after the chariot pilgrimage (*ratha yātra*). The festival is related to the monsoon rains, for in 1991 many Banārasis felt it was inauspicious to attend the event since it had not as yet begun to rain. "The flags of the chariot must be wet," I heard them explain. Fortunately, on the last day of the three-day festival, the day before an official declaration of "drought" was to be made, the rains came.

On the chariot that is pulled down Ratha Yātra street, images of Jagannātha, his brother, Balarāma, and their sister, the goddess Subhadrā are placed. The *Mahābhārata* (Ādi Parva, Chapters 213-228) recounts how Arjuna, enamoured of Subhadrā is advised by her brother and his friend, Krṣṇa, to abduct and wed her, one of the legitimate forms of marriage for a warrior. Subhadrā is also known as Ekanāṁśā (She who is Integral) and represents Supreme Divinity as Consciousness. Ratha Yātra marks the day when the Durgā image makers begin preparation of the mūrtis that will be used for Durgā Pūjā some months later.

Subhadrā, the goddess, is Krṣṇa’s sister. When image makers commence fabricating Durgā images on Ratha Yātra, they make a connection (albeit weak) between Durgā and Subhadrā, which in turn reinforces the identification of Durgā (Subhadrā) as Viṣṇu’s (Krṣṇa) sister. The myth of Subhadrā’s abduction and marriage by Arjuna parallels the myths of the *Durgā Saptāśat* where Mahiṣa, Śumbha, and Niśumbha attempt to possess and wed Durgā by force. The appropriateness of Arjuna’s actions is affirmed by the advice he received from Krṣṇa, who approved of the warrior’s status and claims to his divine sister. Unlike Arjuna, the demons who try to win Durgā, the "offspring" of the gods, are slain.

**Hari Ekādaśī**

*Eleventh of the Waxing Fortnight of Āśādha (June/July)*

Hari Ekādaśī, as the name suggests, takes place on the eleventh (*ekādaśi*) of the bright fortnight of Sravaṇa and is said to be the time when Viṣṇu (Hari) goes to sleep.

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198 A textual version of this myth is also found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Tenth Skanda.
It is the time when wandering world renouncers (sannyāsa) observe caturmāsa, remaining in monastic seclusion for a period of about four months.\textsuperscript{199} The period of Viṣṇu’s sleep in the yearly calendrical cycle reenacts the larger cycle of cosmic dissolution called the pralaya.\textsuperscript{200} The undifferentiated, unmanifest, but latent creation is symbolically imagined as Viṣṇu asleep upon the infinite serpent (Ananta Śeṣa) who floats atop the cosmic waters.

The Mythic Background

In the context of our study, it is the goddess Durgā, as Mahāmāyā, or Yoganidrā, who is recognized by her devotees as the power which puts Viṣṇu to sleep. It is she who truly upholds, sustains, and orchestrates the trinity of creation, preservation, and destruction. It is during this period of sleep, when Viṣṇu’s powers of cosmic preservation are arrested, that the twin powers of creation and destruction emerge in germinal form. A pertinent variant on this myth is well known to Durgā worshippers and is told in the Durgā Saptaśati (1.49-53) and the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa (1.6.20ff). While Viṣṇu sleeps, a lotus grows out of his navel like an umbilicus on which sits Brahmā, the creator deity. Simultaneously, from the earwax which falls from Viṣṇu’s ears grow two demons, Madhu and Kaitabha. Both Brahmā and the demons grow in power independently. While Brahmā contemplates himself, furthering the act of creation, the demons (asura), aware of a greater sustaining power, pray to, and propitiate the Devī.\textsuperscript{201} She grants them a boon. When they discover that they cannot enjoy immortality, they request that their demise be at their own request. It is not long before the demons grow in power and begin to threaten the creator, Brahmā. Brahmā, also aware of the Devī’s underlying

\textsuperscript{199}On the pervasiveness of this practice among mendicants of virtually all ancient sects in India see Dutt 1962:53.

\textsuperscript{200}There are numerous ways of reckoning the Hindu cosmological calendar. One system sees a full human year (360 days) as but a day (and night) in the life of the gods. One year of the gods is but a day of Brahmā. One year of Brahmā is a single day of Viṣṇu. One hundred years of Brahmā brings an end to creation, resulting in a mahāpralaya. One year of Viṣṇu is a single day of Rudra.

\textsuperscript{201}In the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa, it is the Goddess Vāc, associated with Speech or more abstractly, with śabda (sound vibration) who gives the demons their power.
supremacy begins to propitiate her to leave Viṣṇu, so that he may awaken and perform the task of preservation.

Viṣṇu's sleep marks the beginning of many important Devī festivals, starting with the Durgā Mela in the month of Śravana, followed by Durgā's birth and śrāgāra in Bhādrapada, Mahālakṣmi Vrata, the Āśvina Navarātra, Dīpāvalī or Kālī Pūjā, Annakūta, and Jagaddhātrī Pūjā. One might suggest that as Viṣṇu sleeps under the soporific power of the Devī as Yoganidrā or Mahāmāyā, the goddess plays. This is sometimes referred to as Viṣṇu dreaming the cosmic drama. The Devī's play consists simultaneously of nurturing the newly created cosmos, threatening its destruction, and preserving the balance between these two forces.

Śrāvana Mela
[The Entire Month of Śrāvana (June/July)]

This is a month long fair which takes place mainly on the grounds of the Durgā Mandir. It draws thousands of people from the neighbouring villages who visit Śiva temples (primarily Viśvanātha) on Mondays, and Devī temples (primarily Durgāji) on Tuesdays. The grounds of Durgāji are rented to entrepreneurs who set up ferris wheels and merry-go-rounds of all sizes, photo booths and games of chance. A small zoo and circus acts, food stalls and vendors, add to the carnival excitement. The near life-size animated models of deities displayed by the relatively new Tulsi Manas temple, beside Durgāji, is a major attraction for the wide-eyed visitors from the villages.

The monsoon rains have come, and cultivators have free time as they wait for the parched soil to absorb moisture and for seeds to sprout. It is a good time to visit the city for supplies, fulfill some ritual obligations, and enjoy the excitement Banaras offers.

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202While Durgāji's land used to be the main location of the fair grounds, the Śrāvana Mela now extends to cover almost all available land on the main road between Durgā Mandir and Sankata Mochana temple about half a kilometer to the south.

203While the carnival-like festivities appeal to visitors from the villages, the city organizes a free entertainment program called the Gaṅgā Mahotsava for those who enjoy classical music and dance. Held on the banks of the Gaṅgā, with the steps of Daśāśvamedha Ghāṭ serving as seating, it exposes large numbers of people to this aspect of the city's culture.
The first nine days of the waxing fortnight are particularly recommended for the performance of the Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage, in which devotees visit nine shrines of the goddess Gaurī.

**Interpretation of the Time-Cycles in the Durgājī Yantra**

The mythic foundations and patterns of worship which occur at Durgājī through the year enhance our understanding of the conceptualization of Durgā and how it renders meaning to devotional and social activity. Few devotees would be familiar with all the myths to which I have alluded. Similarly, few are likely to participate in all of the Devi’s yearly festivals. Rather than presenting these patterns of worship through the activities of specific devotees, I opted for a generalized, systematic treatment, for the sake of clarity. But this structure is not artificial. The temple priests are certainly aware of every significant day in the yearly cycle since each of these days may require special ritual action. The owners and shopkeepers are equally aware of the cadence of worship through the day, week, months, and year since their livelihood and prosperity depends on it. Ultimately, it is the awareness of the significance of these sacred times in the minds of devotees which is crucial. Should devotees cease to consider these dates important and should worship wane, the temple could become dormant. At present, Durgājī is anything but dormant. It is one of the most popular temples in Banāras, highly regarded as a place where the Devi’s presence is palpable and her grace accessible. It is a place of power and supernormal attainment (*siddha pūha*). The interpretations which follow are shaped by my observations and discussions with worshippers, as well as through my reading of textual sources.

From Ram Prasad’s daily routine, it is clear that Durgā is, for him, a royal mistress and loving mother to whom he renders humble service (*seva*). Although he is considered, by most, to be the finest representative of such *seva* among the temple personnel, others too relate to Durgā out of similar feelings. Through the opulent items such as silk *sārīs* and gold masks, symbols with a royal significance, Durgā represents
a monarch who rules over her loyal subjects. When devotees call out "Mā Durgā," they affirm that Durgā represents a loving mother to her children. The symbolic activities of all Durgā bhaktas (those engaged in loving devotional service) are best understood when viewed from these two perspectives of loyalty and love. The temple personnel awaken the Devī, bathe her, clothe and decorate her, feed her, worship her, and put her to bed. In return for this loving care and devotion, Durgā provides the owners, priests, and workers, in very real ways, with shelter, food, prosperity and protection. Were it not for the existence of the physical manifestations of the symbolic matrix which is Durgā, the Durgājī yantra (e.g., the mūrti, the temple, the kunda, the ritual worship, and so on), their abode and economic sustenance would vanish.

On a general level, it is possible to suggest that although religious ritual activity may create new symbols, it more often structures and reinforces previously existing ones. In so doing ritual sustains a universe, peopled by forms and values, within which activity is rendered meaningful. It is this meaningful activity which is the source of psychological and economic security. In other words, a devotee's worship activities are only deemed worthwhile by others if they produce tangible economic benefits, or discernable psychological benefits. A regular worshipper at Durgājī once told me that "too much bhakti is not good. People can go insane (pāgal, "cracked")." I pointed out that she worshipped regularly, to which she replied that she did not spend all her time at the temple, but worked for a living. In her opinion, excessive bhakti could be an excuse to avoid work. Her statements illustrate ideas which I heard from many others. In Hindu society, where spiritual life is regarded highly, people have various criteria for discerning the "sincerity" of a devotee’s worship. Devotional service should produce psychological stability, primarily characterized by a sense of peace (sānti). Furthermore, devotees should exhibit some signs of success (siddhi), visible proof of having earned the favour of the deity worshipped. The material success enjoyed by the owners, priest, and workers at Durgājī validates the "sanity" of their world view, in which the presence of the Devī looms large. It also validates the "sincerity" within their life-style of constant service to

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204She and her husband managed a small store near Durgājī.
the goddess. Furthermore, their success at life which is lived in complete devotion to Durgā implies an intangible, but potential spiritual success.

The examination of worship patterns in this chapter supports the previous interpretation that the Durgā Mandir site itself, especially the kūnda and the temple are in fact thought of as the Devī. During the *srīgāra*, which is the annual decoration festival, it is not just the inner sanctum and Devī image which are cleaned and decorated. The entire temple site, including the kūnda is scrubbed and adorned, a procedure which is not performed at any other time. Devotees who circumambulate the temple often touch the eight-petalled (*aṣṭadala*) lotus located on the eastern face of the temple wall, and pivot when they do so. That particular point, which is often referred to as the seat (*pītha*) of the Devī, is the centre of their entire ritual circumambulation. There is a strong sense that this is the point where devotees and the Devī, in her manifest form as the yantra which is Durgājī, are brought together in intimate contact.

The close connection between the temple personnel and the Devī is highlighted by the cooked food offerings (*bhoga*), for in these, an intimate contact with the deity is made. The food (*bhoga*) which is offered to Durgā is ultimately eaten by the temple personnel who prepare it. Thus Mā’s food preferences are actually closely aligned with their own. Despite this sharing of common substance, the hierarchical distinction between deity and devotee is maintained, for the devotees are not eating with the goddess. They are eating her leftovers, food which has been sanctified by her touch.

The ultimate offering devotees can make is their own life, evidenced in the case of Kukkuṭeśvara Mahādeva, the legendary *pājārī* who was sacrificed to Durgājī. By being sacrificed, Kukkuṭeśvara Mahādeva achieved the highest union possible between the devotee and the Devī. Although he is enshrined in a neighbouring temple in the form of a *liṅga*, suggestive of a status akin to Śiva, Kukkuṭeśvara Mahādeva is not regarded as the Devī’s male consort. In fact, none of the male deities in the temple vicinity have a status (spousal or other) that is considered equal to hers. In certain temples, the main deity is put to bed with his/her counterpart. Durgā sleeps alone. Even though some priests claim that the disembodied spirit of Kukkuṭeśvara Mahādeva occasionally goes to
the *garbhagṛha* at night, they say it is to perform a traditional priestly *pujā* to Durgā, not a carnal devotional service. The metaphysical implications here are that one can either merge completely with the goddess in a non-dualistic (*advaita*) union, through self-sacrifice, or dualistically, be hierarchically subordinate to her. The dualistic notion of a loving union between equals, symbolized by embracing male and female deities, is wholly absent from the conceptions of Durgā *bhaktas*. It is neither implicit nor discernable in any of their worship activities. Such a notion may, however, form part of the conceptual framework of Durgā tantrics.

Tantrics appear to be most concerned with realization of the goddess, but only after they have fully understood her powers (*śakti*). The most encompassing term for these powers is *māyā*, which is the Devī’s power of illusion. In the view of some Śāktas, "the whole of existence is illusory." By this, they do not mean that *māyā* is superimposed upon some underlying reality. Instead, although it may sound paradoxical, the essential form and nature of Absolute Reality is illusory. This is the body and being of the Devī, Mahāmāyā Durgā. It is within this apparent manifestation of the cosmos, which is like Viṣṇu’s dream, and which is the manifest form of the Devī, that humans go through (*samsāra*) their lives. Birth and death, sickness and health, success and failure, all the phenomena of worldly existence are merely forms of the play of the Devī’s power of *māyā*. Sorcerers and healers tap into some of this power. Although it is difficult to generalize, the implication is that tantrics strive to understand, to utilize, and eventually to surpass the abilities of sorcerers and healers. Ultimately, they seek union with *śakti*, conceived either non-dualistically or dualistically. Since Durgā’s conceptual matrix does not easily permit sexual congress as a symbol of union (it is essentially demons who strive for this, to their detriment) Durgā tantrics are more likely involved in striving for the fullest access to the Devī’s powers or for a non-dualistically conceived union.

Durgā’s association with the number nine is highlighted in her connection to the nine planets, themselves minor deities. The auspicious and inauspicious dimensions of planetary influences reveal a link to the ambivalent character of certain goddesses, and particularly of Durgā. However, my inquiries revealed the surprisingly common
interpretation that it is not Durgā who was the direct cause of inauspicious occurrences. Rather, it is aspects of her power (śakti), in the form of minor goddesses, or as malevolent forces, perhaps directed by agents such as sorcerers which are the cause of problems. Durgā is, however, immediately present and ever ready to protect the victim of malevolence whenever she is invoked and properly propitiated. After all, Durgā is present within the śakti of the malevolent agent. This interpretive scheme facilitates our understanding of the Devī’s ambivalent nature and the behaviours of sorcerers and healers at the Durgā temple.

The idea that Durgā’s power is freely available to all is voiced in the Durgā Saptāśati, and again in the Rāma and Rāvaṇa myth cycle. Rāvaṇa is said to have revived the spring Durgā worship and gained many of his powers in that manner. Rāma, too, worshipped the Devī, but in the autumn. He revealed great sincerity and gained the power to defeat Rāvaṇa. This image of this classic battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, both empowered by the goddess, aids our understanding of the battles fought between illness and health, injury and protection, good and bad fortune, sleep and wakefulness, bondage and liberation that are played out at the Durgā Mandir by devotees, sorcerers, healers, and tantrics.

I was told that Rāma’s decision to wage war in autumn is quite typical, for kings, unable to carry out military campaigns in the rainy season, were finally able to move their armies in the autumn. The rainy season was a time to prepare the weapons of warfare (e.g., bells, swords, armour, etc.). Certain metal-working castes, who claim to have been armourers, designate themselves as belonging to the warrior class and are devout goddess worshippers. Their livelihood, in those days of kingly warfare, would have depended on the quality of their workmanship, which, in turn, would have

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{205}} \text{I have encountered non-Śākta Hindus who refer to Durgā as the cause of disease.} \]

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{206}} \text{Kumar refers to the kṣatriya class claims made by the kasera caste of metalworkers in Banāras (1988:58).} \]
depended on Durgā’s grace. The myth of Rāma’s Durgā Pūjā suggests a growth in popularity of Durgā worship, prevalent even today among the warrior classes (ksatriya). Thus princely patronage and the firm awareness of Durgā’s protective power in autumnal warfare probably account for the martial dimension of Āśvina Navarātra. This martial element, evidenced by the worship of weapons (āyuṭha pūjā), and icons of Durgā as a demon crusher, overlays aspects of fertility, material success, and yogic attainment (siddhi) which also characterize both Navarātras.

The parallels between striving for temporal or spiritual power is evident in the concept of the "world-conqueror," a term which could stand either for a great monarch or one for one who has overcome worldly existence. Certain figures such as the Jain Tīrthāṅkara, Mahāvīra (Great Hero), and Gautama Buddha were called Jinas (conquerors). The great religious traditions founded by these figures, emphasized the necessity of choosing between temporal and eternal ends. That spiritual pursuits were clearly elevated over mundane ones is illustrated in the legend of Gautama’s renunciation. Durgā worship, on the other hand, offers the devotee either the temporal or the eternal option, as noted in the myth of King Suratha and the merchant Samādhī, who opt for a supreme kingship and liberating wisdom, respectively. Both perform the same devotional rituals to the Devī, but the ends they seek are different. One chooses victory over earthly enemies, the other over the inner enemy of worldly attachments. The powers of both enemies, worldly and illusory, ultimately derive from the goddess, and it is only her power which can defeat them. These enemies, in part, are the demons over which she is victorious. When one recalls the foregoing themes of the Devī’s conquest over worldly and spiritual obstacles, the epithets of victory (e.g., Jayā, Vijayā) and slogans, such as "Victory to Mother Durgā (Durgā Māyā ki Jai)" called out by devotees seem particularly

As previously mentioned, the thathera jāṭī who cast bronze are renowned Durgā worshippers. At present their work consists of making bells, religious icons, and brassware which is used for devotional or household purposes. I suggest that in the past, during periods of warfare, these metal workers who were involved in producing weapons (āyuṭha) and armour (kavaca) were well employed. From the Śākta perspective, recalling the notion of sākti entering the weapons, they would have been likely to attribute the qualities of impermeability for their armour or the strength and effectiveness of their weapons to Durgā’s beneficence.
appropriate.

Mythologically, the destructive energies released by the Devī, sometimes themselves appear "demonic." However, such destructive "demonic" forms (e.g., Bhadrakālī in the Sātī myth) are in fact good, gracious, and auspicious (bhadra). They destroy deities who have sunk into demonic status (e.g., Dakṣa) or demons who have achieved divine status (e.g., Mahiṣa). Through their activity, they rectify a cosmic imbalance. Dakṣa, hierarchically supreme, has sunk in divinity (become demonic) due to his treatment of Sātī (hierarchically low, but spiritually supreme). Sātī creates a divine "demonic form," Bhadrakālī, who destroys this demonic divine form (Dakṣa) restoring the spiritually supreme (Sātī, and Śiva) to their proper hierarchical place. The beheading of Dakṣa would seem to represent destruction of the false status. The replacement of his head with that of a goat (humiliation), could symbolize the reestablishment of that divinity but in a newer (lower) hierarchical position.

Similarly, Mahiṣa grows in power and usurps Indra's throne. An essentially human figure, he has gained divine status, but unlike, King Suratha, for example, who through the Devī's grace reincarnates as a Manu and achieves semi-divine status, Mahiṣa's desires are limitless. While he explicitly desires sexual union with the Devī, he implicitly desires to dominate her. The power struggle which ensues is portrayed in the battle between them, wherein slowly but surely, all of Mahiṣa's armies are destroyed, and he himself must ultimately succumb to being beheaded. When his animal head is severed, he emerges in human form again to be felled by the goddess. A message which this myth conveys to devotees is that powers (siddhi) obtained through austerities or through boons received from any deity, ultimately derive from the Devī. She is the giver of such powers (siddhidātṛt). What transforms the status of recipients of such powers and boons from righteous to demonic is their disregard for orthodox social order (dharma). They generally forget their position on the social hierarchy and strive for new status within the same life-time. Orthodox brahmanical tradition and the principle of karma dictate that changes in social status occur between rebirths, so that the merit gained in one life transfers into a more fortunate rebirth. The Mahiṣa myth reinforces the
entrenched social value that such vertical mobility through the hierarchically ordered strata of society is dangerous to the cosmic balance, and must be stopped.

Perhaps this is why the typical Šakta devotee does not seek extraordinary powers. Most worship of Durgā is targeted at less ambitious ends than divine status. It is actually considered to be somewhat uncouth to worship the Devī for particular goals, although this is clearly common. Most devotees worship Durgā in the hopes that she will maintain the good fortune that they are enjoying, and protect them from foreseeable or unforeseeable dangers in their lives. Others wish for spouses, children, wealth, success in work or studies, or the thwarting of their opponents. Many of these desires draw upon and thus reinforce the conception of Durgā as nurturer (e.g., Jagaddhātrī, Annapūrṇā, Kuśmāndā). Since such worship relates to the maternal image of the goddess, it highlights the aspect which produces and nourishes offspring. The implied conceptual scheme is that devotees may develop fully their potential (and power), but within the ordained social structure, as a child grows within the structure of the family. Here, in the context of society, one again notes the Devī’s role in preserving structural integrity which she accomplishes by strengthening each element (i.e., person) within the social fabric. However, the overall strength of a structure, whether social or material, depends on each element knowing its place and exercising its function effectively. The relationship between such social integrity or solidarity and the conceptual matrix of Durgā is particularly evident during the Durgā Pūjā celebrations which will be discussed later.

Worship patterns in the time cycles which operate through the yantra which is Durgājī reveal and reinforce the Devī’s association with other deities such as Ganeśa, Hanumān, Bhairava, Śiva/Rudra, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Kālī, Viṣṇu, and Rāma. In all cases, these deities, and especially the goddesses, are seen as parts of Durgā, or are subordinated to her. They are her children (e.g., Ganeśa, Kārtikeya), her guardians (e.g., Hanumān, Bhairava), or her dependents in battles (e.g., Viṣṇu, Rāma). Although occasionally paired with Śiva, when she is thought of as Pārvatī, or with Viṣṇu, when viewed as Vaiṣṇava sakti, Durgājī in her temple is completely independent, clearly superior to or encompassing all other divine beings.
CHAPTER THREE

ĀŚVINA NAVARĀTRA

General Comments

While Durgā is worshipped at major temples (such as the Durgā Kunda temple) or in images (often just simple lithographs) in home shrines throughout the year in Banāras, her annual worship intensifies dramatically during two nine-day periods called Navarātras (literally, "nine-nights"). There is a Navarātra held in the spring (vasanta) and another in the autumn (śarada), and of the two, it is the autumn Navarātra which enjoys the greater visible popularity among urban Banārasis. This is because during the autumn Navarātra numerous temporary shrines (pandal) are set up throughout the city displaying large, colourful clay images of the goddess Durgā and other attending deities. It is essentially this dimension of public, communal pandal worship which distinguishes the autumn from the spring Navarātra’s devotional patterns. Also, while the autumn celebration mobilizes communities within the city, making their presence highly visible, the spring Navarātra appears to attract larger numbers of devotees from the villages surrounding Banāras. In this chapter I shall primarily discuss worship patterns during the autumn festival and refer to the spring celebration when pertinent differences arise.

The autumn Navarātra takes place on the first nine days of the waxing fortnight of Āśvina (September/October). Astrologers note the appearance of the star Agastya in the night sky. It is said to mark the end of the rainy season, for the river Gaṅgā, whose level is high, often submerging some of the smaller temples on its banks, will begin to
recede, changing from its brown, silt laden colour to a clear green. Several months earlier, at the beginning of the rainy season, on the chariot festival of Rath Yātra, the Pals and other artisan groups, begin the process of fabricating clay images which will be worshipped during the Durgā Pūjā celebrations held in the last four days of Navarātra. They are commissioned by a handful of families, some religious organizations, and over a hundred clubs representing communities in the city, clubs which form specifically for the purpose of organizing community Durgā Pūjās. A small percentage of devotees begin their worship of the goddess from the fortnight which precedes Āśvina Navarātra, known as the Fortnight of the Ancestors (pitr pakṣa). On the ninth day of that fortnight, known as the Ninth of the Maternal Ancestors (mātr navami), certain devotees establish the goddess in their home shrines and may embark on a series of devotional observances (vrata) which could include moderate fasting. But for most devotees the worship of the goddess begins on the first day (pratipada) of Navarātra.

Since Banāras is made up of a mixture of people from all parts of India who have been drawn to the city for a variety of reasons, it is not easy to generalize the nature of worship patterns. People in Banāras worship the goddess according to their family traditions, but since the city has grown into an urban centre and a mosaic of Indian culture, certain public forms of Durgā worship which are prominent in the more culturally homogenous villages from which many Banārasis originate, do not take place publicly in the city. Thus there are fewer occurrences of large scale blood sacrifice or wide-spread public displays of possession by the goddess than might occur during Navarātras in specific, less heterogenous locales. Urban life may cause a mixing or dilution of cultural communities, so that these groups have neither the number of community members nor the traditional organizational mechanisms to worship as they

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208 Banāras is a highly prosperous city and is growing rapidly. I was told by several professionals and landowners that fifty thousand people from surrounding villages make their way daily into the city to work. Land prices are increasing dramatically, transforming the economic status of farmers. "I'm the secretary of the Red Cross here," said a wealthy landlord. "The original cost of land in a village twenty kilometres from here was Rs. 10,000 per bigha [1360 sq. ft.]. Now that a by-pass road from Mughal Serai is to pass through here, that land has jumped in price to Rs. 40,000 per bigha in just two years." Banāras's reputation as a centre of learning (religious and other), and its promise of spiritual liberation (mukti) to all who die there, continues to attract pious Hindus from all over India.
would have in their home villages. I would frequently hear devotees talk about how Durgā was worshipped in their villages in the Bundelkund, the Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and elsewhere. Private forms of such regional worship patterns persist in people's homes.

It is not merely the cultural fragmentation inherent in an urban centre with a high transient population which shapes Banārās's religious culture. The city exudes its own character which is readily recognized as distinctly Banārāsi. Nita Kumar points out that her study of the recreational culture among artisan communities in Banāras describes "a cultural system which is distinctly urban and . . . self-consciously revolves around an understanding of "Banārasipan" (Banāras-ness) as a source of meanings for activities and concepts" (1988:8). I would extend these observations to include religious culture. There is a self-conscious effort on the part of Banārasis (among both the long-term residents and the newly arrived) to understand what it is to be religious in the Banāras style. Were this not the case, the city would not have its pan-Indian reputation as the pre-eminent centre of the Hindu religious tradition. Were one to depict the religious character of Banāras with broad brush strokes, one would note that Śiva is clearly the prominent deity in Banāras. B. Saraswati (1975:49-50) correctly notes that the adjectives which Banārasis apply to themselves, such as masti (pleasantly inebriated) or phakkarpan (carefreeness), are equally applied to Śiva. Indeed the whole of Kāśi is "allegorically known as mahashmashan (the great cremation ground) - the playground of Shiva" (Saraswati 1975:50). Banārasis both implicitly and explicitly identify themselves as descendents of Śiva or as members of his cohorts (gana). Of course, Banārasis may also belong to Vaiṣṇava and Śākta religious sectarian traditions. But while Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas may participate less in each other's festivals, the Devī enjoys some devotion from both these groups who see her as associated with both Viṣṇu and Śiva. Naturally, it is the Śākta strand which is most active in goddess worshipping activities during Navarātra, but

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A comprehensive summary of the cultural traditions of Banāras are found in B. Saraswati (1975). Saraswati briefly traces the origins of and continuities within Banārasi cultural traditions. He discusses how certain groups (particularly religious ones) are custodians of the wide variety of sacred and other traditions. He dedicates an entire chapter to the "self-identifiable culture" of Banārasis.
almost all Hindus in the city get swept into participation in parts of the festival celebrations.

Although Navarātra (also called Navarātrī) is the special festival time of the goddess, one may pose the question, which goddess? There are, after all, innumerable goddesses worshipped in India, and, by consequence, in Banāras. The answer is not simple or unequivocal. After all, during Navarātra devotees may establish the goddess in forms which only exist at this time of the year, such as the ghaṭa, a wide bodied jar topped with a coconut. They may make visits to local goddess temples (e.g., Sankatā Devī, Kāmākhyā Devī, Śītalā Devī) where the names of the installed Devīs vary widely. In Banāras, they may embark on a pilgrimage to nine different temples where the goddesses are known as Gaurīs. Nevertheless despite this apparent ambiguity it is quite certain that during Navarātra, devotees are engaged in worship of the Great Goddess (Mahādevī) through any of her myriad forms. Furthermore, it also becomes clear that the dominant epithet for the Great Goddess who is worshipped during Navarātra in Banāras is Durgā.

One strong indication of the identification of Durgā with the Great Goddess is that the most important devotional text recited to the Goddess during Navarātra is the Devī Māhātmya (Glorification of the Goddess), better known to most devotees in Banāras as the Durgā Saptaśatī (Seven Hundred [Verses] to Durgā). Thomas Coburn (1988:115-121) has shown in his meticulous study of goddess epithets in the Devī Māhātmya that although the name Durgā appears only seven times in the text, it is always synonymous with the goddess in her all-encompassing, supreme form, rather than in any lesser aspect. Also, if devotees perform simple worship rituals before a goddess picture at home, the lithograph is almost always of a many handed Durgā astride her lion mount (simhavāhinī), or in her form as Crusher of the Buffalo Demon (Mahiśāsuramardinī). Navarātra rituals are almost never exclusively performed to an image of the other

210This Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage is more prominent during the spring Navarātra.

211The text is also called the Candi Pātha (Recitation to Candi), but again, most devotees with whom I spoke used the epithets Candi and Durgā as synonymous appellations for the same goddess.
important goddesses such as Laksmi or Sarasvatī, who enjoy worship during their own festivals at other times in the year. These goddesses form part of the image cluster of Durgā Pūjā where they are considered aspects of the Great Goddess, Durgā. Thus even when venerated in their own temples at this time, there is always sense of their inferiority to the Great Goddess, conveyed by the ubiquitous clay images of Durgā Pūjā. Kālī provides a notable exception here, for she is generally not included in the cluster of clay images of Durgā Pūjā. Although she is portrayed merely as an aspect of the Great Goddess (Durgā) in the Durgā Saptaśat, I have observed certain groups of Śākta Tantrics (e.g., some Aghoris) primarily worship an image of Kālī at this time. The Bengali community worships Kālī separately three weeks later.

The particular variety of goddess worship called Durgā Pūjā which takes place on the last four days of Āsvina Navarātra has led to an almost synonymous application of the term Durgā Pūjā for the Āsvina Navarātra. The complex form of the Durgā Pūjā ritual (especially among those with strong Bengali influences) which incorporates virtually all the prevalent rituals of goddess worship during Navarātra has contributed to the notion that the Great Goddess worshipped during Navarātra, is none other than Durgā. Among the various rituals of Devī worship, one encounters the goddess in such disparate forms as a jar, a wood-apple tree, yantras and maṇḍalas, and as young virgin girls. She is worshipped through blood sacrifice, through fire oblations, and in all-night vigils. Although these varieties of images and practices may have originally represented distinct traditions of Devī worship which occurred during Navarātra, they are integrated in the elaborate ritual of Durgā Pūjā. Just as the Durgā Saptaśat is an outstanding textual synthesis of many pre-existing goddess traditions, the Durgā Pūjā ritual is such a synthesis of ritual worship practices. It has played an important role in intensifying the identification between Durgā and the Great Goddess (Mahādevī) worshipped during Navarātra. This very synthesis, which is directed towards the affirmation of a supreme status for Durgā, suggests intentionality in the composition of the ritual. It undermines the position of Staal (1989) that ritual is structured meaninglessly.

A particularly compelling reason why the goddess of Navarātra is identified in Banāras as Durgā is found in the highly influential Skanda Purāṇa. The Kāśi Khaṇḍa,
an important section of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, is essentially a glorification (*māhāmya*) of Banāras, telling of the origins and locations of the city's great temples. The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (Chapters 71 and 72) relates at great length the story of a battle fought between the Devī and a demon named Durga (or Durgama) whom she defeated.212 The Devī then took the demon's name and with eight attendant energy manifestations (*śaktī*), took up residence as Durgā in Banāras, promising to protect it always (72.88). So the presence of the Devī in Banāras under the epithet of Durgā is firmly established through the authority of that purānic text. The purāṇa goes on to encourage devotees to worship Durgā through a pilgrimage and sacrifice (*mahābali*) during Navarātra (72.84, 85). The Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, to which this purānic text likely refers, is an important facet of worship in Banāras during Navarātra. In fact, the pilgrimage is also performed by devotees during the spring Navarātra and in popularity far surpasses the Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage which is prescribed at that time. This preference for the Nine Durgā pilgrimage suggests that Durgā is further identified as the Great Goddess who is worshipped during both of the Navarātras in Banāras.

Having established that there is variety in the worship patterns, but that it is primarily Durgā who is the goddess of the festival, I wish to proceed to a brief discussion of some of the general patterns of worship during Navarātra. Within this discussion I will examine one salient aspect of Durgā worship in the city at some length, namely, the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage referred to above and in previous chapters. I wish to do so for several reasons, the first of which is that the pilgrimage is extremely popular, involving thousands of worshippers. Second, it reveals a connection between worship at the Durgā Kunda temple (discussed in the previous two chapters of this study) and other Durgā temples in the city. It accentuates the theme of the expansion of the Durgājī *yantra* to overlap the entire city of Banāras during this time of the year. Most importantly, it extends the conceptual image of the Devī, which it elaborates through her eight attendant manifestations, revealing significant cultural information. Finally, although this is less clear, the dynamics of this pilgrimage and the motivations behind it

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212See Eck 1988:166 for a summarized translation of part of the myth.
add to our understanding of pilgrimage in the Hindu tradition.

Forms of Durgā Worship in Banāras during Navarātra

I. Simple Worship in the Home

Prakash Jaiswala (a Śākta devotee)\(^{213}\): No, I don’t do anything during Navarātra.

My question: What will you do with this flower garland?
Prakash: Oh, this is for pūjā at home. I do pūjā every day when I get home.

My comment: It is a very nice garland.
Prakash: (It is) a five rupee one. This incense is also expensive, but it is the best.

Although Śākta devotees may not do anything significantly different during Navarātra, the quality and style of their worship may increase as the conversation above, held on the first of the nine days, reveals. A friendly merchant, whom I got to know quite well, Prakash Jaiswala admitted he was a devotee of Durgā, although he frequently criticized religious ritualism. His work in the vicinity of Durgājī gave him the opportunity to take darśana daily and he would also perform a simple pūjā at his home shrine, which consisted of a framed lithograph image. This type of simple pūjā is normally a five-part devotional service (pañca upacāra). It involves the offering of: (1) fragrant ointment (gandha), such as sandalpaste; (2) fresh flowers (puspa), such as a newly purchased garland (mālā); (3) fragrant incense (dhūpa), often incense sticks (agarbatti); (4) a flame (dīpa) waved before the image, generally clarified butter (ghi) or camphor (karpura) ignited in a clay lamp; and (5) some edible food (naivedya), often a sweet (mithāl) or fruit (phala) (see Figure 12). This pūjā may be performed once, twice, or three times daily, at the discretion of the worshipper, generally at sunrise, noon, or sunset.

Devotees may supplement this devotional activity with certain austerities as part of their vow (vrata) of intended religious observances during Navarātra. They may restrict their diet, fasting on the first and ninth day, or eat only after sunset and before

\(^{213}\)A pseudonym.
sunrise, or they may decide to consume only curd (dadhī), fruit, and fruit juice. Some may decide to recite daily certain verses (śloka) from the Durgā Saptasatī a fixed number of times, or recite the entire text once over the entire period of Navarātra. More adept devotees may recite the entire text daily during each of the nine days. Restrictions on the number of hours slept is another typical austerity practiced during Navarātra.

The purposes behind such worship are generally threefold: It may be motivated by pure devotion, or in fulfilment of a promise, or for the acquisition of a boon. In the first case, the devotee sees Navarātra as an appropriate time to worship the Devī for no particular motive other than general appeasement and thanks. In the second case, the devotee’s worship and austerities are carried out in fulfilment of a promise made to the Devī in return for favours granted (e.g., exams passed, job promotion, an illness cured). In the third case, the devotee seeks to propitiate the goddess to obtain a boon and have some desire fulfilled (e.g., personal power, fame, artistic success). The more rigorous application of this third category will be discussed in a subsequent section on personal spiritual practices (sādhana) during Navarātra.

Despite Prakash’s initial comment that he did not perform any special ritual practices during Navarātra, I soon found that he intended to fast (with a diet restricted to uncooked foods) throughout the entire nine days. This dietary austerity was more intention than fact, since he broke the fast on the second day, and reformulated it as a fast intended for the first and ninth day of Navarātra. He later secretly confided to me that he was also performing fifty four thousand repetitions of the Navārṇa mantra: Aṁ Ḥṛīṁ Kliṁ Cāmuniḍyāi Bice. He was using this powerful incantation to thwart a neighbour who, despite numerous requests and warnings, was building an extension to his home which encroached on both Prakash’s and public property. Prakash’s actions are not unusual at this time of year. Śāktas may secretly perform some austerity or devotional observance, and they generally keep any boons they wish from the Devī secret. Prakash, though hardly a sorcerer, was engaged in an act of sorcery, by ritually directing malevolent intent at an enemy. The dynamics of his actions were not clear even to him. He explained that the repetition of the mantra had the power to bring about the
desired end. It was a Devī mantra. Navarātra was a good time to perform it. But he
offered no comprehensive or coherent picture of how these were related. Was the Devī’s
power more accessible at this time? Did he please her through his actions, and did she
act on his behalf in fulfilment of a boon? Or did he acquire some of her power through
his mantric exercise which was channeled by his will at his neighbour? In the religious
practices of Śāktas like Prakash Jaiswala lines which demarcate supplication from the
manipulation of divine power, or "religion" from "magic," disappear.

An interesting sidelight is that Prakash’s wife told me she thinks that all of her
husband’s religious practice, and in fact religious practice in general is complete
nonsense. However, during the last days of Navarātra, I spotted her on several occasions,
intently watching the Durgā Pūjā ritual at the neighbourhood public pandal, virtually
indistinguishable from a pious devotee. The excitement generated by the public drama
of the Durgā Pūjā celebrations draws most members of the community into some form
of participation, at the very least as spectators.

A fast, actually more of a modified diet which often consists of uncooked food,
is maintained by many devotees, during Navarātra.

Varsha: We keep the fast for all the nine days. We eat fruit, curd, and some
types of sweets (not all kinds). Do you know śṛṅgāra? We eat that āṭā, and
sendhā namaka. We can eat dried fruit. Do you know khiciri? . . . No, this is not
prepared with dāl. We make a khiciri of kuṭu cāval, green chili, and ginger. We
only eat after kumari pūjā on Navami.

My question: Why do you fast?

V: It is tradition to fast. It gives us a religious feeling. And (laughing) also it is a
good change of taste.

These comments by Varsha, a married brāhmaṇa woman succinctly states the type of fast
practiced by women (and men) of all classes. Many people only eat uncooked food such
as fruit and curd, but the tradition of eating śṛṅgāra and sendhā namak is quite
widespread. Food, raw or ripe, cooked or uncooked is often representative of stages of
human development, or correspond to forms of the goddess. Sendhā namak is a type of
rock salt obtained from the mountains and has a reddish colour. It stands in contrast to
the white salt obtained from evaporating ocean water in large salt pans. The unprocessed
nature of rock salt, its reddish colour, and its mountain origin suggest that it has a symbolic connection to Durga, the daughter of the mountain, as a young virgin who is about to begin menstruation. Sr̥ṅgāra is a type of water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) with a leathery black skinned, horned (*sr̥ṅga*) fruit with a white inner flesh. I suggest that this fruit of an aquatic lily symbolizes the undeveloped, immature form of the mature lotus blossom. The symbolism of the immature or unrefined, but pure, is also found in the *khiciri* (a staple food preparation, widespread through Central and South Asia, normally made of rice and pulses cooked together) of *kuṭu cāval*, which I understood to be a type of brown, or unprocessed rice.

II. Establishing the Jar (Ghāta)

A form of worship which is substantially more elaborate than the simple worship of the goddess in images in home shrines involves establishing the Devī's presence in the form of a jar (*ghāta* or *kalaśa*) (see Figure 13). Devotees may establish the jar in their home shrines or in any location where they hope to invoke the goddess's power during Navarātra, and her lingering presence even after the festival comes to an end. Virtually every locale in which the goddess is worshipped, with the exception of the simplest home *pūjās*, will have the Devī established in the *ghāta*. The least elaborate installation of the jar proceeds as follows: A low altar of earth, perhaps an inch high and a foot in diameter is created. It is sprinkled with grain. A narrow necked, wide bodied and wide mouthed jar (often earthen) is set atop the altar, and filled with pure water. The mouth of the jar is lined with leaf-bearing mango twigs and a coconut is set atop these. Certain simple prayers may be uttered during each step in the process. The jar is anointed with a symbol of the goddess such as a trident or *svāstika*, and then covered with a red cloth (*cunri*). The overall effect is that the jar looks like a pregnant woman modestly clad in a *sārti*.

"We think that Durga comes to live inside this jar," said a young brahmanā wife when describing their family's *pūjā*. The jar is worshipped with the five-part devotional service (*panca upacāra*) in which it is sprinkled or garlanded with flowers. It will be worshipped as an embodiment of the Devī throughout Navarātra during which time the grains
sprinkled on the earthen altar will sprout. The sprouted grains, called hariyālī by some, may be worn by devotees behind the ears on the ninth day of the festival.

A middle-aged brāhmaṇa woman whom I had met at the Durgā Saptaśatī temple in the south of the city explained about her family’s installation ritual:

We decorate the floor, put down soil, but do not sprinkle grains on the soil. . . . We think that at the end of these nine days the water in the kalaśa has become very pure, like Gaṅgā jala, and we take a little to drink. Also the coconut (nāriyala) we eat as prasāda.

The installation of the jar varies greatly in form and complexity according to the tradition of the family. The jar may be set upon an altar which is an elaborate mystical diagram (mandala) made of coloured powders. The earthen altar may be sprinkled with five types of grains. The jar may be filled with Gaṅgā water or numerous types of sanctified waters, such as water from various holy places (tīrtha). Other substances such as five jewels (pānca rāma) may be added to the water. Five types of twigs may be used instead of plain mango, and elaborate mantras may be recited during each phase of the procedure. The covering cloth may be wrapped tightly around the jar in a special way, and the entire jar cordoned off with sticks (kānda ropanam) in a particular ritual procedure.

In certain worship situations in the city, several jars may be installed. For instance, dozens of jars line the perimeter of the pavilions occasionally set up by communities for ritual recitation of the Durgā Saptaśatī by groups of brāhmaṇas. The deities invoked prior to and after the installation of the jar may also vary. It is quite common for some ritual procedures to include the worship of Gaṇeśa and Gaurī prior to the installation of the ghata. These installations are often followed with the worship of the sixteen maternal ancestors (śoḍaśa mātrkā), which are represented by sixteen spots

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214 A thorough description of an extremely elaborate version of the installation of the jar (in the Bengali Durgā Pūja ritual) is found in the Appendix. Also included there is a description of the Tantric version of the installation.

215 Gaṇeśa may be worshipped in the form of a betel nut bound in string, which signifies his yajnopavīta (sacred thread), and Gaurī (or Ambikā) is worshipped in the form of a lump of cow dung.
of vermilion on a flat surface.\textsuperscript{216}

Significantly, there is no installation of a \textit{ghata} at Durgājī, although \textit{ghaṭas} are enshrined at most other Devī temples. When asked why the \textit{ghata} is not installed at Durgājī, the chief \textit{pūjārī} said it was unnecessary, since Durgājī was an abode (\textit{sthāna}) of the goddess. His explanation implies that the installation of the jar invokes an intensified presence of the goddess at a particular place, but only temporarily. By not establishing the Devī in a jar, and by not performing any special rituals that might indicate that the Devī is caused to manifest at the temple during Navarātra, Durgā Kūṃḍ temple affirms its reputation as Durgā’s perennial residence, or more accurately, as Durgājī’s continuously manifest form. Furthermore, it subtly implies that Durgājī is the centre of the expanded Devī \textit{yantra} whose sphere of influence (\textit{maṇḍala}) encompasses the whole of Banāras during Navarātra. Each \textit{ghaṭa} which has been established in homes and temples throughout the city, accordingly becomes a local embodiment of the Devī at Durgājī.

Concerning the significance of the jar, Raju Tiwari\textsuperscript{217}, a devout Śākta given to intellectual reflection on his practices, said:

\begin{quote}
You may interpret the jar (\textit{kālaśa}) as the whole earth or universe, or some such thing, because it contains so many different things, water, earth, leaves, and so on, . . . , and maybe it is, but my feeling is that it is mainly a way to focus the attention. It brings our thoughts together, our concentration on the Devī.
\end{quote}

Raju’s statements might suggest that he supports the theoretical position of the non-interpretability of ritual put forward by Staal (1989), since Raju chooses not to assign a meaning to particular ritual symbols or ritual acts, such as the jar and its establishment. However Raju’s reluctance to ascribe meaning does not stem from an absence of

\textsuperscript{216}The vermilion spots are placed in a series forming a triangular shape with the first spot at the apex followed by a row of three, then five, and seven spots at the base bringing the total to sixteen. I have mentioned the Ganeśa/Gaurī and Sixteen Mother worship here since they appear to be quite common ritual procedures surrounding the installation of the jar and are not found in the Bengali style of Durgā Pūjā (see details in Chapter Four and the Appendix). They probably represent strands of worship not prevalent in Bengal at the time of composition of the Bengali Durgā Pūjā ritual.

\textsuperscript{217}A pseudonym.
meaning, but from the surplus of possible meanings. Raju’s comment implies that whatever the meaning imposed upon the symbol by worshippers might be, it affects consciousness in a particular way. Raju implies that any symbol could be substituted for the jar, but this is clearly not the case. The devotee’s attention is focused on a symbolic form of the goddess which is suggestive of precisely the kinds of things he mentions, namely, the cosmos or the fecund earth.

III. Worship of the Devi in a Temple

A: Darśana

Many devotees choose to worship the Devi in a temple at Navarātra, and may do so instead of, or in addition to, worship at the home shrine. It is particularly in temple worship that the ambiguity of the epithet of the goddess of Navarātra is most apparent, for although devotees flock to the city’s Durgā temples in large numbers, or to temples of goddesses widely thought of as related to Durgā, virtually all goddess temples are visited at this time. Navarātra, is primarily a celebration in honour of the Great Goddess (Mahādevī). However, every Devi in Banāras, whether present in a permanent temple icon or a temporarily established form such as the ghata, is seen as part of, or ultimately a manifestation of the Mahādevī. My investigations of Durgā worship in Banāras suggest that the epithet Durgā is most commonly used to identify the Great Goddess (Mahādevī) of Navarātra. 218

Temple worship during Navarātra also displays variety. Neighbourhood devotees may visit their local goddess temple for each of the nine days, bringing offerings which have been purchased from the shops surrounding the temple, or from vendors who have set up temporary stalls during the festival (see Figure 12). Devi temples generally contain more than simply the central image of the goddess. Devotees normally circumambulate the main image, taking darśana and worshipping each of the other deities around the

218 On occasion, a devotee may use the epithet Durgā to refer to a subordinate aspect of the Mahādevī, who may be given another name, such as Mahālakṣmī. However, such usages of the term Durgā were rare. The majority of worshippers used the epithet Durgā as a synonym for the goddess of Navarātra. For more on the Mahādevī, as she is portrayed in the Hindu textual tradition, see Kinsley 1986:132-150.
perimeter before (but sometimes after) worshipping the central image. The secondary shrines receive less attention than the main one. The following are typical offerings at Devī temples during Navarātra: (1) Sandalwood powder (candana) and a red powder (rori) may be sprinkled or mixed with water to form a paste and smeared on the images which are worshipped or the offerings made to them. (2) A garland of flowers, ideally red flowers such as hibiscus (japa), purchased from the flower vendors outside the temple, are offered to the Devī through the temple pūjārī. The pūjārī normally simply tosses the garland into the inner sanctum, although he sometimes drapes it around the Devī image, and on occasion sanctifies it by touching it to the image and returns it to the devotee. The devotee either wears this returned garland, or disposes of it in some creative manner. Flower garlands (puṣpamālā) which have been returned as blessing from the deity (prasāda) end up in temple bathing tanks, in the Gaṅgā, around the necks of animals, and on temple floors. Such garlands should not be offered again to another deity. (3) Incense sticks are burned and the fragrant smoke passed in front of the images. (4) A red thread (mauli) and/or red scarf (cunri) is offered. It is an inexpensive substitute for the offering of clothing (vastra), which is a typical element of the more elaborate sixteen-part devotional service (ṣoḍaṣa upacāra) performed for deities. The consecrated thread is tied around the devotee’s wrist, and the scarf used to carry worship materials. The thread and the scarf (cunri) which, ideally, are dyed with a red colour, symbolize blood and possibly blood-stained garments. I noted, in particular, that a tye-dye process is often used to colour the most inexpensive (and therefore the most commonly used) scarves. This process causes the colours to bleed into sections of the material. Furthermore, the dyes used are not very fast and the red colour from the thread and scarf “bleeds” onto the devotees’ bodies and clothing. I suggest that the red dye of these vastra items represents the blood of a woman’s menstrual flow, the blood stains which indicate the loss of a woman’s virginity, and the blood stains of battle and sacrifice. (5) Camphor is ignited in a simple clay lamp and the flame passed before the image. (6) A packet of small hard white cardamom flavoured sweets (ilāyacī dānā) is frequently offered. (7) During Navarātra it is very common for devotees to offer a coconut to the Devī. The
coconut (nāriyala), symbol of the head, in conjunction with the red scarf, representative of blood, substitutes for a more elaborate blood sacrifice (bali dāna). The pūjārī smashes the coconut on the stone floor in front of the image, allowing the water to drip into the hands of the devotee, who drinks of it as prāśāda. The entire coconut or half of it is returned to the devotees as prāśāda. Coconuts halves which remain in the temple serve as an important source of temple revenue. (8) On occasion, devotees may bring water (jala) directly from the Gaṅgā which they sprinkle on images. They may even add this gaṅgā jala to the carāṇa amṛta, the water which has been consecrated through washing the Devī image, which is then offered to devotees to sip.

In simple home worship, a devotee of any social status may perform a pūjā to Durgā. Similarly, anyone may establish the Devī as a jar. Generally, however those who do so are spiritual adepts who know the procedures involved in invoking, propitiating, and finally dismissing the deity. While these are often brāhmaṇas, jars are also established by tantrics and healers and members of low classes who are often possessed or empowered by the Devī’s presence. In all such cases, the devotee may worship the deity without the intercession of a priest. Items offered to the deity in pūjā are honorific, but also symbolize the five elements of earth, water, air, fire, and space. Thus pūjā, like the ancient Vedic yajña, is also a metaphor of cosmic reintegration. The Puruṣa Sākta of the Ṛg Veda (X.90), tells of the first great sacrifice, in which the cosmic being, Puruṣa, is dismembered by the gods into the manifold cosmos. In parallel accounts, such as the ancient Sāṅkhya philosophy, Prakṛti, often identified with the feminine principle, disintegrates into the created world.²¹⁹ Pūjā, as with yajña, symbolically reverses this process of diversification by returning the creation to its original, undivided form. Thus the ritual of pūjā uses explicit symbols to convey what is also the goal of yoga, union with the undivided wholeness. Since the body of the worshipper is itself an item within the manifest universe, it is a potential symbol of the divine cosmic being. This is also

²¹⁹Paraphrasing the contents of the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa IV.7.40; IV.10.17-23; and V.1.35-36, C. M. Brown says "prakṛti (the impersonal, material force of the universe) evolves out of itself the ego-principle in three modes according to the three strands of the guṇas; from the resulting threefold ahaṃkāra arises the whole world and its various qualities" (1990:73).
true of any unconsecrated image (mūrti) of the divine. Once consecrated, however, an image becomes a symbol of the divine and therefore a divine symbol.

A young female devotee, succinctly revealed a central dimension in the symbolism of pūjā, when she volunteered to explain, "When we worship, all our thoughts, our actions, our prayers, all our senses, are offered with the flowers and so on, in the pūjā." I have already discussed how the items offered in pūjā symbolically represent the five elements (mahābhūta), which are the grossest manifestations of the body of the Devī. The offered items, in turn, possess subtle attributes (tanmātra), such as colour, fragrance, and flavour, which interact with the five external senses (jñānendriya). Seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting, are each integral parts of the devotional process of pūjā. Diana Eck (1981) has pointed out the importance, in Hindu temple worship, of seeing the deity. The entire process of visiting a temple and worshipping the deity there, is most frequently referred to as darśana, a word which means "view" or "sight". Even more significantly, Eck highlights the point that darśana is a reciprocal act which involves mutual seeing. Not only does the devotee see the deity, but the devotee makes a temple visit in order to be seen by the deity (1981:15). In a parallel study of mantra, Coward and Goa (1991) establish the centrality of hearing and being heard by the divine. The devotee is embodied in sound, manifests through sound, and is propitiated through sound. When devotees ring bells, beat drums, and recite sacred utterances (mantra), they are doing more than performing an act of adoration. They are, implicitly, engaged in an act of unitive identification with the deity, through the sense of hearing, and the medium of sound.

I suggest that while the two senses of seeing and hearing are dominant in human beings, and therefore command a significant place in the actions of pūjā, Hindu worship consists of the reciprocal interaction of all the senses between deity and devotee. I have already shown, in Chapter Two, how the food offerings made to Durgā, involve a mutual participation in the sense of taste. The offering of food does not merely initiate a ritual act in which the deity and the devotee taste a common substance. When devotees offer a coconut fruit or sacrificial animal, they are symbolically offering themselves to the
deity. Durgā tastes the devotee when the coconut is cracked or when the blood of the beheaded animal flows into the earth of the sacrificial plot. When devotees drink the consecrated water which flows from the cracked coconut offering or eat the flesh of a sacrificial animal, they in turn taste the deity, whose manifest forms are the fruit and sacrificial animal which has been offered. The same type of reciprocity takes place with the senses of touch and smell. In all pājās, devotees actually touch parts of the deity. At Durgājī they touch the marble footprints at the door of the inner sanctum or touch the eight-petalled lotus on the wall of the śikhara. Mutual tactile contact is made. Devotees, also smear divine images with fragrant sandal paste, burn fragrant incense, or offer fragrant flowers. In these acts, they participate with the deity in smelling common fragrances. But they also smell the deity and are smelled by her. Durgā is, after all, perceived to be within the constituent elements of the pājā offerings. In the scent of the sandalwood paste, the incense, and the fresh flowers, devotees are smelling the body of the Devī. Therefore, in pājā, the gross (mahābhūta) and subtle elements (tammātra) of creation (i.e., the pājā offerings and their qualities) are integrated with all of the devotee’s sensory (jñānendriya) faculties. These are offered through ritual actions which enact reciprocity and sharing of the sense faculties with the deity that is being worshipped.

The integrating process which is pājā does not stop there. The action faculties (karmendriya) are also involved in worship. Devotees purify themselves prior to coming to the temple. Defecation and bathing are often performed one after the other. In the act of circumambulation, prostration, the recitation of prayers, and the eating of prasāda,

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220 Banārasi men often referred to the pleasant odour which is exuded by a man who is chewing pān, which instantly strikes others the moment he enters a room. Scent is an extremely important component in Hindu social interaction. People rub fragrant oils into their hair, apply fragrant oils to their bodies, and often wear fragrant fresh flowers.

221 See Kumar (1988:89,95) for a discussion on the relationship between defecation and bathing (nipatanda-nahāna) in Banārasi life. Defecation, or any form of excretion is an activity which brings about a measure of pollution, and thus requires a subsequent act of purification. I suggest that devotees enjoy the ideal purity necessary for temple worship when they have completed acts of excretion (i.e., defecation, urination, menstrual discharge), have performed a cleansing bath (e.g., the post-menstrual bath (ṛtuṣṇāna)), and have donned clean clothes.
the action faculties are fully involved in the process of temple puja. These faculties, in turn, through concentrated devotion, are integrated with the inner faculties of consciousness (i.e., mind (manas), ego (ahañkāra), and intellect (buddhi)) to achieve temporary communion with the Absolute. This inner process is most likely to be occurring during the flame offering (ārati) to the deity. In puja’s perfect execution, deity and devotee are then one.

The terms, darśana and ārati, often used alone for the act of worship, are themselves symbolic abbreviations for the entire process of puja from first sensory contact of the gross form of the divine, through sight, to final unitive communion in the purity of the flame. This is a reason why it is deemed irregular to leave a public puja which is being conducted by the temple priest, prior to or during the ārati. Ārati, worship of the deity with the pure flame, is the high point of puja, and no "gross" offerings are made at the time. Devotees also participate directly in the consecrated items by wearing the flower garlands, eating and drinking the prasāda, and anointing their foreheads with auspicious marks of sandalwood paste and red powder (tilaka).

This mark (tilaka), I was told by a self-professed Śakta tantric, is "the third eye." This is the eye located on the forehead, between the eyes, mainly on Śiva and Durgā images. Śiva is famous for destroying Kāma, the god of love, with the fire from his third eye.222 In the Brahmā Purāṇa (110.85-210) Pippalāda performed asceticism until he was able to see the third eye of Śiva. Like Śiva, he was able to produce fiery destruction from his own eye. Similarly, the sage Kapila, is renowned for having burnt all sixty thousand sons of King Sagara with a flame released from his eye.223 The third eye, therefore, symbolizes wisdom and spiritual power which may be gained through asceticism. Pippalāda’s capacity to see Śiva’s third eye indicates that spiritual attainment may allow one to discern qualities of the divine which are normally hidden. This refined

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222Textual versions of this myth are found in the Śiva Purāṇa 2.3.20.1-23 and the Kālikā Purāṇa 44.124-36.

223Textual versions of this myth are found in the Mahābhārata 3.104-8; Rāmāyaṇa 1.38-44; and the Vāyu Purāṇa 2.26.143-78.
"seeing" is symbolized in the opening of Pippalāda's own wisdom eye, which brought with it powers similar to Śiva himself. I suggest that the tilaka symbolizes the third or wisdom eye which has been temporarily opened through communion with the divine through the act of pūjā. The tilaka symbolizes a highly subtle, or even transcendental organ, through which the reciprocal vision which is implied in the act of darśana, wherein the devotee and deity "see" each other's innermost natures, takes place. Most devotees at Durgājī offer simpler explanations for the mark's significance. "It is a blessing from the Devī," said one devotee. "It is an auspicious (śubha) mark," said another. "It shows others that you have taken darśana," said a third. The devotee has been transformed by the pūjā and through the tilaka, enjoys an elevated, sanctified status, visible to all.

In pūjās to the Devī it is not uncommon for both male and female devotees to mark their throats with a smear of red powder. This is an implicit symbol of offering the head by severing the neck. There are some well-known images of devotees voluntarily offering their heads to the goddess. Although I encountered no such images in modern lithographs or iconography, I was told that they are not uncommon. Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva, the most renowned human sacrifice at the Durgā Kund temple, was offered to the goddess by bandits. An incident of a voluntary head offering most often cited by Banārasi Durgā worshippers concerns the Rajput hero, Ālhā. According to their tales, Ālhā and ūdal were two warriors who worshipped the Devī Šāradā, in the city of Mahoba. This goddess is now identified as Mahiār Devī, in the state of Madhya Pradesh. The goddess had a skull cup which could never be filled with blood offerings. Ālhā severed his head with his sword and filled the Devī's cup. She restored him to life

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224 Vogel (n.d) discusses certain examples of Pallava iconography depicting devotees severing their heads in offerings to the goddess. Newspaper articles occasionally document isolated cases of devotees offering their limbs or lives at various goddess shrines.

225 A translation of parts of the lengthy oral ballad is found in The Lay of Ālhā, translated by William Waterford (1923). I once listened for hours to the ballad recited by a minstrel who would be commissioned to perform such recitations at all-night vigils. Although I was enthralled by the recitation, which combined prose and verse and which were delivered with extremely lively gestures, I did not understand the dialect at all.
and granted him immortality. The mythic devotees Suratha and Samadhi in the *Durgā Saptasatī*, worship Durgā with blood from their limbs, but not through decapitation. The goddess Kāli is normally shown grasping a human head which she has severed.

Significantly, the most frequently encountered image (although these are not very common in Banaras) of voluntary self decapitation is that of the goddess Chinnamastā. Chinnamastā severs her own head and nourishes herself and her attendants from the flow of blood. The fruit offerings in *pūja*, especially the coconut, or the sacrificial offerings of blood and an animal’s head (e.g., goat, or buffalo in elaborate *pūjās*) may represent the head of the devotee, which is the fruit of the body. But through the identity achieved between devotee and divinity, the coconut also obviously symbolizes the Devī’s own head. The coconut, when it is placed atop the jar in the ritual of establishing the ghata, explicitly symbolizes the Devī’s head. The implication of the head offering, I suggest, is that the Devī’s own head, which is also the devotee’s head, is offered back to her. The smashing of the coconut represents the severing of the head. The flow of coconut water, representing blood, is consumed by the Devī (who accepts the offering of blood from her own severed head). The coconut water (i.e., the blood) also flows into the mouth of the devotee (as prasāda). The head and blood are themselves complex symbols for which some interpretations are offered below and in the Chapter Four.

The majority of worshippers do not consciously connect the activities of *pūja* or the items offered to these symbolic underpinnings. To them, *pūja* is essentially an act of worship and provides the means and apparatus through which devotion may be expressed. Ultimately, the sincerity of worship, not its ritual complexity, is regarded as most efficacious in honouring a deity. However, elaborate ritual does have its place and its meaning. In fact, the fuller meaning of *pūja*, I suggest, is revealed in its expanded form, especially as it is interpreted by its specialist performers (*karmakāndī*), the priests

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226 A Chinnamastā shrine is located on the grounds of the Durgā temple in Rāmnagar, on the opposite shore of the Gaṅgā from Banāras. When identified as the Great Goddess, Durgā incorporates the qualities and characteristics of the Ten Great Knowledges (*mahāvidyā*), a cluster of goddesses in which Chinnamastā is normally included.
(pūjāri, purohita). The pūjāri has greater "know-how" or greater experience than the lay devotee. The temple priest (pūjāri) may perform the pūjā on behalf of devotees at a temple, although devotees may worship the deity directly. In temples where intimate access to the deity is restricted, pūjaris exercise greater control. They intercede between the devotee and the deity, but do not seriously impair the sense of communion between the two. Ideally, they should facilitate this interaction which may be impeded by the large numbers who come to worship. The temple pūjāri mediates between the deity and the devotee, but the function and activity of the pūjāri in a temple is far more limited than in the Durgā Pūjā ritual. This is a crucially important distinction. The temple pūjāri facilitates a devotee's worship of a deity that is already manifest at the temple site. However the purohita’s mediation is two-fold. Purohitas, through rigorous ritual actions of purification, self-transformation, and manipulation, induce the deity to manifest in various loci at the place of worship. They simultaneously direct and refine the worshippers’ perceptions so that these devotees may achieve the desired intimate perceptual contact with the manifest forms of the divine.

B: Manauti

It is not unusual for devotees to use Navarātra as a time to request favours from the Devī, or to fulfill the promise of devotional obligations (manauti) for favours granted. Generally the favours requested and the devotional obligations performed in fulfilment of these favours are kept secret. They are of a personal nature and devotees are not eager to share their hopes, desires, and vows with others. There is also a slightly negative connotation to worship performed for the acquisition of favours as opposed to worship for its own sake, which also accounts for the secrecy.

1. Mundana

One of the most frequently observed such devotional obligations is the first tonsure (mundana) of a child’s hair (see Figure 9). Mundana is not exclusively performed during Navarātra, nor is it only done at goddess temples. Although tonsure is one of the
more visible expressions of manauti, it is probably not the most common one. Women who have previously asked a favour from the goddess, often for the birth of child, may promise the Devī that they will perform the child’s first tonsure at the temple. The first tonsure is one of the main Hindu rites of passage (sāṃskāra) and generally occurs between the ages of one and three. I was told that it represents a significant stage in the growth of the person as a separate being from the mother. Just as the sāṃskāra of annaprāśanam, which celebrates the child’s first taking of solid food, marks the weaning from the mother’s breast, so the tonsure removes the hair which arrived at birth and which grew in the womb, and is thus linked with the mother.227 The new growth is the individual’s own hair.

Whole families arrive in a mood of celebration with the child or children to be tonsured. They commission the services of a barber (nai), who draws a pattern with whole wheat flour (āṭā) on the floor of the temple, seats the mother upon it, with the child in her lap, and with a straight-edge razor and water from a bowl shaves the child’s head.228 The barber is paid for his services, and generally transfers some of these earnings to the temple management. Certain families may provide gifts to the nai, such as a stainless steel bowl and razor, and may hire musicians and dancers to entertain the group and the goddess during the mundana. In these more elaborate celebrations, I occasionally noticed gifts of a new sārt given to a woman in the party. One of the barbers who often performed mundanas at Durgājī said he thought it was the husband’s sister who most often got such a gift. Mundana, like many Hindu sāṃskāras, has a variety of ritual elaborations and differences. Certain families (owing to cultural or caste traditions) may choose to leave a top-knot (sikhara) on the child, while others have the head shaved clean. The latter appears to be more common. On occasion, the child’s head is shaved in several locations, sections being removed in each of the temples where her

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227 I was given this explanation by a brāhmaṇa pandit on the occasion of his grand-daughter’s tonsure.

228 A pattern is not always drawn. Often it is the child’s mother who draws the patterns which are as various as the families who use them. Reminiscent of the patterns (alpana) drawn daily in front of homes, these differ in that they are circumscribed by a square, and are less complex.
mother prayed and made promises.

The hair clippings are collected along with the sprinkled flour which formed the diagram on the floor, mixed with water into a ball (*pindā*), and discarded. Since the hair is formed into a *pindā* (symbolizing the body in such acts as the *sapindikaradāna* parts of the death ritual (*śrāddha*)) and occasionally discarded into a sanctified place, like a *kunda*, it is appropriate to interpret it as some form of sacrificial offering, although its meaning is vague. Whether the *pindā* represents the head or the pre-transformation body of the child is unclear.

Almost all the mothers I spoke with told me that they were equally happy to have sons or daughters. Among men there were substantially more who said that, despite their happiness at having daughters, they preferred to have sons. Interestingly, among devotees who spoke English, I frequently encountered the odd usage of the word "child." "The first three babies my wife had were girls, until I prayed at this temple," said one typically proud father. "And only then, a child was born." I could not discern whether such usage is due to a common error in language or whether it is indicative of differing status between a male "child" and female "non-child."

It is interesting that this particular rite of passage, tonsure, is promised to a deity. In what way does tonsure (*muṇdana*) sufficiently compensate for the deity's gift of the birth of a child? Like all life cycle rituals, tonsure marks a transition from one stage to another and parallels other rituals involving hair-cutting. In the Hindu tradition, tonsure is performed in the sacred thread investiture (*upanayana*), entry into certain priestly orders, and in rituals for deceased relatives. In all cases, tonsure carries the symbolism of death and rebirth into a new spiritual status, either for oneself or another. Thus *muṇdana* in Durgā's temple symbolizes a form of offering of the child to the Devī. The child's hair, an important symbolic link to its earthly mother, is removed and offered to the Devī in her temple, forging a new link with the child's spiritual mother.

2. Gifts to the Temple

The donation of gifts to a Devī temple during Navarātra may also be the
fulfilment of a manauti. Individuals or groups may present the temple with artifacts in return for favours which the goddess has bestowed upon them. Village groups on occasion come into the city dancing and singing. They visit a temple like Durgājī to give thanks for such favours as a good harvest or the ending of an epidemic. Typical gifts to the temple may be a brass bell (ghanta) or flag (dhvaja). Among village groups one is quite likely to see both women and men dancing for the goddess in the temple. These groups contrast with the commissioned professional troupes of entertainers where the dancers are normally men dressed as women.²²⁹

A most dramatic example of gift giving, although it is of a different type, is exemplified by Dr. Ganesh Ram Mallik, who recently built the Daśabhujā (Ten-armed) Durgā temple in the north of Banaras. His act parallels Rāṇī Bhavānī’s building of Durgājī and follows in the tradition of charitable giving (dāna). Unlike Rāṇī Bhavānī’s temple, the Daśabhujā temple was not built upon a site renowned for its ancient sanctity. Its reputation will develop through the testimony of worshippers.²³⁰ Dr. Mallik prefers to think of Durgā as pure vital energy. The temple, he explained, because of its use of elaborate images and rituals, attracts people towards an understanding of the divine. Such a gift is not a manauti, but an upāya, a method of bringing others to the goddess.

3. Animal Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice is currently a rare phenomenon in Banaras temple worship, and at present appears to be sanctioned by tradition and temple authorities in only one place, the Durgā Kund temple. The animals generally offered there are goats, and although these blood sacrifices (bali dāna) may take place throughout the year, they occur much more frequently during Navarātra (see Figure 8). At the turn of the century, I was told,

²²⁹On a few occasions, I noticed village men and women dancing on the road on the way to Durgājī. The men stopped always dancing outside the entrance to the temple although the women continued to dance within the temple. No explanation was given.

²³⁰Mallik distributes a booklet which contains testimonies and hymns written primarily by pandits, scholars, and reputable holy men. It constitutes a rudimentary glorification (māhātmya) of the temple and its founder. See Dr. Ganeśa Rāma Mallika. Edited by Dhruva Agrāvāla. Vārāṇasi: 1981.
blood sacrifices were a central component of the elaborate Durgā Pūjā ritual (discussed in Chapter Four), but innumerable offerings used to be made throughout Navarātra, especially during the important time marking the confluence of the eighth and ninth lunar days (sandhi pūjā). At that time, such sacrifices did not take place only in a temple, but were performed in the home shrine or before any altar of Durgā, wherever these were temporarily established for the Navarātra celebrations. In recent decades, as the notion of blood sacrifice began to fall into disfavour, animals which were offered in the course of the Durgā Pūjā ritual were sent to Durgājī to be sacrificed. 231 "So many goats were killed, the blood would flow out of the temple into this gutter and from here go into the kunda" said a flower vendor at the outer gate of Durgājī. The temple functioned as a sacred slaughter house for all the blood offerings in the city. This activity alone must have vigorously reinforced the conception that the goddess who was being worshipped in the wide array of Durgā Pūjā clay images throughout the city, had her abode at Durgā Kund temple. This sacrificial practice, too, for the most part, has disappeared. At present, the main source of sacrifices at Durgājī is the fulfilment of manautis.

The promise to offer up a blood sacrifice is often (although not necessarily) made in return for a life and death request. Devotees who pray that their lives or the lives of their loved ones be spared from disease, the dangers of travel, dangerous work situations, and war may sometimes pledge to offer the life of an animal to the goddess. The animal is generally a dark male goat, in good health. It is brought to the temple and after being purified, anointed, and propitiated, its head is severed with a single stroke of a sword kept on the temple premises for this purpose. The goat's head and some blood are placed on a sacrificial pillar together with a small camphor flame, as an offering to the goddess. Then the head and carcass is given to the devotees who carry it home. There the goat is prepared in a special meal and eaten with great festivity.

An Indian soldier, originally from Nepal, told me he had promised Durgā a goat sacrifice if his life was spared in a dangerous assignment in Kashmir. He had wanted to

231 The detailed description of this sacrificial ritual along with a Tantric variant is given in Chapter Four and in the Appendix.
marry the daughter of a senior officer who disapproved of his intentions. The soldier suspected that he may have been sent on the mission by the officer who hoped to thwart his courtship. Having survived the posting, the soldier returned with experience and new status, and needed to thank Durgā for the protection she had afforded him and the power he had gained. I met him when he was sacrificing a goat at Durgājī on the eighth day of Navarātra, and I was invited to accompany him home to participate more completely in the sacrificial ritual. Almost immediately after we reached his house, friends of his began to arrive. These were mostly other male soldiers, but a few brought their wives and children. The men skilfully skinned and butchered the goat with their curved Nepali knives (khukhār). The head was roasted, to remove the hair, and the skull was split in half. The head was cooked first in spices, together with some organ meats. This dish, which consisted of a mixture of soft and chewy pieces, was served first with a tall glass of alcohol. It was eaten in a manner that struck me as somewhat ritualistic. The mood was certainly sober. I was told that it was blessed food (prasāda). By the time this dish was finished, the alcohol had begun to take effect and the mood was no longer sober. The main carcass was then eaten with rice, vegetables, and more liquor. "If we were at the army base, many goats would be killed," I was told. "Soldiers must know how to kill. They must not be afraid of blood." The soldier also explained that this goat had been tended to for an entire year in a special way. It was left uncastrated. It was given good food, and no one was allowed to point their feet at the animal, which is a gesture of disrespect.

The Nepali soldier devotee directed his sacrifice to Durgā, not to the Bhadrakālī image, which is reputed to have been installed by the king of Nepal. This evidence contradicts the opinion of the head pājāri at Durgājī and others who like to think that it is Bhadrakālī who accepts blood offerings, not Durgā. Male soldiers are particularly numerous among those who make blood offerings with a view to acquiring, as in the case of the soldier above, both protection and power. Here again one notices a connection between death (or life) and the goddess. A soldier risks death, a loss of his life. He offers Durgā a surrogate life (the goat's) in return for his own. Similar to the offering of hair for the birth of a child in the tonsure ritual, the animal sacrifice appears to be an
unequal exchange. Less is given, more is received. But actually a more significant relationship has been acknowledged by the seemingly unequal symbolic exchange. Just as the child has entered a relationship of dependence on the Devi, so have the sacrificers. They have confirmed the dependence of their lives on the goddess, and in so doing have surrendered their lives to her. They die to their former lives of independent but helpless power (symbolized by the uncastrated goat), and are reborn in the new empowered state of their present lives. The goat is the weaker, lesser self which is consumed by the Devi, and which sacrificers then, in turn consume. By eating the offerings of their own lives, consecrated by the Devi's acceptance of it, they confirm their participation in a transformed existence, lives dependent upon, but empowered by the goddess. One might suggest that the cardinal error of egotism would be for devotees to forget the source of this power and identify it with their own. The offering of larger animals (e.g., buffalo) symbolize a devotee's elevated power and status. Ultimately, the most sublime offering (mahābali) is of oneself, symbolic of utter dependence, and the fullest participation in the goddess's power.

It is necessary to address the question why the head of a male animal is offered to the goddess. I typically received the response that male animals were the appropriate offerings, mentioned in the Śāstras or other authoritative texts. When I probed further I was referred to "pandits" and other learned persons. Among this group I was generally told the story of the Devi's destruction of various male demons. The male animal represented the male demon. I found these explanations somewhat unsatisfactory, for the connection between the sacrificial animal and the sacrificer's intention was not clear. The

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232Stietencron (1983:121) relates an interesting myth in which the gods created vegetation but were convinced by the Asuras that they should put animals on the earth. The gods agreed and asked the Asuras to go ahead and create some. The Asuras created an animal with a big stomach, hairless, black skin, short legs, a huge head and vacant eyes. The gods laughed at this creation and the insulted demons desisted from further creation. As their first animal the gods created the white cattle whose products are used in ritual offerings. Stietencron highlights the primordial chthonic nature of the buffalo, an animal which represents strength, the material world, and the tāmas guna. The buffalo (and other sacrificial animals) is thus set in opposition to the cow and the bull, symbols of the pure sattva guna. The slaying of the buffalo, I suggest, represents a movement away from the gross material creation (thick with the tāmas guna) towards refined and transcendent sattvic purity. (I am grateful to B. Cawi and S. Trink for the translation and discussion of Stietencron's article.)
animal may represent the egotistical, deluded, and therefore "demonic" aspect of the devotee which is sacrificed to the goddess, but it is unclear why a male animal should be required. After all, both female or male devotees may offer blood sacrifices (see Figure 8). Thus the male animal cannot merely represent a surrogate of the devotee. To answer this question we must turn to the offerings which are surrogates of blood sacrifice, for if there is some intrinsic quality in "maleness" it may be contained in these offerings.

The most common substitute offerings for blood sacrifice are fruits such as coconuts or kuśmāṇḍā melons. Sometimes a length of sugarcane may be offered. Often a small effigy of a human being is drawn on the fruit with vermillion. During the sacrifice itself, the sword blade passes through the effigy. The effigy suggests that the fruit represents a human body, or that it is the body of the goddess, or that it contains the seed of life, an embryo within. Importantly, the fruits contain liquid or juice which may correspond to the vital fluids within the body of a sacrificial offering. In the male these vital fluids are blood and semen. It is significant that fruits, which contain juice or sap corresponding to blood, also contain seeds which parallel semen. Thus, I suggest that the head of a male animal is the ideal symbol of the seed-containing fruit of the male human body. This is not so with the female body which, in traditional Hindu thought, is often likened to a field (kṣetra) in which the seed is planted (O'Flaherty 1980:29-30). The male seed is nourished by the female soil or withers within it. The symbolic female is often portrayed "headless" as evidenced by the Lajjā Gaurī images (see Figure 4) or in the cluster of nine plants (navapatrikā) worshipped during Durgā Pūjā. The virgin female body is a seedless fruit; its head a flower. However, when seeded, it has the capacity to produce both male and female offspring. The male head is often considered to be the repository of the seed. Mythologically, the male gods produced the Devī with spiritual effulgence which flowed from their foreheads or mouths. Male offspring

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233A cultural parallel is found among the Nuer people of the Sudan, who substitute the cucumber, in particular, for an animal sacrifice. See E. E. Evans-Pritchard 1977 [1956]:146.

234According to O'Flaherty, "so pervasive is the concept of semen being raised up to the head that popular versions of the philosophy believe that the semen originates there" (1980:46).
are valued as the containers of the seed which continues the lineage. In Kundalini Yoga philosophy, the male principle, Śiva, resides in the head, the female principle lies dormant below. When the severed head and blood of the male animal spill onto the sacrificial field (kṣetra) which is the body or possibly the tongue of the Devī, a form of union (remotely sexual) has taken place. She receives or drinks up the blood-seed, either engendering new life or preventing it from germinating. In a related vein, O'Flaherty speculates that "if every man, not merely the yogi, stores his semen in his head, every beheading is a castration" (1980:47). The necessity of using an uncastrated male animal in the sacrifice further supports the interpretation that the animal’s head is a symbol of the reservoir of potent male semen.

4. Devotional Service

Another form of manauti which may take place during Navarātra is the fulfilment of a pledge to perform devotional service to the goddess for a period of hours or several days. This type of pledge is more typical of devotees who come from further afield in the catchment area of the temple than of those who are capable of visiting the temple on a daily basis. These worshippers, who come from afar, had prayed to the Devī of a particular temple on some previous visit. Their pledge is also more characteristic of women’s worship then men’s. Women who have prayed for such favours as the happy marriage of their children or the well-being of their husbands, may promise the goddess that they will come to reside at the temple for several days. During that time they will make offerings a certain number of times per day, cook food for and give money (dakṣinā) to the temple priests and workers, perform some chores such as sweeping the temple premises, and sing, dance, or provide other such entertainments for the goddess.

Such devotees rarely set out alone, and are often accompanied by other female and available male members of their extended family. Their actions combine the dimensions of pilgrimage and monastic penitence, for the processes of going to and

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235 According to Obeyesekere (1978), and O’Flaherty (1980) the high-piled hair on top of a yogi’s head symbolizes the vast reservoir of semen which has accumulated there as a result of his austerities.
staying at the temple are significant. These visitors stay at the temple’s resthouses (dharmaśālā) which may be nothing more than a simple covered structure (see Figure 9). Typical food cooked on such visits are deep-fried unleavened whole wheat bread (pūrī), curried vegetables (sabji) like potatoes (ālū) or okra (bhindi), and a sweetened paste of wheat flour (halvā).

I had chatted with scores of such visitors at Durgājī and other temples. I had even shared some of their experiences and eaten with them during their visits to temples in Banāras. But I felt that I had most closely discerned the "moods and motivations" (Geertz 1965:206) of this activity when I participated in it with a musician friend’s family. Sohan Lal’s mother had prayed to the goddess Śītalā in Adalpur, a village not far from Banāras. She wanted her son to be married happily. Now, a year later, when his wife was soon expecting her first child, Sohan Lal’s mother began to get restless. She remembered her promise to Śītalā and feared for the unborn baby’s safety if she did not keep her end of the bargain. She set off with her son’s wife, and Sohan Lal’s younger sister and brother. They stayed at Adalpur for several days. Sohan Lal, another male friend, and I went up to Adalpur on the last day of their stay. The moist quiet of the country was a remarkable contrast from the dry dust and noise in Banāras. As we walked the mile from the bus-stop on the main road to the temple, we came upon a partially unearthed clay pot buried in the path, with some of its contents spilled out. These were pieces of cloth and bits of paper wrappings. "Stop! Don’t go any closer," cautioned Sohan Lal. "This is the work of a sorcerer." In order to give the pot a wide berth we had to climb partially down and back up the steep embankment of the elevated path on which we were walking. "Sometimes people don’t know what these things are, and terrible things happen to them," he continued. "It is possible to get possessed by a demon, or to get some disease, or go insane, even by just walking over this thing."

At the temple the spirits of the women and children were buoyant. They had been having a marvellous time. They fed us and encouraged us to roam around the banks of the Gaṅgā and explore the shops around the temple. They showed us the shrines they had cleaned and at which they had worshipped. Before our departure, Sohan Lal played his flute for the Devī. A small crowd gathered to enjoy this special performance. Exhilarated,
we returned to Banaras.

Although a temple which is visited on such a pilgrimage to fulfil a devotional pledge may not be very far from the devotees' homes, and although the stay there may last only for several hours, worshippers exhibit a pronounced feeling of joy. Devotional service is not performed begrudgingly, but with happy thankfulness. It is not uncommon for urban devotees to pledge such service to a Devī whose temple is located in the country, or for rural devotees to fulfil their promises to a goddess in a city. Such penitent pilgrimages offer a refreshing change from the routine of life at home. The emotions are infectious. The atmosphere is much like a picnic held at a very pleasant spot.

Elements of Victor Turner's analysis of pilgrimages as "liminal" phenomena are pertinent here (1973:191). Liminality, according to Turner, occurs in transition periods, as in rites of passage, states where individuals reside when they move out of their traditional position in the social structure into a state of anti-structure. This state of antistructure is characterized by communitas, which Turner categorizes in three ways. In existential or spontaneous communitas there is "the direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities which, when it happens, tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogenous, unstructured, and free community" (1973:193). In normative communitas, "the original existential communitas is organized into a perduring social system" (1973:194). In ideological communitas, the third type, utopian models are created with the hope that they will "exemplify or supply the optimal conditions for existential communitas" (1973:194). Turner points out how, for the pilgrim, the pilgrimage centre is itself liminal. It is a threshold, a place "in and out of time," where pilgrims hope to have "direct experience of the sacred, invisible, or supernatural order, either in the material aspect of miraculous healing or in the immaterial aspect of inward transformation of spirit or personality" (1973:214).

In the type of pilgrimage practiced as part of the devotional pledges described here, there is definitely a feeling of communitas which is engendered both by the pilgrimage centre and the pilgrimage process. The pilgrimage centre, the temple, is remote and different from the devotees' normal environment. Villagers often go to a city
temple, while urban dwellers go to villages. While the great pilgrimages made to places like Badrināth or Vaisno Devī may demand that the pilgrim face the dangers of high mountain roads and arduous climbs to the shrine, these lesser pilgrimages have smaller doses of anticipation and ordeal. The devotees enjoy certain elements of carefreeness, but structure has not dissolved, nor has free community been engendered. There has been cordiality and good humour but it has occurred within the parameters of hierarchical structure. This pilgrimage process has regulations and traditions which allow for a measure of communitas, but the structures of the activity are very much a part of the social system. The women feed the men and the brāhmaṇa priests. Hierarchy is maintained. The experience, in Turner's terms, would correspond more to a normative communitas than an existential one.

Also, in accord with Turner's analysis, the temple does serve as a threshold, where pilgrims may experience "a supernatural order" and undergo an inward transformation. There are significant dimensions to these transformatory experiences of pilgrims who are fulfilling devotional pledges, which are better explained through another theoretical model. If devotees have been the recipients of some boon from the Devī, and have not yet fulfilled their pledged devotional service, they begin to experience fear. The Devī is powerful, and her nature is ambivalent. Although she can be the nurturing mother, she is also wrathful and fierce in her punishments. This fear of supernatural retribution, is one experience of a "supernatural order" which may affect devotees. Another fear which devotees experience, as Clifford Geertz would suggest, is based on "the uncomfortable suspicion that perhaps the world, and hence man's life in the world, has no genuine order at all - no empirical regularity, no emotional form, no moral coherence" (1973:108). To Geertz, the religious response is the creation of an ordered symbolic universe which accounts for the source of such discomfort. Among Śākta Hindus, Durgā is part of that world order. She responds to devotees' fears of chaos and alleviates them. However, in order for the orderly universe to be sustained, devotees must fulfil their obligations. Procrastination threatens the structure of the reality construct of devotees, their worldview, for both of the reasons implied above. If they do not fulfill their end of the bargain, they risk living in constant fear of reprisal from the angered
deity. This, in itself, would be enough to disrupt the ordered functioning of their lives. Were they to dismiss their obligation, and then not experience any reprisal from the deity who was the source of their blessing, their worldview would have proved to be illusory and would have to be restructured substantially. The pilgrimage, with its emphasis on temple service, is a process of reintegration. It reinforces the symbols and sustains the worldview held by devotees. It empowers them by returning them to a debt-free state in a structured universe where the Devī presides. The devotees’ status in relationship to the goddess is restored. Both the fear of reprisal and the fear of chaos are eliminated. As a result, the entire reality construct is strengthened for it has "proved" itself to function dynamically. It operates according to predictable laws. The Devī is a symbol which inhabits this universe. Furthermore she is also a designation for that universe and its dynamic orderliness.

In all cases, the fulfillment of the devotee’s end of the manauti is accompanied with mixed feelings: gratitude for a favour granted, and fear of repercussions from the wrathful Devī, if the promised service is not performed. This latter emotion is rarely cited as the reason for fulfilling the bargain, since the spirit of the arrangement is one of mutual consent. Here too, the bargain seems lopsided, for the Devī gives far more than she gets: a lifetime of marital bliss, for instance, in exchange for a few days of devotional service. Here too, the same interpretive key holds. In the face of uncertainty, in which the devotee is powerless to affect the outcome, this weakness, symbolized by the relatively small service (seva) is surrendered to the goddess. The Devī, in turn, exercises her greater power on behalf of the devotee. It is an act of allegiance to and of alignment with power. The devotee moves from feeble independence to empowered dependence.

C: Recitation of the Durgā Saptašatī

As previously mentioned the recitation (pātha) of the Durgā Saptaśatī (also called the Devī-Māhāmya, or the Čanda Pātha) may form part of home worship. Virtually all devout Śākta males who are capable of reciting the text do so during Navarātra. Women are traditionally forbidden from reciting the text, although this does not mean that in
practice all women refrain from reciting it. If women engage in recitation, they generally
do so at home and not on the temple premises where they are likely to get undesirable
attention. As with certain other scriptures (such as the Veda), improper recitation is said
to bring grave consequences. Public recitation of the text on temple premises is an act
of devotion, but also a demonstration of virtuosity. Capable devotees are thus found
scattered in various parts of temples, deeply involved in recitation of the text, which they
may perform in a bewildering number of ways (see Figures 10 and 11). Text recitation
may be carried out in fulfilment of a manauti, or as a spiritual practice (sādhanā) to gain
personal power or to gain a boon from the goddess. These latter forms must be
distinguished from the manauti. While the manauti is a vow to perform some devotional
service after a request is granted by the deity, sādhanā is spiritual practice in the form
of yogic acts, or devotional service, to compel the deity to satisfy the devotee’s request.
Sādhanakas, spiritual practitioners, may decide to perform text recitation for their own
benefit or for the benefit of others. Often, a brāhmaṇa or groups of brāhmaṇas may be
commissioned to recite the Durgā Saptasatī. In these cases the reciters are merely
transformers and conductors of acquired power. Such group recitations may take place
in temples or in separate pavilions (mandapa) erected for the purpose.

The most simple form of recitation is to read the Durgā Saptasatī once through,
on its own. More commonly, the text is recited with its six appendages (aṅga),
shorter hymns which are recited before and after it. Of these limbs (aṅga) the Devī
Kavaca (Armour of the Goddess), the Devī Argalā (Bolt of the Goddess), and the Devī
Kīlaka (Fastening Pin of the Goddess) are recited before the text. The Rātrī Sākta (Hymn
to the [Goddess] Night) from the Rg Veda (10.127) is recited just before commencing the
main text. After the main text, the reciter reads the Devī Sākta (Hymn to the Goddess)
from the Rg Veda (10.125), and the remaining three appendages. These are the
Prādhānika Rahasya (Mystery of the Supreme [Prakṛti]), the Vaikṛtika Rahasya (Mystery
of the Modifications), and the Mūrī Rahasya (Mystery of the Forms).

The texts consists of seven hundred verses in thirteen chapters. The verse count is unorthodox, since
partial phrases such as "The sage said," are figured into the enumeration. Seven hundred was a common
number of verses in certain compositions and the text aligns itself with this convention.
Recitation may be either expanded or abbreviated. The most common expansion is a form of "sandwiching" of the text. Recitation with the appendages is itself an example of expansion through sandwiching. If a particular boon is desired from the goddess, an appropriate verse is selected from the text. This verse, which is a sacred utterance (mantra), is then used to sandwich or to frame or "box" (samputa) each of the seven hundred verses in the text. Such a recitation takes three times as long since each verse in the text is preceded and followed by the mantric verse. On several occasions I heard complaints about unscrupulous or uninformed commissioned reciters of the text (pāṭha karnevala), who would perform a kind of "club-sandwich" recitation for their clients. Such recitations involve only one repetition of the mantric verse between verses, and take less time to perform. As a result, the readers can take on more commissions and earn more money but they undermine the wishes of their clients. Another form of expansion in recitation is an increase in the number of recitations. Typically, one may make one recitation on the first day, two on the second, and so on, up to some reasonable maximum. Several brāhmaṇas may also be commissioned to perform group recitations. Ten brāhmaṇas simultaneously chanting the text once, constitutes ten recitations and earns the equivalent merit. The condensed recitations have tantric elements, in that, each of the seven hundred verses is reduced to a short cluster of seed syllables (bija), or even just one seed syllable (bija). The entire text can thus be recited quickly, or frequently. Bijas may be mixed with regular verses in combination with "boxing" (samputa), generating innumerable variations. Some variations may have the reciter stand and perform a full prostration between each verse (danda-pranāma pātha), or perform recitations before a continually burning lamp (dīpakapranāma pātha).

Although tradition holds that only males should recite the Durgā Saptāṣṭāti, it would be an error to use its contents to discern religious ideas concerning the goddess held by men as opposed to women. I have, on rare occasions, overheard women doing recitations of the text in the privacy of their homes. One woman said it brought peace

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237According to Coburn, Cynthia Humes (whose work is still in progress) identifies over forty "taxonomically distinct types of recitation of the Saptāṣṭāti," based on extensive interviews with reciters from North India (1991:152).
to her severely agitated mind. Women are certainly familiar with the content of the text, through listening if not through recitation. Men are, however, more inclined to perform spiritual practices (śādhanā), of which recitation is an example, to gain personal access to the power of the goddess.

The ability to perform recitations immediately confers on the reciter an elevated status on a hierarchically ordered scale. The ability to recite the Durgā Saptāśatī represents a virtuoso skill or power. The reciter is able to read the revered Sanskrit language and text, and possibly even understand it. The fear generated by the consequences of improper recitation ensures that only those with enough competence or sincerity engage in the practice. Three main types of performers can be discerned in the ritual of recitation: those who do it for themselves (for adoration of the Devī, or to solicit a boon), those who are commissioned by others, and those who do it for themselves for power. In all of these cases, propitiation of the Devī comes through the display of acquired skill (or power). This capacity is essentially a gift of the goddess herself, who is the source of learning. The devotee worships her through a display of ritual virtuosity, through which, in turn, benefits may be gained. On first sight, the motif appears more transactional than sacrificial. Some devotional energy is expended, in exchange for more or different power. Praise and glorification (māhāmya) of the Devī brings immeasurable benefits.

