

THE IMAGE OF THE GODDESS DURGĀ AND HER WORSHIP IN BANĀRAS

THE IMAGE OF THE GODDESS DURGĀ AND HER WORSHIP
IN BANĀRAS

By

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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 (*balī*), 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.

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I would have always been an outsider at Durga Kuṇḍ temple were it not for the support of Bans Nath Dubey and the friendship of Raju Dubey, son of the late *mahant*, Paras Nath Dubey, which dissolved many barriers. I could always find a shady place to sit, sip tea, and chew *pān* in the shop of Om Prakash Agarawal who was enthusiastically supportive of my work. I am also grateful to Mr. Manindra Lahiri and his family for the gracious hospitality and help they offered me during Durgā Pūjā. Sudarshan Chowdhury taught me much about Durga worship, Indian politics, and Banārsi recreational pursuits.

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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 *aṅga*, not *aṃga*.

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

The transliteration of Hindi is problematic because of its silent vowels. Since many Banārasīs speak Bhojpurī, 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 Sanskritic transliteration when the word is represented in isolation. Therefore, I write *kiśamiśa* instead of *kishmish*, or *kiśmiś*. My reasoning is that it is more useful for the reader to trace the word *dharmasālā* (e.g., write it correctly or find it in a dictionary), than its numerous Hindi/Bhojpurī 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 Kuṇḍ temple, but refer to a tank or pond as a *kuṇḍa*. 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 Śāṅkara 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-------|
| ABSTRACT | (iii) |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Subject of this Study | |
| and its General Theoretical and Methodological Framework | 1 |
| Scholarly Work on Durgā and Related Goddesses | 10 |
| The Focus of the Study | 13 |
| Methodology in Research | 15 |
| Methodology in the Report | 20 |
| A Sample Interview | 31 |
| Structure of the Study. | 35 |
| | |
| CHAPTER ONE | |
| THE DURGĀ TEMPLE | 39 |
| Location | 39 |
| The Main Structure | 41 |
| The Central Image. | 44 |
| Symbolic Key | 47 |
| Symbolic Attributes of Durgā at Her Temple | 50 |
| Goddesses at Durgājī | 51 |
| Important Male Deities at Durgājī. | 66 |
| Other Sites and Shrines at Durgājī | 73 |
| The Origins of Durgā Worship in Banāras and Durgājī. | 81 |
| The Purānic Mythological Background. | 85 |
| The Purānic Version of how Durgā Worship | |
| Came to be Established in Banāras | 88 |
| Rānī Bhavānī | 93 |
| The Subsequent Chronology of the Temple | 98 |
| The Personnel and Management of the Temple | 101 |
| Owners | 101 |
| Priests. | 104 |
| Workers and Other Sacred Specialists | 106 |
| Interpretation of Pertinent Symbols at Durgājī | 108 |
| | |
| CHAPTER TWO | 115 |
| WORSHIP AT DURGĀMANDIR. | 116 |
| The Daily Routine | 116 |
| The Weekly Routine. | 126 |
| Healers (Ojha). | 127 |
| Sorcerers, Tantrics, and Śāktas | 128 |
| Pilgrims | 130 |
| The Monthly Cycle | 133 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| The Yearly Cycle. | 134 |
| Durgā's Birth | 136 |
| Śrīngāra | 137 |
| Mythic Background. | 137 |
| The Sentiment behind the Śrīngāra | 141 |
| Ritual Activity during the Śrīngāra | 143 |
| Devotional Performance during the Śrīngāra | 146 |
| Durgāṣṭamī | 155 |
| Jivat Putrikā | 155 |
| Mātr Navamī | 156 |
| The Āśvina Navarātra | 157 |
| The Mythic Background | 159 |
| Durgā Kuṇḍ Temple during Āśvina Navarātra | 160 |
| Daily Worship at Durgā Mandir at Navarātra | 161 |
| Vijayā Daśamī | 163 |
| Lakṣmī Pūjā | 165 |
| Bhūta Caturdaśī | 167 |
| Dīpavalī and Kālī Pūjā | 167 |
| Annakūta | 168 |
| Jagaddhātṛī Pūjā | 172 |
| Kārtikeya Pūjā | 172 |
| Bhairavāṣṭamī | 173 |
| Hari Utthana Ekādaśī | 174 |
| Sarasvatī Pūjā, Vasanta Pañcamī | 175 |
| Mahāśivarātri Vrata | 178 |
| Holī | 180 |
| Caitra Navarātra | 182 |
| The Mythic Background | 182 |
| Worship Patterns | 184 |
| Ratha Yātra | 187 |
| Hari Ekādaśī | 188 |
| Śravaṇa Mela | 190 |
| Interpretation of the Time-Cycles in the Durgājī Yantra | 191 |