Closer inspection of the ritualized recitation of the Durgā Saptāśatī reveals that it still essentially enacts the ritual of sacrificial offering. Pūjā is performed to the text (which on occasion is regarded as the Devī), and with the text to the Devī. In the simple pūjā ritual, items representing the gross and subtle elements of creation are offered back to the goddess, who is then praised with a sacred utterance (namaskāra mantra). The text recitation is offered up as an elaboration of this simple mantra of praise. Speech and sound are more subtle manifestations of the Devī, closer to her transcendent unmanifest form. The text and its recitation are thus embodiments of her, as well as vehicles of homage. In recitation, this subtle vibratory manifestation (vaikṛtī) is reintegrated with its highest source (pradhāna). I concur with Thomas Coburn’s suggestion that devotees
encounter the goddess through the *Durgā Saptaśat"* along a spectrum ranging from recitation to understanding. He points out that "we must follow the anthropological evidence to acknowledge that the media through which understanding is achieved may be behavioural and unconscious, not just verbal and cognitive" (1991:156).

While the *Durgā Saptaśat"* enjoys tremendous status and is incorporated into the *Markandeya Purāṇa*, the appendages (*āṅga*) are not found in any of the *purāṇas* to which they were ascribed. However they are considered to be part of the corpus of purānic literature and are frequently found together with printed versions of the *Durgā Saptaśat"*. Most non-reciting devotees, who are familiar with the text through listening to it, consider the *āṅga* to be part of the text. The *Devi Kavaca* or (Armour of the Goddess), places the protective power of Durgā, first described in her nine forms and then under numerous epithets, into various parts of the male body.238 Paralleling such rituals as the "purification of the elements" (*bhūta śuddhi") or the "imprintment of the limbs" (*aṅga nyāsa"), the Armour invokes the protective power of the goddess into each vulnerable body part. The protective armour is then extended much farther, to the devotee's family, fame, and lineage, and anything else which is vulnerable. The devotee has donned the indestructible armour of the goddess by becoming, as it were, the goddess, surrendering or entrusting his physical being, possessions, and influence to her protective power.

Although it is men who recite this *aṅga*, women frequently recited the opening verses to me from memory.239 These enumerate the Nine Durgās, a symbol cluster particularly meaningful to women. In the *Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (III.19.34-37), the widowed queen Manorāma recites a brief but similar protective spell over her son, the prince Sudarśana, as he set out on a dangerous quest to win his bride, Śaśikalā. Both pieces of evidence suggest that segments of such "armours" are known to women, although most often used on behalf of men. Having donned the armour of the goddess,

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238A discussion of various meanings, types, and uses of protective coverings (*kavaca*) are found in Van Kooij 1983:118-129.

239This is in direct contrast with Bennett's (1983:263,264) observations of the use and knowledge of this appendage among women in a Nepali village during Durgā worship.
the devotee has in effect assumed the indestructible form of the goddess, and is ready to move into battle with his enemies, as symbolically recounted in the *Durga Saptashati*.

The *Devi Argala*, or "Dead bolt," psychologically primes the devotee for the encounter with the main text. Its recitation unbolts the door beyond which lies the devotee’s intentions and desires. The main refrain in the *Argala* is "Grant (me) the form (or an appearance), grant victory, grant fame, destroy (my) enemies" (*rāpam dehi jayam dehi yaśo dehi diviṣo jahi*). The enigmatic request for the "form" (*rūpa*) appears to be a desire for a manifest appearance of the Devī. This is reinforced by the reference, elsewhere in the *Argala*, to the Devī as having "unimaginable form and activity" (*acintyarūpacaritā*). Among the other things requested by devotees are health, wisdom, wealth, and a beautiful wife. The motif of winning a bride, the most important symbol of alliance, reputation, and salvation is reiterated here. The *Ktāka*, is the fastening pin or bolt which unlocks or unleashes the power of the main text.

The *Rātri Sūkta* and *Devi Sūkta* which respectively precede and follow the *Durga Saptashati* link it to the Vedas, drawing on the character and prestige of those most sacred of texts. The Rahasyas (Mysteries or Secrets) expound the Śākta theological or philosophical understanding of the Devī’s nature. The first concerns her supreme or primary form (*pradhāna*), the greatest of mysteries. The next deals with her manifestations through the modifications (*vaikṛti*) of the three qualities or aspects (*guna*) of creation. The last secret discusses the gross forms or images (*mūrti*) of the Devī, as she manifests or is born in the world at various periods in mythic history.²⁴⁰

**IV. The Navadurga Pilgrimage**

A notable ritual activity which occurs during Navarātra in Banāras is the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage (*navadurgā yātra*), in which devotees visit a different Durgā temple on each of the nine days. It is not easy to uncover the historical origins of this pilgrimage but there is support for this tradition in some purānic sources. Many Hindus in Banāras

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²⁴⁰Translators of the *aṅgas* and a discussion of their philosophy and ritual use is found in Coburn (1991).
know the names of the Nine Durgās to be worshipped during Navarātra, which they quote verbatim from what they call the Durgā Saptaśati. There are numerous clusters of nine goddesses, many considered to be nine Durgās, found in texts such as the purāṇas and āgamas. The names of the nine plants (navapatrika) worshipped during Navarātra, or the names attributed to the nine virgin girls worshipped during kumārtī pūjā are examples. Among all these groups, the names of the Durgās of the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage are best known.241 The ordered list which is always cited is, in fact, not from the Durgā Saptaśati itself, but from the Devī Kavaca, an appendage (āṅga) to the text. The Devī Kavaca is virtually undistinguished from the Durgā Saptaśati in the minds of most devotees. The Devī Kavaca states:

prathamaṁ Śailaputrī ca dvitīyaṁ brahmaṁ caturtham//
	ṛṣṭīyaṁ candraghaṁtanī kūśmāṇḍeti caturthakam//3//
parciṁaṁ skandambhavī saśtham kāṭhyāṇi ca/
	śaptaṁaṁ kāḷarātrī ṣatamahāgaurī cāṣṭamam//4//
navamam Siddhitīrī ca navadurgāḥ prakṛtilaṁ
uktāṇeyati nāmāni brahmaṇāiva mahātmanā//5//

The first is Śailaputri, and the second is Brahmaṁśatri, The third Candraghaṁtanī, the fourth Kuśmāṇḍa, The fifth Skandambhavī and the sixth Kāṭhyāṇī, The seventh Kāḷarātrī and the eighth Mahāgaurī, And the ninth is Siddhitīrī. These are proclaimed the Nine Durgās. These names were uttered verily by the supreme Brahmā.

The Kāśṭ Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa, an authoritative text which is a glorification of Banāras, tells how the Great Goddess (mahādevī) who once dwelt in the Vindhya mountains (vindhyacakrālaya) slew the demon Durga, and after adopting his name came to reside together with her eight energy manifestations (śaktī) in Banāras.242 One of those śaktīs is named Kāḷarātrī, linking this myth’s cluster of Nine Durgās to the cluster in the Devī Kavaca. The Kāśṭ Khaṇḍa further states that Durgā took up residence

241According to T. Coburn, "The nine Durgās are one of the popular, numerous, and ill-defined categories of divine manifestation in Śākta and Tantric sources" (1991:210).

242See Kāśṭ Khaṇḍa 72.82-86.
at Durgā Kund and that her eight saktis always act as guardians of Banāras. Devotees are enjoined to perform the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage especially during Navarātra. This mythic account suggests that the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage was well established and that at least some (if not all) of the names of the Nine Durgās and their appropriate temples in the city were fixed at the time of the composition of the Kāśī Khanda. The current locations of the Nine Durgās of the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage are as follows:

1. Śailaputri: (also called Saileśvarī Devī) is located on the northern most edge of the city at Madhiya Ghāṭ on the Varana River.
2. Brahmacharīni: (also called Choti Durgājī, "little Durgā") is near Durgā Ghāṭ at House Number K 22/71.
3. Candraghānta: (also called Citraghāntā) is at Lakhchautara Gali off Chowk at House Number Ck 23/24.
4. Kuśmāndā: (also called Bāri Durgā, "Big Durgā") is at the Durgā Kund temple.
5. Skandamātā: (also called Vagīśvari) is in Jaitpura, east of Nāg Kuan.
7. Kālarātrī: (also called Kālī) is in Kālikā Gali.
8. Mahāgaurī: (also called Annapūrṇā) is in the Annapūrṇā temple besides Viśvanatha temple. (Some consider Saṅkata Devī to be Mahāgaurī.)
9. Siddhidatī: (also called Siddhayogesvarī or Siddhesvarī) is south of Maidaigan, west of Kāla Bhausava temple at House Number Ck 7/124.

The Nine Durgā Pilgrimage is performed by both men and women, although women outnumber men in this devotional activity. The pilgrimage is fulfilled by visiting each temple on its appropriate day, resulting in steady streams of worshippers throughout the day. However, the preference seems to be to visit the temples before dawn or after dusk.243 It is considered highly auspicious to be present for the first sight (maṅgala darśana) of each Devī on her special day, and dozens of pious devotees make it a point to be at the appropriate temple early enough. In order to accommodate the day’s large number of worshippers, temple authorities often open the garbhagṛha for the first sight of the goddess as early as three o’clock in the morning. Several stalls selling offering

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243 Although there are practical reasons for this, such as coordinating a temple visit before and after the day’s work is done, the preferred times for these visits are also linked to the nocturnal (ṛatra) dimensions of the festival (navarātra) and the Devī (Rātri, Kālarātrī).
materials have already opened some hours before this time, and there may be as many
as a hundred devotees waiting for the sanctum doors to be flung open.

The temple of Śailaputrī Devī, in the far north of the city’s sacred perimeter, is
not easy to reach, since it is located on the banks of the Varana River at the end of a
single, long, narrow dirt road. It takes almost an hour of travel from the city centre.
Since Śailaputrī is the first of the Nine Durgās, her maṅgala darśana is particularly
beneficial. Devotees anxiously crowd in the temple courtyard around the small shrine,
where a tennis-ball sized hole in the wooden doors allows them glimpses of the pūjarī
ministering to the Devī. He is engaged in some variant of a sixteen-part devotional
service (ṣodaśa upacāra), in which the Devī is wakened, washed, dressed, and
decorated. The flame he passes before the goddess in the ārati worship can be glimpsed
through the hole. The devotees’ expectations climax at this point and the mood of
excitement is almost palpable. Suddenly the doors are thrown open and the crowd rushes
to the door for the first, pure exchange of sensory perceptions with the Devī. The pūjarīs
have to hold the throng at bay outside the garbha-grha. The priests cry out, "Do what?"
(kya karo?) in rapid succession. They are requesting a quick reply from devotees about
how their offerings should be handled. Some devotees simply make signs to convey their
request. "Give Mā my garland" (Ma ko mala do), yell others. Most have brought
coconuts which are smashed by the pūjarī. He pours the coconut water into the hands of
the devotees to drink, and returns the fragments to them as prasāda. Some devotees are
possessed by the power of the Devī and shake catatonically for some minutes. Others
expect cures from ailments. A group told me of the incomparable power of Śailaputrī to
cure serious ailments almost instantaneously.

This small crowd thins out briefly after the intense activity of the maṅgala
darśana, but within an hour, still before dawn, larger crowds of devotees begin to flock
to the temple. According to the head pūjarī and mahant, simply known as Mahārāj, as
many as fifty thousand people will visit the temple that day.244 The numbers will

244 I cannot confirm these numbers although they are not unreasonably inflated. Counts I have made at
the Durgā Kund temple suggest that thirty to fifty thousand devotees visit each Durgā temple on its
appropriate day.
decrease substantially during the other days of Navarātra, totalling perhaps five thousand daily. These numbers represent vast differences from the regular attendance at the temple through the rest of the year, when far less than a hundred devotees are likely to visit the temple in a day.

The kind of activities which took place at Šailaputri Mandir on the first day of Navarātra are repeated at each of the other eight Durgā temples on their respective days of the festival’s nine days.245 Navarātra, then, is an extremely important time of year for the economic survival of some of these Durgā temples which do not enjoy heavy attendance through the year.246 The temples of Kuśmāṇḍā (Durgājī) and Mahāgaurī (Annapūrṇā) enjoy the worship of tens of thousands of worshippers throughout Navarātra with attendance peaking at about fifty thousand on the fourth and eighth day respectively.247 Despite the fact that attendance numbers show a swell of devotees which moves from the first to the ninth Durgā temple, one cannot easily estimate the number of devotees engaged in the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage. This is because some devotees may visit only one Durgā temple throughout Navarātra, and their choice may be based on convenience or devotional preference. Thus many devotees from the western part of the city, who are not engaged in the pilgrimage may visit the temple of Skandamātā on the fifth day of Navarātra, since it is close by, and quite importantly, because the Devī’s power and presence is highly accessible at that specific time and place. In addition to their role as city protectors, the temples of the Nine Durgās serve as energizing nodes in the city. Śakti (power) circulates in the expanded Durgā/Kāśi mandala, making itself highly available in the locations of their temples, throughout Navarātra, but most intensely, on each Durgā’s particular day. So while some

245 As the first of the Nine Durgās, Šailaputri enjoys the added attention of worship by devotees who make special efforts to take darśana of Durgā on the first day of Navarātra.

246 Among these less frequented temples are Šailaputri, Bhramacāriṇī, Candraghaṇṭā, Skandamātā, and Siddhidātrī.

247 A detailed description of worship patterns throughout the year, including the Navarātra celebrations, at the Durgā Kund temple (Durgājī) is given in Chapter Two. Durgājī is often called Bari Durgā (Big Durgā), a popular epithet indicating her status as the greatest of the Nine Durgās of Banāras.
worshippers only avail themselves of this intense power on a single day during Navarātra, others who worship at the same temple throughout the nine days tap into one day of intense power and eight days of lesser potency. Those engaged in the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage (and there must be several thousand), gain maximum access to the power which is Durgā through all nine days of the festival. Participants in the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage are thus frequently either sādhakas, intent on acquiring and controlling power, or bhaktas, devotees who wish to please the Devī and receive some blessing.

The Nine Durgās of Banāras are particularly important because they reveal conceptions of the Devī and worship patterns which are distinct to the city. The Nine Durgās represent the most popularly known set of epithets of Durgā in the city. The goddesses constitute a symbol set which is reinforced by textual testimony and popular religious practice. Although the list of Nine Durgās from the Devī Kavaca is known to Bengalis, it is not given much importance. I heard of no instances of the pilgrimage being practiced in Bengal. The pilgrimage is a Banarasi Durgā worship tradition which preceded those forms of Durgā worship in the city which have Bengali influence.²⁴⁸ Although most devotees know the names of these Nine Durgās, and are able to produce an explanatory sentence about each of them (often an elaboration of the epithet), and many know the locations of their temples, few are able to provide further details. What follows is a synthesis of explanations about each of these Nine Durgās, culled from the comments of lay goddess worshippers and sacred specialists, from popular books which circulate in Banāras, and from more authoritative textual sources (e.g., purāṇas) to which I was referred by devotees. Where no source is cited, the source is my paraphrase of a frequently encountered oral myth. Although I have often done so, I am reluctant to cite purāṇic texts where versions may also be found, because I feel this tacitly suggests that these purāṇas are the sources of these myths. I have indicated where I have derived interpretations from textual sources. At times I consulted Sanskrit dictionaries to trace etymologies or related meanings of the epithets. I end this section of the Nine Durgā

²⁴⁸The Bengali influence in Durgā worship during this festival is most noticeable in the public Durgā Pūjā celebrations which take place during the last days of Navarātra. This form of worship is described in detail in Chapter Four and the Appendix.
Pilgrimage with two interpretive schemes for the entire set of Nine Durgās. Of these two schemes, the one I discovered among some women devotees offers one of the most revealing explanations of the symbol set.

**Interpretation of the Individual Epithets**

1. Śailaputri

Śailaputri means "Daughter of the Mountain," and thus identifies Durgā with Pārvatī, whose name also means "daughter of the mountain (parvata)." In Hindu mythology, Pārvatī is the daughter of Himavat (the Himalaya mountains) and Menā.249 In the mythology of Durgā (e.g., Durgā Saptaśati 2.9), when Durgā is created from the splendour (tejas) of the gods, Himavat provides her with the lion as her vehicle (2.28). Pārvatī is said to be the reincarnation of Saū, and the wife of Śiva. Similarly, the name identifies Durgā with the goddess Vindhyavāsinī ("she who dwells in the Vindhya mountains").250

Śailaputri also represents that which is born in or originates from the mountains.251 She is the source of all holy rivers, like the Gaṅgā. She is born pure and fresh from the mountains, white like the winter snows. She is vegetation like the bilva tree, and the cannabis plant which grow on the slopes of mountains providing nutrition,

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249 A textual version of this myth is found, for instance, in the Śiva Purāṇa, Rudra-samhitā 3.5.31.

250 The Kaśṭ Khanda, Chapters 71 and 72, tells how the Devī, who dwelt in the Vindhya mountains (vindhyacalakrtālayam) took up residence in Banāras under the name Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durgā. Most devotees at Durgāji make some kind of connection between the goddess in Banāras, and Vindhyavāsinī Devī, whose temple is located in Vindhyacal, a city about eighty kilometers upriver from Banāras. Although they are at times identified with each other, I sensed that devotees maintained the separate identities of both goddesses. It is quite common for Banārasi Śāktas to visit Vindhyacal for darśana two days after Navarātra (i.e., on the eleventh of the waxing fortnight of Āśvina or Caitra). The Forty [Verses] to Durgā (Durgā Cālīsa), a devotional hymn, is carved on marble slabs immediately beside the Forty [Verses] to Vindhyavāsinī (Vindhyavāsini Cālīsa), both of which are placed at the entrance of the Bhadrakāli shrine at Durgāji. The neighbouring presence of these hymns fortifies the connected identity of these two goddesses.

251 The interpretations which follow were less frequently encountered, but came from more than one oral source.
healing medicine, and visions. She is the spiritual insight born in the minds of ascetics who meditate on mountain heights.

2. **Brahmacārīṇī**

"She who moves in Brahman." The term *brahmacārīṇī* is the feminine form of *brahmacārin* and has two main meanings.\(^{252}\) It refers to celibacy, and to the first stage of life during which the student (*śiśya*) learns to be completely conversant with the textual and ritual knowledge of Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*). This is often done in a traditional educational setting (*gurukula*) where the student learns primarily through discipleship to a teacher (*guru*) of religious tradition. It is from the second sense, then, that the word gets its meaning, for the student essentially lives, thinks, and breathes Brahman. Although this stage is primarily prescribed for a male *brahmaṇa* youth, Durgā as Brahmacārīṇī depicts the feminine version of this ideal. During this period of education, the student is expected to keep strict continence, having no sexual relations, especially with the guru’s wife, conserving the vital sexual energy for more sublime uses. It is in this sense that Brahmacārīṇī’s name is sometimes understood as "she who will not allow the ejaculation of semen" (*Durgā Kalpataru* 1984:39). I interpret this to mean that Brahmacārīṇī is that power which allows the spiritual aspirant to maintain continence without the release of semen, a yogic practice deemed vitally important in almost all Hindu ascetic paths to liberation.

According to Dr. G. R. Mallik, the devout Śākta who built a Durgā temple in Banāras, Brahmacārīṇī is a virgin who lives continually in close contact with Brahman, experiencing/manifesting the pure qualities (*guna*) of existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*).

3. **Candraghaṇṭā**

This epithet of Durgā was quite enigmatic to most worshippers since a literal

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\(^{252}\) These interpretations were provided by several people, including my Sanskrit guru, Pandit Vāgiśa Śāstri.
translation is "Bell of the Moon," which is the "interpretation" most offered. The goddess is sometimes, although less frequently, called Citraghaṇṭā, which translates more reasonably as "Wonderful Bell." Mythologically, Durgā was given a bell by Indra from his elephant Airāvata (Durgā Saptaśat 2.21). In battle with the demon Śumbha’s armies, Durgā (Ambikā) rings her bell in tandem with her lion’s roar. Kāli’s howls drown out the sound of bell and roar (8.8, 8.9). When directly engaging Śumbha, her bell filled the directions, destroying the [radiance] of the demon armies (9.18). After she has slain Śumbha and Niśumbha, the gods praise her bell, saying:

Having filled the world with sound, may that bell, which annihilates the heroic lustre of Daityas (demons), protect us as [if we were] children, O Goddess, from evil.253

Iconographically, as well, Durgā is sometimes portrayed with a bell in one of her hands. Thus the epithet Candraghaṇṭā could refer to the goddess who possesses an astounding (citra) or exceptional (candra) bell (ghanṭa).

The bell is also a symbol of sound vibrations which would relate Durgā to the goddess Vāc, or Vāgīśvarī.

4. Kuśmāṇḍā

This is another enigmatic epithet of Durgā, one translation of which is "The Pumpkin Gourd." The kuśmāṇḍā is a large melon (Beninkasa cerifera) which is candied and commonly sold as a sweet in Banāras. More pertinently, it is a sacrificial offering made to the goddess at the high point in her ritual worship, when it is severed in half with a single sword stroke and smeared with vermillion. It is a substitute for a blood sacrifice (bali) to the goddess. The epithet Kuśmāṇḍā Devī could thus mean "The Goddess to whom Kuśmāṇḍās are Offered."

A legendary tale in Banāras tells of a drought which plagued the countryside. A pious temple priest (pujārī), prayed to the goddess who revealed that she would provide fluid and sustenance for her devotees in the form of the kuśmāṇḍā melon. By cultivating

253) hinasti daityatejāmsi svanenpūrya yā jagat/
       sā ghaṇṭā pātu no devi pāpebhya'nah sutāniva// 11.26
and eating the melons the people endured the drought. This legend links Kuśmāṇḍā Devī with the myth of the goddess Śākambhari referred to in the Durgā Saptāśati, where the Devī, after her defeat of Śumbha and Niśumbha tells of her future appearances.

Once again when there has been no rain, no water, on earth for a hundred years, Then, remembered by the sages, I will come into being without being born from a womb. (11.42)
Since I will look as the sages with a hundred eyes,
Human beings will then praise me as ‘Hundred Eyes’ (śatakṣṛ).(11.43)
Then I shall support the entire world with life sustaining vegetables,
Produced from my own body, until the rains come, O gods. (11.44)
In this way, I will attain fame on earth under the name, "She who supports with Vegetables" (śākambhārt).
There I will slay the great Asura named Durgama. (11.45)
Thus, my name will come to be renowned as "the Goddess Durgā." (11.46)

This series of three epithets (Śatākṣī, Śākambhari, and Durgā) appear to belong to a single phase of manifestation of the Devī connecting the epithet Durgā to the previous two epithets. Certainly Śatākṣī and Śākambhari are connected to each other through the episode of the drought. I was told by a Sanskrit grammarian that Śatākṣī, which means "Hundred Eyes," sometimes means "the night," due to the presence of the stars and the unseen creatures of the night. It could thus refer to the goddess as Night personified. It is also likely, I suggest, that Śatākṣī refers to the kuśmāṇḍā melon, since the many seeds within such fruits, are often called "eyes." The reference to the Devī manifesting "without being born from a womb" could refer to vegetative forms of the goddess, such as the bilva tree, the cannabis plant, and the kuśmāṇḍā melon. Thus the epithet Kuśmāṇḍā Devī could also mean "The Goddess who is the Kuśmāṇḍā Pumpkin Gourd."

I was told by a priest in a Jain temple in South India that the Kuśmāṇḍas were a tribal people, sometimes classed with the Śabaras who were Devī worshippers. Little is known about them. The epithet could therefore be construed as "Goddess of the Kuśmāṇḍa Tribes."

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255 This is confirmed by the verses of the Mārī Rahasya, one of the limbs of the Durgā Saptāśati.
Kuśmāṇḍā or Kuśmāṇḍi is a well-known yakṣī (a female tree or water spirit) companion of the twenty-second Jaina Tīrthaṅkara. Also called Kuśmāṇḍinī Devī or Ambikā, she appears identical to the goddess Durgā (M. N. P. Tīvārī 1981). While it is commonly thought that the Jaina Ambikā is merely an incorporation of the Hindu goddess of the same name into a subordinate niche of the Jaina pantheon, some scholars suggest that the Jainas played an important role in grouping certain clusters of deities and systematizing their mythological development (M. N. P. Tiwari 1987).

Kuśmāṇḍās are also a type of fearsome, semi-divine, inimical spirits, perhaps disease-causing, in a class with the elementals (bhūta) and ghosts (preta) who form part of Śiva's or the Devī's entourage (gaṇa). Just as Durgā is sometimes called Bhūtanāyikā (Leader of the Elemental Spirits), the epithet Kuśmāṇḍā Devī, could mean "Goddess of the Kuśmāṇḍa Spirits." The pernicious nature of these beings could be related to Durgā's role in the cause and cure of disease. In this regard, Monier-Williams (1986 [1899]:298) cites the Harivamsa where the term is the "name of a demon causing disease." The term kuśmāṇḍā is also related to a "womb in gestation" (Monier-Williams 1986 [1899]:298) or to a pregnant woman. This image resonates with the interpretation found in the popular printed version of the Durgā Saptaśatt by Gita Press (1980:20) which explains that "within her [Kuśmāṇḍā Devī's] belly, rests the whole of hot worldly existence" (tāpayuktā sāṃsāra jinke udaramem sthita hai). The image also conveyed by this publication is of the fecund and fertile Mother Goddess, who is herself the round orb of the Earth, or who is about to give birth to the creation. The notion of a "hot" (kusma) "egg" (anda) recalls the Cosmic or World Egg, the Brahmāṇḍa, within which the manifest creation resides.

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256 One encounters this meaning in the liturgy of the Durgā Pūjā ritual. See Appendix.

257 Durgā is referred to as Kuśmāṇḍā in the Harivamsa. More remote meanings of the term are "the name of the verses in the Vājasaneyi Samhitā xx, 14ff., Taittirīya Āranyaka" (Monier-Williams 1986:298); "a false conception;" or "a particular religious formula" (Apte 1986 [1957]:590).
5. Skandamātā

Skandamātā means "The Mother of Skanda." According to popular mythology, Skanda is the son of Śiva, and the general of Śiva’s divine army (senāpāti). Although mythological accounts vary, he is well known for his conception when Śiva, the supreme ascetic, unable to resist the allure of his wife Pārvatī, spilt his semen.258 The name Skanda means "seed," or "to spill out or ooze." Thus, just as Brāhmacārīṇī may refer to the Devī’s power to aid the ascetic in the retention of semen, Skandamātā may refer to the Devī’s irresistible power to cause it to spill. The myth tells how this semen of Śiva, too full of fiery heat (tapas) for Pārvatī, was swallowed by Agni, the god of fire, who himself could not hold it. It was delivered to the Gaṅgā, whose cooling waters were also unable to retain it, and it was finally ejected onto the earth in a reed forest, where it developed into the war-god, Skanda. This is why he is known as "Reed Born" (sara janma).259 A group of South Indian pilgrims visiting Durgātī told me that Skanda, or Murugan, as he is called in the South, was raised in the reed-forest by six women, the Kṛttikās, from which his name Kārttikeya (or Kārtikeya) is derived. He is said to have grown six heads to suckle from each of them, resulting in his name Sanmukha (six faced). The Kṛttikās are often identified with the Mātrās, mother goddesses of benevolent and malevolent natures.260

Thus Durgā as Skandamātā, incorporates the myths, characteristics, and identities of the Mātrās, and indirectly, the earth, Gaṅgā, Agni, and Pārvatī all of whom served as maternal vessels for Skanda.

Durgā’s connection with Skanda is not merely maternal, for the goddess appears to share certain attributes with him in some myth cycles, or even to have replaced him

258 See O’Flaherty 1973:32 who extracts these underlying structural elements from several textual sources of the myth. Versions of the myth are found in the Matsya Purāṇa, Chapters 158-60, and the Vīyu Purāṇa, III.10.35-48.

259 See the Śiva Purāṇa 2.4.2.62-4 for a version of this myth. This commonly known version of the myth seems related to another myth cycle in which Skanda is produced by Agni in sexual play with Svāhā. The term Svāhā, used at the end of mantras in fire oblations, is personified/deified as the goddess (Durgā Saptasati 4.7).

260 See, for instance, the Mahābhārata, Vana-parva, 215.16-18.
in others. Skanda’s mythology seems to predate the Devī of the Durgā Saptaśati. I was told that in the Skanda Purāṇa, Skanda was produced from the tejas of Śiva or Agni. Tejas also means "semen." Similarly, Durgā was produced from the cumulative emitted tejas of the gods. She is eventually portrayed as the śakti of all the gods. Durgā’s martial role as leader of the divine armies against the demon hordes vies with Skanda’s role as senāpati.

The South Indian deity Murukan, with whom Skanda came to be identified, resembles the Durgā who is associated with tribal hill peoples, the huntress Durgā, and the lance-carrying Durgā.261 While the myth most widely identified with Durgā is her fight and slaying of the buffalo demon, Mahiśāsura, whom she spears which her lance (śāla), early accounts (e.g., the Mahābhārata 3.221.52ff) attribute the deed to Skanda. Despite these mythic correlations which seem to fuse Durgā and Skanda, in Banaras Durgā is best known as the mother of Skanda through the image cluster of the Durgā Pūjā celebrations where Skanda (or Kārtikeya), known as Kumāra (prince), is portrayed as her handsome son.

6. Kātyāyanī

The origins of the cult of the goddess Kātyāyanī are mysterious. She is first mentioned in the Taittiriya Aranyaka X.1.7 along with the goddesses Vairocanā, Durgī, and Kanyakumārī. This could explain her association with Durgā. Kātyāyanī is the name of one of Yajñavālkya’s wives (Maitreyī is the other) in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upanisad. The Harivamsa refers to the worship of a cluster of goddesses which includes Kātyāyanī, and interestingly, two of the other Nine Durgās (i.e., Kālarātri and Kuśmāṇḍī).262

261 A family in Kerala pointed out to me that the South Indian male god, Ayyappan, resembles Durgā in significant ways. Just as Durgā is associated with the forest (Vana-Durgā) and rides a lion or tiger, Ayyappan emerged from the jungle, riding a tiger. Just as Durgā is a virgin, Ayyappan is strictly celibate (brahmacārin). Most importantly, Ayyappan, like a male mirror image of Durgā, is renowned for slaying the female Buffalo demoness, Mahiśi.

262 The Āryāstavas of the Harivamsa list Kālarātri, Nidrā, Kātyāyanī, Kauśikī, Virūpā, Virūpākṣī, Viśalakṣī, Mahādevī, Kaumārī, Cāndī, Dakṣī, Śīvā, Kāli, Bhayadā, Vetañjī, Śakunī, Yogyūnī, Bhūtadhatrī, and Kuśmāṇḍī, goddesses who are later known through their role in Tantric worship (Bhattacharyya 1973:57). Also see Das (1981) for information on the cult of Kātyāyanī.
Worship of Kātyāyanī, along with Durgā and Ambikā, eventually spread widely and even entered the Buddhist and Jaina pantheons (N. N. Bhattacharyya 1973:42). In the Durgā Saptaśatt, Kātyāyanī is identified with the supreme goddess who slays demons on the battlefield.²⁶³

Das (1981) mentions that Kātyāyanīs also are malevolent manifestations of the supreme Devī, created in order to kill demons. He refers to the Oriya Kalika Purāṇa, which relates how the goddess Durgā created sixty-four yoginis and nine crore (nabakoti) Kātyāyanīs to kill demons on the battlefield.²⁶⁴ Thus the Kātyāyanīs appear associated with the sixty-four yoginis and the number nine. This association is reinforced by evidence from the Causathya Yogiṇī Temple at Hirapur which contains images of sixty-four yoginis, nine Kātyāyanīs, four Bhairavas, and other figures. The fierce nature of the Kātyāyanīs is apparent from their iconography in the temple at Hirapur. Their images are two-armed, associated with a dog and jackal, or two jackals, often standing on a severed head or skull. The nine Kātyāyanīs parallel the cluster of nine Durgās. The epithet Kātyāyanī Devī could thus mean "Goddess of the Kātyāyanīs." It could also mean "Goddess of the Katya tribes."

Pandits told me that there are stories "in the purānas" which tell how a mass of tejas emitted by the gods was placed in the hermitage of the sage (muni) Kātyāyanana, who nourished it. The mass ultimately produced the goddess. The goddess took a concrete form in the sage’s hermitage on the seventh day of the waxing fortnight in the month of Āśvina. She was equipped with weapons on the eighth day, killed Mahiṣāsura on the

²⁶³These associations of Kātyāyanī as a war goddess also appear in versions of the Durgā Saptaśatt myths related in the Vāyu, Matsya, Viṣṇu, and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas. According to Das (1981), from whom the following information is derived, the Skanda Purāṇa describes a virgin residing in the Vindhya mountains who killed Mahiṣāsura. She is portrayed with twelve arms, was born of the energy of the gods, and is called Kātyāyanī. The Vāmana Purāṇa mentions Kātyāyanī in a detailed description of the battle with Mahiṣa, and equates her with Durgā. In both the war-goddess and buffalo demon slaying aspects of her character, Kātyāyanī is identical to Durgā. Early inscriptional evidence of the Kātyāyanī cult is found in the Nāgārjuna Hill inscription of the Maukhari chief Ananta Varman which tells of the establishment of a shrine of the image of Pārvatī under the name of Kātyāyanī. Another inscription at a Brahmanical temple near Neemuch Railway Station on the Ajmer-Kandhwa Railway line records the construction and consecration of a Devī Kātyāyanī temple in 491 C.E.

²⁶⁴One crore equals ten million.
ninth, and disappeared on the tenth day. Since she was formed by the muni Kātyāyana, she is known as Kātyāyanī.

Das (1981) relates another mythic account of Kātyāyanī which is found in the Kālikā Purāṇa, where Brahmā invokes the Great Goddess (Mahādevī) in order to kill Rāvaṇa. Mahādevī Kātyāyanī induced both Rāma and Rāvaṇa to engage in battle in Lanka. She witnessed the battle in disguise for seven days, eventually saved Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and the monkeys, and killed Rāvaṇa and the demons.

A common use of the term Kātyāyanī, found in Apte's Sanskrit dictionary (19886 [1957]:555) is to designate an elderly or middle-aged widow dressed in a red sārī.265 This popular definition is significant when we examine the interpretation offered by women and described later in this chapter, of the entire set of Nine Durgās.

7. Kālarātrī

Kālarātrī means "The Night of Darkness," or "The Night of (All-Destroying) Time." The epithet, in its first translation, incorporates all associations of the goddess with Night whose earliest scriptural references are found in the Rg Vedic Rātrī Sākta. The second translation links the goddess with Kālī, who appears as a wrathful emanation from the forehead of the great goddess (i.e., Durga) in the Durgā Saptasati (7.4-5). Associated oral versions of the myths of Kālī tell how after killing the demons on the battlefield, she continued on her rampage of destruction which threatened to end the entire creation.266 In the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage in Banāras, Kālarātrī Devī is the goddess Kālī of Kālikā temple.

The term Kālarātrī may refer to the night of a man's death. Alternately it may refer to a particular night in a man's life (the seventh day of the seventh month of the seventy-seventh year) after which he is exempt from observing the usual ordinances.

265 Also see Monier-Williams (1986 [1899]:270).

266 Popular lithographs which circulate in Banāras, depict Kālī on such a rampage.
The most compelling association of Kālarātri with Durgā in Banāras comes from a myth related by devotees but attributed to the Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Chapters 71 and 72). The Devī sends her messenger, Kālarātri, to ask the demon Durgā, who had usurped the power of the gods, to surrender. The demon Durgā tried to seize Kālarātri and add her to his harem, but she destroyed his attendants with the fire of her breath and returned to the Devī. The Great Goddess destroyed the demon Durgā, assumed his name, and with her eight energy manifestations, including Kālarātri and others, took up her abode in Banāras.

8. Mahāgaurī

Mahāgaurī is "The Great White Goddess." Gaurī is normally identified with Pārvatī as the spouse of Śiva. As such she is known for performing tremendous austerities until she gains the favour of Śiva and asks that he marry her. In another well-known purānic myth Śiva once teased Pārvatī about her dark complexion. Angered and hurt, she performed austerities (tapas) and shed her dark skin like a snake does its sheath (kośa). She then emerged white and radiant (gaurī). In the third episode of the Durgā Saptasatī, when the gods entreat the goddess for her help, the goddess Pārvatī hears their prayers and asks them whom they are praising. At that moment, the auspicious form of Ambikā emerged from the sheath (kośa) of Pārvatī. Ambikā, the text says, is thus called Kauśikī ("She who is born from a Sheath (kośa)"). Pārvatī turned black (krṣṇa) as a result, is thus known as Kālikā ("little dark one") and returned to her abode in the Himalayas (5.37-41). This would imply that Kauśikī is white (gaurī). Kauśikī (Ambikā) is identified with Durgā later in the text (5.66). Kauśikī is perhaps also related to the Kausika tribe.

267 In the Kāthasarītāgara (XX.104), it is the name of a brāhmaṇa woman skilled in magic.

268 An account of Pārvatī's austerities is found in the Śiva Purāṇa, Rudra-saṁhitā 3.23.19-34.

269 A textual version is found in the Śiva Purāṇa, Vāyaviya-saṁhitā 25.1-48.
The epithet Mahāgaurī could be used to refer to the Devī who is the summation of the city’s Gaurīs. The names, numbers, and locations of these Gaurīs are not so well defined. Some references are found in the Kāśi Khaṇḍa (100.68-72) and Kṛṣya Kalpataru, Tṛṭṭha Viveçana Khaṇḍa (125-127). The following list derives from newspaper clippings in the Banāras daily Āj provided during the spring Navarātra of 1991, when the Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage (navagaurī yātra) is prescribed. Despite such publicity, the Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage is performed by only a few hundred worshippers (mainly women), in comparision to the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage which is performed by thousands even during the spring (vasanta) Navarātra in the month of Caitra (March/April). It should be mentioned, however, that the Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage is also performed by some devotees every month on the first nine days of the bright fortnight or on the third day of the bright fortnight (ṛttiyā śukla pakṣa), especially during the months of Śravana (July/August) and Caitra (March/April). The Gaurīs are:

1. Mukhanirmālikā Gaurī: ("The Pure Faced") located near Gayā Ghāṭ.
2. Jyeṣṭhā Gaurī: ("The Eldest") located west of Jyeṣṭheśvara. {At Bhūta Bhairava, House Number 63/24. See Kāśi Khaṇḍa 63.14}.
4. Śrīgārā Gaurī: ("The Adorned") in Viśvanātha Temple.
5. Viśālakṣī Gaurī: ("The Wide-Eyed") in Viśālakṣī temple near Dharmeśvara at Mir Ghāṭ. {See Kāśi Khaṇḍa 70.13-14; 79.77}.
8. Maṅgalā Gaurī: ("The Auspicious") at Rāma Ghāṭ in House Number K 24/34. {Kāśi Khaṇḍa 49.86-88}.
9. Mahālakṣmī Gaurī: ("Great Fortune") at Lakṣmī Kund. {At Misir Pokhara. See Kāśi Khaṇḍa 70.65-67}.

If Mahāgaurī (Annapūrṇā Devī of Banāras) is the amalgamation of all of Banāras’s Gaurīs, she is subsumed into the Great Goddess Durgā as one of her nine aspects. However, a few temple priests at various Gaurī temples told me that the Nine Gaurīs are the mothers of the Nine Durgās. This interpretation draws on notions of Gaurī
as the wife of Śiva, and Durgā as a young virgin girl.\textsuperscript{270}

9. Siddhidatrī

"She who Bestows Attainments." The term siddhi is often used in the context of spiritual practice (sādhana) where the aspirant (sādhaka) strives to attain supernormal powers or material success. The Durgā Saptaśatī (13.5-17) recounts the well-known experiences of king Suratha and the merchant Samādhi, who propitiate the goddess after three years of steadfast, austere worship. She grants them boons which characterize the nature of the siddhis which may be obtained. Suratha chooses worldly power in order to regain his kingdom, to overthrow his enemies, and to establish a kingdom which would endure in future lifetimes. The merchant, who is referred to as wise (prajñā), chooses knowledge (jñāna) which would destroy attachment to selfish (mama iti) and self-centered (aham iti) notions. The goddess grants him this knowledge which she says leads to spiritual perfection (samsiddhi). So the text supports (or informs) the popular understanding that the Devī grants material attainments as well as spiritual ones, the ultimate spiritual gift being release (mukti) from bondage to worldly existence.\textsuperscript{271}

The worldly boon-granting aspects of Siddhidatrī Devī link her with Lakṣmī, while the knowledge-granting dimensions connect her to Sarasvatī and the Mahāvidyās (Great Knowledges). A devotee’s decision to choose a worldly boon is considered quite acceptable. Although it indicates entanglement in illusion, that predicament is part of the play of the goddess as Mahāmāyā (Great Illusion). The same divine power which ensnares the individual in the worldly round of rebirths can also bestow liberation from it.

\textsuperscript{270}Note Roussel’s characterization of Durgā as the daughter of Śiva, mentioned in the Introduction.

\textsuperscript{271}This is supported by the commentary in the popular Gita Press edition of the Durgā Saptaśatī (1980: 20), which says that the supreme attainment (siddhi) bestowed by the goddess is liberation (mokṣa) of the individual soul from the cycle of rebirths.
Interpretive Schemes for the Entire Set of Nine Durgās

Although the Nine Durgās incorporate many of the most common aspects of the divinity known as Durgā, such as the granting of boons, and although the individual goddesses and their epithets are clearly associated with Durgā, the set seems to lack coherence and thus comprehensiveness. For instance, rather rare epithets such as Kuśmāndā and Candraghaṇtā are placed together with more common ones such as Śailaputri and Mahāgauri. If Candraghaṇtā refers to the bell which Durgā carries, why are other weapons with which she is more frequently associated (e.g., the trident or sword) not mentioned. Virtually none of the people (mostly men) with whom I spoke were able to provide an answer. Most were satisfied that the set of epithets were grouped in the verses of the "Durgā Saptāṣati," and that there was some identifiable link between each epithet and Durgā. However, when I pressed for an explanation, some of the more philosophically oriented male devotees attempted interpretations of the entire set. Their efforts were related to the "manifestations of Prakṛti" metaphysical scheme, in which each Durgā represented the quality of one of the elements (tattva) through which Prakṛti manifests. No one was able to give me a complete interpretation for each of the nine epithets, although I found such an interpretive scheme in the Durgā Kalpataru, a booklet on aspects of Durgā worship published for serious, but non-specialist devotees. The second interpretive scheme is my composite of what was volunteered by some women devotees. While I find the male, tattva-oriented scheme somewhat contrived, I find the women's interpretation particularly comprehensive, consistent, and illuminating.

A. Durgā Kalpataru

One attempt at interpreting the entire cluster systematically is found in the Durgā Kalpataru (1984:39-40), a popular compendium of lore about Durgā written in Hindi (and some Sanskrit). It interprets the Nine Durgās as the principle within various elements (tattva), both gross and subtle, which constitute the material creation.

According to the Durgā Kalpataru, when the goddess is conceived of as the
symbol of manifest creation or nature (prakṛti), she is said to be the active principle (kriyātmaka) in the earth element (prthīvī bhūta). This is Śailaputri who has emerged in the form of, and from matter (1984:39). Since water is the prime substrate of semen (and incidentally blood, which is understood to be another form of semen), Brahmacārīni represents the active principle within the water element (jala bhūta) within creation. By keeping water in its form of ice/snow, she controls the flow of the water (semen, blood) element (1984:39). Since the moon takes its light from the sun, it does not have its own fire. Nevertheless, it has a secret and invisible fire, called ghanta. This fire has the power to cause division or separation. Thus Candragaṇḍā is the active principle within the fire element (agni bhūta) of nature (1984:39). Kuśmāndā means "possessed of motion." It thus identifies the goddess with the active principle of the air element (vāyu bhūta). Kuśmāndā, the text suggests, means "movable egg (anda)," the motion of which creates wind (1984:39).

Skandamātā is the symbol of the insubstantial element of nature, the ether (ākāśa), since she is located centrally in the fifth place among the nine Durgās. Her maternal nature casts her as the seed (bija), or primordial atom (bindu) of all creation, of all the elements. Thus the four gross elements (bhūta) of earth, water, fire, and wind are on one side of her, and the four subtle elements of heart or mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), consciousness (cit), and ego (ahaṅkāra) are on the other. She engenders darkness or opaqueness (anākāśa janini) and when active she is called Skandamātā Janimī. She is the active principle through which all elements are created, and thus although she is the active part of nature, as Skandamātā, she herself has no elements. Thus she is called Jagaddhātrī (Supporter of the World) (1984:39).

It is the heart or mind (manas) that drives the whole world, says the text. This manas is the main reason for birth and rebirth. The power that acts to protect the world is Kātyāyanī. She is the active principle in the element of manas (1984:39). The night, which is empty, which is darkness and blackness, is the vehicle of death. That principle lives in the body as intellect (buddhi). The creation and recognition of time (kāla) is performed by the buddhi, which has the power to decide and discriminate. Kālarātrī is
the active principle in the element of intellect (buddhi) and in the activity of time, whose nature is a form of ignorance (avidyā) called Kālarātri (1984:39). Mahāgaurī gives knowledge of the world. She is the active principle in the element of consciousness (cit) (1984:40).

According to the Durgā Kalpataru, human beings construct reality through the ego, and it is through this that they experience the world. Siddhidatātri is the active principle in the subtle element of the ego (ahaṅkāra). The ahaṅkāra is that element in a being which fashions a sense of the individual self (jīvātmā) as well as the larger, all-encompassing self (parabrahmān) (1984:40). These nine forms of Durgā says the text, are apara forms. The other forms of the goddess are para forms (rūpa). Para involves the realm of understanding or knowledge, and it has ten categories. These ten categories include five active (wind elements) and five feeling (knowledge senses) elements. They emerge from the forms of the goddess known as the "ten great knowledges" (daśa mahāvidyā).

Thus the Durgā Kalpataru formulates a comprehensive interpretation of the group of Nine Durgās within the framework of a Śākta metaphysics, by linking them with the inner and outer elements in creation and then connects them to the set of goddesses known as the Ten Great Knowledges. The first four forms of the Nine Durgās, Śailaputri, Brahmacārini, Candraghanta, and Kūsmāndā, represent the active principle (kriyātmaka) within the four gross elements (rātra) of Prakṛti’s manifestation, namely, earth, water, fire, and air. These four elements fuse or merge into the fifth, insubstantial, etheric element designated as space (ākāśa), represented by Skandamātā. The text implies that she is the unmanifest, transcendent Prakṛti, who is the seed (bhūja) or mother (mātā) of all creation. The remaining four forms of the Nine Durgās, Kātyāyanī, Kālarātri, Mahāgaurī, and Siddhidatātri represent the active principle within the inner elements of human consciousness. These are mind, intellect, consciousness, and ego, respectively. The Nine Durgās constitute lesser or immanent (apara) forms of the Devī. There are ten supreme or transcendent (para) forms, which are categorized as the Great Knowledges (mahāvidyā).
B. Women's Interpretation

One of the most intriguing and persuasive interpretations of the set of Nine Durgās came from two completely different sources both of whom were women. One was a highly educated brāhma woman, a professor who resides in Lucknow. When she heard that I was researching Durgā worship, she stated that she was a devout worshipper of the goddess. She quickly enunciated the verses from the Devī Kavaca which sequentially enumerate the epithets of the Nine Durgās. She simply stated quite exuberantly and as if it were fairly obvious, that the Durgās represented the stages of womanhood and volunteered a few illustrative points. "Ah, Śailaputṛi, the new-born baby girl; Brahmačarīni, . . .; Kuśmāṇḍā, the pregnant woman and Kātyāyanī is the mature woman; . . . and Siddhidatṛi, the spiritually realized woman." The interpretation was puzzling and did not mentally register in any meaningful way. I was, like my male informants, thinking about the set through translations of the epithets or in terms of philosophical symbolism. I was not able to continue my discussion with her due to her busy schedule and subsequent departure. Quite fortunately, a month later, I encountered a similar explanation from a Banārasi woman from a low ranked caste who said, in effect, "these nine Durgās are our life, women’s life" (ye navadurgā hamārī zindagī haim, auratem kī zindagī). When reflecting on this statement in tandem with the professor’s comments, I suddenly found the interpretation startling, and surprisingly revealing, as will be shown below. Later, when I suggested this interpretation to other women (who did not have their own interpretive scheme for the set), they agreed immediately, saying it made a lot of sense. Men dismissed the interpretation with a quick uninterested acknowledgment and affirmation (much as I initially had), but went on to discuss the myths and meanings behind select epithets with which they were familiar.

In this women's interpretation which follows, one finds a strand of religious meanings of notable significance in our understanding of the symbol system which is Durgā. It illustrates rather classically, how a body of religious meanings which circulates essentially orally among women of different class and educational backgrounds is essentially unknown (or ignored) by the male, primarily written, tradition. It is a body of meanings which no doubt influences the way women think about Durgā, and how they
worship her. It reveals something about how women think of themselves and their path in life.

In the women’s interpretation, Śailaputrī represents the new-born woman. She is, like Pārvatī, fresh and pure as the mountain snows. A daughter (puṣṭi) born from stone (sīlā), she is a symbol of the mountain and of the earth. Brahmācārīṇī is the young girl child. She moves (cārya) in the purity of Brahman. She is a virgin. Candraghaṇṭā is the girl who has reached puberty and has begun menstruation. The term ghaṇṭa, which means bell, also signifies a period of time (in Hindi, it means "time," "hour," or "period"). Thus, like the other common synonymous name for a woman, Śaṣikalā, Candraghaṇṭā can mean, "She who has the Periods (cycles, phases, digits) of the Moon."²² Candraghaṇṭā is the girl/woman who experiences a menstrual cycle and is capable of reproduction. It begins her association with blood.

Kuṣmāṇḍā is the ovulating, fertilized, and pregnant woman. Large-bellied, round like a pumpkin gourd, she holds the egg (anda) and the seed (bīja) from which the whole creation will emerge. She nourishes this creation which grows within her. Skandamātā is the woman who has given birth, the woman who suckles her young. She is the young mother. Kātyāyanī is the middle-aged widow. Although older, she is not old, and still cares for her young as a lioness does her cubs. Without a spouse, she is nevertheless, capable, strong, and independent.

Kālarātrī is the woman whose life-creating capacities are coming to an end. She is a woman in menopause experiencing the dark night (or death) of her life-producing and life-sustaining powers. It is the ending of her association with blood. Her offspring are grown up, and she will no longer need to nourish or provide for them. Mahāgaurī is the post-menopausal woman who has returned to the state of purity of the pre-menstrual virgin (gaurī). In this sense, she is the Great Pure One (mahāgaurī). She is a woman who has shed the dark cloak of karmic entanglements. She is no longer capable of producing life, the vehicle of karmic rebirth. She is now able to engage in ascetic and

²²In the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa III.17ff, Śaṣikalā is princess who upon reaching puberty was anxious to marry the prince Sudarśana. Both are aided by Durgā in succeeding in their desires.
other spiritual pursuits such as pilgrimage, without the periodic "pollutions" caused by menstruation. Siddhidatri is the woman who has achieved spiritual perfection. Quite significantly, this state is not defined in terms of personal attainment. Rather (perhaps appropriately within the culture's portrayal of the character of women), it describes this state as one in which the woman is capable of bestowing attainments to others. In this sense, the perfected woman embodies the qualities of the Supreme Devi herself, with whom she has fully merged.

This interpretive scheme for the Nine Durgās is extremely helpful for it provides a coherence and comprehensiveness not found elsewhere. It helps to elucidate not only the meanings of certain epithets (such as Candraghaṇṭā) but accounts for the importance of the proper sequence in the enumeration of the Durgās. The special relationship between the Nine Durgās and womanhood may explain why more women than men engage in the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, although the pilgrimage is performed by both sexes.

The interpretation finds support in another context. During each of the nine days of both Navarātras the Durgā of Durgā Kund temple is dressed in a different coloured sārī. The eldest temple priest dresses the Durgās as follows: Sāilaputrī and Brahmacārīṇī wear saffron yellow; Candraghaṇṭā wears light pink or red; Kuśmāṇḍā, Skandamātā, Kātyāyānī, and Kālarātrī wear red. Mahāgaurī wears saffron yellow, and Siddhidatri may wear any colour (even a multi-coloured sārī), but it must be silk. When asked what the reason was for these colour choices, he offered no explanation other than that it was tradition. However, according to the "stages of womanhood" interpretive scheme the sārī colours are quite appropriate. Saffron is appropriate for the pre-menstrual and post-menopausal forms of the Devi, since it is the colour of purity (Sāilaputrī), continence and celibacy (Brahmacārīṇī), and ascetic renunciation (Mahāgaurī). The pink or red sārī of Candraghaṇṭā indicates the inception of (or fuller) association with blood. This blood association, symbolized by the red sārī, representative of the menstrual flow of women capable of engendering life, nourishing it (milk is thought to be produced from blood), and of the life-blood which must be spilled in sustaining the lives they have engendered, continues in the fecund (Kuśmāṇḍā), nurturing (Skandamātā), protecting (Kātyāyānī), and
destroying (Kālarātri) stages of womanhood. Siddhidatri, encompassing all stages, even transcending them, is not restricted by the colour of her sārī. Rather, it is the quality of the material (silk) which symbolizes the higher state of attainment.

A final support I offer for this interpretive scheme comes from exemplary Durgā worshipping women, aspects of whose lives appear to parallel part of this schema. The lives of Rānī Bhavānī and her daughter, Tārā Sundari, immediately come to mind. Both were widowed early (like Kātyāyanī) but continued to live independently. They did not remarry. Their lives were characterized by austerity and prayer (especially in the case of Tārā Sundari). Rānī Bhavānī certainly exemplified the ideals of pious generosity and material giving (dāna), virtues which resemble the image of Durgā as Siddhidatri, the giver of material boons. One might suggest that Tārā Sundari, through the claims made about the benefits of prayer at her burial place (samādhi) which some devotees refer to as a seat of attainment (siddhāptīha), exemplifies spiritual giving. In this respect she resembles Durgā Siddhidatri in her aspect as the giver of spiritual boons. Both mother and daughter have come to be identified with the Devī herself: Tārā Sundari as the goddess Tārā or Kāli, and Rānī Bhavānī as Durgā through her epithets of Lokamātā and Daśapraharadhārinī.

What is notable in the set of the Nine Durgās is the relative absence of male spousal associations. Thus although the goddess is not exclusively portrayed as a virgin or a widow, her fecund and maternal forms are not linked in any obvious manner to a male deity, such as Śiva. Durgā, through the symbolism of the Nine Durgās, represents a conception of strong, independent womanhood. A woman’s life, in this conception, is fully realized both through worldly (e.g., maternal) and spiritual achievements which are not played off against each other. The "Durgā Woman" need not forfeit children or endure celibacy in a renunciation of the world in order to obtain the fullest realization. Nor does she need to depend on a spouse for support and social acceptance at any stage in life, including when widowed. Although married life is not overtly discarded in this depiction, the path more obviously portrays independent womanhood progressing through the stages of daughter, virgin, single mother, widow, yogini, and goddess incarnate.
Comparison with the Nine Gaurīs

This extremely productive line of interpretation made me immediately examine other sets of goddesses. The most obvious similar set is the Nine Gaurīs of Banāras, who are also the object of a pilgrimage, normally prescribed during the spring Navarātra. Significantly, this set seems to portray the stages of womanhood as well, but here, the male spousal affiliation is highly significant. Although I cannot make a strong supporting case for the following interpretation, since it did not occur to me while I was in India, I saw only women engaged in the Nine Gaurī Pilgrimage, suggesting that the Gaurīs are worshipped for reasons which pertain only to women (such as marriage). Women did state that they worshipped Gaurī for themselves or their daughters. Indeed mythologically, Gaurī (Pārvatī) performed austerities in order to obtain Śiva as a spouse.

Mukhanirmālikā Gaurī is the pure-faced daughter, flawless in complexion and features, probably highly suitable for marriage. Jyeṣṭhā means the eldest, and could represent the eldest daughter, the first to be married. Of the four stages of life (caturāśrama) in the Hindu tradition, the second stage, that of the married householder (grhastha) is often considered the most excellent (jyeṣṭha āśrama).273 Saubhāgya is the fortunate condition of finding the ideal husband or an auspicious state of wifehood (saubhāgyavart) which is in direct contrast to widowhood. Saubhāgyā Gaurī could represent the woman who has found her ideal marital match. Śrīgāra means adornment, and is also the sentiment of erotic love. Śrīgārā Gaurī could represent woman in the stage of discovering and fulfilling erotic passions after marriage. Viśālakṣī means wide-eyed (or deer-eyed) and refers to a classic feature of womanly beauty. Perhaps Viśālakṣī Gaurī (like Kāmākṣī Devī) represents the beauty of a married woman (i.e., a woman whose eyes reveal that she has known erotic love (kāma)). Lalitā runs the gamut in meaning from soft charm to wanton amorousness. Lalitā Gaurī could represent the

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273 Jyeṣṭhā does represent the first or seniormost wife of a man with many wives according to the Śrīdharmapaddhati, an eighteenth century manual on orthodox religious law for women. The eldest wife (jyeṣṭha) is accorded many privileges commensurate with her position in the family. However, a negative dimension may accompany her status if a man chooses another wife, for the first may be seen as lacking in some important trait, such as fertility or sexual attractiveness (Leslie 1991:123-124).
sexual attractiveness of a married woman and the delight of the marital state. Bhavānī is the wife of Bhava (i.e., Śiva), which means "Being" or well-being. This is a clear marital association. Bhavānī Gaurī could represent woman in a well-established marital relationship, the provider of prosperity and well-being to her husband and family. Maṅgala, too, has connotations of prosperity and auspiciousness, perhaps representing the maturation and intensification of these qualities in the married woman. The cluster ends with Mahālakṣmī Gaurī, the goddess who embodies the perfection of these womanly qualities. The woman culminates her path through life by being fully merged with divine prosperity and auspiciousness.

It is noteworthy that maternal aspects of womanhood are not obvious or even apparent in this set. The vision of womanhood portrayed through the Gaurīs, such as marriageable daughter, beautiful and sexually attractive wife, and bringer of well-being and prosperity to the home, tempts the suggestion that it was created from a male perspective. This imagery contrasts with the picture of womanhood in the Nine Durgā symbolism, which one could suggest emerges from a female perspective. However, since it is exclusively women who engage in the pilgrimage to the Gaurīs, it suggests an acceptance (if not a creation) of that vision of womanhood, by women. In a similar vein, men engage in the Nine Durgā pilgrimage, although they do not share the same interpretive framework as women. In this latter regard, the Durgās function more comprehensively as a system of symbols which are meaningful to both men and women.

My observations revealed that it is mainly women who pray to the Gaurīs, probably in order to secure the beauty and purity necessary to attain and retain a happy marriage. However, the Durgās are meaningful to both men and women. For women, the Durgās represent beauty, but, more obviously, purity (as virgin and post-menopausal woman) and independent maternal strength. The Durgās function as particularly meaningful models (although more often as sources of solace and strength) for women, who through circumstance are forced to be independent. Consider the case of women
such as Shanti Devi, the boatman's daughter, who was orphaned young. Married at the age of eight to a forty year old man who was mostly away, Shanti had two children by the time she was sixteen. Her husband drank and gambled so Shanti was essentially alone even during the ten years that he was "at home" with her. He died when she was twenty-eight leaving her widowed and entrusted with the care of her two sons. Although her case may appear extreme, it is not very unusual for Hindu women to have to cope with life essentially alone. It is especially true of women whose husbands are away in dangerous situations for long periods of time, working, for example, as fishermen or soldiers. The combination of danger in the occupation of the males, and the aloneness experienced by the females, may be contributing factors in understanding why Durgā is worshipped by such groups. Durgā is an ideal model of independence and marital fidelity for women, as well as a source of protective strength for their spouses.

In the mythological parallel, Śiva, in his persona as the night-crawling, hemp-consuming male, when designated as the husband of Durgā is an appropriate choice for he does not compromise the Devi's independence. In his absence, his austerity, or his intoxication, she is left to take care of things on her own.

For a young girl (perhaps not "the eldest" daughter) awaiting a husband, or awaiting the consumation of her marriage and her husband's companionship after an early betrothal, Durgā offers a model of chastity and fidelity. Similarly Durgā is a model of virtue and strength, and of loyalty to her children in the absence of a husband. In this

274 Some pertinent aspects of Shanti Devi's life are included in an interview which is partially transcribed in the Introduction.

275 Östör points out how members of the fishermen (Jele) caste claim a special relationship with Durgā (1980:34).

276 It is also quite common for wives to be left in their home villages for weeks or months at a time while their husbands try to earn a living in cities such as Banāras.

277 In many respects, tradition holds that the wife's chastity is the source of her husband's strength. "The chaste wife's meritorious devotion generates power which can help her husband triumph on the battlefield or against the forces of nature, save her husband from the grasp of the God of Death, or even stay the sun in its celestial orbit" (Jacobson 1978:96).
regard, Durgā is also meaningful to males in a patriarchal society. Fathers wish that their daughters will grow up chaste and remain virginal until after their marriage. As pure jewels they are likely to attract wealthy/powerful suitors leading to status-enhancing alliances. Husbands, while they are away, wish that their wives will be chaste and capable of raising their children (especially sons) independently. If a man dies, he hopes that his wife will remain faithful to his memory, not remarry, and raise his children (especially his sons) competently. Sons certainly wish this special care from their mothers. While men do not interpret the Nine Durgās as the detailed stages of womanhood, they do equate Durgā with the virginal daughter, the understanding wife, and the protective mother.

The Nine Durgā Pilgrimage is different from pilgrimages to remote, inaccessible places. It is even different from the type of pilgrimage described earlier in this chapter, in order to perform a devotional pledge of service. Pilgrims in the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage do not go immediately from one temple to another in a continuous circuit but visit a different temple each day. They go alone, or in small groups, for short distances, and return to their homes every day between visits to each of the nine temples. As a result, there is not, in any marked manner, the *communitas* which characterizes pilgrim groups which travel together for long periods of time, a classic example of which is given by Irawati Karve (1962). Karve’s description of a pilgrimage to the shrine of Vithoba Bhave at Pandharpur is used by Turner to illustrate normative *communitas*, where "distinctions of caste are . . . maintained during the pilgrimage journey" (1973:194,195,219-221).

Perhaps the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage exhibits a form of the *communitas* which marks the experience of pilgrims at certain pilgrimage destinations. A good example of such *communitas* is given by Ann Gold (1988) who travelled with pilgrims from a Rajasthani village to the ocean at Puri. Gold, referring to Turner, comments how "during their extended frolic in the waves our pilgrim company did appear to enjoy ‘joyful ludic communitas’" (Turner 1978:37)” (1988:282). The thick crowds within each of the nine Durgā temples make the experience of *dārsana* at the *garbhagṛha* a potentially dangerous
experience. At times one can barely breathe amid the crush of human bodies, and pilgrims who are caught in such a "sea of humanity" do have pained looks on their faces. There is certainly a dissolution of caste distinctions during such close physical contact, but provisions are taken to maintain some forms of separation. In the large temples, such as Durgājī, a wooden barrier keeps men and women separated, a preventative measure against undesirable physical contact between the sexes.

I must admit that I found the press of the crowds physically painful, and disturbing, which I attribute, perhaps inappropriately, to my "western sense" of physical space. When observing the dynamics of the crowd from an uncrowded vantage point, I noticed that the men were far more controlled, even stiff when compared to the women, in their approach to darśana. The men formed orderly lines which only dissolved into a surging crowd in front of the garbhagṛha. The women’s side appeared to throb with life. From the moment they entered the temple, the women struck me as being more relaxed and more at home with the process of worship. They jumped and rang the temple bells with glee. They surged at the inner sanctum with so much vigour that visible waves formed within the mass of their bodies in the porch. After taking darśana, and breaking out of the crowd, almost every one of the hundreds that I observed, broke out into wide grins, indicating that they had clearly enjoyed the experience. Communitas, in which the terms "joyful" and "ludic" are quite appropriate, is clearly applicable to this aspect of the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage.

Leaving Turner’s categories, and turning to some other general studies of Hindu pilgrimage, we note A. Bhāratī’s comment on the importance of movement in pilgrimage (1981:5-6). The word yātra derives from the Sanskrit root yā, "to go." There is certainly considerable movement by pilgrims who perform the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, and in this sense it has the characteristic elements of ordeal and motion. Similarly, Diana Eck has elaborated on the central notion of the salvific potency of a place of pilgrimage (1981). Such places are often called tīrthas, literally "fords" or "crossing places" which allow

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278 Such crowding does keep many worshippers, from both high and low classes, from engaging in the pilgrimage.
one to cross safely from the unsatisfactory condition of life in this world to the far shore of salvation. In some measure this is true of the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, for pilgrims are definitely seeking a change in their lives. However the Nine Durgā sites are not referred to as tīrthas. They are more often referred to as siddhapūtas, seats of supernormal attainments.

The sites of the Nine Durgās are indeed important. However, in addition to Eck's observations about tīrthas, these sites are places of power, not merely salvation. The power of a goddess site derives from the presence of the Devī, although the attainments of others at such a site enhances its reputation. Pilgrims and regular worshippers spoke with unequivocal certainty about the power of the Devī at each of these sites, particularly Durgājī. The Kāśī Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa tells how Durgā and her eight saktis came to reside in Banāras, to protect the city and its inhabitants. The Nine Durgās are located somewhat like protectors at the extremities and centre of the sacred precincts of Banāras (Kṣetra āśrama). Śailaputri Devī is at the extreme north of the city by the banks of the Varana river, Durgājī to the south by the Asī river, Skandamātā to the far west, and most of the others close to the centre not far from the river Gaṅgā to the east. However, the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage is generally not performed by worshippers for the protection of the city, but for the protection of its citizens. Although the pilgrimage may be done in fulfillment of a devotional pledge (manauti), it is more often performed as a vowed devotional observance (vrata). Such a vrata is taken by both men and women of Banāras to request the special protective powers of the Durgās for themselves or their dependents. Women like Shanti Devī may ask the Durgās for the strength to support their sons, and for their sons to find good wives. Men might seek special powers for themselves, success in job competitions, protection in a dangerous undertaking, or suitable marriages for their daughters, along with the status-enhancing alliances which such marriages bring.

If the comprehensive understanding of the Nine Durgās as the stages of womanhood functions at some subconscious level in the minds of female pilgrims, they perhaps see these Durgās as models to emulate in the face of adversity. Males, whose
viewpoint in this context may be characterized as more abstract and philosophical, might see the Devī's power accruing to them in the form of physical, mental, or spiritual prowess. To males, the Devī embodies the cosmos, which is imbued with power in its constituent elements and in the elements of human consciousness. In one application of Geertz's terms, the Nine Durgās function for men as a "model of" the cosmos, whose manifest form and animating energy constitutes a power which affords them protection against any adversity. The same set of Nine Durgās, simultaneously serve as a "model for" women's actual lives.

V. Group Recitation of the Durgā Sapatasati

The close relationship between the recitation of the Durgā Saptaśatt and the worship of the Devī is spoken about by the goddess herself in the twelfth chapter of the text. The Devī tells devotees that those who proclaim (kīrtayiḥṣantī, uccāryam) or recite (paṭhyate) the text will be freed from misfortune (12.2-9). It is particularly beneficial if the recitation be heard (śrōṣyantī) by others (12.3). It is to be recited properly (samyac) by those who are mentally composed (samahita), and listened to with devotion (bhakti) (12.6). It could be recited on the eighth, ninth, or fourteenth day of the lunar fortnight with particular benefit (12.3). The Devī has special regard for recitation during the sacrificial offerings (bālipradāna), the performance of worship (pūjā), the fire rite (agnikārīya), and the great festival (mahotsava) (12.9). She is especially endeared to sacrificial worship (bālipūjā) and the fire oblations (vahnihoma) (12.10). The devotee who hears her glorification during the great worship ritual (mahāpūjā) in autumn (saratkāle) will certainly receive benefits through her blessings (prasāda) (12.11-12). Furthermore, if her glorification (māhātmya) is properly recited in her sanctuary (ayatana), the Devī promises never to leave that place, and to establish her presence there (12.8).

This prescription is succinct and authoritative. It coincides with accounts from devotees explaining why they recite the Durgā Saptaśatt (Devī Māhātmya) out loud, why they organize recitations which are broadcast for all to hear, and why qualified
individuals (e.g., brāhmaṇas) are commissioned to recite the text (see Figure 11). It is difficult to determine whether the Durgā Saptaśati verses cited above are the source of current worship practices, or whether they reflect Devī worship practices which were prevalent at the time of its composition. At present, the text enjoys a tremendously important place in Durgā worship. This is evidence of its enduring influence in shaping and sanctioning contemporary Devī worship practices. The influence of the prescriptions of the text may explain why recitations are more frequent during the Navarātras, especially Āśvina, particularly during the latter days of the fortnight. It also may explain why recitations are performed in temples, which are permanent abodes of the Devī, or in temporary shrines set up for the purpose. In the latter locations, the individual, group, or community erects an impermanent sanctuary (pandal, mandapa) to establish the goddess’s presence permanently in the home, the precincts, or the neighbourhood. The close association of the fire oblation ritual (homa) with the recitation is also mentioned and sanctioned by the text.

Unlike the community Durgā Pūjās where temporary altars (pandal) are erected and where clay images of Durgā and other attending deities are worshipped, a few groups in Banāras set up a pavilion (mandapa) as a sanctuary (ayatana) in which goddess worship consists primarily of recitation of the Durgā Saptaśati and fire oblations. The structure and layout of the pavilion is of interest, since the impression conveyed is reminiscent of Vedic rituals which centered on textual recitation and offerings into the fire. 279

The mandapa is a square pavilion with a thatched or tented roof set atop bamboo poles. It is decorated with flags and has altars to various deities, such as the nine planets (navagraha), in specific locations within it. One or more fire pits (havan kunda) may be set up within the mandapa. Typically, one hundred or one thousand recitations may be made by brāhmaṇas and the number of oblations (avahuti) into the fire are one tenth that number.

Ācārya Purusottama Panditji, the ritual specialist (karmakāndi) who oversaw the

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279See, for instance, Fritz Staal’s (1983) detailed account of the Vedic fire ritual.
"One Hundred Recitations of the Durga SaptaSatī" (Sat Cāndī Pāṭha) organized by the Mā Mahiśāsuramardinī Pūjā Sammiti, in 1991, provided me with many details on this kind of worship. He referred to the ritual as a sacrificial rite (yajña) and as an assemblage of activities concerning the relationship between the individual and the supreme self (ādhyātmika samsthāna). The ritual was directed to the goddess Mā Mahiśāsuramardinī (an epithet of Durgā), located near Lolarka Kunda. "Although it is a small temple, it is a powerful one," I was told. "The image (Mother who is Crusher of the Buffalo Demon) arose spontaneously and was visited by a snake daily. The image changes three times a day. It is different in the morning, at noon, and at night." Such visible transformations in Devī images are not at all uncommon. Sometimes a goddess, fresh and youthful at dawn, grows old as the day proceeds and she takes on the burdens of her devotees. At other times she may be seen to smile or cry. More than just possessing the human qualities suggested by these views, the Devī, like the cyclical cosmos, or the earth's annual cycle, keeps renewing herself daily.

This community's recitation cost forty-five thousand rupees (an inexpensive fee, I was told by the brahmānas). It is noteworthy that it was performed, not just for the community, but for the well being of the whole world (viśva kalyāna). Ten brahmānas were commissioned to chant the text twice daily for five days. Although the ritual centered on the text recitation and the fire oblations, it was also the gathering place for other cultural performances. Religious songs (bhajana), preaching from scriptures, and classical music were among the scheduled activities. In this respect, this type of community worship parallels the public Durgā Pūjā rituals which also take place at the same time. The worship is not influenced by the Bengali style, since no elaborate images (mūrti) are used. Also, rather than the single priest commissioned in the Durgā Pūjā ritual, here more brahmānas are employed. In another location in the city, one hundred brahmānas were performing a thousand recitations of the text, and I was told that in January, 1992, in the city of Patna, two thousand two hundred brahmānas would chant for twenty-seven days to perform one hundred thousand recitations. When I asked why the month of January was chosen instead of the spring or autumn Navarātra, for such a
large recitation, I was told that Mā could be propitiated at any time she was needed. She was available at any time of the year. The Āśvina and Caitra Navarātra are merely special times for the worship of Durgā.  

The pavilion built for such recitations is square, and in the centre of it is a fire pit (See Diagram 5). My subsequent description of the pavilion and the form of worship is primarily derived from discussions with Ācārya Puruṣottama Panditjī, who oversaw the ritual. According to the Ācārya, the fire pit (havan kunda) is not a yoni kunda, but has a yoni located atop it. Offerings are placed into the yoni and from there they enter into the kunda. The kunda has three levels in its construction representing Brahmā (the uppermost), Viṣṇu, and Rudra. The yoni is Durgā. Her "self" is composed of the three fundamental qualities (irigunā ātmikā) and her abode is above the main gods. The square pavilion is like the cosmos. It faces the four cardinal directions. The southeast is the Agni corner. The northeast is the Īṣāna corner. The southwest is the Nairṛti corner and the northwest is Vāyu. The pavilion is divided into nine squares, four on the corners, four on the edges and one in the centre. The most important altar (vedī) is located on the east (pūrva) side. It is to the Supreme Goddess (Pradhāna Devī). A jar (kalaśa) representing the Supreme Goddess is established atop the sarvabuddhara mandala (Orb of All Auspiciousness) made out of coloured rice. In the Īṣāna corner, a nine planet (navagraha) altar is constructed. There is no jar atop this altar, but a small jar representing the innumerable (asaṁkhyāta) Rudras is placed at the side. The altar in the Agni corner is to the Yoginis. Mahākālli, Mahālakṣmi, and Mahāśarasvatī are located in the jar which is situated atop the yogini mandala. Beside this altar a small jar is established for Varuna. Against the altar a plaque with seven vermilion spots leans. These represent the seven mothers (sapta mātrka). Sixteen areca (supāri, betel) nuts are strewn at the base. These represent the sixteen mothers. Their child, Ganeśa, is represented by an areca nut wrapped in a red thread, which symbolizes his sacred thread. In the Nairṛti corner there is the altar of Structural Foundations (vāstu vedī), and the

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280 Although the pandits did not mention it, a Navarātra of lesser importance occurs in the month of Magha which often falls in the month of January.
Guardians of the Field (ksetrapāla) are located in the Vāyu corner. There is a jar of the goddess located atop this group. The goddess abides in all these things, each of which are her forms. She pervades the entire pavilion.

A pūjā is performed to the earth (prthivī), prior to the building of the pavilion. There are jars established for the ten Guardians of the Directions (dikpāla), the eight guardians of the worlds (lokapāla), and two guardians of the gate (dvārapāla). There are coloured flags representing some of these deities, but the great flag (mahāpāthaka) is located at the Īśāna corner. When I asked the Ācārya where he learned all of the procedures, he said that he had performed such a ritual many times in the past. When I asked if there was a text I could consult to find out more about the ritual, he mentioned the Kuṇḍaśuddhi, which is supposed to give details on the construction and performance of these rituals.²⁸¹ "Why are such rituals performed?" I asked. "To uplift/spread righteousness and order (dharma ke uttana/utthana), and for the well-being of all from a wide variety of ailments," answered the Ācārya.

Such organized recitations of the Durgā Saptaśati represent a strand of worship closely aligned with brahmanical orthodoxy which they certainly support. The pavilion which represents the cosmos is divided into nine squares which point to the geometric significance of the number nine in goddess symbolism. It is interesting to note the relationship of the nine planets, Varuna, and the Rudras with goddess worship. Also significant is the presence of the Vāstu altar, which confirms the Devī’s relationship with all architectural constructions. She is the stable base as well as the force which gives integrity to structures. I was told that the shape of the kundā depends on the objective of the ritual. When special desires are wished for (sakāma), a yoni shaped kundā is built. It is the portal through which desires are carried to the celestials, and through which the fruit of desire is born. In rituals where no special desires are wished for (akāma), a square kundā is built. The yoni on top represents the portal through which offerings enter, and the square represents the stable cosmic order.

²⁸¹I could not find a copy prior to my departure from Banāras.
VI. Personal Śākta Śādhana

Ravi Kumar (a Śākta practitioner): I feel rhythms in my body when I chant. It makes me feel I can do anything that I need to. I don’t see a woman, or a mother before me. The sitting and the concentration, these develop a kind of mental energy, a logic, a wisdom. This is what I get from the practice.

Another aspect of goddess directed activity during Navarātra involves the spiritual practices (śādhana) performed by individuals interested in tapping into the power (śakti) of the Devī, or in receiving a boon (vara). Unlike devotion (bhakti) or the austerities performed in fulfilment of a promise (manauti), śādhana has a manipulative dimension. It is aimed more at compelling than beseeching the attention or grace of the goddess, owing to her previous promise (attested to in scriptural sources) to worshippers.

Śādhana need not be a distinct worship activity. It may therefore accompany a devotee’s simple home worship, where a numbered repetitive chanting (japa) of a goddess mantra is expected to bring about a desired result. Establishment of the ghata, recitations of the Durgā Saptasati, visiting and worshipping at a temple, performance of the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, and performing fire oblations (homa) may all constitute part of spiritual practice.

Besides non-specialist devotees, who may perform some simple form of śādhana, it is the Śākta tantrics, healers, sorcerers, and priests who are more likely to engage in serious forms of spiritual practice. The difficulty of a particular śādhana often lies in a combined display of knowledge, will power, and endurance. The spiritual practitioner (śādhaka) must know what to do to earn the favour of the Devī. Typically, winning her favour involves knowing how and when to worship her according to traditional ritual prescriptions. Besides the efforts involved in ritual preparation, the śādhaka may embark on strenuous pilgrimage circuits, such as several repetitions of the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, or a more recent practice may include visits to certain of the temporary shrines (pandal) which are erected during Durgā Pūjā. These pandalas, quite significantly, constitute new touchstones of sacrality for Śākta śādhakas.

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282 A pseudonym.
The most frequently performed item of spiritual practice for a sādhaka during Navarātra, however, is the recitation of the Durgā Saptaśati. However, there are degrees of difficulty in recitations. Thus while one person may decide to read the text once through the entire nine days, others read the text on each of the nine days. Still others may perform any of a number of variations of a bracketed or boxed recitation (sampuṭa pāṭha). In the sampuṭa pāṭha, every verse of the Durgā Saptaśati is preceded and followed by a chosen verse from the text. This makes each recitation three times as long. The sandwiching verse is generally chosen according to the sādhaka’s particular desire. Another variation may involve increasing the numbers of recitations. Thus the sādhaka may repeat the pāṭha once on the first day, twice on the second day, and so on until nine recitations are performed on the ninth day. If such numerical increments are conjoined with boxed recitations, there may not be enough time in the day to satisfy the requirements. As a result, Tantric condensations of the Durgā Saptaśati exist, where every verse of the text, which is considered to be a sacred utterance (mantra), is reduced to a seed syllable (bija). Thus the entire text can be recited boxed or normally, more easily and often.

Variations in the preparations of the fire oblation also constitute part of the sādhana. These may involve the construction and shape of the fire pit, and the number of oblations made into it. Some sādhakas may include a blood sacrifice (bali dāna). For the few who follow the left hand tantric path (vāmācāra mārga) this provides the meat (mamsa) element (tattva) in their sādhana which involves a five element (pañcatattva) offering. I was told that this ritual is normally performed during the confluence (sandhi) of the eighth and ninth solar days, in the middle of the night. It is called the mahāniśa pūjā (Dead of Night ritual worship).

Ravi Kumar and the late Svāmi Sukhānanda Mahārāja are persons whose spiritual practices exemplify the path of personal sādhana. Ravi is a young man who is still a novice in his practice when compared to the late Svāmi, who is said to have lived the entirety of the last fifty years of his life in worship of Durgā. Ravi Kumar learned to recite the Durgā Saptaśati on his own against the advice of his parents and teachers, who
felt he needed formal training in Sanskrit. He attributes his motivation and success in learning the text to the Devī’s grace. Ravi continued his education at university, although not in Sanskrit or religion, but said that through recitation he has learned tremendously. The *Durgā Saptasatī* led him to read other texts on goddess worship. "I found contradictions in the texts," he said.

So I use my intuition in selecting the rituals. I combine them so they are meaningful to me. I don’t follow the tradition exactly, but adapt it. . . . I don’t know what the power is, or where it comes from, . . . , only that it works.

The late Svāmi Sukhānanda Mahārāja of the Durgā Saptasatī Mandir in Nagwa, in the south of Banāras, is a most dramatic example of personal Śākta sadhāna. Considered by his devotees to be a fully attained master (*siddha yogī*), he is said to have lived a life completely dedicated to Durgā. The Svāmi rarely spoke about his life. "You can ask those who are around here about my life," he would say when I asked him about it. About fifty years before his death, Sukhānanda found a spot by the Gaṅgā under a large pippal tree and meditated there. According to worshippers at the temple, he was often visited by people for his blessings or advice and even by bandits (*dacoits*) who sought to frighten him off the property or steal his belongings. The Devī is said to have protected him always and slowly his fame spread. Gifts were given to him, which in turn he dedicated to Durgā. In time, devotees acquired the land and a temple was constructed on the premises. It contains paintings of the Nine Durgās, the Ten Great Knowledges, and the entire text of the *Durgā Saptasatī* carved on the marble walls. Sukhānanda slept, woke, and lived in front of the Durgā image in the temple. He explained to me that all his thoughts and actions were directed to the goddess. He disliked giving interviews, although he seemed to approve of my interest in the goddess. I spent many hours essentially ignored as he carried out his rituals of worship and self-sustenance which were so seamlessly connected that I could not distinguish when he was preparing food for the Devī, or for himself, or if he was preparing some unguent for application to himself or to the Devī image. Although not far from death when I knew him, he exuded a fierce power and surprising mental clarity at times. Otherwise, he would often be swooning before the Durgā image in what struck me as a form of mental absorption (*samādhi*).
He once showed me how his tongue had been severed at the underside, allowing it to flip backward into the throat to detain and taste the nectar which flows from the top of the head upon perfection of kundalini yogic practice. During Navarātra, he would keep two lamps burning constantly on either side of the temple’s marble Durgā image and establish the jar of the Devī there. At the climax of the ritual of worship, he would strip off his clothes, and clad only in a loincloth ascend a stool in front of the image and shower Durgā with a basinful of aparājitā blossoms.

Sādhana is directed at acquiring, increasing, storing, and utilizing the mysterious power in the cosmos. To most spiritual practitioners (sādhaka), practice is not unlike that involved in the study of music or some other art. Sādhana repeats the actions of such previously acquired powers as memory, concentration, patience, and volition through the discipline required for text recitation. The sādhaka actually experiences the mysterious power of the Devī in the process of practice, and thus feels empowered to deal with other matters in different contexts. Personal practice often includes innovative elements and a combination of rituals drawn from a variety of prescribed authoritative sources. Privacy and secrecy insure that the practitioner will not have to justify the particular ritual form to others. In many ways the personal practitioner is a locus of the fusion between the authoritative textual traditions and the local, oral ones. Like Ravi Kumar, the personal practitioner is interested in adopting and adapting rituals from a variety of sources as long as they are considered reasonable and prove effective. Specific rituals may be experimented with if prescribed, but they are only maintained if they prove themselves to be useful. Such composite rituals may then be transmitted within the practitioner’s family or to disciples. Custodians and promoters of certain authoritative traditions may

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283 According to this practice the Devī, who resides like a coiled dormant serpent at the base of the subtle body, is awakened through psycho-spiritual exercise. She ascends the channels of the body until she unites with the male principle, Śiva, at the apex. This union results in the flow of an elixir which, among its many activities, transforms the body of the practitioner into immaculate and adamantine substance. See the Appendix for a detailed description of kundalini yogic practice within the context of the Durgā Pūjā ritual.

284 Several flowers are designated as aparājitā. These were the tiny white blossoms with orange at their base, also known as shephāli.
be quick to criticize the unorthodox practices of novices like Ravi Kumar whose practice is seasonal. However they acknowledge the validity of the unorthodox practices of such virtuosi as Sukhānanda Mahārāja, whose dedication to the Devī was total and irreproachable.

VII. Elaborate Home Worship

A few homes in Banāras celebrate the Āśvina Navarātra with an elaborate pūjā. These homes typically belong to families which are both wealthy and pious; families which can afford to stage elaborate celebrations and those who feel the need to do so. In Banāras these are often, although not exclusively, Bengali families such as the Mitra family in Chaukhamba, or the Lahiri family in Bengali Tola.

Elaborate home worship may be distinguished by the commissioning of a ritual specialist (purohita) to perform the Durgā Pūjā and the recitation of the Durgā Saptaśat. This act of patronage almost immediately raises the complexity of the celebration for the specialist is likely to demand numerous items to celebrate the worship of the goddess properly. The patron (yajamāna) is expected to commission some sort of image of the Devī if there is no permanent image in the shrine room at home, and also to supply all the ingredients which will be offered in worship. The yajamāna may also be required to provide the ritual implements necessary for the performance of the pūjā, and finally offer payment to the purohita for the services rendered. In elaborate home pūjās, expensive foods are offered to the Devī and afterwards to visiting guests as blessed items (prasāda). Expensive clothing may be offered to the Devī and ultimately goes to the ritual specialist.

A lengthy and detailed description of such a home pūjā is given in the next chapter.

Although the practice is in decline, certain families arrange night-long vigils (rātra jāgara) where either the family members (particularly the women) or professional minstrels perform folk songs to the goddess. These songs are not exclusively directed to Durgā, but may be directed to other goddesses. Also popular are such epics ballads as the tale of the heroic brothers Ālhā and Ûdal, who worshipped the goddess Śāradā. A
typical song roughly translates as follows:²⁸⁵

_Bhavānī re deviŷā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

Likhi-likhi cithiyā je asurā pathavai he
A demon is writing many letters [saying]
_Durgā se karavi ham viyāha
"I will marry Durgā."
_Bhavānī re deviŷā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

Likhi-likhi cithiyā je devī jī pathavai he
The Goddess writes to him [saying]
Asurā ke karavi ham samhār
"I will destroy the demon."
_Bhavānī re deviŷā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

Om ē re atasīyā cāḍhī maiyā je nihār īt.
The Mother ascends a high turret and looks down to see
_Kat dal āvai bariyāt
How many members are coming in the marriage party.
_Hathiyā [unnaś] āvai ghoravā.
Elephants [in the lead] and horses are coming.
_Bhavānī re deviŷā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

_Ek hāthai lihṭ maiyā dhāl.
In one hand Mother took the shield.
_Ek hāthai lihṭ maiyā taravāṛtyā
In one hand Mother took the sword.
_Larat-larat maiyā rath me [sathailo!
Riding on a chariot, Mother begins fighting them.
_Bhavānī re deviŷā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

²⁸⁵The transcription of this song derives from an oral version. I asked a companion to jot down the lyrics phonetically. The language is some folk dialect of Hindi. The translation is "rough" because I am not completely sure if all of the words have been transcribed accurately and because I am uncertain about the meanings of certain words. I have placed these in square brackets. I cross checked my translation with a Hindi speaking Banārasi friend who was unable to provide any further clarification.
Asura ke [kail] samhâr re
All the demons are destroyed.
Bhavânã re deviyã!
Hail Goddess Bhavânî!

VIII. Public (Sarvajanînã) Worship

The final major visible form of Durgâ worship in Banâras is that of public (sarvajanînã) Durgâ Pûjâs. Business or religious organizations such as the City Hall or the Râmakršna Mission, community groups or specially formed clubs such as the Bengali Tola community or the Student’s Club organize, collect money, and stage public Durgâ Pûjâs along the lines of the elaborate home Durgâ Pûjâs discussed above. This phenomenon is growing so rapidly that the city of Banâras has restricted the number of public Durgâ Pûjâs which can be held. With the costs of private Durgâ Pûjâs becoming prohibitively high, and with the gradual decay of the feudal system of private patronage, community celebration of Durgâ Pûjâ is on the rise.

The pattern of worship at community celebrations is essentially similar to that described in Chapter Four although the public Durgâ Pûjâs are often less elaborate in ritual complexity. They make up for this in the elaborateness of the images worshipped, the size of the temporary shrines (pândal) constructed for the purpose, in the entertainment provided, such as drumming, music performances, and in the excitement which takes place at the shrine or during the immersion (visarjana) ceremonies at the end of Navarâtra.

Interpretation of Symbols and Worship Patterns during Navarâtra

The key symbol of the yantra enables us to recognize that during Navarâtra the orb of the Devî’s influence expands from her permanent abodes in the city to encompass the entire sacred circle of Banâras (Kâśi mandala). Because Durgâ Kuṇḍ temple does not install the goddess at this time of year it tacitly claims that Durgâjî is the centre of the
yantra and the permanent abode of the Devi in Banaras. Also, since the temple serves as the sole sanctioned place where the blood sacrifices offered by any of the city’s pujas are made, the idea that Durgājī is the Great Goddess of Navarātra is reinforced.

The patterns of Durgā worship during Navarātra reveal a remarkable consistency despite their variations. The theme of pūja is always present, ritual worship in a variety of elaborations. The goddess is either already present in forms ranging from a simple picture in the home, or a stone image in a shrine, to a sacred tank or temple. Alternatively, she may be invoked into a jar, a combination of jars and mandalas in a temporary pavilion, or into a clay anthropomorphic image in a temporary shrine. Once invoked and worshipped her presence is thought to linger at the invocation site permanently, although not as intensely as when she is manifest during the pūja itself. Navarātra is the special time in the year when Durgā is invoked and worshipped at both new (temporary) and ancient abodes.

The places where the Devi is established are not necessarily or solely places of ultimate liberation (tīrtha), but they are places of power and accomplishment (siṅgha pīṭha). Devotion can lead to attainments of every kind, of which liberation is one possibility. Seats of the goddess therefore claim a more encompassing capacity than other sacred places. They have the potential to grant spiritual and worldly desires. Most devotees are interested in worldly pursuits, seeking spouses, strength and stamina, courage, material gain, and earthly happiness. Durgā is the world supporting and world protecting mother who keeps people attached to phenomenal existence as well as offering them the possibility of liberation from it. One cannot overcome her even through the most stringent of austerities, since she is the source of the power which austerity brings. Thus loving devotion expressed through sacrificial offerings is the most common and ideal relationship one can have with the Devi. These devotional and sacrificial themes are at the heart of Devi pūja.

In pūja, the substance of the Devi is offered back up to her, but there are two dynamics which operate in the ritual. First the Devi is made to manifest from her most sublime (pradhāna) form, and then she is worshipped with elements of her own self from
the gross to the most subtle. Among the forms into which her presence is invoked are the jar, sacred diagrams, the fire pit, and a variety of images. Among the sacrificial offerings are blood sacrifice, fire oblations, and the recitation of sacred sound. In the conjunction of her manifestation and the devotee’s sacrificial offering, the fullness of communion is realized and the devotee achieves a form of union with the goddess. This union is not symbolized as the sexual union between lovers, but as an organic union of child with mother, or seed with soil. Just as sons and daughters are said to share a profound bond with their mothers, male and female devotees recognize that they derive their substance and power from their divine mother. Self-sacrifice is the ultimate offering one can make back to the source and substance of one’s being.

As a child would to its mother, devotees ask the goddess for boons, and she provides them. "If you ask your father for five rupees, he will give you two," said one devotee. "Your mother will give you ten, if she could." In contrast to a paternal vision of Godhead, the Divine Mother is enormously generous. The only condition she demands is that devotees keep their end of any bargain they have made. The mode of exchange in such transactions with the divine are two-fold. Either the Devī fulfills a request and then awaits the worshipper’s promised devotional offering. Alternatively, the worshipper performs a series of demanding ritual observances, such as pilgrimage, fasting, or chanting to secure the goddess’s favour. In the case of spiritual practitioners empowerment may be obtained directly through the practice of their ritual art. Seekers of boons hope to find a supportive presence during adverse conditions in an unfriendly universe. Devotees fulfilling promises have found such a merciful presence in a powerful divine ally, while spiritual aspirants seek immediate grace through contact with that divine power.

We have also seen how Durgā is identified with a sacred geometry and architecture as evidenced by the structure and layout of the pavilions used for group recitations of her glorification (See Diagram 5). Divine presences such as those which constitute the essence of structural forms (Vāstu), of astrological bodies (navagraha), and of the heavens and the cosmic waters (Varuṇa) contribute to a configuration which represents the entire cosmos. The goddess is worshipped at the head of this microcosmic
geometric layout which consists of nine squares. Such recitations and pavilions are used in the worship of other deities as well as Durgā. They suggest a continuity of tradition with the earliest Vedic rituals which involved recitation of hymns and fire oblations. Although there is a direct benefit from recitation of the Durgā SaptaSati for the community surrounding the microcosm, such recitals are always followed by offerings of grains and ghi into the sacrificial fire. To me, the process appears to imply that the fruits of recitation (phalaśrūti) contain seeds which are represented by the grain offerings. When these seeds, which are like semen when mixed with ghi, are offered through the yoni into the kunda, they fertilize or are planted within the divine womb, through the agency of the sacrificial fire. This seeding leads to fruits which benefit and permeate (utthana) the entire cosmos rather than the immediate environs of the recitation.

I am therefore suggesting that textual recitation is partially aligned with the symbolism of sacrificial offering and the process of pūjā. Also quite importantly, the sacrificial process which is one of reintegration of the cosmos, may also be seen as a seeding of the divine field, the cosmic body of the goddess. The word as seed, or blood as seed, (i.e. the sacrificial offering as seed) unite with the goddess and constitute the most sublime act of reintegration. From this fertilized and pregnant singularity a new creation can emerge permeated with the meritorious qualities of the seed. In this sense, the sacrificial process is also a regeneration, renewal, or reconstitution of the cosmos.

We have also seen that in the symbols of the set of Nine Durgās and through the process of the pilgrimage to these deities, devotees reiterate the sacrificial theme. The worship of the Nine Durgās in their temple locations concretely expands the yantra of the Devī to the sacred perimeter of Banāras. The Durgās serve as protectors of the inhabitants of the city and are sources of power for both male and female devotees. Many devotees interpret the members of the set of Nine Durgās as corresponding to the component elements of creation, which suggests that the pilgrimage implicitly is a process through which these elements are reintegrated. I have also shown that to women in particular, the set of Nine Durgās may represent the stages of womanhood. For these women, the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage may implicitly represent a process of traversing the
entire cosmic cycle of time and creation, a cycle which is symbolically condensed in the microcosm of a woman’s life. It is reasonable to suggest that through this pilgrimage, women deepen their understanding of themselves within that cosmic process of creation, as forms and living expressions of an aspect of the goddess’s own being.

Having examined various aspects of Durgā worship throughout the city of Banāras, when the yantra of Durgāji expands to encompass the whole of the Kāśī mandala, I will move to an indepth discussion of Durgā Pūjā, a festival and ritual which takes place during the last days of Navarātra. We have seen how within the framework of Śākta metaphysics, the Devī’s form as diversified manifest Prakṛti is comprehensively reintegrated through the actions of pūjā and sacrifice. Even the activities of pilgrimage and textual recitations may be reasonably deemed as consistent with the process of reintegration of the manifold and diverse cosmos back to its primordial source. In the Durgā Pūjā ritual which is the focus of the next chapter, we see a more elaborate articulation of the dynamics of pūjā.
CHAPTER FOUR

INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DURGĀ PŪJĀ RITUAL

Historical Underpinnings

Mythological Background

The Durgā Pūjā is said to have originated in the worship performed by King Suratha and the merchant Samādhi as recounted in the Durgā Ṣaptāsati (13.5-17). As a result of their worship, Suratha eventually reincarnated as a Manu and Samādhi gained liberation. Their worship, however, had divine precedents. Mythic accounts tell how the great demon Rāvana reinitiated the worship of the Devī in the spring. Rāma, the warrior incarnation of Viśnu, initiated the autumn worship of Durgā by invoking her aid in the slaying of Rāvana.286 The Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa (III.30.23-26) tells us that these godlike human worshippers, on the advice of the sage Medhas were reenacting a ritual which had been performed earlier still by the seers (ṛṣi), Bhṛgu, Vaśiṣṭha, Kāśyapa, and Viśvāmitra, and the deities Indra, Nārāyaṇa, and Śiva in an earlier cycle of creation. In these myths, ṛṣis and deities set ritual precedents for incarnate hero-deities and demon devotees. These, celestials, in turn, through engaging in Durgā worship, set precedents for mythic human heroes. Purānic tales relate how the kings Subāhu and Sudarṣana, of Banāras and Ayodhyā, eventually re-established the worship of the Devī in their

286See, for instance, the Kālikā Purāṇa 62.24-49; the Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa 36-38; and the Brhadādharmā Purāṇa 1.18-22.
respective cities.\textsuperscript{287}

The Bengali Heritage

While it is difficult to ascertain the forms that Durgā worship might have taken in the centuries prior to the Muslim occupation of Banāras, the current form of worship during the autumn Navarātrā owes much to the Bengali style of worship.\textsuperscript{288} While this Bengali style of Durgā Pūjā is often thought to have started in 1757 in the areas of Nadia and Shova Bazaar (two powerful Bengali zamīndārs), the earliest instance of this celebration is traced to a period almost a hundred and fifty years earlier. A Banārasi friend of Bengali heritage, an organizer of one of the oldest public Durgā Pūjās in the city recounted the following story.\textsuperscript{289} Whatever be the verdict on its historical truth, it is a version of the past which currently circulates among some members of the Bengali Durgā worshipping community.\textsuperscript{290}

Lakṣmī Kant was one of the earliest known landlords (zamīndār) in Bengal.\textsuperscript{291} He was the descendent of a certain Panchānanda Śakti Kant, of the Savari lineage (gotra), who had gained a title due to his bravery and who had fathered seven children. The seventh child, Shambhupatti, had a son by the name of Jio (Jiv). Jio’s daughter died on the feast day of Lakṣmī Pūrṇimā in 1570 after delivering a son who was named Lakṣmī Kant. Lakṣmī Kant’s grandfather, Jio, unable to care for the child, left him in the care of Brahmananda Giri and Atmaram Giri, two spiritual preceptors at the Kāllighāṭ.

\textsuperscript{287}These myths are recounted in detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{288}Inscriptional and iconographic evidence suggests steady Goddess worship in Banāras from about the 6th century C.E. (Altekar 1937:27, citing Epigraphica Indica IX:69), and Durgā worship from the 8th century C.E. (Mahiśāsumardini images in Bharat Kala Bhavan).

\textsuperscript{289}His information was derived from Raga Rammohan Roy, "Bangla Pracintomo Durgā Pūjā," Navakalola (Calcutta: 31st year, Pūjā Issue, 1990).

\textsuperscript{290}I have inserted some supporting or conflicting accounts from textual histories where pertinent.

\textsuperscript{291}According to S. Roy, Lakṣmikanta Gangopadhyaya was born in 1570. He founded the Sabarna Roy Choudary family, whose members were the first zamīndārs of the region of Calcutta (1991:198).
temple in Calcutta. Jio left for Banaras to become a world-renouncer (sannyāsin) and eventually became famous under the name of Kamadeva Brahmacari. Meanwhile Lakṣmi Kant, through dint of his efforts, educated himself and rose in prominence until he was the right-hand man of Pratapaditya, the king of Jessore, a small state in Bengal. This kingdom eventually fell to the Hindu general of the Mughals, Man Singh, through an unusual turn of events.

The Mughal emperor Jehangir had come to power in 1605. Man Singh, his general, on his conquests from Delhi in the direction of Bengal stopped in Banaras and became a student of Kamadeva Brahmacari, Lakṣmi Kant's grandfather, Jio. Through this association Man Singh learned much about the geography and other characteristics of Bengal and was thus able to conquer the kingdom of Jessore. In gratitude to his mentor (guru daksina), Man Singh gave Lakṣmi Kant, Kamadeva Brahmacari's grandson, five pieces (pargana) of land. These were Khaspur, Magura, Colicatta, Baikant, and Anwarpur. Eventually the pargana of Hetelpur was also bestowed on him. Thus Lakṣmi Kant was one of the major landlords (jaigirdar/zamīndār) in Bengal. Together with Bhavānanda of Nadia and Jayānanda of Bhansbedia he became one of Bengal's three tax collectors.

Lakṣmi Kant, who had grown up in Kālighāt temple, was familiar with the regions around Calcutta. Calcutta was made up of three villages: Colicatta, Sutanuti, and...

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292 The family hailed from Halisahar in the north of the zamīndārī known as "Twenty-four Parganas" (S. Roy 1991:198). The Kālighāt temple complex was built by Rāja Basanta Roy (198).

293 According to S. Roy (1991), Lakshmikanta was adopted by Rāni Kamāla, the younger wife of Rāja Basanta Roy (builder of Kālighāt temple), and was brought up in their family home of Sursoona with a traditional education and military training (1991:198). He thus grew to consider Rāja Basanta Roy as his "uncle."


295 S. Roy identifies these districts (pargana) as Magura, Khaspur, Kālikātā, Paikan, Anwarpur, and Hetegarh.

296 S. Roy mentions that Lakshmikanta received the title "Majumdar" (1991:199) and the family came to be known as the Roy Choudhurys (1991:9).
Govindapur which were rather poor and poorly populated at the time (1605-8). Lakṣmī Kant’s uncle Rāja Basanta Rai Choudary, brother of Jio, ruled the state of Raigarh, in which was located the village of Barisha (Behala). Lakṣmī Kant had established a court (kacari bari) there, and had also built a place of worship called Ḍt Cala, named after the distinctive eight pairs of pillars in its construction. It was at Ḍt Cala in Barisha in 1610 that Lakṣmī Kant and Basanta Rai Choudary celebrated the first autumn Durgā Pūjā. They reenacted the primordial act of invoking and worshipping Durgā out of time (akāla bodana) initiated by Rāma for the destruction of Rāvana. It is likely that their act was inspired by similar inclinations, this time to throw off the shackles of Mughal rule.

Although people normally celebrated Durgā Pūjā in the spring, apparently this celebration set a precedent and a few families began to follow the tradition of autumn worship. After 1610, Lakṣmī Kant’s family (now known as the Sabarna Rai Choudarys) continued to celebrate the autumn Durgā Pūjā at Ḍt Cala. These pūjās used to be open to the general public, and the images were not disposed after the celebration but reused every year.

On November 10, 1698 the villages of Colicatta, Sutanuti, and Govindapur were sold by the Rai Choudary family to the East India Company, and those historic documents signed at Ḍt Cala. These villages constituted the city of Calcutta and became the seat of British Power in India. The Bengali zamīndārs of that period are well-known for their resistance to Mughal rule (A. C. Roy 1968:356) and it is possible that the Durgā Pūjās, which supported both religion and culture, served as a means of sustaining Hindu solidarity against the influence of Islam. Among such renowned zamīndārs were Rāja Krishnachandra Rai and Rānī Bhavānī.

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297 According to S. Roy, the first celebration took place there in 1585, with Laksmikanta serving as the priest for Rāja Basanta Roy’s Durgā Pūjā (1991:198). Photographs of the Rai Choudhary family’s "over four hundred year old image" of Durgā and the shrine at Ḍt Cala are found in Nair 1986:1.

298 The Rai Choudary family still celebrates Durgā Pūjā in a new structure built beside the historic Ḍt Cala. This Durga Pujā is domestic, restricted to family members, and the disposable images are immersed in the Gaṅgā. Their celebration is characterized by the offering of thirteen goat sacrifices (chàga bali), one on Saptami, three on Aṣṭami, and nine on Navami. A buffalo (mahīṣa) is also offered. Bodhana is performed nine days before ṇaṣṭhi.
According to A. C. Roy, an eminent historian of Bengal, Raja Krishnachandra, a contemporary of Rani Bhavani, "played a glorious role in the evolution of Bengal's society, art, and literature," was "the most important man of the period in the Hindu society of Bengal" (1968:361-362). Maratha invasions of Bengal during the period from 1741-1751, kept the Nawab (Mughal Viceroy) Alivardi Khan occupied with the frontiers of the territory, allowing the British to gain in strength. When he was succeeded by the young and impetuous Siraj-ud-daula, the British found an opportunity to further their position by conspiring against the young Nawab (A. C. Roy 1968:396-397). In 1756, Siraj-ud-daula attacked Calcutta and defeated the British at their outpost there. The British recaptured Calcutta in 1757, marking the beginning of the deterioration of the British relationship with the Mughal empire, and the former's rise to power in India (A. C. Roy 1968:398). Although Siraj-ud-daula signed a treaty with the British, they conspired with Raja Krishnachandra, and others, to oust Siraj from power (S. Roy 1991:203). At the Battle of Plassey, fought in June of the same year, the British won a decisive victory over the Nawab, and he was subsequently murdered (A. C. Roy 1968:400).

It is significant that later in this very year, 1757, Raja Krishnachandra Rai of Nadia and Raja Navakrishna (of the Rai Choudhary family) of Shova Bazaar are reputed to have initiated grand scale celebrations of the Asvina (September/October) Durga Pujas. These celebrations obviously marked their own ascendancy to power, in alliance with the British, against their Muslim overlords. The Durga Pujas were open to the general public and this initiated the tradition which now flourishes in Bengal, Banaras, and throughout India. These grand celebrations of Durga Pujas by powerful zamindars in Bengal occurred not long before the construction of the Durga Kund Mandir in Banaras, by Rani Bhavani,

299 According to certain Bengali scholars in Banaras, Siraj-ud-daula is reputed to have abducted the young widowed daughter of Rani Bhavani, Tari Sundari, an act which angered many members of the Hindu nobility. He released her due to the public outcry which ensued.

300 This defeat of Calcutta is the source of stories about the notorious "Black Hole of Calcutta," a dungeon in which 123 of the 146 British soldiers reputedly confined there suffocated in the heat.

who was herself an extremely pious and wealthy zamīndār, and whom we are told, celebrated Durgā Pūjā with a grandeur commensurate with her status (Ghosh 1986:181). In the actions of Lākṣmī Kant’s grandfather, Kamadeva, who left for Banāras to pursue the religious life, and Rānī Bhavānī’s extensive patronage of the Banārasi religious community, we note two examples of the close relationship between Bengali culture and the city of Banāras. Both figures had acknowledged the eminence of Banāras as a religious centre, and Rānī Bhavānī played an instrumental role in reviving Hindu traditions of worship in the city. Bengali benefactors such as Rānī Bhavānī, who were involved in the Hindu revival in Kāśī, or who came here to retire, brought their characteristic styles of Durgā worship, which are, at present, still highly influential in the Banārasi celebration of Durgā Pūjā.

Roots in Banāras (Domestic)

While the Sabarna Rai Choudary family was the first major brāhmaṇa family in the area of Calcutta, in time other powerful brāhmaṇa and kāyastha families settled in the area.302 The "most eminent families of eighteenth century Calcutta were non-brahmins" (S. Roy 1991:10). Among the eminent brāhmaṇa families were the Tagores, and among the kāyastha families were the Mitras.303 Govindaram Mitra, also called the Black Zamīndār, celebrated Durgā Pūjā in Govindapur, one of original three villages which constituted Calcutta, with great pomp and glamour. He, like the zamīndārs of Nadia (i.e., Rājā Krishnachandra Rai and others) and Šhova Bazaār (i.e., Rājā Navakrishna Rai Choudary, and others), helped to give Durgā Pūjā much of its cultural impetus in Bengal. In 1773, his son, Ānandamayī Mitra, came from Bengal to Banāras and reputedly performed the first Bengali style, autumn Durgā Pūjā ever held outside

302 The kāyasthas correspond to the kṣatriya or warrior class in Hindu society. In the kāyastha Tarun Kanti Basu’s words, "Some kāyasthas were taken as kṣatriyas. Kāyasthas don’t belong to the original varṇa system. Nobility, zamīndārs, and so on were there, and they were taken as kṣatriyas."

303 The content of this section of my account derives from interviews with the head of the family that celebrated the first Durgā Pūjā in Banāras, Tarun Kanti Basu and his niece, Pallavi. This pūjā is still celebrated in the family home in the quarter of the city known as Chaukhamba.
Bengal in the Mitra’s Banaras home located in the Chaukhamba quarter of the city, where it continues to the present day. Initially a small affair, the pūjā grew when Anandamayi’s son, Rajendra Mitra, expanded his zamīndārī into other parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal. Similar to the grandeur of Govindaram Mitra’s celebrations in Bengal, Rajendra’s Durga Pūjā in Banaras became an elaborate fifteen day affair. Dancing girls (natch), singers, dramatists, and other artists performed for the guests and British gentry who visited to partake in the celebration which occurred in the large quadrangle (natch ghar; literally "dance house") of the Mitra’s home.

The Mitra family, patrons of the Durga Pūjā, were not merely zamīndārs but intellectuals who encouraged the arts and who insisted on the highest quality of religious ritual performance from the purohitas since they themselves knew the Sanskrit liturgy. Among these Mitras, I was told, was Babu Pramendradas, a Sanskrit scholar of some repute who wrote the well-received Mirror of Philosophy and corresponded with Swami Vivekananda. The Mitra family, through marriage, united with the Basu family, also great patrons of culture. Sivendra Nath Basu (Santhu Babu) was a renowned vīnā player who promoted such great musicians as the shehnai player Bismillah Khan and the sitarist Ravi Shankar. The current owner of the home is Tarun Kanti Basu, an exuberant intellectual who continues to celebrate the Durgā Pūjā with as much grandeur as he can afford. My information on the Chaukhamba family and its Durgā Pūjā derive from conversations with him and his niece, Pallavi. I also observed parts of the Durgā Pūjā celebrations there during the 1991 Āśvina Navarātra.

The Chaukhamba or Mitra-family Durgā Pūjā, as it is commonly referred to by other Banārasis, is exceptional in certain respects. Instead of a single cluster of images of Durgā and attending deities (pratimā), which is characteristic of Bengali family Durgā Pūjās, there is a permanent metal structure of numerous alcoves which serves as the celebratory altar (śrungārāsana). Individually fashioned images of the deities are then placed within the alcoves of this altar. Also unique is the presence of Śiva and Rāma images among the cluster. Rāma’s presence is explained by the myth of his invocation of Durgā to defeat Rāvana. Śiva is said to accompany Durgā/Pārvatī on her return from
the Himalayas to her parents’ home. Śiva and Rāma images were included by Govindaram Mitra in his Bengali celebrations. 304

The Mitra family takes credit for bringing the Pals, the traditional Bengali image-making caste (jāti), to Banaras. They also brought purohitas and their families to perform the ritual. Originally, the face of the Durgā image used in their pūjā was cast from a mould on the premises of the house, close to the altar. This is no longer done, and at present, the images are made in the Pandey Haveli quarter of the city.

A substantial number of blood sacrifices (bali) were originally performed in the home as part of the Durgā Pūjā, but eventually this practice was stopped. The goats were sent to the Durgā Kunda temple, which served as a sort of sacred slaughter house. Eventually the Mitras stopped all blood sacrifice. The Mitra family name is carved on a marble plaque at Durgāji, where they are listed among the patrons of the temple. Their patronage of Durgāji, and their use of that temple as a location for performing the blood sacrifices of their pūjā forges a fundamental connection between Durgāji and the domestic worship of the goddess. By having performed their blood sacrifices at Durgāji, an act which is one of the highest points in the Durgā Pūjā ritual, the Mitras (and other families who did the same) reinforced the implicit claim by the custodians and devotees at Durgā Kunda temple, that Durgāji is the actual recipient of every Durgā Pūjā celebration in the city. The site of Durgāji is acknowledged as the centre of the yantra which encompasses all of Banaras during this period of Navarātra.

In determining the dates and times of the Durgā Pūjā celebrations, there is a choice of two different calendrical systems (listed in the pañjika) which may be followed. The Mitras follow the same one used by the Rāmakṛṣṇa Mission in Banaras. As a result some years earlier, these two groups celebrated Durgā Pūjā several weeks before others in the city. Other distinctive characteristics of their pūjā include forming a six-pointed star (ṣaṭkona) from the 108 ghi-lamps which are traditionally offered to the Devi (see Figure 17). The worship of young virgin girls is performed on the seventh, eight, and

304 According to Mr. Basu, it is possible that a branch of the famous Tagore family in Pathuriaghata, Calcutta also includes them.
nineth days. During the immersion (*visarjana*) procession, everyone walks barefoot to the waters of the Ganga. The images are carried in palanquins by hand. Two rare birds, Nilakanthas, a type of blue-jay, are released. Nilakantha means "blue throat." It is an epithet of Śiva who in a well-known myth drank up the poison which threatened to engulf the world when it was released at the churning of the ocean by the gods and demons. The Devi is said to have resuscitated him by suckling him with milk from her breast. I was told that the birds are released during the immersion ritual so that they may fly to Kailāsa, Śiva’s abode, and inform the god of Durgā’s imminent return.305

In this chapter I present a detailed interpretive analysis of the Durgā Pūjā ritual based on several sources. My most detailed observations of the *pūjā* were made in the home of Manindra Mohan Lahiri, a Bengali *brāhmaṇa* whose family were zamīndārs in what was then East Bengal, and now Bangladesh.306 Just after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857/8, Mr. Lahiri’s grandfather, in keeping with the traditional reputation of Kāśi as the city which grants spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*) to those who die within its sacred perimenter, came to Banāras with his family, to spend his last days. In the tradition of wealthy Bengali zamīndārs, the Lahiris celebrated Durgā Pūjā in their home in a grand scale, in which the celebrations were open to the public at large and consecrated food (*prasāda*) was given to everyone who attended. Although the Mitra family’s Durgā Pūjā in Chaukhamba began earlier, the Lahiri family’s *pūjā* is one of the oldest in the city. The family points out that as *brāhmaṇas*, their Durgā Pūjā contrasts with the Chaukhamba celebration. Even though it used to be open to the public, the Lahiris’ say that their *pūjā* has always had a quality of intimacy and is characterized by strong religious sentiments and feelings of family togetherness. This appraisal coincides with my own feelings when attending the celebrations at their home where the setting and ambience contrast with the theatrical scale of the Chaukhamba *pūjālaya* (place of worship).

305 This explanation contradicts the one given for the presence of the Śiva in the image cluster of the Mitra family *pūjā*. Śiva is supposed to have accompanied Durgā on her visit to her parents’ home.

306 I described my first encounter with the Lahiri family in the Introduction.
After his grandfather’s death, Mr. Lahiri and his mother moved to Calcutta but kept returning to Banaras for the Durgā Pūjā celebrations, since his grandfather had accumulated a sizeable amount of the materials and equipment used in the performance of the ritual. After the steady loss of his properties, fueled by the land redistribution policies of post-independence India (1947) and the formation of East Pakistan, and following his mother’s death, Mr. Lahiri moved to Banaras to spend his own last days. He and his wife, Añjali, spend a substantial part of the year meticulously planning each year’s pūjā and acquiring all of numerous items which are to be offered. Each year the cost of staging the pūjā increases, even though the family’s financial resources are dwindling. As a result, they are forced to scale down the size of celebration, to offer fewer and less expensive items, and, at present, to invite only members of the immediate family and close friends.

Mr. Lahiri has no sons. He is therefore concerned that without a male heir, the Lahiri family Durgā Pūjā will disappear after his death. He has four married daughters, three of whom live in cities outside Banaras. They say that they will continue the tradition of holding Durgā Pūjā in the ancestral home in Banaras. The daughters hold post-secondary degrees in the arts or sciences and are each married to professionals (a scientist, two engineers, and a chartered accountant). Durgā Pūjā is an opportunity for the family to re-unite. The daughters, mirroring the mythological accounts of Durgā, return to their parents’ house. They bring with them their husbands and seven children. When I asked Mr. Lahiri why he persists in performing the Durgā Pūjā, he said he could not imagine not performing it. It is one of the main focal points of his life. “Throughout the year, this house is quiet. It is just me and my wife. Sometimes some friends come to visit. But look at the house now,” he said. "Look at it during this time of the year.

307 The Bengali population in Banaras was one hundred thousand before the partition of East Pakistan after Indian Independence in 1947 (Kumar 1988:217). About one million Hindus had left East Pakistan for West Bengal (Spear 1978:239). Many of these must have migrated to Banaras, because the Bengali population in the city rose to two hundred thousand in the next two decades. In 1988, the population was estimated at one hundred and twenty five thousand (Kumar 1988:217). Kumar attributes the Bengali population decrease to the re-location of major employers (e.g., the railways) to other city centres, and to the diminishing attraction of the city as a retirement centre (1988:217).
It is so full of life. My daughters are back, and my grandchildren are here. The house is never as beautiful as it is at this time of the year, . . . , when Durga is in my home.

Mr. Lahiri put me in touch with the ritual specialist (purohita) who performed his family’s Durgā Pūjā. Pandit Nitai Babu, as the purohita was affectionately called by the family members, introduced me to Pandit Hemendra Nath Chakravarty, a Sanskrit scholar and student of the renowned Tantric scholar, Gopināth Kavirāj. Pandit Chakravarty has performed the Durgā Pūjā ritual on numerous occasions, and acts as a mentor and consultant to Nitai and other ritualists who perform the Durgā Pūjā for various groups in the city. Nitai, for instance, performs the Durgā Pūjā for the Lahiris as well as for city’s oldest public celebration, staged by the Durgotsava Sammilini.308 Pandit Chakravarty, following Gopināth Kavirāj’s approach, belongs to a religious tradition which does not believe in the suspension of the intellect in the practice of religious ritual. Although they concede, and even affirm, that ritual works in ways that surpass rational understanding, these pandits feel that the mind must strive to "go as far as it can" in its capacity to comprehend the nature of ritual action. In this regard, this tradition contradicts the position of scholars such as Fritz Staal (1989), who feel that ritual is essentially devoid of meaning. My work with Pandit Chakravarty has led me to conclude that, among a group of Śākta purohitas and pandits, there is a ritual tradition in Banāras, which has existed for at least a hundred years, where meaning and interpretation are important components in the rituals of Durgā Pūjā.

The detailed description of the Durgā Pūjā ritual, as described to me by Pandit Chakravarty is given in the Appendix. In addition to my extensive discussions with Pandit Chakravarty, I carefully observed performances of the Durgā Pūjā at the Lahiri’s home, at the Ānandamayī Mā Ashram (Spring 1991), at the Durgotsava Sammilini, and at the Durgā Sporting Club in the autumn of 1990 and 1991. My analyses are derived from my observations, from the study of the structure of the ritual and its liturgy, from interpretations offered by religious specialists such as Pandit Chakravarty, Pandit Nitai, and Muktinath Pandey (who performed the rituals at the Durgā Sporting Club) as well

308I discuss this club and public celebrations below.
as from the words of lay worshippers at the ritual.

Roots in Banaras (Public)

If you come from any pandal, you will notice that there is a large crowd here. Why? First because Mother is going to eat. She will take bhog. She has come to her father's place, where she was born, her original place. She is about to eat. She is the daughter of Himalaya.309

The public celebrations of Durgā Pūjā in Banaras developed as an offshoot of the elaborate domestic pūjās staged by the wealthy Bengali zamindār families. I shall discuss this phenomena before proceeding with the detailed analysis of the Durgā Pūjā ritual. Public celebrations, such as the Durgotsava Sammilini pūjā, which utilizes the services of the same purohita who performs an elaborate home pūjā, are rather similar in form and style to the private celebrations. My description (in the Appendix) and interpretation of the Durgā Pūjā (in this chapter) is most closely related to the ritual as performed by these groups, and by religious organizations with a Bengali heritage. Priests performing public Durgā Pūjās for non-Bengali groups may utilize other ritual manuals, resulting in variations in the sub-structure of the ritual and in the content of the liturgy.

The information in this section derives from numerous interviews with various club members and organizers. Immediately across the intersection of the roads at the south west corner of Durgā Kund temple, the Durgā Sporting Club stages its public pūjā. The Sporting Club is an example of one of the many community Durgā Pūjās which have emerged within the last fifteen years. In the course of my research at Durgā Kund temple, I came to know several members of the Durgā Sporting Club, and had intimate access to their celebrations. I would frequently visit the Pals and other image makers, all of whom are located in the Bengali Tola quarter of Banaras. While chatting with them and observing the process and progress of the image making, I met members of clubs that had been staging public Durgā Pūjās since the early 1950s. In this manner I had the opportunity to converse with members of a dozen different organizations including the

309 An organizer at Durgotsava Sammilini, the oldest public Durgā Pūjā in Banaras.
Student's Club (formed in 1953) and the Eagle Club. One of my best contacts, who became a good friend, was Sudarśana Chowdhury (Babla), who in 1990 and 1991 was one of the organizers of the celebrations staged by the Durgotsava Sammilini (Assembly for the Festival of Durgā), the oldest public Durgā Pūjā in Banāras. In his words:

The club pūjās are a sort of exhibitionism for us all. We celebrate it not totally to satisfy our religious mind, but more to celebrate our merry making purposes.

Do you have the Maliya cassette? You must purchase the Maliya cassette, with songs to Durgā and recitation of the Candi Path interspersed. It is a full program. The one with the recitation by Virendra Krishna Bhadra is the one you want. His recitation is the best. At our pandal, some boys and girls stage a Candi Path program just like that one, on saṣṭhī. But his is best. For us, Durgā Pūjā starts with this Maliya Candi Path. It is known as the Avāhana - Calling of the Mother.

I can certainly vouch for the engaging quality of Virendra Krishna Bhadra's recitation of sections of the Durgā Saptasātī. The recitation arouses a simultaneous feeling of power and dread in me, enough to produce horripilation every time I hear it. I am sure that Bengali devotees experience similarly strong feelings. The recitation is broken up with soft voiced songs by women to Durgā. These are called āgamanī, Mahālaya, or Mahisamardini songs. The mood of the songs contrasts sharply with the recitation and dramatically conveys the ambivalent nature of the Devī who is about to appear. She is soft and maternal, but also powerful and deadly. All-India Radio broadcasts this recording, which is generally heard in Banāras at about five in the morning of saṣṭhī.

Sudarśana introduced me to Purnendu Bhattacharyya, who has been president of the Durgotsava Sammilini for over twenty-five years. Mr. Bhattacharyya is the source of much of the information which follows in this section. According to him, public (sarvajanīnā) pūjās are also called bārvari pūjās. The word bāra means "twelve" and so the term may refer to the twelve brāhmaṇas who are reputed to have originated these communal celebrations in Bengal. Previously, the Durgā Pūjās were held in temples or the homes of wealthy zamīndārs who could sponsor the celebrations. A dozen brāhmaṇas decided to hold pūjās without the patronage of the landlords by collecting money from
community members all of whom could participate equally in the celebrations. The public pūjās initially represented a movement towards egalitarianism, away from the hierarchical structure of patronage, and also provided a venue for affirmation of cultural identity through performance. Thus Bengali culture asserted its influence on the Hindu community, and Hindu identity asserted its presence amid the non-Hindu community (i.e., both Muslim and British colonial).

In 1922, the earliest public pūjā in Banāras was organized by Lalit Bihari Sen Roy, a Bengali who was the financial advisor of the Mahārāja of Banāras. It was celebrated in the location of the former Mint House in the section of the city known as Nadesar. Although the grounds and the theatre were ideal for the Durgā Pūjā, the location was too remote from the Bengali community. Eventually the celebrations were moved to the grounds of the Bengali Tola Intercollege where, with community donations, a permanent stage was built for cultural performances. This was the origin of the Durgotsava Sammilini, and this is why it considers itself to be the oldest public Durgā Pūjā in Banāras.310 Artistic performances are an important part of the older public Durgā Pūjās such as the Bengali Durgotsava Sammilini. These Durgā Pūjās normally included dramas (such as jātra, theatre in the round), recitations, singing, debate, and music although the variety and quality of such performances, as well as community attendance, is on the decline. The convenience of television and the fear of communal violence are blamed for the declining interest in such cultural gatherings.

The nature of the public Durgā Pūjās began to change as they grew more numerous. For one, they began to be staged by other, non-Bengali communities in Banāras. According to the image makers in the Bengali Tola quarter of the city such as Vanshicharan (Bangshi) Pal, at the time of Indian independence, in 1947, there were only about thirty mūrtis being fashioned in Banāras.311 There was a marked increase in the

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310 Although some people speculated that the Saradotsava Sangha (Gathering of the Autumn Festival), located across the Vijayānagar Bhavan in Belupura is older, the organization was founded in 1943 (Kumar 1988:218).

311 "Until the middle of this century, Durgā Pūjā is not even mentioned as a festival or mela worthy of note among the thirty plus melas of Banāras" (Kumar 1988:218).
number of community groups forming clubs to celebrate Durgā Pūjā after Independence and there may have been as many as seventy or eighty mūrtis by the mid-nineteen seventies. In 1978, a violent incident took place in Pandey Haveli, site of the Durgostava Sammilini community Durgā Pūjā. During the immersion (visarjana) procession, while passing through a Muslim quarter (muhalla), communal friction sparked violence which resulted in city-wide rioting and deaths. Instead of quelling the growth of the public celebrations, this event led to the further mushrooming of community pūjās. These Durgā Pūjās are an affirmation of Hindu identity, a source of community pride, and a visible form of organization and solidarity, which offers community members a feeling of security. Estimates of the number of public Durgā Pūjās now celebrated in the larger city vary from one hundred fifty to two hundred. It is not simply a coincidence that Durgā Pūjā is the venue of expression of Hindu unity, for Durgā is, at present, one of the most potent symbols of the divine energy which destroys all fears and overcomes all enemies.

While mūrtis may cost from Rs. 500 to 10,000, a pūjā such as that held at Durgotsava Sammilini, may cost about Rs. 50,000 to stage. By comparison, the largest of Banāras’s public Durgā Pūjās at Hathivar Market in Lahurabir costs over a lakh (Rs. 100,000), while the largest of Calcutta’s Durgā Pūjās may cost over six lakhs.

It is possible to distinguish at least four types of public Durgā Pūjā according to their various emphases. The first type, such as the Durgotsava Sammilini, emphasizes the community’s culture against the back-drop of the Devī’s presence and worship. It is characterized by social gatherings around organized cultural activities and performances by or for community members. The second type of public Durgā Pūjā, often staged by religious organizations like the Rāmakrṣṇa Mission, Ānandamayī Mā Āśrama, and Bharat Sevasram Samgha, emphasizes the dimension of worship, although religious cultural performances by organization members or lay patrons (e.g., singing devotional songs and reciting the Durgā Saptasati) are an essential component of the celebrations. The Bengali influence in these organizations is still great among the groups I have mentioned since

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312 Conversations with image makers. See also Kumar 1988:219.
their founders were from Bengal. These religious organizations also utilize the traditional Bengali style of image cluster in which Durga and all her attending deities are connected together in a single unit called the *pratimā*.

The third group, exemplified by the enormous *pandal* at Hathivar Market in Lahurabir and the Durga Pūjās of the Eagle Club or the Student's Club, are characterized by having originated with distinctly non-Bengali club members and thus include non-Bengali modes of worship. These *pūjās*, too, have a long history in Banāras. The *pūjās* combine some performative elements, such as the presence of *dhāk* drummers or *dhunuchi* dancing (dancing with aromatic smoke containers in the hands), with elaborate images, backdrops, and structures. The most visible dimension of these *pūjās* are the throngs of people from all over the city who flock to take *darśana* of the large temporary temples and the large ornate images of the Devī and other figures.

In the fourth group, made up primarily of the post-1978, non-Bengali clubs such as the Durgā Sporting Club, there is little in the way of cultural performance of any kind. Community members come to take *darśana* of the glitteringly decorated images, watch the *pūjārī* perform the worship, and may socialize around the *pandal* while taped music, mainly soundtracks from popular Hindi films, blares from loudspeakers. The emphasis appears to be on the club members (generally young men from the community) who, through the process of organizing the *pūjā*, have solicited funds, organized themselves hierarchically, defined and displayed their capabilities, enjoyed themselves with surplus funds, and indirectly competed with other communities. These are essentially fledgling forms of the third type of public Durga Pūjās. It is very common to hear criticisms from members of the more established community *pūjās* about the lack of religiosity or culture in these newer celebrations. In contrast, a young Bengali woman summed up the attitude of the younger generation:

> It is true that these celebrations are mainly the activity of young men, but women participate peripherally by preparing food and so on. In certain housing cooperatives in Bengal, where they feel safer, women take a more active role. I think it is a good thing for these young men, many of whom are students or unemployed. It channels their energy, and gives them something to do. Sure, sometimes they coerce people for money, and they keep aside some money to
booze and so on. But this is not a problem for me. The mood of the festival is one of celebration. The old zamindârs did the same in a bigger way. They had big boozing parties, with dancing girls, and so on during Durgâ Pûjâ. The women had to watch from the balconies. Now at least, the celebrations are public. Everyone can enjoy them.

The surging masses of people that move from one temporary temple to another on Saptami, Aśṭami, and Navami have created new "pilgrimage circuits" in the city. These circuits to the temporary Durgâ temples and images are less clearly defined than, but parallel to, the Nine Durgâ Pilgrimage circuit in which people visit the city's permanent Durgâ temples and images. The swell of people making their way to some of the huge temporary pandals is greater than the crowds which visit any of the permanent Durgâ temples during Navarâtra. The main roads in downtown Banâras are closed to vehicular traffic. These roads are a solid mass of excited "pilgrims." People seem to enjoy the "crush" of human bodies pressed against each other as they move together for darśana. Although vendors set up some stalls in the environs of these public pandals, the crowds are so large that they inhibit effective commerce. Curiosity and community celebration, more than reverence, are the marked motivational factors in this pilgrimage.

"Have you seen the pandal at Lahurabir? It is huge. The images are very beautiful." Such comments are typical. When one considers the number of visitors to these pandals, relatively few offerings are made. The dynamic is conducive to a hasty glimpse of magnificence and beauty which leaves visitors with a feeling of awe, discerned both by the looks on their faces and their comments. Here darśana is essentially visual contact, overriding the notion of darśana as a part of a larger set of devotional actions.

However, I suggest that the darśana of Durgâ which has actually taken place in these pilgrimages is more abstract than the perceptual contact offered by the pandals and mûrisis. It is a vision of the capacity of the Hindu community to come together in vast numbers, to erect, almost miraculously, pavilions of extraordinary dimensions and visual impact virtually overnight, and to display within these structures in the manifest forms of the deities the community's noblest values of courage, beauty, power, and affection. There is a passage in the Mahâbhârata, in which the eldest of the five Pândava heroes,
Yudhiṣṭhira, while being instructed in the arts of successful kingship is taught the nature of the six kind of fortresses. The term for a fortress or citadel is durga, the Sanskrit masculine for the name of the Devī. Yudhiṣṭhira is told, "among the six kinds of citadels indicated in the scriptures, indeed among every kind of citadel, that which consists of (the ready service and love of the) subjects is the most impregnable." It is precisely this vision of unassailable strength, which derives from the united sentiments of the people, that is a constituent in the darsana of Durgā during Durgā Pūjā. Durgā is the monarch for whom the people have gathered in a display of service, loyalty, and love. In their numbers and in their visible and verbalized sentiments of revelry and unity, they have a vision (darsana) of their own power and with it the certitude of being victorious in any undertaking. This vision of the victorious power (vijayā śakti) which, in turn, permeates the community of worshippers, binding them in a union which is characterized by joy and fearlessness, is implicitly a view of the manifest form of the goddess.

Interpretive Analysis of the Durgā Pūjā Ritual

Domestic Durgā Pūjās or those in religious organizations are performed for the benefit of the family or āśrama members only. The celebrations of all pūjās begin with a saṅkalpa (intentional vow). In the domestic saṅkalpa, the head of the family’s name (karta), his lineage (gotra), the deity’s name, the place, the time, and so on are each mentioned, situating the ritual and the family within a cyclical continuum of space and

313 Translation from Pratap Chandra Roy (n.d.:Vol. VIII). The six types are the fortresses formed by a desert (marudurgam), by water (jaladurgam), by earth (prthvīdurgam), by a forest (vanadurgam), by a mountain (parvatadurgam), and by human beings (manasyadurgam). See Mahābhārata, Śānti Parva, Chapter 56.35. Quoted in Mani 1975:254.

314 In this interpretation I am not advocating a Durkheimian reductionism, which would imply that the force and majesty felt by Hindu society in the Durgā Pūjā gatherings is the entire substance of the conception of the divine that is Durgā. I have already shown how Durgā is conceptualized in complex ways such as through a sophisticated metaphysics which includes a "science" of nature with numerous variant forms. Durkheim’s analysis does not adequately account for the existence of variations in the construction of religious symbols. Nevertheless, the felt force of the collective consciousness to which Durkheim alludes in his seminal work, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, does, in my opinion, play a role in shaping the conceptual image of Durgā, and in devotees’ experience of her. See Durkheim (1954 [1915]).
time. In the *sarvajanīnā pūjā*, some individual is chosen as the representative worshipper (yajamāna) of the group which itself may be heterogeneously composed of people of different castes (jāti) and lineages (gotra).

**Ritual Manuals**

The rituals pertaining to the Bengali style of domestic Durgā Pūjā are described in a manual called the *Purohita Darpana* (Mirror for the Priest), which contains the techniques for most other pūjās as well. The *Purohita Darpana* is an extremely popular manual among Bengali purohitas.315 There are, however, a large variety of other ritual manuals (paddhati) used by non-Bengali purohitas. Purohitas who are well trained and highly experienced in the Durgā Pūjā rarely make use of a commercial offprint of such a paddhati during the ritual performance, but possess some personalized printed (or handwritten) version. The majority of purohitas in the public *pandalas* use commercial editions.316 The Durgā Pūjā ritual is influenced by purānic prescriptions on goddess worship, specifically from the *Devī Purāṇa*, the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, and mostly from the *Bṛhannādiśvare Purāṇa*. It also draws on Tantric ritual prescriptions. The actual performance of the Durgā Pūjā varies according to the capacities and desires of the purohita and yajamāna. At times the priest may embellish parts of the ritual which are common to most pūjās according to his inclinations. Thus he may include the names of favoured or local deities in the ritual invitations and propitiations. He may substitute condensed rituals (often Tantric variations) for longer prescribed forms. The yajamāna may request that the priest insert a ritual or liturgical variant, which has been traditionally used by the family or group, during sections of the pūjā. Such variations and substitutions offer further evidence of the active role taken by both the ritual performer

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315 It is a Sanskrit text written in Bengali script.

316 The rapid increase in the number of Durgā Pūjās in the last few decades has created a high demand for skilled performers of the ritual. In Calcutta alone the number of Durgā Pūjās increased from 30 to 3,000 in the years 1930-1980 (Kumar 1988:219). However, since the Durgā Pūjā is a complex and lengthy ritual and since it is performed only once a year, there is a shortage of competent purohitas. As a result, the publication of Durgā Pūjā manuals is a growing industry. These manuals are essential aids since the Devī's wrath is reputed to descend on purohitas who err in the performance.
and the patron in intellectually shaping the structure of the Durgā Pūjā ritual. Were religious ritual action purely compulsive and instinctive, a view held by Fritz Staal (1989), such substitutions would be unlikely to occur.

The Ritual Performer (Purohita)

You ask me what the meaning of pūjā is, and I say that it means different things to different people. Many people see it again and again and nothing special registers. It is like Newton and the apple. Many people see an apple fall, but only the Newtons understand or grasp a deeper principle which is there.

These comments by one of Mr. Lahiri's son-in-laws reflect the widespread notion that there are those to whom ritual is profoundly meaningful. While it is not easy to discern who such individuals might be, it is likely that they may be found among the religious virtouosi, such as priests (purohita, pūjāri), whose lives are spent virtually entirely in the practice and mastery of ritual art. Although the terms purohita and pūjāri are, in my experience, used synonymously, I have reserved the term purohita for the ritual specialist who performs the Durgā Pūjā. I refer to temple priests and others as pūjāris. The purohitas who perform the Durgā Pūjā ritual, particularly among the Bengali community, are far more advanced in training and ritual competence than the pūjāris who minister to deities in most of the temples in Banāras. These temple pūjāris are not expected to perform complex rituals or know lengthy tracts of Sanskrit liturgy.

The ritual celebration of Durgā Pūjā, is essentially a marvellous activity performed by the purohita for the benefit of the family or the community. The purohita's capacity to perform such rituals begins with his education as a ritual specialist following his initiation into the first of the four stages of life (caturāśramadharma). It is during this student stage (brahmacarya) that he is expected to remain celibate and study the sacred scriptures if he is a brāhmaṇa. He is invested with the sacred thread (yajñopavīta) during this important life cycle initiation called the upanayana samāskāra. Most of the Śākta purohitas whom I have met began learning to chant the Durgā Saptaśat at that time, and some have continued daily recitations since then. With the steady disappearance of elaborate home pūjās, few brāhmaṇa families continue the profession of purohita, turning
instead to other gainful employment. As a result, the complex dimensions of the ritual, which require regular performance in order to learn and execute masterfully, are rapidly being lost.

To be able to perform elaborate rituals, the purohita receives Śaiva initiation (dikṣa) by his father or some other competent person.³¹⁷ He will then be able to perform the pūjā of Śiva. Certain Śaiva dikṣas give him competence to do all pūjās, including those of the goddesses Lalitā, Śrī, Durgā, and others. This is the level of initiation possessed by many of the non-Bengali purohitas who perform the Durgā Pūjā in Banāras. Additionally, however, a purohita may be initiated in the Śākta ritual tradition (Śākta dikṣa). In this initiation, he learns advanced rituals which are specifically oriented to Devī worship. These include the numerous hand and bodily gestures (mudrā), the drawing of ritual diagrams (maṇḍala/yantra), the techniques of imprintment of the sacred (nyāsa), the appropriate sacred utterances (mantra), the placing of worship materials in their proper places and in the correct sequential order, and so on. If initiated by a sadguru, a highly developed religious figure capable of giving others the direct means of liberation, the purohita is understood to have earned all competency.³¹⁸

Thus the celebration of Durgā Pūjā may be, for the devout and earnest Śākta purohita, a magnum opus of ritual performance, the highest expression of his profession, bringing together most of the forms of his ritual learning, and demanding from him an astounding display of memory, concentration, yogic achievement, dramatic art, and finesse. As the conduit for worship, he is expected to embody the goddess herself before

³¹⁷The first preference for dikṣa, I was told, is given to the family’s spiritual teacher (kulaguru), from whom one’s father took initiation (dikṣa). If he is no longer available (e.g., deceased), his son should be asked. If he has no son, one may ask his wife, brother, or some other family member. If immediate family members do not follow the tradition, some other close relative should be found. Regardless of the competence of the chosen individual, the kulaguru should not be overlooked, since the power of the tradition is thought to flow through the kulaguru’s lineage.

Although I have been using the pronoun “he” for the purohita, I was told by members of the Lahiri family that there is nothing in the scriptures to prevent a woman who has been properly initiated from performing the Durgā Pūjā ritual. One of the married daughters of Mr. Lahiri mentioned having seen, in her youth, a female purohita perform the ritual. Nevertheless, female purohitas are extremely rare.

³¹⁸An initiatory encounter with a sadguru is an ideal, but extremely rare event. It is considered miraculous.
transferring that embodiment to the devotional image. He must therefore perform complex ritual purifications and visualizations to make himself a fit receptacle for the divine.  

**General Comments on Pūjā**

Every specific pūjā (viṣeṣa vidhi), such as Durgā Pūjā, is normally preceded by general preliminary duties (samānya vidhi). Pūjās themselves may be of two types, one performed for the obtainment of special desires (kāmya pūjā), and the other performed as the obligatory worship (nitya pūjā) of deities during the day and at specific times in the year. Thus the worship at the confluence periods (sandhyā pūjā) of the day, namely dawn, noon, and dusk is nitya. Śaiva and Śākta pūjās (if the purohita is initiated), performed for the purohita’s personal deity of choice (iṣṭadevatā) are also nitya. These nitya pūjās may be simple or elaborate. The Durgā Pūjā, if performed without expectations of the fulfilment of any specific desire (kāmya), may be considered an obligatory (nitya) pūjā which is performed once a year.

**Introductory Summary of the Structure of the Ritual**

Do you know about differential equations, in Calculus? Some series equations have a particular solution. Some have general solutions. Some have no solutions. Pūjā is like a series differential equation with many particular solutions. Each person participates in the ritual in their own way, and gets their own meaning from it.  

The Durgā Pūjā ritual takes place during the last four or five days of Āśvina Navarātra. Not unlike a rāga in Indian classical music, the ritual consists of repetitive elements and key variations which build to a climax over the course of the days. The purohita’s common preliminary duties, the purifications of the ritual implements and

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319 Most purohitas sadly admit that this is rarely the case with the majority of their colleagues who just go through the motions of the ritual. However in homes or religious institutions where the yajamānas are both pious and knowledgeable of the ritual, one finds extraordinary purohitas and performances.

320 Satyabrata Moitra, an engineer; one of Mr. Lahiri’s sons-in-law.
offering materials, the utterance of oaths and so on, constitute the repetitive elements.

The first key variation in the Durgā Pūjā ritual is the Awakening of the Goddess, the Bodhana. It generally takes place on the sixth day, śaṣṭhī, but may occur a day earlier. Durgā is established in a jar (ghaṭa, kalaśa), and her presence is awakened in a branch of the wood-apple tree (bilva vṛksa). The Bodhana ritual raises questions concerning sleep. In what sense has Durgā been dormant or asleep, requiring that she now be invoked and awakened, and what form will this wakeful state take? The next ritual of importance, performed on śaṣṭhī, is the Anointing, known as the Adhivāsa (or Adhivāsanam). The Adhivāsa prefigures the loci of the Devī’s manifestations as various items are imbued or "perfumed" with her essence. Among these loci are the Cluster of Nine Plants (navapatrikā), the clay image cluster (pratimā), a mirror (darpana) and a sword (khaḍga).

The seventh day, Mahāsaptami (Great Seventh), is marked with several important ritual acts. Among these are the Bathing of the Cluster of Nine Plants (navapatrikā), the Great Bath of Durgā, and the worship of Ganeśa and various attendant deities. The rituals of Mahāsaptami also include the invocation of Durgā into the clay image which is "brought to life" and the subsequent worship of the goddess. Rituals of the invocation and worship of the attending deities in their living images are also performed on this day.

The eighth day, Mahāśāśtami (Great Eighth), is characterized by worship of the Devī in a more abstract form, namely, a yantra which is called the Sarvatobhadra Maṇḍala. The highpoint of the Durgā Pūjā takes place on the confluence of the eighth and ninth lunar day (tīthi). On this Sandhi Pūjā a blood sacrifice (bali dāna) or surrogate offering is made to the Devī and she may be worshipped in human form as a living virgin girl (kumārī pūjā).

The pūjā then winds down with the fire oblations (homa) on the ninth day, Mahānavami (Great Ninth). Durgā Pūjā ends with the worship of the Devī as the Unconquerable One, Aparājīta, and the immersion (visarjana) of the clay images on the tenth day (Vijayā Daśami).

Although the Durgā Pūjā activities are performed mainly by the purohitā, the
yajamāna and other members participate in varying degrees according to their inclination. Women help in the preparation of food, youngsters may ring bells during the flame worship (ārati). Someone may twist cotton into wicks for the hundred and eight ghi lamp offering, while others make decorations for the altar and place of worship. I inquired into the general mood or the feelings which were elicited during participation in the ritual and received this revealing answer:

**S. Moitra:** I feel good when I participate in the pūjā. A feeling of elation.

**My question:** You mean the same kind of feeling as when you solve a math problem or when you are visiting family and friends?

**S. Moitra:** One fellow may be enjoying a good meal of meat, while someone else looks and says this is very bad. There are things which are relative, good and bad, based on your perspective. But if some chap is playing music and I am enjoying it, and he is enjoying playing it, then there is less of an opposite to that feeling. The elation I feel when participating in Durga Pūjā is ānanda, bliss. It does not have an opposite. It covers everything.

**Note:** The sources of the descriptive elements of the pūjā which follow derive primarily (but not exclusively) from the detailed description of the Durga Pūjā ritual, which is found in the Appendix. The Appendix should be consulted in tandem with this section.

### Bodhana

The pūjā starts with bodhana, on Mahāāsthi. The time is according to the pañji set by the brāhmaṇa. The bodhana is calling Mā Durgā to come and stay with us till visarjana. Mā Durgā lives with us for four days.321

The purohita begins the bodhana ritual with an oath (saṅkalpa) in which he identifies himself as a sinful material manifestation (prakṛtam cittam pāpakrantam). He asks the goddess to cleanse away his sins. After another oath, in which he promises to perform the bodhana ritual he proceeds to the installation of a jar (ghaṭasthāpana) which is done in front of a bilva tree or one of its branches. In the ghaṭasthāpana, the purohita begins by drawing a yantra on the ground. This drawing may be a simple triangle or the much more elaborate sarvatobhadra mandala. I was told that the yantra represents the Devī, who is the source and portal of her own manifestation. Upon this yantra, the

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purohita builds a low soil altar which is identified as the earth, the supporter of the world, and as Aditi, the mother of the gods. Sprinkling five grains upon the altar, symbols of nourishment, the purohita next places a narrow necked full-bodied jar upon it and fills the jar with water (see Figure 13). Placing five leaf-bearing twigs around its wide mouth he tops the jar with a coconut and covers it with a cloth so that it appears like a woman dressed in a sārī. The jar is anointed with sandal paste, given steadiness (sthīrā karāṇa), and its sacred perimeter demarcated (kāṇḍa rōpanam).

The purohita now proceeds to perform the common worship ritual. Through the power of the goddess he induces sacred female rivers to flow into the water he will use in the ritual and with this consecrated water he purifies himself, the worship materials, and the images. He drives away inimical spirits by scattering white mustard seed, and next begins a process of bodily transformation. Utilizing the yogic technique of breath control (prāṇayāma), he proceeds to purify (śuddhi) his constituent elements (tattva) (see Figure 15). He does so by reversing the creative process through which these elements are thought to manifest. Beginning with the gross elements (mahābhūta), he dissolves these one into the other, then into the subtle elements (tanmātra), into the sense organs (jñānendriya), into the organs of activity (karmendriya), into the inner mental elements of mind (manās), ego (ahaṅkāra), and intellect (buddhi) and finally into sentient primordial matter (prakṛti). This purification is performed through the method of Kūḍālinī Yoga. The goddess Kūḍālinī, who lies dormant at the base of the subtle body is awakened and allowed to rise through the central energy channel (suṣumṇā) via various energy vortices (cakra) until she unites with the supreme reality (adīśakti/paramaśīva) in the thousand petalled lotus (sahasrāra padma) located approximately at the top of the head.

This ritual is a most explicit and elaborate articulation of the process of reintegration which is at the heart of the act of pūjā. The purohita collects all the elements of creation, each of which is present in his body, which is a microcosm of the whole of reality. He dissolves each of these elements, one into the other, from the grossest to the most subtle. Ultimately he merges this transformed body with that of the
Devī in her most sublime form. Having performed this "journey" to the source of all creation, the purohita undertakes the task of bringing the Devī back into manifestation so that she may be accessible to the less adept worshippers.

There is clearly a relationship between the awakening of the goddess Durgā in the bodhana ritual and the awakening of the goddess Kuṇḍalinī in the purification ritual. It would appear that the purohita is the primary human locus into which the Devī's energy flows. I suggest that the Devī has been residing in dormant form in the earth (the earthen altar), waters (rivers, pools), and vegetative matter (seeds, the bilva tree, leaf-bearing twigs, the coconut fruit), represented by the ghāta which by incorporating all those symbolic elements becomes her "body cosmos." It is from this state of passive presence and support of the cosmos (jagaddhārt) that she is being invoked and awakened. The first human vehicle through which her energy flows is the body of the spiritual adept, the purohita. Through initiation (dikṣa), spiritual training (sākta sādhana), and frequent encounters with the Devī's energy through ritual performance, the purohita is the ideal and necessary channel for the flow of Śakti. As the Devī's energy awakens within him, his body is transformed from gross materiality to immaculacy.

The purohita now imprints his purified body with the syllables of the Sanskrit language (mātrkā nyāsa), imprints his hands and limbs (kara and aṅga nyāsa), and imprints the energy vortices of his subtle inner body (antarātmātrkā nyāsa) with them. In the external imprintment of syllables (bahya mātrkā nyāsa), the purohita takes refuge (āśraye) in the deity of speech (vāgdevatā) whose body is composed of the fifty Sanskrit syllables. Through the preceding imprintments the purohita's body was composed of the same substance (i.e., the Sanskrit syllables) as the Devī's body. Through the external imprintment and the subsequent enfolding imprintment (samhāra mātrkā nyāsa), the purohita effects an unitive identification of his vibrational body with that of the goddess of speech. Speech (vāc) is the symbol of the creative process through its connection with conceptualization. The manifest differentiated universe is created from the transcendent and undifferentiated singularity through conceptualization, through naming. Thus speech or sound vibration is that through which creation occurs.
The purohita next assigns various abodes of the goddess to his body parts in the pūtha nyāsa procedure. These abodes of the goddess, seats or places where she is thought to reside are conceptual (e.g., the supreme supporting power), locational (e.g., the earth), symbolic (e.g., the jewelled pavilion, the wish-fulfilling tree), and qualitative (e.g., righteousness, dispassion, ignorance). The Devī has taken up abode in his body. Through the rṣyādi nyāsa he secures (kālaka) the union, and with the vyāpaka nyāsa he completes the transformation by making the Devī’s presence thoroughly pervasive in his being. This entire process is considered preliminary to awakening the goddess externally.

The purohita now worships Ganeśa who must be propitiated at the start of any pūjā. He worships the other deities and celestial beings and drives away inimical spirits before turning to Durgā. Recharging his limbs and hands with the seed syllable "Hṛīṁ," the purohita takes up a flower in the meditative visualization gesture (dhyāna mudrā), and visualizes the goddess (see Figure 15). He then worships her mentally. The process of awakening the goddess therefore occurs through the purohita, who is now the goddess herself and an abode of the goddess, and begins at the most subtle level of manifestation, namely conceptual thought. Durgā is mentally visualized and worshipped.

Durgā is next invoked into a conch shell (see Figure 16). The conch shell has many symbolic associations. It emanates from the waters and possesses great beauty in form, colour, and iridescence. It is rare, auspicious, and valuable. Its shape of spiral expansion suggests the creative flowering of the cosmos. It is reminiscent of the female reproductive organ (yoni) (Eliade 1991:125ff). In Bengal, conch shell bangles are worn by women to indicate their married status. It is associated with Viṣṇu, the preserver of the cosmos. It is blown in battle, striking dread into the hearts of the enemy. It symbolizes victory in battle. When held to the ear, it produces a sound of the primordial ocean, the vibration of creation. For all these associations, in particular those linked with

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322 “The bride’s father provides a pair of bangles, which are put on her wrists by a Śāṅkari (shell-maker)” (Fruzzetti 1982:69). The shell-maker caste claims a special relationship to Durgā (Östör 1980:34). In a related myth, Durgā is teased by her in-laws for not having any jewellery on her arms. Śiva, to appease her anger, appears disguised as a Śāṅkari, and provides her with conch-shell bangles. Since then, all Bengali brides were conch-shell bangles as a sign of marriage (Fruzzetti 1982:70).
the feminine, with creation, and with sound vibration, it seems appropriate that the next level of manifestation of the goddess, should be the conch shell.

After worshipping Durgā in the conch shell, the purohita invokes her into the bilva tree. The prayers suggest that he both awakens her into and asks her to take up her abode in the bilva tree, requesting that she stay there as long as it pleases her. The purohita makes offerings and says prayers to the Guardians of the Fields and the elemental spirits. Then invoking the divine bilva tree into the local bilva tree, he carries a branch of it to the place of worship and explicitly states that it will be worshipped as Durgā. Again the sacred space surrounding the goddess in the bilva tree is cordoned off and, rather significantly, the Devī is worshipped as the protector/concealer of the secret of all secrets (guhyāti guhya gopārī). This epithet identifies Durgā with Mahāmāyā, the great power of illusion which conceals the divine mystery from being revealed to all but those on whom she bestows her grace. This ends the bodhana ritual.

Adhivāsanam

The anointing (adhivāsanam) ritual is generally performed later on the same day (śaśṭhī) as the bodhana, unless the bodhana ritual was performed a day earlier. The purohita begins with an utterance of approval, an oath to perform the adhivāsanam, and proceeds to the purificatory transformation of his body (bhūta suddhi) after driving away the inimical spirits. Transforming himself into an abode and portal for the Devī, he worships Ganeśa and the other devatās before performing a meditative visualization (dhyāna) of Durgā. He then proceeds to anoint the goddess with a wide array of materials, each of which is, in fact, a subtle form of the goddess herself. He anoints the ghata, the conch shell, and the bilva vrksa, by lightly stroking these manifest forms of the Devī with the appropriate material. These materials include sandal paste, soil, a small stone, unhusked rice, dūrvā grass, flowers, fruit, curd, ghi, the svāstika symbol, vermilion, a conch shell, collyrium, cow bile, yellow mustard, gold, silver, copper, a yak's tail, a mirror, and the light of a lamp (See Figure 16). These forms of the Devī are then symbolically anointed with all the materials together. The sword (khāḍga) and the
mirror (darpana), other forms of the Devī, are also anointed. Durgā will be offered blood sacrifice with this sword, and she will be symbolically bathed through her reflection in this mirror.

It is reasonable to suggest that the Devī in her dormant cosmic body in the form of the ghata, awakened through the medium of sound vibration into the conch shell, and invoked to take up her abode in the bilva tree is now "teased" out of these forms via her numerous manifest forms into other loci, such as the sword and the mirror, which will resonate with her presence. The "quickening" experienced by worshippers during this ritual is said to reflect the Devī's growing presence within them as well.

In the adhivāsa ritual one notes how worship materials are identified as subtle forms of the Devī. Certain of these materials, common in virtually all other pūjās are rarely recognized by outsiders as symbolic forms of the Devī. While it has been noted how the symbolic bathing of the Śiva liṅga is the union of the Devī as Gaṅgā with Śiva, the offering of the flowers, fruit, ghi, milk, sandal paste and so on are similar symbolic unions. A purohitā, who has taken Śaiva/Śākta dikṣa, when performing the worship of other deities with these materials most likely, through force of habit, mentally associates the materials with variant forms of the Devī, whose body is envisioned as the manifest universe.

The purohitā then anoints the Cluster of Nine Plants (navapatrikā), each of which represents an aspect of the Devī. The goddesses who embody these aspects are named Brahmāṇī, Cāmūndā, Kālikā, Durgā, Kārtikī, Sivā, Raktadantikā, Śokarahitā, and Lakṣmī. Durgā's name among these nine forms, suggests to me, that although this ritual is called Durgā Pūjā, it is a ritual for the Great Goddess who transcends the more limiting identifications which inevitably accompany any single epithet. Navapatrikā worship may have been incorporated into the Durgā Pūjā from other goddess-worshipping traditions. The navapatrikā itself appears to be a symbolic amalgamation of cults centring on trees and vegetation as abodes of the goddess, and may have roots in the extremely ancient worship of tree spirits (yakṣī).

The purohitā now moves from the location of the bilva tree or from the shrine
where the bodhana and adhvāsa were taking place to the temple where the clay image is to be installed. He draws a yantra on the floor and establishes another ghata on a small earthen altar which he constructs upon it. He then moves the ghata to the front of the altar, leaving room for the clay image which will be installed there. He then places the clay image on the altar and performs a simple or elaborate adhvāsa to all the images in the cluster, including the buffalo demon, Mahiṣāsura. The Devī’s power (sakti) has begun to resonate within these images as well. The sacred space is cordoned off, and the purohita’s activities end for the day.

Mahāsaptamī

The rituals of the seventh day begin with the varana, a ritual in which the sacrificer (yajamāna) selects the purohita. This ritual establishes the relationship of reciprocity between the offerer of the sacrifice and the purohita. The ritual dialogue clearly states that the yajamāna pays reverence and obeisance to the purohita who is symbolically identified with the sun. The purohita has previously established his intimate connection with the goddess by tying a thread around her wrist (in the clay image), as a symbol of protection (as in the ritual of rakṣa bandhana) or contractual union (as in the ritual of guru pūjā). Despite the ritual norm of respect for the purohita, many yajamānas with whom I spoke, in both brāhmaṇa and ksatriya families which staged the pūjas, refused to concede much in the way of special status to the purohita. The brāhmaṇas said that they themselves could perform the ritual if necessary, while the ksatriyas said that the purohita was merely hired help, performing a particular occupational function like a musician or doctor.

Some family members of the same yajamānas mentioned above, conceded that the purohita was treated in a special way during the time of the Durgā Pūjā. He had a higher status, was indispensible, and could dictate many terms. Furthermore, his skill was of the utmost importance in making the ritual meaningful to the participants. Perhaps this was at the heart of the yajamānas’ more unyielding stance. As sponsors of the ritual, yajamānas foot the bill for the pūjā and must be able to draw the line somewhere in
conceding to the purohita's demands. When asked what constituted a meaningful ritual, the kind of answer I was most frequently given by participants, was that a successful ritual facilitated an awareness of the Devi's presence, and elicited a mood of awe and reverence when one realized this presence. As Pallavi, a family member of the Chaukhamba Durgā Pūjā said,

[The purohita] must pay attention - have a visible effect on the people. His performance can make a dead ritual into something living. It can transport and change our attitude and feelings. My attention would have wandered and I would have begun to question the usefulness of the ritual if the purohita's performance had been poor.

These comments are particularly discerning for they suggest that a successful ritual subverts the capacity of a devotee to remain as an observer. By directing attention and orchestrating emotions successfully, the purohita disengages the analytic, discriminating mental faculties of the observers, drawing them into participation in the ritual. In this state of direct, emotive perception, participants experience the "meaning" of ritual rather than questioning it. I suggest that in this direct emotional experience, elicited by the skillful manipulation of concept-laden items, the ritual performer induces participants to remain "insiders" for periods of time which may extend well beyond the duration of the ritual, ideally perhaps for a lifetime, or at least until the following celebration. Ritual thus reconstructs and reinforces a devotee's worldview and ethos.323

After performing the common preliminary purification rituals, the purohita cuts a branch from the bilva tree (or takes the previously cut branch) and lashes it to the navapatrika. He now proceeds to bathe the navapatrika (see Figure 18).

There is evidence to suggest that ritual bathing has ancient roots in Hindu social and religious behaviour. Indus valley civilization sites reveal the central position of what appear to be public baths in the layout of the cities. While we cannot be certain about the usages of those baths, ritual bathing for the purpose of purification is still common at

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323 I am implying that human beings stand somewhere on the spectrum between being fully involved participants ("insiders") or disengaged observers of an experience ("outsiders").
temple tanks and sacred rivers throughout the sub-continent. It becomes clear that bathing does not simply serve the function of cleansing pollution but brings about a change in being. It is a transformative purification. This explains why baths are not merely conducted with cleansing agents such as water and soaps, but include anointments with materials of sacred purity such as the products of the cow. In the Vedic Rājasūya ritual, the king would be bathed in numerous materials and in the process undergo a form of spiritual rebirth into a pure, rejuvenated body. Bathing someone else is an act of loving service, honouring the king, queen, master, child, guest, or deity. Hindu deities are regularly bathed as part of the devotional service offered them. It is a combination of these notions and practices which inform the ritual activities of bathing which take place on Mahāsaptami.

The navapatrikā Devī is first anointed with a pinch of tumeric and oil. The prayers suggest that although the Devī's place of origin, nature, and purpose are mysterious, her presence is auspicious. This presence is capable of assuming a variety of forms (nānārūpadhare), and smearing these forms with unguents destroys sins (sarva pātam vinaśyati). Although the Devī is being anointed, the sins of the worshippers are being cleansed.

The navapatrikā is bathed in the five products of the cow (pañcagavya), and the five nectars (pañcāmṛta), after these have been purified. The purohita then bathes the navapatrikā in nine kinds of water, each of which is directed to a particular one of the nine plants. Through the liturgy we are told that the goddess abides in the breast of Viṣṇu (viṣṇuvakṣah sthalāśrāye) and is Śiva's beloved (haраприye). She is the abode of beauty/glory (śrīnikeśā), the giver of life (prāṇadāyint) to all living beings, and she gives fulfilment of desires (kāmapradā). She is paid reverence by both gods and demons, removes the sorrow of separation, removes sin and hunger, and bestows all attainments.

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324 Archeologists generally agree that [the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro] must have been associated with some sort of bathing ritual, and this strongly recalls later Hindu practices and concepts of pollution. A similar construction in Indian villages today catches and retains monsoon rains, and is used for practical as well as ritual bathing" (Craven 1976:11-12).

325 See Hesteerman (1957) for a detailed description and interpretation of this ritual.
(sarvasiddhi). She is the embodiment of victory (jayarūpā), the cause of victory (jayahetu), and the increaser of victory (jaya bardhanā).

This preceding section is a fine example of how the liturgy of the Durgā Pūjā ritual reveals important information about the goddess. The earlier epithet, made towards the end of the bodhana ritual, which accentuated the mystery of her origin, nature, and purpose (guhyāti guhya goptrī) contrasts dramatically with the statements made during the bath. Through the intimate act of bathing the Devī, certain details of her being are revealed to the worshipper (through the purohita). The mystery begins to reveal itself. I suggest that as the Devī is symbolically cleansed, the eyes of the worshippers are simultaneously cleansed so that they may more clearly discern the goddess's presence.

A particularly significant revelation found in the liturgy is that Durgā permeates immovable or stable objects (sthāvarsthāsa). This is extremely helpful in understanding why devotees identify structural integrity with the Devī's presence. The strength and unassailability of a fortress (durga) would depend on the presence of the goddess, and this is why it is very common to find Durgā temples associated with fortresses, often within their very walls. The Devī's solidifying presence extends to other constructions as well, such as bridges, which incorporate the salvific notion of fording dangerous waters which are difficult to traverse (durga). We have already encountered the notion that a temple itself may be identified as the Devī. The ideas of protection, indestructibility, and firm support extend to recognizing Durgā's presence in armour (kavaca), weapons (āyudha), rocks, mountains, altars, thrones, and so on. Thus, conceptions of Durgā's nature encompass a sacred physics. In addition to her better known presence as cosmic kinetic energy (Śakti), the Devī is seen to be present as latent, static, potential, and bonding energy.326

The navapatrikā Devī is then bathed in eight different waters. She is bathed by different divine beings with each water in an honorific gesture of subservience. The navapatrikā is then dried and draped in a red sārt, so that she resembles a modestly clad

326I have already discussed (in the section on public Durgā Pūjās) how Durgā's bonding power permeates community groups, unifying and strengthening them.
lady (as did the ghata which was installed earlier). She is placed next to the image of Ganeśa, where it is identified as his wife (kala bou) by many devotees. It is clear that the navapatrikā Devī is none other than Durgā, although one might suggest that she is Durgā in a manifest form which is more primordial than those in which the Devī will later manifest (i.e., the clay image, and a living virgin girl). The navapatrikā’s placement next to Ganeśa, makes Durgā’s connection to Ganeśa more complex. Although most worshippers consider Ganeśa, in the clay image cluster, to be Durgā’s child, in his association with the navapatrikā, he is Durgā’s wife. The kinship associations between deities in the image cluster of Durgā Pūjā are a symbolic overlay on more profound connections between aspects of the Great Goddess Durgā herself. Even the male deities Ganeśa and Kārtikeya, are not her "sons," but facets of the Devī’s nature.327 Since the navapatrikā is a primordial, autochthonous, or even a yakṣī form of the Devī, her pairing with Ganeśa is appropriate, since the elephant-headed god "has his origins among the thick-set, fat-bellied, beneficient yakṣa deities, whose worship in India was prevalent long before the theistic worship of either Vishnu or Shiva came to the fore" (Eck 1982:182).

The purohita next symbolically bathes the clay image of the Devī through bathing its reflection in a mirror (darpana) placed on a tripod. The mirror, through the adhivāsa ritual had already been identified as a form of the goddess. Sometimes the mirror is placed on a triangle formed from twigs which is placed over an earthen jar. The triangle or the tripod reflect the tripartite nature of the goddess, conceived both through the symbolism of the guṇas and as the three forms of śakti (i.e., action, knowledge, and will). In the ritual process, the purohita, who through yogic action has achieved unitive communion with the goddess, is inducing the Devī to manifest, actively and intensely, in the material forms in which she is ever present, but latent. Simultaneously, the worshippers are led, through the refining of their consciousness and perception, to "see" the Devī’s manifest presence. The cloudy mirror is, in my opinion, an ideal symbol of the devotees’ dulled perception, and the indistinct view of the Devī reflected within it.

327 This interpretation was offered by many Durgā worshippers, although the majority of devotees discuss the deities and their relationships with each other in terms that parallel human society.
As the Devi’s image is bathed in the mirror, the mirror itself is cleansed. Innumerable aspects of the image of the Devi are revealed in the process, and the devotees’ perceptions are steadily heightened, dramatically deepening the experience of darśana.\footnote{According to early Hindu texts, a reflection in water or a mirror represents the soul of a person. See Śāṅkhāyana Aranyakā 6.2, 8.7 and Aitareya Aranyakā 3.24. On the pervasive use of the term "mirror" as a symbol of illusory reality and indirect perception, see Wayman (1974).}

The purohita rubs the mirror with rice powder and explicitly states that he is washing the body of the goddess in the earthen image and the bilva tree. He then bathes the reflected image with the pañcagavya. Then, paralleling royal consecration rituals, he bathes Durgā with a special spouted vessel (bhrngāra). The liturgy states that the goddess is bathed by a host of entities both benevolent and malevolent, divine and mundane, including sacred rivers, gods and goddesses, the mothers (mātr), planets, sages, sacred places, the divisions of time, and demons. Besides the obvious symbolic meaning that all this manifold creation pays homage to her, there is a sense that this vast diversity is part of her and emanates from her.

Durgā is then bathed with numerous watery infusions or waters obtained from varied sources poured from a conch shell. The shell was previously identified as a form of the Devi. Next she is bathed with a water which flows through a container pierced with dozens of holes. The numerous streams of water which flow from this millifluent (sahasradhāra) symbolize countless rivers. After a bath with eight different types of water, the mirror is dried, smeared with vermillion on which a seed syllable of Durgā is written, wrapped in cloth and placed on the altar. This ends the great bath (mahāsnāna).

The purohita then drives away the inimical spirits and worships the navapatrikā with a ten part devotional service (daśopacāra). While touching the altar of the clay image, he urges Durgā to enter the place of worship (pūjalaya). Next he installs another jar (ghaṭa) and performs the preliminary procedures of purification of the worship materials, and himself. He makes a common offering (samānya argha). Once again purifying the worship materials and himself, after driving away inimical spirits,
worshipping the spiritual teachers, and performing the appropriate imprintsments (*nyāsa*), the *purohita* meditates on Durgā and makes a special offering (*viśeṣa argha*). He worships Ganeśa and the other deities. An important dimension of this worship is that Ganeśa is here installed as a *ghata* which is placed before his clay image in the cluster. It was not absolutely clear to me if the other deities are also represented by the same *ghata*, but its presence in the ritual reinforces the interpretation that the *ghata* is the cosmic body of the deity. Durgā and the other deities in the clay image cluster are soon to be brought to life and the *ghata*’s presence suggests that from this cosmic egg (*brahmaṇḍa*) the living deity will hatch.

Placing the central jar before the clay images, the *purohita* performs the meditative visualization of Durgā and beckons her and her eight attendant *śaktis* (*aṣṭabhiḥ śaktibhiḥ saha*) into the image with a powerfully charged set of invocations. He invites all the other deities to be present. He asks Durgā to take up her abode in the clay image, in the *bilva* tree, in the plants and herbs, in the twigs and fruit, and to remain as long as she is being worshipped. Anointing her three eyes with collyrium from a *bilva* leaf he performs the ritual of giving eyesight (*cakṣur dāna*) to the image. Touching the heart of the image with a flower, with the use of appropriate seed syllables, he induces life energy (*prāṇa*) into the image. He installs the soul (*jīva*) and activates the sense organs and other vital energies within the now living image.

It is crucial to recognize that the difference between temple *pūjā* and this ritual of worship hinges on the manifest presence of the goddess. The goddess is thought to reside at her temples always, and therefore each temple or permanent shrine enjoys worship and prestige in proportion to the intensity of the Devī’s presence there. Durgājī, as I have shown, enjoys a far-reaching reputation as a seat of power and attainment where the Devī is everpresent and accessible. During the Durgā Pūjā ritual, however, the goddess is invoked into places where she is not normally available and where she will

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329 A North American Hindu acquaintance who on occasion performs a simplified version of the Durgā Pūjā for a community there, in which only a single *ghata* is installed at the beginning of the ritual, once told me that the *ghata* represented Ganeśa. It is clear that he was identifying this Ganeśa *ghata* with the Devī *ghaṭas*.
be worshipped only during the course of the festival. It is of pivotal significance to note that the invocation is referred to as an awakening. The Devī does not abide in some remote place but is "awakened" at the very locations where she will be worshipped.\textsuperscript{330} Her presence there was dormant. The bulk of the purohita's actions, entirely absent in temple pūjā, are directed towards this process of awakening the goddess and intensifying her manifest presence. When investing the clay images with eyesight and vital breath, the purohita has, in effect, brought what appeared to be an inanimate figure of earth to life. Actually, the ghaṭa was precisely such an animate manifestation of the Devī, but the clay image, even surpassing the living embodiment of the Devī in the navapatrikā, embodies the goddess in her most dramatic anthropomorphic form. The purohita breathes life into the divine form described in the meditative visualizations complete with such attributes (saguṇa) as ten arms and three eyes.

The purohita next worships Durgā embodied in this clay image with an elaborate form of what is traditionally referred to as a sixteen-part devotional service (sodāśopacāra). Commencing by offering the Devī a seat (āsana), he moves through offerings of water for washing her feet (pādyā), general food offerings (naivedya) and specific ones which include a honeyed mixture (madhupārka), betel nut (tāmbūla), and sweet balls (modaka). These are normally followed with frequent offerings of water for sipping (ācamaniya). Amid these food offerings are the standard offerings of bath water and clothing. A number of feminine accoutrements are also offered such as ornaments (alāṅkara), including a conch shell bangle, vermillion, collyrium, and a mirror. Flowers and flower garlands, fragrant incense, and a flame are part of the offerings.

It surprised me that the members of the yajamānas' families, or their guests and other lay worshippers, do not pay much attention to the activities of the purohita, through much of his performance in the early stages. It is mainly during the devotional service stage of the ritual that they begin to gather around the image and participate, at first, through their observation. Their participation peaks during the flame worship (ārati). At

\textsuperscript{330}The notion of her arrival from her abode in the mountains is a metaphor of this awakening process from dormancy.
the Lahiri household, the children in particular were given gongs and bells, which they rang with vigorous abandon, while the purohita passed the sacred ghi flame before the Devī. The women of the household utter a blood-curdling cry, onomatopoeically called the ululu, during the ārat. Bengali women utter this cry during all the high points of the Durgā Pūjā ritual. They had uttered the ululu during the bodhana and adhivāsa rituals. The cry mobilizes the entire household, causes horripilation, and suggests the excitement and dread which accompanies Durgā’ s arrival and her palpable presence.331

One of the highest points of the devotional service in elaborate home pūjās is the offering of cooked food (anna/bhoga). Although most of the offering materials have been painstakingly gathered by the yajamāna’s family, often for months prior to the pūjā, the food offerings provide a direct participatory liaison between the female worshippers and the Devī. While the uncooked food may have been prepared somewhat earlier, the cooked food is prepared immediately before the offering. To the chilling reverberations of the ululu, the matriarch of the home carries the food from the kitchen to the place of worship (pūjālaya) with utmost care while water is sprinkled before her, purifying the ground on which she will tread. The elderly women in the worshipping household are extremely active during the pūjā in the preparation of the food. This is not merely festive preparation, for although the food will be eaten by the household and guests, it is prasāda, food that was first offered to Durgā and then distributed as blessings from the goddess.

There are rituals of purity which accompany the food preparation, and as a male ethnographer, I was skilfully sidetracked from the kitchen throughout my observations of the pūjā. The kitchen is very much women’s space in a household possessing its own mysterious aura to males and others who do not enter it. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the kitchen functions like another pūjālaya where the miraculous chemistry of cooking is taking place. During the pūjā, an initiated post-menopausal woman, in a role not unlike that of the purohita, oversees the preparation of the food.

331 In the Durgā Saptasatī (8.22-27) the sakti of the goddess Candikā herself, a gruesome deity known as Śivadūti, appears and yelps like a hundred jackals. The ululu uttered by Bengali women is reminiscent of such a blood-curdling, jackal-like yelp.
Married daughters who have returned to the family household are requested not to lift a hand in the preparations. I was told that this "prohibition" insures that they have a relaxing time and enjoy being treated to the beneficience of the pūjā rather than be bothered with their traditional domestic burdens. In a sense they are living embodiments of Durgā/Pārvatī, perceived as the spouse of Śiva, who has returned to her father's home, where she is treated as a royal guest.

Somewhat confused about the role of women with respect to food preparation I was provided with the following details by Añjana Moitra, the eldest of Mr. Lahiri's married daughters.

Añjana: My mother prepares for Durgā Pūjā for the whole year. She shops for wheat, dāl (lentils), grains, and so on all year long. We store these grains in that room in the house. She then washes everything to clean it. It must be purified. She removes the stones and little sticks and so on which are in these grains. You must not touch them with night clothes or with clothes you have worn when going to the toilet.

- Girls who are younger than twelve can go everywhere and they can touch the food. They can participate in cutting the vegetables for the uncooked naivedya offerings, but since they have not taken the mantra from a guru, they cannot touch the food used for bhog (i.e., cooked food).

- Girls older than twelve, but who are unmarried, cannot cook or touch any of the food.

- Married women can touch and prepare the uncooked food, but cannot prepare the cooked food for Durgā unless they have taken the mantra. I can cook the bhog for Sarasvatī Pūjā, and we can give Nārāyana and Gopala bhog.

- Our Durgā Pūjā is Tantric.

Her son interrupts: No, it is Vedic.

Añjana continues: There is a yantra in the middle and bel leaves are offered. These are Tantric.

- Widows cannot touch any of the food.

- A woman, after menopause can touch the food, but for Durgā and Kāli Pūjā only women with the mantra can prepare the bhog.

It is clear from Añjana's comments that girls prior to the onset of their menstrual cycle, married women, and post-menopausal women enjoy a much higher status than unmarried women and widows. The latter exist in a liminal and inauspicious state and are completely excluded from the preparation of divine food. Food offerings therefore are a symbolic parallel of womanhood. This observation is reinforced by the relationship
between women and cooked food. Pre-menstrual girls may handle and prepare the uncooked food offerings but only married women may prepare cooked offerings. Higher on the hierarchy of purity are post-menopausal women, who are no longer associated with reproductive blood flow. Highest are women who have taken Tantric initiation (dikṣa/mantra). Charting this relationship, we have:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Preparations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-menstrual girls</td>
<td>May prepare Uncooked Food offerings to minor deities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menstruating unmarried women</td>
<td>May not prepare food offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married women</td>
<td>May prepare Cooked Food offerings to minor deities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widows</td>
<td>May not prepare food offerings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-menopausal married women</td>
<td>May prepare Cooked Food offerings to minor deities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated women</td>
<td>May prepare Cooked Food offerings to Durgā and Kāli.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Virgins, one might suggest, are like unripe fruit or uncooked foods whose flavour and nourishment are not fully developed. Married women, who are capable of producing life and mother’s milk, are like ripe fruit and cooked food, rich in flavour and nourishment. Just as the virgins and married women are considered embodiments of Durgā, I suggest that the Devī is also embodied in the delicious nourishment, both cooked and uncooked, which is offered to her living image. She is present in the admixture of the food’s spices, its aroma, and subtle flavours. Food, delicious and nourishing, so closely associated with the feminine, is an important sensory element in conveying the growing presence of the Devī in the household.

The devotional service ends with the offering of special cooked foods like *paramanna* and cakes (*piśṭaka*), and with obeisance (*vandana*) to the Devī.

The *purohita* next invokes nine goddesses into the *navapatrikā* and worships each of them separately with a ten-part devotional service (*daśopacāra*). He invokes Brahmāṇī into the plantain, Kālikā into the *kacvī*, Durgā into the turmeric, Kārtikī into the *jayantī*, Śivā into the *bilva*, Raktaḍantikā into the pomegranate, Śokarahitā into the Asoka, Cāmūndā into the *mana*, and Lakṣmī into the rice paddy. After offerings to the directional guardians (dikpāla), the *purohita* invokes Gaṇeśa into the clay image, gives
it eyesight and installs its vital energy. He worships Gāneśa with an elaborate devotional service. He repeats the procedure for Nārāyana and Śiva, Kārtikeya, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, the mounts (vāhana) of the deities, the snake (nāga), Durgā's lion mount (mahāsinha), and the demon Mahiśasura (see Figure 14). When the entire image cluster is animated and worshipped, the purohita turns again to the goddess and worships her with a repetition of her mantra and an elaborate ārati in which numerous honorific items, such as a lamp and a yak's tail whisk are passed before her (see Figure 17). A hymn of adoration is recited and the day's rituals end with a communal flower offering (puspāñjali). For worshippers this is an important part of the ritual since it allows them to move from being merely spectators to actual participation. They repeat prayers given by the purohita and shower the Devi with purified flowers.

The purohita has effected the difficult task of enabling the Devi to manifest within various media. Through successive and successful transformative purifications of the matter around him, of the worshipper, and of himself, he has induced the goddess to take up her abode in the navapatrikā and the earthen image where her presence is now palpable to all who have participated in the process.

Mahāśtamī

The rituals of Mahāśtamī are essentially repetitions of those of Mahāsaptamī. The purohita performs the purifications of the place of worship and the worship materials. He purifies himself through appropriate imprints and after the meditative visualization of Durgā, repeats the bathing ritual of the clay image using the mirror. He proceeds to worship Ganeśa and the other deities, but this time there is no installation of jars. This change reflects the notion that the deities are already present in the earthen images. They have germinated from the cosmic womb or seed which the ghata also represents. Similarly, the purohita does not perform the installation of vital energy or eye opening rituals. After the meditative visualization, the purohita worships Durgā embodied in the clay image and also worships the navapatrikā. He now proceeds to the ritual which is of central importance on this day, the worship of Durgā in the Sarvatobhadra Maṇḍala.
(Sphere of All Auspiciousness) a diagram which he had drawn on the floor the previous night (see Diagram 4). The Sarvatothradra Mandala consists of an eight-petalled lotus in the centre, surrounded by a checkerboard of squares grouped in particular patterns. Coloured red, yellow/green, white, and blue/black, the patterns appear to emanate outwards from the centre.

The purohita begins the practice of the mandala by invoking and worshipping the eight saktis of Durgā into the eight petals of the lotus. Starting with the east and moving in a clockwise direction, he invokes Ugracandā, Pracandā, Candogrā, Cādanayikā, Candā, Candavati, Candrupā, and Aticandikā respectively. He then invokes and worships the sixty four yoginis into the centre of the sacred instrument. It is noteworthy that he next worships goddesses who "dwell in other regions/countries" (nānadeśanivāsinī) universalizing the forms of the Devī in the mandala. All goddesses, named or unnamed, are thus accounted for in this ritual. The purohita invokes and worships the Mothers (mātr) Brahmāṇī and Maheśvarī in the northeast corner of the mandala, Kaumārī and Vaiśnavī in the southeast, Vārāhī and Nārāsimhī in the southwest, Indrānī and Cāmunḍā in the northwest, and Kātyāyanī in the centre. He worships Cāndikā and the Nine Durgās (unnamed) and then Jayantī and other goddesses.

Leaving the mandala temporarily, the purohita moves to the worship of Durgā’s weapons (āyudha pūja). The location of the āyudha pūja within the mandala process forges a connection between the earthen image and the symbolic diagram. The weapons are symbols of Durgā’s powers. Armed with the weapons of all the deities, she is the summation of all their potencies. The deities which have been invoked and which will subsequently be invoked into the mandala are, like her weapons, aspects of her power. They are her saktis. The purohita worships the trident, sword, discus, sharp arrow, the sakti weapon, the staff, the fully-drawn bow, the goad, bell, axe, and the serpent noose. He also worships the Devī as the bearer of all weapons.

The purohita next worships the Devī’s ornaments, a ritual which within the mandala process extends the symbolic dimensions of the instrument. The diagram represents not only Durgā’s powers but her attributes and adornments. Returning to the
mandala, the purohita worships in the four cardinal directions, the young lads (bātuka), considered to be male offspring of the four desirable states of attainment (siddha), knowledge (jñāna), friendship (sahaja), and togetherness (samāya). Between the lotus petals and the filament, the purohita worships the guardians of the field (kṣetrapāla). The fierce forms of Śiva (bhairava) are next invoked into various sections of the mandala. The Mahāśāṭamī rituals end with the worship of Durgā as the entire mandala.

A mandala, like a yantra, is a schematic representation of a deity which through appropriate ritual construction or utilization may embody that deity. Although they are often constructed in two dimensions, mandalas are to be seen as multi-dimensional. Temples may be seen as three-dimensional mandalas. Mandalas represent spheres of power and the sarvatobhadra mandala represents the expansive benevolent influence of the goddess. From the seed of her cosmic body (represented by the ghāṭa) the Devī germinates and sprouts (represented by the bilva vrksa and navapatrikā) and then takes up her abode in the anthropomorphic living earthen image (mārti). From here, symbolized by the flowering of the mandala’s lotus petals and its checkerboard matrix, Durgā expands to the farthest recesses of the cosmos. The yoginis, mothers, and every feminine conception of deity are her weapons (ayudha), her powers (śakti), while the male deities are her ornaments (bhūṣana). Her presence is no longer localized but has grown all-pervasive. Every place of worship has become the centre of an all-expansive yantra which overlaps the entire cosmos and intersects with every other centre of Durgā worship.332

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332 Zimmer’s penetrating analysis of the relationship between pūjā and yantras, in their diverse forms, is summarized when he says,

It is not until the spiritual activity of the devotee makes a particular yantra (pratimā, mandala, or a yantra in the narrower sense) the focal point of all his powers of concentration, that the yantra takes on any significance.

This process of transformation, which human consciousness performs on the material substance of the yantra, occurs in the act of worship, in pūjā (1984:32). In the foregoing rituals of Durgā Pūjā, we see an illustration par excellence of the process of transformation of human consciousness and the substance of the yantra which is the Devī, in which the two are fused in an encounter of sublime significance.
Sandhi Pūjā

In our Bengali tradition, the Aṣṭamī day is very important for us. The actual time is when Aṣṭamī and Navamī meet (sandhi chana/khana) because this is when Mahiṣāsura was killed. For non-Bengalis, Navamī is more important. Śakti is a symbol of power, and it is this power which destroyed the demon.

... No one is allowed to enter the room when sandhi pūjā is done. There is no bali offered here, but in some organizations, the blood sacrifice is given (S. K. Rai Choudary, September 27, 1990).

The sandhi pūjā which takes place during a forty-eight minute period at the juncture of the eight and ninth lunar day is the high point of the Durga Pūjā. After quickly performing the necessary purifications, the purohita meditatively visualizes a dreadful form of Durgā as Cāmundā/Kālī. The goddess is worshipped with a sixteen part devotional service but the significant addition is the blood sacrifice of a goat (chāga bali) or surrogate offering of a kusmanda melon. This offering, central to the pūjā, is disappearing in Banāras. The sword (khadga) is worshipped as the body of the Devī, the composite of the major gods and goddesses. The goat’s head is severed with a single stroke. The animal’s head with blood and a lamp is offered to Durgā. Baṭukā, the yogins, the kṣetrapālas, and Ganeśa all partake in the flesh and blood offerings.

One hundred and eight ghi lamps are lit by the yajamāna and his family allowing them to participate more intimately in the worship of the goddess at this most crucial juncture of time. This offering is an āratt par excellence (See Figure 17).

Young girls who have not yet reached puberty are next worshipped in the kumārī pūjā. One of the maidens is selected to represent the others. She is placed on a large brass plate and is worshipped as a living embodiment of the goddess. The purohita washes her feet and after performing a meditative visualization of the goddess Kumārī worships the virgin girl with a sixteen part devotional service. The girls are given sweets and gifts upon departure.333

Although in the Bengali style of Kumārī Pūjā, the purohita performs the worship, in many other homes in Banāras the pūjā is a ritual performed by women, for women,

333Some notes on Tantric prescriptions concerning virgin worship are found in Kaviraj 1987:277-280.
although "men can cooperate." The women in a *brāhmaṇa* family perform the *pūjā* in the following manner. A minimum of nine girls who are not members of the immediate family, preferably *brāhmaṇas* under the age of twelve, are invited from the neighbourhood. "Nine is Durgā’s form. We also say there are nine forms of Durgā." "A few parents object to send their children," I was told, "because they are concerned about what they might be fed, but generally most families like to send their daughters." The girls’ feet are washed and decorated with red lacquer (*alta*). "Everything is done with a religious feeling. Washing the feet means that we are worshipping Durgā. We give water for washing the feet to any god we worship." The maidens are given a seat (*āsana*). Their hair is rubbed with oil and they are given a decorative forehead dot (*bindi*). "This is a symbol of adoring Durgā with make-up or decorating her. . . . We decorate our Durgā." The *kumarīs* are fed a sweet (*halvā*) made from coarsely ground flour (*sūji*), sugar, *ghi*, and dried fruits.

In the tradition of the women who were describing the *pūjā*, the virgins are fed cooked food such as deep fried bread (*pūrī*) and curried vegetables (*sabji*). These cooked foods are first offered to Durgā, then to the *kumarīs*, and finally eaten by the women as *prasāda*. The women have been observing a fast of a restricted diet (of uncooked or unrefined food) during the nine days of Navarātra. "We think that Durgā is also fasting like us," I was told. Kumārī Pūjā which takes place on Navami, brings an end to their fast and the Navarātra rituals. I was curious about how the *kumarīs* felt during this ritual and was given this answer by a former *kumarī*:

My older two sisters, my younger sister, and I, and our friends would often be chosen as *kumarīs*. We would enjoy going in a group. We would get some money (*dakṣina*) and sometimes maybe a scarf (*chunni/dupatta*). We would enjoy ourselves.

In the Kumārī Pūjā we again notice the structural relationship between uncooked and cooked food. The immature unripe or uncooked food, a symbol of the *kumarī* and the virginal Durgā, I suggest, changes after the Navarātra fast to mature ripened or

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*The following description and comments derive from a mother and daughter in a *brāhmaṇa* family.*
cooked food, a symbol of the fertile Durgā. I feel that there is an element of sympathetic magic in this ritual, where the collective energy of the fertile females, harnessed through their fast (in which they align themselves with their pre-menstruation state), is transferred to the maidens of the community. Their worship of the virgins encourages or elicits a maturation in them, a transformation towards fertility. This transformation is paralleled by the sprouting of the seeds sowed in the soil altar, or the oozing of the sap of the mango twigs into the water within the jar. The inception of the blood flow of menstruation may also be symbolized by water which flows from the cracking of the coconut which was placed atop the jar which represented Durgā. The virginal goddess has changed into the fertile female, within whom flows menstrual blood, the substance capable of engendering life and nourishing it.

Both flesh and blood are central to the symbolism of the sandhi pājā. The Devī is first worshipped with the flesh and spilled blood of a sacrificial victim. And then the Devī is worshipped in the flesh and blood form of a living virgin girl, one who has not yet begun her menstrual bleeding. To explore this relationship between spilt and contained blood further, one needs to inquire into the symbolism of the sacrificial animal.

The Bengalis are essentially meat eating Hindus, and it is thus appropriate that at the climax of the food offerings within the devotional service, an offering of meat be made. This meat, generally goat, but sometimes buffalo, is typical food fare eaten on festive occasions. After being consumed by the Devī, the blessed food (prasāda) is eaten by the worshippers. In several pertinent philosophies such as the Sāṅkhya/Yoga adaptations within Śākta Tantrism, flesh and blood are symbols of the process of manifestation which results when the three constituent aspects (guna) of nature (prakṛti) are thrown out of balance. Sattva guna is diminished while the tamas and rajas guna

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335 Unripe fruit or uncooked food is often considered to have greater "spiritual nourishment." I have chatted with a number of ascetics whose diet consists entirely of such food. An ascetic who resides at the Durgā temple located within the exterior wall of the fortress at Chunar, not far south of Banaras, told me he only ate certain types of leaves. Most Śākta devotees are impressed by such austerities. They do not feel that a diet of unripe or uncooked food is more "physically nutritious" but acknowledge that a human being's capacity to survive on such a diet is an indication of spiritual refinement. Ripe fruit or cooked food release juice (rasa) and flavour, which have implicitly been gained at the expense of contained potency.
grow, ultimately leading to the production of the grosser elements (*mahābhūta*). One might suggest that the Devī, as an embodiment of Nature (*prakṛti*) in its state of perfection, transforms the sacrificial offering of flesh and blood back into pure, *guna*-balanced substance. Flesh, often associated with the dark (*tamas*), polluted, and obscuring quality of nature, and blood, symbol of the passionate, energetic quality (*guna*) of nature are made pure (*sattva*). The Devī inverts the human situation wherein pure food, once eaten, becomes polluted.\(^{336}\)

Blood sacrifice is also a common element in the Durgā Pūjā of the *kṣatriya* class. I frequently encountered the following explanations among soldiers for their preference for blood sacrifice. Soldiers say that in order to satisfy a pledge if the Devī protected them during some previous perilous mission, they offer her a life for the life she has spared. Here the sacrificial victim figures in a spiritual arithmetic where it serves as a surrogate life principle (*jīva*). The other reason given for blood sacrifice is that it develops in the warrior the essential capacity to kill. Since one cannot easily go into battle and slay enemies unpracticed, blood sacrifice develops the necessary familiarity with taking lives and spilling blood. This grisly capacity, essential for the protection of a society against its enemies, is considered to emanate from the Devī. The soldier and his weapons are thought of as extensions of the Devī’s weapons.\(^{337}\)

Notions of the buffalo as edible sacrifice and of the sacrificial victim as potential enemy, connect with the visual representation in the clay image worshipped during the Durgā Pūjā, which depicts the myth of Durgā slaying the buffalo demon, Mahiśāsura. The sacrificial victim, then, is also seen as a symbol of demonic power which is slain through this Pūjā. For some worshippers the demon represents specific human enemies,\(^ {336}\)Compare Hubert and Mauss who define sacrifice as "a religious act which, through consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned" (1964:13).

\(^{337}\)In the *Puruṣa Sūkta* of the *Rg Veda* X.90, the Cosmic Being, is sacrificially dismembered and produces the cosmos and the various classes (*varṇa*) of Hindu society. The *brahmanas* derive from the head/mouth of Puruṣa, and the *kṣatriyas* from his arms. In a similar vein, Śāktā metaphysics, which equates the Devī with Absolute Reality (Brahman) and the cosmic being Puruṣa (see for instance the Devī *Gītā* of the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Skanda 7, Chapters 31-40), would imply that the entire *kṣatriya* class are the arms of the Goddess.
such as rivals in business and politics. For others, demonic power may be perceived more generally, as the fear of pernicious political (e.g., secularism, communism) or religious ideologies (e.g., Islam). The blood sacrifice should appease the goddess who protects her worshippers from these enemies by vanquishing them. There appears to be a close relationship between demonic power, enemies, and fear. That which one fears is one’s enemy and one fears it because its power is greater than one’s own. This superhuman (i.e., beyond one’s own), terrifying, and therefore demonic, power requires the intercession of a still greater dreadful power to defeat it. Durgā is this dreadful, benevolent power.

Certain worshippers do not simply interpret demonic power as embodied in external enemies but see it as the enemy within. "Mahiśāsura represents our animal instincts," said one devotee. The late siddha yogi, Svāmi Sukhānanda Mahārāja of the Durgā Saptaśatā temple in the Lanka district of Banāras, in a rare interview, answered my question about demonic power this way. He began by saying, "Muslims are the demons." As I was thinking to myself how facile and disappointing this answer was, located as it was within a limited sectarian political and religious framework, he surprised me by continuing, "Hindus are also the demons." He went on to convey, in essence, that the empowerment which resulted from identification with a particular group and ideology, depended on the Devī’s grace. By thinking otherwise, both Muslims and Hindus were deluded and thus the consciousnesses of such groups were demonic. In classic Śākta fashion, he felt that all power and all things, too, emanate from the Devī, and it is to her that everything must be offered back. Demonic power, as exemplified by the Mahiśāsura myth, is based on egocentrism. In that state one falsely attributes one’s status and capacities to one’s own meritorious actions forgetting their true source.

It follows that the demon which is to be slain is the conglomerate of the obscuring aspects of consciousness, the "inner enemy," a term explicitly used by a few devotees. This includes egoism (asmitā and ahaṅkāra) and other afflictions (kleśa). The Durgā Saptaśatā myth of Mahiśāsura’s destruction tells us how the demon changed shape many times before being slain. He assumed the form of a buffalo (symbol of tamas guna)
(3.20-28, 32-37), a lion (symbol of rajas guṇa) (3.29), an elephant (a symbol of power) (3.30-31), and a person (symbol of egoism) (3.29,38). These shifting shapes, I suggest, symbolize the incessant modifications (vr̥tti) of the mind (citta) afflicted by ignorance (avidyā). The head of the sacrificial victim represents the devotee’s own head, a symbol of spiritual ignorance (avidyā). Just as the Devī beheaded the human form of the demon which emerged from the mouth of his crushed buffalo shape, she, who is supreme knowledge (mahāvidyā) severs the bonds of ignorance and grants the devotee the boon of spiritual attainment (siddhi). This conquest over ignorance is ultimately a conquest over death and the fear associated with it, for one is freed completely from the samsāric cycle of rebirth. Yama, the god of death, rides a buffalo.338 (Also see Oakesh 1978: 99-100).

On several occasions, devotees drew to my attention the triangle in the clay image formed by Durgā at the apex, with one foot upon her lion mount and the other crushing the buffalo demon (the bases of the triangle). Her lion, I was told, represents the passionate energy (rajas guṇa) needed to carry one to liberation. The triad represents the perfect balance of the tripartite qualities of creation. Tamas guṇa, symbolized by the male buffalo demon is emasculated while the pure, resplendent sattva guṇa, symbolized by the Devī, rides triumphant upon the active principle of the rajas guṇa, symbolized by the Devī’s lion.

The comments of these devotees suggest that unlike the misguided passion (rajas) symbolized by the lion form assumed by the demon, and his blood which is spilt, Durgā’s great lion vehicle, Mahāsimha, is rajas at the service of the purified sattva consciousness. This interpretation is reinforced in the Raktabīja episode within the Durgā Saptasati (8.39-62). The demon Raktabīja (He whose Seed is Blood), when injured by the Devī’s saktis, the Mothers (mātri), spawns thousands of identical forms, one from

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338 I have seen certain Buddhist religious images where, Yama, or Dharmarāja as he is also called, has a buffalo head. He is conquered by the sword-bearing Mañjuśrī, who personifies wisdom. Yama is also shown with the hideous goddess Cāmundā as his consort. This imagery links Durgā via her wrathful emanation Kāli, whose epithet is Cāmundā/Cāmundā, to Yama. Furthermore, it also links Durgā, via her epithet of Mahāvidyā to the Buddhist goddess Prajñā-paramitā, who personifies Mañjuśrī’s wisdom. The implication here is that Durgā in her wisdom aspect, is victorious over the forces of phenomenal existence and death, which are ultimately part of her fearful aspect.
each drop of his river of blood (8.40). Spilt blood here is the explicit symbol of demonic powers proliferated (they pervade the entire world (8.51)); the misguided rajas guṇa run amok. The Devī commands Kāli/Cāmunḍā to drink up the blood as it spills (8.52-55) and thus destroys the demon who falls to the ground bloodless (8.60-61). The Mothers dance as a result, intoxicated by his blood (asrīmadoddhataḥ)(8.62). It is interesting to note that the destructive rajas guṇa has moved from the demon’s now bloodless body through Kāli/Cāmunḍā (8.60) into the body of the Mothers (8.62), where its activity is not diminished, but transformed (8.62). The Mothers and other śaktis are eventually reabsorbed into the Devī’s body as she explicitly proves that all these apparently different forms are none other than manifestations of herself (10.3). The demon’s blood (i.e., rajas), the source of uncontrolled tamasic creation and chaotic proliferation, has, implicitly, entered the Devī herself, sattvically reintegrated through her energy manifestations who were intoxicated with it.

This line of interpretation, a synthesis culled from many separate interview sources, is consistent with the Śākta Tantric philosophy which sees the human condition within the process of creation as one resulting from the imbalance of the three guṇas. This imbalance leads to an evolution (or devolution) of transcendent nature (avyakta prakṛti) into gross elements (mahābhūta). Just as the purohita transforms his body into immaculate substance through the ritual of purifying the elements (bhūta suddhi), which essentially reverses the evolutionary process, so too, worshippers offer gross and subtle elements of their being, symbolized by the flesh and blood of the sacrificial victim, to the Devī. By accepting the offering, the Devī performs the desired spiritual alchemy on the devotee. And yet there is a difference between the two modes of transformation. Adepts (sādhaka), such as the purohita, transform their bodies through yogic power (it is still the Devī’s power as Kuṇḍalinī, for instance, however) and facilitate the manifestation of the Devī in the place of worship. Devotees then throw themselves at the mercy of the goddess and request her aid in bringing about their purificatory transformation. Devotees may request a mundane boon as did king Suratha, for example. Others may request the knowledge (vidyā) which leads to liberation from false
attachments as did the merchant Samādhi. The tacit acknowledgement is that the devotee’s ignorance and delusion are, in fact, also the work of the Devī, who is the goddess of obscurity (tamasī) and supreme illusion (mahāmāyā). The Devī initiates the saṃsāric cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, keeps people enmeshed within it, and ultimately liberates them from it.

The Devī in the place of worship (pūjālaya) is envisioned as pure. In her, the three guṇas are in perfect balance. Within her, the blood (rajas guṇa) of creative manifestation is either still contained or flowing in a harmonious and controlled fashion. Put another way, in flesh and blood form she is either the pre-menstrual virgin (kumārti), pure, without the juice of menstrual blood, but full of creative potential, or she is the fertile mother, whose menstrual blood is channeled into the production and nurturing of offspring. The sacrificial victim may also represent the destruction of all those forces (biological and social) which would thwart the harmonious change from kumārti to mother, a transformation of utmost importance in the preservation of the cosmic order.\(^339\)

When the kumārti begins to menstruate, the flow of blood (rajas guṇa) initiates the disequilibrium of the guṇas. A process is initiated which leads ultimately to childbirth.\(^340\) Since life feeds on life, blood must be spilled to sustain offspring.\(^341\) The Devī (in her menstruating years) is associated with nourishing blood which produces and sustains life. The sacrificial victim in the Durgā Pūjā thus also represents the blood which must be spilt to sustain worldly existence. Flesh and blood then are important

\(^339\)Infertility is an example of a biological obstacle. An example of a social danger is marriage to an inappropriate suitor.

\(^340\)One of the ideas concerning the way a human embryo is conceived in post-Vedic Hindu thought is related to blood. "Blood in a man produced semen, while blood in a woman produced female seed and milk. Later still, this model was challenged by yet another: seed in a man corresponded with menstrual or uterine blood (rajas or puspa) in a woman" (O'Flaherty 1980:33).

\(^341\)One finds the notion of life feeding on life in the earliest Hindu religious texts. The Brhadāraṇyaka Upanisad 1.4.6 states "etavād va idam sarvam annam caivaṁnndaṁ ca" (Thus everything is just food and the slave of food). In Vedanta philosophy, anna is the grossest of the body's five sheaths (kaśa) and serves the purpose of supplying nourishment or food to creatures (Apte 1978:129).
symbols of the cycle of rebirths or *samsāra*.

Upon examining the various interpretations of the sacrificial offering in the Durgā Pūjā, it is apparent that these, in form or quality, are representations or attributes of the goddess herself. The nourishing and delicious food, the life principle, the blood-lust of the protective arm of society, the illusory power of self-centeredness based on ignorance, and misguided passions and desires are all aspects of the Devī. Not unlike the Vedic notion of sacrifice, wherein the dispersed aspects of Prajāpati are reconstituted in the fire of the *yajñā*, one might recognize that the sacrifice is the Devī herself offered back unto herself.

The notion of the Devī’s self-sacrifice is explicitly represented in images of the goddess Chinnamāta (She Whose Head is Severed), who is often included in lists of the Ten Mahāvidyās. In most images, Chinnamāta, astride copulating male and female figures (often identified as Kāma and Rati), is shown holding her own severed head in one hand and the bloodied sword in the other. Three streams of blood from her neck flow into the mouth of her decapitated head and into two female attendants on either side of her. In Chinnamāta we are presented with symbols of sexuality, sacrifice, blood, and nourishment. The Devī drinks her own blood, blood which also nourishes her attendants.

In her detailed study of Chinnamāta, Elisabeth Bernard (1990) has convincingly argued that the goddess, whom she readily identifies as an aspect of Durgā through the Daśa Mahāvidyās, and whom she equates with the Buddhist Tantric deity Vajrayoginī, personifies wisdom (*prajñā*). Chinnamāta’s self-decapitation symbolizes, in part, the transcendence of all dualities which is the ultimate goal of tantric *sādhana*. The fountains of blood embody the symbolism of the controlled and unrestricted flow of subtle vital energies (*prāṇa* and *apana*) achieved when the adept (*sādhaka*) has attained the death-like state of supreme detachment (1990:282-290).

The identification of the Devī as the sacrifice is less explicit in the common offerings of the coconut (*nāriyala*) at goddess shrines. The fruit is cracked and the

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342 One of the only Chinnamāta temples in Banāras is located within the grounds of the Durgā temple in Rāmnagar, reinforcing the connection between the conceptualizations which accompany this goddess and Durgā.
fragments and coconut water, after being "eaten" by the Devī, are handed back to the worshipper as prasāda. Although the coconut is most frequently interpreted as a surrogate head, it is clearly not solely the symbolic head of the devotee, but of the Devī herself. The coconut, after all, is the fruit which forms the head of the Devī's cosmic body in the ghaṭa. The head is the fruit of the body.343

The equivocal nature of the fruit sacrifice is again apparent in the pertinent myth concerning the decapitation of Gaṇeṣa, who is present in the Durgā Pūjā ritual as a ghaṭa and as a clay image.344 Gaṇeṣa is created by the Devī from rubbings of her skin. The severing of Gaṇeṣa's head is indirectly the severing of the Devī's head, since Gaṇeṣa, like all manifestations of nature, is part of her creation. Other surrogate offerings such as the kuśmāṇḍā melon or a piece of sugar cane, each of which are marked with the auspicious sign (svāstika) of the goddess, are similarly ambiguous items which may represent the Devī or her creation. No devotees suggested that in severing the fruit, they were sacrificially offering the Devī. This interpretation is, however, inherent in the symbols and implicit in their actions.

A pertinent piece of evidence in support of this interpretation comes from Eveline Meyer's (1984) observations of Navarātra celebrations at the temple of the Devī Ankālamman in Madras. An image of Mahiṣa, placed on a vehicle "charges" at an image of the Devī who symbolically cuts off his head. A succession of heads are replaced on the Mahiṣa image, representing his numerous changes in form, each of which are decapitated by the Devī. In this fashion he changes from demon to elephant, lion, tiger, buffalo, cow, boar, and ram, finally arriving headless, with only mango leaves sprouting from his neck (1984:248-249). This dramatic scene suggests not only the identification

343This interpretation supports Hubert and Mauss's generalization that in the sacrifice of a god, the deity is one with the sacrificer and the sacrificial victim (1964:101).

344Ghaṭas are fairly ubiquitous in rituals to all deities in South India (Paul Younger, personal communication), and so one must exercise caution in over-interpreting the significance of these symbols. In the context of Navarātra in Banāras as well, one notes ghaṭas established for Varuṇa (see the section on group recitation of the Durgā Saptasatī in Chapter Three), Gaṇeṣa, and Durgā. I am still inclined to suggest that the ghaṭa symbolizes the body cosmos, the brahmāṇḍa, and thus may be used to represent any deity. Varuṇa, as god of the heavens and the waters is appropriately represented by a ghaṭa. I later argue that conceptions of Durgā subsume those of Varuṇa, just as they have subsumed elements of Gaṇeṣa.
of Mahiṣa with the sacrificial animal, but indicates that mango leaves sprouting from the neck are symbols of spurting blood. When we connect this image to the ghāṭa of the Devī (and Gaṇeśa, incidentally), we irresistibly forge a connection between the mango leaves at their necks and their decapitated heads. In compelling ways, the vegetative flowering at the severed neck is reminiscent of the so-called Lajjā Gaurī images found throughout India which depict a nude squatting goddess with a lotus flower or leaves emanating from the headless neck (see Figure 4) (See J. N. Tiwari 1985:182-220).

J. N. Tiwari suggests a "continuity of ideas" between these headless nude squatting goddesses and Chinnamastā-Vajrayogini (1985:182-220). Pratapaditya Pal states that Chinnamastā imagery is one of primal sacrifice and renewal of creation. The goddess sacrifices herself, and her blood, drunk by her attendants, renews or resuscitates the universe . . . Therefore beheading her own head is a temporary expedient to provide food and appears to be a more sanguinary manifestation of the goddess as Śākambhari and Annapūrṇā (1981:82).

This line of reasoning suggests a connection between the worship of the earliest images of headless goddesses and central aspects of the Durga Pūjā.345

The prestige given to blood sacrifice and virgin worship during the highly important sandhi pūjā suggests that at this time the Devī is adored in both her uncreate, potent presence (symbolized by the kumārī), and her life-containing manifestations (symbolized by the rakta bali). The blood sacrifices also represent a sympathetic magical procedure to induce reproductive and nourishing "blood" to flow in such loci of the creation as rainfall, vegetative sap and the budding fertility of virgin girls.

345 As early as in the literature of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (XIV.1.1.1-19) one finds a myth relating to the Pravargya ritual and the establishment of the Mahāvira pot. In this myth Viṣṇu, identified with the sacrificial pot, is beheaded and the sap which flowed became the essential nutrients of life.

O divine Heaven and Earth, -- for when the sacrifice had its head cut off, its sap flowed away, and entered the sky and the earth, . . ., for when the sacrifice had its head cut off, its vital sap flowed away, and therefrom those plants grew up; with that vital sap thus supplies and completes it (XIV.1.1.19).
**Mahānavami Pūjā**

The Mahānavami rituals repeat those performed on Mahāsaptamī. The special variant is the Fire Oblation (*homa*) (see Figure 18). A fire pit called a *sthañdila* is constructed according to ritual specifications (see Diagram 6). Various deities and aspects of the goddess are worshipped in sections of the *sthañdila* which is itself a cosmic yantra. The *purohita* performs a meditative visualization (*dhyāna*) of Vāgīśvarī, the goddess of Speech (i.e., Sarasvatī). He recites a verse and imagines her as entering into playful sexual union with the god of Speech (*vāgīśvarena samyuktaṁ kriḍā bhava samānvitam*) (i.e., Brahmā) after her post menstrual purificatory bath (*ṛusnātam*). While uttering this verse, the *purohita* collects fire from an ember and kindles tinder which he lays down into the *sthañdila*. Fire is thus visualized as the playful copulation of male and female creative vibratory principles, personified as the deities of speech (vāc). The *purohita* offers obeisance to the fire and other deities.

He then divides a plate of *ghi* into three sections by placing within it two lengths of *kuśa* grass. Having thus created a microcosm of the subtle body, he selects *ghi* from the right, left, or central sections of the plate for offering into the fire. These sections correspond, respectively, to the *ida, pīṇgalā, and susumnā* energy channels of the subtle body. The *purohita* next makes offerings of *ghi* using the great mystical utterances (*mahavyāhrīṇi*). These are syllables which form part of the Gayatri mantra. He proceeds to offer twenty five ladles of *ghi* into the fire while reciting the *mūlamantra* of Durgā.

The *purohita* then conceives of himself as identical with the fire and with Durgā, firming the identification with appropriate oblations and mantras. The *purohita* now turns to the offering of one hundred and eight, undamaged, trifoliate *bilva* leaves into the fire with the *mūlamantra* of Durgā. The trifoliate leaves, symbolizing the trident (*trisūla*) of Durgā (and Śiva), represents such triads as the three guṇas and the tripartite aspects of manifest sakti, namely the energies of desire (*iccātā*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and action (*kriyā*). The *purohita* now offers himself (he is identified with the Devī and the fire) the items which the *yajamāna* has allocated as his payment for performing the ritual. It includes food and money representing gold (*dakṣinam kāñcanamūlyam*). He allays any
faults which may have occurred during the procedure and then extinguishes the fire. Ashes from the *homa* are used to mark his body. He also anoints the *yajamāna* and other onlookers with the auspicious ashes. This ends the rituals of the ninth day.

Although the *purohita* conducts the *homa* ritual, the *yajamāna* is an essential participant in it. The *yajamāna* offers quantities of material into the fire, and often recites the entire *mantras* or their terminating utterance, "svāhā" with the *purohita*. The *homa* ritual hearkens back to the earliest Vedic fire sacrifices (*yajña*), and allows the sacrificer (*yajamāna*) the closest communion with the deity yet experienced. The identification of the *purohita* with the sacred fire and the goddess Durgā imply that the offerings made into the *homa* fire, or offerings made through the *purohita*, go directly to the goddess. The *yajamāna* may also make special requests at this time. The *homa* also strategically places the *yajamāna* in direct physical relationship with the *purohita*, at the time when the former must reward the latter for his services.

**Vijayā Daśami**

The "Tenth for Victory" technically follows the nine days of Navarātra but clearly is a continuation of the Durgā Pūjā celebrations. The *purohita* visits the place of worship and after the appropriate purifications worships the Devī with a ten part devotional service (*dasopacāra*). He then prays that the Devī's grace confer fulfillment on any rituals which may have been performed inadequately. Next he dislodges the jar (*ghata*) from its established position, and also moves the platform on which the clay images rest. These actions initiate the dismissal procedure which constitutes the central ritual of this day.

The *purohita* pays obeisance to the goddess as Nirmalyavāsinī (She who Abides in Purity). The term "nirmalyam" refers to the debris which remains after ritual offerings, which although seemingly impure are, in fact, stainless. It would seem appropriate that the Devī is here worshipped as "She who Abides in the Wake of the Ritual." He also worships the Devī as Ucchisṭacāndālinī (She who is the Impure..."
Outcaste).\textsuperscript{346} Like nirmalyam, ucchίста carries the meaning of impure remnants from the sacrifice. Candālint, picks up on common epithets of Durgā as Canda, the Fierce One, while at the same time associating her with the candāla, the lowest, classless group of Indian society. In these acts and epithets, the crucially important symbolism of wholeness is accentuated. The Devī is the entirety of creation, from its purest, most subtle, uncreate essence, to its grossest material forms. Not only is she present in the refined and fashioned items, but is the dross and debris which accompany such creations. Her manifest presence is found in the litter, the off-scourings, and leftovers of life’s activities. In a classic ritual of reversal, those items which are traditionally considered impure and polluting are raised to divine status. This reversal extends to the low social classes, the sweepers and cleaners, for example, whose association with polluting materials, diminish them in social status. Their role and function in society, and the materials with which they are associated, are elevated to a divine status in the person of the Devī.

The purohita then asks the Devī as Cāmundā, with her eight šaktis, to leave and to return to her highest abode (paramasthānam). The liturgy here is vitally important since it reveals to us that the Devī is not dismissed in her entirety. She is asked to remain in the water, in the house, and in the earth (jale tīṣṭha gehe ca bhūtale). These are precisely the substances from which and the locations from where the Devī will be invoked and awakened in the following year’s Durgā Pūjā. The Devī does not abandon the site where she has been invoked, but lingers there permanently. Paralleling the notion of the sanctification of the food offerings to the Devī, in which the "polluted" remains are returned as blessings (prasāda) to the worshippers, "purified" by the Devī’s touch, the "polluted" (ucchίsta/nirmalyam) remains of the entire Durgā Pūjā ritual is the lingering, "sanctifying," stainless presence of the Devī after her departure.

The purohita immerses the mirror (darpāna), which is a form of the Devī, in water and touching the altar of the clay image he again dismisses Durgā, as the beloved

\textsuperscript{346}This is also a synonym of the goddess Mātāngī, one of the Ten Mahāvidyās, whose name means a female of the outcaste group.
of Śaṅkara, and in the form of the Nine Durgās, to her abode atop Mt. Kailāsa. He also dismisses all the other deities to their respective places after they have granted their devotees the requested boons. This ritual officially constitutes the immersion and dismissal (visarjana) of the goddess. The visibly dramatic disposal of the clay image in the waters of the Gaṅgā, although generally identified with the visarjana ritual is more an act of "lay" rather than "virtuoso" religiosity. The purohita is not involved in the process, and the responsibility of disposal of the clay image rests with the yajamāna.

The purohita’s duties are not entirely finished however. Prior to the immersion of the clay images, he performs the worship of the Devī as Aparājītā (She who is Invincible). Resonating with the notions of victory (vījāyā), this pūjā is generally performed on the tenth tithi. The goddess as Aparājītā is normally worshipped in the form of a deep purple floral creeper. The purohita performs a dhyāna of her and worships her with devotional service. A yellow string is used to affix bits of the creeper to the upper arm or wrist of devotees. During immersion, this creeper is also surrendered to the water. However a flower may be retained and installed into a small container (often silver). This serves as a protective amulet which is worn around the neck or arm.

The ladies of the house now feed each other sweets and betel nut. They also smear the mouths of the clay images with sweets and drape them with betel leaves (see Figure 19). Even the demon Mahiṣa is treated this way. One explanation for this ritual is that since Durgā is returning to her husband’s abode atop Mt. Kailāsa, she will experience great hardships during the ensuing year with that austere master yogi. The sweets will fatten her up for the year ahead. They also crown the symbolism of the gracious treatment she has received during her stay in her paternal home, the memory of which will hopefully encourage her to return again the next year. This interpretation certainly parallels the moods of the family celebrating the pūjā concerning the married daughters of the household who have returned for the celebration. It is clear that their feminine presence has created an atmosphere in the home which is crucial to the mood of Durgā Pūjā. Like the Devī, they too will be departing, leaving only the lingering perfume of their presence until the next year.
The homage rendered to Mahiśa in the entire ritual, but especially at the end affirms the importance of his role in the cosmic drama. Alf Hiltebeitel (1988) meticulously develops Madeleine Biardeau’s (1981) insight that the South Indian figure of the Buffalo King (Potu Rāja) who serves the Devī is a transformed Buffalo demon. The attitude of devotees in the Durga Puja towards Mahiśasura appears to support this interpretation, for he is honoured at the end and encouraged to return the following year. Some devotees told me that they admired Mahiśasura for his courage (however misguided) to struggle against the insurmountable and unconquerable power of Durgā. This comment reminded me of the ubiquitous temple reliefs of the sārdūla, a mythical leogryph in battle with a courageous warrior. Often referred to as a heraldric symbol of the ruling dynasty, discerning interpreters see it as the heroic battle of the individual against the overwhelming power of Māyā. The sārdūla, enormous and changing shape, like the Devī’s lion, represents her awesome power. The individual’s battle with this power is heroic, yet futile. The iconography never shows the beast defeated by the hero, but conveys something akin to the opposite. Perhaps in this sense Mahisa is that hero, the individual who at first struggles to conquer the Devī, and ultimately, defeated by her unassailable power, becomes her devoted worshipper.

Since Bengal is an Indian state in which Marxist political ideas are prominent, it was natural that I encountered interpretations framed in Marxist philosophical terms. Social progress, I was told, can only occur through a tension between opposing forces. It was only through the struggle between such dialectical forces that a new synthesis could emerge. Without this struggle, society would stagnate. Wealth would remain in hands of the rich and the poor would suffer. There would be no change in the status quo. Mahīṣa and the Devī represent the timeless cosmic duel through which creation occurs. Prior to hearing this, the majority of opinions which I had heard had led me unconsciously to associate the Devī/demon conflict as symbolizing the struggle to maintain upper class social purity against the impurity resulting from mixed marriages

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347 Among such discerning interpreters are Kramrisch 1976[1946]:334-337, and a young Hindu temple guide at Khajuraho.
with the lower classes, or as the tension of Hindu religious and cultural values against Islamic or other antithetical doctrines. However, in the Marxist interpretation the Devī represents the economically and socially disenfranchised. Mahiṣa is a symbol of the arrogance of corrupt power and ill-gotten wealth. This interpretation adds an important dimension towards understanding the appeal that conceptions of Durgā hold for subaltern classes, and their vision of empowerment by the goddess.

After the celebrations are completed, people collect the weapons from the images as souvenirs. While these weapons are now made of metal of disposable quality (e.g., by the tin-working caste), it is possible that in the earlier celebrations of this ritual, the image of Durgā was equipped with items of weaponry which would have been actually used in battle. The pūjā would have consecrated the weapons with the Devī’s power and durability. With great fanfare, the image cluster is carried to the Gaṅgā where it is placed on a boat, floated some distance from the bank, and discharged into the water. A jar of Gaṅgā water is brought back to the place of worship. The purohita sprinkles it on the heads of devotees. The pūjā has ended and the mood of festivity and good will continues at least until Kāli Pūjā some weeks later.

While most accounts of Durgā Pūjā end on Vijaya Daśami, the worship of the goddess continues to the eleventh (ekādaśī) of the waxing fortnight of Āśvina. In the words of a member of the Bengali community,

Watch us on ekādaśī where we are seen coming together, doing a musical performance, a show. We meet each other, greet our seniors, touch their feet, get asirvad (blessings), and so on. It is sure that visitors are offered sweets and pleasantaries. This eleventh day celebration is called Vijayā Sammilini. Rāma fought a battle against Rāvana. He performed a pūjā to Durgā. He won, and then celebrated this with a great festival of gathering. Non-Bengalis generally don’t celebrate it. But those who have been influenced by the Bengali’s way, and all Bengali clubs will celebrate Vijaya Sammilini. On Vijaya Sammilini, Durgā Pūjā ends (Sudarśana Chowdhury, September 27, 1990).

On the ekādaśī, many non-Bengalis Banārasi Śāktas (young men, in particular) are likely

348I have on occasion seen soldiers and policemen bring new rifles to Durgāji to consecrate the weapons on Mahāstamī. They told me that it was normal to have new items, including cars and appliances, consecrated and gave no explicit indication that their consecration was a form of weapon (ayudha) pūjā.
to visit the temple of Vindhyavāsīṇī Devī, located about eighty kilometers upriver from Banāras. A sizeable percentage of these will perform a triangular (yoni-shaped) pilgrimage circuit in the hills at Vindhyachal. The working poor often take a holiday on this day, and allocate a healthy amount of their savings for the trip.
CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This account of Durgā worship in Banāras at certain exemplary locations and times adds significantly to the findings of previous scholarly studies on the Devī. By studying a particular place of worship, the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple, over a period of time, the yearly cycle, I discovered numerous symbols which contribute to the conceptual image of the goddess Durgā. A key symbol of overarching importance that provides these varied symbols with a patterned order is the form of the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple, which is conceived of as a material manifestation of the Devī, and as a device through which devotees may gain intimate contact with her. Durgā Kuṇḍ temple is a yantra of Durgā, which, like a lotus flower, blossoms at various times of the year. During the festival period of Navarātra, when the yantra expands to encompass the entire city of Banāras, which is itself envisioned as a maṇḍala, I explored a spectrum of worship patterns throughout the city of Banāras. My intention was to study the relationship between conceptual images of the Devī and religious activity, with emphasis on particularly noteworthy elements of each. The three most salient devotional activities integrally related to Durgā worship in Banāras are pūjā, blood sacrifice, and pilgrimage. Salient symbols were less easily isolated, although I have already mentioned the pivotal place of the concept of the yantra. While a symbol set such as the Nine Durgās is strongly related to the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage in Banāras, worship activities, including that particular pilgrimage, generally draw on aspects of the "image of Durgā" writ large. Therefore, I have striven to compose a portrait of the Devī with conceptual images drawn from a wide variety of Banāraṇi sources among which one will find the words, actions,
literature, and art of worshippers. And yet, despite this variety of sources, no individual in Banāras is likely to hold an image of Durgā exactly as she is portrayed in this study. This is because although my portrait is comprehensive, it is not complete. However, neither is it incomplete. These adjectives, I suggest, do not apply to the evaluation of a portrait. I hope that my study offers a vision of Durgā which is both recognizable and revealing to most of those Banarasis in whose symbolic universe the goddess resides. I have tried through this account to provide those who have little or no knowledge of the Hindu tradition with a glimpse and appreciation of that world. The thrust of my work, however, is directed to the community of scholars who are familiar with Śākta sectarian traditions within Hinduism, and who wish to know more about current forms of Durgā worship in one of India's most important religious centres.

The conceptual image of Durgā has cosmological, epistemological, and ontological dimensions. These constitute a comprehensive metaphysics which constructs for her worshippers an orderly universe within which they can lead meaningful lives. More importantly, this universe is not orderly in a mechanistic sense, but is imbued with consciousness and character. It is benevolent and when propitiated properly bestows the grace of benefits upon its devotees. The cosmological dimension of the image of Durgā reveals her place in the creation of the universe. Thus it deals with a spiritual physics of space, time, and energy, a spiritual chemistry of matter, and a sacred mathematics. The epistemological aspects of Durgā tell of her central role in the acquisition of knowledge, particularly that which leads to spiritual liberation (mokṣa) or keeps one in bondage to phenomenal existence (samsāra). The ontology of this metaphysics deals with devotees' perceptions of themselves in relationship to the goddess, and their views of how her presence in their universe shapes their sense of self and their social relationships. In this concluding discussion, I first consider these metaphysical aspects of Durgā worship and then proceed to an appraisal of theoretical and methodological issues.

As I have previously mentioned, it is not easy to discern when devotees are speaking about the Devī, in general, or Durgā in particular. The need to make such a distinction is purely academic and is not problematic to devotees. The terms Devī (Goddess) or Mahādevī (Great Goddess), in my experience, are used as overarching
epithets for a supreme, divine feminine principle. Just as there are no temples, shrines, or icons dedicated to Brahman, the supreme principle which underlies reality, there are no temples in Banaras dedicated simply to "the Devī" or "the Mahādevī." Rather, every specific manifestation (i.e., shrine, effigy) of the goddess is assigned a particular epithet. Nevertheless, certain epithets of particular goddesses such as Durgā, Lakṣmī, and Pārvatī are frequently used as synonyms for the Mahādevī. Each of these particular goddesses, however, do have their own characteristics and distinctive mythological associations. In my experience, Durgā is the particular goddess who is most often identified with the Great Goddess (Mahādevī) and, as a result, a study of Durgā is necessarily a study of the Great Goddess tradition in Hinduism. It therefore follows that the general form of the portrait of Durgā which I have composed contains conceptions of Durgā as Absolute Reality, characteristic of her nature as the Great Goddess (Mahādevī). However, my study also aimed at extracting symbolic dimensions more particular to the Devī, rather than the Mahādevī, Durgā.

I found that Durgā, unlike deities strongly characterized by their transcendent nature, is identified with immanent matter (prakṛti) and its transformations, and in this sense, her worship is a participation in a divine alchemy. She is the Cosmic Mother who gives birth to creation, nourishes and protects it, and ultimately destroys it. This cosmological conception figures strongly in the understanding of pūjā. The most basic pūjā, the five-part devotional service, involves offering items which correspond to the five gross elements (pāṇca mahābhūta) of material manifestation. Thus earth, water, air, fire, and ether/space are represented in the sandalwood paste, fruit, flowers, flame, and smoking incense that are offered to the Devī. In the liturgy of the Durgā Pūjā ritual, for example, we note that these and other tremendously varied substances are identified with the Devī, either explicitly or implicitly. I have argued that, certainly among Śākta ritual practitioners and devotees, offerings made to the Devī are, at some level of consciousness, thought of as a worship of her manifest form (the diversified creation) or as a reintegration of the goddess back into herself.

Certain Śāktas conceive of Durgā/Prakṛti, nature, as one part of a dualistic reality, in which the other part is Puruṣa, pure spirit or consciousness. Puruṣa, is
identified with a male deity, such as Śiva, or to a lesser extent as Viṣṇu. To these worshippers, Absolute Reality is imagined as a complementary relationship or as a union between these two principles. It is therefore pertinent to note that when pūjā offerings are made to male deities, through activities such as bathing a līṅga with water or anointing it with sandalwood paste, these acts may be subconsciously understood by such Śākta devotees as effecting that relationship or union between the god and the goddess.

Not only is Durgā conceived of as the material universe, but she is also Śakti, the dynamic conscious energy which permeates the cosmos. Her worship therefore entails entering into a relationship with this power and therefore constitutes a spiritual physics. Pāja, I have discovered, involves more than merely offering the fundamental elements (mahābhūta) of creation and their subtle attributes (tanmatra) back to the goddess. Rather, it includes the offering up of those elements and their attributes, along with the five perception senses (jnanendriya) and the five action senses (karmendriya). The act of offering, and in the process reintegrating, every constituent element of the creation, which is the body cosmos of the Devī, is the crucially important meaning of Devī pūjā. I have described how, in temple worship, reciprocal touching, tasting, and smelling of the goddess and the devotee are activities which are as vitally important as mutual hearing and seeing (darśana). The five actions traditionally listed in Sāṅkhya-Yoga systems are evacuating, moving, grasping, communicating, and generating, symbolized by the anus (pāyu), the foot (pāda), the hand (hasta), the mouth (vāk), and the sexual organ (upastha), respectively (Apte 1978:387). When devotees purify themselves before performing pūjā, when they make pilgrimages or circumambulate the shrine, when they carry and make offerings, when they recite prayers, and when they touch the yoni (or līṅga) of the deity, they are, quite explicitly, in my mind, incorporating the action senses into the reintegration process that is pūjā.

Human action (kriyā), a central element in the process of pūjā, is of pivotal importance in understanding the locus of the Devī's śakti. Durgā’s energy flows through her devotees, animating them. The tacit implication is that among those who are less favoured by Durgā, there is less power and thus less of a capacity to engage in elaborate
worship practices. Adept(s) (sādhaka) demonstrate their powers through lengthy and numerous recitations of the Durgā Saptasati, through fasts and pilgrimages, through maintaining wakefulness, and other demanding ritual practices. Durgā’s power also manifests through a devotee’s economic status, or political influence. Worshippers of high socio-economic status demonstrate acts of power, during Navarātra in particular, by staging elaborate and expensive Durgā Pūjās. Acts of physical or supernormal power are also visible proofs of the Devī’s grace.349

Pūjā also involves the reintegration of the inner elements of mind (manas), ego (aḥaṅkāra), and intellect (buddhi), for Śakti is not merely lifeless energy. It is imbued with life and consciousness (cit). In this respect, for many devout Śāktas, Durgā is more than the Prakṛti which is defined as distinct from Puruṣa (spirit or consciousness). The Devī combines the qualities of the dualistically conceived Puruṣa and Prakṛti (or Śiva and Śakti) and, at her most sublime level (Ādi sakti), transcends them. This is why she is considered the Cosmic Mother. She engenders both male and female principles. When devotees stand before the manifest image of the Devī, in deep contemplation during the flame worship (arati) that is the culmination of their devotional acts, they are engaged in a mental worship through which the inner elements of consciousness are finally reintegrated in offering to the goddess. The vision (darśana) which they enjoy at this point, if the pūjā has been carried out successfully, is not simply one involving the physical sense of sight. It is a transcendental vision of the Absolute achieved through the

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349I witnessed only minor examples of people being visibly flooded with Durgā’s sākti. A few devotees would shake catatonically at the auspicious, maṅgala darśana periods in certain temples during Navarātra. However, I heard numerous tales about devotees imbued with the Devī’s power. Vagiśa Śāstri, a brāhmaṇa pandit, told me how members of the lower classes in his village in the Bundelkund regularly get empowered with sakti during Navarātra.

On the ninth day, after twelve noon, . . . , the men plant a trīśūla, flag, and ghata in the road of the village and commence a homa there. They skewer a lime on the trīśūla. As they sing bhajanas some fall into a trance state, their heads shake, their faces become red, and some jump and demonstrate their powers. Some pull out the trīśūla, others walk barefooted on wood shoes full of spikes, and others place metal skewers through their tongues. Certain men may carry a long bamboo staff (dhāl) topped with heavy swords and other items and run as far as a kilometre to demonstrate the power they have obtained. The higher brāhmaṇa castes sometimes gather to watch these activites of the camārs [the leather workers].
spiritual insight (symbolized by the "wisdom eye") of the devotee. The Durga Pūjā ritual, because of its elaborate symbolism, renders clearly explicit the aforementioned processes of reintegration of every constituent element in creation, processes which are present in the simplest of Devī pūjās.

The notion of reintegration of gross and other more subtle elements of creation (i.e., the external and inner senses) in the act of pūjā, extends to sacrificial offerings (bali) of blood and flesh which are examples of matter imbued with the life force (prāṇa). The sacrificial offerings symbolize both the goddess and the devotee who are "of one flesh" as mother and child. The human body, male or female, is the fruit of the female body which gives birth to it. Therefore, the human body of the devotee is the fruit of the Devī, the Divine Mother of all creation. I have also suggested that the head symbolizes the seed-containing fruit of the male body. In orthodox Hindu biological science, life is produced from the combination of male semen (originating in the head) and female blood (menstrual) (O'Flaherty 1980:17-61). In the symbolic offering of a blood sacrifice, the severed fruit may serve as a symbol and substitute for the devotee's self-sacrifice. In addition, sacrificial offering of the head and blood of a male animal enacts a form of union between the devotee and the Devī. The male seed, symbolized by the head of an uncastrated male animal and its blood, unites with the female field, symbolized by the sacrificial plot.

Blood sacrifice is also related to the Devī's cosmological dynamic, for blood symbolizes the rajas guṇa, the active principle in creation, preservation, and destruction. In the uncreate state the three guṇas are in balance with the sattva guṇa (pure spirit, non-duality, order, immortality) at a maximum. When creation begins, the rajas guṇa begins to increase and flow, as does the tamas guṇa (impure matter, fragmentation and diversity, disorder, birth and death). This process, a devolution of spirit at the expense of matter reaches a point of stasis when the tamas guṇa is at a maximum.

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350 The notion of a special organ of vision in order to perceive the divine is found in the most popular scripture in Hinduism, the Bhagavad Gītā (XI.8). In that hymn, the hero Arjuna is given a divine eye in order to perceive the supreme form of Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, in the climax of pūjā this extraordinary communion which leads to understanding the nature of the divine, is achieved.
Mythologically, this is framed as a point in time when the demons (tamas) are about to overthrow the gods (sattva) entirely. Chaos is about to engulf order. Adharma is about to overrun dharma. Ontologically, the devotee exists in the world as configured at this cosmological time, the most degenerate epoch, the Kali Yuga. Lest the forces of chaos overrun the universe, destroying social order and individual morality, a balance must be struck between the three principles, all of which are embodied in the Devī. The central image worshipped during the Durgā Pūjā ritual symbolizes the conquest of the tamasic principle (the buffalo demon), by the sattvic principle (Durgā). The rajasic principle (the demon’s blood) entrapped within materiality is spilled, freed from further empowering it. Instead, rajas, no longer empowering chaos, is the vehicle (the Lion) of the sattvic principle (Durgā) shifting the balance away from gross diversified material creation back to spiritual integration. Devotees who engage in blood sacrifice, through the actual offering of an animal, or a surrogate, or even through the worship of Durgā in the sanguine image or its meditative visualization (dhyāna), reaffirm the victory of the sattva guna over the tamas. Order triumphs over chaos. A stable, secure universe temporarily prevails.

The energy which pervades the world is most often referred to as Śakti, a term often synonymously applied to Durgā as Mahādevī. Śakti is akin to Brahman, having as its attributes the dynamic triad of volition (icchā), knowledge (jnāna), and action (kriyā) which correspond to Brahman’s static attributes of bliss (ānanda), consciousness (cit), and being (sat). When Śakti is present, things can change. And change can bring disorder. Change, and by implication Śakti, is a source of fear. Devī Durgā, in contrast to the Absolute nature of the Mahādevī Durgā, provides an orderliness or stability within the potentially chaotic dynamism of change. Just as Śiva, the static male principle, restricts the discharge of his semen (a symbol of tapas, static vital energy), Durgā, the dynamic female principle controls the dynamic flow of blood (a symbol of sakti, the dynamic vital energy). A mundane manifestation of this metaphysical notion of dynamic śakti is human movement and activity such as travel. For the traveller journeying through dense jungles, crossing rough waters, negotiating high mountain roads, or the soldier
setting out for battle, Durga provides protection in the face of the kinds of danger which may be precipitated by movement (ga) in difficult (dur) situations.

The movement involved in travel is an illustration of the dynamic operation of šakti through space. Šakti also operates through time. Time is, of course, an inevitable source of change, one that ultimately leads to the dissolution of all things. Durga offers security through the disruptions which may accompany seasonal change. She protects her devotees from the jaws of death (yamadamsra), seasons when disease is rampant. Devotees from the villages surrounding Banaras, who live agriculturally-based lives which are highly dependent on orderly cycles of nature, propitiate Durga to ensure a good planting and a good harvest. She ensures that there will be enough water during the dry season, that seeds will germinate and grow well, that fruit will be juicy, and that there will be enough nourishment to sustain life over periods of drought and famine.

Change as one progresses through the stages of human life can be particularly unsettling, and here Durga functions as a stabilizing matrix within which her vital energy, designated as feminine, can develop. Although Durga's vital but stabilizing energy is present in the feminine half of the creation, she is actually imminent in all things, for both male and female are thought to emanate from the Mother. The notion of orderly and controlled development is most apparent in the scheme of the Nine Durgās as they pertain to the stages of womanhood. Durga is worshipped in each of her nine states of development from virginal purity and potential, to pregnant creative power, to protective and nurturing motherhood, culminating in the power which grants supreme attainment. This set functions, in the terminology of Clifford Geertz, both as a "model of" the cosmic order through which Šakti develops, and as a "model for" the independent female.

Durga's essential nature as the cosmos leads her to permeate the branches of knowledge through which we apprehend that cosmos. She thus embodies the sciences (vidyā) of mathematics, matter and energy, life, and mind, to name a few. Epistemologically, she is therefore the object and product (i.e., technology) of every
science and rightly deserves the epithet mahāvidyā. In the abyss between what is known and what is not, Durgā abides as the great mystery (guha) and the supreme illusory power (mahāmāyā) which veils reality. Importantly, she is the source of revealed knowledge as the examples which follow suggest.

The symbolism of the number nine is one example of Durgā’s presence in the mathematical sciences. The extremely ancient Indian philosophies of enumeration (sāṅkhya) were constructed upon the decimal system. Just as all quantities can be represented by two digits in a binary system of enumeration, in decimal systems the digits one through nine represent the fullness of countable possibilities. When combined with zero (śunya, bindu), all of objective reality can be enumerated. This arithmetics, I suggest, contributes to the significance of the close relationship between the Devī and the number nine. Similarly, as symbols of the generative organ (yoni) of the Devī, equilateral triangles can generate more complex forms such as hexagons and

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351I have heard that in the terminology of Tantra, the term vidyā connotes a sacred utterance or mantra. This is aligned with my usage of the term vidyā, for Tantric mantric utterances are essentially condensed formulations of various aspects of reality, which are embodied within them. In this respect, Tantric mantras correspond, in a fashion, to scientific formulas, condensed symbolic statements revealing truths about the nature of reality. Like scientific formulas, the meaning of mantras are only fully understood by adepts. As mahāvidyā, Durgā is the great utterance, the supreme sign or formula of the Absolute. It is vitally important in this context to mention the close relationship between mantras and yantras.

The inner dynamics of yantras can never be understood in isolation from the system of sound dynamics, as the two combine to make up the complete ‘definition’ of the divine. The yantra-mantra complex is basically an equation that unites space (ākāśa), which in its gross form appears as shapes, and vibrations, which in their finite forms occur as the spoken or written word (Khanna 1979:34). The sense that I derive from the term vidyā is that it constitutes a comprehensive science of the Devī of which the mantra-yantra complex, and its practice, is a technological manifestation.

352The so-called Arabic decimal system originated in India, and is therefore also known as the Hindu-Arabic numeral system (see Webster’s or other dictionaries). Sāṅkhya-Yoga is “possibly the oldest among the Indian systems” (Klostermaier 1989:358) of philosophy, and the word sāṅkhya literally means "relating to numbers." Since the Sāṅkhya-Yoga system enumerates the elements through which creation manifests, I am suggesting that the decimal numeral system emerged from some branch of philosophy which may be labelled as Sāṅkhya.

353Śiva is sometimes referred to as the void (vyoma). In Hindu sacred linguistics the male consonants unite with the female vowels to produce syllables which are the seeds of all sounds, words, and conceptions. Similarly, the manifest female numerals (Śakti) combine with the transcendent or unmanifest male emptiness (Śiva) to produce all numbers and enumerations. Durgā is conceived of either as the numerals, one through nine, or as these and the void (śunya, bindu).
tetrahedrons, and are the basis of a sophisticated geometry. Even the rectangular space of the sacred field, as found in the pavilion for group recitations of Durgā Saptaśati (discussed in Chapter Three), is also divided into nine squares, a configuration which creates a central and eight surrounding squares. One of Durgā’s important manifestations is the Yantra of Twenty (bisa yantra). Unlike the sacred geometry suggested by the better known Śri Yantra, the Durgā Bisa Yantra reveals a sacred mathematics. It is neither the number twenty nor the number nine alone which is significant, but the sequence of numbers one through nine placed in an orderly spatial scheme which hints at the magical powers of the geometric and arithmetic sciences combined. These are examples of mathematical sciences which unveil aspects of the mystery of reality, revealing comforting underlying patterns and structures within what would otherwise be a terrifying chaotic maelstrom of space and time.

Among the properties of matter, inanimate or animate, are integrity of form, dynamism, and dissolution. We have seen how Durgā is thought to permeate fabricated or natural structures closely connected to the matrix of the cosmic being (vastupuruṣa). The durability of a temple, the impregnability of a fortress (durga), the stability of a bridge, the reliability of a weapon (ayudha), and the invulnerability of armour (kavaca), are examples of her presence. In the bodies of creatures, in vegetation, in rivers and ponds, in the earth itself, she abides in varying states of vitality. She controls the flow of blood, the vital energy, the juice within all creation, which in some sense is thought to hold it together.354

The ontological dimensions of Durgā worship have social and political ramifications, but also concern the religio-philosophically defined existential predicament

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354From my own childhood experiences, I know that Indian boys often apply the blood of the first creature killed with their slingshots to these weapons, in an act of sympathetic magic. The action consecrates the weapon, empowering it and imbuing it with the life drawn from the creature. Their actions and the blood also fuse a connection between the warrior, the weapon, and its victim. A similar psychological reasoning extends to more elaborate human constructions which should not only be built along the lines of Śākta architectural science, but imbued with life (prāna pratistha). Blood sacrifice is a common way in which an inanimate construction is imbued with life. This line of thinking is behind the frequently heard (and generally quite unfounded) rumours that babies or young children are kidnapped and sacrificed whenever a major construction project, such as the building of a bridge, is underway.
presence of the kunda the central position of the linga is undeniable.\footnote{A possible explanation for the feminine appellation of the linga is suggested in a paper by Gabriella Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi in which she points out examples of Hindu symbols which have interchangeable meanings. In particular, symbols normally associated with the divine as feminine, such as the lotus, the vessel, and the cow can have masculine connotations. And the linga and the snake, for instance, normally identified with male gods can have feminine associations (1980: 45-68). She uses her examples to suggest a greater arbitrariness in symbol interpretation than would be allowed by Freudian analysis and a lesser one than structuralism might permit.}

Attempting to understand this combination of linga and kunda within its specific context, I refer to the comments of Dr. G. R. Mallik, a devout Śākta with considerable influence in Banāras. He has built the Daśabhuja Durgā temple in the north of the city. Perhaps drawing on his experience as a physician, Dr. Mallik first inquired if I was married. He then asked if I was familiar with the female reproductive organ. Despite my answer in the affirmative, he proceeded to tell me how

... woman has both yoni and linga. You see, if you look at the upper part of the female reproductive organ, you will find a small penis. This is the clitoris. It is just like the male penis. Therefore, woman is more than man. She has the attributes of both man and woman. This is why she can give birth to both sons and daughters.

That linga within the kunda, in such Śākta thought, is simply the Devī as Jaleśvarī, for the goddess incorporates both male and female attributes.\footnote{Incidentally, from this Śākta perspective, the same would hold for all of Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi’s other examples, including the white anthill, the tree, and the mother.}

Although Durgā is acknowledged by all devotees as the possessor of the supreme binding power and the source of all other binding powers they prefer to allocate positive rather than ambivalent qualities to her. Among Hindus to whom Durgā is one of many deities, and not their supreme conception of the divine, the goddess’s ambivalent or negative qualities are more pronounced. She is the agent of disease, delusion, and so on. However, for avid Durgā bhaktas (those who practice loving devotion), the "negative" aspects of the Devī’s nature are placed well in the background. They are likely to think and speak more often of her ferocity and destructive power as directed at demonic forces and dangers which threaten devotees. Devotees do, however, fear divine retribution if they have been truant in fulfilling their end of a devotional pledge. Even in such
Like Varuṇa, Durgā is associated with darkness (as Rātrī) and the waters. Like Yama and other restraining deities, she is associated with death and disease. A dramatic feature in all the Durgā Pūjā clay image clusters is the figure of Mahiṣāsura bound by the Devī’s snake noose (nāga pāśa) (see Figure 14).

However, unlike these binding deities, and more like Indra/Rudra, Durgā overpowers the magical transformations of the demon Mahiṣa with her superior magic. Indra is frequently referred to as having "overcome the magician (māyin) (Vṛtra) by means of māyā" (Eliade 1991:100). In the myths of the Durgā Saptāstī (23.20-40), and in the symbolism of the Durgā Pūjā image cluster, Mahiṣa’s māyā is no match for the Devī’s. Mahiṣa, there the symbol of bondage (his buffalo form links him with Yama, the supreme restraint, death), is first snared by the Devī’s noose, pierced with her spear, and then slain with her sword.

The relationship between Durgā and Varuṇa/Rudra is further affirmed in the Durgā Kund temple where one finds the shrine of Jaleśvaraī, the Lord or Lady of the Waters, which in the masculine is an epithet of Varuṇa. The deity of that shrine is also known as Tilaparneśvara, Lord of Sandalwood, and designated as one of Kāśī’s Twelve Rudras. Although depicted as a liṅga this divinity is quite often called Jaleśvaraī by devotees, an epithet which initially caused me some puzzlement, for unlike the ambiguous gender of the image of the Jvaraharesvaraī image in a nearby shrine, Jaleśvaraī is clearly a liṅga (see Figure 5). On further examination, I noticed that the liṅga is located within a kuḍa, and in rituals to invoke rainfall during periods of drought, this kuḍa is slowly filled with water which is sprinkled on the liṅga. But despite the

Varuṇa is often associated with the overarching sky or with the waters. According to Bhattarcharji (1970: 22-47), Varuṇa replaced the sky god Dyaus. He spied on human beings with thousands of eyes, an attribute which corresponds to the epithet of Durgā as Śatakṣi, "She who has a Hundred Eyes." The term for eyes (spaśa), eventually became pāśa, the snare or noose with which Varuṇa bound the wicked. According to the Durgā Saptāstī (2.22), Durgā bears Varuṇa’s noose.

This most graphic symbolism contained in the central image cluster of the Durgā Pūjā ritual is one that has deep and enduring meaning in the Hindu religious tradition. It subverts arguments that the relationship between mythic symbolism and ritual activity is merely incidental.
the most influential text concerning Durgā, the *Durgā Saptāsati* (1.11-44). In what is often referred to as the frame story, the king Suratha and the merchant Samādhī approach the sage Medhas for advice (1.27-28). Both king and merchant suffer from the same problem. They are helplessly attached to kingdom and family, respectively, despite being rejected by these objects of their affection. Despite their rational perception of their predicament, they are unable to free themselves from this bondage to mundane life (*saṃsāra bandha*) (1.29-33). This initiates the sage’s account of the nature of the Devī. He tells them that Durgā is the power that binds as well as the power which grants liberation (1.43-44).

Mircea Eliade deals with the symbolism of binding in a pertinent fashion (1991:92-124). Drawing on observations made by Georges Dumezil, Eliade notes that the sovereign Vedic deity Varuṇa uses as his supreme weapon, the "*māyā of Asura,*" which is depicted as a noose (*pāsa*). Varuṇa is referred to as the Great Asura who magically binds people and is propitiated by people who wish to avoid being bound or wish to be freed from their bondage.355 In this respect Varuna is like the other binding (or restraining) deities such as Vṛtra, such deities of death as Yama, or deities who preside over maladies. In opposition to Varuna, the deity Indra, liberates people from the bondage of Varuna, from death and disease. Although Indra sometimes uses his magical "snare" to triumph over the magician Vṛtra, who bound up the cosmic waters, his primary method of liberation is severing bonds with a traditional warrior’s weapon such as a sword, illustrated when he dismembered Vṛtra’s body.

In her influential study of Śiva, Wendy O’Flaherty points out how this great god of Hinduism has subsumed aspects of such Vedic deities as Rudra, Indra, and Agni (1973:83-110). It is evident that the goddess Durgā similarly has subsumed fundamental aspects of binding deities such as Varuṇa and Yama, and of heroic, martial, liberating deities such as Indra and Rudra. Like Varuna, Durgā is called the great demoness (*mahāsuri*) who controls with the power of magical illusion (*māyā*) (*Durgā Saptāsati*).

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355 The early usage of the term *asura,* refers to gods not demons. It was derived from the term *ahura,* in Avestan, which means spirit. Information on Varuṇa is contained in Dumezil (1934), and Bhattacharji (1970).
of the individual, namely, bondage to worldly existence. When dismissing Durgā at the end of the Durgā Pūjā ritual, the purohita makes a statement of cardinal importance. He asks Durgā to abide in the earth, the water, and the home. Once the Devī’s presence has been established in any temporary shrine, the place is made sacred, and the goddess will always abide (although in a latent form) at that site. She is ever-present in the earth and in water, and this, I suggest, is why the earthen jar, filled with water, is the primary form through which she may be established during any but the simplest worship ritual.

In domestic pūjās, the Devī is asked not to abandon the home. Indeed, it is not the house but the home in which she abides. This is explicit during the domestic Durgā Pūjā, when the Devī’s presence, which provides a bonding energy that unites a family, is most evident. In a related vein, the Mahābhārata (Śānti Parva, 56.35) states that there are five kinds of forts (durga) of which the strongest is the fortress of human beings (Mani 1975:254). Community solidarity is the greatest source of strength, offering the best defense against enemies and the surest weapon against fear.

The rather militant Bhārat Sevāsram Saṅgha, an influential religious organization in Banāras makes this point quite explicitly in one of its printed pamphlets which I obtained from its reception centre (1991). "What is the real form of the Goddess?" asks the brochure. It replies, "The real form of the Goddess is Hindu society. Millions of Hindus will wake up and unify - that is the symbol of the waking up (bodhāna) of the Goddess." Elsewhere it states that the "main aim of [Durgā] worship is to get victory and kill enemies. . . . Hindus must remember that worship is not only giving incense, flowers, bilva leaves, or crying in front of her." Also,

to nurture the growth of Hinduism within people - this is true Durgā worship. As Hindus meet each other and become brothers, this is the fruit of this worship.

The establishment of a Hindu religious society - that is the great slogan (mahāmantra) of this pūjā.

One could suggest that the clay images which are brought to life during the Durgā Pūjās are embodiments of the subtle but powerful energies which bind homes, communities, and kingdoms. But this power which binds families and kingdoms is ambivalent for it is also at the heart of bondage to samsāric existence, an idea central to
circumstances their actions appeared to me to derive more out of respect than fear. The maternal image of Durgā again looms large. The devotee fears the Devī no more than a child fears its mother. A devotee’s fear of potential punishment for an indiscretion is subsumed by the greater certainty of the Devī’s protective, caring, and nurturing nature.

In my experience, Durgā bhaktas generally attributed positive qualities to the Devī. They love, respect, and worship her. Among these qualities are such positively perceived unifying forces as the warm feelings of family togetherness (in which women play an instrumental role), the solidarity of a community (spiritual or secular), the spirit of the young men’s pūja clubs, the soldier’s platoon, and other forms of "male bonding." Just as worshippers of Śiva or Viṣṇu might attribute negative qualities to Durgā, Durgā bhaktas attribute the negative dimensions of bondage through ignorance and attachment which may accompany such group identifications to subsidiary deities or demonic powers. Similarly, they attribute such restraints as fear, starvation, disease, and death, to other goddesses, gods, or demons. I have suggested how epithets provide buffers between the goddess and her attributes, especially in the case of identifications which particular devotees may find unsuitable. In general, Durgā is viewed as the protector who battles against these dangers and defeats them. She restrains the restraints; binds the agents of bondage; slays the slayer.

Despite mythological and liturgical references which connect her to Śiva, or Viṣṇu, and occasional comments by devotees affirming those relationships, Durgā is essentially viewed as an independent, all-encompassing deity by her worshippers, who are both men and women. She is most commonly addressed as mother (Mā) by her male and female devotees. Mā Durgā, is not viewed, for the most part, as the feminine complement to some male deity. She is propitiated for her beneficent presence, or for boons (vara) which she has a reputation for granting. But her powers can also be compelled through rigorous spiritual practice (sādhana). Śākta tantrics, artists, magicians, and healers tap into her energy for personal empowerment or to direct it towards others. Sorcery (jadu karna) is an interesting category for although many ordinary people dabble in directing pernicious energy at enemies, they would not likely call themselves
sorcerers. The designation is generally derogatory. Sorcery is most often defined by healers who identify that their patients are victims of such acts.

The most common means of propitiation or manipulation of Durgā's energies is recitation of the *Durgā Saptaśatt*. The ambivalent potential within the text, which when read with ritualized precision, forms, and numbers can coerce the Devī's powers or earn her grace, often blurs the intention of the worshipper. It is not always clear if he or she is engaged in supplication of the divine or in a spiritual physics. Commissioned ritual specialists span both those activities. Those who are hired to recite the text (*pātha karne vala*) on behalf of the patron (*yajamāna*) or someone else acquire and transfer merit. They are enlisted for their priestly abilities, but the general consensus is that the Devī's grace does not automatically result from their actions. In a similar vein, the *purohita* who performs the Durgā Pūjā ritual, through a psycho-physical yogic science, induces the Devī to manifest, through his own transformed body, in various forms and locations, from which she can be worshipped by others who seek her grace.

Devout Durgā worshipping Śāktas attribute their existential condition to the grace of the Devī. If their situation is favourable, their worship consists of giving thanks in the hopes that such good fortune continues. Devotees may however have needs, or desires, or face difficulties. In these instances, worship often takes the form of a barter where promises (*manautii*) are made and fulfilled. Although Durgā is accessible everywhere and at all times to her worshippers, this presence is mostly latent. It intensifies at her abodes (*pātha, sthāna*), such as temples and other sacred places, and is surely close when danger threatens. Not unlike Viṣṇu's incarnations, the Devī is ever present when the terrifying forces of chaos challenge the cosmic order. Her power is more dreadful than any other. Although devotees can tap into her power at any time, this power percolates out, in special ways, at certain times of the year. Besides the night, notable periods when the Devī's power wells up are the days affected by the grip (*graha*) of detrimental planetary influences and those days dedicated to dangerous deities like yogins and mātrakās who seize the vulnerable. Durgā is most palpably present during the autumn and spring Navarātras, nine-night periods which, significantly, correspond to the destructive seasonal
presence of Yama.

During Navarātra, especially the autumn celebration, there is a renewal of strength and a reintegration of the cosmos which was perhaps drifting perilously close to disintegration. The end of the rainy season means that roads and rivers are once again traversable. Families that have endured the absence of their married daughters now enjoy their return, often with their children and husbands. Homes hum with the warm animated presence of the women and children who offer proof of binding family alliances. By honouring the married daughter and her children, the parents honour her spouse. Through performances and attendance at public pūjās communities see demonstrations of their cultural heritage and are offered visible proof of its vitality. The quality of their pūjā is testament to their solidarity, economic status, and spiritual zeal. Such rallies are demonstrations of a strength which overwhelms any fear which might have been generated by rival communities. For instance, the Muslim community in Banāras stages parades and public displays of martial strength by the young men during the festival of Muharram, which re-enacts the Passion of Husain, the martyred heir of the prophet Muhammad. But when the enormous Hindu crowds throng in the streets during Durgā Pūjā, there is a feeling of invincibility (aparājitā) and the certitude of victory (vijayā) against all odds.

There is, moreover, a festive spirit of conviviality and rejuvenation at Navarātra. Money changes hands. New clothes are purchased. Gifts are given. People eat good food. The community is stimulated on many levels as priests, artisans, labourers, merchants, the police, and the transportation network are flung into high gear to service the demands of the mass of worshippers.

Despite occasional complaints about growing commercialism, there is a close correlation drawn between the mood or spirit of the festival and Durgā’s presence. There are, of course, differences of opinion as to what this mood should be, and accusations are launched by family groups against the public pūjās, or by older public pūjās against the newer ones. While for some groups, there is the mood of sweet sorrow at Durgā’s departure, for others it is marked by raucous jubilation of a wedding procession. In fact, there is a complementarity to these seemingly contrary emotions. One focuses on the loss
of the Devī’s intimate presence, the other on the necessity of her presence in her other abode. At the symbolic level of the family, Durgā, a model for every woman, is the thread which links one home to another, one lineage to another. The proper functioning of this social order is only possible if the wife both comes back to her paternal home and then returns to the home of her spouse. Her movement between households is the flow of sakti which binds these social groups together while maintaining the proper hierarchical order. By welcoming her back to his home, the father expresses approval of her husband. By returning to her husband’s home, she affirms her transfer of loyalties to him. At the level of the community, Durgā’s presence is symbolically linked to the emotional energy generated by the group. A regenerative, healing, comforting force when manifested for a short period of time, it can become destructive if sustained for too long. The jubilant crowd can turn into an uncontrolled mob. In this broader social context, too, it is imperative that the Devī be dismissed.

Durgā, when conceived of as the regulated flow of blood, cosmologically explained above, aides in our understanding of social processes. The manifest creation, although somewhat fickle and unpredictable, in the traditional male stereotype of the Indian woman, ultimately serves the purpose of liberation. Although volatile and dynamic, it has its own internal logic and stability. As men and women move through life, it is necessary to maintain control over the potentially dangerous feminine energy whose progress may be tracked through the flow of blood. Times are particularly dangerous when there is a period of transition for Sakti can be unleashed with destructive consequences. It is the male principle which corrals or controls this female energy as suggested by such myths as the rampage of Kāli stopped by Śiva.360 I have shown how the Nine Durgās offer meaningful representations to women of the stages of their life.

360For numerous examples of myths of the taming of the female goddess by a male spouse goddess, see Shulman 1980:141. Also see Harman 1989:44-46 who describes how the warrior goddess Minaḵśī loses her third breast (a symbol of her abnormal femininity) when she encounters Śiva Sundaresvara.

In contrast to the above notion, the taming or corraling influence of female energy on destructive male energy is found in a myth conceiving Pārvatī and Śiva. Pārvatī wins Śiva’s attentions and through marriage breaks his intense solitary austerities and moves him into the order of domestic life. See Śiva Purāṇa, Rudra-samhitā 3.12-28-33. Also see Kinsley 1986:48 and O’Flaherty 1973:220,225,257.
and to men, more abstractly, as the flow of Śakti, and the manifestations of Prakṛti.
Males too, do think of Durgā within a social framework as the chaste virgin, the
understanding wife, and the protective mother.

From the traditional orthodox Hindu point of view, in the first three stages of a
Durgā woman’s life, as the new-born Śailaputri, the chaste virginal Brahmacārīni, and
the newly menstruating Candraghāntā, she is under the control of her father. However, the commencement of the menstrual flow of blood has brought with it a
disruption to the stable social order. The daughter is restless, and begins to attract
suitors. The father must relinquish control to the husband. The husband must defeat other
suitors, and the woman must finally stabilize the new order through her obedience. In
the classic myth of Sātī we see the disfunctional enactment of this transition. Śiva
is the unwanted suitor who wins the hand of Sātī. Dakṣa, her father, does not accept the
new conditions. Dakṣa dishonours Śiva by not inviting Sātī (or Śīva) back to Dakṣa’s
home to participate in his great sacrifice. Sātī disobeys Śiva and attends Dakṣa’s great
celebration. Dakṣa dishonours Sātī and Śīva destroys him. In contrast, the proper divine
precedent takes place when Sātī next incarnates as Pārvatī. She longs for Śīva, wins him
with the consent of her parents Himavat and Menā and goes to live with him in his
abode. Periodically, she returns with or without him to her parental home, in the
company of her children. This myth is explicitly drawn upon in Durgā Pūjā celebrations
when devotees identify Durgā with Pārvatī and when married daughters return to their

361 The classic statement of the control under which women must be kept is found in the Laws of Manu:
Day and night, woman must be kept in dependency by the males (of) their families. . . (IX.2-16).
By a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done
independently, even in her own house.
In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is
dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent . . . (V.147-165).
For a detailed survey of attitudes to women in the course of Indian history, see Altekar (1978 [1962]).
Leslie (1989) presents an excellent study of the depiction of women in Hindu scriptural texts. For studies
on women in modern Indian society, see Jacobson and Wadley (1977), Wadley (1975), and Leslie (1991).

362 Menstruation is often considered a mark of a woman’s sexual appetite and her innate impurity (Leslie
1989:251). However, it may also symbolize the process through which a woman renews her purity (Leslie

363 A textual version of this myth is found the Śīva Purāṇa, Rudra-samhita 2.11-2.42.
parents’ homes. The demon-slaying myths of the Durgā Saptasati recount another proper divine precedent where the inappropriate suitors are slain rather than successfully obtaining the jewel of a woman they desire. Their victory would have overturned the cosmic order just as the victory of an unsuitable suitor (e.g., lower class) over one’s daughter would disrupt the social order.

In the married stages of life, the woman must remain under the control of her husband. When pregnant like Kuśmāṇḍā, she may give birth either to male (functional) or female (somewhat disfunctional) offspring. In the birth of male offspring the male principle must dominate. As Skandamātā, Durgā nurtures the child, Skanda, who was produced by the potent emission of Śiva. Somewhat disfunctionally, the Devī, too, produces the male child Ganeśa from her own body. Ganeśa, symbolic of maternal yearnings exclusive of male control, represents a disobedience to the male will. He is suggestive of the undesirable trait of placing the child before the husband. Ganeśa’s beheading and resuscitation with another head rectified the potential familial imbalance. In the strongly Śākta atmosphere of the Durgā Pūjā celebrations in Banāras, both Ganeśa and Skanda are portrayed as the Devī’s children, although Ganeśa, produced from the Devī’s own substance, is regarded more fondly by Śākta devotees than Skanda.

Further strains are placed on the social order in the absence of the husband who may be away at work or play, or who has met an untimely death. Here the widow, exemplified by Kātyāyanī, or the single mother, like the purānic prince Sudarśana’s mother, Manorāmā, must live a chaste, single life. Both Kātyāyanī and Manorāmā lived in the hermitages of sages. The mother’s concern for her children, especially her sons, must elicit control over her behaviour, but not at the expense of dharmic order. Just as Manorāmā declined the rulership of Kaśi when it was offered to her, the single mother should not remarry or assume male authoritative roles. She must nourish her children, protect them, and see to their suitable marriages. Rānī Bhavānī, who fled Bengal when her daughter Tārā drew the undesirable attentions of the Muslim ruler Siraj-ud-daulah, stands as an example of this ideal. Similarly, in contemporary Banāras, women such as Shanti Devi, the cleaning woman whose words are presented in the Introduction, demonstrates precisely these virtues in her concern for her sons.
The last three stages of a woman’s life offer few potential disruptions to the prescribed social order except for the period of menopause when the flow of blood and feminine energy, typified by Kālarātri, is as tumultuous as it was at its inception. The controlling male, like Śiva in response to Kālī’s bloody rampage, remains passive through this process. The woman’s capacity to produce offspring is ending, as is her menstrual flow of blood. She drinks up the vital energy of the male without conceiving children. This withering of the juice of life is symbolized in the shrivelled breasts and sunken bellied appearance of certain Kālarātri/Cāmundā images. For women who may have drawn so much of their sense of self from their fecundity, this stage is akin to a "dark night of the soul." But the bleak darkness yields to a new purity, the post menopausal, sattvic, Mahāgaurī. Chaste and given to religious pursuits such as pilgrimage she continues to care for the males in the family. As Siddhidattī, she is the culmination of womanly attainments, the bestower of boons.

In the light of the above analysis, let us return to David Kinsley’s comments that Durgā "represents a vision of the feminine that challenges the stereotyped view of women found in traditional Hindu law books" (1987:99). Drawing on Victor Turner’s notions of the high creativity present in liminal states, Kinsley says "Durgā exists outside normal structures and provides a version of reality that potentially, at least, may be refreshing and socially invigorating" (1987:99). I believe these comments are essentially correct for Durgā is not subservient to or controlled by any male. She is pre-eminently independent. This clearly casts her outside the normal social structures prescribed for Hindu women. However Kinsley’s comments may be developed further by addressing certain important questions. If the portrait of the Devī challenges the female stereotype in Hindu law books, why are traditional feminine roles still so enduring, even among Śāktas? After all, the myths of the Durgā Saptaśati have circulated for over a thousand years and have certainly enjoyed immense popularity for the last several centuries. Has the socially invigorating potential within the version of reality provided by Durgā been realized?

In discussions with Pallavi, the educated, independent, and extremely articulate niece of Tarun Kanti Basu, I thought I might find the answer. Tarun Kanti Basu is the patriarch of the first family to celebrate the elaborate Bengali-styled domestic Durgā Pūjā
in Banaras. Pallavi, who holds a Master's degree in English literature, is neither shy nor subservient. She expressed her opinions freely in front of her strong-willed uncle, even though, not infrequently, these directly contradicted his own. Pallavi is beautiful and single; a most desirable woman. In many ways Pallavi struck me as an ideal embodiment of the independent, strong-willed woman, for whom Durga might have served as a divine model. Every year Pallavi comes from Calcutta to spend several weeks in Banaras to celebrate Durga Puja at the family home in Chaukambha (see Figure 17). As a scion of one of the great families who perform Durga Puja, she is intimately familiar with a young woman's experience of the festival and the attitudes which surround it. When I asked her about the attitude to women generally and during Navaratra in particular, she surprised me by replying:

These times create illusions for you, but don't change any of the social situations. Bengalis, after the Mughal period, were responsible for the worst abuses on women - two million sati, and child marriages, to name some of the abuses. . . . Any woman of my generation will tell you that these festivals only create an illusion and are designed to fool women into thinking their place is special. . . . I don't feel special and am not treated specially at this time of year (i.e., Navaratra). I've never heard anyone feel or talk this way. I suppose married women get special treatment in their paternal home. But to unmarried women, no special things happen. No privileges. Very young girls are made to feel special during virgin worship (kuman-puja) (October 15, 1991).

Pallavi's unorthodox opinions affirm that there is a social invigoration in progress, which results from a critique of the traditional social order. However, voicing the opinion of women of her generation (and social, economic, educational, and marital status), she does not attribute the changes and potential transformations of the social order to Durga Puja which she feels affirms traditional social roles. No longer the pre-pubescent girl, nor yet the married woman, Pallavi exists in a liminal state (according to norms prescribed by dharma), no longer under the control of her father nor under the control of her husband.364 Even if she marries, it is doubtful that she will ever be under anyone's "control." Typically, Pallavi receives no special treatment while in this state

364Were Pallavi in the Lahiri household the inauspiciousness of her unmarried state would have been highlighted by her prohibition from touching any of the food offerings.
which is, in Victor Turner’s terminology "betwixt and between" the two structured states of the pre-menstrual virgin and the married woman.

Significantly, it is precisely to a woman in this state that the mythology of the independent Durgā of the Durgā Saptasatī speaks, for she is the object of desires of many potentially unsuitable suitors against whom she must defend herself. If she wards off all suitors, however, she cannot move to the acceptable married and maternal status which is prescribed by the orthodox tradition and honoured during the Durgā Pūjā celebrations. In sharp contrast to Pallavi’s comments, the married daughters of Mr. Lahiri, the patriarch of the family with whom I had participated in Durgā Pūjā celebrations, all felt that they were made to feel special and were empowered during Durgā Pūjā. While Pallavi felt that Indian women were deeply oppressed and suffered a tremendous inequality in comparison to men, the Lahiri daughters felt that the situation of women was quite good, and well on its way to social equality.

Although their perspectives diverge strongly, both Pallavi and the Lahiri daughters agreed that women’s strength is traditionally thought to lie in their forebearance, tolerance, and naturally embracing compassion. "You can take any problem to your mother and she will try to help." However, while the Lahiri women upheld this capacity in women and their need to adapt to the needs of their husbands, Pallavi was cynical. She said:

You know the idea of sacrifice, renouncing, is big in Hinduism. I had a friend who wanted a career but after her marriage her husband wanted her to give it up. When she said, "How can I give up my career?" he said, "Women can do everything." You see that’s the stuff we are fed. Women can give up anything. They can make the ultimate sacrifice because they have the power to make

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365 In a subsequent conversation Pallavi told me that her aunt had inquired if she had told me how only Indian culture, and Bengali culture in particular, venerated women, uplifting them to the status of goddesses. Pallavi replied that she had told me that despite such a conception, she felt the Durgā Pūjā ritual was just "eye wash." This resulted in a long and heated debate at the dinner table during which Pallavi was told that Indian men know how to respect women, that women of her generation probably did not deserve respect, and that women of her aunt’s generation do feel that they are special, especially during the Durgā Pūjā.

366 One of the Lahiri daughters felt strongly that it was wrong for a wife to stay with a husband who was abusive, while the others made strong arguments in favour of fidelity and compromise.
sacrifices. The poor men can’t do it.

The opinions of Pallavi and the Lahiri daughters reflect a tension between "modernization" and tradition that is highlighted in the status of women within contemporary Indian society. Pallavi voices the concerns of unmarried women who must face the prospect of marriages in which they are obliged to maintain traditional female roles which they may deem subservient and unsuitable for their own self-realization. The Lahiri daughters voice the opinions of married women who find adequate freedom, equality, and power in that state and thus uphold the traditional structures of marriage and marital roles, within which they feel there is the possibility of "modernization" and change.

The Durga Puja ritual clearly treats pre-menstrual girls and married women specially, elevating them to the status of a goddess. It clearly makes unmarried women feel inauspicious, and thus implicitly impels them towards the auspicious state of marriage. In this sense the ritual supports traditional social patterns. The image of Durgā, also speaks directly to the unmarried woman. Durgā, in the myths of the Durgā Saptaśatī, is an alluring woman who attracts the attention of the demons. She is virginal in the "western" sense of not having had a sexual partner, but the implication is that she has begun her menstrual flow and is capable of reproduction. Thus she is not a kumārī and not yet a mother. She is an independent, unmarried woman who fights off unsuitable suitors (the demons) and retains her chastity. Therefore, although the pūjā may promote fertility and marriage, the Durgā Saptaśatī image of Durgā promotes chastity and independence.

Among unmarried girls, just past the stage of kumārīs, I was told that Sītā offered

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The social values which accompanied the notion of "modernity" as used by most of the Lahiri daughters were virtually indistinguishable from, and used synonymously with "westernization." The tendency among many Indians to equate modernization with Western values is discussed in Singer (1972). Singer also outlines the country's ongoing efforts to modernize within the parameters of its own cultural heritage.
the most desirable model of womanhood. Why is this so, when Sītā’s worship is so much rarer than Durgā worship and generally occurs in subordinate association with Rāma worship? Why does the image of Durgā, far more visible and pervasive, far more empowering from a Western perspective, not have the same appeal as Sītā to marriageable Hindu women? I discern at least two contributing factors in answer to these questions. The first is that Sītā offers a human model of beauty and fidelity. Although divine, she is often thought of as a human incarnation of the goddess Lakṣmī. Despite the unfortunate circumstances which ensue in her life, Sītā’s mythology portrays her with a loving and doting father. Sītā wins the husband of her choice and accompanies him even in his exile. Unlike Sītā, Durgā’s mythology tells of the actions of a divine being, and it is less common for worshippers to identify themselves with purely divine models. Durgā’s story is not placed within the context of loving relationships with parents, siblings, friends, and the like. Devotees worship her as a supreme goddess and do not consciously model themselves on her. Mythic human models with a Durgā-like nature, such as the queen Manorāmā in the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa are husbandless or widows.

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[^368]: Among Bengali girls, Behula is as influential a model of womanhood as Sītā. The story of Behula belongs to a cycle of myths related to the snake goddess Manasā. I was told this version of the story by the grandchildren in the Lahiri family. There was some confusion and disagreement on their part about details of the story, which they heard on occasion from their grandmother, Añjalī Lahiri. Durgā Puja is not merely the time when families congregate, but it is also a time when myths and legends are transmitted to the younger generations.

There was a prince called Chāndo who had a handsome son called Lakhindar. Lakhindar was betrothed to Behula, the beautiful daughter of a merchant. Behula had been cursed by a brahmā woman that her husband would die of a snake bite on his wedding night. Behula did not worry because she was a devotee of Manasā. She did not realize that the old woman who cursed her was Manasā in disguise. To avoid the effects of the curse Behula had a special sealed room built for her wedding night but the builders had left a small hole in it. Manasā crept through the hole on the wedding night and bit Lakhindar who died in accord with the curse. Behula blamed Chāndo for Lakhindar’s death, saying that he was not a worshipper of Manasā. Behula, then, got on a boat with her husband’s corpse to plead with Manasā for his revival. After a long time and many adventures in which Behula proved her loyalty to her husband even after his death, Behula met Manasā. The goddess told her that she would bring Lakhindar back to life if Chāndo would worship her. She agreed to convince her father-in-law to worship Manasā. He agreed but only on the condition that the priest would turn his back to the image while worshipping her.

Behula parallels Sītā in her loyalty to her husband, but differs from Sītā in certain respects. Behula enjoys only a night of marital bliss before being separated from her husband by the ultimate of restraints, death itself. Her actions reveal extraordinary loyalty both to her husband, even after his death, and to the goddess, who was the agent of her suffering. Behula’s perseverance and fidelity ultimately wins back her husband from the jaws of death.
Such models are hardly agreeable to young women seeking marriage.

Therefore, although the image of Durgā, in her demon-slaying power and independence, offers a challenging vision to the orthodox roles of women as they are prescribed in the Dharma Śāstras (i.e., subservient to and under the control of men), it does not, for the most part, consciously serve as a model for women which critiques traditional social values. Its potential to do this is not realized or manipulated. In some measure, this is precisely because Durgā is an image of that which is purely divine. Even among Durgā-worshipping women, such as Pallavi, who do oppose traditional values, there is no overt admission that Durgā’s image functions to critique and transform the social order. The image does not function to provide such women with a new or different social status. The substance of social protest against traditional feminine roles in Hindu society emanates from the larger body of discourse on feminism. However, I suspect that the image of Durgā implicitly plays a role in the emancipation and empowerment of women. In contemporary India, the late prime minister Indira Gandhi, because of her concern for India and her exercise of power, is still frequently cited by devotees as an example of a woman who embodied the qualities of the goddess Durgā. The married daughters of Mr. Lahiri and others stated explicitly that powerful women such as Indira Gandhi serve as models of emancipation for other women from traditionally subservient roles. By identifying such powerful women with Durgā, the conceptual image of the Devī is further shaped. This divine image, in turn, through the human models with which it is associated, influences and empowers women. The image of Durgā could, of course, function dramatically in pertinent branches of feminist liberation theology.

Despite its capacity to transform social structures, which I believe does occur to a certain extent, the image of Durgā, as it currently operates in Banāras, affirms, supports, and reinforces traditional social roles for women. I have already shown how this is so in the analysis of the meaning of the Nine Durgās above. Quite importantly the image of Durgā serves to maintain an essentially patriarchal, orthodox social order when disfunction threatens. Mythologically, Durgā is the daughter sacrificed in order that her brother Kṛṣṇa may live. Durgā is the beautiful virgin who resists and slays the adharmic male suitors Mahiśa, or Šumbha and Nišumbha, thus maintaining the position of the male
gods. Durgā, I feel, is the model for the unjustly widowed Manorāma who chastely raises her son, Sudarśana, and finds him a suitable spouse.369

Durgā also is a source of solace and empowerment for both men and women in weakened positions. Mythologically, the young Sudarśana is protected by his mother as a lioness would protect her cubs.370 Similarly, the king of Kāśi, Subāhu, who could have forced his daughter to accept marriage to a powerful ally, concedes to her personal choice (icchā svayamvara) for a disempowered but righteous husband and braves the attacks of the disgruntled unrighteous suitors. A moral here is that despite the odds which are stacked against them, these protagonists earn the protective grace of the Devī, who intercedes on their behalf. There is little new in the moral behind this theme. If devotees adhere to dharma and align themselves with the Devī’s power, temporary imbalances where adharma appears to be prevailing will soon be set aright. Durgā sustains moral order in society.

While the prescribed course of both men and women’s lives in the Hindu tradition ideally involves a good education, happy marriage, children, health, sufficient wealth, and spiritual growth, social realities are often otherwise. Orphans or other economically disadvantaged people may never get access to a good education. Certain men or women may never marry, or their marriages may be unsuitable. Children may not be born. One of the spouses may leave or die. Illness may befall any member of the family. There may be insufficient money on which to live or to ensure good marriages for the children. One’s spiritual life may suffer. In all these undesirable circumstances, for either gender, Durgā offers a consoling vision. In fact the bulk of promised devotional observances (manauti) are made for protection and boons related to tragedies that may change the course of the worshipper’s life. Spiritual practices (sādhana) are also directed towards

369 One could suggest that Durgā is the model for Sita’s fidelity when in the clutches of Rāvana. Alone and separated from her husband, Rāma, who might have been dead, she refuses the advances of the most appealing, most powerful, but adharmic suitor.

370 Prior to my research, I had been puzzled as to why Durgā, so frequently depicted armed with weapons and slaying a demon, was referred to as Mother. Many devotees told me that a mother is far more protective over her children than a father. Durgā spills blood to protect and nourish her devotees.
the achievement of protective or effective power. One could thus classify the desires of devotees as either hopeful or preventative. The hope is to maximize the potential within the dharmic ideal while keeping misfortune at bay. For both male and female Durgā worshippers this ideal, at the mundane level, is imaged in the goddess’s family portrayed at the Durgā Pūjā image cluster. The most desirable values held by both genders of worshippers, including fertility, beauty, intelligence, artistic talent, heroism, and spiritual purity are embodied in the figures of Lakṣmī, Gaṇeśa, Sarasvatī, Kārtikeya, and the Devī. Mahīṣa, crushed and disempowered, represents all that is to be avoided or destroyed. In this symbolic cluster, Durgā represents an ideal of womanhood which is shared by both men and women. However for those in non-ideal situations, for whom misfortune has already struck, Durgā is less a model of hope than a source of strength.371

Once devotees have entered into a relationship of dependence on Durgā’s grace, they may see the social order as emanating from the goddess, but also fear her punishment. The Devī either acts with malice against those who have been truant in their devotions or, by withdrawing her protection, leaves the devotee vulnerable to the dangerous uncertainties of life. Worship reestablishes the relationship with the Devī, assuring the devotee of the Devī’s secure protective presence. The circularity in Shanti Devi’s comments, quoted in the Introduction, is a good illustration of this process. Shanti pledges to eat only uncooked food such as fruit and curd until she has taken darśana of Durgā. If she does not visit the temple she gets dizzy and cannot work. Implicitly, it is the Devī’s action which brings on this dizziness, which is a sign of a perforation in the well-woven fabric of reality. Misfortune is about to strike. To rectify this problem, Shanti takes darśana and then eats a proper meal. To break the pledge would be to risk

371B. Saraswati, after an extensive sociological survey of Banāras, found that the city "shelters a large number of widows, most of them young widows. It has been the practice of Brahman families in most parts of India to send their widows to Kashi where they have to live all their life" (1975:60). I have no supporting statistical evidence for these statements. Shanti Devi’s comments in the Introduction contradict this, although she could have been trying to gain sympathy rather than convey facts. It is, however, true that the Durgā Kund temple was built by the widowed queen Rāni Bhavānī, who came to reside in Banāras with her widowed daughter Tārā Sundarī. If there is a large population of widows in Banāras, it is possible that Durgā serves as source of strength for them and readily draws their worship.
far more serious consequences than dizziness.

It is precisely this dynamic of reciprocity which operates when pilgrims visit a temple to perform devotional service. They fulfill their side of the bargain and enjoy entry into the protective perimeter of the Devī's kingdom. The temple and its environs give visible expression to the feeling of spiritually-elevating tranquil security. The devotee has entered the Devī's orb of influence (*mandala*) and has synchronized with the flow of *sakti* through her *yantra*. The pilgrimage to the Nine Durgās extends this protective perimeter to the boundaries of Banāras, for the Durgās, located at the centre and edges, are understood as city protecters. During Navarātra, the sacred *maṇḍala* of Banāras, whose perimeter is circumambulated by worshippers on the Pañcakroshi Pilgrimage, is none other than a Durgā *maṇḍala*.

When pilgrims make the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, that is, traverse the whole *maṇḍala*, at some subconscious level they are able to perceive the whole pattern of the cosmos (i.e., the creation as it manifests spatially and temporally). Women encounter the entirety of their lives from birth to spiritual attainment and benevolence in a vision of the feminine which is never subordinate, but pure, strong, and independent. Men perceive a vision of Absolute Reality imbued with much the same qualities, through the fullness of Śakti's manifestations. If each of the Nine Durgās represents an aspect of the energy within material creation (see the discussion of this interpretation in Chapter Three), then this pilgrimage is an extension of the principle of *pūjā*, where the Devī's form is worshipped or reintegrated. Pilgrimage, in this sense, like blood sacrifice, is an elaboration of *pūjā*.

The image of Durgā conveyed through the set of the Nine Durgās appeals to both men and women because of its purity and power. And, unlike the Nine Gaurīs which possess spousal traits, the Durgās present an image of unattached virtuous power. It is common for devotees to model their relationship with the divine on some human pattern. A deity like Kṛṣṇa may be conceived of as a friend, a lover, or an adorable mischievous son. Since wives hold inferior positions to their husbands in the orthodox hierarchy of Hindu society, it would be difficult for a man to hold an image of the divine which he
views as subordinate to himself. The image of a supreme goddess as "wife" is therefore rare. This could account for the lack of popularity of Gaurī worship among males. It is true that men, too, wish for a wife with the loyalty of Sītā, but do not generally find her a suitable model of supreme divinity. However, for men, Durgā is the chaste daughter, the jewel of his eyes, or the ideal mother, his protector and nurturer. In the set of Nine Durgās, womanhood progresses through its stages without the presence of a male spouse. This independent, unwifely Durgā, not subordinate to a spouse, functions as a suitable image of Absolute Divinity for male worshippers.

The preceding discussion has shown that there is a strong relationship between the image of Durgā and Durgā worship, particularly in the acts of pūjā, blood sacrifice, and pilgrimage. This conclusion substantially supports Geertz's (1973) theoretical definition of religion as a cultural system of symbols which creates a worldview that generates powerful emotional states and elicits social actions. Most importantly, religion provides a metaphysical framework within which the world as experienced (at times frightening in its mystery) and human action in relationship to the world are rendered meaningful. The anthropological task is interpretive, aimed at uncovering a culture's symbols and meanings. According to Geertz, in ritual, human action moves in accord with the world as imagined. Ritual, therefore, serves to sustain, if not shape, the religious worldview. In ritual, then, one should find both the symbols of this cosmological construction and the kinds of actions permitted within it.

Fritz Staal, however, favours a far more radical position, arguing that ritual is meaningless. Staal suggests that a Vedic sacrifice, such as the agnicayana, may be designated as ritual since no one would deny that it is ritual. From such an example of Vedic ritual, he works out a theory and definition of ritual. He concludes that "ritual is pure activity without meaning or goal" (1989:131). Like grammar it consists of rules, but unlike language refers to nothing. It is self-referential. Success in ritual activity depends on its proper performance but "not only have we established the rules ourselves, so that we are completely in control; we are also assured of success. If one rite goes wrong, another takes its place. This goes a long way to explain the curious fact that rituals, so apparently meaningless and useless, are at the same time readily engaged in"
In our examination of worship activities, particularly the Durgā Pūjā, it is clear that ritual activity is partially interpretable in the Geertzian sense and partially meaningless in the way meant by Staal. Staal speculatively suggests that ritual rulemaking is grounded in biologically compulsive behaviour patterns not unlike the instincts of other animals.

Originally, ritual was a mere activity performed by animals in accordance with rules. Among humans, when contrasted with ordinary, everyday and purposeful activities, its meaningless became patent, and rationalizations and explanations were constructed to account for its persistence. The chief provider of meaning being religion, ritual became involved with religion and through this association, meaningful. Next, rites were attached to important events which thereby acquired religious meaning, too. In the course of time, rituals, instead of remaining useless and pure, became useful and meritorious.

From this perspective, the contemporary Durgā Pūjā ritual is a product of a long line of evolution in which many a rationalization, explanation, religious meaning, and meritorious significance of the circumstances of its performance have accrued to the originally pure activity. Therefore, I suggest, it has substantial interpretable elements in the Geertzian sense. However, in the purohitas' refusal to interpret Vedic liturgical verses when they occur in the Durgā Pūjā, we see elements of ritual action to which no "meaning," in the form of discriminating thought, is assigned. This could be an indication of "meaninglessness" in Staal's sense of the term.

Frankly, however, I find Staal's definition of ritual rather narrow, for it attempts to separate an entity from its attributes. Or, to use another analogy, Staal's definition suggests that the seed is the "real" or "pure" plant. He mirrors the non-dualist Hindu tendency to search for the attributeless (nirguna) Absolute, underlying manifest reality. It is true that Mīmāṃsā philosophers applied the argument that ritual is performed for its own sake, but when Staal says that "the stress on symbol and meaning is largely due to the preoccupations of scholars" (1989:155), he is forgetting to acknowledge that the Mīmāṃsā position is also essentially an interpretive approach. "Meaninglessness" is the meaning they attribute to ritual. Staal's statement that "to the Vedic ritualist, it is the action which counts, not the verbal elucidation or interpretation" (1989:155) does hold
for most *purohitas* who perform the Durgā Pūjā ritual. But he is extreme when he maintains that practicing ritualists "pay no attention" to the Indian scholarly tradition (of interpretation) whose origin he attributes to the authors of the Brāhmaṇas.

It is possible to suggest that the two millenia which have elapsed since the composition of the Brāhmaṇas have produced a number of scholar-ritualists, those who have attempted to combine ritual action and meaning. As a ritual which emerged in the atmosphere of the post-Islamic Hindu revival in North India, the Durgā Pūjā no doubt developed out of a combination of ritual grammar and language, of formal action and intention. My view, therefore, is that the Durgā Pūjā was always meaningful, insofar as it is expressive of a worldview. I disagree with Staal's view that rituals such as the Durgā Pūjā, only acquire this aspect over time. Certainly, the pandits and ritualists with whom I examined the Durgā Pūjā ritual followed a lineage of transmission which highlighted the place of symbolism in ritual action. These scholar-ritualists, in the tradition of the renowned Tantric scholar Gopināth Kavirāj, followed an approach to ritual which conceded efficacy to the power of ritual action, but encouraged the full use of the intellect in understanding its meaning. This "thoughtful" (*jñāna*) approach to ritual also adds "feeling" (*bhakti*) to the simple purity of otherwise meaningless "action" (*karma*). I will offer one illustrative example of an incident related to me by a *purohita*.

After completing the first day's Durgā Pūjā rituals for his patron, the *purohita* Pandit Vasudeva Trivedi Babu noticed that the image cluster which was to be used for the subsequent rituals was cracked after delivery. New images could not be obtained, and the family's celebration would be ruined. Rather than stopping the ritual, he made slight modifications. While going through almost all of the motions of the ritual to the image cluster, Vasudeva Babu did not imbue the image with life, and directed his devotional intent to the other forms of the Devī which were present, namely the jar, the *bilva* tree, and the *sarvatobhadra mandala*. To the outside observer, all that was occurring in the ritual was meaningless action according to rules, but to Vasudeva Babu much more was taking place. Whatever criticisms might be voiced by other ritualists

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372A psuedonym.
concerning his actions, in Vasudeva Babu’s mind, the ritual could still be successfully carried out by following the rules of ritual action. In this respect, my example reinforces Staal’s view. But insofar as Vasudeva Babu continued despite observing that the image was damaged (broken rule), and modified only the locus of his intended devotions, he displayed the interpretive mind at work in a more fluid ritual process, not bound merely by hard and fast rules. There was a higher operational logic at work, one which permitted the transference of symbolic meaning. Symbols and their meanings can only be transferred if they are acknowledged and recognized.

A similar example of the transference of symbolic meaning is found in a well known myth. In the myth of Rāma’s worship of Durgā, the hero discovers that he is a single flower short in the 108 lotus offering ritual. He volunteers to pluck out his eye as a substitute, but is stopped by the Devī who acknowledges the sincerity of his devotion. Rāma’s gesture suggests that in his mind while nothing could truly replace his oversight in the lotus offering, his eye could serve as a substitute for both the missing lotus flower and his technical error. The gesture of reaching for his eye, is more than merely a surrogate offering. He is really appealing to a higher logic which is at work in the entire process of ritual. Intention overrides form in pūjā. Loving devotion (bhakti) surpasses both pure action (karma) and intellectual rumination on it (jñāna).

Staal would probably distinguish pūjā from yajña and he would thus not consider pūjā ritual. However by his own criteria for yajña, we may consider the Durgā Pūjā to be ritual, since virtually nobody would consider it not to be ritual. In the words of the Bhārat Sevāsrama Saṅgha pamphlet (1991) referred to earlier, "Durgā Pūjā is the horse sacrifice (aśvamedha) of the Kali Yuga." From the perspective of this group then, this pūjā is the equivalent of that great Brāhmaṇic ritual (yajña) in this degenerate age. Staal mirrors this current in Hindu thought which gives special status to origins (e.g., Vedic), but draws his definition of ritual from and virtually restricts it to the earliest sources. Perhaps neither the horse sacrifice (aśvamedha) nor the Durgā Pūjā constitute rituals in the true sense, according to Staal’s criteria. It would thus be pointless to elaborate on the political function of both those (ritual) activities which have obvious and implicit goals
beyond the ritual act itself. Similarly, the meaningful correspondences between the Mahiśa myth of the Durgā Saptāsatī and the central image cluster would not prove for Staal that ritual is interpretable since, according to Staal, "rituals resemble other things, including features of myth and social structure" (Staal 1989:135).

In the Durgā Pūjā ritual, which contains obvious strands of meaning which yield to shared interpretations, one has an example of rituals which demand an analytic "middle way" between the extreme notions of full interpretability and meaninglessness. I consider the Durgā Pūjā to be a fine example of ritual activity which possesses both uninterpreted and meaningful elements. Chapter Four provided a detailed interpretive analysis offering neither "the" meaning of the Durgā Pūjā ritual nor classifying it as a series of self-absorbed meaningless actions. Were Durgā Pūjā purely self-absorbed, any ritual could be substituted for it with similar results. Unlike Staal, I do not see ritual as meaningless. Instead, I propose that it is reality which is mysterious, and thus to an extent without meaning. I suggest that it is human beings who ascribe meaning to reality, which essentially, "just exists." One cannot easily answer the question, conventionally ascribed to the Buddha, about the "meaning" of a flower. Scientific or religious explanations of the origins or functions of aspects of reality are not ascriptions of meaning. Meaning, I suggest, belongs to a realm of consciousness, human or other (e.g., animal), in which something is designated to stand for (i.e., to symbolize) something else. One may therefore reasonably ask what the word "flower" means.

Meanings are therefore ascribed to "reality," within which one finds human beings and human actions of both the biologically instinctive and methodically meaningful kind. Religious ritual circumscribes a portion of this reality incorporating within the circumference of this set a variety of elements and ordering patterns. In so doing religious ritual incorporates both meaningless (i.e., fragments of reality which are left uninterpreted) and meaningful elements. At the broadest level, the very act of ritual circumscription renders order (and meaning) to the cosmos. Thus every ritual constitutes a worldview and is meaningful.

At the ontological level, I feel that a fundamental function of a ritual such as the Durgā Pūjā is to bring the participants to a psychological state where the known world
and the mysterious meet. Through the skilful manipulation of symbols from the known world (e.g., myths, images, music) which pertain to the mystery (and are therefore uninterpretable), the ritual generates psychological states of heightened emotions and consciousness which mimic those which may be encountered in non-ritual contexts (e.g., mystical experience, danger). In a successful ritual these states are orchestrated for sustained periods of time providing participants with psychological experience through which they may make sense of life as experienced later. Meanings gleaned from deciphering previous ritual activity (or at least the psychological security gained from familiarity with ritually induced states) may be applied by individuals to their encounter with the unpredictable world.

The awakening of the Devi, and the progressive intensification of her powerful presence, which is enacted in the Durgā Pūjā ritual, provides worshippers with a meaningful system with which to encounter fear and misfortune. Volunteering an unsolicited interpretation of the high point in the Durgā Pūjā, Mr. S. K. Rai Choudary said,

Śakti is a symbol of power, and it is this power which destroyed the demon. The power is a feeling which wells up and coalesces in a sense in which one overcomes the forces which cause fear and insecurity. During the sandhi pūjā, the ślokas which are recited tell of the goddess in terrifying aspect, changing shapes from Devi to demoness (rakṣasī).

When feelings of fear arise, or misfortune strikes, the Devi is close at hand. The climactic points in the Durgā Pūjā ritual (e.g., āratt, sandhi pūjā) induce horripilation, a physical symptom of both fear and excitement. Based on comments from devotees such as those by Mr. Choudary stated above, I suggest that the instant a feeling of fear arises it is immediately "recognized" as paralleling the feelings generated during the ritual worship of Durgā. The source of the fear (symbolized by the demon) is then overshadowed and vanquished by the more dreadful, but protective presence of the Devi.

**Summary**

This study of the image of Durgā and her forms of worship in Banāras has taken us into the heart of the Hindu tradition since the Devi is closely related to both of the
other major sectarian strands, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. Since Banāras is, in many ways, a microcosm of Hindu India, the study may have pan-Indian significance. The most pervasive and unifying image of the goddess which emerges from this study is not that of a dreadful warrior goddess or of a maternal goddess, despite the ubiquitousness of her demon-slaying images and her most common epithet, "Mā." Instead Durgā's most comprehensive image is a yantra, a symbolic representation (and embodiment) of an underlying order or law through which the cosmos unfolds.

This account began with a detailed examination of symbols of the goddess at the renowned Durgā Kund temple where I discerned that the central image behind the mask (a visible form for devotees) is a yantra. Durgājī, the temple itself, is considered to be a yantra within whose compass reside the shrines of related deities who are aspects of the goddess herself, or are subordinate to her. The yantra is a multi-dimensional dynamic entity which unfolds or blossoms (symbolized, for instance, by lotus petals) and contracts. Durgājī thus has cadences where the yantra waxes and wanes through cycles of time and expands spatially to permeate wider regions. As the annual cycle of festivals in Banāras proceeds, the orbs of influence of other deities also grow and shrink, at times overlapping and intersecting the Durgājī yantra. The Devī's relationship to other divinities and her place within the divine hierarchy is defined through this festival process. During the annual decoration ceremony (śrīgāra), and the festival of Annakuta, the Durgājī yantra has a wider sphere of influence, but it is during the autumn and spring Navarātra festivals, in particular, that the yantra expands to pervade the whole sacred circle (mandala) of Banāras.

The flowering of the Durgā yantra during Navarātra into the whole of the Kāśi mandala is confirmed by the concept of the Nine Durgās, a set of goddesses which includes Durgājī, whose temples are located on the boundaries and the centre of the city. By making a pilgrimage to these nine temples, devotees traverse the entire Durgā yantra and Kāśi mandala, which turn out to be one and the same. Since Kāśi is a symbol of the whole cosmos, I suggest that the breadth of the yantric expansion during Navarātra implicitly is the entire creation. Besides the temples of the Nine Durgās, worship of the
goddess erupts in thousands of locations throughout Banaras during Navarātra. The term "erupts" is appropriate, for as I have shown, the abodes of the goddess are considered to be seats (pīṭha) or sites of sacred power (hierophanies which are kratophanies) which, surpassing places of spiritual liberation (āśīṛṭha), offer both worldly and spiritual accomplishments (siddhi). Along with a variety of worship locations, Durgā is venerated in forms as diverse as lithographic images in the humblest of home shrines, and elaborate anthropomorphic clay images in temporary shrines specially erected for her adoration.

The proliferation of the sites of goddess worship during the autumn Navarātra, and the visually dramatic nature of the large, colourful clay images in the public shrines give this festival one of the highest profiles in the city. Tens of thousands of people move through the city visiting the public displays, unconsciously confirming the Devī's awesome and widespread presence. Each of the thousands of sites where the Devī is established becomes a centre of a goddess yantra within the larger yantric circle. This study described in detail numerous worship patterns prevalent during Navarātra. The yantra proved to be central in the layout of the pavilions (and their constituent altars) used for group recitations of the Durgā Saptaśatī, the most important hymn of glorification to Durgā. At such sites, not only is the Devī worshipped through yantras (e.g., the altars, the fire kunda), but, since the pavilion is modelled on the cosmos, the reciters actually sit within a yantra. My research also probed into the ritual of Durgā Pūjā, where I found that the goddess is invoked into a variety of forms. Among these there are numerous yantric manifestations of the Devī. One of the most sublime forms in which she is worshipped on Mahāstamī, is as the yantra known as the Sarvatobhadra Maṇḍala. It affirms the centrality of the yantric image of Durgā.

The yantric image of Durgā is a symbol, formula, or technological manifestation of a comprehensive Śākta metaphysics upon which I have also expanded in this dissertation. From the devout Śākta perspective, Durgā (like the Vedantic Nirguṇa Brahman) is the most sublime power and unmanifest source of the entire creation. She (like Brahmā) is also the dynamic energy through which the creation unfolds, the substance of the creation (like Prakṛti), and (like Śiva) the power through which it
disintegrates or dissolves. She (like Viṣṇu) is the stabilizing force which protects and
preserves the creation. From non-Śāktta perspectives, Durgā ranks lower in the divine
hierarchy. She may be identified as the feminine half of a bipolar reality: Śakti in relation
to Śiva, or Prakrti in relationship to Puruṣa. She may be identified as the summation of
Vāc/Sarasvatī, Śrī/Lakṣmī, Pārvatī/Kālī, the feminine consorts of the trinity of Brahmā,
Viṣṇu, and Śiva. Others see her as a separate goddess who is independent and best
known for her slaying of the buffalo demon Mahiṣa, but who is mariginally identified as
the spouse of Śiva.

However, for devout Durgā-worshipping Śāktas, the goddess combines all these
designations and more. She is the source of the illusions, desires, and attachments which
keep human beings enthralled with and tied to worldly existence. Therefore, by
worshipping her one furthers one’s understanding of her nature and taps into the source
of worldly power. However, Durgā is also the source of liberative knowledge and thus
represents the power which leads to spiritual freedom. The yantra therefore embodies the
science and logic of the creation, of worldly existence, the means of empowering oneself
within it, and the means of liberating oneself from it. The worship of Durgā, whether
in a temple or in a home shrine or installed image, is an encounter with the goddess
through which devotees seek a deeper understanding of her nature and their relationship
to her. Worship, such as a temple visit, I suggest, implicitly intensifies the practice of
the yantra, where devotees determine their place within an ordered cosmos which is the
body of the goddess.

I have focused on three aspects of Durgā worship in detail, and I argue that both
blood sacrifice and the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, although obviously different in significant
ways, reiterate the principles contained within the third aspect, pūjā, the most common
and yet most comprehensive act of worship. As the yantra is to the symbolic image of
the Devī, pūjā is to all forms of her worship. From a detailed study of the Durgā Pūjā
ritual and temple pūjā, I suggested that pūjā is more than simply a process of veneration
or adoration of the goddess. Rather it is a process of reintegration and encounter.

I have shown how in Devī pūjā, the constituent elements of the creation are
offered back to the goddess. The constituents of creation are not merely the well-known group of the five gross elements. Although the lists and count of the elements vary, the constituents include the subtle attributes of the elements, the five senses, the action capacities, and the inner elements of heart/mind, ego, and discriminating intellect. I have argued that *darśana* (sight or view), a term used for the process of temple worship, is more than an act of seeing the deity. It is even more than the reciprocation of sight. Rather, *darśana* is an abbreviation of a thorough and intimate encounter with the deity involving all the senses and faculties of consciousness.

The process of *pūjā* begins with intention (*icchā*) and initiates a series of actions (*kriyā*) which move the devotee from a state of impurity (*tamas*) to purity (*sattva*). The actions of *pūjā* begin with cleansing and purification. *Pūjā* then proceeds through the activity of offering items which represent the constituent elements of creation. These include the internal elements of consciousness. Quite importantly, all the senses are involved in the act of *pūjā* including the action faculties or senses. This is why circumambulation and the recitation of *mantras* are vital components of *pūjā*, and why acts such as the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage, and the recitation of glorification of the goddess are arguably elaborations of the principle of *pūjā*. The reintegration of the cosmos, which is symbolically enacted in *pūjā*, culminates in *darśana*, a sublime sensory encounter with the goddess represented in the purity of the flame offering (*ārati*). It is through this most common, yet sublime act of worship, that devotees achieve communion with the goddess, increase their understanding (*jñāna*) of her nature, and strengthen their relationship with her.

I have also shown that a crucial difference between *pūjā* to Durgā in her temple, and the Durgā Pūjā ritual is that, in the latter, the *purohita*’s role as mediator between the Devī and the devotee is much greater. The *purohita* must bridge the transcendental and earthly realms. He must invoke the goddess to manifest in progressively more immanent, more tangible, more expansive (e.g., *yantra*), and more highly conscious forms (e.g., a living virgin girl). Simultaneously, the *purohita* must uplift and refine the consciousness and senses of devotees so that they may directly perceive these manifest
forms of the goddess. In the temple yantra, the Devi is reckoned to be already manifest and may be worshipped directly by the devotee.

Although scholars occasionally distinguish sacrifice from pūjā, it is evident that blood sacrifice is a component of goddess pūjā both at the Durgā Kunḍ temple, where it takes place with some regularity, and during the Durgā Pūjā, where it is placed at the climax of the ritual. I have shown that blood sacrifice is a multivocal and equivocal symbol which, when offered, may represent the reintegration with the substance of the Devi of those constituent elements of her creation which are endowed with the vital energy of life. The sacrificial victim may also represent a demonic power, the devotee, or the Devi. Although this triad, at first sight, appears to be radically different, there are pervasive notions which unify them. Demon and Devi are linked through her identification as the Great Demoness, and through the recognition that even the demons’ destructive powers emanate from the goddess. Many people ascribe their misfortunes directly to a subsidiary malevolent goddess, not a demonic power. The devotee and the Devi are connected through the maternal metaphor in which the goddess is the mother of all creation, and thus the mother of the devotee. Within the devotee resides the ego (ahaṅkāra), a constituent of consciousness which is the source of fragmentation and false identifications. It is the inner enemy, the demon, the source of attachment and rebirth. Whatever the symbolic identification may be that a devotee makes when offering a blood sacrifice, it is clear that the act is one of rapprochement, where a bond is established with the goddess. Blood, I have argued, binds.

Blood is a pervasive symbol of Durgā. The Durgāī yantra is painted red like blood. In line with the cosmic order suggested by the yantra, I suggest that Durgā represents the orchestrated or controlled flow of blood. This is the symbol of stability and strength, while the disorderly flow of blood signifies chaos and destruction. Durgā, who spills the blood of the demon Mahiśa, or who through her surrogate, Kālī, drinks up the blood of the demon Raktabīja, corrals or redirects the chaotic or degenerate flow of blood symbolized by the demons. Blood, I have argued, is the locus through which the creation manifests and it symbolizes the path back to transcendent wholeness. It is
a symbol of the *rajas guṇa*. When imaged in a maternal role, Durgā represents the orderly flow of blood, or the *rajas guṇa*, in the process of creation. She engenders offspring (menstrual blood) and nourishes them (milk from blood). When imaged in a martial role, Durgā represents the power which crushes (*mārdana*) the forces which would thwart the cosmic order. Although tacitly the source of these destructive forces, Durgā expressly destroys them when they have grown powerful enough to threaten the cosmic balance. She is more dreadful than the most terrifying threatening power. The cosmic balance, I have shown, is envisioned among Banārasis as the interplay of the three *guṇas*. The *tamas guṇa*, a symbol of materiality, torpor, inertia, pollution, egoity, and chaos must eventually be stopped in its uncontrolled growth. It must yield to the *sattva guṇa*, which symbolizes purity, order, integrity and harmonious balance.

As residents within the sphere of the Devī's influence, devotees inhabit the Devī *yantra*, especially during Navarātra. The yantric symbol gives a measure of coherence to the numerous, seemingly disparate conceptions of the Devī, but it must be stressed that for most devotees Durgā is not a mechanistic principle but a conscious being. Rather than think of the goddess abstractly, or as a "formula," or "instrument," devotees often think of Durgā as a powerful feminine presence, a loving, nurturing, and protective mother. Like children playing in the presence of their mother, a temple visit explicitly places devotees within the range of Mā Durgā's perceptions and attracts her attention. In the symbolism of the set of Nine Durgās, one finds an elaboration upon the nature of this feminine conception of Absolute Divinity. Through that imagery, Durgā is not just a protective mother, but represents successive stages of womanhood from birth to the fullest maturation of feminine power. I have shown that this image, which conveys qualities of renewal, chastity, independence, fecundity, nourishment, protective

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373 My research supports B. Saraswati's observation that the idea of the three *guṇas* is pivotal in Banārasi culture. Saraswati, in what he denotes the Nilakantha Syndrome, defines four concentric "fortresses" which must be penetrated for an element to become part of the mainstream of Banārasi culture. "But in order to occupy a key position in the functioning of the system it has to concede at the fourth gate the ordered hierarchy of the *trigunas* - *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Whereas at the first three gates the interpreting mechanism has shown considerable liberality, it now rigidly abides by the law of the *trigunas* and no compromise could ever be effected in interpreting this law" (1975:66). From this perspective, Durgā is well entrenched in the heart of Banārasi culture.
nurturing, protective destruction, purity, and beneficent grace, provides an ideal for the lives of women. I have shown that this image provides a source of strength for women in socially disempowered states such as premature widowhood. Furthermore, I have argued that although the image of Durgā may offer a critique of traditional social roles for women, it currently supports the dharmic order by offering women orthodox models of independence and chaste strength in any stage or condition of their lives.
APPENDIX

THE DURGĀ PŪJĀ RITUAL AS CELEBRATED IN BANĀRAS
(BENGALI STYLE)

Preamble

The domestic worship of Durgā during the Asvina Navarātra takes place in numerous homes in Banāras, particularly among families who belong to the Śākta, or goddess-worshipping tradition. These celebrations vary in their ritual complexity. In some homes a lamp may be kept lit before a picture of the goddess for the entire nine days of Navarātra and devotional prayers uttered. In others, a jar (kalaśa) embodying the goddess may be established, and the Durgā Saptaśati recited daily. But of all the domestic forms of Durgā worship the Bengali Pūjā is the most elaborate. It is important to observe this form in detail since it has influenced the growing phenomenon of public worship of Durgā in Banāras immensely. Certainly the public worship among the oldest clubs (which incidentally are Bengali) is derived directly from the Bengali style of elaborate domestic worship. These community pūjās however have slight modifications such as streamlined rituals and theatrical cultural additions. It would be as much an error to dismiss these rituals as Bengali, and therefore non-Banārasi, as to consider Mardi Gras celebrations as Caribbean and thus not properly belonging to New Orleans culture.

Domestic vs. Public Pūjā

The domestic celebration of Durgā Pūjā differs from the public pūjās (sārvajanīna pūjā), in that the latter are performed for the community with funds gathered by that
community. Home pūjās are put on by families with their own financial resources, a factor which is becoming prohibitively expensive, and leading to the disappearance of the home pūjā altogether in Banāras.¹ Certain organizations, such as the Ānandamaiyī Mā āśrama, Bhārat Sevāśrama Saṅghā, and the Rāmakṛṣṇa Mission perform Durgā Pūjā in the elaborate domestic style with their own funds.² Thus they continue to keep alive this ritual tradition but within the confines of a spiritual community centre. Domestic pūjās in the home or in such religious organizations are performed for the benefit of the family or āśrama members only. The celebrations of all pūjās begin with a saṅkalpa (intentional vow). In the domestic saṅkalpa, the head of the family’s name (karta), lineage (gotra), deity’s name, place, time, and so on are mentioned, while in the sārvajanīna pūjā, some individual is chosen as the representative worshipper (yajamāna) of the group which itself may be heterogeneously composed of people of different castes (jati) and lineages (gotra).

Ritual Manuals

The rituals pertaining to the Bengali style of Durgā Pūjā are described in a book called the Purohita Darpana (Mirror for the Priest), which contains the techniques for most other pūjās as well.³ It is very popular among the large variety of ritual manuals (paddhati) used by purohitas. Purohitas who are well trained rarely make use of a common commercial offprint of such a paddhati during the ritual performance, but possess some personalized printed version. The majority of purohitas in the public pandals use commercial editions. The Durgā Pūjā rituals are influenced by Purānic prescriptions on goddess worship, specifically from the Devī Purāṇa, the Kālikā Purāṇa,

¹The elaborateness of this style of Durgā Pūjā is a telltale reminder of its origins in the homes of wealthy landowners (zamindar).

²Often wealthy patrons will contribute the funds for an entire day’s celebration.

³Actual performance of the ritual varies according to the capacities and desires of the purohita and yajamāna. At times a priest may embellish parts of the ritual common to most pūjās according to his inclinations. Thus he may include the names of favoured or local deities in invitations and propitiations. He may substitute long rituals with condensed forms. The yajamāna may request that the priest substitute a ritual or liturgical variant, which are traditional to the family or group, during sections of the pūjā.
and mostly from the Brhannandikesvara Purāṇa.

The Ritual Performer (*Purohita*)

The ritual celebration of Durgā Pūjā, is essentially a marvellous activity performed by the *purohita* for the benefit of the family or the community. The celebration of Durgā Pūjā may be, for the devout and earnest Śākta *purohita*, a *magnum opus* of ritual performance. It may be the highest expression of his profession, bringing together most of the forms of his ritual learning. It demands an astounding display of memory, concentration, yogic achievement, dramatic art, and finesse. He is expected to embody the goddess herself before transferring that embodiment to the devotional image and must therefore perform complex ritual purifications and visualizations to make himself a fit receptacle for the divine. At the same time, through his proficiency, he draws, directs, and heightens the perceptions of the devotees towards the deity. In a successful ritual performance the *purohita* has forged a link between the divine and mundane realms, so that the deity, palpably manifest in material forms, and the worshipper, with senses suitably refined and purified, can meet in the most intimate act of perceptual contact. This profound meeting of the senses, gross and subtle, active and passive, outer and inner, is *darsana*.

General Comments on Pūjā

Every specific or special *pūjā* (*viśeṣa vidhi*), such as Durgā Pūjā, for example, is normally preceded by general preliminary duties (*sāmānyā vidhi*). *Pūjās* themselves may be of two types: one performed for the obtainment of special desires (*kāmya pūjā*), and the other performed as the obligatory worship (*nitya pūjā*) of deities during the day and at specific times in the year. The worship at the confluence periods (*sandhyā pūjā*) of the day, namely dawn, noon, and dusk is *nitya*. Śiva and Śākta *pūjās* (if the *purohita* is initiated), performed for the *purohita*'s personal deity of choice (*iṣṭadevata*) are also *nitya*. These *nitya pūjās* may be simple or elaborate. The Durgā Pūjā, if performed without expectations of the fulfilment of any specific desire (*kāmya*), may be considered
an obligatory (nitya) pūjā which is performed once a year.

**Durgā Pūjā**

The detailed description of the Durgā Pūjā ritual which follows is derived primarily from discussions with Pandit Hemendra Nath Chakravarty, a Banārasi scholar of Bengali origin, who was a student of the renowned Tantric scholar Gopināth Kavirāj. Pandit Chakravarty has performed the Durgā Pūjā frequently and serves as a mentor on ritualistic and philosophical points to a group of other ritualists in the city. He provided the description of the Durgā Pūjā ritual by drawing primarily upon the *Purohita Darpana* for the structure and liturgical content, but supplemented this account with details from his own memory and style.

**Advisory Note:** I have included the Sanskrit liturgy in this description of the ritual for several reasons. The sound (śabda) of the sacred utterances (mantra) is considered crucial to the success of the ritual. Furthermore, I found that the liturgy, at times, conveys meaningful interpretations of the ritual action and enhances our understanding of the conceptual image of Durga. Since the sacred sound has such importance, I have striven for accuracy in transcribing the Sanskrit liturgy as it was given to me. I have, however, observed (and left) grammatical inconsistencies. These deviations from what would be considered grammatically perfect Sanskrit are due to human errors in the transcription of the sections of the liturgy which were given to me orally by Pandit Chakravarty, or due to printing mistakes in the manual which he consulted. At times, the prayers conform more to the demands of sound and meter than to grammatical precision. I have made no attempt to modify these. They are included (as is) to allow those who have facility with the language to see how the liturgical text (even when grammatically flawed or somewhat opaque) is interpreted. What appear to be translations are actually interpretive translations of the liturgy made primarily by Pandit Chakravarty.4 I have,

4See Tedlock (1983) for an extended discussion on the importance of transmitting as accurately as possible oral texts as they were encountered in the field. Pandit Chakravarty, if he had the opportunity, would prefer to correct the errors in grammar and transliteration. In fact, on occasion, he did so when
on occasion, made slight modifications in the English grammar, but have left the syntax, adjectives, and so on as they were provided in order to maintain better the sentiment of the indigenous interpretation.

Pandit Charkravarty was reluctant to translate any of the Vedic sections of the liturgy, although I pressed him to do so on several occasions. He does not consider himself sufficiently competent in Vedic Sanskrit to provide the "best" quality of translation. He suggested I consult translations by R. T. H. Griffith or other scholars, if I so desired. Essentially, the innate power of the sound of the Vedic passages enjoys a far greater prestige than the non Vedic prayers. Thus entire Vedic passages are treated in the same manner as such seed syllables as "Hṛīṁ," and are left untranslated. I have, in places, indicated in which Vedic texts these passages may be found, but I have not inserted the translations. This is because I wish to give greater primacy to the "text of the ritual" as an ethnographic document, than as a work of textual scholarship. In a very few places, the liturgy is missing. For instance, in the crucially important giving of eyesight (cakṣur dāna) ritual, three Vedic verses are absent. This omission is more than mere oversight on my part. I had requested these passages on more than one occasion and was always side-tracked from obtaining them. Although I think that I would have been successful with greater persistence, the reluctance to reveal the liturgy suggests a tendency to keep these verses secret and transmit them within the confines of initiation (dikṣa). In a few other places, the non Vedic liturgy is missing an interpretive translation. I thought it would be inappropriate for me to insert my own translations in this version of the "ritual text." Despite these omissions, what follows is at present the most complete description of the Durgā Pūjā, one of the most popular rituals in Hindu India today.

The Purohita's Own Obligatory Duties (Nītya Pūjā)

Before the purohita can begin to perform the preliminary duties (sāmānya vidhi) for Durgā Pūjā, he should perform his personal obligatory daily rituals (nītya pūjā) for

taking material from the manual during his descriptions. As a result, the "text" of the ritual, as it appears here is a composite drawn from oral and written sources.
these are part of the preliminary procedures. Thus, for instance, upon awakening, mantras may be recited before getting up, and the proper foot should be placed on the floor when alighting from the bed. A toothstick may be collected from a nūm or some such tree before brushing, more mantras recited, and the stick may be discarded in the proper direction. He may defecate and perform his other morning ablutions facing the proper direction. Underwater silt may be collected from the river bank where he has gone to bathe, and fashioned into three balls (piṇḍa). One is smeared on the lower body, one the upper body, and with a third a yantra is drawn with triangles and the seed (bīja) syllable of Durgā. After his bath, he dons a clean cloth over his shoulder and returns to his shrine. He may smear the door with sandal paste, throws flowers, water and so on, while facing appropriate directions for mokṣa, bhoga, and so on.

These days, such elaborate procedures are greatly curtailed. The average purohita normally gets out of bed without any ritual action. He may say "Durgā, Durgā," goes to his toilet and bath at home like most people, and then goes to his shrine. There he sits on a special seat, the kuśāsana, a rectangular mat ideally made of kuśa grass, covered with a wool blanket for comfort. He now begins the preliminary duties (sāmānya vidhi), common or generic rituals which are performed by themselves or before all special (viśesa) pūjās. If he is performing Durgā Pūjā for someone else, the purohita will move to the yajamāna's shrine room for the sāmānya vidhi and subsequent rituals. Normally, however, the Śākta purohita will at least install a jar (ghata) embodying the goddess in his own home shrine, to be worshipped for the duration of the festival.

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5 There is a symbolic identification of the body of the purohita with the body of Durgā (in the yantra). The three balls are representative of the lower, human, and divine realms (triloka). For the kind of yantra and Durgā bīja that may be used, see the lengthier discussions on yantras later in the work. He would likely use such a yantra only if Durgā was his iṣṭadevatā, or if he was preparing for the Durgā Pūjā ritual.

6 The following description of sāmānya vidhi is specifically followed by a particular group of purohitas in Banāras prior to Durgā Pūjā. It is a modification of the sāmānya vidhi commonly followed for other pūjās. I was told that this is because the Durgā Pūjā ritual is long, and the time allotted for the ritual may be short (e.g., the sixth lunar day (śaṣṭi tīthi) may only last for a few hours after dawn on the sixth solar day of Navārinkrāt, and the entire śaṣṭi pūjā must be performed during those hours). Furthermore, several elements of the sāmānya vidhi are included in each day's Durgā Pūjā ritual itself, and so the purohita may omit those repetitive sections from the common (sāmānya) observances (vidhi).
NOTE: Unless stated otherwise, all interpretive translations of the liturgical passages in this ritual are those provided primarily by Pandit Hemendra Nath Chakravarty and, occasionally, by other scholar-ritualists who perform the ritual. Interpretations (most of which are contained in the footnotes) of the ritual actions and the translated liturgical passages are my own and stem from discussions with the ritualists and from my own observations and readings. Any errors which may appear in the following descriptions or interpretations of the ritual are most likely due to misunderstandings or mistakes on my part, and not on the part of my mentors.

The Preliminary Duties (Sāmānyā Vidhi)

Ācamana (Sipping of Water)

A kośā, a specially shaped copper vessel, is filled with fresh pure water. Water is scooped into the palm with the smaller copper kuśṭ and sipped three times while repeating the mantra "Om Viṣṇuḥ, Om Viṣṇuḥ, Om Viṣṇuḥ," and then the mouth is ritually wiped with a mudrā. This procedure is called ācamana. If, as in this case, the special (viśeṣa) pūjā to be performed after this sāmānyā vidhi is for Durgā or Kālī, a Tantric style of ācamana is performed. Instead of repeating "Om Viṣṇuḥ" three times, the purohita says:

7A particularly large version is used for Durgā Pūjā itself due to the complexity of the ritual and the amounts of water used.

8The hand is shaped into the gokarna (cow's ear) mudrā with the palm cupped upwards so that it can contain just enough water to immerse completely a small bean or legume.

Mudrās are ritual postures or, more commonly, gestures with the hands and fingers which may convey messages (e.g., fear-not (abhaya), symbolize processes (e.g., dhenu mudrā), or seal a ritual act (e.g., matriya mudrā). I suggest that just as writing and speech are understood to be composed from alphabetic characters and primary sounds, the nonverbal language of "signing" is understood to be composed of archetypal gestures. Mudrās are especially powerful gestures which, like seed syllables (bīja), resonate with meaning. Such sacred gestures form a vital part of Hindu religious ritual activity. While static mudrās are known and identified through iconography and descriptions in literature, the immensely important "liturgy" of dynamic ritual action is only observable in the ritual process. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of visualizing the "flow" of the purohita's bodily movement throughout the pūjā.
Then various parts of the body (specifically, the mouth, nostrils, ears, joints of the shoulders, sahasrāra, navel, and heart) are touched and this mantra is repeated:

By sipping this water, I remember Viṣṇu the all pervading consciousness, the highest abode, and so on.

Argha (Offering to the Sun)

Next, the priest purifies flowers, washed rice, and durva (a common, resilient, green grass), a red flower (e.g., hibiscus), perhaps kuśa grass, and placing these into the small copper kuśṭ, makes this offering (argha) to the Sun. He then pours the argha into a copper plate (tāmra pātra). This offering, which is for the Sun, is not made just to the visible sun (surya) but also to the inner self (ātman) and the supreme self (brahman). These three are said to constitute the notion of "Sun," and they must be conceptually unified while offering the argha to the visible sun. Occasionally, a disc of smeared red sandalpaste is made in the center of the tāmra pātra representing the Sun itself.

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8 Om is the universal primordial vibration of all manifestation and is generally uttered before all sacred utterances (mantra). Svāhā is one such sacred utterance offered to all deities. It is generally uttered at the end of a mantra, often in conjunction with oblations into the fire.

9 Ātma refers to the Supreme Self, identical with the singular underlying reality which is the Absolute Brahman. Vidyā means "knowledge," "magical lore," or "science." It is an epithet of Durgā. Here, understood within its tantric context, it refers to the Divine Feminine which is synonymous with the Divine Masculine, Śiva, and the Supreme Self. Vidyā and Śiva may also be conceived of as complementary polarities of the Absolute.

10 The sahasrāra is the subtle body's energy centre visualized as a thousand-petalled lotus approximately located at the top of the head of the physical body.

11 Argha offerings are sometimes made in more elaborate containers such as conch shells. These containers are also referred to as jars, and may be symbolically identified with the earth containing as they do water, flowers, grass, rice, and sometimes fruit. I therefore suggest that the argha pātra may be implicitly understood as another form of the Devī.
Jalasuddhi (Purification of Water)

Next, the purohita draws a yantra with the seed (bija) syllable in the centre. If he is to be performing Durgā Pūjā that day he may use a goddess yantra and bija. He then recites some mantras, places the kośā on the yantra, and repeats some more mantras while stirring the water within with his middle finger. Through these mantras, he invokes the "Sun" to deliver other sacred waters (tīrtha), known for their capacity to carry people to liberation, into the kośā’s water. Since everything is thought to be dissolved in the "Sun," it is the source of all tīrthas. Since the Sanskrit word "kara" means both a ray of the sun and the hand, and since the chest area of the body is also conceived of as the sun, through his stirring and pointing mudrā the purohita’s "body sun" delivers the "ray" into the kośā. In this way, with the ankuśa (goad) mudrā, the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, and other holy rivers (nāḍī) are delivered into the kośā.

Om gaṅge ca yamune caiva godāvart sarasvati/ narmade sindhu kavert jale 'smin sannidhiṃ kuru.

Om! May the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā, and others like the Godāvari, Sarasvatī, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaverī come to this water.

Its fulfillment is symbolized by the dhenu (cow) mudrā. The kośā is then covered with the matsya (fish) mudrā.

13This is called ankuśa (goad) mudrā.

14The goad (ankuśa), used by elephant trainers, is a symbol of control. The goad, tiny in comparison to the elephant, when properly used steers, directs, and generally compels the large power to follow the trainer’s directions. Similarly, the purohita compels the waters to enter the kośā.

15This mudrā which resembles a cow’s udder represents the successful transfer of sacred, spiritually nourishing waters into the kośā, which is symbolically transformed into the Earth Cow ("dhenu" also means "the Earth").

16This mudrā is thought to seal the ritual, marking its effective accomplishment. Fish which swim in those sacred rivers are now present in the consecrated vessel. The term matsya also recalls the first incarnation (avatāra) of Viśnū who, during a great Deluge, is said to have only saved the seventh Manu and the Seven Sages from inundation. The symbol of the fish thus also connotes the salvific power of these waters.
Puṣpaśuddhi (Purification of Flowers)

Then, dipping kuṣa grass into the kośā, the purohita sprinkles the consecrated water in different directions, purifying the objects in the room. He then purifies the flowers that will be used in the worship ceremony. Touching the flowers, which are kept in a plate set on a tripod to his right, he utters:

Om puspe puspe mahāpuspe supuspe puṣpaśambhave/
puspacayāvakirṇe ca hum phat svāhā.

Om! [Through the utterance of the mystic syllables,] "Hum phat" may flowers, small and big flowers, beautiful flowers, things born of flowers, and the space scattered over by heaps of flowers be purified.

Asana Śuddhi

He next performs the ritual of purification of the seat (āsana śuddhi), by drawing a triangle with water from his fingers on the floor just in front of his mat. With hands crossed at the feet, and offering a flower dipped in sandal paste, he utters:

Om hṛṃ ādharāṣaktaye kamalāsanāya namah.

Then touching the seat he says:

āsanamantrasya merupṛṣṭhariṣh sutalam chandah kūrmodevata āsanopavesane viniyogah.

The approximate meaning of this combined act and utterance is:

Om! Uttering "Hṛṃ" [I offer this flower] to this seat of lotus, the supreme supporting power [i.e., the goddess]. Its sage is Merupṛṣṭha, the metre is Sutala, the presiding deity is the Tortoise, and its application is the function of sitting.

Then with folded hands he recites:

Om prthvi tvayā dhṛta lokah deva tvam viṣṇunā dhṛta/

---

17 For Durgā Pūjā, the red hibiscus or China rose (japā) is common.

18 Merupṛṣṭha literally means the "the back/roof of Meru," the cosmic mountain. It stands for the sky or heavens. Kūrma, or tortoise, on which the cosmos rests, symbolically recalls the second incarnation of Viṣṇu who served as a "base support" for the cosmic mountain when the oceans were churned by the gods and demons to extract the nectar of immortality (amṛta). Among the many things to emerge from this churning was the goddess Śrī/Lakṣmī. Sutala, means "foundation," and is also the name of one of the seven nether regions (of which pātala is the lowest). I therefore suggest that heaven, earth and the netherworlds are linked in the āsana which represents, through the symbolism of Meru and Kūrma, the cosmic ridgepole or axis mundi.
Om! O Earth, the worlds are borne by you. You, O Goddess, are borne by Viṣṇu. Please bear me eternally and thus purify this seat.

Bhūta Śuddhi (Purification of the Elements)

Next the purohita proceeds to purify the bhūtas. It is thought to be a cleansing of his constituent elements and his attachment to outward material things. Thus bodily and external matter to which the individual clings are both thought to constitute the physical being, and it is this gross body which is transformed in this purification ritual. It begins with ritual yogic breathing (prānāyāma) using various mantras. In this prānāyāma, the sacred mantra, Om (om-kara) is not used. Other seed syllables (bija) are utilized. The energy vortices (cakra) within the body are purified with mantras so the dormant potential energy (kundalini) can be activated and allowed to move up the bodily energy channels (nādi) smoothly. The lower cakras are merged into the upper, until the purohita's body is transformed into one of immaculate substance.¹⁹

Nyāsa: Kara and Aṅga (Imprintment: Hand and Limb)

The purohita then performs nyāsa. This is a yogic ritual practice in which the vibrational sounds which constitute the entire conceptualized universe, sounds which are contained in the alphabet of the Sanskrit language, are imprinted on various parts of the transformed body. Since all concepts are capable of being labelled with language composed of the vowels and consonants of the Sanskrit language, it is understood that the entire conceptualized cosmos can be symbolically reduced to this alphabet. By associating letters to body parts, the microcosm of the purified body is made to correspond to, to represent, to parallel, even to contain the divine macrocosm. Kara nyāsa, through an act of meditative visualization, places these Sanskrit syllables in the fingers of the hand (kara) and then these syllables are placed in six parts (aṅga) of the body in a procedure called aṅga nyāsa. Appropriate mantras are recited in conjunction

¹⁹The details of this purification will be given in the discussion of Durgā pūjā.
with the mudrās.20

Dig Bandhana (Restraining the Directions)

The purohita restrains the directions (dig bandhana), establishing a perimeter around the space in which the ritual is to be performed. To do so he snaps his fingers in each of the ten directions (North, East, West, South, their midpoints, and the zenith and nadir).21

Bhūtāpasāraṇa (Dispersing the Agencies of Obstacles)

Finally he performs the ritual of bhūtāpasāraṇa, removing the agencies which might prove obstacles to the ritual. Such obstacles are twofold. They include the internal bad moods and dispositions which could result in failure or poor performance of the pūjā, as well as the outer agencies which may prevent one from proper performance. These outer agencies may be disembodied spirits of the recently dead (bhūta), ghosts (preta), vampires (vēta/a), and a host (gāṇa) of other such pernicious beings.22

20Some purohitas suggest that ādya Śaṅkarācārya, the great 7th or 8th century C.E. reviver of Hinduism, founder of the Hindu monastic (matha) system, and proponent of a philosophy of non-dualistic understanding (advaita vedānta) prescribed these practices. Śaṅkara is often invoked to give a measure of legitimacy or orthodoxy to such ritual practices. For instance, his reputed composition of the Saundaryalahari (The Wave of Beauty), a Goddess text, draws the Śaṅkta tradition into the mainstream of Hinduism with which he is identified. Although better known as a devotional text, the Saundaryalahari frequently has yantras appended to it, which are to be used ritually with each of its verses.

Elaboration upon the nyāsa ritual will follow later in the study.

21From my discussions with the ritualists, this is what I understand to be the meaning of this procedure. Just as timing is crucial in ritual performance with windows of sacred time appearing during the year (e.g., Navarātra), within which there are further subdivisions of sacrality (e.g., the conjunction of the eighth and ninth day), so too, the vast expanse of space must be divided and consecrated. The ritual must occur at a particular point in the space-time continuum, and thus the directional elements have to be held back. Within the sacred perimeter, virtually a "black hole," there is no time, no space, no direction. The directions are restrained, held back, often with guardians placed at the cardinal points to prevent the untimely intrusion of the "create" into the "uncreate" primordium.

22Details of this ritual will follow in the context of Durgā Pūjā.
Offerings to Brāhmaṇa Attendants

Sometimes there is only one purohita performing the entire pūjā. But for elaborate pūjās such as Durgā pūjā, it is not unusual to find a few brāhmaṇas assisting the priest. These may include the tantradhāraka, who coaches the purohita by pointing his finger along the written ritual script, prompting him at stages when he has lost his place, and so on. Other brāhmaṇas, friends or relatives of the yajamāna may be assisting in the lighting of lamps, or the placement of offerings. Flowers, sandal paste, and a small quantity of washed, uncooked rice (attapa) are offered by the purohita who pinches the offering with his thumb and fingers (as when moving a chess piece) and places them in the tāmra pātra in front of the brāhmaṇas.23 He says three times:

\[
\text{Om kartavyesmin durgāpūjana karmāni} \\
\text{Om punyāham bhavanto bruvantu}
\]

Om! On the occasion of this ritual to be performed for Durgā, would you please utter "Om punyāham" (Let auspiciousness be on me).

The brāhmaṇas are asked three times to repeat the request for auspicious benediction. If they are unable to repeat the mantra (e.g., not present at the time, or unable to utter the sacred Sanskrit mantra), the purohita will do it on their behalf.

When offering flowers to them he says:

\[
\text{Om kartavyesmin durgāpūjana karmāni} \\
\text{Om svasti bhavanto bruvantu}
\]

Om! On the occasion of this ritual to be performed for Durgā would you please utter "Om svasti" (Om! Approval).

And he, with fingers facing downward, gently tosses the flowers into the tāmra pātra.

Again:

\[
\text{Om kartavyesmin durgāpūjana karmāni} \\
\text{Om rādhīr bhavanto bruvantu}
\]

Om! . . . would you please utter "Om rādhīm (Om! Prosperity).

---

23 Attapa is the kind of rice normally used for pūjā offerings. First it is dried and then husked, but it is not cooked. Siddha is rice which is first boiled, dried, and then husked. This is popular in Bengal and is not used in rituals.
The *brahmānas* repeat:

*Om r̥dyatām. Om r̥dyatām. Om r̥dyatām.* (Let there be prosperity.)

When finished he says, with folded hands:

*Om sūryah soma yamah kalaḥ sandhye bhūtānyah ksapah/
pavane dikpatir bhunir ākāśah kacarāmarāḥ/
brahmyam śasanam asthāya kalpadhvaṁ iha sannidhim.
Om tat sat ayamārambhaḥ śubhāya bhavatu.*

The deities superintending over the sun, the moon, death, time, the two junctures of day and night, the waters and other elements, the wind, the guardians of the directions, the earth, the sky, those who move in the sky, the immortals, etc., properly following the rules/discipline as given by Brahmā, all of you should remain present here. May this beginning of ours be auspicious.

After having blessed and propitiated the *brahmānas*, and invoked the celestial beings to attend the ritual and make the commencement auspicious, the *purohita* proceeds to the *svasti vācanam*.

**Svasti Vācanam (Utterance of Approval)**

Taking some rice from the plate, the *purohita* says:

*Om somam rajanam varuṇam agnim anvārabhāmahe/
adityam viśnum sūryam brahmāṇanca brahmāṇaḥ brahmāṇaḥ brahmāṇaḥ/ Om svasti, svasti, svasti.*

[Interpretation was not offered by the *purohita* since this is a Vedic verse].

[SV.1.91a; TS.1.7.10.3a; SB.5.1, 5.9]

The plate (*tāmra pātra*) is placed on a tripod (*tripādikā*) which is placed in a big bowl. Should the *tāmra pātra* fill with water and overflow, the big bowl collects the overflow.

This *svasti vācanam* is described in the Sama Veda fashion. There are also Ṛg and Yajur Veda ways of performance according to the family’s Vedic association. Public (*sārvajanīna* *pūjā*) normally follows the Yajur Veda method, unless the representative *yajamāna* is from a Sama or Ṛg Veda *brahmana* family.

There is also a Tantric method of *svasti vācanam*. It is likely to be used if the *purohita* has special initiation, and if so desires. It is a must if performing the *pūjā* of Tantric deity. However, since Durgā it worshipped with a combination of Vedic,
Purānic, and Tantric elements, the use of Tantric variants are left to the purohita’s discretion.

Saṅkalpa (Oath)

Saṅkalpa is the standard preliminary oath taken before the performance of any pūjā or vowed observance (vrata) of some duration. In it the purohita promises what he intends to do during the course of the pūjā. During the preliminary observances (sāmanya vidhi) prior to Durgā Pūjā it reads as follows:

Visnurom tat sadadya aśvine māsi kanyārasīste bhāskare śukle pakṣe saaptamśe iithau vārabhya mahānavam māvat amukagotra (kaśyapagotra for the purohitas whom I consulted) śrī . . . devāsarma (here varieties of desires wished for through the performance of the pūjā may be introduced) sarvāpačhānti pārvaka dirghāyuṣṭva paramaiśvarya atula dhana dhānya putra paurāḍaya navacchinnna santati mira vardhana śatrukṣayottottottara rājasamānādyaḥbhīṣṭa siddhaye paratra deviloκa prāptaye ca (śrīdurgāpṛiti kāmo vā) yathopakalpitopaharaiḥ devipurāṇokata vidhinā saptaṁ vīhiṁa rambhāḍi navapatrīkā snāna pravesa mrnmaya śrīdurgāpravesa mahāsnāna ganapatyādi nānādevata pājāpārvaka vārṣiṣka śarat kālīna śrī bhagavaddurgāpājā chchāga paśu balidāna mahāstami vīhiṁa mrnmaya śrīdurgāmahāsnāna ganapatyādi nānādevata pājāpārvaka śrībhagavaddurgāpājā chchāgapaśu balidāna mahāstami mahānavam sandhikāla vīhiṁa ganapatyādi nānādevata pājāpārvaka śrī bhagavaddurgā pājā chchāgapaśu balidāna mahānavam vīhiṁa mrnmaya śrīdurgāmahāsnāna ganapatyādi nānādevata pājā chchāgapaśu balidāna pārvaka śrī bhagavaddurgā pājana mahāmaham kariye.24

Om Viṣṇu! Today, in the month of Aśvina, in the Kanya (Virgo/virgin) constellation (aśvina naksatra), from the 7th to the 9th of the bright fortnight, I,_______, of the ________ lineage, after allaying all obstacles, invoke peacefulness in order to obtain peacefulness and prosperity, wealth and food, sons and grandsons and an unbroken lineage, increasing numbers of friends, the destruction of my enemies, and to continue my association with endowments of honour from the overlord of the country, to obtain the results of my desires in this world and after my non-existence in this world. (He may alternately only say "in order to obtain the satisfaction of Śrī Durgā.") What has been gathered by me following the tradition of the Devī Purāṇa, I shall follow all the rituals prescribed there, namely: the navapatrīkā, installation, entering the temple, getting Devī Durgā to enter the temple, the great bath, and performing the rituals to Ganeśa and the

24 "Amuka" is a term equivalent to "John Doe." The purohita replaces it with the yajamana’s lineage (gotra). This gotra is related to a Vedic brahmana family, such as Kaśyapa.

If the pūjā is performed for others, the purohita ends with the word "kariṣyāmi," which is the parasmaipadi first person future form of the verbal root "kr" (to do). If he is performing the pūjā for himself he will use the atmanepadi form, "kariṣye," used for actions pertaining to the self. Both forms translate as, "I will do/perform."
other deities. After that a goat shall be offered (this is only said if a sacrifice will be performed). On the seventh day (mahāsaptami), the bathing of the clay moulded Śrī Durgā, Ganeśa, etc., and after that a goat sacrifice (balidana) will be offered. Again at the juncture of the eighth and ninth tiṭhi (mahāstami mahānāvami sandhikāla) Ganeśa and the other gods should be worshipped, and the clay image of Durgā bathed and worshipped, and a goat sacrifice offered. Again on the ninth day (mahānāvami) the whole process will be repeated.

While reciting this saṅkalpa, the purohita places his right hand over the kuśī which he holds in his left hand, and which has some water, rice, white flowers, sandal paste, dūrvā grass, and a harītakī fruit placed in it. At the critical moment, when he comes to the end of the saṅkalpa, on the word "kariṣye" he overturns the vessel on the floor to the right. This is a dramatic ritual gesture of commitment to the oath. He then sprinkles some rice while reciting the saṅkalpa sūkta verses from the Ṛg Veda.

Saṅkalpa Sūkta (Oath Hymn)

The saṅkalpa sūkta is a short hymn of praise (sūkta) which is offered up to assure the successful enactment of the oath. It is a drawn from the Ṛg Veda, symbolically linking the entire ritual procedure (pūjā) to Vedic sacrificial (yajna) antecedents.

Om devo vo dravinodāh pūrnam vivaśāsycam udvā siṅcadhvam upa vā prnadhvam ādīdvo deva ohate/
Om saṅkalpitārtha siddhirastu.
[RV.7.16.11a; SV.1.55a]

The above mentioned rituals are preliminary to the celebrations of Durgā Pūjā proper, which begin on the sixth lunar day (tiṭhi) of the nine lunar tiṭhis of Navarātra.25

25As previously mentioned, the sāmānīya vidhi described here is a modification specific to a particular group of purohitas prior to their performance of Durgā Pūjā. If the subsequent special (viśeṣa) pūjā to be performed is not as elaborate, the procedural order is as follows: ācamana, svasti vācanam, saṅkalpa, āsana śuddhi, jala śuddhi, puspa śuddhi, purification of palms and fingers of the hand (kara śuddhi), preparation of the vessels for argha (arghapraṇapratīpatti), sāmānīya argha, offerings to dīkṣālas, prāṇāyāma, bhūta śuddhi, mātraka nyāsa, kara nyāsa, aṅga nyāsa, antarmātrkā nyāsa, vahya mātrkā nyāsa, pīṭha nyāsa, rṣyadi nyāsa, aṅga nyāsa (again), kara nyāsa (again), caśuṣr dāna, prāna pratiṣṭha, avahāna, dhyāṇa of the deity, manasa pūjā, preparation of the vessels for viśeṣa argha, viśeṣa argha, dhyāṇa of the deity, and detailed pūjā of the deity.

Since Durgā Pūjā is rather elaborate, purohitas modify the sāmānīya vidhi, performing many of the procedures within the context of the bodhana rituals which follow.

One can see that the order and content of the procedures listed above differs from classic puranic prescriptions concerning the worship of the Goddess as described, for instance, in detail in Van Kooij's
The two main rituals performed on the sixth (śaṣṭhi) day are bodhana and adivāsanam. Due to a variance between the solar and lunar calendars, the sixth lunar day may not overlap satisfactorily with the sixth solar day. If the sixth tithi does not endure till after sunset (actually four o’clock in the evening) on the sixth solar day, bodhana will take place on the fifth day (pañcamī), and adhivāsanam on the sixth day.
BODHANA

Bodhana means "causing to awaken." It is commonly believed that the gods sleep for six months and are awake during the other six months; the full year constituting a single night and day in their lives. During Āśvina Navarātra, Durgā needs to be woken up from her sleep, out of her normal awakening time. Thus, the ritual is sometimes called akāla bodhana (untimely awakening/awakening out of time). A myth cycle tells how Rāma performs a pūjā for Durgā to aid him in defeating the powerful and learned demon, Rāvaṇa, who had abducted his wife, Sītā. Rāma decided to wake up the goddess in the month of Āśvina, performing her pūjā six months before the normal time of her worship, in the spring month of Caitra. Durgā, propitiated, appeared to him and granted him victory.26

This is normally performed on the evening of ṣaṣṭhi. If the tithi of ṣaṣṭhi ends before four o’clock in the evening on the sixth solar day, the bodhana will be performed on the evening of the fifth day (pañcami).

Bodhana Saṅkalpas (Oaths related to the Awakening Ritual)

This oath is not the same as the general saṅkalpa done previously.

Viṣṇurom tat sadadya, . . ., amuka gotram, . . ., vārṣika śaraś kālīna śrī bhagavad durgā bodhana karmadhikāra pratibandhaka pāpapānodaṇa kāmah om devi tvam ityādi mantrādvyā japamaham karisyē.

Om Viṣṇu! Today, . . . in the autumn season, during the ritual of awakening Durgā, with the desire of removal of obstacles, I shall recite two verses beginning with "Om devi tvam" (Om! O you lady divine, etc.)

Then immediately, with folded hands, he reads out these verses:

Om devi tvam prākrantan caittam pāpākrāntam abhūnamama tannih śvaraya caittānme papam. Hum phat ca te namah!

26Most devotees claim that Rāma’s worship of the Devī during Āśvina was the "human" precedent for such worship. In the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the sage (ṛṣi) Narada tells Rāma how both ṛṣis (Bṛghu, Viśvamitra, etc.) and gods (Indra, Śiva, Narāyaṇa, etc.) worshipped the Devī in this manner to defeat their enemies.
Om sūrya somo yamaḥ kālo mahābhūtani pañcavai, śubhāśubhāsyeha karmanoḥ navas sakṣīnaḥ.

O you lady divine, my heart is born of Prakṛti and full of sins. Please remove from my heart all these sins with my utterance of "Huṃ and Phat."

The sun, the moon, the lord of death, time itself, and the five gross elements, these nine are the witnesses of deeds which may be sinful or virtuous.

The purohita then looks down and to the sides with an angry glance (krodhadrśti), mimicking the witnesses in their action of destroying the obstacles.

He then sits quietly, and taking the kuṣṭ and putting kuśa grass, sesamun (tila), and flowers (puspa) in it, he makes another saṅkalpa. This is the same as the previous long saṅkalpa up to yathopakalpitopaharāiḥ, and it then proceeds as follows:

. . . devī purāṅotavidhinā, bilva vrksa, vārisika śarat kālina, śrī bhagavad durgā pujāṅgabhūta nānadevata pūja pūrvaka śrī durgāyāḥ bodhanamaham kariṣye.

. . . I will do the bodhana of Devī Durgā according to the method of the Devī Purāṇa, and it is one of the limbs of Durgā Pūjā.

This saṅkalpa also mentions that Durga is to be invoked into a wood-apple (bilva) tree (vrksa). This tree, also called the bel, has leaves in triads, resembling a trident (trisula), and is sacred to Śiva. If a bilva tree is present closeby, the ritual will take place there. If not, a branch from the bilva tree is removed and "planted" in an earthen pot (ghaṭa). Ideally, this branch should have two fruit on it of equal size, resembling and symbolizing the breasts of the goddess. In front of this bilva vrksa, the next set of rituals will take place.

The purohita now reads the saṅkalpa sūkta, previously given.

He then begins the installation of a jar (ghaṭa) in front of the bilva tree. Just as the bilva tree represents the goddess, so does the jar (ghaṭa) which he is about to establish.

Ghaṭasthāpana (Installation of the Jar)

The jar (ghaṭa or kalaśa) is symbolic of the Devī, who will come to reside, or
more accurately, be embodied in it.\(^{27}\) While the composite structure will construe her
final form, it is crucial to recognize that each element in the composition of the jar
\((\text{ghata})\) is one of her manifest forms. In compelling ways, one can observe in the
\(\text{ghātasthāpana}\) the recreation of the body cosmos of the Devī herself.

First, a low altar of soft clay is built in front of the \(\text{bilva}\) tree.\(^{28}\) It is built over
a \(\text{yantra}\). While some homes have a very elaborate ritual diagram \((\text{ālpanā})\) drawn, more
often it is the \(\text{purohita}\) who will draw an eight-petalled \((\text{aṣṭadala})\) lotus. On occasion, the
\(\text{sarvatoḥḍadra maṇḍala}\) (Diagram of a All Auspiciousness) may be used.\(^{29}\) He utters the
following Vedic \(\text{mantra}\) while preparing the soil altar.

\[
\text{Om bhūrasi bhūmirasi aditirasi viśvadāya viśvasya bhuvanasya dhartrī prthvīṁ yacca}
\text{prthvīṁ dhṛṇha prthvīṁ mān himst.}\(^{30}\)
\]

Thou art the earth, the ground, thou are the all-sustaining Aditi, she who supported the
world. Control the earth, steady the earth, so the earth causes no injury.\(^{31}\)

The \(\text{purohita}\) next sprinkles five grains \((\text{dհānyamasi})\) on the altar: paddy, wheat,

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\(^{27}\)In many temples which house Śiva \(\text{liṅgas}\), the goddess is recognized as the \(\text{yoni}\) in which the \(\text{liṅga}\) stands. Often, a \(\text{ghata}\), a clay pot, is suspended above the \(\text{liṅga}\) and its sanctified water \((\text{amrta})\) is allowed
to drip slowly upon the \(\text{liṅga}\). This \(\text{ghata}\) is clearly the Devī, identified through certain notions, such as
the descending Gaṅgā Devī who flows through Śiva’s locks. The \(\text{ghata}\) often contains Gaṅgā water or its
metaphor.

\(^{28}\)Grain will be planted in this altar which symbolizes the goddess as earth and soil.

\(^{29}\)Here the \(\text{yantra}\) symbolizes the Devī as the unmanifest cosmic matrix from which this particular
manifestation emerges.

\(^{30}\)It comes from \(\text{Yajur Veda}\) 13.18 (Himyapāda, svt 10.406).

\(^{31}\)The symbolism of the clay altar is further expanded in this liturgical verse. The goddess earth (Bhu
Devī) and the goddess who supports the world (Jagaddhatri) are symbolically linked. So is Aditi, the Vedic
goddess who is often portrayed as the mother of the eight Adityas, gods, of whom one is the Sun. Aditi
is sometimes considered to be the mother or daughter of Dakṣa, and either the wife or mother of Visnu.
In its broadest sense Aditi is the expansive heavens, thought to be the supporter of the earth. In this latter
meaning, the altar also symbolizes the vast manifest cosmos of space and time, in which the earth resides.
barley, sesamum, and mustard. He utters:

_Om dhinuhi devaṁ dhinuhi yajñam/
dhinuhi yajña patim dhinuhi mām yajatyam._

Nourish the gods, nourish the oblation, nourish the lords of the oblation, nourish me the sacrificer also.

The jar (ghaṭa), particularly shaped with a wide circular mouth, narrow neck, and full round body, is placed on the altar as the _purohīta_ recites:

_Om ājighra kalasam mahyā tvā viśanvindavah/
punarurja nivartasva sānaḥ sahasraṁ dhuksyrudhārā payasvatt/
pānarmā viśatdrayīh._

[Vedic verse]

He next fills the jar to the neck with clean water, uttering:

_Om varunasyothambhanamasi varunasya skambha sarjanisthah/
varunasya rtaṣadanyast varunasya rtaṣadanamasāṇa._

[VS.4.36; ŚB.3.3.4.25]

Ideally, in the next step, five jewels (pañcaratna) are to be placed into the water.

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32 These grains will sprout within a few days and serve as a prophetic oracle for the quality of crops from the coming planting. The grains represent the goddess as germinal (garbha) forms of the expected harvest.

33 The symbolism of nourishment resonates with the notions of the goddess as Annapūrṇā (Replete with Sustenance) and Śākambhari (Supporter with Vegetables). "Anna" simply means "rice," or "grain," or "food." In the context of the ritual cosmic recreation, the dimension of life symbolized by the grain is noteworthy. Sowing seeds in the clay altar imbues the creation with life. Since all creation is understood as possessing consciousness, here the dimension of life which is nourishing is added. This aspect of nourishment is a crucial part of the manifest cosmos and an important component of the nature of the Devī.

34 The jar is supposed to be made of metal or clay, and represents the body of the Devī. It is the full orb of creation, or more microcosmically, the round, abundant earth itself. It is every container, ocean, lake, river, valley, cave, pond, tank, vessel, which holds treasures and life nourishing elements. It is the human body, and the female body.

35 The water is symbolic of all liquid elements in creation. It incorporates the symbolism of all the sacred female river goddesses, such as the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī. It is the sap of life which flows through all things.
Normally, five tiny filings of gold are sprinkled into it as a substitute.\(^{36}\)

The mouth of the jar is then decorated with five leaf-bearing twigs (*pañcapallava*). These are the mango (*āmra*), banyan fig (*bhargata*), *pippala*, *aśoka*, and *yatnādumbara* (a twig commonly used in fire oblations).\(^{37}\) He utters:

\[
\text{Om dhanvanā gā dhanvanājim jayema/}
\text{tivrāh samado jayema/}
\text{dhanuḥ satorapakāram krotni dhanvanā sarvāḥ pradiśo jayema.}
\]

[RV.6.75.2a; VS.29.39a]

He then places a fruit (*phala*), ideally a green coconut, on the jar.\(^{38}\) Often, a green coconut is unavailable and a dried husked coconut is used as a substitute. While doing so he says:

\[
\text{Om yāh phalint ryā aphalā apuspā yaśca puspinthī/}
\text{brhaspati prasūtāstā no muṅcatvaṅghm hasah.}
\]

[RV.10.97.15a; VS.12.89a]

Next, a vermillion (*sindūra*) diagram symbolizing the goddess is drawn on the *ghata*. It resembles a stick drawing of a human being.\(^{39}\) The *purohita* recites:

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\(^{36}\)This procedure is occasionally completely omitted as the cost of staging such *pājās* escalates. The jewels symbolize the treasure and wealth within creation. In this manner, it recalls the goddess Śrī/Lakṣmī who is associated with material bounty and riches.

\(^{37}\)The diversity of creation is symbolized by the number five used in the selection of grains, jewels, and leaf-bearing twigs. Most obvious is the notion of the five gross elements (*bhūta, tattva*), but there are numerous such collections.

Many people use only mango leaves instead of the prescribed variety.

The leaf-bearing twigs identify the goddess with all trees, not just the *bilva* tree into which she is invoked. The twigs represent the process of growth of life, through the symbolism of the sap or blood which flows through them.

\(^{38}\)The coconut serves as the head of the goddess’s body, which is being gradually built up. The coconut represents the fruition of the growth initially symbolized by the twig-bearing leaves. The coconut is often offered to the goddess in her temples. As such it has often been identified as a substitute for a human or animal head. Yet, it is also quite clear that the coconut is a symbol of the Devī’s own head which is offered back to her. The Devī’s decapitation of herself is well represented in the images of Chinnamastā, where streams of nourishing blood flow from the Devī’s severed neck into her own mouth and into the mouths of her attendants.

\(^{39}\)This symbol of the Devī, which appears quite ancient, is found throughout India. It is referred to as a *svāstika* (a symbol of well-being) and it resembles the better known form of that symbol. The Devī *svāstika* also resembles the trident (*trīśula*), and has even been identified, by some devotees, with the *pranava*, "Om."
As rushing down, the rapids of a river flow swifter than the wind, the vigorous currents, the streams of oil in swelling fluctuation like a red courser bursting through the fences.  

The purohita then drapes a cloth (vastra) (often red, or red-bordered) over the coconut and the entire jar (ghaṭa), tying it the edges snugly, so that it resembles a woman discreetly enshrouded in a sari. He says:

*Om yuva suvāsāḥ parivṛtta āgāt sa u śreyān bhavati jāyamānāḥ/ tam āhitrāsah kavyaḥ unnayanti sādhyā manasa devayantarḥ.*  
[RV.3.8.4a; AB.2.2.29a]

He sprinkles the top of the Devī with dūrva grass saying:

*Om kāndāt kāndāt prarohanti puruṣaḥ paruṣaḥ pari/ Evā no dūrve pratanu sahasreṇa śatena ca.*  
[VS.13.2a; ŚB.7.4.2.14; TA.10.1.7a]

And with flowers (puspa), saying:

*Om śrīṣca te lakṣmiṣca patnyā ahorātre parśve nakṣatrāṇi rūpamaśvinau vyāttam/ isāniṣana mumma isāna sarvalokan ma iśāna.*  
[VSK.35.22n]

And with sandalpaste (gandha), saying:

*Om gandhadvārām dārādhāraṃ nityapustāne kariṣṭāṃ/ iśvarī sarvabhūtanām tvāmihopahvaye śriyam.*  
[RVKh.5.87.9a; TA.10.1]

**Sthirī Karaṇa (Giving Steadiness)**

When the jar (kalaṣa) is established, the purohita proceeds to the ritual of sthīrī karaṇa, "giving steadiness to the jar." This ritual acts firmly plants the jar in its location. It serves as a closure to the elaborate ritual of installation (sthāpana). To do so he recites:

The colour of vermillion is red, like blood, and symbolizes the ooze of sap or juice, when a fruit is ripe. It is the menstrual blood of the matured female or the pregnant climax before delivery.

*This is a Vedic verse [RV.4.58.7]*
Next, he recites the *Gāyatrī Mantra* one to ten times over the jar.

_Om bhūḥ bhūvah svāḥ tat savitur vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt. Om._

Om! Let us contemplate the wondrous spirit of the Divine Creator (Savitṛ) of the earthly, atmospheric, and celestial spheres. May he direct our minds, that is ‘towards’ the attainment of _dharma, artha, kāma, _and _mokṣa_. Om!

**Kāṇḍā Ropanam (Erecting the Staffs)**

Four sticks, slightly longer than the height of the _kalaśa_, and forked at the tops, are stuck in large lumps of clay and placed at four corners around the jar. A red thread is then wrapped clockwise around the sticks making about seven to ten rounds from the bottom to the top.⁴¹ The _purohita_ utters the mantra:

_Om kāṇḍāt kāṇḍāt prarohant puruṣah puruṣah pari/ eva no dūrve pratanuḥ sahasreṇa śatenaca._

[V.S.13.20a; S.B.7.4.2.14; T.A.10.1.7a]

**Tantric Method of Ghaṭasthāpana**

Clearly, the aforementioned procedure of establishing the jar is both lengthy and complicated. The _purohita_ may run the risk of making errors in the recitation of the Vedic _mantras_ or may run out of time. He may therefore opt for the Tantric method of _ghaṭasthāpana_, which is simpler by far. Lengthy _mantras_ are replaced by seed syllables (_bija_) which encompass the potency and meaning of the expanded forms.

In the Tantric method, the _purohita_ purifies the jar by uttering "_Klīm," _and then _"Aim." _Placing the jar on the earth altar he utters "_Hṛīm," _and fills it with the _mantra

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⁴¹ The term "ropanam" means "to plant," and is somewhat more suggestive of the method in which the _kāṇḍās_ are erected, implanted in balls of mud. I was told that the term _kāṇḍā_ originally meant a length of branch between two knots. The forked tops of the _kāṇḍā_, together with the mud balls, conjure an image of a young trees being propagated. When wrapped around with string, it conveys an image of fencing or cordonning off a sacred space. The jar embodied Devī thus sits upon an earthen altar, seeded with grain, surrounded by forked branches.
"Hrīm." Then the purohita utters the mantra:

\[
\text{Om gāṅgādyah saritah sarvah sarāmsi jaladā nadāh/}
\text{hradāh prasravanāh punyāh svarga pātāla bhūgaṭāh/}
\text{sarva tirthānti punyāni ghaṭe kurvantu sannidhim.}
\]

Om! All rivers beginning with the Gaṅgā and all mighty water-givers, holy fountains, abiding in the heavens, nether world or earth, all these auspicious and meritorious tirthas should abide in this jar.

When placing the leaf-bearing twigs on the jar, he utters "Śrīm." Uttering "Hum," he places the coconut on top of the kalaśa. To steady the kalaśa, he utters "Srīm." Anointing it with vermillion, he utters "Ram." Placing the flowers, he utters "Yam." When placing the dūrvā grass, he utters the seed (bija) syllable of Durgā, "Dum." Sprinkling the jar with water, he says "Om," and striking it with kuśa grass he utters the mantra, "Hum phat svāhā."

Sāmānyārgha (Common Offering)

After establishing the jar (ghaṭasthāpana), the purohita proceeds to the common sacred offering (sāmānyārgha). Dipping his finger in water, he draws, under the kośā, a small downward pointing triangle, symbolic of the female generative organ (yoni) in which he writes the seed syllable (bija) of Durgā, "Dum." He encircles the triangle with a circle (maṇḍala) and the circle is surrounded with a square (bhūpura). He has, in essence, created a yantra.

Then some rice is taken from the plate of worship materials on his right hand side, he scatters it on the yantra, saying:

\[
\text{Om āḍhara ṣaktaye namah/}
\text{Om kārmaṭya namah/}
\text{Om anantāya namah/}
\text{Om pṛthivyai namah.}
\]

Salutations to the Supporting Power
Salutations to the Tortoise
Salutations to the Endless Serpent
Salutations to the Earth.42

He then washes the container (argha pâtra) which will be used for the sacred offering, namely the kośā, while uttering "Phat."43 He fills it with water, uttering "Om." Worshipping the water in the vessel, he utters:

\[\text{Am sūrya mandalaya dvādaśa kalātmane namahi}\\ \text{Um soma mandalaya sodaśa kalātmane namahi}\\ \text{Maṁ vahni mandalaya daśa kalātmane namah.}\]

Am! Salutations to the disc of the sun consisting of twelve divisional elements.
Um! Salutations to the disc of the moon consisting of sixteen divisional elements.
Maṁ! Salutations to the disc of fire consisting of ten subtle elements (digits).44

At the head of the kośā, the purohita places dārvā grass, flowers, and sandal paste.45 Then he stirs it well with his middle finger.46 He performs the mudrās of the goad (aṅkuṣa), the cow (dhenu), and the fish (matsya) uttering:

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42All references are to entities which support or bear the cosmos. Here again the yantra represents the unmanifest cosmic matrix which is the Goddess. The scattered rice grains represent the coming into manifestation of the all encompassing energy base, the mythic cosmic supports (tortoise and serpent), and the earth itself. The tortoise and cosmic serpent, often identified with Viṣṇu, are here identified with the goddess.

43In the argha rituals which form part of the common preliminary duties (sāmānāya vidhi), the smaller copper kusā is used as the worship vessel. Here it is the larger kośā which is used. Both vessels resemble the female reproductive organ, the vulva, which they represent.

44The pranava or omkāra, "Aum," or "Om" is composed of the letters "A," "U," and "M," corresponding the sun, the moon, and fire respectively. The essence of the pranava is the Devī.

The argha is often connected with sun worship, but here the sun, moon, and fire are linked, along with their constituent parts, and identified with the Devī.

45The head of the kośā corresponds to the upper part of the vulva. The dārvā, a hardy green grass, is common nutrition for grazing animals, such as cows, buffaloes, and goats. Its symbolic meaning, I suggest, resonates with the sustaining aspects of the goddess in her role as Annapūrṇā. It is also thought of as the hair on the goddess Earth (prthivī). The flower (often a red hibiscus, possessing four large red petals and prominent pistil) elicits identification with the labia and clitoris of the female reproductive organ. Both flower and sandal paste convey the sensory element of scent.

46The significance of these mudrās has been explained earlier. The stirring with the middle finger is either separate from, or combined with the aṅkuṣa mudrā which has two forms, one with the middle finger extended and index finger curved, and the other with only the index finger curved. I suggest that the movement of the middle finger within the kośā, which represents the vulva, has implicit erotic connotations. This manipulation stimulates the flow of salvific fluids (tīrtha).
Om gange ca yamune ca godavarti sarasvati narmade sindhu kaveri jalesmin sannidhim kuru.

Om! May the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvari, Sarasvatī, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaverī come into this water’s proximity.

When the induced flow and sanctification of the waters is complete, placing his hand over the kośā, (also called the offering vessel, argha pātra), the purohita silently repeats "Om" ten times. He then sprinkles the consecrated water with a little kuśa grass over his own body, the worship materials, and the images (murti).

Bhūtaparasaraṇa (Removal of Inimical Spirits)

The purohita now takes either white mustard or rice, and uttering the following mantra scatters the grain in various directions.

Om apasarpantu te bhūtāḥ ye bhūtāḥ bhuvīsamsthitāḥ/ ye bhūtāḥ vighnā kartaraste naSyantu śivājñayā.

Om! May those ghosts be gone who are abiding in this earth and those ghosts who are the makers of obstacles, by the command of Śiva, disappear.

He then draws a triangle (trikona) with cow-dung on the left-hand side of his seat, and worships it with flowers and sandal paste while uttering the mantra:

Om ete gandha puspe/ om ksetrapāladāth bhūtaganēbhyoḥ namah.

Om! These flowers and fragrances are offered with obeisence to the group of protectors of the field and the host of elemental spirits.

Placing some māsa (pulse with its husk), curd, and turmeric (haridrā) powder in a wood-apple (bilva) leaf plate, the purohita mixes them together. Taking a small quantity of the mixture, he addresses it, purifying the offering:

Om esah māsabhaktabalaye namah.

Om! Salutations to this sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse.

He then offers the mixture on the bilva plate (pātra) to the spirits, saying:

Om esah māsa bhakta balih/ Om ksetrapāladāth bhūtaganēbhyoḥ namah.
Om! This sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse is offered with obeisance to the group of protectors of the field and the host of elemental spirits.

With folded hands, the purohita next prays:

*Om bhūta preta piśācaścas dānavāḥ rākṣasāśca ye sāntim kurvantu te sarve imaṁ grḥantu tad balim.*

The elemental spirits, departed souls, goblins, demons, and fiends should create an atmosphere of peace and receive this offering of mine.

And taking white mustard seed in his hand, he scatters it around the offering, saying:

*Om vetālaśca piśācaśca rākṣasāśca sarṣtpah apasarpantu te sarve narasinghena tāditaḥ.*

May all of you vampires, goblins, fiends, and crawling entities be driven away by Narasiṅgha.⁴⁷

**Prāṇāyāma (Control of the Vital Energy)**

After driving away the inimical spirits, the purohita performs the yogic control (*ayāma*: expansion and restraint) of the vital energy (*prāṇa*) in breath. A single prāṇāyāma cycle consists of inhalation through one nostril (the other is kept shut with the thumb), retention of the breath (both nostrils are now closed with the thumb and index or ring finger), and exhalation through the other nostril. Then inhalation through the same nostril through which exhalation took place, retention, and exhalation through the other nostril. Once again inhalation, retention, and exhalation. Thus a single cycle, for example, is: in(r)-hold-out(l), in(l)-hold-out(r), and in(r)-hold-out(l). At a minimum, the inhalation may be done to a count of four, retention for a count of sixteen, and exhalation for a count of eight. Based on the expertise and desire of the purohita, the count may be altered in complex and lengthier ways. Three prāṇāyāma cycles are performed and the seed syllables Hrīṁ, Kliṁ, Duṁ, or Om are uttered during the yogic activity.

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⁴⁷The inimical spirits include the guardians of the field. They are both appeased through the offerings and driven away. Śiva and Viṣṇu (in his fierce incarnation as the man-lion avatāra) are invoked to command away the malevolent beings.
The purohita is now ready to embark upon the purification of the gross material elements of the body (bhūtaśuddhi).

The body is understood to be composed of five basic elements (pañcamahābhūta): earth, water, fire, air, and ether. These bhūtas are themselves composed of vibrational clusters expressed by certain seed syllables (bijā). Thus:

- Earth (prthvī) is made of the syllable Lām.
- Water (jala) is made of the syllable Vān.
- Fire (agni) is made of the syllable Rān.
- Air (vāyu) is made of the syllable Yān.
- Ether (ākāśa) is made of the syllable Hān.

Furthermore, these five bhūtas are connected with five of the body’s energy vortices (cakra). Thus:

- Mūlādharā is associated with prthvī
- Svādhishthana is associated with jala
- Manipura is associated with agni
- Anāhata is associated with vāyu
- Viśuddhi is associated with ākāśa

The purohita sits cross-legged and taking water in the palm of his right hand he encircles his entire body conceiving it to be a wall of fire.4 He then places his right palm over the left on his lap. Uttering the mantra, "So'ham (I am this)," he conceptually, and emotionally leads the limited self (jīvatman), which is said to abide in the centre of the heart like the flame of a lamp (visualized as a bud of a flower), to the thousand-petalled lotus (sahasrāra) approximately located at the top of the head. He does this by arousing the coiled, serpentine energy (kundalīnī) which abides in the mūlādharā cakra. He allows the kundalīnī to snake upwards along the central energy channel (suṣumṇā). On its journey, the awakened kundalīnī traverses the lower energy cakras until it reaches the heart cakra (anāhata) from where the limited self (jīvatman) is carried up by her (Kundalīnī is personified as a goddess) to the sahasrāra. The thousand-petalled lotus is

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4He may assume the full lotus posture (padmāsana).
conceived of as facing downwards, symbolizing in one conception the varied and manifold creation descending from the single supreme unmanifest reality. The limited self (jīvatman) is made to unite with that supreme Brahman (parātman) in the pericarp of that lotus.

During the raising of kūndalini the purohita conceives that the (1) earth has been dissolved in water, (2) water in fire, (3) fire in air, (4) air in ether, (5) ether in sound, (6) sound in form, (7) form in taste, (8) taste in touch, (9) touch in smell, (10) smell goes to rest in the nose, (11) the nose goes to rest in the tongue, (12) the tongue goes to rest in the eye, (13) the eye goes to rest in the skin, (14) the skin goes to rest in the ear, (15) the ear goes to rest in (16) the mouth (organ of speech), which in turn dissolves into (17) the hands, (18) the feet, (19) the arms, (20) the generative organ, all of which rest in (21) matter or the sentient, primordial energy (prakṛti), then (22) mind (manas), (23) intellect (buddhi), and (24) ego (ahaṅkāra). The subtle essence of each of these twenty-four elements or states (tattva) are to be conceived as dissolved into the latter and finally into that supreme reality (parātman, parabrahman, paramaśiva).49

This act is a deep and profound meditation which is executed according to the capacity and yogic attainment of the purohita, who next proceeds to perform another prāṇāyāma as part of the bhūta śuddhi ritual.

Taking the seed syllable (bija) "Yam", he exhales air from the left nostril thinking it to be smoky coloured. He does similarly with exhalations from the right nostril with the same bija, repeating the prāṇāyāma sixteen times. Next, taking the bija, "Ram," he inhales it with the colour red through the right nostril to a count of four. Holding the bija "Ram" with the breath, he visualizes a sinful person (pāpapuruṣa) residing in his body.50 Then he vividly imagines the pāpapuruṣa burned by the bija "Ram," while the

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49This supreme reality is envisioned as the union of the goddess Kūndalinī with the supreme Śiva, or is thought of non-dualistically as the supreme goddess.

50The pāpapuruṣa is generally visualized on the left side of the belly.
breath is held. Upon exhalation to a count of eight, he visualizes the ashes of the destroyed sinful being being ejected from the left nostril. Then, inhaling in from the left nostril he manifests a white coloured bīja of the moon, "Yam." This moon he visualizes on his forehead (in the place of the third eye). He manifests the bīja, "Vam," during the breath retention, and "Lam" to steady his body.

Abbreviated Version of Bhūta Śuddhi

The purohita conceptually builds a wall of fire around himself as described above. He then proceeds to perform prāṇāyāma. During the period of breath retention, when both nostrils are held, he utters these four mantras:

- Om mūla srṅgāta chīrāḥ susumnā pathena jīvaśivam paramaśivapade yojayāmi svāhā.
- Om yam liṅgaśatāram śoṣaya śoṣaya svāhā.
- Om ram saṅkoṣā śatīram dāhā dāhā svāhā.
- Om paramaśīva susumnā pathena mūla srṅgatam ullāsollasat ullasat jvala jvala prajvala prajvala hām saḥ so'ham svāhā.

These are concerned with uniting the limited self (jīvaśīva) with the supreme self (paramaśīva) through the susumnā which connects the prāṇa channels of the base and the head. They deal with the drying and burning of the subtle body and its sheaths (kośā). While uttering these mantras, he should meditatively visualize the transformation of his body.

Mātrkā nyāsa (Imprintment with the Alphabet)

The purohita now proceeds to the ritual imprintment (nyāsa) of the Sanskrit

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51The Sanskrit syllable, "ra" (repha), which is composed of the consonant, "r" + the vowel "a," as well as the seed syllable (bīja), "Ram," formed through the addition of the nasal ending (anusvāra), are associated with fire (agni). Thus it is appropriately used to burn the pāpapuruṣa.

52This process is said to recompose the body. Originally made up of gross and subtle elements, the body is constituted of pure nectar when the goddess Kundalini rises and unites with the supreme Śiva in the sahasrāra. This pure nectar then rains back down on the purified body like the discharge of sexual fluid from their union. When it reaches back down to the level of the lowest cakra (i.e., malādhāra or prthīvī), it becomes solidified. The body is then immaculate and composed of adamantine substance.
alphabet (mātrkā) upon his transformed body. In this process various charged syllables (varṇa mayā) are placed in different limbs of the gross body thus transforming it into a body composed of charged sound vibrations (varṇa mayī tānu). He begins by saying:

Asya mātrkā mantrasya brahmārṣṭḥ gāyatrīcchando mātrkā sarasvatī devatā halo būtīni svarāḥ saktayāḥ mātrkā nyāse viniyogah.

This is a general statement of the presiding sage (rṣī), meter (chandas), deity (devatā), and application (viniyoga) of the procedure, and is explained in his following utterances. The application (viniyoga) or purpose of the procedure is to perform the imprintment of syllables. Taking a flower from the right side and touching the top of his head it he says:

Om brahmāne rṣaye namah.

Om! Salutations to the sage Brahmā.

Touching his mouth, he says:

Om gāyatrīai ccaṇdase namah.

Om! Salutations to the meter Gāyatrī.

Touching his heart, he says:

Om mātrkayai sarasvatyai devatāyai namah.

Om! Salutations to the goddess mother Sarasvatī.

53There is a conceptual pun taking place here. The term mātrkā, means both alphabetic symbols and mother. Consonants cannot be uttered without the use of vowels. Thus when consonants combine with vowels they are fertile mothers of sound vibration.

54One form of the Goddess’s manifestation is as Vāc, sound or speech vibration. Actually, "vāc" should be understood more comprehensively as the essential vibration of every conceptualization (thus every manifestation) which can be recognized through linguistic labels, and thus uttered (sabda). By imprinting his immaculate body (transformed through bhūtāuddhī) with the complete primary syllabary of the Sanskrit language, the purohita transforms it into the vibrational body of the goddess.

55The term "hala" refers to all the consonants which are said to be seeds (būja). The vowels are called svara, and are said to be energy (śakti). The symbolism of Śiva-Śakti is apparent in this identification. The consonant (Śiva) is lifeless (śava) without combination with the vowel (Śakti) at which point it gains potency. One could also say that a Brahmā-Sarasvatī union is occurring producing creative potential.

An alternate interpretation, also suggested by the ritualists (but not supported by these mantras), sees the collection of consonants as the generative source (yoni), and the vowels as the fertilizing seed.
Touching himself at the lower back just above the region of the anus, he says:

\textit{Om halbhyoḥ bijebhyoḥ namah.}

Om! Salutations to the seed consonants.

Touching the sides of his thighs and sweeping down to his ankles, he says:

\textit{Om svarebhyoḥ saktibhyoḥ namah.}

On! Salutations to the energy vowels.

Then passing his hands over his whole body, palms facing forward he says:

\textit{Om klīm kīlākāya namah.}

Om! Salutations to the bolt Klīm.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Kara Nyāsa (Imprintment on the Hands)}

The purohita proceeds with the ritual of placement of syllables in the fingers of the hand (kara nyāsa). He recites the following mantras:

\textit{Om am kan kham gam gham nām ām aṅgusthābhāhyām namah.}
\textit{Om im can cham jham ūm ām tārjantībhāyām svāhā.}
\textit{Om um tam tham dam dhām nam ām madhyāmabhyām vaśat.}
\textit{Om em tam tham dam dhām nam ām aṁ anāmikābhāhyām hum.}
\textit{Om om pam pham bham mum aum kānīśthābhāhyām vauśat.}
\textit{Om am yam ram lam vam śam śam sam ham kṣam ah karatāla prṣṭhābhāhyām astrāya phat.}\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{56}This magical formula "Klīm" unleashes or unlocks the power of the mantras which have been fixed with a bolt/pin/nail (kitāka) ("like a door shut with a bar," I was told). The notion of such a fastening pin is not uncommon in Tantric and Śākta ritual practices. An important appendage (aṅga) to the \textit{Durgā Šaṭīśaḥ} is called the Kitāka and is recited just before the text itself. Normally the kitāka is thought to release the power contained in the mantras. In the context of the nyāsa ritual, where syllables are being imprinted on the body, the kitāka is both releasing the power of these vibrations and fastening them onto the purohita’s body.

In other applications of ritual activity, I was told by some adepts, kitāka bijas are used, in conjunction with nails, to fasten exorcised spirits to trees. Inadvertent removal of such a nail can have dire consequences including possession by malevolent spirits.

\textsuperscript{57}The endings namah, svāhā, vaśat, hum, vaśat, and phat are called the jāti and are used in kara nyāsa and aṅga nyāsa.

The purohita has placed the consonants and vowels of the Sanskrit language into his hands after suffixing the nasal ending (anusvara) to them. In his two thumbs (aṅgustha) he places the aspirated and
Aṅga nyāsa (Imprintment of the Limbs)

The purohita proceeds to place the syllables in the limbs (aṅga) of his body. He uses the same combination of syllables but ends the mantras thus while pointing to the appropriate body part.

Pointing to the heart with the palm of the hand: . . . hrdayāya namah.

Pointing to the head with the fingertips of the hand: . . . śirase svāhā.

Pointing to the top-knot with the tip of the thumb: . . . sikhāyai vaṣat.

With both hands embracing the body: . . . kavacāya hum. 58

With three fingers indicating the three eyes (middle finger pointing to the third eye): . . . netratrayāya vaṣat.

Moving his hands around each other and slapping the palm of the left hand briskly with two fingers of the right hand he says: . . . karatāla prṣṭābhyām astraṅa phat. 59

Antarmātrkā Nyāsa (Internal Imprintment of Syllables)

The purohita begins to imprint the syllables on the inner parts of his body. He non-aspirated guttural consonants and corresponding nasal, sandwiched between the vowel "a" and its increased (vrddhi) form, "long a" (i.e., ā) This envelopment (sampūta) of consonants by vowels unifies and empowers them. A similar procedure is used in certain forms of recitation (sampūta pātha) of the Durgā Saptāsāt. In the index fingers (tarjānā), he places the palatal consonants and corresponding nasal, between "i" and "long i." The retroflex (hard palate) consonants and nasal are placed between "u" and "long u" in the middle fingers (madhyama). The dental consonants and nasal, boxed between "e" and its vrddhi "ai" are imprinted on the un-named or ring fingers (anāmika). On the little fingers (kanisṭha), he places the labials and corresponding nasal, enclosed by the vowel "o" and its vrddhi form "au." Finally in the backs (prṣṭha) and palms of his hand (karatāla), he places the semivowels, sibilants, and conjunct consonant, "kṣa" contained between the nasal (anusvara) and aspirated endings (visarga).

58 The body is here referred to as an armour (kavaca). This is because it has already been transformed (through bhātaśuddhi) into adamantine substance. An important quality of this bodily material, conveyed through the term, kavaca, is its impenetrable, unassailable (durga), and protective nature.

59 The choice of limbs reflects the divine status of the purohita's body. While the heart, head, top-knot, divine armour, and third eye are readily linked with the divine, the inclusion of the hands is interesting. The hands, it will be noted, were first imprinted with the syllables in kara nyāsa before these were transferred to the limbs. I suggest that the hands (and body) could be seen as the representative symbol of devotional service and action (karma), while heart and head (manas) symbolize feeling and loving devotion (bhakti), and the head and third eye correspond to intellect, knowledge (jnana), and wisdom.
begins at the energy vortex of sound and speech vibration (viśuddhi cakra), located at the
base of the throat (kantha māla). Visualizing a sixteen-petalled lotus there, he places all
the fourteen vowels, anusvara and visarga in the following manner. Sandwiching each
between "Om" and "namah," he proceeds saying:

\[\text{Om am namah, om ām namah, om ēm namah, om ōm namah, om ūm namah, om ūm namah, om ēm namah, om ōm namah, om ēm namah, om ūm namah, om ēm namah, om ōm namah, om ūm namah, om ēm namah, om ōm namah, om ūm namah.}\]

Next at the energy plexus of the primal sound (nāda), (anāhata cakra), the seat of the
limited self (jīvātmā), located in the region of the heart, he visualizes a twelve petalled
lotus. There he imprints the first twelve consonants, saying:

\[\text{Om kam namah, om kham namah, om gham namah, om ṇam namah, om ṇam namah, om cam namam, om chaṇam namah, om jam namah, om jham namah, om iam namah, om am namah, om ōm namah.}\]

In the region of the navel, at the manipūra cakra, he visualizes a ten petalled lotus and
places the next ten consonants:

\[\text{Om dam namah, om dham namah, om nam namah, om tam namah, om tham namah, om dam namah, om dham namah, om nam namah, om paṃ namah, om pham namah.}\]

In the region of the base of the male sexual organ, at the svadhiṣṭāna cakra, he
visualizes a six petalled lotus, and places the next six consonants and semi vowels:

\[\text{Om bam namah, om bham namah, om maṃ namah, om yaṃ namah, om raṃ namah, om laṃ namah.}\]

At the base plexus (mūlādhāra cakra), the seat of the serpent energy (kūṇḍalinī), located
in the region of the perineum between the genitals and the anus, he visualizes a four
petalled lotus and imprints the last semi-vowel and sibilants:

\[\text{Om vam namah, om śam namah, om sām namah, om saṃ namah.}\]

Then moving to the energy plexus at the region of the third eye at the joining point of
the eyebrows, the seat of mind, the ājñā cakra, he visualizes a two petalled lotus. There
he places the aspirate syllable and the conjunct consonant.

\[\text{Om haṃ namah, om kṣaṃ namah.}\]
Bahir/Bahya Mātrkā Nyāsa (External Imprintment of Syllables)

Having completed this internal nyāsa through meditative visualization and mantra, the purohīta proceeds to perform and external placement of syllables, with the aid of physical action. He begins with a meditative visualization and manifestation (dhyāna) of mātrkās thus:

Pañcāśallipibhir vibhakta mukha doh panamadhyā vaksasthalām/
ḥāśvan maiuli nivaddha candraśakalām āptā tāṅgastanīm/
mudrām aksa gunam sudhāḥhya kalsam vidyāḥca hastambujair vivhrānam viśada
prabhām trinayanāṃ vāgdevatam āśraye.

I am taking recourse in the divinity of speech, who has her body made of fifty syllables differentiated, that have taken part in constituting the limbs of the deity like the moon, the two arms, the middle portion, etc. She has decorated her head with the disc of the moon and she has well formed large breasts. In one of her hands she has taken a rosary of rudrās [beads] and the mudrā (here the purohīta assumes the vaikhānas mudrā where his index finger touches the thumb) and a jar and a replica of a book are held with her lotus hands. She is luminous, with three eyes, emanating clear light.

Then touching his forehead, he proceeds with the nyāsa.

Samhāra Mātrkā Nyāsa (Enfolding/Collapsing/Compressing Imprintment of Syllables)

The purohīta follows the same procedure as the external mātrka nyāsa but in reverse.60

Pītha Nyāsa (Imprintment of Seats)

The purohīta now assigns the various seats or abodes (pītha) of the goddess to appropriate body parts.61 Touching his heart, he says:

60 Through this process he enfolds the vibrational body of the goddess into his own.

61 The term, pītha (altar or seat), is commonly associated with the legend of the goddess Śaśi, the parts of whose body are scattered over the Indian subcontinent. The location of each of her body parts is a pītha of the goddess, the most important being at Kāmarūpā where the sexual organ (yoni) of Śaśi fell. L. Renou and D. C. Sircar (1973), point out the relationship between the notion of pītha and the sexual organ of the Devī, symbolically akin to the līṅga of Śiva. Thus the pītha is conceptually the sexual organ (yoni, bhāga) of the Devī, from where all creation emerges. In her role as giver of spiritual attainments (Siddhidātṛī), the places where yogins have attained perfection (siddhi) are called siddha pīthas. The Durgā Mandir in Banāras is frequently referred to as such a siddha pītha, and the stone lotus icon which is reverentially
Om ādhara śaktaye namah/
Om kārṇāya namah/
Om anantāya namah/
Om prthivyai namah.
Om kṣtra samudrāya namah.
Om śvetadvīpaya namah.
Om manimandapāya namah.
Om kalpaṇvṛkṣāya namah.
Om manivedikāya namah.
Om ratnasimhāsanāya namah.

Om! Salutations to the supreme supporting power, the tortoise, the endless serpent, the earth, the sea of milk, the white island, the jewelled pavilion, the wish-fulfilling tree, the jewelled altar, the jewelled throne.  

Om! Salutations to righteousness, knowledge, dispassion, royal power, wickedness, ignorance, passion, base weakness, the endless serpent, the lotus.  

Touching his
right shoulder, he says:
Om dharmāya namah.
left shoulder
Om jñānāya namah.
right shoulder
Om vairāgyāya namah.
left thigh
Om aisvaryāya namah.
right thigh
Om adharmāya namah.
mouth (opening of face)
Om aijñānāya namah.
left flank
Om avairagyāya namah.
navel
Om anaisvaryāya namah.
right flank
Om anantāya namah.
heart
Om padmāya namah.

Om! Salutations to righteousness, knowledge, dispassion, royal power, wickedness, ignorance, passion, base weakness, the endless serpent, the lotus.

He then says:

Am arkaṃandalāya dvādaśa kalātmane namah.
Om somamaṇḍalāya sōdaśa kalātmane namah.

The pitha nyāsa will again be repeated during the special offering (viśesa argha) ritual of Durgā Pūjā. The current set of nyāsas, it should be remembered, although within the bodhana rituals, are essentially part of the general preliminary practices (sāmānya vidhi) prior to the actual awakening procedure. During viśesa argha the nyāsa will be performed on a conch shell which represents the pitha of the goddess.

The pithas referred to here are not the commonly understood sacred places of the goddess as enumerated in the Pārthananīyā or purānic texts. They are far more encompassing cosmic and divine entities. The term for "throne," simhāsana, literally means "lion seat." It informs our understanding of Durgā's mount (vāhana), the lion, which establishes her position of rulership.

The Devī's ambivalent nature is clearly indicated in these abodes.
Mam vahnimandlaya dasa kalâmane namah.\(^{64}\)

Kara and Aîga Nyâsa

The purohita repeats the imprintment on the hand and limbs.

Ṛṣyadi Nyâsa (Imprintment of the Revealer and Others.)

He utters:

Śiras brahmane rṣaye namah.
Mukhe gāyatryai cchandase namah.
Hṛdaya durgāyai devatāyai namah.
Guhye duṁ bījaya namah.
Pādayoh duṁ śaktaye namah.
Śarvaṅgescu klīṃ kītaka namah.

Salutations to the revealer Brahmā in the head, to the meter Gayatrī in the mouth, to the goddess Durgā in the mouth, to the seed syllable Duṁ in the anus (literally, the hidden part, also understood as the malādhāra), to the śakti Duṁ in the two feet, and to the fastening pin Klīṃ in the entire body.

Vyāpaka Nyāsa (Pervasive Imprintment)

The purohita makes a general movement of the hands down the front of the body and back up over the head. He repeats it perhaps seven or nine times.

The purohita has finally completed the various nyāsas in this portion of the ritual. His body is not only transformed into pure substance through bhūtasuddhi, but effectively imprinted with the vibrational capacity to bring about manifestation. It is also now a pīṭha, a creative abode and source of the goddess.

Prāṇāyāma

He once again performs prāṇāyāma, this time with the bija "Hrīm."

This completes the bodhāna rituals prior to actually awakening the Devī.

---

The understanding is that arka (sun) is the pramāna aspect (the instrument of knowledge), soma (moon) is the prameya aspect (the thing that is known, the knowable), and vahni (fire) is the pramā aspect (the knowing subject). All three are fused in the person of the purohita.

Through the pīṭha nyāsa, the purohita’s body is itself transformed into a seat of the Devī.
Gaṇeśa Pūjā

Now that the preliminaries have been finished, the purohita moves to the awakening (bodhana) of the goddess. He starts with a pūjā to Gaṇeśa, who among all the deities must be propitiated first. Taking a flower from the flower plate, he performs the meditative visualization (dhyāna) of Gaṇeśa.

Om kharvam sthālanum gajendra vadanām lambodaram sundaram/
prasyandam madhugandha lubdha madhūpa/
vyalola gandasthalam danta ghata vidārītrudhirāh sindūra śobhākaram/
vande śailasutāsutam ganapatim siddhipradam karmasu.

I pay obeisance to the son of Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya. He is considered to be the lord of hosts (attending deities of Śiva). In stature he is short; his body is robustly built. His face is that of an excellent elephant. He is a pot-bellied person, yet beautiful. His two cheeks are full of bees attracted by the scent of the ichor that oozes from it. He is beautiful because of being smeared with vermillion throughout his body and also with the flow of blood of the enemies who have been killed by the blow of his tusk. I pay obeisance to that god who is the giver of success in every effort.

Generally this dhyāna is performed twice. First a flower is placed in the palm of his hand and with the dhyāna mudrā moved in front of his heart. It is then placed on the top of his head. The purohita then performs the dhyāna again with a flower placed on a tripod.

---

65 The primacy in ritual worship afforded to Gaṇeśa is attributed to his role as a guardian deity and as the "Lord of Obstacles." His iconographic image is often found on the portals of temples and recalls the mythic event in which he tried to prevent Śiva from entering Parvati's chambers.

66 I have used the term meditative visualization to acknowledge the common translation of the term "dhyāna" (meditation). The dhyānas performed during pūjā are perhaps better translated as creative visualization, since they actually provide the matrices for the manifestation of the deities.

67 This dhyāna is considered to be the most commonly used one to Gaṇeśa. It identifies Gaṇeśa as Parvati's (śailasutāsutam) son. It reinforces the identification between vermillion and blood. Vermillion (śindūra) is traditionally used to decorate elephants (śindūratilaka). The word sindura (with a short "u") also means elephant. Gaṇeśa is propitiated as the "remover of obstacles."

68 Among the ritualists with whom I studied, the dhyāna mudrā was interchangeably referred to as the yoni mudrā.

69 The purohita uses the flower as the orifice through which the deity can manifest. By holding it in the dhyāna/yoni mudrā by his heart, Gaṇeśa is born through his heart-mind activity. (Note: the term manas is identified both with the heart and the mind, indicating an integrated mental and emotional faculty). The flowering forth, or blossoming of the deity is frequently represented by images of the deity atop a flower,
The *purohita* now worships Ganeśa with the commonly performed devotional ritual consisting of five offerings (*pañca upācara pūjā*).

1. Taking a fragrant ointment (*gandha*) such as sandal paste, he offers it, saying "Om! Gām! Obeisance to Ganeśa."

   \[Eṣa gandhā/ Om gām ganeśāya namah.\]

2. Taking a most excellent flower (*sacchandanaṃ puspaṃ*), he worships Ganeśa, saying:

   \[Etat sacchandanaṃ puspaṃ/ Om gām ganeśāya namah.\]

3. Taking incense (*dhūpa*), such as camphor (*karpūra*), he offers it saying:

   \[Eṣa dhūpāḥ/ Om gām ganeśāya namah.\]

4. He next worships with light from a flame, perhaps using a lamp (*dīpa*) of clarified butter (*ghi*), saying:

   \[Eṣa dīpah/ Om gām ganeśāya namah.\]

5. And lastly he makes a small offering of food (*naivedyam*), such as a piece of sugar cane, or a piece of banana, saying:

   \[Etan naivedyam/ Om gām ganeśāya namah.\]

He finishes the Ganeśa *pūjā* with:

\[Oṃ devendra maulimandara makarandakaṇarunāḥ vighnān harantu devendra caraṇambuja reṇavah.\]

normally a lotus. When he places the flower on his head, he is allowing his body to serve as the matrix for divine manifestation. He may include a mental offering (*mānasa upācāra*) to the deity. When he finally places the flower atop the tripod during the second *dhyāna*, the *purohita* provides an independent locus for the deity's manifestation.

70"Gām" is the seed syllable (*bṛṇa*) of Ganeśa.

71 In certain *pūjās* there may be hundreds of such morsels of food offerings (*naivedya*), which vary in size. A small piece of flower petal is often placed on each one as it is offered to the deity by the *purohita* so as not to lose count. The large numbers of *naivedyās* may correspond to the number of deities present in the murtis, but may also be offered to deities present in disembodied form. To offer *naivedyās*, the *purohita* sanctifies them with some water, and with a flower offered to the superintending deity (e.g., Visnu, Durgā). He then offers them to the deities themselves.
Pūjā to the Other Gods, Goddesses, and Celestial Beings

Prefacing his words of obeisance with, "these flowers and fragrances (ete gandhapuspe)" the purohita makes offerings to all the other important deities as follows:

Ete gandhapuspe / Om śivādi paṅcādevatābhyo namah.
/ Om ādityādi navagrahebhīyo namah.
/ Om ādityādi daśādikpālebhīyo namah.
/ Om mātyādi daśāvatārebhīyo namah.
/ Om gāṅgāyai namah.

Since he is performing the pūjā in Banāras, he adds:

/ Om viśvanāthāya namah.
/ Om annapūrnāya namah.

Continuing with:

/ Om nārāyānāya namah.
/ Om lakṣmyai namah.
/ Om sarasvatīai namah.

Om! Obeisance to the five deities beginning with Śiva, to the nine planets beginning with Aditi, to the ten guardians of the directions beginning with Indra, to the ten incarnations beginning with Matsya, to Gaṅgā, to Viśvanātha, to Annapūrnā, to Nārāyana, to Lakṣmi, to Sarasvatī.72

Bhūtapasarana (Removal of Inimical Spirits)

Taking some white mustard seed, he utters the mantra:

Vetālāśca piśācaśca rākṣasāśca sārṣrpāh/
apasarpantu te sarve ye cānye vighnakārakah/
vīṇyakā vighnakarāh mahogrā vajhādevi piśītasanāśca/
siddhārthkaiḥ vajrasamāṇā kalpaih mayā nirastāḥ vīdiśāḥ prayāntu.

Vampires, goblins, fiends, and creeping entities be gone from this place, you and any others who are the creator of obstacles. Those who are the creators of obstructions and agents for misguiding people, very fierce by nature, inimical to oblations and sacrifice, eaters of raw meat, by the means of this white mustard which resemble thunderbolts (vajra), are removed by me.

And he disperses the mustard seed in different directions.73

---

72 The purohita may add as many deities as he desires here, often including his chosen personal deity (istadevata). He definitely makes offerings to all the deities present in the yajamana's home shrine.

73 The passage serves as exemplary evidence of how the liturgy itself partakes in the interpretation of ritual substance and activity. The white mustard (siddhārthaka) is compared to thunderbolts (vajra) which disperse the spirits. The preceding offerings to Śiva and a host of other deities has attracted a variety of
Kara and Aṅga Nyāsa

The purohita now again performs kara nyāsa and aṅga nyāsa with the bīja, "Hṛīṁ."74

Durgā Dhyāna (Meditative Visualization of Durgā)

Grasping a flower in the yoni mudrā by his heart, the purohita performs a meditative visualization (dhyāna) of Durgā.75

Mānasa Upacāra (Heart-mind Devotional Service)

Placing the flower on his head, the purohita, with appropriate sentiments (manas) mentally visualizes offering various materials to Durgā.76

Viśeṣa Argha (The Special Offering)

The purohita draws a square (bhūpura) with water from his finger on the floor to his left. Within this square he draws a circle (mandala) and within that a triangle (trikōṇa). Inside the triangle he writes the bīja, "Dum." He worships this yantra with the words, "These flowers and fragrances (ete gandhapuspe)" preceding "Om! Obeisance to the Supporting Power, the Tortoise, the Endless Serpent, and the Earth." He offers sandal paste and flowers while making the utterances.

\[
\text{Ete gandhapuspe/} \quad \text{Om ādhara śaktaye namah/}
\text{Om kūrmāya namah/}
\text{Om anantāya namah/}
\text{Om prthivyai namah.}
\]

unwanted entities, which have to be held at bay or dispersed.

74 The nyāsas transform his body into the vibrational body of the goddess, capable of manifestation.

75 The dhyāna will be given in detail in a later section of the description.

76 This may be the traditional five (pañca), ten (daśa), or most likely, the sixteen (sōdaśa) item offerings, since Durgā is the central deity in this pūja.
He places a tripod on the diagram.\textsuperscript{77} The \textit{viśeṣa argha} is not prepared in the \textit{kosā} or \textit{kust} as in the case of the \textit{sāmānya argha}, but in a conch shell.\textsuperscript{78} The conch (\textit{saṅkha}) is purified with water and the mantra, "Hum phat." The \textit{purohita} then places it on the tripod worshipping both the conch and the tripod with flowers and sandalpaste while uttering, "These flowers and fragrances (\textit{ete gandhapuspe})." He fills it with water saying:

\begin{align*}
\text{Am sūrya mandalāya dvādaśa kalātmane namah/} \\
\text{Um soma mandalāya śodaśa kalātmane namah/} \\
\text{Mam vahni mandalāya dāśa kalātmane namah.}
\end{align*}

Am! Salutations to the disc of the sun consisting of twelve divisional elements.
Um! Salutations to the disc of the moon consisting of sixteen divisional elements.
Mam! Salutations to the disc of fire consisting of ten subtle elements (digits).\textsuperscript{79}

At the open tip of the conch, he places flowers, \textit{dārvā} grass, \textit{kuśa} grass, sandal paste, and washed rice, while uttering the Durgā \textit{bṛja}, "Dum." He covers the conch with \textit{dhenu mudrā}, transforming the water into ambrosial nectar (\textit{amrta}), and with \textit{matsya mudrā}, to signify its completion. Then inserting his middle finger into the conch, in the \textit{aṅkuśa mudrā}, with a vigorous stirring motion he utters:

\textit{Om gānge ca yamune ca . . .}

inducing the sacred rivers to flow into the vessel.\textsuperscript{80} He then repeats the seed syllable of

\textsuperscript{77}The tripod is an important ritual apparatus and may be quite ornate. Among its symbolic referents are the various triads of primary qualities (\textit{triguna}) through which the Devī as Prakṛti or Śakti manifests, namely \textit{sattva}, \textit{rajas}, or \textit{tamas guna}, or \textit{icchā}, \textit{jñāna}, and \textit{kriya śakti}.

\textsuperscript{78}Unlike the conch shells used for blowing into (in worship and battle), these are left naturally sealed at one end.

\textsuperscript{79}The \textit{pranava} or \textit{omkāra}, "Aum," or "Om" is composed of the letters "A," "U," and "M," corresponding the sun, the moon, and fire respectively. The essence of the \textit{pranava} is the Devī.

The \textit{argha} is often connected with sun worship, but here the sun, moon, and fire are linked, along with their constituent parts, and identified with the Devī.

\textsuperscript{80}See the previous discussion of \textit{sāmānya agrha} for the translation and interpretation of this activity.
Durgā, "Dum," and invokes the deity from his heart into the conch and water.⁸¹ Taking some water from the conch with kuśa grass, the purohita sprinkles it all around him and places a small quantity in the praksani pātra, the container from which water is offered to the deity.⁸²

**Durgā Avāhana (Invocation of Durgā)**

Bhagavati Durgā is then invoked (avāhana) into the conch with this mantra:⁸³

_Hrīm bhagavati durge devi iha āgaccha/_
_iha tiṣṭha iha tiṣṭha/_
_atra adhiṣṭham kuru/_
_mama pūjām grhāṇa._

Hrīm! O blessed goddess Durgā, come here, stay here, stay here, take up residence here, accept my worship.

**Durgā Mantra**

The purohita then worships Durgā with this mantra:

_Om durge durge raksani svāhā/_
_hrīm durgāyai namah._

Om! O Durgā, O Durgā, O protectress, Svāhā.⁸⁴

Hrīm! Obeisance to Durgā.

---

⁸¹Among the diverse interpretations of the _argha_ (sāmānya and viṣeṣa) is that it is an offering made to the deity. Thus the water is purified, transformed into nectar, and given to the deity to drink. While this would seem appropriate for the _argha_ within the sixteen-part offerings (śodāśa upacāra), a more compelling interpretation is that the _argha_ is the Devī herself. As previously stated, the unmanifest Devī, through the matrix of the yantra, engenders the creative orifice (yoni) of the conch, by means of the tripod on which it rests, through which she herself manifests.

⁸²This is generally the kosa. It is clear that the water which is offered to the deity is different from the water in the _argha_, which could be thought of as the deity. A certain circularity is present in the conceptual symbols of the ritual, for ultimately, the Devī is offered nothing else but parts of her own manifest form.

⁸³D.C. Sircar (1973) speculates on the etymology of the term "bhagavat,” which means one who possesses the female reproductive organ (bhaga), suggesting that it might predate the masculine form "bhagavan” which is now synonymous with "Blessed One” or "God."

⁸⁴Although the term svāhā is used as an utterance at the end of mantras, particularly in the fire oblation rituals (homa), it is also an epithet of the Devī (e.g., Durgā Saptasatī 4.7).
Sodaśa Upacāra (Sixteen Part Devotional Service)

The purohita worships Durgā with sixteen aspects of devotional service (sodaśa upacāra). Each has an appropriate mantra. They may be subdivided thus:

1. āsana (seating the Devī)
2. svāgata (welcoming the Devī)
3. pādya (washing the feet of the Devī)
4. argha (making a worship offering to the Devī)
5. ācamanīya (offering sips of water
6. punarācamanīya (offering sips of water again)
7. madhuparka (offering a honeyed mixture)
8. snāna (bathing the Devī)
9. vastra/utartya (offering an outer garment to the Devī)
10. ābhūṣana/ābharana (ornamenting the Devī)
11. gandha (anointing the Devī with fragrances)
12. pūspa (offering flowers)
13. dhūpa (offering fragrances)
14. dhāpa (worship with a flame offering)
15. naivedya (food offerings)
16. praṇāma/vandana (paying homage)

In this final part, the purohita pays obeisance by repeating the mantra of Durgā, "Dum," at least ten times.

Worship of the Bilva (Wood-apple) Tree

The purohita now worships the bilva tree with the mantra:

Om bilva vṛksāya namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the bilva tree.

---

85 What exactly constitutes the sixteen parts of this worship varies somewhat since certain parts (e.g., the food offerings, naivedya) may be subdivided and included in the count. The extended description of this part of the ritual will occur later in the study.

86 These may be fruit (phala), homemade food or racanā (lai/haja; H/Skt), ladā and other sweets (miḥat), betel nut (tambula), pānarthodaka, and so on.

87 The wood apple (bilva) tree grows large and is considered sacred to Śiva. Its leaves grow in triads which resemble his trident (triśūla). The tree is reputed to have innumerable medicinal properties, and the fruit produces a most refreshing beverage in the hot summer months.
He proceeds to perform the five-fold devotional service (panca upacāra) to it.88

**Bodhana of Durgā in the Bilva Tree**

The purohita now prays:

\[
\text{Aim rāvanasya vadhārthāya rāmasanugrahāyaça/}
\text{ akāle brahmanā bodho devyāsvayi kṛta purā.}
\]

Aim! For the purpose of killing Rāvana, and for showing grace to Rāma, the great Brahmā awakened you, divine lady, untimely, in the holy past.89

\[
\text{Ahāma pūṇaye tadvad bodhayāmi suresvarīm/}
\text{ dharmārtha kāma moksāya bhavaśobhāne.}
\]

I, too, in the same way, awaken the lady of all divine beings in Āśvina for the purpose of righteousness, wealth, desire, and liberation (i.e., the four aims of existence). O beautiful one, be graceful (i.e., bestow boons on me.)

\[
\text{Śakrena saṅgabodhyā svarajyamāptam tasmādahantvām pratibodhayāmi/}
\text{ yathaiva rāmena hato daśāsyastaiva śatrūn vinipādayāmī/}
\text{ devi candatmike candi candavigraha kārini/}
\text{ bilva śakaṁ samasṛtya tīṣṭa devī yathasukham.}
\]

After awakening you, Indra (Śakra) obtained his own domain once again, therefore I also cause you to awaken.

As by Rāma, ten headed Rāvana was killed, in the same way, I shall also cause my enemies to fall.

O deity with the characteristic of dread, O dreadful one, who makes a very terrible war, taking this branch of the bilva tree as your abode, please remain here according to your pleasure.90

---

88This consists of *gandha*, *puspa*, *dhūpa*, *dīpa*, and *naivedya*.

89The mythic reference to Rāma’s worship of Durgā, as well as the untimely awakening of the Devī is clearly articulated here. It is Brahmā who awakens her on Rāma’s behalf for Rāvana’s destruction.

90Without specific reference to any particular incident, Indra’s regaining of his sovereignty is attributed to the Devī. This could allude to a similar reference in the *Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, where Indra’s defeat of Vṛtra is attributed to the Āśvina Navarātra pūjā. While Rāma’s untimely worship is that by an incarnate god on earth, Indra’s worship is an earlier precedent purely among the gods. It reveals a pattern of worship: first by the gods themselves, then by the incarnate gods on earth, and finally by exceptional humans, who by the very act become godlike.

The martial purposes of awakening Durgā are stressed in the first and third verses while the second verse mentions the other reasons.

The goddess is attributed with the characteristic of dread.
Offerings (Bali) to the Kṣetrapālas (Guardians of the Field)

The purohita now makes offerings to the guardians of the field (kṣetrapāla), deities who protect the sacred space in which the ritual is taking place. He prays with folded hands that they will accept the offerings made to them:

Om kṣetrapāladayah sarve sarvaśānti phalapradah pūjā vighnavināśāya mama grhnantvimam balim.

Let all the protectors of the field, the givers of all sorts of peacefulness for the purpose of the removal of obstacles regarding the ritual made by me, receive this offering.

Then he offers the mixture of unhusked pulse (Skt/H. māsa/urad), mixed with curd, placed on a bilva leaf, which is placed on a yantra which he draws with cowdung on the floor. He says:

Eṣa māsa bhakta baliḥ/ Om kṣetrapāladibhyoh namah.

This is a sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse.

Prayers to the Bhūtas (Elementals) and other Spirits

With folded hands he prays:

Om bhūta daitya piśācaśca gandharva rakṣāsām ganāḥ/ siddhim kurvantu te sarve mama grhnantvimam balim.

Om! Elemental spirits, devils, goblins (literally, "eaters of raw flesh," and the host of heavenly musicians and demonic fiends should give me successful attainment (siddhi) of my end and should receive my offering.91

When making the actual offering of the leaf plate with pulse and curd (dadhi), he says:

Eṣa māsa bhakta baliḥ/ Om bhūtādibhyoh namah.

This is a sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse.

Om! Obeisance to the elemental spirits and others.

91 The spirits here are not dispersed as in bhūtaparasara, but are propitiated and enjoined to help the ritual succeed. Their capacity to bestow attainment (siddhi) links them with the Devī, who possesses the epithets of Siddhidārī (Bestower of Attainment) and Bhūta Nayikā (Leader of the Elementals). Durgā is also referred to as the Great Demoness (mahāsūri) (Durgā Saptāśat 1.58)

I was told that one may also understand these prayers as meaning that the gross and subtle senses (bhūta) should not behave inappropriately during this ritual.
After each of these offerings he washes his hands.\textsuperscript{92}

Once again with folded hands, he prays:

\begin{quote}
Om dākini, yoginī caiva mātraro devayonayah nānārūpadharāṇiḥyantum mama grhnanviman balim.
\end{quote}

Om! dākinīs, yoginīs, mothers, and all those who are born of the divine (devayoni), who always assume different forms, should receive my offering.\textsuperscript{93}

With the actual offering, he says:

\begin{quote}
Eṣa māṣa bhakta balitaḥ/ Om dākinyādibhyoh namah.
\end{quote}

This is a sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse.
Om! Obeisance to the dākinīs and others.

Next he prays:

\begin{quote}
Om ādityādi graha ca kuṣmāṇḍā rākṣasāśca indrādyāścaiva dikpāla mama grhnantvimam balim.
\end{quote}

All the planets, beginning with the sun, those called kuṣmāṇḍās, raksasas, protectors of the quarters, like Indra and others should receive my offerings.\textsuperscript{94}

With the offering, he says:

\begin{quote}
Eṣa māṣa bhakta balitaḥ/ Om ādityādibhyoh namah.
\end{quote}

This is a sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse.
Om! Obeisance to the sun and others.\textsuperscript{95}

\textbf{Invocation (Avāhana) of the Bilva Tree}

The purohita now invokes the divine bilva tree to manifest in the bilva tree on the

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\textsuperscript{92}These offerings appear to bring a measure of pollution onto the purohita, which he must remove through the purifying power of flowing water.

\textsuperscript{93}The devayoni are celestial beings who are divinely born and include among their ranks the fountainheads of sciences (vidyadhara), the kinnaras, heavenly damsels (apsaras), and others.

\textsuperscript{94}The inclusion of the term Kuṣmāṇḍā in this category of beings may suggest a capacity to grab aspects of people, like the planetary forces (graha). The Durgā at Durgā Mandir is well-known as Kuṣmāṇḍā Devī, indicating sovereignty over this ill-defined class of beings, and pointing to an aspect of her nature.

\textsuperscript{95}The entire set of foregoing offerings symbolically link the Devī to a range of spirits, demigods and demi goddesses, and demons. It resonates with Durgā’s epithet of the great demoness (mahāsūrya) in the Durgā Saptasātt.
altar where it will be worshipped as Durgā.

    Om meru mandara kailāsa himavat śikare girau jātah śrīt phalavrksavam ambikāyāḥ sadā priyah śrīt saila śikhare jātah śrīt phalāḥ śrīt niketanāḥ netabyo 'si mayā gaccha pujyo durgā svarupataḥ.

Born from Meru, Mandara, and Kailaśa, at the top of the Himālaya mountains, you tree called "śrīphalavrksa (tree of the fruit of auspiciousness)" have always been a favourite to Ambikā (the consort of Śiva). You are born at the top of Śrī Saila, and for this reason you are called "śrī phala" and the abode of auspiciousness. You are to be carried by me to the place of worship (altar) and be worshipped as Durgā there.96

Kaṇḍā Ropāṇam (Erecting the Staffs)

He now proceeds to perform the ritual of closing off the sacred space, by placing four forked sticks, implanted in clay balls at four corners around the jar. He utters the mantras:

    Om kāndāh kāndāh . . .

And then circumscribes the sticks about seven times with red thread.97

Durgā Japa (Repetition of the Durgā Mantra)

The purohita now begins to repeat (japa) the Durgā Mantra counting on the fingers (kara japa) in a special ritualized way. This ten count is done at least ten times and the repetition (japa) is offered to the left hand of the goddess, saying:

    Om guhyāti guhya goptṛ tvam grhān asmat krtam japam siddhir bhavantu me devī tvat prasādam mahēśvarti.

    Om! You are the protector of the secret of all secrets, please receive my repetition of the mantra and thus attainment may follow by your grace.

96There are several symbols juxtaposed in this prayer, including a conceptual "pun." The tree is born at the top of the cosmic mountains Meru, etc., linking it with the axis mundi. Born at the top of mount Śaila, it is equated with Śailaputri (Daughter of the Mountain), an epithet of Durgā. As the favorite of Ambikā, the tree is equated with Śiva, whose name means "auspiciousness." The bilva is the abode of auspiciousness and its fruit is "auspiciousness" (śrī phala). Of course, the term Śrī also links the tree and Durgā to the goddess Laksṇī.

97See interpretation in the previous section on kāndā ropānam. I am inclined to interpret the process as a planting ritual, not of grain, but of orchards. There appear to be elements of pruning, grafting, transplanting, and protecting the trees in this ritual.
With this utterance, the purohita places consecrated water on the left hand of Durgā in her manifestation (svarupa) as the bilva tree.\textsuperscript{98}

**Worship of Durgā**

Now the purohita says:

\textit{Om sarva maṅgala maṅgalye śive sarvārtha sadhike śaranye tryambake gaurī närāyaṇī namo’stute.}

You are the abode of all auspiciousness. O consort of Śiva you are the giver of every kind of object (you are the means by which one can achieve all sorts of desired ends). You are the last resort, O mother of the three gods, salutations to you O Gaurī, O Nārāyaṇī.

**Ending of Bodhana**

The purohita now places the right hand on the kośā with left at his inner elbow, and recites a statement of completion.\textsuperscript{99}

\textit{Om visnurom tat sadadya āśvine māsi śukle pakṣe śaśṭhayām tithau kṛtaitat bhagavad durgāyāḥ bodhana karmanī yad vaiguṇyam jātam tadādoṣa praśamanāya viṣṇu smaraṇamaham karisye.}

Om! Whatever I have done regarding the bodhana rituals of goddess Durgā on this day of sāsthi on the bright fortnight in the month of Āśvina, whatever faults, flaws, and omissions have occurred, I shall repeat "Om Viṣṇu" ten times for allaying the defect.

Having done that, he says:

\textit{Om adya āśvine māsi śukle pakṣe, śaśṭhayām tithau kṛtaitat bodhana karmā acchidram astu}

Om! Today, on this day of sāsthi on the bright fortnight in the month of Āśvina, may this ritual called bodhana be free from all defects.

One of the attending brāhamanas may reply:

\textit{Astu!}

So be it.

\textsuperscript{98}In the worship of a male god the meritorious action of japa is offered to the right side.

\textsuperscript{99}This complements the sankalpa oath he took at the beginning of the ritual.
ADHIVASA

Adhivāsanam, interpretively translated, means "colouring the self with impressions." The purohita is said to "perfume the image." It is "teased with the colour of his thought." The adivāsanam (or adhivāsa) is the process through which the essence of the deity first, and subtly, permeates the image into which she will be invoked. The adhivāsa ritual is performed to the ghāta and the bilva tree, because the Devī has been invoked into the jar and the tree. After finishing all the anointings, the purohita moves to the more elaborate clay images (murti) of the Devī, and at a minimum makes an offering of "flowers and fragrances (anena gandhena puspena . . .). If time and energy permits, he may perform the entire adhivāsa anointings again to the murtis. If the șaṣṭhi ṭiṭhi does not extend past sunset (actually after 4:00 o'clock in the evening) of the sixth day of Navarātra, bodhana is performed on the fifth day (pañcami). But if it does, then both bodhana and adhivāsa are done on the sixth day.

Preliminary Rituals

Svasti Vācanam (Utterance of Approval)

The purohita begins by taking some rice from the plate of worship materials and gently throwing them down says:

Om somam rájānam varunam anvim anvārabhāmahe/
adityam visnum sūryam brāhmananca brhaspatim/
Om svasti svasti svasti.

100 An analogous process is used in the marriage ceremony. Prior to their meeting, the bride and groom are each anointed with turmeric (Skt/H: haridra/haldi) and mustard oil which is rubbed on their bodies. Some remnants of the oil from the groom's anointing, "perfumed" with the subtle essences of his body, are mixed with oil with which the bride will be anointed.

The term is also to describe the patient, persistent, and ultimately unignorable waiting by a person (e.g., a beggar) for attendance by another. This suggests the quality of beckoning and eager anticipation in the adhivāsa ritual process.

101 The ritual allows one to see the process and mediums through which Durga manifests.
Adhivāsa Sañkalpa (Anointment Oath)

This is the same as the long sañkalpa of bodhana except at the end where it is changed as follows:

Om viṣṇurom, . . ., bhagavad durgāyāḥ subhādhiśāsana karamāham karisyē/karisyāmi.

Om Visnu! . . . I shall perform the most auspicious deed of anointment with regards to Durgā.

Sañkalpa Sūkta (Oath Hymn)

The purohita then recites a sañkalpa sūkta which differs from the one recited after the bodhana oath.

Om yajjagrato duram udaiti daivam tudu suptasya tathaivaiti/ dūram gamam jyotiṣām āryotirekam tanne manah śivasañkalpamastu.

Whatever shines to the awakened one it shines at a distance, and when he remains asleep it remains the same as arising. It is the light of all lights and the light of it goes far. Let my mind remain awakened to the auspiciousness of that light.

Bhūtapasaranā (Removal of Inimical Spirits)

Taking some white mustard seed in his hand and saying:

Om vetalāśca . . .

the purohita scatters the seed in various directions dispersing the vampires and other spirits hostile to the ritual about to be performed. After scattering them he propitiates the elementals and others (bhūtagana) with pādyā (water for washing the feet) and argha (dūrvā grass, flowers, and rice), saying:

Etat pādyam/ Om bhūtaganebhyyoh namah.
Idam argham/ Om bhūtaganebhyyoh namah.

Then, taking a prepared mixture of unhusked pulse (māsa), curd (dadhi), etc. (māsa bhakta bali), he says:

Om bhūta preta piśācaśca ye vasantayatra bhūtale/ te grhnantu mayā datto balim esa prasadhitah/ pūjitā gandhapuspādyair balibhistarpitāstathā/
The elemental spirits, ghosts, and other goblins who stay on the surface of the earth should receive this offering of mine as has been prepared by me. Being worshipped with sandal paste, flowers and other things, and having been satisfied by this special kind of offering, they should go away from this spot and should watch the ritual presented by me.102

When he finishes reciting this statement, he takes a small morcel of offering (bali) from the bilva pātra, saying:

_Eṣa māṣa bhakta baliḥ/ Om bhūtebhyoḥ namah._

**Āsana Śuddhi**

After washing his hands (kara śuddhi), he purifies his seat (āsana).

**Bhūta Śuddhi**

Through _prānāyāma_ he performs _bhūta śuddhi_ transforming his body into immaculate substance into which the Devī can be embodied.

**Sāmānyārgha**

He then does the installation of the _sāmānyārgha_, creating the _yoni_ through which she manifests.

**Pīṭha Nyāsa**

He next performs _pīṭha nyāsa_, manifesting the seats of the goddess in various parts of his body, which is thus transformed into an abode and portal for the Devī.

**Pañcopacāra Worship of the Devas, Devīs and Devatās**

With five devotional offerings (pañcopacāra: _gandha, puspa, dhūpa, dipa_, and _naivedya_) he worships Ganeśa, the five gods beginning with Śiva, and others. He thus

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102 The spirits are not merely dispersed. They are subsequently propitiated and requested politely to attend the ritual from afar.
propitiates the lesser deities before worshipping Durgā herself.

**Kara and Anga Nyāsa**

He imprints his fingers and limbs with the Sanskrit syllables, transforming his body into the vibrational matrix of the goddess as sound (*sabda*) or Vāc (thus, by implication, as conceivable).

**Durgā Dhyāna**

The *purohita* now proceeds to perform the meditative visualization (*dhyāna*) of Durgā, aided by the verbal description. 103

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**Adhivāsa of the Devī in Bilva Tree and Ghaṭa**

The full array of anointing materials have been prepared in advance and placed on a large plate. 104 The *purohita* utters a *mantra*, sanctifying each item, and smears it on the Devī. 105 In one hand he holds a bell (*ghanta*) which he rings continuously. A special drum called the *dhāk* is also sounded continuously. The overall effect during the *adhivāsa* is a "quickening" in the audience of worshippers which is paralleled by the arising of the goddess. It soon grows apparent that the items are not merely devotional offerings of a royal and feminine nature, but subtle and varied forms of the goddess. The *purohita* prays:

*Om adya prāptasi devītvam namaste śaṅkarapriye!*

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103 The *dhyāna* description will be given later.

104 A major activity of the *yajamana*’s family, often months prior to the actual celebration of Durgā *pūjā*, is the acquisition of materials which will be used in worship of the goddess. No item is too obscure or insignificant, and a tremendous anxiety can be felt if items have not yet been obtained as Durgā Pūjā approaches. Thus, however important the *purohita*’s role may appear in the actual performance of the *pūjā*, it is vital to remember that it is the climax of a much wider range of ritual activity by the patron’s family or the communal body of worshippers.

105 This is Durgā embodied in the *bilva* tree.
**Surge devi samunittha aham tvam adhivasaye.**

Om! O dear consort of Śiva, O divine one, O Goddess Durgā, please arise properly. I shall anoint you with these articles.\(^{106}\)

1. Sandal paste (*gandha*).

After reading the verse:

*Om gandha dvārām durādhaṁśam nityapṛṣṭāṁ kartṣīṁṇ/ svarūṁ sarva bhūtānāṁ tāmiḥopahvaye śṛṇyam/ anena gandhena bhagavad durgāyāḥ (navapatrikāyaśca)\(^{107}\) śubhādhiḥvāsanam (asitu)/ om astu.*

[RVKh.5.87.9a; TA10.1.10a]

he takes a small amount of sandal paste and touches the heart of the image.

2. Soil (*mahī*).

Taking a bit of soil from its container in the large copper plate, he says:

*Om mahī trīṇāmavarastu dyuksam mītrasyāryamnah/ durādhaṁśam varūṇasya/ anāya mahyāḥ bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*

[SV.1.192a; RV.10.1.185a]

3. Sandal paste (*gandha*) again.

*Om bhadra indrasya rūtayah/ yo asya kāmam vidhato no rasati mano dānāya codayan/ anena gandhena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*

[RV.8.62.1a-6e; AV.20.58.2b; SV.2.670b]

4. Small stone (*śīla*).

*Om vi tvadapo na parvatasya prṣṭhādūtkebhi ragne janayanta devāḥ/ tam tvā girah suṣṭutayo vājayantajīṁ girvavāho jigyurasvāḥ/*

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\(^{106}\) If *bodhana* was the awakening ritual, then *adhivāsa* could be understood as the "getting up" ritual causing the Devī to arise. The bells and drums figure in the process of enlivening the goddess.

If it is inconvenient for the *purohita* to reach the Devī images (*bilva* tree, etc.), he may use a long piece of *kusa* grass with which to touch the offerings, *ghata*, and other images.

\(^{107}\) As previously mentioned, the *purohita* will repeat the entire *adhivāsa* (or a greatly curtailed symbolic equivalent) to the *navapatrikā* and the clay *mārtis*. The *navapatrikā* is a collection of nine plants which embody the Devī. At times the *bilva* tree is worshipped independently where it is rooted, while the clay images are in a different location. When worship of a rooted *bilva* tree is not convenient, a *bilva* branch implanted in earth is worshipped instead. This branch may form part of the *navapatrikā*. 
5. Unhusked rice (dhānaya).

Om dhānāvantam karambhīnam apā pavantam ukthīnam/
indra prātarujasvanah/
anena dhān,yena bhagavad durgāyāh . . .
[RV.3.52.1a; SV1.210a]

6. Dārva grass.

Om yajjāyathā apūavya maghavan vrtrahatyāya/
tat prthivimaprathaya tadastahān uito divam/
anaya dārvayā bhagavad durgāyāh . . .
[RV.8.89.5a; SV.2.779a]

7. Flower (puspa).

Om pavamāna vyāsnuhi raśmibhi vājasātamah/
dadhāt stotre svuṭryam/
anena puspena bhagavad durgāyāh . . .
[SV.2.662a]

8. Fruit (phala) (e.g., myrobylan/gooseberry (haritaki)); dried fruit may be substituted.

Om indram naro nemadhitā havante yatparyā yunajate dhiyastāh/
sāro nṛjātā śravasaśca kāma & gomati vraje bhajā tvam nah/
anena phalena bhagavad durgāyāh . . .
[RV.7.27..1a; SV.1.318a]

9. Curd (dadhi) in a small container.

Om dadhikrāvno akārisam jisno raśvasya vājinah/
surabhī no mukhā karat prāṇa ṛṣumśi tārisat/
anena dadhnā . . .
[RV.4.39.6a; SV.1.358a]

10. Clarified butter/ghi (ghṛta).

Om ghṛtavādi bhuvanānam abhiśryorvī prthvī madhunghhe supeśasā/
dyāvā prthvī varunasya gharmanā viskabhite ajare bhūrtetāsā/
anena ghṛtena bhagavad durgāyāh . . .
[RV.6.7.1a; SV.1.378a]
11. Auspicious symbol (svāstika). This is often a cone shaped (perhaps multicoloured) item made of rice powder by the women of the household.

   Om svasti na indro vrddhastra/  
   svasti nah pāśā viśvaved/  
   svasti na stārksyo 'ristanimih/  
   svasti no brhaspatir dadhātu/  
   anena svastikena bhagavad durgāyāh . . .
   [RV.1.89.6a; SV.2.1225a]

12. Vermillion (sindūra).

   Om sindhorucchavāse patayantamukṣanam hiranyapāvāḥ paśumapsu ṛghhnate/  
   anena sindhena bhagavad durgāyāh . . .
   [RV.9.86.43c; AV.18.3.18c; SV.1.564c]

13. Conch shell (śaṅkha).

   Om sa sunve yo vasantam yo rāyamānetā ya idānām/  
   somo yah suksītānām/  
   anena śaṅkhena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .
   [RV.9.108.13a; SV.1.582a]


   Om amṣate vyaṁṣate samaṁṣate kralām rihanti madhvā bhaṁṣate/  
   anena kajjala bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .
   [RV.9.86.43a; SV.18.3.18a; SV.1.564a]

15. Bile of a cow (rocanā or gorocanā).

   Om adha jno adho vā divo brhatro rocanād adhi/  
   ayā bardhāsva tanvā girā mamā jātā sukrado prṇa/  
   anayā rocanayā . . .
   [RV.8.1.18a; SV.1.52a]

16. Yellow mustard (siddhārtha).

   Om eṣa āṣa apūrvyā vyucchati priyā divāh/  
   stūṣe vamaśvinā brhat/  
   anena siddhārthena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .

17. Gold (kāñcana).
18. Silver (raupya).

\[\text{Om yadvarco hiranyasya yadvavarco gavamuto/}
\text{satyasya brahma no varca stena mām sam srjamasī/}
\text{anena raupyena bhagavad durgayāh . . .}
\]
[AvS.4.10a]

19. Copper (tāmra).

\[\text{Om vanmahāmasi sūrya vadditiya mahāmasi/}
\text{mahante sato mahimā paṇistam mahnā deva mahāmasi/}
\text{anena tāmrena bhagavad durgayāh . . .}
\]

20. Whisk from yak’s tail hair (cāmara).\(^{108}\)

\[\text{Om vāta ā vātu bheṣajam sambhu mayobhu no hṛde/}
\text{prana āyumsi tarisat/}
\text{anena cāmarena bhagavad durgayāh . . .}
\]
[RV.10.186.1a; SV.i.184a]


\[\text{Om aditpratnasya retaso jyotih pāsyanti vāsaram/}
\text{paro yādīdhyaite divi/}
\text{anena darpanena bhagavad durgayāh . . .}
\]
[RV.8.6.30a; SV.1.20a]

22. Lamp (dīpa).

\[\text{Om āyurjyotih raviyotih/}
\text{uhovā evārkajyotih/}
\text{anena dīpena bhagavad durgayāḥ . . .}
\]

The purohita now picks up the entire platter with worship materials (praśasti pātra) in his hand. On it he places a small burning lamp. He touches it to the earth and

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\(^{108}\) A cāmari gai (taken from a cow) may also be used. Nowadays, synthetic ones are also common. Unlike the cāmara used in other parts of the worship, the one used for adhivāsa is only a few inches long.
then to the Devī in her various forms. He repeats the process three times.

Om udyallikamarocayah/
imaillikonamarocayah/
prajābhūttamarocayah/
viśvambhūttamarocayah/
anena praśastipātrenā bhagavad durgāyāh.

A dhunuci is filled with coal or coconut husks and burned. Dhuna (incense powder) is added to it with sandal powder and guggulu (which produces a sweet smell). It burns continuously through the adhivāsa, filling the space with a pleasant sweet smoke, adding to the atmosphere of heightened expectancy. The purohita occasionally passes the dhunuci before the Devī.

Adhivāsa of the Khaḍga (Sword) and Darpaṇa (Mirror)

During this adhivāsa ritual, the purohita anoints the sword (khaḍga) which will be used for the blood sacrificial offering (bali) or its substitute (e.g., a type of melon (kusmāndā)). He also anoints the mirror (darpana) which is used later in the pūjā to worship (particularly bathe) the Devī in her form in the clay image.109

Adhivāsa of the Navapatrikā (Nine Plants)

The purohita has simultaneously been anointing the nine plants each of which symbolizes a goddess form of Durgā, one of which is the bi/va tree, also called Śrīphalā. The nine plants are:

1. Kadalī (plantain): It is a large tree about four to five feet tall, comparable in size with the image. It should not be cut, but uprooted and its roots washed free of soil. It symbolizes the goddess Brahmāni.  
2. Māna (a broad leaved plant): Symbolizes the goddess Cāmundā.  

109 While it is possible to see this as merely a purification of worship items, it is more reasonable to recognize the sword and the mirror as the Devī herself. The potencies of both items are being aroused.

110 More will be said about the navapatrikā later in the ritual.
6. Śrīphala (a bīlva branch containing two fruits resembling breasts): Symbolizing Śivā.
8. Aśoka (a large shady tree; in Caitra it blossoms with small red flowers): Symbolizes Śokarahitā.

Namaskāra Mantra (Sacred Utterance of Homage)

The purohita now utters the namaskāra mantra greeting and worshipping the goddess after her anointment. He says:

Om sarva mangala mangalye śive sarvārtha sādhihe śaranye tryambike gauri nārāyanī namas’tute.

[See bodhana for interpretation].

He now leaves the bilva tree and goes to the premises which will serve as the temple for the clay image of Durgā.\(^{111}\)

Preparing the Altar

The purohita draws a yantra on the floor of the shrine room (or temple). This is either an eight-petalled lotus (aṣṭadala kamala) or the sarvatobhadra mandala. He covers it with earth, and sprinkles it with five kinds of grain (pañca śasya). He establishes a jar (ghata) atop the earth altar filling it with clear water, placing mango twigs in its mouth and topping it with a green coconut. This he covers with a green coconut and ties it with small red cloth (H/Beng: aṅgoca/gamca). Since this installation of the jar (ghaṭaṣṭhāpana) is done rapidly, he may use the Tantric method previously mentioned.

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\(^{111}\) There are two types of image clusters used in Durgā Pūjā. One is a single structure where the images of all the deities, their vehicles, and the demon are attached to each other. This is most commonly used in Bengali homes and community celebrations. It is considered to be the traditional style of image cluster. The wood base and frame is called a kathamo in Bengali. The other type of cluster has separate murtis of the gods (Ganeśa and Kārtika) and goddesses (Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī) with a central image of Durgā, Śiṅgha, and Mahīśāsura. The single image cluster is generally topped by an arch, which in Bengal is usually not painted by the Pals, the caste (jāti) traditionally associated with Durgā Pūjā image making. It is painted by some other folk artists. In Banāras, single cluster images are made by the Pals who do the arch painting as well. The Pals and other artisans also make multiple image clusters which are popular among the non-Bengali community (sārvajanta) pūjās.
The jar (*ghata*) is set in the front of the earth altar, leaving room for the clay image. The clay image is carried from the image makers and set down in the shrine room on the prepared altar.

**Adhivāsa of the Clay Image**

The *purohita* may now repeat the entire elaborate *adhivāsa* ritual previously performed at the site of the *bilva* tree. Sometimes he just makes a simple offering with flowers and sandal paste. In the elaborate *adhivāsa* he makes sure to touch the hearts of all the divine images, including Mahiśāsura. The devotion paid to Mahiśa during Durgā Puja challenges facile interpretations of the goddess and the demon as simply representing a struggle between good and bad.

**Kāṇḍā Ropanam (Erecting the Staffs)**

The *purohita* now places four forked sticks (*kāṇḍā*) around the image and wraps string seven or more times around them. This gesture of cordonning off sanctified space, is done privately, with the *yajamāna* in preparation for the rituals of the following day.
Varaṇa (Selection of the Purohita)

The purohita begins with his everyday (nitya) ritual actions (kriyā) on the seventh (saptamī) day. After finishing these (at his own home), he approaches the shrine of Durgā (in the yajamāna’s home) where the clay images were installed the day before, and binds a red thread on the Devī’s wrist while uttering the Durgā Gāyatrī Mantra.

Mahādevyai vidmahe/
durgayai devyai dhimahi/
tanno devi pracodayat.

We know the Great Goddess.
We make a meditation of the Goddess Durgā.
May that Goddess guide us (on the right path).

He then takes his seat (āsana) and asks the yajamāna to present himself near the altar. The yajamāna sits facing north, and the purohita remains seated facing east. The yajamāna sips water thrice, wiping his lips with the cow’s ear (gokarna mudrā), and says:

Om viṣṇuh/ om viṣṇuh/ om viṣṇuh.

The yajamāna then offers the purohita a red flower (japā), dūrvā grass, and washed uncooked rice in a copper vessel (possibly the kuśī), while uttering:

Om namo vivasvate brahman bhāsvate viṣṇutejase jagat savitre śucaye savitre karmadyāyne idamargham/
Om śrī sāryāya namah.

Om! I pay obeisance to the Sun, associated with all glory, the supreme reality, shining, the progeniter and giver of fruits of actions; this offering of mine which is given back to the universe is always pure.

With this utterance he offers up the content in the plate making an obeisance to the Sun thus:

Om javākusumasaṅkāśam kāśyapeyam mahādyutim/
adhvāntārim sarvapāpaghnam prañato ’smi divākaram.

Om! It is the colour of the China rose (javā), exceedingly luminous, the son of Kaśyapa,
remover of darkness, destroyer of all sins, I bow myself down to that maker of the day.\textsuperscript{112}

Then looking at the \textit{purohita}, he says:
\textit{Om sādhu bhavān āstam.}

Om! May you be seated comfortably.

The \textit{purohita} answers:
\textit{Om sādhvahamāse.}

Om! I am well seated.

\textit{Yajamāna:}
\textit{Om arcayisyāmoh bhavantam.}

Om! I shall pay reverence to you.

\textit{Purohita:}
\textit{Om arcaya.}

Om! You may go ahead.

The \textit{yajamāna} then takes sandalpaste, a flower, two pieces of cloth (an upper and lower garment)\textsuperscript{113}, a sacred thread (\textit{yajña sūtra}), a seat (e.g., a woolen blanket), a \textit{kuśāsana} (seat made of \textit{kuśa} grass), a silver ring (\textit{angulīyaka}), betel leaf and nut (\textit{pan}), and places these into the hands of the priest.

He asks the priest (the \textit{purohita} is referred to as \textit{ācārya} in these prayers) to uncover his knee, and taking \textit{dūrvā} grass, a flower, and washed rice in the \textit{kūśī} in his left palm. Covering it with his right palm, he touches it to the knee of the \textit{purohita} as a sign of obeisance, and recites this oath (\textit{saṅkalpa}):\textsuperscript{114}

\textit{Om viṣṇur namo 'dya āśvine māsi śukle pakṣe saptamī tiḥāvārabhya mahānavaṃśīm yāvat}

\textsuperscript{112}The \textit{purohita} appears to be identified with the Sun through this \textit{argha} offering. The Sun, as previously noted, is the formless Brahman.

\textsuperscript{113}These may be of silk, artificial silk, or pure cotton. They will be worn later by the \textit{purohita}.

\textsuperscript{114}This gesture is one of politeness and signifies meek reverence. It parallels a gesture in the marriage ritual when the father of the bride touches the groom's knee.
mat sankalpita durgāpujāna karmanī acārya karma karnāya amuka gotram śrī amuka devaśarmānām gandhadibhir abhyarca bhavantamaham vrne.

Om Viṣṇu! From this day onward, in the bright fortnight in the month of āśvina, from the seventh lunar day to the great ninth, in the rituals of Durgā Pūjā as has been desired by me for the purpose of performing Durgā Pūjā, I, after showing reverence to you by presenting sandalpaste, etc., am selecting/appointing you, belonging to the gotra named _________ as my priest.

The purohita answers:

*Om vṛto 'smi.*

Om! I have been chosen.

**Yajamāna:**

*Om yathāvihitam acārya karma kuru.*

Om! Please perform the Durgā Pūjā ritual according to the method.

**Purohita:**

*Om yathājñām karvāṇi*

Om! I shall do it according to my knowledge.

If the tantradhāraka is present, the same ritual is repeated for him. He will be referred to as the tantradhāra karma karana.\(^\text{115}\)

**Saptamī Sāmānya Vidhi (Preliminary Common Rituals on the Seventh)**

The purohita now occupies the seat again and sips water three times (ācamana). He then utters the *svasti vācanam*. He follows this with a call for the presence of the sun, moon, and so on, and for an auspicious beginning to the ritual.\(^\text{116}\) He then makes a common offering (*sāmānya argha*), purifies the flowers (*puspa śuddhi*), and his seat

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\(^{115}\)The tantradhāraka aids the purohita in the ritual by holding together the various strands of ritual activity. If the purohita is still learning, he may enlist the aid of a senior brāhmaṇa (perhaps his mentor) to serve in the role. If he is relatively confident to see his way through the ritual he may use a novice, for whom the role serves as training.

\(^{116}\)See the relevant mantra under *sāmānya vidhi* section in the Offerings to Brāhmaṇa Attendents previously discussed.
(āsana śuddhi). He then makes a simple flower and fragrance offering to all major deities.

**Main Sañkalpa (Oath)**

The *purohita* now utters the long *sañkalpa* (oath), concerning all the rituals to be performed on Saptami, Aṣṭamī, and Navami. This is the same one uttered before the *bodhana* rituals on Śaṣṭhi. He does this while placing a piece of myrobalan/gooseberry (*haritaki*) into the *kuśī* (small copper ladle) along with water, flowers, and washed rice. He carries it in his left palm and covers it with his right. He places both hands on the right side. As he finishes the oath, he overturns the *kuśī* in a gesture of commitment.

**Sañkalpa Sūkta (Oath Hymn)**

He now reads the *sañkalpa sūkta*. While doing this he takes washed rice in his hand and throws down the grain in small pinches saying: "Om svasti, svasti, svasti."

**Note:** The rice grains and the *kuśī* are in the Northeast (Išana) corner of the *purohita*.

**Cutting of the Bilva Tree Branch**

The *purohita* now goes to the *bilva* tree and worships it with a ten-part devotional service (*daśopacāra*). These include washing of the feet (*plidya*), water for rinsing the mouth (*acamana*), offerings (*argha*), etc.

Then with folded hands, he utters:

*Om* *bilva* *vrkṣa* *mahābhāga* *sada* *tvam* *śaṅkara* *priyah/*
*grhitvā* *tava* *śakānca* *durgāpūja* *karomyaham/*
*sakha* *chedodbhavam* *duhkham* *nacakāryam* *tvayā* *prabho/*
*devai* *grhitvā* *teśākham* *pujyā* *durgeti* *viśrutih."

Om! O great souled *bilva* tree, you are always dear to Śaṅkara. Taking a branch of yours, I shall perform the worship ritual to Durgā. The pain born of the cutting of the branch should not be minded by you, O master. It is said that "taking the branch, it was
worshipped as Durgā by the gods.\textsuperscript{117}

Then taking a knife, he utters the mantra:

\textit{Chindi chindi phat phat svāhā.}

And cutting the branch (this is only a symbolic gesture since the selected branch has already been separated from the main branch earlier to avoid difficulties during the ritual), he says:

\begin{verbatim}
Om putrayur dhana brdiyartham nesyāmi candikālayam/
bilva śākhān samāsṛya laśmīṁ rājyaṃ prayacchāmi/
āgacchacandike devi sarva kalyāṇa hetave/
pājān grhaṇa sumukhi namaste śaṅkara priye.
\end{verbatim}

Om, for the purpose of the increase of sons and wealth, I shall take you to the temple of Candikā, after making your abode in the branch of the \textit{bilva} tree, you please endow me with wealth and kingship. Please, O Candika, come along for the purpose of giving all sorts of auspiciousness/well being. O nice faced one, dear to Śaṅkara, please accept my offerings/worship.\textsuperscript{118}

With this \textit{mantra} offering, and the beating of drums, blowing of conch shells, and ringing of bells, the branch is brought to the Devī shrine room and joined into the \textit{navapatrikā}. The \textit{bilva} branch, called Śrīphala, possesses two fruit which resemble breasts. It is lashed to the plantain (\textit{kadali}) which is also about three to four feet in height. These two plants give the \textit{navapatrikā} body its form. The other plants are smaller and are wound like creepers around these and tied into place.

\section*{Bathing of the Navapatrikā}

The \textit{purohita} makes a preparation of turmeric and oil (just a pinchful) and smears the body of the \textit{navapatrikā} saying:

\begin{verbatim}
Om kosi katamosi kasmai tvā kāyatva susloka sumangala satyarājan/
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{117} The prayer suggests a divine precedent for the act wherein the gods themselves took a branch of the \textit{bilva} tree and worshipped it as Durgā.

\textsuperscript{118} The goddess Candikā is identified with Durgā as the \textit{bilva} tree. In contrast to the martial dimension of worship, where "defeat of one's enemies" is requested, here it is increase in sons, wealth, status (kingship), and auspiciousness. One might be inclined to suggest that where the \textit{ghaṭa} rituals hope to induce fertility, the \textit{bilva} tree rituals seek to promote an increase in beneficence.
Om! Who are you? From where have you come? For whom are you here? Your body is auspicious and remains luminously manifest in truth.\textsuperscript{119}

\textit{Om nānārupadhare devī divyavastṛavagunthite/ tava lepana maṭreṇa sarva pāpam vinaṣyati.}

Om! O Goddess, you assume different forms. You are covered with divine clothes. Only by smearing your body with these unguents all kinds of sins disappear.\textsuperscript{120}

Purification of the Pañcagavya (Five Products of the Cow)

The navapatrikā will first be bathed in five substances from the cow (pañcagavya). The purohita first purifies them with the following purification (śodana) mantras:

1. For the cow urine he uses the Gāyatrī Mantra:

\textit{Om bhūr bhuvah svāh tat savitur vareṇyam bhargo devasya dhiṃahi dhiyo yoh nah pracoḍayāt.}

He who gives birth to the three worlds (bhū, bhuvah, svāh), the glorified light of that progenitor of the worlds, we meditate on that light, who may guide our intellect.

2. For the cow dung:

\textit{Om gāvāścidghā sāmānyavah sajātyena marutaḥ savandavah rihate kakubho mithaḥ.}

3. For the cow milk:

\textit{Om gavyoh suno yathā purāśvayota rathayā varivasyā mahonām.}

[RV.8.46.10a; SV.1.186a]

4. For the cow curd (dadhī):

\textit{Om dadhi krāvno akāriṣaṇa jīṣorāśvasya vājināḥ surobhino mukhā karat praṇa āyumṣi}

\textsuperscript{119}The passage (Vedic) reflects the speculative awe in the face of the mystery of existence characteristic of some ṛg Vedic hymns and Upanisadic literature.

\textsuperscript{120}The mysterious divine presence is identified as the Devi, who is recognized as assuming a variety of forms. Although clothed in celestial garments, the process of manifestation (like the journey of a guest) has brought with it some "pollution." These defilements are removed by anointing the Devi with the turmeric and oil mixture. The purohita is also indirectly alluding to the upcoming bathing of the navapatrikā in a variety of substances.
tārisat.

5. For the ghi (ghṛta):

   Om ghṛtavarte bhuvaṇānām abhiśriyorrī prthvī madhudushe supeṣasā/
dyāvā prthvī varuṇasya gharmanā viśkabhiṣe ajare bhūri retasā.

Then he utters a mantra for the purification of the whole mixture:

   Om dyaurāpah kanikradam sindhorāpo marutāḥ mādayantāṁ dharmaṃ dyotīṁ.

**Purification of the Pañcāmṛta (Five Nectars)**

He also purifies the five nectars (pañcāmṛta) in the process since it also consists of curd, milk and ghi, for which the same mantras as above are used. For the two other ingredients, sugar (śarkarā) and honey (madhu), he recites:

For the sugar:

   The kusodoka mantra. This is the mantra for water infused with kuṣa grass.

For the honey, he utters:

   Om madhu vātā ṛtāyate madhu ksaranti sindhavah/
mādhvīr nah santrosadhīṁ/
om madhu naktamuto sasa madhu mat pārthivam rajah/
madhu dyaurastu nah pita/
madhu mānno vanaspatīr madhumāṁ astu sūryah/
sadhvīrgāvo bhavantu nah/
om madhu madhu madhu.

**Bathing the Navapatrika in the Pañcagavya**

The purohita holds the navapatrikā over a large vessel (to catch the bath fluids), and begins to bathe it by pouring consecrated substances over it while uttering appropriate mantras.

When bathing it with consecrated cow urine, he says:

   Om ṛṇ ṛṇ caṇḍikāyai namah. Obeisance to Caṇḍikā!

With cowdung:

   Om gām gauryai namah. Obeisance to Gaurī!
With milk:

*Om hṛṃ triṇetrayai namah.* Obeisance to She who Possesses the Third Eye!

With curd:

*Om hṛṃ bhairavyai namah.* Obeisance to Bhairavi!

With ghi:

*Om hṛṃ bhuvanesvarya namah.* Obeisance to Bhuvaśvarī!

Then he bathes it in water touched with *kuśa* grass saying:

*Om hṛṃ pārvatayai namah.* Obeisance to Pārvati!

**Bathing the Navapatrikā in Nine Kinds of Water**

The *purohita* next bathes the *navapatrikā* in nine different kinds of water while uttering the following *mantras*. Each is directed to a particular plant in the *navapatrikā*.

1. In hot water, uttering:

*Om kadalt tarpamsthāsi viṣṇavakṣah sthalāraye/ namaste navapatri tvam namaste caṇṭanāyike.*

Om! You, who abides in the breast of Viṣṇu, are abiding in the plantain tree (*kadali*). 121 I bow to you, O divine nine plants. You are representing Caṇṭanāyikā (one of the forms of Caṇḍi).

2. Water from a tank:

*Om kaccitvam sthāvarsthasi sadā siddhi pradāyinti/ durgārupena sarvatra snānena vijayam kuru.*

Om! You are called *kacci*. 122 You remain in immovable objects and you are the giver

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121 The term *kadali* is also used to describe a beautiful woman. A myth tells how the yogi Gorakṣṇāth rescued his master Mātyāndraṇāth who was made a prisoner by the women of Kadañī. Gorakṣṇāth told his master that it was Durgā who had brought on the "forgetfulness" that had almost cost him immortality (see Eliade 1963:115). In this myth Durgā’s power of delusion is implicitly linked to the beauty of women.

122 Also called *kacvi* (*Arum colocasia*), the plant is cultivated for its fleshy edible root.
of all kinds of attainments in the form of Durgā.\textsuperscript{123} Through this bathing of yours bestow victory upon us.

3. Dew:

\textit{Om haridre hararūpāśi śaṅkarasya sadā priyā/}
\textit{rudrarūpāśi devi tvam sarvasiddhim prayacchame.}

Om! You are called turmeric (haridrā). You represent the form of Hara (Śiva). You are always beloved by Śaṅkara. In the form of Rudra, O lady divine, bestow upon us all kinds of attainments.

4. Water mixed with flour:

\textit{Om jayanti jayarūpāśi jagatām jayahetave/}
\textit{namāmi tvam mahādevi jayam dehi grhe mama.}

Om! Jayantī is the form of victory (jaya). She has assumed this form for the purpose of giving victory to worldly people. O great lady, I pay obeisance to you. Give me victory in my house.

5. \textit{Sarvaśadhi} water (mixture of herbs):\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{Om śrīphala śrīniketo 'si sadā vijaya bardhana/}
\textit{dehi me hiitakā māmśca prasanno bhava sarvadā.}

Om! You (śrīphala) are the abode of beauty and always increaser of victory. Please bestow upon me the desired well-being and remain satisfied all the time.

6. Ocean water:

\textit{Om dādimityaghaṁvināśaya ksunnaśaya ca vedhasā/}
\textit{nirmitā phalakāṁaya prasūta tvam harapriye.}

Om! O you pomegranate (dādimit), for the purpose of removal of sins and of hunger, Lord Brahmā created you. You have been made for the purpose of fulfillment of the fruits of desire. O beloved of Hara, be pleased with me.

---

\textsuperscript{123}This is a highly significant example of how liturgy can provide clues to the "nature" of the deity. Durgā's presence is said to reside in immovable objects. This aspect of her power reinforces her identification with structural integrity (e.g., forts, temples, homes, armour, weapons, rocks, mountains, altars, thrones, etc.) which is vitally important in affording protection and firm support.

\textsuperscript{124}The mixture consists of powdered herbs and can be purchased at a shop which supplies materials for \textit{pūjā}. 
7. Scented perfumed water:

\[
\text{Om sthirabhava sadā durge aśoke śokarini/}
\text{maya tvam pājitā durge sthīra bhava harapriye.}
\]

Om! The aśoka tree is one which removes the sorrow of separation. O Durgā remain steadily here. I have worshipped you, O beloved of Hara, for this purpose.

8. Water containing jewels:

\[
\text{Om māna mānyeṣu vrksesu mānanyah surā suraiḥ/}
\text{snapayāmi mahādevaṁ mānam dehī namo' stute.}
\]

Om! O māna, among trees you māna are shown respect above all and even by gods and demons you are paid reverence. Obeisance to you Great Goddess.

9. Water mixed with sesame oil:

\[
\text{Om lakṣmīstvam dhānyarūpasi prānīnām prānadāyinī/}
\text{sthirāyantam hi no bhūva grhe kāmapradā bhava.}
\]

Om! You are Lākṣmī in the form of paddy (dhānya) and you are the giver of life to all living beings. While remaining steadily in my house, be the giver of fulfillment of all desires.

Bathing the Navapatrikā in Eight Waters

The purohita next bathes the navapatrikā with water from eight jars filled separately with different kinds of water. Where the previous bathing was intended for each of the plants, this series represents homage paid to the Devī by various groups of divine beings.

1. Water from the Gaṅgā:

\[
\text{Om devyāstvāmabhisiṇcantu brahmavisnumahēśvarāḥ/}
\text{vyomagaṅgāmbupūrṇena ādyena kalasena tu.}
\]

Om! Let Brahmā, Viśnu, and Maheśvara bathe the divine goddess with the first jar full of water which has fallen from the river Gaṅgā in the void/sky (vyoma).\(^{125}\)

\(^{125}\)Śiva is also known as vyomakesa (He whose Hair is the Void/Sky).
2. Rain water:

Om marutaścābhisiṅcantu bhaktimantarā suresvarim/
meghāmbu paripārṇena dvitiya kalasena tu.

Om! Let the heavenly air/wind-gods (maruta) who are devoted to you, the monarch of
the gods, bathe you with the second jarful of water collected from water falling from the
cloud.\textsuperscript{126}

3. Water from the Sarasvati river (collected from Prayāga).\textsuperscript{127}

Om sārasvatena toyena saṃpūrṇena surottamām/
vidyādhārāścābhisiṅcantu trītaya kalasena tu.

Om! Let Vidyādhāras bathe you, the supreme of all divine ladies, with water form the
third jar filled to the brim from the Sarasvati river.\textsuperscript{128}

4. Water from the sea:

Om śakrādyāścābhisiṅcantu lokapālāḥ samāgataḥ/
sāgarodakapārṇena caturtha kalasena tu.

Om! Let Indra and the other guardians of the quarters who have come here bathe you
with the fourth jar full of water filled with the water of the sea.

5. Water mixed with pollen from the lotus flower:

Om vārinā paripārṇena padmarenau sugandhinā/
pahcamenabhisiṅcantu nāgaśca kalasena tu.

Om! May the serpents bathe you with the fifth jar of water which has been made fragrant
with pollen from the lotus flower.

6. Water from a waterfall:

Om himvaddhemakūtādyāścābhisiṅcantu parvataḥ/

\textsuperscript{126}The Maruts are wind gods mentioned in the Vedas who are generally associated with Rudra.

\textsuperscript{127}Prayāga is a city at the confluence (saṅgam) of three holy rivers, the Gaṅgā, the Yamunā, and the
Sarasvati, each of which is a goddess. Mundane geography reveals that only the first two rivers meet at
this place, but the Sarasvati is a divine river which flows underground.

\textsuperscript{128}The Vidyādhāras are celestial beings who are possessors and revealers of knowledge (vidya). They
are shown subordinate to the Devī, one of whose epithets is Mahavidyā.
nirjarodaka pūrṇena saṣṭhena kalasena tu.

Om! May the mountains, beginning with the Himālaya, Hemakūṭā, and others, bathe you with the sixth jar full of water collected from waterfalls (or fountains).

7. Water from different holy spots:

Om sarvātirūṃbūṃpūrṇena kalasena sureshvarām/
saptamenābhisiṃcantu rṣayaḥ sapta khecarāḥ.

Om! The seventh jar is filled with water collected from holy rivers and lakes. May the seven sages who roam about in the void/sky bathe you with this jar.

8. Water scented with sandal paste:

Om vāsavaścbhisiṃcantu kalasenaṣṭamena tu/
astamaṅgala samyukte durge devi namo'vaste.

Om! May the Vāsus bathe you with the eighth jar full of water, O Durgā, who are associated with the eight kinds of auspicious things. I pay obeisance to you O Goddess Durgā.

The purohita now removes the excess water from the body of the navapatrikā with a new cloth and wraps it in a red bordered sāri, draping part of it over the plantain leaves, so that it resembles a modest lady. He places it on a raised altar near the Ganeśa image. The navapatrikā is commonly called the kala bou by Bengalis. This, I was told, means a "newly married lady made of a banana plant." It is ambiguously thought of both as Durgā herself and as the wife of Ganeśa.

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129 The Vasus are "souls of the universe." They sometimes refer to the constellations.

The use of eight waters parallels the notion of the eight lucky items (astamangala) which are mentioned at the last bathing. These items (when associated with great occasions like coronations) are listed as a lion, a bull, an elephant, a water jar, a fan, a flag, a trumpet, and a lamp. Other listings have them as a brāhmaṇa, a cow, fire, gold, ghi, the sun, water, and a king.

130 Ganeśa is often thought of as unmarried. At times he is paired with two wives, buddhi/rddhi and siddhi, whose names mean intellect/prosperity and spiritual attainment, respectively. Since these qualities are generally also attributed to the goddess (e.g., under her epithets as Mahāvidyā, Śrī, and Siddhidātrī) it is appropriate to pair the navapatrikā with Ganeśa. In one myth related to me, Ganeśa wanted a wife and was tricked into marrying the kala bou. Only later did he discover that she was a plant. Ganeśa, with his pot-belly and his ambivalent qualities of creating obstacles or being benevolent, mirrors, in form and character, Kubera, the god of the yaksas and of riches. The navapatrikā is very much a tree-sprite (yaksi) form of the goddess, and thus is appropriately paired with Ganeśa.
Mahāsnāṇa (Great Bathing) of the Goddess

The purohita now takes a large brass or earthenware pot and places a tripod in the centre of it.131 Upon the tripod he places a highly polished metal mirror (darpana), arranging the apparatus so that the reflection (pratibimba) of the clay murti falls directly onto it.132 The mirror had been previously consecrated during the adhivāsa ritual. The purohita will proceed to bathe the image of Durgā in the mirror. Taking a small twig from the bilva tree (from the navapatrikā or the main bilva tree), about the length of eight digits (aṅguli), he places it on the mirror. It is for the goddess to wash her mouth and teeth.133 Pouring hot water on the twig, he utters:

Om āyurbālam yaśovarcaḥ prájāḥ paśu vasūni ca/
brahmā prájñānca medhānca tvanno dehi vanaspate.

Om! Longevity, strength, reputation, and inner stamina, progeny, animals, and wealth. Let Brahmā bestow upon me insight, wisdom, memory (medhā), and place upon me, O lord of the trees, all these things.

The purohita now rubs the surface of the mirror with rice powder, imitating that he is rubbing the whole body of the Devī, while uttering:

Om uḍvartayāmi devī tvām mrnaṃ ye śṛīphale 'pi ca/
sthirāryantam hi no bhūva gṛhe kāmaradā bhava.

Om! I am rubbing your whole body in the earthen image and the bilva fruit. You should remain steady in this place and be the giver of desires.134

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131 Sometimes a large earthenware jar with a wide mouth is used. A triangular support made of sticks is placed over the mouth. The mirror is placed upon this support which is yoni shaped and carries the same triadic representations of the tripod.

132 It would be impractical to bathe the earthen image due to its size and construction material (unbaked clay). The mirror is a practical alternative. However it is also a symbolic device for the mirror, in its use during self-adornment, is traditionally associated with the feminine. Also quite importantly, it suggests the illusory forms of manifest reality (i.e., the play of the Devī as Mahāmāyā), against the background of her unchanging self (i.e., as Brahman). The mirror, as an entity which has no intrinsic form or attributes, but which reflects all without itself being changed, is a symbol of the underlying essence of all reality.

133 This implicitly makes a link between the Devī as bilva tree, navapatrikā, and the image in the mirror.

134 He explicitly connects the Devī in the earthen image and the bilva tree.
Bathing with Pañcagavya

Then, in the method used for the navapatrikā, he bathes the goddess’s body with the five products from the cow (pañcagavya), using the same mantras.

Bathing with the Bhringāra

Taking water in a spouted water container (bhringāra), the purohita utters these mantras one after another as he pours them on the mirror’s surface. It represents devotional service to the Devī by a wide variety of divine beings.

Om ātreya bhāratī gāngā yamunā ca sarasvatī/ sarayur gandakī punyā śvetagaṇgā ca kauśikī/ bhogavatī ca pātāle svarge mandākinī tathā/ sarvāḥ sumanaso bhūvā bhringārāh snāpayantute.

Om! O river Ātreya, Bhārati, Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Sarayu, Gandakī, Śvetagaṇgā, Kauśikī, the river in the nether region (pātāla), Bhogavatī, and Mandākinī, all are very auspicious rivers. With all their attention concentrated towards the divine deity, they bathe you with a bhringāra.

Om surāstvāmabhīṣḍhacatu brahmaviṣṇumahēṣvarāh/ vāsudeva jagannāthastathā saṅkarśanah prabhuh/ pradyumnaścāniruddhaśca bhavantu vijayāya te/ ākhandalo 'gnirbhagavān yamo vai nairistathā/ varuna pavaṇaścaiva dhanādyakṣastathā śivah/ brahmānā sahaso ākṣiṇo dīkapālāḥ pāntu te sadā.

Om! Let all the heavenly beings, like Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśvara, Vāsudeva, who is the lord of the universe, and Saṅkarśana, the lord, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha bathe you and stand for your victory. May the guardian deity of the east (i.e., Indra), Agni, Yama, Nairīti, Varuṇa, and Pavana, the keeper of wealth (i.e., Kubera), and Śiva, Brahmā, along with Śeṣa, protect you all the time.

Om kārtirakṣaṁdirḥtirtmedhā pustih śraddhā kṣamā matih/ buddhir lajja vapuḥ śāntistuṣṭih kāntiśca mātaraḥ/ etāstvāmabhīṣḍhacantu rāhu ketuśca tarpitāḥ.

Om! May these Mothers (mār), reputation (kārti), wealth (lakṣmī), forbearance (dhṛti),

135 The bhringāra is a vessel traditionally used in the consecration of kings.

136 Vāsudeva, Saṅkarśana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, are four generations of deities related to Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa. In Pañcarātra philosophy they are the four arrays (vyāha) of consciousness.
memory (medhā), nourishment (puṣṭi), faith (ṣraddhā), forgiveness (ksama), intuition (mati), intellect (buddhi), bashfulness (lajjā), comeliness of form (vapu), peace (sānty), satisfaction (tuṣṭi), and delicate beauty (kānti) bathe you properly. And also Rāhu and Ketu.

Om rṣayo munayo gāvo devamātara eva ca/
devapatmyo dhruvā nāgā dāityāścāpsarasāṃ gaṇāḥ/
āstrāṇi sarvaśāstrāṇī rājaṇa vāhanāṇi ca/
ausadhāṇi ca ratnāni kālaśyāvayāṣca ye/
Om sarītāḥ sāgarāḥ sailāśtrāṇī jaladā naḍāḥ/
devadānavagandharvha yakṣarākṣasapannagāḥ/
ete tvāmāmbihiṣīṇcantu dharmakāmartha śiddhaye.

Om! Seers and sages, cows, the mothers of divine beings, their wives, the serpents, demons, the host of heavenly damsels, different kinds of weapons, all kinds of sacred texts, kings and their vehicles, medicinal herbs, jewels, the fractions of time, rivers, oceans, hills and mountains, givers of water (i.e., rivers and lakes), dwellers in heaven, demons, celestial musicians, yaksas, rakṣasas, creeping animals, may these all bathe you properly for the attainment of the three worldly ends of life, righteousness (dharma), desires (kāma), and the means of their fulfillment (artha).

Om! O the (male?) rivers Sindhu, Bhairava, Soma and other rivers which exist in this earth, after becoming mindful should bathe you with this bhrṅgāra.
Om! The sacred places like Kuruśetra, Prayāga, where the deathless banyan tree exists, the river Godāvari, the river in the sky, Narmadā, and the holy Manikarnikā, after coming over here should bathe you with the bhrṅgāra.
Om! The serpents beginning with Tākṣaka, who live in the nether world, with all willingness of their mind, should bathe you with the bhrṅgāra.
Om! Durga, the most dreadful among the terrific forms, Varahī, Kartikī, Harasiddhā, and Kālī, Indrāṇī, Vaisnāvī, Bhadrakālī, Visalakṣī, and Bhairavī, assuming various forms, having intentions of goodwill, should bathe you with this bhrṅgāra.137

137 It would appear from this piece of the liturgy, that the Devī transcends even her epithet as Durgā, since Durgā is named as just one, although the supreme, of her fierce forms. Such usages of epithets suggest that the Devī pūjā, though called Durgā Pūjā is a composite of worship rituals from many goddesses.
Bathing with Waters poured from the Śaṅkha (Conch Shell)

The purohita takes up a conch shell (śankha) and bathes the mirror in different waters poured from it while reciting appropriate mantras. He says, "This is a bath" (etat snāniyam) before each mantra.

Water from the Gaṅgā:

Om mandyākinyāstu yadvāri sarvapāpaharam śubham/
svargasrotasca vaiṣṇavyam snānam bhavatu tena te.

Om! The water of river Mandyākini, auspicious and the remover of all kinds of sins, and the rivers of the heavens belonging to Viśṇu, let your bathing be done by them.

Hot water:

Om pavitram paramam cosnām vahniyōti samanvitam/
jīvanam sarvapāpaghnaṁ bhṛṅgāraṁ snāpayantvimāṁ.

Om! The holy hot water housing the light of fire and life itself, and a remover of all sins, let it bathe you with bhṛṅgāras.

He also recites a Vedic verse:

Om āpo hi śīhā mayā bhuvaṣṭāna ārje dadhātana mahe raṇāya caṅṣase.

Water mixed with gold:

Om prthivyāṁ svarnarūpena devāṣṭhanti vai sadā/
sarvadosavinaśārtham snāpayāṁ maheśvarīṁ.

Om! Gods indeed remain always in the earth in the form of gold. For the purpose of destruction of all kinds of defects/faults I am bathing this great divine goddess.

Water mixed with silver:

Om ambike tvam mahābhāga śārade pāpanāśintī/
snānenaṇena devi tvam varadā bhava suvrate.

traditions. It also suggests that though Durgā is the synonymous epithet of the Mahādevī (Great Goddess) in this pūjā, the Great Goddess is beyond all epithets. A more mundane explanation could be that "Durgā" should be "Durge" placing it in the vocative case, thus identifying Durgā as the Mahadevi.

138This ritual operation may be greatly curtailed with Gaṅgā water substituting for all other waters.
Om! O you mother Ambikā, the most glorious one, you are known as Śaradā and the destroyer of sins. By this ritual bathing, O Goddess, you should become the giver of boons.

Plain water:

\[ Om \textit{y}ah \textit{apah} . . . \]
[RV.7.49.2a]

Om! The water which is considered to be the cause of attainment for all beings, it is sacred to all. I am bathing you with these waters.

Water mixed with flowers:

\[ Om \textit{devasyatvā} . . . \]

Water mixed with fruit:

\[ Om \textit{agn}a \textit{ayāhi} . . . \]
[RV.6.16.10a; SV.1.1a]

Water with plain sugarcane juice (Devi Gāyatrī Mantra):

\[ Om \textit{nārāyaṇyai vidmahe bhagavatīyai dhimahi tanno gauri pracodayāt}. \]

Om! We know Nārāyaṇī. We make a meditation of the goddess. May that goddess named Gaurī guide us (on the right path).

With ocean water:

\[ \textit{Devī Gāyatrī Mantra}. \]

With \textit{aguru} (a substance like sandalwood), camphor (\textit{karpūra}), and silt from the banks of the Gaṅgā:

\[ \textit{Devī Gāyatrī Mantra}. \]

With sesame oil:

\[ Om \textit{Hrīm cāmuṇḍāyai namah}. \]

Om! Hṛīm! Obeisance to Cāmuṇḍā.
Then with a special oil (Viṣṇu taila) made by an Ayurvedic firm.

*Om Hrōm caṃundāyai namōḥ.*

Then with water infused with five pungent flavours (*pañcakāśāya*), obtained from the bark/fruit of five different trees:

*Om Dum durgāyai namōḥ.*

Om! Dum! Obeisance to Durgā.\(^{139}\)

Water from a waterfall:

*Om candavatīyai namōḥ.*

Om! Obeisance to Caṇḍavatī.

Water from a Coconut:

*Devi Gāyatrī Mantra.*

Dew:

*Devi Gāyatrī Mantra.*

Water from the sea:

*Devi Gāyatrī Mantra.*

Water infused with *sarvauṣadī* (all herbs):

*Om yāḥ osadhāḥ somarājñīrvarvahitośata vicaksanāḥ/ tāsāmīrvamaśyuttamāram kāmāya śamhṛde.*

Om! The herbs, the Empress of Soma, and possessing the capacity of hundred types of efficacy, among them you are the best. For the fulfilment of desire, I keep you in my heart.

\(^{139}\)This is the root (*māla*) mantra of Durgā.
Bathing with the Sahasradhārā (Thousand-fold; Millifluent)

The purohita next bathes the mirror using a devise like a shower head, called the sahasradhara ("having a thousand"). Its openings shower the Devī with numerous distinct streams of water.

Om sāgarāḥ sarita . . .

Om! All the seas and rivers, the rivers of heaven and the big male rivers mixed with all sorts of herbs which are the destroyer of sins, let them bathe you with their hundred openings. The oceans consisting of salt, sugar, wine, clarified butter, curd, milk, and water, should bathe you the Great Goddess with thousands of streams/flows.

He then utters the first verses from each of the four Vedas:

Bathing the Reflected Image with Eight Different Waters

After this, the purohita again bathes the Devī in the mirror with eight small jars full of different waters using the previously mentioned mantras. This is exactly the same process used on the navapatrikā.

Ending of the Mahāsnāna

Finally, after drying the surface of the mirror with a piece of white cloth, the purohita draws a disc with vermillion on the mirror and writes a seed syllable in the centre. The mirror, well covered with a piece of cloth, is then placed on the altar where the clay image is installed. The mahāsnāna is completed.

Bhūtapasaranā (Appeasement of Inimical Spirits)

The purohita now commences an appeasement of the spirits, saying:

Etat pādyam/ etat sacandana puspam/ om bhūtebhyaḥ namah.

This a an offering of water for the feet.

This could "Hrīm," the seed syllable of the goddess, or it may be the specific seed syllable of Durgā, "Dum."
This is an offering of a fragrant flower.
Om! Obeisance to the elemental spirits.

Om ghorarāpebhya ghoratrebhyah siddhibhyah śādhyādibhyo bhūtebhyaḥ namah.

Om! Obeisance to the dreadful, to the more dreadful, and to those who are called siddhis and sādhyas.

Then he recites these verses:

Om bhatapreta pītācašca . . . (See bodhana)

And makes an offering of curd mixed with unhusked pulse on a bilva leaf (māṣa bhakta bali).\textsuperscript{141}

The purohita then takes fried rice (lāja), sandal paste, white mustard, sacred ashes, dūrvā and kuśa grass, and washed rice in his hand. He charges its with the mantra, "Phat," seven times, and then utters the verses:

Om apasarpantu te bhatā ye bhūtā bhūminpālakāh/ bhūtānāmavirodhena durgapūjām karomyham.
Om vetalāśca . . . (see bodhana).

Om! Let those elemental spirits and those who are protectors of the land be away. I shall worship Durgā without any opposition to those elemental spirits.
Om! May all vampires, . . . (see bodhana).

He scatters the items held in his hand onto the floor and says:

Om bhūtebhyaḥ namah. Om! Obeisance to the elemental spirits.

Worship of the Bilva Tree

The purohita now proceeds to worship the bilva tree either in its separate location, or (more conveniently) as part of the navapatrikā. While offering flowers to it, he utters the mantra:

Om bilvaśakavāsinyai durgayai namah.

Om! Obeisance to Durgā who abides in the bilva tree.

With the same mantra he proceeds to worship the bilva/navapatrikā with the ten-part

\textsuperscript{141}Māṣa bhakta bali serves as naivedya for the spirits. It is lowly food.
devotional service (daśopacāra). Meditating on it to be a form of Durgā, he offers dūrvā grass and washed rice onto the "head" of the tree.

**Invocation of Durgā into the Pūjālaya (Place of Worship)**

Touching the altar of the clay image, the purohīta now utters the mantra:\(^{142}\)

\[\text{Om caṇḍike caṇḍike caṇḍike caṇḍika durgे pūjālayam praviṣa.}\]

Om! O goddess Caṇḍi, please enter the place of worship without delay. You should please go to my abode with attendant deities and please accept my rituals for the purpose of offering good to everybody.

**Ghaṭasthāpana (Installation of the Jar)**

Then a jar (ghaṭa) which was prepared beforehand is marked with curd and rice. While installing the jar in the method which he follows (Tantric or other) he utters the following mantras:

\[\text{Om gāṅgādyā saritāḥ . . .}\]

Om! All rivers, oceans, lakes should come here for the purpose of the removal of sins of the yajamāna.

He then invokes the holy rivers into the water of the jar:

\[\text{Om gange ca yamunā . . .}\]

And he stirs the water with his middle finger (aṅkuśa mudrā) inducing the salvific (stīrha) streams to flow into the vessel. He places the leafed twigs, coconut, and cloth on the jar completing the installation. If it has already been done, he performs it mentally.

**General Preliminary Procedures**

The purohīta now purifies the flowers (puspa śuddhi), his seat (āsana śuddhi), and performs the common offering (sāmāmya argha). He also performs the purificatory transformation (bhūta śuddhi) of the gross and subtle elements of his body.

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\(^{142}\)It is as if he directs the Devī from the bilva/navapatrikā to the sanctified space of the clay image.
Pūjā of Gaṇeśa and Other Deities

Purification of Worship Area and Materials

The purohīta prepares to worship Gaṇeśa and the other deities before moving onto the worship of Durgā herself. He begins by uttering:

_Haṃ Ḥim Ḥuṃ Phat_

and looks at all the materials present there with a fierce divine look (_krodhadṛṣṭi_, _divyadrṣṭi_), purifying them.

_Bhūtaparasaraṇa (Removal of Inimical Spirits)_

Once again, taking the fried rice (_lāja_), sandal paste, white mustard seed, and so on, in his hand, charging it with the _bij_ "Phat," he removes the _bhūtas_ as before, uttering:

_Om apasarpantu . . . (See bodhana)._  

Removing the Obstacles of Earth and Sky

He strikes the floor with the heel of his left foot, while seated, removing the obstacles of the earth/soil. Then he snaps his fingers three times above his head, removing the obstacles of the sky (_antariksa._)

Worship of the Gurus (Spiritual Teachers)

The purohīta then makes obeisance to three lines of spiritual teachers (_guru_). With his palms pressed together (_pranāma_) and held by his left shoulder, he worships his human teachers with:

_Om gurubhyo namah._  
_Om paramagurubhyo namah._  
_Om parāparagurubhyo namah._

_Om! Obeisance to the gurus, the most excellent gurus, the gurus of the past and future._

Moving his folded palms to the right shoulder, he worships Gaṇeśa as _guru_:

_Om paramēṣṭhi gurubhyo namah._
Om! Obeisance to the supreme one.

And then with folded palms in the centre, he pays obeisance to Durgā, as supreme teacher:

*Om durgāyai devyai namah.*

*Om! Obeisance to the Goddess Durgā.*

**Ṛṣyādi Nyāsa (Imprintment with the Sages and Others)**

Next the purohita imprints (nyāsa) his body with a sage (or revealer) and others (ṛṣyādi) for the purpose (viniyoga) of worshipping Durgā. Placing his hand at the top of his head, he states:

*Om śirasi nāradarṣaye namah.*

*Om! Obeisance to the revealer/sage Nārada in the head.*

On his lips:

*Om mukhe gāyatrīcchandase namah.*

*Om! Obeisance to the metre Gāyatri in the mouth.*

On his heart:

*Om hrīṁ hrdaye durgāyai devatāyai namah.*

*Om! Hṛīṃ! Obeisance to the goddess Durgā in the heart.*

**Kara Śuddhi (Purification of the Hands) and Dig Bandhana**

After purifying both of his hands (kara śuddhi) with sandal paste and flowers by rubbing them in his palms and throwing them away, he snaps three times over his head. Again snapping ten times while circling his head he arrests the ten directions (dig bandhana).143

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143The centre, I was informed, is the highest reality. The ritual of restraining the directions frees the sacred space from any directional/spatial context.
Nyāsa (Imprintments)

The purohita next performs the imprintment with syllables (mātrkā nyāsa). He performs prāṇayāma with the seed syllable, "Hrīm." He then imprints his hands and limbs (kara and aṅga nyāsa) with the appropriate seed syllables. Next he performs pūṭha nyāsa, imprinting his body with the seats of the Devī.

Durgā Dhyāna (Meditative Visualization of Durgā)

He now makes a meditation (dhyāna) of Durgā holding a flower in the dhyāna mudrā close to his heart. Placing the flower on his head he mentally worships her with a sixteen part devotional service (mānasa ṣodāṣopacāra).

Viśeṣa Argha (Special Worship) in the Conch Shell

The purohita takes a special conch shell and places it on his left side (to the front of him). He draws a simple yantra in which is inscribed the seed syllable, "Hum." He follows the previously described procedure in worshipping the conch shell and the tripod on which it is placed. Then at the "head" of the conch shell, he places flowers with sandal paste, dārvā grass, and washed rice. This being done, he shows dhenu mudrā over it. He covers it with matsya mudrā, and sanctifies the water with aṅkuśa mudrā inducing the sacred rivers to join the water in the conch shell (ṣaṅkha). Next he repeats the Durgā seed (bhūja) mantra, "Dum," eight times over it.

He then utters:

Om ihāgaccha/
iha tiṣṭha/
iha sannidehi/
iha sannirudhyasva/
arūdhisthanam kuru mama pūjīnam grhāna.

Om! Come here. Stay here. Come close by. Remain in my presence. Take up your abode here and accept my worship simultaneously performing appropriate gestures. When saying "ihāgaccha," his hands are cupped facing upwards calling the deity. When saying "iha tiṣṭha," he closes his fingers towards the palms, as if taking hold of a person's hands. As he says "iha sannidehi," he
rolls his fists to face each other clenched fingers touching each other, symbolizing closeness. And with "iha sannirudhyasva," he moves the touching fists up and down in a pleading fashion.\textsuperscript{144}

**Worship of Gaṇeśa (as a Ghaṭa) and Other Deities**

The purohi\textit{ta} now places an installed jar called the Gaṇeśa \textit{ghaṭa} in the north-east corner (i.e., in front of the Gaṇeśa image).\textsuperscript{145} Next he performs the imprintment of hand and limbs (\textit{aṅga} and \textit{kara nyāsa}) with the following mantras, while performing the appropriate \textit{mudrās}. He says

\begin{quote}
\textit{Gām gām gām gām gām}
\end{quote}

while passing his hands over each other and finishes with a clap while uttering, "gah." He now performs the meditative visualization (\textit{dhyāna}) of Gaṇeśa first with a flower clasped in the \textit{dhyāna mudrā} by his heart. He places it on his head and mentally offers worship. He then places the flower before him (on the \textit{ghaṭa}) and after repeating the \textit{dhyāna}, and the above mantra (\textit{ihāgaccha/ iha tishta} . . . ) performs an actual five or ten part devotional service (\textit{pañca or dasopacāra}). He concludes his worship of Gaṇeśa with an obeisance (\textit{namaskāra}), uttering:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Om devendra maulimandara maṇḍara kaṇārunah/ vighnān harantu devendra caranāmbuja renavah.}
\end{quote}

Om! May the dust of your feet, O Heramba, remove all obstacles. These dusts have collected at your feet from the garland made of \textit{mandara} flowers from the head of Indra, and have become red and smeared with honey.

\textsuperscript{144} The traditional interpretation is that the combination of \textit{mudrā} and mantra "\textit{agaccha}" is invocation (\textit{dvāhana}); "\textit{tisṭha}" brings about establishment or steadying of the deity (\textit{sthāpana}); "\textit{sannidehi}," causes the deity to come near (\textit{sannidhāpani}); and "\textit{sanniruddha}," arrests (\textit{sanrodhani}) the deity causing it to remain face to face (\textit{sannukhikarati}). The \textit{mudrās} and mantra should be accompanied by concentrated (\textit{dhāraṇa}) mental visualization (\textit{dhyāna}).

\textsuperscript{145} This worship of Gaṇeśa as a \textit{ghaṭa} links him to Kubera, to \textit{yakṣas}, to fertility, and vegetation, and the Devī. The \textit{ghaṭa} is shaped like the round belly of Gaṇeśa, and the coconut head may be implicitly connected to Gaṇeśa’s decapitation.
In that same ghata, the five gods beginning with Śiva, the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu, and the other deities, are worshipped separately with a five or ten-part devotional service (upacāra). The purohita then worships Brahmā, the directional guardians (dikpāla), and nine planets (navagraha) separately.146

Pūjā of Durgā in the Central Image

Invocation of Durgā into the Central Image

Moving to the central jar (ghata) which was installed earlier in front of the clay images (murti), the purohita offers flowers. He follows the ritual of imprintment of his body with the seats of the goddess (pūtha nyāsa). Again he performs kara and āṅga nyāsa. In the anga nyāsa he imprints the words of the Durgā Mantra (Om durge durge rakṣani svāhā) onto various parts of his body which is undifferentiated from the body of the goddess. He says:

Om durge hrdayāya namah.
Om durge sīrāse svāhā.
Om rakṣani sīkhyai vasaṭ.
Om svāhā kavachāya hum.
Om durge durge rakṣani netratraya vausāt.
Om svāhā astrāyā phat.

He makes the pivotal meditative visualization (dhyāna) of Durgā while holding a flower in the dhyāna mudrā close to his heart. He places it atop his head, transforming himself into the deity, and mentally renders devotional service. Next he places the flower which was at the top of his head onto the top of the central jar. He again utters the dhyāna:

Om jatājīta samāyuktāmardhenduktaśekharaṁ/
lacanatraya samyuktaṁ pūrṇendu sadṛśānanāṁ/
atasīrupa (tapiṅkāṅcana) varṇabhām supratiṣṭhām sulocanāṁ/
navaśuvaṇa sampannām sarvābharana bhūṣitām/

146 This ritual suggests that the cosmic bodies of all the deities who will be invoked into the clay images, or who will preside at the ritual, are first established in the jar. Gaṇeśa is the first but not the only deity present in the jar.
sucarudśasanām tadvat pīṇonatapayodharām/
tribhaṅgasthānaṃ samsthanām mahiśāsurasamārdinām/
mṛndāyata sansparśā daśabahuśamanvitām/
triśūlam daksine dhīyeyam khadgam cakraṃ kramādadhanah/
tikṣṇavānam tathā śaktim daksinesu vicintayet/
ketakam pūrṇacāpānca pāśamanākṣaśmeva ca/
ghanant vā paraśum vāpi vāmataḥ sanniveśayet/
śiraschedodhavam tadvaddānavam khadgapānīnam/
hṛdi śūleṇa nirbhinnāṃ niryadantra vibhūṣitām/
raktārakti krtaṅgaṇaṃ raktavisphuriteśaṇāṃ/
veṣṭitaṃ nāgapaśena bhrūkuṭi bhūṣanānām/
sapāśavāmāhaśastena dhṛtaśeṣaṇaṃ durgaya/
vamadrudhiravakraṇaṃ devyāḥ sinham pradарśayet/
devyāstuv daksīnām pādam samam simhoparisthatām/
kiṣcīd ārdhvaṃ tathā vāmam aṅgustham maheśopari/
stīyamānaṃcak tadārpaṇamārānīṃ sanniveśayet/
ugracandā pracandā ca candogra candanayikā/
candā candavattī caiva candarūpāti candikā/
aṣṭābhīḥ saktihistabhiḥ sitatam pariveśitām/
cintayet jagatāṃ dhārtīṃ dharmāḥ kāmārtha mokṣadām.

The deity has matted hair. The top of it is adorned with the crescent moon. She has three
eyes. Her face is like the beauty of the full moon. Her complexion is like the atasṛ flower
(in some variants "like molten gold" (tapta kāñcana)).\footnote{The atasṛ is the dark coloured flower of the hemp plant.} She is well established having
beautiful eyes, possesses all the beauty of early youth, decorated with all kinds of
ornaments. Her teeth are nice-looking. Her breasts are well formed and heavy. She is
standing in triple curve (tribhaṅga) form. She is crushing the demon Mahiśa. Her arms
are like the lotus stalk (in their tenderness of touch), extended. She has ten arms. She
should be meditated upon as having a trident in the uppermost right hand and lower down
gradually the weapons are the sword, the discus, the pointed arrow, and the sakti (a kind
of weapon). These should be meditated to occupy her right hands. And one should place
on the left side the ketaka (a staff), a bow, a noose, a goad, and a bell or axe. These
are on the left hand side. Down, below the image of the goddess, there is a buffalo
shown whose head has been separated (beheaded), and emerging from the severed spot
a demon is seen bearing a sword in his hand. His chest has been pierced through by a
spear, and together with that (spear) his body and limbs are smeared with entrails and
blood. His angry red eyes are wide. His whole body is entwined with the noose in the
form of a serpent. His frowning look is dreadful. With the left hand, Durga has caught
hold of his hair with her noose. The lion should be depicted vomiting blood from his
mouth. The right foot of the goddess is placed straight on the back of the lion. Slightly
above that, the left toe of her left foot is placed on the demon. This form of the goddess
should be shown in such a way that she is praised by the various divinities. She is always
surrounded by eight different saktis (attendant feminine powers) named Ugracandā,
Pracandā, Candogrā, Candānāyikā, Candā, Candavati, Candarūpā, and A ticandikā. The
aspirant should meditate on her as the protectress of the world and the bestower of virtue,
fulfilment of desire, the desired end, and also liberation.

The *purohita* then utters:

\[Om bhur bhuvā svar bhagavatī durge devī svaganasahīte
   ihāgacchā/
   tha tīṣṭha/
   iha sānnidehi/
   iha saṁnirudhasva/
   mama pujaṁ grhāna.\]

Om! O Goddess Durgā, divine lady of the three worlds, with your own attendents, come, stay, approach, and remain here accepting my worship.

Passing his hands around each other in the *aṅguṣṭhādi sadāṅga nyāsa* (imprintment of the six limbs consisting of the five fingers and palms), he recites:

\[Hṝm hṝm hṝm hṝ̄m hṝm hṝam hraum\]

and ends by slapping the first few fingers of the right hand into the left palm while uttering, "hrah."

With his hands suitably charged, he places one on the image (or reaches it with a length of *kuśa* grass\(^{148}\)) and prays:

\[Om āgacchā madgrīhe devī aśṭābhīḥ śaktibhiḥ saha/. . .\]

Om! O goddess, come to my house with eight attending śaktis. O doer of all good, please accept my ritual done according to the prescribed method.

\[Om ehyehi bhagavaddurge śatruksaya jayaprade/
   bhaktitāḥ pujaṁyāmi tvām navadurge surarcite.\]

Om! O goddess Durgā, the giver of victory and killer of enemies, I worship you, the one who is worshipped by gods.

\[Om durge devi saṁgaccha sānnidhyamiha kalpaya/
   yajñabhāga grhāna tvam aṣṭābhīḥ śaktibhiḥ saha.\]

Om! O goddess Durgā, come over here and show your presence beside me along with

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\(^{148}\) Such uses of *kuśa* grass in this procedure and as the *purohita*’s seat (*āsana*) of worship, identify it as a "conductor* par excellence* of divine energy."
your eight saktis. Please receive the share/portion of the oblation.

Om śāradityamimāṃ pūjām karomī kamalaksne/
aññāpaya mahādevi dāityadarpa nistānī.

Om! O Great Goddess, give your leave/permission, O suppressor of the arrogance of demons, I shall perform this autumnal worship of yours, O lotus-eyed one.

Om samśārārṇava duspāre sarvasura nikrṇī/
trāyāsva varade devī namaste śaṅkarapriye.

Om! The worldly existence is like an ocean which is very difficult to cross. O destroyer of all sorts of demons, please rescue me, O giver of boons. I bow to you the beloved of Sankara.

Om ye devāh yāḥ hidevyāśca calitāḥ yāścalanti hi/
āvāhāyāmi tān sarvān candike paramēśvari.

Om! The gods and the goddesses that have moved towards us, and those who are still on their way, I invite all of them here, O Great Goddess Candikā.

Om prāṇan rakṣa yaśo rakṣa putradārādhanam sada/
sarvaraksakart yasmād tasmātēvāyī jagat priye.

Om! Protect our lives, and protect our good names and always protect our sons and wives as you are the protectrix of all. The epithet, "The Beloved of the World," is right.

Om praviśya tiṣṭha ‘smin yāvat pūjām karomyaham/
śailānanda kare devī sarvasiddhiḥcā dehi me.

Om! Please enter the place of worship and remain steady there so long as I make all my ritualistic offerings to you. You are the giver of happiness to the mountain (Himālaya). Please give us all kinds of attainments.

Om āgaccha candike devī sarvakalyāṇa hetave/
pūjām grhāna sumukhi namaste śaṅkarapriye.

Om! O goddess Candikā, please come for the purpose of well-being of all. O beautiful faced one, the beloved of Śaṅkara, I pay obeisance to you, please receive our offering.

Om āvāhāyāmi devī tvām mṛṇmaye śṛṇphale ‘pi ca/
kailāśa śīkharoddevī vindhyādīr himaparvataṭ/
āgāya bilvaśākhāyām candike kuru sannidhim/
sthāpitāsī mayā devi pūjāye tvām prasīdā me/
āyurārogyam aśvārayaṁ dehi devī namo ‘stute.

Om! I invite you, O Goddess, to abide in the image made of earth, and also in the bilva
fruit from the top of Mount Kailasa and from Vindhya hill, or from the Himalaya. Come from those places, be present in the branch of this *bilva* tree. I have installed you here and should worship you. Be pleased. I pay obeisance to you O Goddess. Give me strength, longevity, health, and wealth.

*Om devi candatmikeya candavigraha kārini/
  bilvasākhāṁ samāśritya tiṣṭha devaganah saha.*

Om! O Goddess, you are dread incarnate, and make terrific battle. Abiding in the branch of the *bilva* tree, please remain along with the other divine beings.

The *purohita* next recites some Vedic verses:

*Om hamsah śucisadvusurantIKṣa saḥ hotā vedī sat/
  nṛsad varasad vyomasad avjāgojā rati adrija riam brhat.*

[RV.4.40.50]

The *hamsa* [swan] homed in light, the *vasu* in mid-air, the priest beside the altar, in the house the guest. Dweller in the noblest place, mid men, in truth, in sky, born of flood, kine, truth, mountain, he is holy law.\(^\text{149}\)

*Om pra tad viṣṇuh stavate vireṇa mrgo na bhūmah kucaro giristhāḥ/
  yasyorūṣu triśu vikramanēśvadhiksiyanti bhuvanāṁ viśvāḥ.*

*Om viṣṇur yonim kalpayatu tvasta rūpāni pimṣatu/
  ā śīncatu prajāpatiḥ dhātā garbham damhātu te.*

*Tat savitur vareṇyam*

*Om tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pustibardhanam urvarukamiva bandhanan mytyor
  murksiya ma mṛtat.*

[RV.7.59.12]

Om! Tryambaka we worship, sweet augmenter of prosperity. As from its stem the cucumber, so may I be released from death, not reft of immortality.\(^\text{150}\)

He then reads the Devī Gāyatrī. Following this he utters more verses:

*Om devi tvam jagatāṁ mārāṁ sṛṣṭi samhārakārini/
  patrikasū samastāsu sannidhyāmiha kalpayā.*

\(^{149}\)Griffith 1963:17.

\(^{150}\)Griffith 1963:17. This verse is highly significant since it refers to the removal of a seed-bearing fruit (cucumber) from its stem. A cucumber or melon, may be offered to Durga as surrogate for an animal (or human) sacrifice. The head, which is the fruit of the body, is separated from the body during the sacrificial offering, resulting not in death, but in immortality for the devotee.
Om! O Goddess, you are the mother of the world and the agent of creation and dissolution. Make your presence here in all the plants and herbs.

*Om pallavāśca phalopetaḥ śākhābhīḥ suranōrike/
pallave samāsthe devi pūjām grīṇā prastāda me.*

Om! In the twigs, branches attached with fruit, O Leader of the divine beings, abiding in the twigs, after receiving my ritual worship, be pleased with me.

*Om āvāhayāni devi tvām mṛṇmaye śrīphale 'pi ca/
sthirātyantam hi no bhūtvā ghre kāmapradā bhava.*

Om! I invoke you, O Goddess, in the earthen image and also in the bilva fruit. Being steadily established here be the giver of fulfilment of all desires.

*Om candike candarūpāsa suratejomahāvale/
praviśya tiṣṭha yajñe 'śmin yāvat pūjām karomyaham.*

Om! O Candikā, you are terrific in form. You have enormous strength/might born of the divine energy (tejas) of the gods. Please enter in the altar of rituals (yajñā) and stay here so long as I am engaged in worshipping you.

The Devī has been successfully invoked into all her representative forms, including the navapatrikā, and bilva fruit, as well as the earthen image (mṛṇmayi murti).

**Cakṣur Dāna (Giving Eyesight)**

Now that the Devī has come to reside in the image, the purohita proceeds to give the image eyesight (cakṣur dāna).\(^{151}\) He takes collyrium (kajjala) which has been prepared and placed on a bilva leaf, and with the blunt end of another bilva leaf he applies it to the eyes of the image, while uttering:

" " for the right eye.  
" " for the left eye.

Gāyatri Mantra and "Om kātyānanī . . ." for the third, upper eye.

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\(^{151}\)In the installation of any murti in a place of worship (pājalaya) such as a temple (mandira), the ritual of giving eyesight (cakṣur dāna) along with the installation of vital energy (prāṇa pratiṣṭha) are climax points. The first ritual activates the faculty of vision, so important for the lay worshipper’s devotional interaction with the deity, where reciprocation of sight (darśana) is central. The second brings the image to life. The image and a designated space around it is thereafter treated with utmost reverence.
Prāṇa Pratiṣṭha (Installation of Vital Energy)

The purohita next installs vital life energy (prāṇa) into the image. He begins by touching the heart of the murti with a flower, saying:

*Om aṁ hṝ̥ṃ krō̥m gāṁ ṝ̥m lām vām sām sām ṝ̥m hām saḥ durgāyāḥ prāṇa iha prāṇah.*

Om! Let the vital energy (prāṇa) come through the utterance of these syllables.

*Om aṁ hṝ̥ṃ krō̥m, . . ., haṁ saḥ durgā devyāḥ jīva iha stītha.*

Om! Let the soul (jīva) of Durgā come through the utterance of these syllables.

*Om aṁ hṝ̥ṃ krō̥m, . . ., haṁ saḥ durgā devyāḥ sarvendrīyāṇi iha stītha.*

Om! Let all sense and motor organs come with the utterance of these syllables.

*Om aṁ hṝ̥ṃ krō̥m, . . ., haṁ saḥ durgā devyāḥ vakmanāścaksuḥ svak śrotra ghrāṇa prāṇa iha gatya sukham ciraṁ tiṣṭhantu svāhā.*

Om! Let the speech, mind, eye, touch, hearing, organs of smell, and all the vital energies after coming over here remain comfortably in this body.\[^{152}\]

He then utters a Vedic verse:

*Om mano jutir justāmāyasya brhaspatir yajñamimam tano tu/ aristam yajñam samimam dadhatu viśvedvāsa iha mādhayantam om pratiṣṭha. Asyai prāṇah kṣarantu ca/ asyai devaṁ saṁkhyaṁ svāhā.*

He recites this while showing the gesture of the lapping flame of fire (leliha mudrā) in which the thumb touches the bottom of the ring finger, and touching the body of the image.\[^{153}\]

The purohita repeats the procedure for each of the other clay images, including the demon, imbuing them with life.

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\[^{152}\] This process of installation of life in the clay image is crucial in understanding the significance of Durgā Puja (or any pūja). Just as the Devi has been brought into material existence through the descent and manifestation of each of the various elements (tattva) of creation, the devotee reverses this process in the activities of pūja. In so doing the devotee and deity meet (half-way so to speak) in a communion which has been facilitated by the purohita.

\[^{153}\] The mudrā is said to symbolize the spark of vital energy taking flame in the image.
Worship of Durgā Embodied in the Clay Image

Before offering anything to the Devī, the purohita sprinkles purified water from its vessel, consecrating his seat and the altar, uttering:

Vam āsanāya namaḥ.

Vam! Obeisance to the seat.

Seating himself, he then offers a flower and sandalpaste over the sacrificial offering vessel (kośā) saying:

Om adhipataye śrīviṣṇave namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the overlord Śrī Viṣṇu.

Idam āsanam/ Om durge durge durgāyai namaḥ.

This is a seat. Om! O Durgā, O Durgā. Obeisance to Durgā.¹⁵⁴

He now proceeds to worship Durgā in the earthen image with an elaborated form of the sixteen-part devotional service (sodāśopacāra).¹⁵⁵

1. Āsana (Seat)

With folded hands he says:

Om āsanam grhṇa cārvanāt nānā ratna vinirmitam/ grhānedam jāganmātah prastāda bhagavatyume.

Om! Please receive this seat studded with various jewels, O Mother of the Universe, and be propitiated.

¹⁵⁴The exact nature of the seat of the Devī is ambiguous in this ritual sequence. The altar on which the clay image sits, the purohita’s own seat are two possible candidates. Since the superintending deity (adhipatī), Viṣṇu is then worshipped with the kośā which is later called the seat, one can infer that Viṣṇu himself serves as the seat of the Devī.

¹⁵⁵I have numbered the parts of the devotional service to illustrate that it consists of far more than sixteen parts. The alphabetic subdivisions (e.g., 7 and 7a) do not indicate less significant offerings. They are so designated since they appear somewhat connected to the previous devotional offering, and because they do not possess their own mantra.
2. Svāgatam (Welcome)
Uttering the root mantra (mūlamantra) of the Goddess, he states:

Om dum durgāyai namah.
Om durge iha svāgatam? Svāgatam astu.

Om! Dum! Obeisance to Durgā.
Om! Durgā, do you feel welcome here? Be welcome here.

3. Pādyā (Water for Washing Feet)
Taking some water in the smaller copper ladle (kuśt), he offers it to Durgā for washing her feet:

Om pādyam grhna mahādevi sarva duhkha pahāram/
trāyasva varade devi namaste śaṅkarapriye.

Om! Please receive this offering of a washing of your feet. It is the remover of all kinds of pain. Please protect me, O giver of boons. I offer my obeisance to the beloved of Śaṅkara, thus.

4. Argha/Arghya (Offering)
Placing some dūrvā grass, washed rice, and bilva pātra in a conch vessel (śaṅkha), he offers it to Durgā:

Om dūrvāksata samāyuktam bilva pātram tathā param/
Śobhanam śaṅkhapāṭraṣtham grhānārghyam harapriye/
nānā tīrthodbhavam vāri kuṅkamādi suśītalam/
grhānārghyam idam devi viśeṣvari namośtute.

Om! O beloved of Hara, accept my offering of this dūrvā, rice, bilva leaf, and most beautiful conch vessel. The water comes from many holy tīrthas, has been made cool by adding saffron (kuṅkuma) and other things. Please accept this offering (arghya) from me, O Goddess. I am paying obeisance to you, O Mistress of the World.

5. Ācamaniya (Water for Sipping or Rinsing the Mouth)
Offering some water in the kuśt, he utters:

Om mandakinyāstu yadvāri sarvapāpaharam Śubham/
grhānācamiṇiṇyam tvam mayā bhaktā niveditam/
idam āpo mayā bhaktā tava pānitaśeśpītēm/
ācāmaye mahādevi prīta śāntīm prayacchāme.
Om! The water that has come from Mandakini is auspicious and also the remover of all sins. Please accept this water for the purpose of sipping. This water has been presented by me into your hand out of devotion to you. You may wash your mouth and thus satisfied offer me peace.

6. Madhuparka (Honeyed Mixture)

He takes a fist sized container (Hindi: katora) of brass or silver containing honey (madhu), ghi (ghṛta), and curd (dadhi). He first purifies it by saying:

Vam madhuparkaṇya namah. Vam! Obeisance to the madhuparka.

He then utters:

Om madhuparkaṁ mahādevi brahmādyaih parikalpitam/
      maya niveditam bhaktā parameśvari.

Om! This honeyed mixture, O Great Goddess, was invented by Brahmā and others. It has been offered to you out of devotion. Please accept it, O Supreme Lady.

6a. Punar Ācamaniya (Again)

7. Snānīyam (Bathing)

The purohita offers Durgā water for bathing, saying:

Om jalaṁśtalam svaccham idam śuddham manoharam/
      snānārtham te maya bhaktā kalpitam pratigrhyatam.

Om! Cool, clear, pure, nice water I have arranged for your bath. Please accept it.

7a. Punar Ācamaniya (Again)

8. Vastra (Clothing)

Offering a new sārī, after purifying its (with the bīja, "Vam.") he says:

Om bahutantu samayuktam paṭa sūrādi nirmitam/
   vāso devi suśuklaṁ grhāna varāvarṇini/
   tantusantāna samyuktam ranjitam rāgavastunā/
   durge devi bhaja prittim vāsaste paridhyatam.

Om! It is made of many threads and is composed of silken threads. It is white and it is coloured. O goddess Durgā be satisfied after wearing it. It is one which has many solids are more in need of purification, I was informed.
stretched threads and is coloured with dyes. O goddess Durgā, be satisfied and put this cloth on as your own.

8a. Punar Ācamaniya (Again)

9. Alaṅkāra (Ornamentation)

The ornaments are first purified and then offered. (A small silver ring may be offered as a token of ornaments):

\[
\text{Om divya rata na samāyuktaḥ vah nibhānusāmaprabhāḥ/}
\text{gātrāṇī śobhayisanti alaṅkārāḥ suresvari.}
\]

These ornaments are studded with divine gems and shine like fire and the sun. They will adorn your limbs, O Queen of the Gods.

10. Śaṅkha Alaṅkāra (Ornamentation with Conch Shell Bangles)

He utters:

\[
\text{Om śaṅkhaṇca vividham citram bāhunāḥca vibhūṣanam/}
\text{mayā niveditam bhakte śaṅkhaṇca pratigrhyatām.}
\]

Om! The bangles made of conch shell are of various types. They decorate your arms and wrists. I have offered these with devotion. Please accept these conch shell bangles.

During this time other items of jewellery and personal feminine ornamentation are offered.¹⁵⁷

11. Gandha (Fragrant Ointment)

Taking some sandal paste in his fingers, the purohita says:

\[
\text{Om śatṝante na jānami ceṣṭām naiva ca naiva ca/}
\text{māṃ rākṣa sarvato devi gandhā netāṃ grhāṇa ca.}
\]

Om! I do not know what form you have, and I am quite unknowing of your activity.

¹⁵⁷ These may include a bottle of the red coloured dye with which women paint their feet (Skt./Beng. alakraka/alāta), combs, a small mirror, an iron bangle, which is the sign of a married woman (sadhava), and a small basket. All such items offered to the Devi go to the purohita who probably turns them over to his wife. In large religious community pujās (e.g., Ānandamayi Mā Āśrama), where numerous items may be offered by wealthy patrons, these donations are often kept in trust and given to needy women (as a wedding sārī, for instance).
Please protect me from all sides and please accept this sandal paste.158

12. Puṣpa (Flowers)
While offering some flower garlands (puspamāla) to the goddess, he says:

\[ \text{Om puspam manoharam divyam sugandham devanirmitam/} \]
\[ \text{hrdyam abhūtam aghreyam devī dattam pragṛhyatām.} \]

Om! Flowers, fascinating, divine, fragrant, created by the divine hand, very lovely, unique (hard to obtain), worthy to be smelled, which are being offered to you, O Devī, please accept them.

13. Dhūpa (Fragrant Incense)
Offering incense in a vessel he says:159

\[ \text{Om vanaspati rasa divyo gandhādhyāḥ sumanoharāḥ/} \]
\[ \text{mayā nivedito bhaktyā dhūpo 'yam pratigrhyatām.} \]

Om! This incense is the sap/essence of big trees. It is a heavenly thing full of fragrance and pleasing to the mind. I have offered this to you with devotion. Please accept this incense.

14. Dīpa (Lamp)
Waving a ghi lamp (often multi-wicked) in front of the goddess, he says:

\[ \text{Om agnir jyotir vijyotiscandra jyotisthātā ca/} \]
\[ \text{jyotisāmuttamo durge dīpo 'yam pratigrhyatām.} \]

Om! The light of fire, the sun’s light, the moon’s light, among all of them this lamp is the best. O Durgā, please accept it.

15. Sindūra (Vermillion)
The purohita touches a small amount of vermillion (sindūra) to the forehead of the goddess saying:

\[ \text{Om candanena samāyuktam sindūram bhālabhūṣaṇam/} \]

158 This is an important prayer for it signifies that despite the many visible forms in which the Devī is embodied in this pūjā, the worshipper admits that her true form and activity is mysterious.

159 Stick incense (Hindi: agarbatti) is considered unsuitably meagre.
rupadyutikaran devi candike grhna mastake. 
Om candikayai vidmahe bhagavayai dhimahi tanno gauri pracodayat. 
Om idam sinduratitakam/ 
Om durge durge rakshi svaha/ 
Hrim durgayai devyai namaḥ.

Om! This vermillion is associated with sandal paste. It decorates the forehead and manifests illumination of the form. O Candikā, please accept this on your forehead. 
Om! Candī Gāyatī 
Om! Purification and Obeisance.

16. Kajjala (Collyrium)

He offers collyrium on a bilva leaf to the Devī, saying:

Om namaste sarvadevesi namaste śaṅkarapiye/ 
caksusamaṭjanam hrdayam devi dentam pragṛhyatām.

Om! O Goddess of all Gods, I bow to the beloved of Śaṅkara. This collyrium, which I offer to you, is pleasant to the eye. Please accept it.

17. Naivedya (Food Offering)

The purohita first purifies the food and then offers it saying:

Om āmānṇam ghṛtasamyuktam phalatāmbula samyuktam/ 
mayā niveditām bhaktyā āmānṇam pratigrhyatām.

Om! This uncooked food (āmānṇam) is associated with clarified butter, fruits, and betel nuts. This uncooked food which is offered by me, please accept it.

Next, another separate offering of fruits and other prepared but uncooked foods are offered:

Om phalamulani sarvāni grāmyāranyāni yāni ca/ 
nanāvidhasugandhāni grhṇa devi mamācīram.

Om! Fruits and roots which have come from villages and grew in the forest, they have

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160A spot of vermillion is often placed on the forehead on top of and within a slightly large spot of yellow sandalpaste (candana).

161Washed rice heaped in a pile served in a spacious plate with fruits (bananas, etc.) on the top, and large, specially shaped pieces of coconut, sweet balls, etc. are offered. There might be special cakes (tala) made from palmrya palm fruit juice. The whole configuration resembles a mountain, at the base of which other fruits are placed.
different smells. Please accept them as my offering.\textsuperscript{162}

18. Bilva Pātra (Wood-apple Leaf)
Next he offers bilva pātras to the goddess:\textsuperscript{163}

\begin{verbatim}
Om durge durge raksani svāhā/
Hṛ̦m durgāyai devyai namah.
\end{verbatim}

19. Pānārtha Jalam (Water for Drinking)
The purohita offers clear water for drinking:

\begin{verbatim}
Om jalaḥca śītalam svaccham sugandhi sumanoharam/
mayā niveditām bhaktā pāntyam pratigrhyatām.
\end{verbatim}

Om! Water which is cool, clear, fragranced, pleasing to the mind, I have offered with
devotion as drinking water. Please accept it.

20. Tāmbula (Betel)
Betel leaf and betel nut are offered separately (not mixed as in the common preparation
of pān):

\begin{verbatim}
Om phalapātra samāyuktam karpūrena suvāsitam/
mayā niveditām bhaktā tāmbulām pratigrhyatām.
\end{verbatim}

Om! This betel, associated with betel nut and leaf, fragranced with camphor, is offered
to you with devotion. Please accept it.

21. Dūrvā Grass
He offers dūrvā grass which has been woven into a thread:

\begin{verbatim}
Om namaste sarvadeveśī namaste sukha moksade/
dūrvām grhāṇa devi tvam mām nistāraya sarvatah.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{162}The naivedya consists essentially of uncooked or minimally cooked food. Fruits and roots, associated
with villages and forests are also offered to the Devī, linking her with agricultural, and "gatherer" peoples.
It supplements our understanding of her epithet, Vanadurgā (Durgā of the Forest) and her connection to
forest tribes like the Śabarās.

\textsuperscript{163}Since such items as the conch shell (śāṅkha) and bilva leaf are unambiguous forms of the Devī,
which are offered back up to her, it is not remote to suggest that an implicit identification exists between
each of the offered materials and the goddess herself.
Om! I bow to you supreme goddess, the giver of happiness and liberation. Please accept this *dūrvā* grass, and rescue me from every quarter.

### 21. Bilvapātramāla (Garland of Wood-apple Leaves)

He presents a garland of *bilva* leaves to her:

\[
Om \text{ amṛtdbhavam śṛtyuktaṃ mahādevapriyam sada/pavitram te prayacchāmi śṛphalīyaṃ sureshvari.}
\]

Om! I am giving you this pure sacred thing born of the *bilva* (*śṛphala*) tree, O Goddess of all Gods. It emerged from nectar. It is associated with auspiciousness and has always been beloved to Śiva.\(^{164}\)

### 22. Puṣpamāla (Flower Garland)

The *purohita* offers an exceptionally beautiful flower garland to the Devī, saying:

\[
Om \text{ sūtrena grathitam mālyam nānapuspasamanvitam/ śṛtyuktaṃ lambamānañca grhāṇa paramesvari.}
\]

Om! This garland has been woven by means of a thread (*sātra*). It is associated with different kinds of flowers. It looks beautiful when it hangs on the neck. Please accept this, O supreme goddess.

#### 22a. Puṣpa

He now recites the Gāyatrī Mantra while offering a handful of flowers three times to the goddess.

#### 22b. Darpaṇa (Mirror)

He then allows the Devī to see her reflection in the mirror.

#### 22c. Pādyā, Argha, Punar Ācamaniya

Again he offers water for her feet (*pādyā*), *dūrvā* grass and washed rice (*argha*), and water for sipping (*ācamaniya*).

### 23. Anna/Bhoga (Cooked Food)

At this point he clears the precincts in front of the Goddess, and after drawing a yantra

\(^{164}\) *Bilva* leaves, I was told, are thought to contain *pārada* (mercury/quicksilver) which is understood to be the semen of Śiva. This adds to its medicinal potency.
he places cooked food (anna/bhoga) on it. The purohita now offers that cooked food to the Devī, the navapatrikā, and other deities present, praying:

\[
\text{Om annam caturvidham devi rasaiḥ sadbhīḥ samanvitam/}
\text{uttamam prāṇādaḥcaiva grhāṇa mama bhāvataḥ.}
\]

Om! Food of four types, flavoured with six kinds of tastes, it is excellent and the giver of life. Please accept it from my sincere sentiment (bhāvataḥ).

24. Paramanna (Supreme Food)

Next he offers the Devī, paramanna (i.e., rice cooked in milk, ghi, and sweetened with raisins, etc.) similar to the preparation known as khira in Hindi.

\[
\text{Om gavyasarpīḥ samāyuktam nānāmadhura saṃayuktam/}
\text{mayā nivedītam bhāitya paramāṇnam prāgrhyatām.}
\]

Om! The milk of the cow, and a slight amount of ghi, mixed with some other sweets, I have offered this supreme food with devotion.

25. Piśṭaka (Cakes)

Then the purohita offers piśṭaka (i.e., cakes of different kinds, always cooked):

\[
\text{Om amṛtaiḥ ractīm divyam nānārūpa vinirmitam/}
\text{piśṭakam vividhām devi grhāṇa mama bhāvataḥ.}
\]

Om! These cakes have been prepared as if with nectar. It is a heavenly delicacy made into different shapes. These varieties of cakes which I offer to you should be accepted.

---

165 This is an extremely important participatory portion of the ritual, wherein the woman (possibly the yajamana’s wife) who has prepared the food brings it directly from the kitchen to the place of worship. Water is sprinkled before her, and her pathway is cleared of any persons who might defile the food. Unmarried women and widows are particularly inauspicious. Pre-menstrual girls are pure and entitled to handle the uncooked food offerings. Preparation and handling of the cooked food offerings are restricted to married women who are not menstruating, or women who are past menopause. For the pūjā of Durgā and Kāli, they must have been received a special initiation (dikṣa). The initiated post-menopausal woman’s cooking activities in the kitchen are likely to be as elaborate as the purohita’s in the place of worship. In the ritual of the food offerings, the activities of these two ritual specialists connect; the elaborate food preparations are eaten by the manifest presence of the Devī.

166 The four types of food referred to are those that can be chewed (carvya), sucked (cusya), licked (lehya), and drunk (peya).
26. Modaka (Sweet Balls)

Next he offers sweet balls (Skt/H: modaka/ladu): 167

Om modakam svādu sāmyuktam śarkarādi vimiśrītām/
suramām madhuratm bhofyam devi dattam pragrhyatām.

Om! These very tasty sweetballs, mixed with sugar and other ingredients, are very sweet and edible. I have given them over to you. Please accept them.

26a. Pāniyam Jalam (Water for Drinking)

Again he offers drinking water (paniyam jalam) to the Devi.

27. Praṇāma/Vandana (Homage/Obeisance)

The purohita finishes off the devotional service by reciting an obeisance to Durgā. 168

Om sarva mangala mangalye śive sarvārtha sadhike śaranye tryambike gauri nārāyani namo' stute.

See bodhana for interpretation.

Invocation and Worship of Nine Goddesses in the Navapatrikā

The purohita now commences worship of the navapatrikā separately.

1. He invokes the goddess Brahmanī in the plantain (rambha), saying:

Om! O Brahmanī, who abides in the Rambha (plantain), come here, stay here, take up residence here. Please accept my worship.

Om! Obeisance to Brahmanī who abides in the Rambha.

and he offers a ten-part devotional service (daśopacāra) to her ending with an obeisance (namaskāra) in which she is worshipped as Durgā. He says:

167 These may be made from coconut or puffed rice mixed with molasses.

168 This is taken from Chapter 11 of the Durgā Saptasati.
Om! O goddess Durga, come over here and remain close to this place in the form of the plantain (rambha) tree. Offer peace everywhere. I pay obeisance to you.\textsuperscript{169}

2. He repeats the procedure for the Kacvi (\textit{Arum colocasia}) plant, invoking the goddess Kālikā:\textsuperscript{170}

\begin{align*}
\textit{Om kacvādhiḥṣhātri kālike} \\
iḥgaccha iha tistha atrāḍhiṣṭhanam kuru mama pūjām grhāna. \\
\textit{Om kacvādhiḥṣhātryai kālikāyai namaḥ.}
\end{align*}

and worshipping her with:

\begin{align*}
\textit{Om mahiśāsura yuddheṣu kacvābhūtāsi suvrate/} \\
mama cānugrāhārthāya āgatāsi harapriye. \\
\textit{Om! O Beloved of Hara, you turned yourself into Kacvī during the war with the demon Mahiṣa. You have come over here only to bestow favour on me.}
\end{align*}

3. In the turmeric (haridrā) he invokes Durga:

\begin{align*}
\textit{Om haridrādhīṣṭhātri durge} \\
iḥgaccha iha tistha . . . \\
\textit{Om haridrādhīṣṭhātryai durgāyai namaḥ.}
\end{align*}

and worships her with:

\begin{align*}
\textit{Om haridre varade devi umārūpāsi suvrate} \\
mama vighnavināśāya prasīḍā tvam harapriye. \\
\textit{Om! O Turmeric, you have the characteristics of both Śiva and Umā, and for the removal of my obstacles please accept my offering and be pleased, O beloved of Hara.}
\end{align*}

\textsuperscript{169}Rambha, I was told, is also the name of a heavenly damsel (apsaras) considered to be the most beautiful woman in Indra’s paradise.

\textsuperscript{170}The \textit{kacvi} is a black-stemmed plant known for its fist-sized succulent root. When boiled, the root is soft and sweet, and may be prepared into a sweet.
4. In the Jayantī creeper he invokes the goddess Kārtikī.\textsuperscript{171}

\textit{Om jayantyadhiśṭhātri kārtiki}
\textit{ihāgaccha . . .}
\textit{Om jayantyadhiśṭhātryai kārtikyai namah.}

and worships her saying:

\textit{Om niśumbha śumbhamathane sendraiḥ devaganaiḥ saha/}
\textit{jayanti pūjirāsi tvam asmākam varadā bhava.}

Om! In the war of Śumbha and Niśumbha with Indra and the other gods, she who killed them is Jayantī. O Jayantī, you have been worshipped here. Be the bestower of boons to us.\textsuperscript{172}

5. In the wood-apple (\textit{bilva}) tree, he invokes the goddess Śīvā:

\textit{Om bilvavrksādhiśṭhātri sive}
\textit{ihāgaccha . . .}
\textit{Om bilvavrksādhiśṭhātryai śivāyai namah}

offering obeisance with:

\textit{Om maḥādevapriyakaro vāsudevapriyah sada/}
\textit{umāpratikaro vrksa bilvarūpo namo stute.}

Om! Whatever you do is always favoured by Śiva and Vāsudeva.\textsuperscript{173} O tree, you cause delight to Umā. I pay obeisance to you who are in the form of the \textit{bilva}.

6. He invokes the goddess Raktadantikā (She whose Teeth are Bloodied) in the pomegranate (\textit{dādimi}) saying:

\textit{Om dādimyadhiśṭhātri raktadantike}
\textit{ihāgaccha . . .}
\textit{Om dādimyadhiśṭhātryai raktadantikyai namah.}

\textsuperscript{171}Jayantī is the feminine form of Jayanta, an epithet of Kārtikeya, the war god. It also refers to the sprouted grain planted on the earthen altar during Navarātra, which is harvested on the last day.

\textsuperscript{172}The word \textit{jayanti} means "victorious one," and links the goddess with Skanda/Kārtikeya’s role as leader of the army of the gods. Durgā is linked with Kārtikeya in the Durgā Pūjā as his mother, and through her epithet, Skandamātā.

\textsuperscript{173}Here the \textit{bilva} (śṛphala), and thus the Devī, is explicitly connected to both Śiva and Viṣṇu (as Vāsudeva).
worshipping her with:

\[ \text{Om } \text{dadimi } \text{vam pura yuddha raktabijasya sammukhe/}
\text{umakaryam kriam yasmadasmakam varadabhava.} \]

Om! O Pomegranate (dadimi), in former times, while warring against Raktabija you have
done the duty handed over by Uma well. Therefore, please be the bestower of boons on
us.

7. In the Aśoka tree, he invokes the goddess Śokaraḥitā: 174

\[ \text{Om aśokādhisṭhātri śokaraḥite}
\text{ihāgaccha . . .}
\text{Om aśokādhisṭhātryai śokaraḥitāyai namah} \]

paying obeisance with:

\[ \text{Om harapritikaro vrksa hyaśoka śokanāśanah/}
\text{durgāprāṅkaro yasmān mānasokam sadā kuru.} \]

Om! O Tree, you had always been doing deeds favoured by Śiva. O Tree, you are called
Aśoka, the remover of the pangs of separation. As you cause delight in Durgā, please get
me free from grief/(the sadness of bereavement).

8. He invokes Cāmunda in the Māna, saying: 175

\[ \text{Om mānādhisṭhātri cāmundे}
\text{ihāgaccha . . .}
\text{Om mānādhisṭhātryai cāmundāyai namah} \]

and propitiates her with:

\[ \text{Om yasya parre vaseddevi mānavrkṣah śacṛpriyah/}
\text{mama cānugrahārthāya pūjām grhāna praśīda me.} \]

174Śokaraḥitā means "She who Frees from Grief." This aspect of Durgā's nature is often ignored since
it is engulfed in her maternal qualities. The epithet is synonymous with "Aśoka," conceptually linking it
to the great Mauryan emperor (3rd century B.C.E.) noted for his victories in battles. Aśoka's grief after
his defeat of the Kaliṅgas is known throughout India. This consoling aspect of Durgā must have especially
great appeal to warring peoples who experience grief through loss of loved ones.

The Aśoka tree produces red flowers, and can be induced to blossom, according to legend, when
struck by the red-lacquered feet of a maiden wearing jingling anklets.

175Māna is a long stemmed, broad leaved plant (perhaps a variety of Kacvi). The thick stem (6 to 8
inches in diameter) is the source of delicious food preparations and the leaves are used for protection from
rain.
Om! The Māṇa plant is favoured by Śacī, the beloved of Indra. Here the goddess abides in the leaf. For bestowing grace to me please accept my offering and be pleased.\textsuperscript{176}

9. In the rice paddy (dhānya), he invokes Lakṣmī:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Om dhānyādhiṣṭātri lakṣmī}
\textit{ḥāgacchā . . .}
\textit{Om dhānyādhiṣṭārayai lakṣmyai namah}
\end{quote}

worshipping her with:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Om jagataḥ prāṇa rāksārtham brahmaṇa nirmītam purā/
umāprīti karaṃ dhānyam tasmātvan rakaṣa māṃ sadā.}
\end{quote}

Om! For keeping the world alive, O paddy, you have been created by Brahmā in ancient times. It is favoured by Umā. Please protect us for this reason.

Lastly, he worships the navapatrikā as a whole with the following mantra:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Om navapatrikāvasinyai durgāyai namah.}
\textit{Om patrike navadurge tvam mahādeva manorame/
pūjām samastāṃ sanīgrhya rakaṣa māṃ tridaśeśvari.}
\end{quote}

Om! O the divine goddess of all the gods, you have assumed these nine forms of Durgā in nine different plants and leaves. You are dear to Lord Śiva. After accepting all my offerings, please protect us.

**Offerings to the Dikpālas (Directional Guardians)**

The purohita now offers flowers to the lords of the directions (dikpāla):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the</th>
<th>East, Indra: \textit{Ete gandhapuspe}</th>
<th>Om indrāya namah.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the SE,</td>
<td>Agni:</td>
<td>Om agnaye namah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South,</td>
<td>Yama:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW,</td>
<td>Nirṛti:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West,</td>
<td>Varuṇa:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW,</td>
<td>Vāyu:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North,</td>
<td>Kubera:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NE,</td>
<td>iśāna:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zenith, ENE, Brahmā:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadir, WSW</td>
<td>Ananta:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{176}The Devī is identified with Indra’s consort Śacī as well as Cāmuṇḍā.
Invocation and Worship of the Clay Images of the Attending Deities

The purohita proceeds to worship the deities attending Durga in the clay image cluster. He proceeds in the standard manner, first grasping a flower in the dhyāna mudrā by his heart, meditating on the deity, placing the flower on his head, worshipping the deity by mentally devotional service (mānasopacāra), and finally by placing the flower in front of the image and repeating the meditation. He then invokes the deity into the image and worships it with devotional service (upacāra), ending with an obeisance (prāṇāma) mantra which he utters while making a respectful bow. 177

Ganēśa

The purohita begins with Ganēśa, meditating thus:

Om kharevaṁ śhūlataṁ gajendra vadanaṁ lambodaram sundaram. . . 178.

He invokes Ganēśa into the image with:

Om ganeśa
iḥgaccha/
iha tistha/
iha sannidehi/
iha sannirudhasva/
mama pujaṁ grhaṇa.

completing the invocation with:

Om gām ganeśāya namah.

He gives eyesight (caksur dāna) to the deity and installs vital energy (prāṇa pratiṣṭha).

He worships Ganēśa with devotional service ending with an obeisance (prāṇāma) mantra: 179

177 In this prāṇāma, he kneels and bows so that his hands and forehead touches the floor.

178 See bodhana for the full dhyāna and its interpretive translation.

179 Generally, on Saptami, a five-part service (pañcopacāra) is used. The lengthy mantras which accompany offerings are not uttered here. He merely offers up the various items quickly, saying, "This is an offering of flowers (for instance). Om! Obeisance to Ganēśa. (Ete gandhapūpe! om ganeśāya namah)." These attending deities will each be worshipped at least once during the subsequent days with a full sixteen-part devotional service (ṣoḍaśopacāra).
*Om devendra maulimandara karakanda kanårunah*
*vighnän harantu heramba ca ranambuja renavah.*

Om! May the dust of your feet, O Heramba, remove all obstacles. These dusts have collected at your feet from the garland made of mandara flowers from the head of Indra, and have become red and smeared with honey.

**Nārāyaṇa and Śiva**

In certain performances of Durgā Pūjā, the deities Nārāyaṇa and Śiva are invoked and worshipped. Śiva’s image often appears painted on the arch (cala) which rests over single-piece clay image clusters.¹⁸⁰

**Nārāyaṇa**

Nārāyaṇa is invoked and meditated on with the dhyāna:

*Om śankhacakragadāpadmadharam kamalalocanam/
śuddhasphatikasankāsam kvacinnambujacchavim/
garudopari ca dhyāyet śuklapadmāsanam harim/
śrīvatsavākṣasam śaṇṭam vanamālādharam param/
keyūrakundaladharam kīrtīa mukutojvalam/
lakṣmī sarasvatī kāntam sūryamandala madhyagam.*

Om! Nārāyaṇa, with lotus eyes, having the colour of pure crystal, is holding the conch shell, the discus, the club, and lotus. Or he may be meditated on as shining like a blue lotus sitting on Garuda. And this Hari should be meditated upon as seated on a white lotus. His chest is covered with a śrīvāta sign. He is very tranquil in appearance. A forest garland (vanamālā) is hanging on his chest. He is wearing an armlet (kayūra) and shining with a crown and diadem (kīrtīta). He is the beloved of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī and is seen inside the orb of the moon.

His devotional service ends with this obeisance (pranāma) mantra:

*Om namo brahmādevāya go brahmanahitāya ca/
jagaddhitāya krṣṇaya govindāya namo namah.*

Om! I pay obeisance to Nārāyaṇa who is always engaged for the good of the universe.

¹⁸⁰Nārāyaṇa may be invoked and worshipped in families having Vaiṣṇava leanings. Viṣṇu and Śiva (neither of whom necessarily have a tangible presence during the ritual) are linked to the Devī in a hierarchically ambiguous fashion. Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa is sometimes considered to be the deity who presides over the ritual, and Durga is often referred to as the beloved of Śiva (Śaṅkarapriyā).
He is the person doing good to cattle and *brahmanas*. He is very awe-inspiring. I pay obeisance to Kṛṣṇa and Govinda repeatedly.

Śiva

Śiva is invoked and meditated upon with this *dhyāna*:

```
Om dhyānenityam maheśam rajatagirinibham/
cārucandrāvatamsam ratnākalpojjvalāṅgam/
paraśumrgavarābhaṭṭihastam prasannam
padmāśīnam samantē samutamamaragānaṁ
vyāghrakṛittivāśānāṁ viśvādyam viśvahīṁ
nikhilabhayaharanāṁ pañcavakṛtāṁ trīṇetram.
```

Om! One should always meditate on Śiva, the Lord of gods. He is white like the colour of the silver mountain, having the disc of the moon as the ornament of his crest. His limbs are very bright like heaps of shining jewels. In his four hands he holds an axe, a deer, and in the lower right, the gesture of the boon, and in the lower left, assurance. He appears to be very graceful, sitting in lotus posture and from every side he is praised by a good number of divinities. He is wearing the skin of a tiger. He is the primary cause and the seed of the universe. He is the remover of all sorts of misery. He has five faces, with three eyes in each.

His devotional service ends with this obeisance *mantra*:

```
Om śivāya śāntāya kāranatrāyahetave/
nivedayāṁ cāṁmāṁ tvam gath parameśvarah.
```

Om! I pay obeisance to Śiva, the tranquil one. He is the cause of three causes. I surrender myself realizing that you are our ultimate resort.

Kārtikeya

Next the *purohita* proceeds to meditate (*dhyāna*) on Kārtikeya:

```
Om śambhornandanam agnivarcasamudāradindraputṛṣṣutam/
śāntam śaktidharam sadānamalaṁ kṛtam/
bhāsā nirjita hemakuṇkapagurocaneś śailajam/
dhyāyedāitya kulārdanaṁ suramudāṁ tām kartikeyam mahāṁ.
```

Om! The son of Śiva is bright like the flames of fire. He is also called the son of the daughters of Indra. He is quiet in appearance, holding the *śakti* weapon in his hand.\(^{181}\)

---

\(^{181}\)Kārtikeya’s traditional weapon is the *śakti*, which means energy or power. In the *Durga Saṁtaśati*, Durgā, too, is armed with this weapon. The term *śakti* is most commonly used to refer to the feminine divine energy which activates the cosmos.
He has six faces and is well-decorated with ornaments.\textsuperscript{182} By his brightness, he has surpassed the brightness of gold, saffron (kunkuma), cow's bile (gorocanā), and resin (śailaja).\textsuperscript{185} One should meditate on him as the defeater of the host of demons. He who elates the hearts of gods is Kārtikeya.\textsuperscript{184}

He finishes the devotional service with this obeisance mantra:

\begin{verbatim}
Om kārtikeya mahābaga gaurīrdaya nandana/
kumāra rakṣa mām deva dāityārdana namō'stute.
\end{verbatim}

Om! O great Kārtikeya, you are the giver of delight to the heart of Gaurī. O Kumāra, please protect us. I pay obeisance to you who are the killer of demons.

\textbf{Lakṣmī}

Then Lakṣmī is meditated upon:

\begin{verbatim}
Om kāntyā kaṅcana sannibhām himagiriprakhyāścaturbhi gajaih/
 hastat kṣipīa hiraṁmayāmṛtaghatair āstīcyāmnām śriyam/
vibhrāṇāṁ varam abhjayugmam abhayam hastaiḥ kīrtōjñvalāṁ/
 kṣāmābaddhanitambahimbalaṁtāṁ vande 'ravindasthitāṁ.
\end{verbatim}

Om! In beauty she resembles gold. She is seen bathed by four elephants resembling the Himalāya mountains, with their trunks holding golden jars raising them above.\textsuperscript{185} She bears two lotuses, the boon-giving (vara), and assurance (abhaya) gestures. She is resplendent with her crown. Her buttocks are nice, reflecting the brightness of the silken cloth. We pay obeisance to the one who is seated on a red lotus.

She is invoked into the image, worshipped, and rendered obeisance with the mantra:

\begin{verbatim}
Om dhanaṁ dhānyam dharāṁ dharmam kārtīmāyurasah śriyam/
turaśaṁ dantiputrānśca mahālakṣmī prayacchame.
\end{verbatim}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{182}Although this \textit{dhyāna} depicts Kārtikeya with six faces, the clay \textit{murtis} used for Durgā Pūjā portray him as a single faced, handsome prince (kumāra). He is considered, by many devotees, to be the youngest child of Durgā (GaJīlesa is the eldest). If a male child is born slim and comely, he is said to be like Kārtikeya; if stout and charming, he is like Ganeśa.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{184}The male gods are given ritual precedence over the female deities. Ganeśa always enjoys first worship.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{185}The \textit{dhyāna} corresponds to the form of Lakṣmī more commonly called Gajalakṣmī (Lakṣmī with Elephants). It supports the placement of the elephant-headed god Ganeśa beside her in the Durgā Pūjā image cluster.}
\end{footnotes}
Om! Give us wealth, crops, land, right morals (dharma), fame, longevity, good name, and beauty. Give us horses and elephants. O Mahālakṣmī, give me all.

Sarasvatī

Next Sarasvatī is meditated upon with the dhyāna:

_om_ tarunaśakalamindoribhṛatt śubhakāntiḥ /
kucabharaṇamaitāṃt sannisannā sitābje /
nijakara kamalodyallekhani pustaka śrīḥ /
sakalavibhasiddhāhīṃ pātu vāgdevatā nāḥ.

Om! Bearing the disc of the young moon (on her head), white in complexion, bent by the burden of her breasts, seated on a white lotus, she shines beautifully with a pen and a book in her hands. May the goddess of speech protect us and help us for the attainment of all wealth.

She is invoked into the image, imbued with eyesight and vital energy, and worshipped.

The devotional service ends with this obeisance mantra:

_om_ sarasvatī mahābhāga vidye kamala locane /
viśvarūpe viśālaksi vidyāṃ dehi namo stute.

Om! Eminent Sarasvatī, learning personified, with eyes like lotus, who assumes multifarious forms and has long eyes, I pay obeisance to you. Give us learning.

Vāhanas (Mounts) and Nāga (Snake)

The _purohita_ then offers three handfuls of flowers, one after the other, worshipping all the mounts and Durgā’s snake noose (nāgapāśa) saying:

_om_ sāngo pāṅgāyai savāhanāyai durgāyai namāh.

Om! Obeisance to Durgā, and to the group of mud images, with their vehicles.

He then makes quick offerings to the snake (sarpa), peacock (mayura), and the mouse (muṣika), saying.\(^{186}\)

_om_ sarpaṇāḥ _om_ mayurāya namāḥ _om_ muṣikāya namāḥ.

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\(^{186}\) The peacock is the vāhana of Kārtikeya, though it is also associated with Sarasvati. The mouse is the mount of Ganesha. The snake is a noose which is wrapped around the limbs of the demon Mahiṣa. If Sarasvatī’s swan mount and Lakṣmī’s owl are present in the image cluster, the _purohita_ will quickly worship them as well.
Mahāsinḥa and Mahiṣāsura

Both the great lion (mahāsinḥa) mount of Durgā and the demon Mahiṣa, have been meditated upon, and brought to life, in the Durgā dhyāna (see before). He reinvokes the lion with:

_Om vajranakha damstraṇuḍhaya mahāsinḥaya hum phat namah._

Om! Obeisance to the great lion, armed with teeth and nails like thunderbolts.

He makes offerings to Mahāsinḥa ending with the _mantras:_

_Om simha tvam sarvajantānām adhipo 'si mahābala/ pārvatīvāhana śrīman varam dehi namo 'stute.
Om āsanaṇcāsi bhūṭanām nānālaṅkāra bhūṣitam/ merusrīṇa pratiśasam simhitāna namo 'stute._

Om! You are the lord of all creatures (living beings), enormously mighty lion. You, auspicious one, are the vehicle of Pārvatī. Please bestow blessings on us. I pay obeisance to you.

Om! You are the seat of all beings, and decorated variously with different ornaments. You are like the pinnacle of Mount Meru. I pay obeisance to the seat in the form of a lion.

The _purohita_ then offers devotional service to Mahiṣāsura paying obeisance to him with the _mantra:_

_Om mahiṣāsurāya namah. Om! Obeisance to Mahiṣāsura._

Adoration of Durgā

_Durgā Japa_

Now that the entire image cluster is alive and active, the _purohita_ repeats a _mantra_ of Durgā, at least ten times.

_Om dum durgīyai namah._

Ārati

Next he performs an _ārati_ to Durgā using the following items. The term "ārati" is most often used synonymously with "dipopacāra" (devotional service with a lamp). It is related to (even possibly derived from) the word "ārātrika" which refers to worship at night (rātrī), in which light (or its container) is waved in front of the image. _Ārati_ may also be derived from the
before the Devī:
1. Incense (*dhūpa*) in a container.
2. A lamp (*dīpa*) with at least five wicks.
3. A conch shell (*śaṅkha*) with water in it.
4. Washed clothes (*vastra*).\(^{188}\)
5. A large yak's tail whisk (*cāmara*).\(^{189}\)
6. He offers flowers (*puspa*) to the Devī.
7. He again waves the *śaṅkha*, this time sprinkling some water from the shell.\(^{190}\)
8. He bows before the goddess (*namaskāra*).

**Durgā Stuti**

The *purohita* follows the *ārati* by reciting a hymn of adoration (*stuti*) to Durgā.\(^{191}\)

\[
\text{Om durgāṁ śivāṁ śāntikāṁ brahmāṁ brahmanapriyāṁ/}
\text{saṁvaloka pranatītā pranamāmi sadā śivāṁ/}
\text{maṅgalāṁ śobhāṁ śudhāṁ niśkalāṁ pranām kalāṁ/}
\text{viśveśvarāṁ viśvanātām candikāṁ pranamāmyahām/}
\text{sarvadēvamayāṁ devīṁ saṁvalokabhayāpahāṁ/}
\text{brahmaśa viśvunamāṁ pranāmāmi sadā umāṁ/}
\text{vindhyāstham vindhyanilayāṁ divyasthāna nivāsānām/}
\text{yoginīṁ yogamātāṁ candikāṁ pranamāmyahām/}
\text{tisānamātaram devīṁ tisvārāṁ tisvarapriyāṁ/}
\text{pranato 'smi sadā durgāṁ saṁsārāṁavatārinānām/}
\text{ya idam pathaiṁ stotrom śrṇuvād vāpi yo narah/}
\]

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188 Normally these are new items of clothing (Hindi: *sārī or dhotī*) which have been previously washed. It symbolically links the rejuvenating power of the goddess with the purificatory power of water and the domestic activity of washing performed by the housewife or the clothes washer caste (Hindi: *dhobi*).

189 A tiny symbolic form of the *cāmara* was used during *adhivāsa* ritual, but an elaborate full-sized version was used in the devotional service and in this *ārati*. The *cāmara* serves as a fan, wafting cooling air towards the deity, and keeping insects away.

190 This provides a pleasing cooling effect.

191 He may opt instead to recite the *Durgā Kavaca* (Armour of the Goddess), one of the limbs of the *Durgā Saptaśati*, or the *Durgā Stava*, a *Mahābhārata* hymn attributed to Yudhiṣṭhira.
Om! I always pay obeisance to you, the consort of Śiva. You are Durgā (the one who saves persons in danger). You are Śivā (auspicious), giver of peace. You are also called Brahmapāni, the dynamic aspect of Brahmapāni and lovingly attached to Brahmā. You are the creatrix of all worlds.

You are well-being itself, beautiful to look at, pure. You do not have any parts and at the same time you are the ultimate division (kalā). You are the lady of this universe. I pay obeisance to your terrific form.

You, O Goddess, are made of the essence of the gods. You are the remover of fears arising from all quarters. You are shown reverence by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. I pay obeisance to you, O Umā.

You are steadily established in the Vindhyā mountains and having an abode in the Vindhyaśas you live in the divine level. To yogins, you are the mother of the Yoga. O Terrific one, I pay obeisance to you.

You are the mother of Īśana (Śiva). You are the lady and beloved of the superintending agent (Īśvara). O Durgā, I always pay obeisance to you, who are the rescuer of worldly existence.

Whoever reads this verse praising Durgā, or the person who listens to it, becomes liberated from all sins and lives happily with Durgā afterwards.

**Puspañjali (Adoration with Flowers)**

The purohita now asks devotees to come up and offer flowers. This is a participatory portion of the ritual to which the worshippers greatly look forward. Everyone wants to make an offering to the Devi, and passive members are encouraged to participate. If a large group is present, a helper passes out flowers and bilva pātras from a basket. The people wash their hands first, or the purohita sprinkles water on their bodies for purification. They then pray aloud, with great reverence, following the purohita, who may dictate some of these or other appropriate mantras to them.

First, the purohita utters:

Mahisaghnī mahāmāye cāmunde munḍamālini/
āyurārōgya vijayam dehi devi namo 'stute.

---

192 Īśānamātā is a crucially important epithet, because it explicitly extends the conceptualization of Durgā beyond that of a spousal affiliation with Śiva. She is the mother, or source of the supreme male deity (under a subordinate epithet of Īśana) himself.

193 Often the namaskāra mantra of Durgā is used.
O Cāmundā, the great deluder, bearing the garland of skulls, you are the slayer of Mahiśāsura. Bestow on me longevity, health, and victory. I pay obeisance to you.

And finishes with:

\[\text{Eṣaḥ sacandanaṁ bilvapatrapasphājaliḥ namo bhagavataye durgāyai devyai namah.}\]

This is an adoration with fragrant flowers and \textit{bilva} leaves. Obeisance to the goddess Bhagavatī Durgā.

When this is complete, the devotees throw the flowers towards the image.

Second:

\[\text{Candanena sanālabdhe kuṅkumena vilepite/}
\text{bilva patra krtya pūde durge ham śaraṇam gataḥ.}
\]

\[\text{Eṣaḥ sacandena bilvapatra . . namah.}\]

Being anointed with sandalpaste and smeared with saffron (\textit{kuṅkuma}), being overlaid by \textit{bilva} leaves, I am surrendering myself to Durgā.

Third, he utters:

\[\text{Puspam manoharam divyam sugandham devanirmitam/}
\text{hrdayam abhūtam āghreyam devi dattam pragṛhyatām.}
\]

\[\text{Eṣaḥ sacandena bilvapatra . . namah.}\]

Flowers, fascinating, divine, fragrant, created by the divine hand, very lovely, unique (hard to obtain), worthy to be smelled, which are being offered to you, O Devī, please accept them.

He may now utter portions of the \textit{Durgā Stuti} for people to repeat.

Next then utters:

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194 Since may people in the audience are not initiated, the \textit{purohita} feels they have not earned the right to say "Om" or "Aīm." Normally women and \textit{sudras} (even if initiated), and the uninitiated, are not supposed to say "Om." Thus the more general, "Namah" is used.

195 Often a large copper plate is used in front of the image with a sandal (\textit{pāduka}), symbol of the Devī's footprint in it. This prevents the clay image from being damaged by the over enthusiastic throwing of flowers.

The term \textit{āṅjali} generally refers to the classic gesture of prayer made by pressing the palms together, fingers extended. In \textit{puspāṅjali}, the flowers are held between the palms. The palms are then raised over and behind the head and the flowers thrown with both hands.
Ayurdehi yaśodehi bhāgyam bhagavati dahime/
putrān dehi dhanāṃ dehi sarvān kāmānśca dehime.

Bhagavati bhayocchede bhava bhavāni kamade/
śaṅkari kauśikī tvam he kātyāyani namostute.

Harapāpam hara klesam hara śokam harāśubham/
harma rogam hara ksbham hara devi harapriye.

Give me longevity. Endow me with reputation. Please give me good fortune. Give me sons, wealth, and all sorts of desires.

O divine lady, you are the uprooter of all fears, O consort of Bhava (Śiva), giver of all desires, you are Śaṅkarī, Kauśikī, and Kātyāyani. I pay obeisance to you.

Please remove sins, remove affliction, remove the pain of separation, remove all sorts of inauspiciousness, remove illness, remove agitation of the mind, O beloved of Hara (Śiva).

Finishing this, he asks them to repeat the namaskāra mantra:

Sarva maṅgala maṅgalye sive sarvārtha sādhike/
śaranye tryambake gaurī nārāyaṇi namo 'stute.

You are the source of all auspiciousness, O consort of Śiva. You are the fulfiller of all desired ends. You are the last refuge of all. You are the three formed mother,196 O Gaurī, O Nārāyaṇī, I pay obeisance to you.

This brings an end to the rituals belonging to the seventh day of Navarātra (Mahāsaptami). The purohita returns home. Some time during the night he may return to the place of worship (pujahālaya) to prepare the mandala which will constitute a major part of the worship ritual on the following day, Mahāśāntami.197

196The epithet Tryambakā is somewhat ambiguous. It may refer to the triple form of the Devī as Mahālakṣmī, Mahāsarasvatī, and Mahākāli, or to the Devī as mother of the trinity, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.

197I was told that the prescription for drawing this mandala is found in the Devī Purāṇa. The purohita draws it using a chalk line (string covered with powdered chalk, as used on construction sites). Since it is a complex procedure, purohitas may use a mandala which they have previously drawn and which is repeatedly reused for this purpose.
The worship on the eighth day \( (a\text{ṣṭ}a\text{mi}) \) of Navarātra, is essentially a repetition of the rituals performed on the previous day \( (s\text{aṣṭ}a\text{mi}) \). The significant difference lies in the worship of Durgā in the form of a complex \textit{maṇḍala}. This \textit{Maṇḍala of All Auspiciousness} \( (s\text{a}r\text{v}a\text{to} b\text{ha}d\text{ra} \text{mandala}) \) is a diagram which consists of a large square which encloses several smaller squares, a circle, and an eight-petalled lotus. The small squares are filled with five colours of powdered dust (white, green, yellow, red, and black). In the eight-petalled lotus, the eight \textit{saktis} which were mentioned in the Durgā \textit{āhūna}, namely, Ugracandrā and other goddesses are worshipped.

The \textit{pu\text{r}ohita} arrives at the place of worship \( (p\text{a}j\text{i}l\text{a}ya) \), and sipping water three times \( (a\text{c}a\text{m}a\text{na}) \) makes himself pure. He makes a frowning glance \( (k\text{r}o\text{d}ha/d\text{i}v\text{y}a\text{d}r\text{s}t\text{i}) \) to everything around uttering, "\textit{Ra}m \textit{ri}m \textit{ru}m \textit{phat}." He proceeds by doing everything which was done during Saptami, including:

1. \textit{sāmānyārgha}
2. \textit{āsanaśuddhi}
3. \textit{pu\text{s}p\text{a}śuddhi}
4. offering at least flowers and fragrances to Ganeśa, Śiva and the other gods, Aditya and the other \textit{na\text{v}agr\text{a}h\text{a}s}, the \textit{daś\text{a}v\text{a}t\text{a}r\text{a}}, etc.
5. \textit{bhūtaśuddhi}
6. \textit{nyāsas}
7. \textit{pr\text{a}nāyāma}
8. \textit{p\text{u}h\text{a}n\text{y}ās\text{a}}
9. Durgā \textit{āhūna}
10. He takes the mirror \( (d\text{a}r\text{p}a\text{n}a) \) from its place on the pedestal of the clay images. Placing it in front of the image, he offers three handfuls of flowers to the reflection, pouring them onto the mirror, saying:

\textit{Ete gandhopuspe/ duṃ durgāyai namah.}

He then moves the mirror with some petals on it gently beside him onto a tripod which
is situated inside a large container. He smears the surface of the mirror with mustard oil and turmeric.198

11. He performs the mahāsnāna in the same manner as on Saptamī.
12. He dries the mirror. He then writes the mantra, "Hrīm," with vermillion on it and places it on the altar (pedestal) of the clay image cluster.
13. He offers māśabhaktabali to pacify the entities which may create disturbances.

Note: There is no ghaṭasthāpana performed on Astami.

14. He invokes Ganeśa again, and after making a dhyāna of him, he proceeds to worship him with daśopacāra.
15. He follows this with Śivādi pañcadevātā worship.
16. prānāyāma again
17. rṣyādi nyāsa
18. karanyāsa
19. aṅganyāsa
20. Durgā dhyāna again (internal)
21. viśeṣārgha (conch shell worship)
22. pīthanyāsa
23. karanyāsa
24. anganyāsa
25. Durgā dhyāna again (external)199

Note: There is no prāna pratiṣṭha performed on Astami, since the images are already imbued with life.

26. He now worships the Devī with sodoṣopacāra, as on Saptamī.
27. The purohita performs śadaṅganyāsa and worships the bilva tree and the

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198 This combination, also used in the adhivāsa ritual, is used to remove blemishes and to give a golden colour to the skin.

199 Dhyānas are normally performed twice: first, internally, with a flower held in dhyāna mudrā by the heart, and second, externally, with the flower placed before the image (e.g., ghāṭa, plant, murti, yantra) to be worshipped. In this ritual the purohita places the flower at the feet of the clay image. Air which escapes the nostrils during the dhyāna is thought to transfer the internally meditated deity to the external image.
navapatrika.

28. The purohita now performs the practice of the *mandala*.

### Sarvatobhadra Mandala

See Diagram Four

The *purohita* has drawn the *mandala* the previous night on the floor in front of the image. Alternately, he may bring a previously drawn *mandala* which he uses for this purpose.\(^{200}\) He turns his attention to the eight-petalled lotus in the centre of the diagram. He begins by invoking and worshipping the eight *saktis* referred to in the Durgā *dhyāna*, who are said to accompany the goddess always.\(^{201}\)

#### Ugracandā

The petal facing east is for the *sakti* Ugracandā. He invokes her there with:

*Om hṝ̄ṁ śrīṁ ugracandē/ ihāgaccha ihāgaccha
 iha tiṣṭha iha tiṣṭha
 iha sannidehi iha sannidehi
 iha sannirudhyasva iha sannirudhyasva
 mama pūjāṁ gṛhāna.*

He worships her with *pañca* or *daśopacāra*, uttering her mantra:

*Eṣā gandr̥̄pa/ Om hṝ̄ṁ śrīṁ ugracandāyai namah.
 Etat puṣpam/
 Eṣā dhūpah/*

---

\(^{200}\)Truly adept ritual specialists, may perform the invocations while drawing the relevant parts of the *mandala*. On occasion, the entire clay image cluster sits upon the *sarvatobhadramandala*. The *mandala*, which enjoys such an eminent position in the worship ritual, is clearly an important embodiment of the deity. Sastric injunctions, I was told, normally prohibit the worship of images and yantras or *mandalas* in the same ritual. The Durgā Puja disregards this strict formality.

\(^{201}\)The *purohita* may visualize these *saktis* if he is aware of their forms. I was told that their colours are mentioned in the *Kalikā Purāṇa*, as follows: Pracandā is black; Cāndogrā is blue; Cāndanayikā is white; Cāndā is smoky coloured; Cāndavatī is blue; Cāndarūpā is black; Ati Candikā is white; and Ugracandā is bright (like the noonday sun).
and ends with a gesture and mantra of obeisance (*praṇāma*):

*Om ugracanda tu varada madhyahnarka samprabhā/ sāme sadāstu vradā tasyai nityaṁ namo namah.*

Om! O Ugracandā, having the brilliance of the noonday sun, is the bestower of blessings. May she be a giver of boons to me. I pay obeisance to her everyday.

**Pracaṇḍā**

In the south-east petal, Pracaṇḍā is invoked and worshipped similarly. Her *praṇāma mantra* is:

*Om pracaṇḍe putrade nitye pracaṇḍa gana samsthite/ sarvā nanda kare devi tubhyam nityam namo namah.*

Om! O Pracaṇḍā, eternally surrounded by dreadful groups (*gaṇa*), you are the giver of boons. You are the source of all happiness. I pay obeisance to you everyday.

**Caṇḍogrā**

In the south petal, Caṇḍogrā is invoked and worshipped. Her *praṇāma mantra* is:

*Om lakṣmistvam sarvabhūtānām sarvabhūtabhayapradā/ devi tvam sarva kāryesuvradā bhava śobhane.*

Om! Your beauty/affluence (*lakṣmi*) is present in all beings, and you are the giver of assurance to all beings. O divine deity, we hope that in every effort of ours you should be the giver of blessings (boons). You are the beautiful one.

**Caṇḍanāyikā**

In the south-west petal, Caṇḍanāyikā is invoked and worshipped with the *praṇāma*:

*Om yā srṣṭi sīhitinām nāca deveśa varadāyini/ kalikalma ṣanāṣaya namāmi caṇḍanāyikām.*

Om! The one who is the giver of boons to the Lord of gods of creation and preservation, for the purpose of removal of sins of Kali (i.e., *kaliyuga*), we pay worship to Caṇḍanāyikā.
Cāndā

In the west, the sakti Cāndā is invoked and worshipped:

_Om devi candātmike candi candārīvijayaprade/
dharmārthamoksāde durge nityam varadā bhava._

Om! O goddess, you have assumed the form of Cāndā, who is the giver of victory over the enemy called Canda. You are the bestower of dharma, artha, and mokṣa. O Durgā, always be the giver of boons to me.

Candavatī

In the northwest, Candavatī is invoked and worshipped.

_Om yā srsti sthiti samahāra guna traya samanvita/
yā parāh sakayas tasyai candāvatyai namo namah._

Om! The one who is associated with the three attributes of creation, preservation, and dissolution and the one transcends those powers (saktis), I pay obeisance to that Candavatī.

Candarūpā

In the north, Candarūpā:

_Om candarūpātmikā candā candikā candanāyikā/
sarva siddhi prade devi tasyai nityam namo namah._

Om! All the forms of Candā, Candikā, and Candanāyikā have assumed the form of Candarūpā. She is the bestower of all attainments. I always pay obeisance to her.

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The reference is to the Devī's destruction of the demon generals Canda and Munda, in the battle with Śumbha and Niśumbha (see _Durgā Saptasati_ 6.17-7.23). In the _Durgā Saptasati_ version it is Kāli who destroys them and obtains the epithet, Cāmunda. The word "canda" means fierce and its more common feminine form, "candi," is associated with Durgā. Here, the less common feminine form "candā" is attributed to the sakti who destroyed Canda.

The tendency to name deities after the demons they destroy requires closer examination. Sociologically, it could be explained as the incorporation of the divine symbols of one culture into that of another. In this process the divinities of the subordinate culture may be placed in a subordinate position in the divine hierarchy of the composite society (i.e., one group's gods become defeated demons, whose positive characteristics are incorporated into the nature of the dominant group's deity). Yogically, such deity/demon battles could represent the internal struggle and the victorious transcendence of base feelings (e.g., fear). Both fear (bhaya) and fearlessness (abhaya) are considered to be the activity of the Devī.
Atiçaṇḍikā

In the northeast, Atiçaṇḍikā:

\begin{quote}
Oṃ balārka nayanā candā sarvābhaktavatāla/
candāsurasya mathani varadastvaticāṇḍikā.
\end{quote}

Oṃ! Atiçaṇḍikā has eyes like the morning sun. She looks tenderly on her devotees. She who has trampled down the demon Canda is the giver of boons.

Invocation and Worship of the (Sixty-four) Yoginīs

In the centre of the lotus, the purohita now invokes the Sixty-four Yoginīs thus:

\begin{quote}
Oṃ catusaṣṭayogini/ ihāgaccha ihāgaccha . . .
\end{quote}

He then worships each of them saying:

\begin{quote}
Ete gandapuspe, etc. / Oṃ hṛm kīm nārāṇyaṁi namah.
\end{quote}

(He repeats the procedure for each of the sixty-four names).

The listings of the yoginīs vary considerably. The purohita selects his own tradition’s count or that of the yajamāna’s family. The list given in the Brahmaṇandikeśvara Purāṇa follows: Nārāyanī, Gaurī, Śākambhari, Bhimā, Raktadantikā, Bhrāmarī, Pārvatī, Durgā, Kātyāyanī, Mahādevī, Caṇḍaghantā, Mahāvidyā, Mahātapā, Śāvitri, Brahmāvadini, Bhadrakāli, Viśālakṣi, Rudrāṇī, Kṛṣṇā, Piṅgalā, Agnijvalā, Raudrānukhī, Kālarātri, Tapasvinī, Medhasvanā, Sahasrakṣi, Viṣṇumāya(1), Jalodari, Mahodaṇi, Muktakesī, Ghorarūpā, Mahāvīyū, Śrūti, Smṛti, Dhṛtī, Tuṣṭi, Puṣṭi, Medhā, Vidyā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Aparnā, Ambikā, Yoginī, Dākini, Sākini, Hākinī, Nākinī, Lākinī, Tridāseśvarī, Mahāsaṃśthi, Sarvamaṅgalā, Lajjā, Kauśikī, Brahmāṇī, Maheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Aindrī, Nārasimhī, Vārāhī, Cāmunda, Śivadūti, Viṣṇumāya(2), and Mātrkā.

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203 The list possesses sixty-five names, although Viṣṇumāya is repeated twice. This list seems more appropriate than the one found in the Purohita Darpana, which follows. The Purohita Darpana lists sixty-six yoginīs, but Candikā is listed three times, and Kātyāyanī twice. It includes some of the saktis previously invoked in the petals, suggesting its unsuitability. The yoginīs are: Brahmāṇī, Candikā(1), Raudrī, Gaurī, Indrāṇī, Kaumārī, Bhairavī, Durgā, Nārasimhī, Candikā(2), Cāmunda, Śivadūtī, Vārāhī, Kauśikī, Maheśvarī, Śaṅkari, Jayantī, Sarvamaṅgalā, Kāli, Karālinī, Medhā, Śivā, Śākambhari, Bhimā, Śantā, Bhrāmarī, Rudrāṇī, Ambikā, Syāmā, Dhatrī, Kātyāyanī(1), Svāhā, Svadhā, Pūrṇā, Mahodari, Ghorarūpā,
The *purohita* finally invokes the group of them together: 204

*Om koṭi yoginīgaṇaḥ iḥāgaccha iḥāgaccha . . .*

**Worship of Deities from other Regions** 205

The *purohita* utters:

*Om hṛṃ śrīn nānādeśanivāsinibhyoh devibhyoh namah.*

Salutation to other deities residing in other regions/countries.

**Invocation and Worship of the Mātr̥s (Mothers)**

**Brahmāṇī**

The *purohita* invokes and worships Brahmāṇī at the northeast of the *mandala*:

*Om hṛṃ śrīn brahmāṇyai namah.*

and pays obeisance with this *mantra*:

*Om caturamukham jagadāhārim hamsārudham varapradām srṣī rāpām mahābhāgām brahmaṇīn tām namamyaham.*

Om! She has four faces, is seated on a swan, and is the giver of boons. She is the protector of the world. She is the form of creation. She is noble hearted. I pay my obeisance to you.

**Maheśvarī**

He also invokes Maheśvarī in the northeast:

*Om hṛṃ śrīn maheśvaryai namah.*

and pays obeisance with:

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Mahākālī, Bhadrakālī, Kapālinī, Kṣemaṅkārī, Ugracandra, Candogra, Candanaṅkī, Candā, Candavati, Candī, Kālāratri, Mahāmohā, Priyaṅkārī, Balavṛddhikārī, Balapramathinī, Manonomanī, Sarvabhuṭādamani, Umā, Tārā, Mahānīdrī, Vijaya, Jayā, Śailaputrī, Candikā(3), Candraghaṇṭa, Kuṣmāṇḍā, Skandamātā, Kātyāyanī(2), Kālāraṇī, and Mahāgaurī.

204 It is conceivable that here he is invoking not just the group of sixty-four, but the full collection of yoginis, said to number in the crores (i.e., ten millions) (koṭi).

205 I was told that some elements of this and the next worship rituals are drawn from prescriptions in the *Devi Purāṇa.*
Om vṛṣārūḍhāṁ subhaṁ śuklaṁ trīnētram varadāṁ śīvaṁ/
māheśvarāṁ namāmyaṁ dya srṣṭi saṁhārakārināṁ.

Om! Mahēśvarī is atop the bull. She is auspicious, white, with three eyes. She is the
giver of boons and is known as the consort of Śiva. I pay obeisance to Mahēśvarī today,
who is the agent of creation and destruction.

Kaumāri

In the southeast, he invokes Kaumāri:

Om hṝm śrūṁ kaumāryai namah.

and pays obeisance with:

Om kaumārīṁ pūrvāśanāṁ māyārvaravāhanāṁ/
śakti ēkāṁ sitāṅgīṁ tām namāmi varadāṁ sadā.

Om! Kaumāri is wearing yellow clothes and has a peacock as her vehicle. The weapon
she bears is called śakti. Her limbs are white. I always pay obeisance to her, the giver
of boons.

Vaiśṇavī

Vaiśṇavī is also invoked in the southeast corner:

Om hṝm klōṁ vaiśṇavyai namah.206

and paid obeisance with:

Om sāṅkha cakra gada padmadhārināṁ krṣnarūpināṁ/
stīthi rūpāṁ khagendraśāhūṁ vaiśṇavōṁ tām namāmyaham.

Om! Vaiśṇavī bears the conch, discus, club, and lotus. She is of the form of Krṣṇa. She
signifies maintenance. She is seated on Garuda. I pay obeisance to Vaiśṇavī.

Vārāhī

In Banāras, Vārāhī is invoked into the southwest corner.207

Om hṝm klōṁ vārāhyai namah.

and paid homage with:

206Notice the use of klōṁ instead of śrūṁ for the Mātrs related to forms of Viṣṇu.

207There are certain regional variations.
Om vārāha rupinām devīṃ damstrodhritā vasundhāram/
subhādām pitavāsanāṃ vārāhīn tām namāmyaham.

Om! She is of the form of a boar, who by her tusk holds up the earth. She is the giver of well-being. She puts on yellow clothes. I pay obeisance to that Vārāhī.

Nārasimhī

Again in the southwest corner, he invokes Nārasimhī.

Om hṛīṃ klīṃ nārasimhyai namah.

and pays obeisance with:

Om nṛsimharūpinām devīṃ daitya daṇava darpahām/
subham subhapradam nārasimhim namamyham.

Om! She is of the form of a lion-person. The goddess is the destroyer of the arrogance of demons. She is auspicious, the giver of auspiciousness, white in colour. I pay obeisance to that Nṛsimhī.

Indrāṇī

In the northwest corner of the maṇḍala, Indrāṇī is invoked.

Om hṛīṃ śrīṃ indrānyai namah.

and paid obeisance with:

Om indrānt gajakumbhasthām sahasaranayajñivalām/
namāmi varadām devīṃ sarva deva namakṛtām.

Om! Indrāṇī is seated between the two lumps of an elephant’s temples. She is bright with one thousand eyes. I bow to that giver of boons who is paid obeisance by the gods.

Cāmūṇḍā

Cāmūṇḍā is also invoked in the northwest corner.

Om hṛīṃ śrīṃ cāmūṇḍāyai namah.

and worshipped with:

Om cāmūṇḍāmundamathanāṁ mundaṁalapośobhitāṁ
aśūdhāsa muditaṁ namāmyāma vibhūtaye.

Om! Cāmūṇḍā is the destroyer of the demon Munda. She is wearing a garland of skulls. She laughs loudly and thus shows her inner delight for proper attainment of power of the
self. I bow to her.

**Kātyāyanī**

And in the centre of all these goddesses he invokes Kātyāyanī.

_Om hrīm śrīm kātyāyanīyai namah._

paying her obeisance with:

_Om kātyāyanīm daśabhujām maḥīṣāsuramardinīṁ
prasanna vadanāṁ devīṁ varadāṁ tāṁ namāmyaham._

Om! Kātyāyanī, possessing ten arms, crushed the demon called Maḥīṣa. She has a smiling face, and is the giver of boons. I pay obeisance to her.

**Caṇḍikā and the Nine Durgās**

Then taking flowers, the _purohita_ utter this verse:

_Om caṇḍike navadurge tvam maha-devamanorame
pujāṁ samastāṁ sakṛiḥya rakṣaṁāṁ tridāśeśvarī._

Om! O Caṇḍikā, you are the Nine Durgās. You are dear to Śiva. After receiving my worship, O goddess of the heaven, please protect me.

and he offers these flowers three times to the centre of the _mandala_, with the _mantra_:

_Om hrīm śrīm navadurgāyai namah._

Om! Ḫrīm! Śrīm! Obeisance to the Nine Durgās.

**Jayantī and other Goddesses**

The _purohita_ now invokes Jayantī and other goddesses with:

_Om hrīm śrīm jayantīyai namah._ (Repeated for each of the other goddesses)

He does so for Maṅgalā, Kālī, Bhadrakālī, Kapālinī, Durgā, Śivā, Ksamā, Dhātrī, Svāhā, and Svadhā.

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208I was told that the _Devī Purāṇa_ does not have this navadurgā worship in its account.
Worship of the Weapons

The purohita leaves the maṇḍala temporarily to perform the worship of Durgā's weapons. He begins with the weapons in her right hands.

Triśūla (Trident)

He invokes the triśūla with:

Om triśūla namaḥ.

and then pays obeisance:

Om sarvāyudhānām prathamo nirmītastvam pinākina
śūlai śūlam samākrṣa kṛtvā muṣṭigrāham śubham.

Om! You have been made as the first of all weapons by Śiva himself. He has made you by making it emerge from his trident by means of his auspicious grasping fist.\(^{209}\)

Khadga (Sword)

Om khadgāya namah.

Om asirviśasanah khadga stikṣṇāḥdūrasadāh/
śrīgarbha vijayaścāvā dharmapāla namo 'stute.

Om! The sword is that which causes death. This sword is very sharp and cannot be overpowered. I pay obeisance to you who is named as Śrī, Garbha, Vijaya, and Dharmapala.

Cakra (Discus)

Om cakrāya namah.

Om cakra tvam viṣṇurupō 'si viṣṇu pāṇau sada sthitāh/
devi hastasthitā nityam sudarśana namo 'stute.

Om! O discus, you are of the form of Viṣṇu and always remain in his hand. Now you are in the hand of the goddess and remain there eternally. I pay obeisance to this discus named Sudarśana.

\(^{209}\)This refers to the myth of the creation of Devī, which is recounted in the Durgā Saptasati 2.19, where Śiva arms her with a trident produced from his own.
Tikṣṇavāna (Sharp Arrow)

Om tikṣṇavānāya namah.

Om sarvāyudhānām śreṣṭo 'si daityasenānisūdana
bhayeḥbhyaḥ sarvato raksāh tikṣṇavāna namo 'stute.

Om! This sharp arrow excels among all weapons. It is the key destroyer of the army of the demons. Please protect us from everything. I pay obeisance to you.

Śakti Weapon

Om śaktaye namah.

Om śaktistvam sarvadevānām guhasyaca viṣeṣataḥ/
śaktirūpena sarvatra raksām kuru namo 'stute.

Om! You are the śakti of all gods, particularly of Guha (Kārtikeya).210 I pay obeisance to you and you should protect us from all sides.

The purohita now worships the weapons in the left hands of the Devī.

Khetaka (Club/Staff)

Om khetakāya namah.

Om yaṣṭi rūpena khetatvam vaīrisamḥāra kāraṇah/
deviḥasta sthithonītyam mama raksām kurusvaca.

Om! You are the destroyer of enemies in the form of a club/staff.211 Remaining in the hands of the goddess please protect me.

Pūrṇacāpa (Fully-drawn Bow)

Om pūrṇacāpāya namah.

Om sarvāyudha mahāmātra sarvadevārisūdanah/
cāpam mām sarvataḥ raksā sākam sāyaka sattamaih.

Om! The bow and arrow of yours is the destroyer of the enemies of the gods, and the chief (minister) of weapons. The strung bow along with excellent arrows should protect

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210There is a pun here. The weapon (and the Devi) is the śakti (power) of all the gods.

211The staff is generally associated with Yama, Śiva, and Kāli. It is more commonly called the khaṭvaṅga. The club (gadā) is associated with Viṣṇu.
me from all sides.

**Aṅkuśa (Goad)**

*Om aṅkuśāya namaḥ.*

*Om aṅkuśo ’si namastubhyam gajānām niyamaḥ sadā/ lokānām sarva rakṣārthāṁ vidhiṛāḥ pārvatiḥ kare.*

Om! O goad, you are the restrainer of elephants. I pay obeisance to you. For the protection of the world, it is held by the hands of Pārvatī.

**Ghaṇṭa (Bell)**

*Om ghaṇṭāya namaḥ.*

*Om hinasti dairya-jāṃsi svaṇenā-pūrya yā jagat/ sa ghaṇṭā pātuno devi pāpebhīyoḥ naḥ sūtāṇīva.*

Om! By the sound of the bell which fills the whole world and overturns the vigor of the demons, may that bell, like sons, protect us from sins.

**Paraśu (Axe)**

*Om paraśave namaḥ.*

*Om paraśu tvam mahāttksna sarvadevārī śūdanaḥ/ devihasthithonītyaḥ śatrūksāya namo ’stute.*

Om! O axe, you are very sharp. You are the destroyer of the enemies of the gods. You always remain in the hand of the goddess. I pay obeisance to you, the destroyer of enemies.

**Nāgapaśa (Serpent Noose)**

The *purohita* now worships the serpent noose weapon which is wrapped around the image of the demon Mahiśa.

*Om nāgapaśāya namaḥ.*

*Om pāśatvam nagarūpo ’si viśapūrṇo viśodarah/ śatrūnām duḥsahahaniyauṁ nāgapaśaṁ namo ’stute.*

Om! You are of the form of the serpent, O noose, full of poison. Your stomach is full of poison. It is quite unbearable to the enemies. I pay obeisance to you all the time.
Worship of Candikā as Bearer of All Weapons (Sarvāyudhadharinī)

He pays obeisance to Candikā herself with the mantra:

\[ \text{Om hṝm śrīm sarvāyudhadharinyai namah.} \]

\[ \text{Om sarvadhānam śresthāni yāni yāni tripistape/} \]
\[ tāni tāni dadhatyai candikāyai namo namah.} \]

Om! You are the bearer of all those excellent weapons which exist in heaven. I pay obeisance to that Candikā over and over again.

Worship of the Devī's Ornaments

Then he worships the ornaments worn by the goddess, by uttering:

\[ \text{Om kirtādi devyaṅgabhūśaṇebhyoh namah.} \]

Om! I pay obeisance to all the ornaments on the goddess's body, beginning with the crown, and so on.

Worship of the Batukas (Young Lads)

Once again the purohita goes to the mandala and on the eastern side he offers flowers to the Batukas, saying:\[212\]

\[ \text{Om śrīm siddhaputra baṭukāya namah.} \]

Om! Śrīm! Obeisance to Bāṭuka, son of Siddha (Attainment).

On the south:

\[ \text{Om śrīm jñānaputra baṭukāya namah.} \]

Om! Śrīm! Obeisance to Baṭuka, son of Jñāna (Knowledge).

West:

\[ \text{Om śrīm sahaṇaputra baṭukāya namah.} \]

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\[212\]The Batukas, or Bāṭuka Bhairavas, are fierce boy forms of Śiva. They could be considered male counterparts of the Kumāris. I was told that Bāṭuka, in sattvic form, is white like crystal. He removes untimely death, offers longevity and liberation. In rajasic form he is red and offers dharma, artha, and kama. The tamasic form is blue and removes fear from enemies and the inimical effects of the planets. I was told that, according to the Brhannandikeśvara Purāṇa, there are five baṭukas. The Kalikā Purāṇa talks of four while the Devī Purāṇa does not refer to the number.
Om! Śrīm! Obeisance to Baṭuka, son of Sahaja (Friendship).

North:

Om śrīm samayaputra baṭukāya namah.

Om! Śrīm! Obeisance to Baṭuka, son of Samaya (Togetherness).

Worship of the Kṣetrapālas (Guardians of the Field)

Then he worships the kṣetrapālas between the lotus petals and the filament (keśara) of the lotus.

North: Om hetukāya kṣetrapālāya namah.
NE: Om tripuraghnāya kṣetrapālāya namah.
East: Om agnijihvāya kṣetrapālāya namah.
SE: Om agnivetālāya kṣetrapālāya namah.
South: Om kālāya kṣetrapālāya namah.
SW: Om karālāya kṣetrapālāya namah.
West: Om ekapādāya kṣetrapālāya namah.
NW: Om bhīmanāṭhāya kṣetrapālāya namah.

Worship of the Bhairavas

The Bhairavas are fierce forms of Śiva. The purohita invokes into sections of the maṇḍala and worships them as follows:

East: a) Om asitāṅgāya bhairavāya namah.
      b) rurave
South: a) candāya
      b) krodhāya
West: a) unmattāya
      b) bhayamkarāya
      213
North a) kapāline
      b) bhīsanāya
Centre: samhārine

This completes the invocations and worship of deities in the maṇḍala.

Worship of Durgā

The purohita once again worships the Devī as a whole, in all her forms, by

213I was told that the Bhairavas are normally listed as eight in which Bhayaṅkara does not appear.
repeating her mantra according to his mood and capacity. He offers the fruit of this worship back to her. He may offer her and the companion deities cooked food (bhoga/annam) and perform ārati. He pays obeisance to her with a full prostration (aṣṭaṅga praṇāma). He may then again recite the Durgā Stuti. This completes the rituals of Mahāṣṭamī.
SANDHI PŪJA

The purohita must finish the Mahāṣṭamī pūja before Sandhi pūja, a requirement which may greatly reduce the time and ritual elaboration of the Aṣṭami worship. The Sandhi pūja occurs at the point of confluence of the eighth (aṣṭami) and ninth (navami) lunar days (tīthi). This juncture’s duration is forty-eight minutes, composed of the last twenty-four minutes of the aṣṭami tīthi and the first twenty-four minutes of the navami tīthi.214 The juncture, which may occur at day or night, is considered highly auspicious. The entire pūja must be performed during this interval. The climax occurs with the offering of a blood sacrifice (bali dāna) to the goddess.

To expedite matters, everything that is to be offered to Durgā is prepared beforehand. The purohita sits on his āsana. He sips water three times (acamanā), utters the svasti vācanam, performs āsanaśuddhi, and offers flowers to Ganeśa and other deities. Then making a nyāsa of the mārkās, followed by prāṇāyāma, he worships Durgā as Cāmunda. To do so he takes a flower in his hands in dhyāna mudrā and meditates:

Oṃ kālī karaṇā vadanā viniskṛntāsī pāśinti/
viṣṭra khatvāngadharā naramātā vibhūṣanā/
dvīpi caramapartdhanā śuskamāmsāḥ bhairavā/
ativistāravadanā jihvā lalannbhīṣā/
nimagnā rakta nayanā nādā pūrtā dinamukhā.

Oṃ! She is Kālī, deadly black, very dreadful faced, emerging with a sword and noose in her hands, holding a strange staff (khatvanga) in her hand, adorned with a garland of human bodies, wearing the hide of an elephant. The flesh of her body has become withered (emaciated) and is exceedingly dreadful. Her exceedingly expanded mouth has a dreadful lolling tongue. Her eyes are deeply set but very red in colour. The sound which is emanating from her is of such a high pitch that it has filled all the quarters.

Cāmunda is then worshipped mentally according to regional differences.215 Most

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214 A tīthi is divided into equal divisions called dandas. Twenty-four minutes is the duration of one danda.

215 Since the dhyāna is short, it is appropriate for Sandhi pūja. I was told that the dhyāna of Cāmunda is different in the Brhadnandikesvara Purāṇa.
significant here is the decision regarding the inclusion of a blood sacrifice.

The purohita then performs a viṣeṣārgha (conch-shell worship) in the same manner as performed on Saptami. He repeats the dhyāna of Durgā as Cāmuṇḍā and offers the sixteen part devotional service (ṣodāsopacāra), of which the blood sacrifice may be a part, with this mantra:216

Om krīm hṛṃ cāmuṇḍārūpāyai namah.

Om! Krīm! Hṛṃ! Obeisance to the form of Cāmuṇḍā.

Balidāna (Sacrificial Offering)

The blood sacrifice occurs just after the Devī is shown her own reflection in the mirror (darpana).217

The sacrificial animal, normally an uncastrated male goat, is bathed. The yajamāna places a red garland on its neck and puts vermillion marks on its horns. Then it is brought before the purohita. Its face should be directed towards the east. The Tantric form of the ritual is described below. It is shorter, focuses more on the sword than on the animal, and is more commonly used, since it is shorter. The Vedic form follows for reference.

The purohita sprinkles it with water from his vessel, purifying the animal simply by uttering, "Hum." He shows it dhenumudrā. He offers consecrated water onto its feet (pādyā), saying:

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216 Due to time limitations, the purohita does not recite the lengthy mantras normally used in the rituals of the other days.

217 This could strengthen the interpretation that the Devī, who is the cosmic Creadrix, is being offered back her own self. While this is true for all the offerings made, the blood offering is more representative of the vital life force and activating energy with which she is associated and through which she is understood.

The blood sacrifice, a crucial part of the Durgā Pūjā, is rapidly disappearing in Benaras. It is no longer performed by the few homes in the city which continue the tradition of elaborate domestic pūjās. Some of these homes, and most public pūjās, have eliminated this dimension altogether from the celebration, while others offer a vegetable substitute in place of the animal. In the not-too-distant past, however, all these groups used the Durgā Kund temple as the place where these sacrifices would take place. This sacrificial function rather significantly links the Durgā Mandir with the Durgā Pūjā celebrations all over the city. It suggests that the Devī enshrined at Durgāji is the recipient of the worship performed by each of the many groups in the city.
Etat pādyaṁ/ om chagapaśave namaḥ.

This is pādyaṁ. Om! Obeisance to the goat animal.

He utters this Vedic mantra in its ears:

_ Om paśupāsaye vidmahe viśvakarmaṇe dhīmaḥi tanno jīva pracodayāt._

Then the sword is brought before the animal, washed and cleaned. He marks it with a disk of red vermillion. He then writes with the stem of a _bilva_ leaf, the word, "Hṛim," on the vermillion.\(^{218}\) He worships the iron sword with the mantra:

_ Om hṛim kālī kālī vajreśvari lauha danda namaḥ._

Om! Hṛim! O Kālī, O Kālī, thunderbolt goddess, iron staff, obeisance.

Then he utters this mantra and offers flowers to the top of the sword.

_ Hūṃ vāgīśvaribrhamābhyaṁ namaḥ._

Hum! Obeisance to Vāgīśvarī (the goddess of speech) and Brahmā.

To the middle:

_ Hūṃ lakṣmīnārāyaṇābhyaṁ namaḥ._

Hum! Obeisance to Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa.

To the hilt:

_ Hūṃ umāmaheśvarābhyaṁ namaḥ._

Hum! Obeisance to Umā and Maheśvara.

Then to the entire body of the sword:

_ Om brahmāvisnuśivaśaktiyuktaya khadgaya namaḥ._

Om! Obeisance to the sword, united with Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Śakti.

Then the priest makes a praṇāma to the sword, saying:

_ Om khadgaya kharadharāya śakti kāryārthatapatā/ paśuschedyastvāyā stghram khadganātha nama ’stute._

Then taking some sesamum, _tulasi_ leaf, and _kuśa_ grass in the _kuśī_, he reads an oath:

\(^{218}\)In the Bengali tradition a special secret way of writing the seed syllable is used.
And with folded hands he prays:

*Om bātim grhna mahādevi paśuṁ sarva-gruṇān-vitaṁ/
yathoktena vidhānena tubhyam astu samar�tim.*

Then taking up the sword in both his hands and uttering:

*Aim Hum Phat*

he severs the neck of the goat with a single stroke. 219

**Vedic Procedure of Balidāna**

*Om vārāhi yamunā gaṅgā karatoyā sarasvatī/
kaṁerī candrabhāgacca sindhu bhairavā ṣonagāḥ/
ajāśnāne maheśāni sāṇidhyāmī ṣaṁkayaḥ/
Om prṣṭhe puṣche laḷāte ca karnayoh janghayostahā
medre ca sarva gātresu muṣcanto paśudevataḥ.*

Om! O rivers, Vārāhi, Yamunā, Gaṅgā, Karatoyā, Sarasvatī, Kaverī, Candrabhāgā, Sindhu, Bhairava, and Ṣonagā, be present when we bathe this goat. The deities present in the limbs of the goat, namely in the back, the tail, forehead, ears, shanks, and genitals, and his limbs should help the animal to attain release.

Sprinkling the beast (*paŚu*) with water (with *kuśa* grass) he utters Vedic verses 220:

1. *Om āgniḥ paśu-rāṣṭe tenayayanta sa etam loko mjaḥat/
yasmin āgniḥ sate loko bhavīṣyati tam yesyi pivaṁa ahaḥ.*

Om! In the beginning, Fire was an animal. It has made sacrifices/oblations and made a victory over this region in which it now abides. It will be your domain. You will be able to win it, so drink this water.

2. *Om vāyuḥ . . . /
yasmin vāyuḥ . . .

Om! In the beginning, Wind was an animal, . . .

3. *Om sūryaḥ . . . /

219 He may alternately release the goat with a small release of blood from a cut made in the goat’s ear.

220 These are said to come from the *Yajur Veda*, Vājasanīya *Samhitā*.
Then he utters:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Om} & \quad \text{vāc} \quad \text{te} \quad \text{sundhāmi} \\
\text{Om} & \quad \text{prāna} \\
\text{Om} & \quad \text{caksus} \\
\text{Om} & \quad \text{strotram} \\
\text{nabhim} & \\
\text{medhram} & \\
\text{payum} & \\
\text{caritram} & \\
\text{vāk} & \quad \text{ta} \quad \text{āpyāyatām} \\
\text{manas} & \\
\text{caksus} & \\
\text{strotram} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Yat} & \quad \text{te} \quad \text{krūramyadāṣṭhitam/} \\
\text{ṣṭhitam} & \quad \text{tā} \quad \text{āpyāyatām.} \\
\text{tā} & \quad \text{te} \quad \text{nīṣṭhāyatam} \\
\text{tā} & \quad \text{te} \quad \text{suddhatu} \\
\text{sama} & \quad \text{hobbyhay} \quad \text{svāhā} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Om} & \quad \text{aṁ} \quad \text{ḥṛm śṛm} \quad \text{candramandalādhithita} \quad \text{vigrāhāyai/} \\
\text{paśurāpa} & \quad \text{candikāyai} \quad \text{iṃaṇi} \quad \text{paśuṁ} \quad \text{prokṣayāmi} \quad \text{svāhā.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Om} & \quad \text{paśupāśaya} \quad \text{vidmahe} \quad \text{śīraścchedāya} \quad \text{dhūmahī/} \\
\text{tannah} & \quad \text{paśuḥ} \quad \text{pracodayāt.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Om} & \quad \text{paśupāśa} \quad \text{vināśāya} \quad \text{hemakāta} \quad \text{ṣṭhitāya} \quad \text{ca/} \\
\text{parāparāya} & \quad \text{parameśṭhīne} \quad \text{hunκārāya} \quad \text{ca} \quad \text{mūrtaye.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Then he binds the animal to a sacrificial stake (Y - shaped at the top), placing its neck in the V, and says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Om} & \quad \text{mēghākāra} \quad \text{ṣṭhambha} \quad \text{madhye} \quad \text{paśuṁ} \quad \text{bandhaya} \quad \text{bandhaya} \quad \text{sasṛnga} \quad \text{sarvā} \quad \text{vayavāṁ} \\
\text{paśuṁ} & \quad \text{bandhaya} \quad \text{brahmānda} \quad \text{khandarūpinam} \quad \text{paśuṁ} \quad \text{bandhaya} \quad \text{bandhaya.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

He severs its head in a single stroke saying:

\[
\text{Aṁhum} \quad \text{ḥphat} \quad \text{svāhā.}
\]

**Surrogate Offerings**

As a substitute, a *kuśmāṇḍa* melon, sugarcane, a plantain, a cucumber, etc., may
be offered. To sanctify these offerings, he may say:

\[ Om \text{kusmānda} \text{ balaye namah.} \]
\[ Om \text{ikṣudānda} \text{ balaye namah.} \]
\[ Om \text{kadaliphala} \text{ balaye namah.} \]
and so on.

He marks an effigy of a human figure (called a \text{svastika}) on the fruit, and cuts its in a single stroke, across the centre of the figure.\textsuperscript{221}

**Offering of the Head to Durgā**

After the head of the goat is cut, the head is brought back near the \textit{purohita}, with some blood, and placed before the altar facing north.\textsuperscript{222} A \textit{ghi} lamp is lit atop the head and the \textit{purohita} says:

\[ Eṣa \text{ sapradṛpta cchāga sīrṣa balih/ om durgā devatāyai namah.} \]

This is a sacrificial offering of a goat’s head with a lamp.
Om! Obeisance to Goddess Durgā.

**Offering the Flesh and Blood to Durgā and Other Deities**

The \textit{purohita} offers the blood thus:\textsuperscript{223}

\[ Eṣa \text{ samāmsa rudhira balih/ om durgā devatāyai namah.} \]

This is a sacrificial offering of blood with flesh.
Om! Obeisance to Goddess Durgā.

\textsuperscript{221} The \textit{svastika} is a symbol of the Devī. Thus the sacrificial offering may be conceived of as the goddess herself. The epithet of the Devī at Durgā Mandir is Kuśmāndī Devī which could mean “Goddess who is a Kuśmāndā”. The identification of the Devī with the sacrifice is not at odds with interpretations of the blood offering as representing either her consort, or the devotee. Ultimately, these too are none other than her manifest forms, which are offered back up to her.

\textsuperscript{222} The actual slaughter of the goat may take place at the Durgā Kuṇḍi temple, and is performed by another person, such as a worker at the temple. Most of the \textit{pajāris} and workers at Durgā Mandir find the task repulsive and try to avoid it. Nevertheless they do perform the ritual blessing of the goat, sword, and offering of the severed head to the Devī, while leaving the actual killing to someone else. At Durgā Mandir, the goat faces north when being beheaded. The severed head is then placed atop the sacrificial pillar facing east (and the Devī).

\textsuperscript{223} Sometimes a portion of flesh (\textit{māṃsa}) from the decapitated body is added to the blood offering.
He offers about a half portion to Durgā, and divides the remaining half into four portions which he offers to other deities who partake of blood sacrifices.

He offers flowers to Baṭuka:

_Ete gandhapuspe/ om hum vaṃ baṭukāya namah._

and then one of the portions:

_Esa samamsarudhira balīh/ om hum yām baṭukāya namah._

The second portion to the Yoginīs:

... _/ om hum yām yoginībhīyoḥ namah._

The third to the Kṣetrapālas:

... _/ om hum kṣetrapālāya namah._

And the last to Gaṇapati (Gaṇeśa):224

... _/Om hum gām gaṇapataye namah._

The _purohita_ concludes the blood sacrifice ritual with:

_Om aim hṛm śrīm kauśikī rudhīre na Ṛpyāyatām._

**Offering of One Hundred and Eight Lamps**

The _yajamāna_ or members of his family sets about lighting one-hundred and eight _ghi_ lamps. These are often set in a large tray or arranged in some yantric pattern. One such pattern may be intersecting upward and downward pointing equilateral triangles, with a _svastika_ figure in the hexagon formed at the centre. The procedure requires patience and excellent timing, since it is not easy to keep all lamps lit simultaneously. The effect is impressive. This ritual is essentially an elaborate variation of the _ārati_ worship to the Devī. The _purohita_ offers the one hundred and eight lamps to Durgā, uttering:

_Om viṣṇurom tat sadadya āśvine māse śukle pakṣe avimukta vārānast kṣetra amuka gotra śrī amuka devaśarma śrī durgā pritiḵāmah/ Etan aṣṭodara śata samkhyakan praṇīvalītān dipaṃ śrī cāmundayāpyai durgāyai tubhyamaham sampradāde._

224It is noteworthy that Gaṇeśa receives blood sacrifices last, when normally he is propitiated first.
Om! . . . , I am offering these one hundred and eight lamps to you, O Cāmunḍa.

**Kumārī Pūjā (Worship of Virgins)**

Young girls before puberty are invited to the place of worship. They are to be worshipped as living forms of the Devi. The purohita makes an oath (saṅkalpa):

*Om viṣṇurom tat sadadya... sukle pakse... amuka gotra, amuka devaśarma gauri prātikāmah gaṇapatyādi nāṇādevatā pūjā pūrvaka kumārīpūjānamaham karisyे.*

Om! . . . , in order to please Gaurī, after worshipping Ganeśa and other deities, I shall worship a virgin representing the consort of Śiva.

He then reads the oath hymn (saṅkalpa sūkta) and performs all preliminary worship rituals (sāmānya vidhi) like sāmānyaārgha, āsanaśuddhi, and so on. He does mātrkā nyāsa and offers flowers to Ganeśa and other deities. He places a maiden girl (generally, below eleven years of age) adorned with clothes, ornaments, garlands and decorated with sandal paste (spots placed on the face for beauty) on a large brass plate. He washes her feet and offers a flower with the mantra:

*Om śrīn kumāryai namah.*

He does prāṇāyāma, angānyāsa, karanyāsa, and then does a dhyāna of the goddess Kumārī.

*Om kumārīm kamalārūdhām trinetrāṃ candraśekharaṃ/
tapta kāncana varṇāhyām nānālaṅkara bhūṣitām/
raktāmbāra paridhānāṃ raktamālāyānulepanām/
vamenābhayadām dhyāyet daksīnena varapradām.*

---

225This pūjā generally follows the blood sacrifice. Since blood sacrifice is most often likely to be performed (in Banāras), if at all, during the Sandhi pūjā, it is described in this section. The short time interval of the Sandhi is also the prescribed time for kumārī worship. However, it is often performed on Aṣṭamī or Navamī.

226The girls are normally brāhmaṇas, although this varies according to the family tradition. They come from the yajamāṇa’s immediate family, or from the families of relatives, friends, or neighbours.

227I was told that the theological or philosophical symbolism of the virgin is suggested in Kaśmīri Śaivism where one encounters the phrase: *icchā sakti unā kumārī.* The *icchā* spoken of here transcends the triad of manifest śaktis, namely, conscious will (*icchā*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and action (*kriyā*). It is svatantra śakti, the autonomous will, which is equated with the supreme Śakti. Thus the virgin symbolizes the uncreate active potential to manifest.
Om! The maiden is standing on a bloomed lotus. She has three eyes, with the moon on
her forehead. Her complexion is like molten gold, and she is adorned with different kinds
of ornaments. She wears a red cloth and on her neck there is a red garland. She is
smeared with red sandalpaste (ungents). Her left hand is offering assurance. And with
her right hand she is giving boons.\textsuperscript{228}

He offers worship mentally and then repeats the dhyāna actually performing the sixteen-
part devotional service (sodaśopacāra).

The purohita next offers flowers to Kauśikī, Gaṅgā, Sarasvatī, Yamunā,
Vegavatī, Nāradā, Vaśīnavī, Viṣṇū, Padmā, Śāṅkhā, Śvetādiṣṭā, Pavanā, Ghorā,
Ghorarūpā, Menakā, Kamalā, Simhältanā, and Cakrā. He then recites the verse:

\begin{quote}
Om! ayurbalam yaśo dehi dhanam dehi kumārike/
sarvam sukham ca me dehi prasūda paramēśvari/
namaste sarvato devi sarva papapranāśini/
sauḥāgyam santatim dehi namastute kumārike/
sarva bhistā prade devi sarvapat vinivārini/
sarvaśānti kare devi namastetum kumārike/
brāhmaṁ maheśvārā raudṛī ripatriyayadhārīnt/
abhayaṁca varam dehi narāyanī nama 'ṣute.
\end{quote}

Om! Give me, O maiden mother, longevity, vigor, fame, and wealth. Give me all kinds
of happiness, and be pleased with me. I pay obeisance to you in every respect. You are
the remover of all sins. Give me prosperity, sons and daughters. I pay obeisance to you,
O maiden mother. You are the bestower of all sorts of desired objects. You are the
remover of all sins. You are the giver of peace. I pay obeisance to you mother. You are
of the form of Brahmā, Maheśvara, and Rudra in female aspect. You assume these three
forms. Give me fearlessness and blessing. I pay obeisance to Nārāyanī.

\textbf{Dakṣiṇā (Offering of Money)}

The purohita then makes a prayer of the monetary donation (dakṣiṇā) to be given
to him for the services rendered. He begins with the saṅkalpa:

\begin{quote}
Om visnurom tad sadāya, . . ., amuka gotra amuka devāsarma kumāripūjā
sāṅgatārtham dakṣiṇāmidam kañcanam śrī viṣṇu daivaṁtum yathā sambhava gotra
nāṁne brahmaṁca aham dadāmi.
\end{quote}

He finishes with:

\textsuperscript{228}The description most closely resembles the common forms in which the Devī appears in most temple
images, where she is portrayed with a gold mask and draped in a red cloth. The virgin symbolizes a more
primordial form of divinity.
Om! . . . , a value of gold is given to the \textit{brāhmaṇa} for fulfilling this \textit{kumari pūjā}.

The maiden is then fed with dainties or well-cooked food and sent away.\footnote{The traditionally recommended numbers of virgins to be worshipped are one, nine, seventeen, one hundred and eight or more. However, there is often just one \textit{kumārī} chosen to represent all others who are present. The rituals are performed to her.}
MAHĀNAVAMI PŪJA

The Mahānavami rituals are identical with those performed on Saptami, differing primarily in that they include the fire oblation ritual (homa). Everyday, before going to the place of worship, the purohita has made some small offerings and offered obeisance to the bilva tree. He then enters the pūjālaya, begins as usual performing the ācamana, svasti vācanam, and so on, and proceeds to the great bath of the goddess (mahāsnāna). He offers her bilva twigs as tooth cleansers (dantakāśṭhā), completing the bathing ritual just as it was done on Saptami. He then offers māsabhaktabali to the bhūtas. Next, he offers flowers, etc. to Ganeśa, Śiva, and other deities, performing the full sixteen-part service if inclined. He now proceeds to worship Durgā through the fire oblation.

Homa (Fire Oblation)

The fire pit (kundā) where the oblation is to be held is called the sthandīla. Its area is one square cubit.230 It should be 4 fingers (aṅguli) in height, and made of bricks and mud. Fine sand is spread over it. A yantra consisting of an ascending triangle intersected by a descending triangle is drawn with kuśa grass in the middle and a point (bindu) placed in the centre of it. The triangles are surrounded by a circle and then eight lotus petals emanate from the circle. This is surrounded by a bhūpura, a square with symbolic gateways at the cardinal directions. A bija mantra, such as, "Dum," may be drawn on the bindu.231

---

230 A cubit is the length from the elbow to the finger tip.

231 This diagram is the Durga Yantra. It is illustrated in Diagram Three. The bindu or point symbolizes the first manifestation of the Supreme Goddess who is beyond all conceptualization or predication. The bija mantra is the seed syllable from which conceptual forms or predication about the nature of the goddess germinates. It also represents the root or primal vibration from which the goddess begins to manifest the diverse and manifold creation. The descending triangle is a symbol of the female principle and generative organ, the yoni, the portal through which the creation will emerge. It symbolizes the triad of qualities of feminine energy which animates the creation. These are desire (icchā), knowledge (jñāna), and action (kriyā). The ascending triangle is symbol of the male principle and generative organ (the linga). It symbolizes the triad of attributes of the male principle, namely, bliss (ananda), consciousness (cit), and existence (sat). The triangles also represent the triad of principles within every component of creation, namely, the three guṇas. These are the principles of pure integral stasis (sattva), passionate action (rajas),
The purohita looks at the sthāndila while uttering Durgā's mūlamatra and he strikes it with kuśa grass saying "Phat!" and sprinkles it with water saying, "Hum." Again uttering the mūlamatra, he says:

Om kūndāya namah.

He places fine lengths of kuśa grass in the kunda according to a particular pattern (See Diagram Six):

When this is done, he purifies the sthāndila with sprinkling (proksana), striking (tādana), and spreading of water in it (abhyuksana).

He worships the three lines of kuśa grass pointing east (i.e., at the extreme right) with:

1st  Om mukundāya namah
middle Om īśānāya namah
last Om purandarāya namah

To the three lines facing north, he pays obeisance with:

1st  Om brahmane namah
middle Om vaivasvate namah
last Om indave namah

Next, he offers flowers to Durgā five times, after which he examines the oblation materials silently repeating, "Om."

Offering flowers into the centre of the pit, the purohita utters:

Om ādhārāśaktyādi pithadevatābhva namah.

Om! Obeisance to the deities of the abodes of the goddess, the Supreme Supporting Śakti

and dissolve inertia (tamas). The intersection of these triangles, indicate the union of male and female principles, also called Śiva and Śakti, to produce numerous other yonis and liṅgas, symbols of the proliferation of male and female principles. The circle and the lotus petals symbolize the outward flowering of the creation. The bhāpura is the barrier which separates the phenomenal world from the noumenal realm. The portals into the bhāpura represent the routes through which the spiritual aspirant may pierce the veil which keeps the process of creation, which is knowledge (vidyā) of the nature of the Devī, mysterious.

In the homa ritual, the sthāndila is identified as the yantra of the Devī, and the offerings made into the fire, are symbolic of the reconstitution or reintegration of the cosmos. The Devī's manifest form is offered back to her. The gross elements of the creation, through the medium of the fire, are transformed into more subtle elements and through the symbolism inherent in the smoke, flame, and ashes are reunited with the Devī in her most sublime essence.
and others.

Facing east, he worships aspects of the Devī in the various corners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corner</th>
<th>Mantra</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Om dharmāya namah</td>
<td>righteousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>Om jñānāya namah</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>Om vairāgyāya namah</td>
<td>dispassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>Om aśīvāryāya namah</td>
<td>royal power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and in the sides:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corner</th>
<th>Mantra</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Om adharmāya namah</td>
<td>wickedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Om ajñānāya namah</td>
<td>nescience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Om avairāgyāya namah</td>
<td>passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Om anaisvāryāya namah</td>
<td>base weakness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and to the middle:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mantra</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Om anantāya namah</td>
<td>endless serpent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om padmāya namah</td>
<td>lotus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then, also to the centre, he utters obeisance to the solar, lunar, and fire spheres and their divisional components:

*Am arkamanḍalāya dvādaśakalātmane namah*
*Um somamanḍalāya śodaśakalātmane namah*
*Mam vahnimandalāya daśakalātmane namah*

Next, he offers flowers to the centre paying obeisance to each of the components parts of fire saying:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mantra</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Om pitāyai namah</td>
<td>yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om śvetāyai namah</td>
<td>white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om arunāyai</td>
<td>rose pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om dhūṃrāyai</td>
<td>smoky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Om kṛṣṇāyai</td>
<td>black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tibrāyai</td>
<td>very fierce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sphuliṅgayai</td>
<td>sparkling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rucirāyai</td>
<td>lovely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jvālīnayai</td>
<td>ripening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vahni āśanāyai</td>
<td>fire as the seat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then he makes a dhyāna of the goddess of speech, Vāgīśvarī:

*Om vāgīśvarīṁ rūṣnātāṁ niśendī vara locanāṁ vāgīśvareṇa saṁyuktāṁ krīḍa bhāva saṁanvītāṁ.*

Om! Vāgīśvarī is the lady of speech, who has eyes like a blue lotus. She has just
completed her menstrual cycle and properly bathed, and now has entered into playful
union with the lord of speech.²³²

And he offers flowers and obeisance with:

*Om hriṁ vāgaśvara sahita vāgaśvaryai namah.*
*Om! Hriṁ! Obeisance to the Lord of Speech united with the Lady of Speech.*

The *purohita* then collects fire (from an ember) with the *mantra,* "Vauṣat," and
invokes/kindles the tinder with "astrāya phat." Saying:

*Hum phat kravyādevyāh svāhā*

he takes a small amount of fire and offers it to the deities who are eaters of raw flesh
(*kravya*). He then waves the flame around the *kunḍā* three times, kneels down with both
knees touching the earth, and places it with both hands into the *sihandīla.* He offers it
flowers, saying:

*Om hriṁ vahni mūrtaye namah*
*Om vam vahni cetandāya namah*
*Om cit piṅgala hana hana daha daha paca paca sarvajñā ājñā paya svāhā.*

and now places kindling on it causing the fire to blaze properly.

Then with folded hands he says:

*Om agnim prajjvalitam vande jāta vedam hutāśanam suvaranam amalam sānnidhyam
vīśvato 'mukham/ agneh tvam baladanām (varadanām) āsti.*

*Om vaiśvānara jātaveda ihavāha lohitākaṣa sarvakarmāṇi sādhaya svāhā.*

He next offers obeisance to the fire with flowers and sandal paste:

*Eta sacandaṇapuṣpam/ om agnaye namah*

and worships the aspects of fire and other deities with flowers:

*Ete gandhapuṣpe/
Om agner 'hiranyādi sapta jivhābhīyoḥ namah*
*Om agner sadaṅgebhīyoḥ namah*
*Om agnaye jātavedase aṣṭamurtībhīyoḥ namah*

²³²Sexual playfulness is implied in this *dhyāna.* Fire is perceived to be the play (*krīḍā*) of the divine,
conceived of as the copulation between male and female polarities of divinity at the threshold of
manifestation (symbolized by Vāc, "speech," which represents "vibration.") The sexual union appears to
be essentially for pleasure, not primarily for reproduction.
Then taking two very thin-edged lengths of kuśa grass called pavitras, each the length of a span, and placing them in the plate from which the oblation of ghi will be taken, the purohita divides the plate into three spaces. These spaces correspond to the three main energy channels (nadī) in the body cosmos. The right section of the plate is īdā, the left is piṅgalā, and the middle is suṣumnā. When offering oblations of ghi into the fire, the purohita may take ladlefuls from any of the three sections in a process which resembles the alternate breathing in prāṇāyāma. If he takes ghi from the right (īdā), he utters

_Om agnaye svāhā._ Om svāhā to Agni.

and places it at the left of the fire. If he takes ghi from the left (piṅgalā), he utters

_Om somaśa svāhā._ Om svāhā to Soma.

and places it to the right of the fire. If from the middle, he places it in the middle, saying:

_Om agniśomābhyaś svāhā._ Om svāhā to Agni and Soma.

The purohita begins by taking ghi from the right with a ladle, pouring it onto the fire and uttering:

_Om agnaye sviṣṭi krte svāhā._

Om svāhā to Agni, the well-doer of sacrifices.

Mahāvyāhṛti Homa (Oblation of the Great Mystical Utterances)

The purohita next makes an oblation called the _mahāvyāhṛti homa_. The _mahāvyāhṛtis_ are the utterances made by all brāhmaṇas during their daily worship at the junctures (sandhyā). They are "bhur," "bhuvas," and "svas," and are part of the Gāyatrī

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233 I was told that the nadīs exist not merely in the physical body of the human, but in the subtle bodies (śaṅgā sartrī) as well. Furthermore, the human body is merely a microcosm within the larger cosmic body, through which the nadīs actually flow.
Mantra.

First uttering the following:

\[ \text{Prajāpatir } rṣī gāyatrī chando agnir devatā mahāvyāhṛti home viniyogāḥ} \]

The revealer (ṛṣi) is Prajāpati, the metre (chandas) is Gāyatrī, the deity (devatā) is Agni, the purpose (viniyoga) is the Oblation of the Great Mystical Utterance

he then offers ghi, uttering the mahāvyāhṛtis saying:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Om bhūr svāhā/} & \\
\text{Om bhuvaḥ svāhā/} & \\
\text{Om svāh svāhā/} & \\
\text{Om bhūr bhuvaḥ svāḥ svāhā.} &
\end{align*} \]

He repeats the process, for different metres and deities, saying:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Prajāpatir } rṣī uṣṇik chando vāyur devatā . . . & \\
\text{Prajāpatir } rṣī anuṣṭup chando sūryo devatā . . . & \\
\text{Prajāpatir } rṣī vṛhat chandah prajāpatir devatā . . . &
\end{align*} \]

Oblations to Durgā

The purohita now offers twenty-five ladles of ghi oblations into the fire with the mālamāntra of Durgā.

\[ \text{Om durge durge rakṣaṇi svāhā.} \]

Then the purohita conceives oneness of himself with the fire and the goddess Durgā, uttering:

\[ \text{Om vaiśvānara jñātaveda īhāvaha lohitākṣa sarvakarmāṇi sādhaya svāhā.} \]

and offers oblations three times with that mantra. He worships Durgā in this form with the mālamāntra offering up eleven oblations. Next offers oblations saying:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Om mālamāntrasya aṅgadevatābhyaḥ svāhā} & \\
\text{Om āvarāṇa devatābhyaḥ svāhā} &
\end{align*} \]

\[ \text{Note the Vedic (rather than Tantric) form of the mulamantra, where "Om" is used instead of other bijas like "Dum" and "Hrīm."} \]

\[ \text{This explicitly identifies the triad of the purohita, the fire, and Durgā.} \]
Having completed this the *purohita* turns his attention to the *bilva* leaves, one hundred and eight of which will be offered into the *homa*. Every one should be untorn, unbroken, unmarked, and have three leaves, be washed and wiped clean of excess water. He then makes an oath (*sāñkalpa*).

\[\text{Om viṣṇurom tat sadasya dāśvine māsi śuklepakse navamīyāṁ tithau durgapūjā karmanī durge durge raksani svāhā iti mantra karanākaśottara śata sāñkhyaka sāẏya bilva patra sannidbhīr homāham karisyē.}\]

Om! . . . I will perform the fire oblation with one hundred and eight *bilva* leaves while uttering the mantra "durge durge raksani svāhā."\(^{236}\)

When the *bilva* leaf oblations have been given to the fire with the *mulamantra*, the *purohita*, taking a flower, says:

\[\text{Agneya tvam mrđanāmāśi. Agni, you are Mrđanāma.}\]

Offering the flower to Agni he pays obeisance:

\[\text{Ete gandhapāpe/ Om mrđanamagnaye namah.}\]
\[\text{Etat havir naivedyam/ Om mrđanāmāgnaya namah.}\]

**Pūrṇāhuti (The Final Oblation)**

Taking a ladleful of ghi, the *purohita* stands up and says:

\[\text{Prajāpati rsir virād gāyatrī chanda indro devatā yaśas kāmasya yajanīsyā prayoge viniyogāḥ.}\]

The revealer is Prajāpati, the metre is Virādgāyatrī, the deity is Indra, and the purpose is for the person desirous of fame.

\[\text{Om pūrṇa homam yaśase juhomi yo `asmai juhoti varamasmai dadāti varam vrne yaśasaḥ bhāmi loke svāhā.}\]

Om! I offer this final oblation for fame. Whoever makes an oblation towards god, he blesses him with a boon, therefore I pray for that kind of boon. May I remain shining in the world.

He performs a *mudrā* while pouring the oblation into the fire.

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\(^{236}\)I was told that for the goddess Durgā, *bilva patra* and *ghi* is normally offered into the *homa*. On occasion, sesamum with *ghi* (sāẏya *tila*) is also used.

The *mulamantra* of the Devī is generally uttered silently (to preserve it from casual repetition by the audience), while the "svāhā" is always pronounced loudly.
Offerings to the Purohita

In front of the fire some unwashed rice, a fruit (e.g., banana), one betel leaf, and sometimes a ripe coconut wrapped in a red cloth is placed. The purohita purifies it saying:

\textit{Ete gandhapuspene om pūrna pātrānkalpa bhojyaya namah.}

Then while sprinkling water on the fire, he utters:

\begin{align*}
\text{Om visnurom tat sadadya āśvine māsi śukle pakse navamyam tithau durgāpūjā karmāṅga homakarmanī brahmakarma pratiśṭhārtham daksināmetat pūrna pātrānkalpa bhojyam brahmane tubhyamoham sampradade.}
\end{align*}

Om! . . . this platter full of rice, pulses, spice, ghi, oil, and so on, representing full-food (pūrna pātrānkalpa bhojya), I offer to you, O brāhmaṇa.

Then he says:

\begin{align*}
\text{Etasmī kāñcanamūlyāya namah}
\text{Etad adhipataye Śrīviṣṇave namah}
\text{Etad sampradānāya brāhmaṇāya namah}
\end{align*}

Salutations to this exact money as fees; to the superintending lord Śrī Viṣṇu; to the donation to the brāhmaṇa.

The purohita now utters an oath (saṃkalpa) of monetary offering (dakṣīna):

\begin{align*}
\text{Om visnurom, . . ., śukle pakse saptamiśtvārābhyā mahānāvamām yāvat durgāpūjā karmanah saṅgatārtham daksināmidam kāñcanamūlyam śrī viṣṇu daivatam, yathā saṃbhava gotramādhine brāhmaṇāya aham dadami.}
\end{align*}

Om! . . . for the completion of the Durgā Pūjā rituals from Saptami to Navami, this fee representing gold, superintended by Viṣṇu, I offer this to a person belonging to . . . lineage (gotra) and belonging to a brāhmaṇa family.

Allayment of Errors

The purohita performs another saṃkalpa:

\begin{align*}
\text{Om visnurom, . . ., śukle pakse saptamiśtvārābhyā mahānāvamām yāvat durgāpūjāna karmanī yadyat vaigūryam jātram tad doṣa praśamanāya viṣṇu smaraṇamaham karisye.}
\end{align*}

Om! . . . in this Durgā worship, whatever faults have occurred in order to allay them, I shall repeat the name of Viṣṇu several times.
He then utters "Śrī Viṣṇu" ten or more times. He finishes with:

_Namo brahmanyā deva ya go brāhmaṇa hitācayā jagaddhitāya kṛṣṇāya govindāya namo namah._

**Extinguishing the Fire**

When the final oblation (_pūrṇāhuti_) is completed, and the _dakṣina_ has been offered, the _purohita_ sprinkles water on the fire saying:

_Om agni tvam samudrām gaccha._

Om! O Fire, go to the ocean.

On the northeast corner of the fire, he offers some curd (_dadhi_), saying:

_Om prthīvī tvam śītalā bhava._

Om! O Earth, be cool.

**Anointing with Ashes**

Taking some ashes from the northeast corner of the fire altar the _purohita_ rubs it in with _ghi_ in his palm. Dipping his middle finger in the mixture, he places an anointing mark (_tilaka_) on his forehead, moving the finger upwards. He then marks his throat, shoulders, and heart, and does so to worshippers present who may want these auspicious marks.²³⁷ He utters these _mantras_ while anointing the body parts:

**Forehead:**

_Om kasyapasya tryauśam._

Om! May the three ages (longevities) of Kaśyapa be on you.

**Throat:**

_Om yamadagnestryauśam._

Om! May the three longevities of Yama and Angi be on you.

²³⁷ The northeast corner is the traditional place of Śiva, Lord of the cremation grounds. Anointing the body with ashes, I suggest, forges an equation between it and the burnt offerings. The body has been symbolically cremated and offered, through the flames, to the Devi. The ashes, the debris of the fire sacrifice, are themselves a form of _prasada_, blessed remnants from the offerings which have been consumed by the goddess, through the tongues of flames.
Shoulders:

*Om yaddevānām tryaṇam.*

Om! May the three longevities of these deities be on you.

Heart:

*Om tantrme astu tryaṇam.*

Om! May the three longevities be on you.

Śānti Mantra

The *purohita* now recites the Śānti Mantra which offers peace to the worshippers.\(^{238}\) It is an important part of the *pūjā* since it occurs at the end of Navamī, the last day of Navarātra. It serves as a benediction, conferring the grace of peace on all who have participated in honouring the Devī. He reads:

*Om surāstvāmaḥbiṣiṇcanteḥ brahmaḥviṣnumaḥ*[ę*śvarah/ vāsudeve jagannāthasthāṁ saṅkaraṁ viṁśhuh/ pradyumnaścāniruddhaṁ bhavantu viṁśāyāṁ te/ Om ākhandalo 'gnirbhagavān yamo vai naṁśtathāṁ/ varunā pavanaścaiva dhanāḥhyakṣastathāṁ śivah/ brahmaṁ saḥito ṣeṣo dīkpatāḥ pāṇtā te saṁātā. Om kīrtirlakṣmīṁdhrirmedhāḥ pustīṁ śraddhāṁ ṣaṁāṁ maṁ/ buddhīṁ lajmāṁ vapuḥ śāntiṁstūṁ śāntiścāmaṁ maṁ/ etāṁvaṁmahbiṣiṇcanteḥ rāhu keśīṁca tarpīṁā. Om rṣayo munayo gavo devamātara eva ca/ devapatiṁnya dhruvaṁ nāgaṁ dairṛścāpsarasāṁ gaṇāṁ/ astrāṁ sarvaśāstrāṁ rājāṁ vaṁśhāṁ ca/ ausadhāṁ ca ratnāṁ kalasāyaṁśaṁ ye/ Om saritāṁ sāgarāṁ saṁśātirhāṁ jalaṁ naṁ/ devadānavaṁgandharvā yaksarāḥsasaparāṁnāḥ/ ete tvāṁmahbiṣiṇcanteḥ dharmakāmāṁrtha siddhāye.\(^{239}\)

The *purohita* may now recite the *pradaksīna stotra*.

He has completed the rituals of Navamī and has finished for the day.

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\(^{238}\)The *mantra* may be either Vedic or Tantric. For Durgā Pūjā, the Tantric *mantra* is considered preferable.

\(^{239}\)The translation is given in the Saptamī ritual of the bathing of the Devī with the *brnghāra*. 
VIJAYĀ DASAMI

Officially, Navarātra has come to an end. This tenth day is called Vijayā Daśamī, held in honor of the Devī in the form of victory (vijayā). The day is dedicated to the departure rituals of the Devī, which include the immersion (visārjana) of the clay image.

The purohita goes to the place of worship the next morning, sips water three times, performing ācamana. He then performs svasti vācanam, bhūtasuddhi, and makes a simple nyāsa. Next he performs a dhyāna of Durgā and worships her with a ten-part service (daśopacāra). He offers cooked food (bhoga), and other things to the Devī, including a worship with lamplight (ārati). The purohita completes the ritual quickly (perhaps within one danda (twenty-four minutes)).

Then with folded hands, he says:

_Om vidhīhitām kriyāhitām bhaktihitām yedarcitam pūrṇam bhavatu tat sarvam tvat prasādān maheśvari._

Oṃ! Whatever rituals I have made which have been bereft of right method, right activity, and right devotion, all these should attain fulfilment by your grace, O consort of Śiva.

He places his hand on the main jar (ghata) uttering:

_Om hṝm durge devi kṣamasva_

while moving the jar slightly, dislodging it from its firm position. He also moves the platform of the Devī in the clay image cluster, and the altars of the navapatrikā and bilva tree.

Then he draws a triangular yoni on the floor by his left side. He offers flowers into it to the goddess as Nirmalayavāsinī, saying:

_Om nirmalayāvasinyai namah._

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240 On Vijayā Daśamī it is customary, in many Banārasi homes, for people to offer, according to their family tradition, curd, cēra (flat rice), and puffed rice (H/Beng: lai/lāja), as well as cooked foods. If the pūjā is performed at home, typical foods would be boiled rice, cooled with water, and served with bananas, coconut, and some deep-fried battered vegetables (Hindi: vada). Sweets (Hindi: mithai), too, are given to Durgā.
Om! Obeisance to the goddess Nirmalayavasini.

He now brings some previously offered flowers and with the samhara mudra (arms outstretched in front, crossed, with the backs of the hands touching each other and fingers intertwined) places them in the triangle. He then worships the Devi, saying:

*Om ucchista caNDalini namah.*

Om! Obeisance to the goddess UcchistaCaNDalini.

He then says:

*Om uttistha devi camunde subham pujaM pragriya ca/ kurusva mama kalyanam asiabhih sakthibhih saha/ gaccha gaccha paramsthanaM svasthanaM devi candike/ yat pujiTam maya devi pari puRanaM tadastu me/ vroja tvam srotasi jale tistha gehe ca bhutaM.*

Om! O divine goddess Cumnada, after receiving my auspicious rituals, arise, and along with your eight saktis do good for me. Go to your highest place, O divine Candika. Whatever rituals I have made should obtain their fulfilment. Please go to the stream. Remain in the water, in the house, and in the earth.

Here he recites the following small hymn of praise (stotra).

*Om janmaya upahrtam kimcita vastragandhuluppanam/ tat sarvam upahuktva tvam gaccha devi yatha sukham/ rajiyaM saNyam grhaM saNyam sarvasaNyam daridratA/ tvamrte bhagavatyamba kim karomi vadasva tat.*

Om! Whatever I have offered, which is very little, in the form of clothes, incense, sandalpaste, and so on, after enjoying them you may retire with satisfaction. To me this kingdom of mine is nothing but a void; my house is empty; everything is nothing but a void to a person who is very poor. Without your presence, O Goddess, I do not know what I should do. Please tell me that.

Now a large vessel, into which some water is poured, is placed so that the reflection of the Devi’s clay image may fall upon it. The purohita brings the mirror (darpana) from the seat/platform of the image and immersing it into the water says:

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241 This piece of the liturgy is crucial in aiding our understanding of the ritual of Durga Puja. The Devi, although dismissed, is asked to remain everpresent in the home, the earth, and the water. It is from these very abodes that she is reinvoked into the ghata the following year.

242 This is also called the pradakshina stotra, but no circumambulation of the image is performed at this time.
Om! After worshipping you properly, I immerse you in this water without the navapatrikā. I have placed you in this water for the purpose of getting increase of sons, longevity and wealth.

Then placing his hand on the Devī’s clay image altar, he reads:

Om! O goddess Durgā, mother of the universe, after being worshipped go to your own place. Be satisfied, O mother goddess, Please rescue me from the sea of worldly existence. I have performed your worship, O beloved of Śaṅkara, and completed it according to my ability. Let all the deities go their respective places after giving us our desired blessings/boons. You remain at the top of Mount Kailāsa, which is very beautiful, in the company of Lord Śaṅkara. You have been worshipped by me with devotion. O Form of Nine Durgās, who is also worshipped by the gods, accepting my rituals and giving me boons, you go on sporting/playing according to your desire.

This being done, the priest offers some flowers, sandalpaste, etc. into the hands of the assembly.

Aparājitā Worship

The purohīta now performs the pūjā of the goddess as Aparājitā (Invincible). The pūjā should be performed only on the tīthi of daśamī which is not associated with ekadaśī. Thus, if Vijaya Daśamī is in contact with the eleventh (ekadaśi) tīthi the Aparājitā pūjā should be performed on Navamī. Since most people do not favour doing this, during such astronomical circumstances the Aparājitā pūjā is abandoned.

The Devī is worshipped in the form of a floral creeper.243 The purohīta performs a dhyana of Aparājitā, saying:

243Several different plants are designated as aparājitā. These include a deep indigo flowered creeper, and tiny white flowers with orange bases (sepālikā).
Om sūdha sphatika sāṅkaśām candra koti suśtalām/
varadābhaya hastāṇca śukla vastraīrākṛtām/
nānā bharana samyuktam cakrāvākiṣṭa veśitām/
evam saṃcintayan mantri devim tām aparājītām.

Om! Her complexion is like pure crystal. She is very cool, more than millions of moons. She has the postures of giving boons and assurance. She wears white clothes and is decorated with various ornaments. She is surrounded by Cakrāvāka birds. The person who uses her mantra should meditate on her thus.

He worships her with a five, ten, or sixteen part service. Then, a yellow string is tied to bits of divine aparājitā creeper, and the creeper is tied around people’s wrist or arms as an symbol of blessing from the goddess to attain victory.

Next the time for immersion is fixed based on astrological calculations which determine an auspicious interval.

The ladies of the house now give sweets and other delicacies to the clay images of Durgā, the demon Mahiṣa, the lion, the other deities, and to each other.

**Immersion**

Immersion of the clay image is the duty of the yajamāna. Although the Devī is no longer thought to reside in the image, it has been infused with her presence and must be treated properly. Some people gather the weapons and keep them as souvenirs. The dhāk drummer has the right to the the navapatrika’s sārṭ. All other offerings go to the purohita.

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244 These birds (*Anas casarca*) are known for their mournful cries as they call from opposites sides of river banks for their mates.

245 Some time intervals in every day are inauspicious. For instance, the Kala bela and Vara bela periods in the day should be avoided.

246 These sweets are not previously blessed *prasāda*. They are actually stuffed and smeared onto the mouths of the clay images. Everyone, including the demon and the vāhanas are treated. Betel nut and leaf (*pan*) is also fed to all the images. In Bengali, the activity is called *varana*. The women feed each other sweets as well, at this time. An explanation for the ritual is that the Devi is returning to her husband’s abode, where life with him is full of hardship. Thus she is being fattened with sweets, and treated well, to sustain her for her year away from home, and to encourage her to return again the following season.

247 The weapons are made of tin and are the workmanship of a particular tin-working caste.
The image is carried with much fanfare through the alleys to the Gaṅgā, where it is placed atop a boat and carried some distance away from the bank. Then it is toppled into the water. It is a time of highly mixed emotions. There is a mood of festive revelry at the success of the worship, mixed with sorrow at Durgā’s departure.248 The aparājitā creeper is also surrendered to the waters.249

After returning, the immersion party brings back a jar of Gaṅgā water and places it in the middle of the sitting place. The purohita sprinkles this sanctified water on the devotees while uttering the Śānti Mantra. The devotees arise, approach and embrace the purohita, and touch his feet in a gesture of reverence and thanks. He blesses them with a touch to the forehead.250

Conclusion

The Durgā Pūjā is finished. People distribute sweets (not prasāda) to each other. If worshippers visit the homes of relatives on Vijaya Daśamī night, it is customary to exchange sweets and embrace everyone.251 People send letters or greeting cards to their elders which might say: “Take my respectful homage (pranāma) of Vijaya, and I expect your blessings in return.” Elders respond with blessings and requests for homage from youngsters. This mood of felicity and goodwill continues till Kālī Pūjā.

248The emotional moods, easily discerned because they are highly visible at this time, are induced by a complex combination of factors, which include religio-political (i.e., Hindu) and communal (e.g., club) identity. Also present are the feelings of sadness at the end of the holidays and the parting of families which have come together. Married daughters had returned to their parent’s home for the celebration and will soon be leaving. Thus mothers are often seen crying, for Durgā’s departure truly marks the departure of their own daughters.

249A blossom from the creeper may be kept and sealed into a small metal (often silver) case which is worn around the neck or arm as a protective amulet. The word aparājitā has come to be synonymous with such a talisman.

250It is traditionally held that the last words uttered by the purohita in the pūjā are "Bhagavat pratyaye." This means that although all sorts of benefits have been asked of the Devī, these too are ultimately offered up to the discretion and will of the goddess.

251Gifts of new clothes to as many people as one can is a traditional part of Durgā Pūjā. These gifts are normally given before the pūjā begins so that worshippers may wear these clothes during the festival days.
GLOSSARY

ācamaniya Ritual sipping of water.
Ācārya Title of a religious teacher or one who supervises religious rituals.
adharma Unrighteousness; not orthodox behaviour (dharma).
adhipūram Anointing. A ritual performed during Durgā Pūjā.
agarbatti (H) Incense sticks.
ahaṅkāra The ego, or "I-maker." An element in consciousness.
akāla bodhana Untimely awakening. Rāma’s invocation of Durgā in the autumn.
ākāṭa Space, ether. One of the five constituent elements of creation.

alaṅkāra Ornament. Ritual of ornamenting a deity.
Ālhā Rajput hero in oral epics who offered his head to goddess Śaradā.
āmalaka Myrobalan, gooseberry. Fluted member crowning temple spires.
amāvasyā New-moon day according to the Hindu lunar calendar.
Ambikā Endearing form of the term for mother (ambā). One of the most common epithets of the goddess in the Durgā Saptasati.
amrta Ambrosia of immortality churned out of the ocean.
ānanda Bliss.
anā Egg.
aṅga nyāsa Yogic imprintment (of vibrations, etc.) on the limbs of the body.
anā/bhoga Food. Cooked food.
Annapūrṇā She who is Replete with Sustenance. Goddess consort of Śiva as Viśvanātha in Banaras. One of the city’s Nine Durgās.
antarāmātrkā nyāsa Ritual of inner imprintment.
aparājīā Unconquerable
apṣarā Heavenly nymph. Often depicted sculpturally on temples.
ārātī Honorific passing of a flame before a deity. Also designates the entire process of devotional service and offerings to a deity.
ārātī lena (H) Partaking in the devotional flame after it has been offered.
Argalā Bolt.
aroha Valuable offering. Also arghya.
arthā Achievement. Often equated with economic and material success.
asmītā Egoism
aṣṭadaḷa kamala Eight petalled lotus.
aṣṭamī Eighth day of a lunar fortnight (pākṣa).
asura Demon. Originally meaning Supreme Spirit; applied to Varuṇa.
Āśvina Autumn month (September/October) in which one of two annual nine night (navarāтра) festivals of the Goddess is celebrated.
ätā (H) Flour (generally whole wheat).
avatāra An incarnation. One of Viṣṇu’s incarnations.
avidyā Ignorance.
āyuḍha Weapon.

bahya mātrakā nyāsa A type of external yogic imprintment ritual.
bāli Sacrificial offering.
Banāras City in Uttar Pradesh on the river Gaṅgā renowned as a religious centre. Also called Kāśi or Vārāṇasī.
Banārasi Residents of Banāras.
bāraha Twelve.
barāi karnā (H) To laud or praise.
batuka Young lad. A fierce boy-form of Śiva.
Benares Alternate spelling of Banāras.
Bengāli Tolā A quarter in Banāras with a high Bengāli population.
Bhadrakāli Gracious Kāli. Name of a fierce but auspicious goddess.
Bhairava Fierce form of Śiva.
bhajana Hymn.
bhakta Devotee.
bhakti Devotion.
bhāṅg (H) Ground, fresh leaves of the hemp (cannabis sativa indica) plant.
Bhāvanī Queen who built Durgā Kund temple. Epithet of Annapūrṇā.
Bhojpūrī A dialect spoken by the residents of Banaras.
bhṛngāra Spouted vessel used in royal consecration.
bhūta An elemental spirit.
bija A seed. A germinal cause.
bilva Wood-apple tree. Also called the bel tree. Sacred to Śiva.
bilva patra A bilva leaf.
bīṣa (H) Twenty.
bodhana Ritual of awakening the goddess Durgā.
Brahmā Creator god.
Brahmacarini Name of a goddess who is one of the Nine Durgas.
brahmacarya First stage of life for a Hindu, characterized by study and celibacy.
brāhmaṇa Member of the priestly class in Hindu society.
brāhmaṇa Ancient texts concerned with religious rituals.
buddhi Discriminative intellect. A constituent element of consciousness.
cakra Wheel, vortex. Energy plexus in the body.
cakṣur dāna Ritual of giving eyesight to a divine image.
cāmara Leather worker caste.
cameli (H) Jasmine.
Cāmuṇḍā  Name of a terrifying goddess often equated with Kālī.
candana tilaka (H)  Forehead anointing mark made with sandalwood paste.
Caṇḍi  She Who is Fierce. Name of a goddess. Epithet of Durgā.
Caṇḍikā  Little Fierce One. Epithet of Durgā.
Candraghānantā  Bell of the Moon. One of the Nine Durgās.
canna sabji (H)  Curried chick peas and vegetables.
caraṇa  Foot.
caras (H)  Hashish.
caturmāsa  Four month rain retreat observed by wandering religious ascetics.
chāga bali  Goat sacrifice.
chai (H)  Tea.
Chinnamastā  Tantric goddess portrayed in an act of self decapitation.
cillum (H)  Clay funnel used for smoking cannabis and tobacco.
cit  Consciousness.
Citraghānantā  Wonderful Bell. One of the Nine Durgas.
citta  The thinking faculty in consciousness.
cunām (H)  Lime.
cunri  Tie-dyed scarf with the appearance of being stained with blood.
dandaśvāmi  Type of world renouncer who carries a staff.
dandaśat pranāma  A full prostration.
dacoit  Bandit.
dadhi  Curd.
dakṣinā  Monetary payement to a priest.
dāna  The act of charitable giving.
daśopacāra  Ten-fold devotional service to a deity.
darpana  Mirror.
darśana  Intimate perceptual contact with a deity. Temple worship.
Daśa Mahāvidyā  Ten Great Knowledges. A cluster of goddesses.
Devi  Goddess.
dhāk  A kind of drum played during Durgā Pūjā.
dharma  Orthodox prescribed social and religious duty.
dharmaśāla  Pilgrim resthouse.
dhotī (H)  Cloth worn about the waist by men.
dhūpa  Incense.
dhūnuci  An incense container.
dhvāja  Flag.
dhyāna śloka  Verses describing a deity which are to be used for meditative visualization.
dikṣa  Initiation.
dikpāla  Guardians of the Directions.
dīpa  Lamplight.
dugdha  Milk.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Durgā Kunda</th>
<th>Sacred pond in Banaras. Site of a famous temple to Durgā.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Durgā</td>
<td>Unassailable. Difficult to overcome. Impenetrable. Name of a goddess who possesses an ambivalent nature which encompasses nurturing and protecting maternal qualities as well as fierce destructive nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durgā Mandir</td>
<td>Temple of Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durgājī</td>
<td>Affectionate and honorific name of the goddess of Durgā Kunda temple in Banaras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dūrvā</td>
<td>A resilient grass used in worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dvārāpāla</td>
<td>Guardians of the Portal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gāli (H)</td>
<td>A narrow alley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gāli (H)</td>
<td>An insult, abuse. Teasing comment often with sexual references.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gana</td>
<td>Gang. Group of spirits associated with Śiva and led by Ganeśa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gandha</td>
<td>Fragrant ointments such as sandalwood paste.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gandharva</td>
<td>A celestial musician.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganeśa</td>
<td>Elephant headed god often considered to be the son of Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaṅgā</td>
<td>Name of a sacred river which is considered to be a goddess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gaṅgājala</td>
<td>Water from the river Gaṅgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garbhatra</td>
<td>House of the Embryo. The inner sanctum of a temple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaurī</td>
<td>She who is White. Name of a goddess who is the spouse of Śiva.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gāyātrī</td>
<td>Name of a goddess. Mantra uttered by brāhmaṇas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghaṭ (H)</td>
<td>Landing on the bank of a river generally used as a bathing site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghata</td>
<td>A jar or pitcher (kalaśa) in which a deity is ritually embodied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghasthāpana</td>
<td>Ritual of establishing a jar which embodies a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghi (H)</td>
<td>Clarified butter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ghrta</td>
<td>Ghi. Clarified butter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gotra</td>
<td>Family or lineage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graha</td>
<td>Astrological bodies. Planets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thandhāri</td>
<td>A &quot;coldie.&quot; Intoxicating beverage prepared with cannabis leaves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thāthera</td>
<td>Caste of tinkers. Metal workers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>halvā</td>
<td>A sweet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hariyāli</td>
<td>Sprouts of grain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>havan</td>
<td>Sacrificial fire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>havan kunda</td>
<td>Sacrificial fire pit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hijara</td>
<td>A transvestite; an eunuch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homa</td>
<td>Ritual oblations into the sacrificial fire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>icchā svayamvara</td>
<td>Marriage where a bride chooses her husband from a group of suitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>icchā</td>
<td>Will or desire. One of the three qualities of power (śakti).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ilāyaci dānā (H)</td>
<td>Sweets of cardamon seeds coated with sugar and offered to deities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iṣṭa devatā</td>
<td>Deity which a devotee preferentially chooses to worship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"iśvara" Lord. God.

"itra" (H) Perfume.

"jādū" (H) Sorcery.

"jādū karne vala" (H) Sorcerer.

"jāgara" Wakefulness.

"jāla" Water

"jalebī" (H) Spiral shaped syrup-filled sweet.

"janghā" Thigh or other part of the leg.

"japa" Ritual repetition of a sacred utterance (mantra).

"jātī" Caste. Hereditary occupation and social group.

"jayantī" A kind of plant. Name of a goddess.

"ji" Affectionately respectful suffix added to persons' names.

"jīva" An individual living being; the soul.

"jīvātman" The soul or innermost self of a being.

"jñāna" Transcendental knowledge.

"jñānendriya" The organs of perception. The five senses.

"jvāla" Flame.

"jyoṭiśa" Astrology.

"kacauri" (H) Spherical pastry stuffed with spiced vegetables and pulses.

"kaccha" (H) Raw, unripe.

"kajali" (H) A kind of song sung during the rainy season.

"kajjala" Lampblack. Collyrium.

"Kālarātrī" She who is the Dark Night. Name of one of the Nine Durgās.

"kalaśa" Jar; Pitcher (ghaṭa) in which a deity is ritually installed.

"Kāli" Name of a dark goddess with a dreadful appearance.

"kāma" Art of love.

"kāṇḍa ropanam" Ritual of erecting staffs around a consecrated image.

"kanyā" A virgin; an unmarried daughter.

"kara" Hand.

"karma" Action. A metaphysical principle of cause and effect.

"karmakāṇḍi" A ritual specialist.

"karmendriya" Action faculties.

"karpūra" Camphor.

"Kārtikeya" God of War. Son of Śiva. Also called Skanda.

"Kāśī" Ancient and sacred name for the city of Banāras.

"kaśta" Difficult, problematic, dangerous, evil, bad.

"kṣatriya" Member of the warrior class.

"katthā" (H) Catechu; the tree from whose bark catechu is obtained.

"katthaka" A type of classical dance popular in North India.

"Kātyāyanī" Name of a goddess. One of the Nine Durgās.

"kavaca" Armour. A type of hymn or formula recited for protection.

"khaḍga" Sword.
A meal of rice and lentils cooked together.

Food made from rice, milk, honey, and dried fruit.

Nepali knife with curved blade.

Type of hymn/mantra which locks or unleashes the power of subsequently recited formulas.

Seedless raisins.

Defilement.

A sheath. A large vessel used in worship rituals.

Action. One of the three qualities of power (śakti).

Field; plot of land.

Guardian of the Field

Family deity.

A well; water tank; natural pond.

Name of a goddess identified with a serpentine energy in the body.

Saffron.

A sacred grass with widespread use in ritual ceremonies.

A kind of melon. Name of one of the Nine Durgās.

A sweet ball.

One hundred thousand.

Goddess of good fortune and auspiciousness.

Sign. The phallic symbol of Śiva.

People. The world.

Guardian of the Worlds/People.

A cloth garment worn around the waist.

Mother. Epithet of Durgā.

Intoxicant. Intoxicating beverage.

A honeyed mixture offered in pūjā.

A great sacrifice. An animal or human sacrifice.

One of the five gross elements (tattva).

The Great Goddess. Epithet of Durgā.

Great White Goddess. One of the Nine Durgās.

Great formulaic utterance.

Great Delusion. An epithet of Durgā.

The Great. Title of the owner of a temple.

The Great Lion mount of Durgā.

Great Bathing ritual.

Great Demoness. An epithet of Durgā.

Greatness of Essence. A hymn of glorification.


Great Utterance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahiṣasura</td>
<td>Name of a buffalo demon slain by Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahiṣasuramardini</td>
<td>Crusher of the Buffalo Demon. Epithet of Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maithuna</td>
<td>Sexual union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mālā</td>
<td>Garland. Rosary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manas</td>
<td>Mind/Heart. Inner sense which perceives the workings of consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manauti (H)</td>
<td>A devotional pledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mandala</td>
<td>A sphere of influence; a sacred diagram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mandapa</td>
<td>A temple porch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mandira</td>
<td>Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maṅgala darsana</td>
<td>Auspicious first sight of a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maṅgalavara</td>
<td>Tuesday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mantra</td>
<td>Sacred utterance or formula.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manvantara</td>
<td>A great cycle of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marga</td>
<td>Path or way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mamāsa</td>
<td>Flesh or meat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mastī (H)</td>
<td>Pleasantly inebriated, enjoying an altered state of consciousness, &quot;high&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mātrkā nyāsa</td>
<td>Ritual of imprintment with syllables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maśya</td>
<td>Fish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maulī (H)</td>
<td>Untwisted thread, dyed red and used in worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maund (H)</td>
<td>A measure of weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>māyā</td>
<td>Power of illusion which permeates the creation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mela</td>
<td>A fair or gathering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mūthā (H)</td>
<td>A sweet; a confection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muhalla (H)</td>
<td>A quarter of the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukti</td>
<td>Liberation from worldly existence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mūlamantra</td>
<td>Root or Primary sacred formulaic utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>munda (H)</td>
<td>Ritual first tonsure of a child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muni</td>
<td>A sage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mūrti</td>
<td>Image. Generally refers to the image of a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muśkil (H)</td>
<td>Difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nai (H)</td>
<td>A barber.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naimītika</td>
<td>An occasional rite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naitika</td>
<td>Regular worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naivedya</td>
<td>Offerings of morsels of food to a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nakṣatra</td>
<td>Constellation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>namaskāra</td>
<td>Respectful salutation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nanketai (H)</td>
<td>A type of almond biscuit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāriyala</td>
<td>Coconut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naubhat khāna (H)</td>
<td>Temple hall in which a large drum in kept and beaten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>navadurga</td>
<td>Cluster of goddesses called the Nine Durgās.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>navagrahī yātra</td>
<td>Pilgrimage to the shrines of the Nine Gaurīs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>navagraha</td>
<td>Nine planets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>navapātrikā</td>
<td>Cluster of Nine Plants worshipped as a form of Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>navārṇa mantra</td>
<td>Sacred formulaic utterance consisting of nine syllables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navarāṭra</td>
<td>Nine night goddess festival held in the spring and the autumn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nawāb</td>
<td>Mughal viceroy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nirguṇa</td>
<td>Without attributes or qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nirnāla</td>
<td>Cast off or withered flowers which have been offered to a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niśumbha</td>
<td>Name of a demon slain by Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nityā pūjā</td>
<td>Obligatory rituals of worship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyāsa</td>
<td>A ritual of yogic imprintment on the body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ojha</td>
<td>Spiritual healers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>om-kāra</td>
<td>The sacred syllable &quot;Om.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pādūka</td>
<td>Sandals. Images of the footprints of a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pādya</td>
<td>Offering of water for washing the feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pakṣa</td>
<td>A fortnight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pakka</td>
<td>Cooked. Refined or finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pān (H)</td>
<td>A preparation from betel nut and leaf which is chewed with relish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paṅca upacāra</td>
<td>Five-part devotional service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paṅcagavya</td>
<td>Five items which derive from the cow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paṅcakroṣṭi yātra</td>
<td>Pilgrimage around the perimeter of Banāras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paṅcāmākāra</td>
<td>Five items beginning with the letter &quot;M&quot; offered in Tantric ritual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paṅcāmṛta</td>
<td>Five nectars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paṅcānga</td>
<td>An almanac.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paṅcatattva</td>
<td>Five elements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pandal</td>
<td>Temporary shrine established for Durgā Pūjā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paṇḍīja</td>
<td>An almanac.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>para</td>
<td>Supreme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parabrahman</td>
<td>Supreme Being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paramāṇna</td>
<td>Supreme food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paramaśiva</td>
<td>The Supreme Śiva.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paraśu</td>
<td>Axe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parikrama</td>
<td>Circumambulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pāśa</td>
<td>Noose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pāṭha karne vala</td>
<td>One who recites a scripture aloud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phala</td>
<td>Fruit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phul (H)</td>
<td>Flower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phul ki mālā (H)</td>
<td>Flower garland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piṇḍa</td>
<td>A clump.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piṅgalā</td>
<td>One of the energy channels of the body.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
pippal  A large tree which is often venerated.
pūha  A seat or abode of the goddess.
pitr  Paternal ancestor.
pradaksinā  Circumambulation.
pradhāna  The supreme form of Prakṛti.
prahara  An eighth part of a day. A watch of about three hours in duration.
prajñā  Wisdom.
prāṇa pratiṣṭha  Installation of vital energy into an image of a deity.
prāṇāma  A salutation.
prāṇayāma  Control of the vital airs.
prasāda  Blessing. Sanctified offerings.
pratimā  An image. The clay image cluster worshipped in Durgā Pūjā.
pratipada  The first day of Navarātra.
pratyahāra  Restraint of the senses. Concentration.
preta  Ghost.
prthivi bhūta  Among the five gross elements, the earth element.
Prthivi  The goddess Earth.
pūjā  Devotional worship rituals.
pūjalaya  Place of worship.
pūjāri  Priest.
purāṇa  Genre of sacred texts containing mythic history.
pūrī (H)  Deep fried unleavened bread.
pūrṇimā  Full moon.
purohita  A priest. Ritual practitioner.
puspa  Flower.
puspmālā  Flower garland.
puspāṅjali  Veneration with flower offerings.
putrī  Daughter.
pyāj (H)  Onion.
rajas guna  The quality of passion or activity. Symbolized by blood.
rākṣasa  A demon.
rakta bali  Blood sacrifice.
Raktabija  Blood Seed. Name of a demon slain by Kālī.
rasa  Flavours. Emotions.
Rātrī  The goddess Night.
rorī (H)  A powder used to anoint the forehead.
rotī (H)  Bread.
rṣī  A celestial sage.
A ritual imprintment a sage and other entities.
Post menstrual bath.
Form.

Sound. Vibration.
Vegetables.
Spiritual practitioner.
Spiritual practice.
Holy man.
Spinach or other leafy vegetables.
Thousand petalled lotus; psychic centre at the top of the head.
Daughter of the Mountain. Name of one of the Nine Durgās.
Seat of the goddess.
Goddess worshipping sect in the Hindu tradition.
A seat or place of power.
State of deep contemplative union with the object in consciousness.
Name of a mythical merchant who worshipped Durgā.
Triangular pastry stuffed with spiced vegetables or meat.
Rites. Rites of passage.
Confluence periods in the day: sunrise, midday, and sunset.
Saturn.
Oath.
Enumeration. Ancient philosophy often paired with Yoga.
Passage of a heavenly body into a new astronomical configuration.
The state of renunciation.
A world renouncer.
Seven Mothers. A cluster of goddesses.
Flame worship performed before a deity is retired for the night.
Autumn.
She who is Full of Juice. Goddess of creativity and the arts.
A refreshing beverage.
Leogryph. Representation of Śakti often sculpted on temple walls.
Long single piece of cloth worn by Indian women.
Relating to everyone. Communal.
The sixth day of a lunar fortnight.
She who has a Hundred Eyes. Name of a goddess.
Hexagon. Six pointed star.
Quality of purity, stasis. Equated with spirit as opposed to matter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>saubhāgya</td>
<td>Blessedness. Beauty. The state of being married.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sehnaī</td>
<td>Reed-blown wind instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seva</td>
<td>Devotional or other service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shephāli</td>
<td>A kind of flowering plant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siddha</td>
<td>One who has attained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siddha pīha</td>
<td>A seat or place of spiritual attainments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siddhi</td>
<td>Spiritual or other attainments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siddhidātrī</td>
<td>She who Gives Attainments. Name of one of the Nine Durgas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śikhara</td>
<td>The head. Spired structure characteristic of North Indian temples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>simhāsana</td>
<td>Lion seat. A throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simhavāhinī</td>
<td>She who Rides a Lion. Epithet of Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śīṣya</td>
<td>Student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śītalā</td>
<td>She who is Cool. Goddess associated with smallpox and cholera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sītār</td>
<td>Stringed instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śiva</td>
<td>Auspicious. Great god of Hinduism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śivadūtī</td>
<td>She who has Śiva as a Messenger. Name of a fierce goddess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skanda</td>
<td>War god. Son of Śiva and Durgā. Also called Kārtikeya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skandamātā</td>
<td>Mother of Skanda. Name of one of the Nine Durgās.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śloka</td>
<td>Sanskrit verse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śmaśāna</td>
<td>Cremation ground. Abode of Śiva and other fierce deities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śodaśa mātrkā</td>
<td>The Sixteen Mothers. A cluster of goddesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śodaśopacāra</td>
<td>A devotional service consisting of sixteen parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somāvāra</td>
<td>Monday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śrāddha</td>
<td>Death rituals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śrī</td>
<td>Auspiciousness. Goddess of good fortune. Epithet of Lakṣmī.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sṛṅgāra</td>
<td>Erotic sentiment. Decoration festival at temples such as Durgājī.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A type of water chestnut eaten during certain fasts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sthalamāhātmya</td>
<td>Glorification of a place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sthāna</td>
<td>A place or abode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sthandīla</td>
<td>Fire altar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sthāpana</td>
<td>Installation ritual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sthirī karaṇa</td>
<td>Ritual of confirming the installation of a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stotra</td>
<td>Hymn of praise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strīratna</td>
<td>A jewel of a woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śuddha</td>
<td>Pure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śuddhi</td>
<td>Purification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śūdra</td>
<td>Labourer class ranked lowest in the orthodox Hindu hierarchy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sūkta</td>
<td>Hymn of praise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Śumbha</td>
<td>Name of a demon slain by Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>śūnya</td>
<td>Emptiness. The Void.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supāri (H)</td>
<td>Betel nut pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surathā</td>
<td>Name of a mythical king who performed the Durgā Pujā.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
suṣumṇā The central channel of the psychic body.
svārģa Heaven.
svaṣṭika Sign of auspiciousness and well-being.

 tabla (H) A type of drum beaten with the hands.
tamas guṇa The quality of inertia, dullness, and disintegration.
tamboli (H) Caste of betel nut harvesters.
tāmbūla The areca nut or betel nut.
tanmāra The subtle attributes of elements by which they are perceived.
tantra A genre of text and a religious philosophy.
tantrika A follower of Tantic philosophy and religious practices.
tapas Heat. Ascetic practice.
tarpaṇa Water libations made to the ancestors.
tattva Element. Constituent. Substance.
tejas Spiritual effulgence, radiant energy, splendour. semen.
tilaka Mark anointing the forehead or other body part with sandalwood.
tīrtha Holy place reputed to grant liberation from worldly existence.
tīthi A lunar day.
triguṇa Three qualities inherent within material creation (Prakṛti).
trikōṇa Triangle. Symbol of the female reproductive organ, yoni.
triloka The three world systems: heaven, earth, and the underworld.
trisūla Trident. Weapon of Śiva. Symbol of the goddess.
tulaśī A sacred plant. Consort of Viṣṇu.

ucchīṣṭa The remnants. Refuse. Impure leftovers from a sacrifice.
ullū (H) Owl.
upanāyana Ritual of investing a Hindu boy with the sacred thread.
upāya Means or method.

vāhana A mount. Vehicle.
vaśya Merchant class.
vāmācārā The left-hand (heterodox) Tantric path.
vara A boon.
Vārāṇasī Sacred city on the river Gaṅgā. Also called Banāras or Kāśi.
varana Worshipping.
varna Colour. Class.
vasanta Spring.
vastra Clothing. Cloth.
vastupuruṣa Being of the Foundations. Entity permeating architectural forms.
vedī An altar.
vesṭya Prostitute.
vīṇā A stringed musical instrument. A lute.
Vidyā She who is Knowledge. Epithet of the goddess.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vijayā</td>
<td>Victory personified as a goddess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vindhyāvāsinī</td>
<td>She who Dwells in the Vindhya Mountains. Epithet of Durgā.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visarjana</td>
<td>Dismissal. Ritual of sending away a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>višeṣa argha</td>
<td>Special offering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viśvanātha</td>
<td>Lord of the Universe. Epithet of Śiva in Banāras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viṣṇu</td>
<td>Great deity in Hinduism. Preserver of the cosmic order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vrksa</td>
<td>Tree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vrata</td>
<td>Vowed devotional observance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vṛtti</td>
<td>Transformations, modifications, modulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yajamāna</td>
<td>The patron or offerer of a sacrifice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yajña</td>
<td>Sacrificial rite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yajñopavīta</td>
<td>Sacred thread conferred on members of the upper three classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yakṣa/i</td>
<td>Demigods associated with nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yama damśrā</td>
<td>Yama’s teeth. The jaws of death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yantra</td>
<td>Multidimensional mystical diagram embodying a deity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yātra</td>
<td>Pilgrimage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yoni</td>
<td>Female generative organ. Symbol of the goddess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yoni pāha</td>
<td>Seat/abode of the goddess. Portal of creation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zamīndār</td>
<td>Proprietor of a landed estate. A landlord.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Bibliography

#### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>Atharva Veda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RV</td>
<td>Rg Veda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVKh</td>
<td>Rg Veda Khila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV</td>
<td>Šama Veda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ŠB</td>
<td>Šatapatha Brähmana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Taittirīya Áranyaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Taittirīya Samhitā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi Samhitā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSK</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi Samhitā Khila</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHART ONE

OWNERSHIP INHERITANCE SCHEME AT DURGĀ KUNDA TEMPLE IN BANĀRAS

Original Dubey

Raja Panda 20% 20% 20% 20%

Sri Nath Dubey 40% 20% 10% 10% 20%

Paras Nath 40%

Inheritors
Mohan
Bhola
Raju
Sanjay
Vikas

Krsna Prasad (Lallan) 20%

Mitthan Nath 10%

Bans Nath
Hrday Narayan
Rang Nath
Sailendra
Ram Nath
Rajesvar
Vivesvar

10%

20%

Hausala Prasad
Durga Prasad
Chilbil
Girja Shankar
Rama Shankar

20%
Diagram 1: Durgājī (Temple, Grounds, and Tank)

Courtesy of Dr. Rana Singh
1. Durgā
2. Bhadrakāli, Canda Bhairava, "Tantric Kāli"
3. Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī
4. Sacrificial plot and pillar
5. Tilparneśvara or Jaleśvara
6. Fire pit (Havan kūnda)
7. Kukkuśeśvara Mahādeva
8. Gangeśa, Śesanāga
9. Jvalateśvara
10. Sūrya
11. Kesava-Rādhā
12. Eight-petalled lotus
13. Lion pillar
14. Stone lions
15. Brass lions
16. Naubhat Khāna (Drum room)
17. Dharmaśīla (pilgrim shelter)
18. Hanumān
19. Bhairava
20. Dvārapāla (Guards)
21. Mahisakourāmadinī
22. Kṛṣṇa Gopāla
23. Lakṣmī-Narāyana
24. Brass bells
25. Sanctified Water (Caraṇāmṛta)
26. Rudra Bhairava
27. Maṇḍapa (porch)
28. Śikhara and Sanctum

Diagram 2: Durgā Kunda Temple (Spatial Plan)
Diagram 3: (Above) Durgā Yantra of Twenty (Bisa Yantra). The yantra contains the numerals from one to nine. The sequence of four numbers along any side add up to twenty. (Dotted lines indicate variant forms). (Below) Durga Yantra. (Circle at left indicates a common variant containing the seed syllable, Dum).
Diagram 4: *Sarvatobhadra Maṇḍala*

(The Sacred Circle of All Auspiciousness)
East

Altar of the Supreme Goddess (Pradhīna Devi) established in a Ghata atop the Sarvatobhadra Mandala.

Agni

The Seven Mothers.
The Sixteen Mothers.

East

Ghata of the Innumerable Rudras

Altar of the Nine Planets (Navagraha)

Varuna Ghata

Altar of the Sixty-four Yoginis with Ghata of Mahākāli, Mahākālīnī, and Mahāsarasvatī

Test

Diagram 5: Pavilion for the Group Recitation of the *Durgā Saptasatī*.

Note that the ground plan divides the pavilion into nine equal spaces with the fire pit (*havan kunda*) located in the central square. Oblations are made into the *yoni* located at the western edge of the fire pit.
Seated on the West side of the sthāndīla, facing east, the purohita pours a thin layer of sand into it and places lengths of kāṣa grass according to the following diagram:

The purohita presses on the grass to make lines in the sand.

Using the ring finger and thumb of his right hand, he picks up the grass which is twelve fingers (aṅguli) in length saying:

*Om rekhyam prthvī devatāka pitavarna*

This line is superintended by the deity Prthvī, whose colour is yellow.

He repeats the process for the grass of twenty one fingers in length. The superintending deity is Agni whose colour is red. For the three grasses which are a span in length, the deities are Prajāpati, Indra, and Soma, whose respective colours are black, blue, and white.

With his ring finger and thumb, he removes some sand while drawing the lines in the impressions made by the grass. These removings are called *utkara*. He utters the mantra:

*Om prajāpati rṣi renustubh cando agnirdevatā utkara nirasane viniyogah. Om nirastah paravasu*

So saying he discards the *utkara* to the Northeast direction.
Figure 1: The Durgā Temple and Kuṇḍā as it appears today.
Figure 2: The Durgā Temple and Kuṇḍa sketched by Sutherland in 1838. (Courtesy of Bhārat Kalā Bhavan).
Figure 3: (Above) **Mask of the Goddess Durgā** in the inner sanctum of the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple.

(Right) **Bhadraṅgī Mask** in Durgā temple.
Figure 4: (Left) Nude, squatting, "Lajja Gaurī" fertility goddess image (*From Badāmi Museum*). (Right) Cānda Bhairava (centre), Durgā Simhavāhinī (left), and "Tantric Kālī" (right) images at Durgājī.
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(Right) Female devotees touch and pivot around the Eight-Petalled Lotus image at Durgājī.
Figure 6: (Above) The Fire Pit (*Havan Kundâ*) at Durgājī where sorcerers and healers may worship.
(Below) A Healer (*Ojha*) at Durgājī administers a therapeutic camphor flame to a patient.
Figure 7: (Left) A Religious Mendicant at Durgājī. (Above) Female Mendicant at Durgāji.

(Neither belongs to a religious organization nor enters the inner courtyard of the temple.)
Figure 8: (Left) A woman tethers a **Sacrificial Goat** to the stake in the Sacrificial Plot. (Right) The severed head is offered on the **Sacrificial Altar/Pillar** along with a camphor flame.
Figure 9: (Left) Women (Pilgrims) prepare food in the shelter (dharmaśālā) by the tank at Durgājī.
(Right) A Child's First Tonsure is performed at Durgājī.
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(Below) Group of Brahmans, commissioned to recite the Durga Saptasati.
Figure 12: (Left) *Durgā Worshipper* roadside vendor. The framed Durgā image would receive special veneration during Navarātra.

(Above) *Shop selling Devotional Offerings* such as coconuts, scarves, and incense.
Figure 13: (Above) Durgā is Established in a Jar (Kalasha).
The clay pot is set atop a low earth altar which is sprinkled with seeds.

(Right) A Female Healer Garlands the Jar which, draped with a red scarf, resembles a woman modestly clad in a sārfi.
Figure 14: (Left) An **Image Maker adjusts Durgā’s Snake Noose (Nāga Pāśa)** wrapped around the demon Mahīśa.
(Right) The **Ritual Specialist (Purohita)** begins to imbue the Durgā image cluster (*pratimā*) with life.
Figure 15: The ritual specialist uses a variety of techniques drawn from tantric yoga in the worship ceremony. Among these are: (Left) Control of the Breath (Prāṇāyāma) and (Right) Ritual Gestures (Mudrā).
Figure 16: Some Ritual Implements used in Durgā Pūjā.
(Above) Conch shell and copper vessels resembling female generative organ (yoni). The large vessel is called the kośa; the smaller, the kuśi.
(Right) Platter of food offerings (naivedya) and items used to invoke the goddess.
(Photos by Ruth Rickard)
Figure 17: Flame Worship (Arūṭi) of Durgā

(Above) The oldest elaborate home celebration in Banāras at the Mitra family in Chaukhandha.
(Below) Lighting an offering of 108 butter lamps.
(Photos by Ruth Rickard)
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(Below) The Fire Oblation is performed by the purohita and the ritual patron (yajamāna).
Figure 19: (Above) The images have their Mouths Smeared with Betel Leaf (Tāmbula) and sweet offerings in the final worship.
(Below) The mood is festive and bitter sweet as the Lahiri family prepares to immerse the image cluster in the Ganga (visarjana).