CHAPTER THREE

| | |
|--|-----|
| ĀŚVINA NAVARĀTRA | 199 |
| General Comments | 199 |
| Forms of Durgā Worship in Banāras during Navarātra | 205 |
| I. Simple Worship in the Home | 205 |
| II. Establishing the Jar (Ghaṭa) | 208 |
| III. Worship of the Devī in a Temple | |
| A. Darśana | 211 |
| B. Manauti | |
| 1. Mundana | 219 |
| 2. Gifts to the Temple | 221 |

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| 3. Animal Sacrifice | 222 | |
| 4. Devotional Service. | 227 | |
| C. Recitation of the <i>Durgā Sapataśatī</i> | 231 | |
| IV. The Navadurgā Pilgrimage | | 236 |
| Interpretation of the Individual Epithets | | |
| 1. Śailaputrī | 242 | |
| 2. Brahmacāriṇī | 243 | |
| 3. Candraghaṅṭhā | 243 | |
| 4. Kuṣmāṇḍā | 244 | |
| 5. Skandamata | 247 | |
| 6. Kātyāyanī | 248 | |
| 7. Kālarātrī | 250 | |
| 8. Mahāgaurī | 251 | |
| 9. Siddhidātrī | 253 | |
| Interpretive Schemes for the Entire Set of Nine Durgās | | 254 |
| A. <i>Durgā Kalpataru</i> | 254 | |
| B. Women's Interpretation. | 257 | |
| Comparison with the Nine Gaurīs. | 261 | |
| V. Group Recitation of the <i>Durgā Saptaśatī</i> | | 267 |
| VI. Personal Śākta Sādhana | | 272 |
| VII. Elaborate Home Worship | | 276 |
| VIII. Public (Sarvajanīnā) Worship | | 278 |
| Interpretation of Symbols and Worship Patterns during Navarātra. | | 278 |
| CHAPTER FOUR | | |
| INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DURGĀ PŪJĀ RITUAL | | 283 |
| Historical Underpinings | | 283 |
| Mythological Background | | 283 |
| The Bengālī Heritage | | 284 |
| Roots in Banāras (Domestic) | | 288 |
| Roots in Banāras (Public) | | 294 |
| Interpretive Analysis of the Durgā Pūjā Ritual. | | 300 |
| Ritual Manuals | | 301 |
| The Ritual Performer (Purohita). | | 302 |
| Introductory Summary of the Structure of the Ritual. | | 304 |
| Bodhana | 306 | |
| Adhivāsanam | 310 | |
| Mahāsaptamī | 312 | |
| Mahāṣṭamī | 323 | |
| Sandhi Pūjā | 326 | |
| Mahānavamī | 337 | |
| Vijayā Daśamī | 338 | |
| CONCLUDING DISCUSSION | | 344 |
| Summary | | 378 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| APPENDIX | |
| THE DURGĀ PŪJĀ RITUAL AS CELEBRATED IN BANĀRAS | |
| (BENGALI STYLE) | 386 |
| Preamble and Introductory Sections | 386 |
| The Preliminary Duties | 392 |
| Bodhana | 403 |
| Adhivāsa. | 436 |
| Saptamī | 447 |
| Mahāṣṭamī | 503 |
| Sandhi Pūjā | 519 |
| Mahānavamī Pūjā | 529 |
| Vijayā Daśamī and Concluding Sections | 539 |
| | |
| GLOSSARY | 544 |
| | |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 557 |
| | |
| CHART #1 | 575 |
| | |
| DIAGRAMS | 576 |
| | |
| FIGURES | 582 |

INTRODUCTION

Subject of this Study and its General Theoretical and Methodological Framework

When the opera *Padmāvati* 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 Padmāvati 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 Kālī, 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 Padmāvati (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]" (Ricoeur, 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, Sāṅkhya/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 Kuṇḍ 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., purāṇic 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 (Śākta) 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 Śākta 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 Śākta 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 Navarātrā 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 Kuṇḍ and other permanent temples to

Durgā. Popular attention shifts to temporary places of worship, called *paṇḍals*, 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 purāṇic (and upa-purāṇic) myths. Their work on such topics as the concept of Śakti in the Purāṇas, or on the *Devī-Māhātmya* 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 Siṃhavāhinī Devī (Durgā) in Punjab, and neighbouring states, and R.

Preston's (1980) *Cult of the Goddess*, which examines worship at a Caṇḍī temple in Orissa. C. Humes's forthcoming work on the ritual use of the *Devī-Māhātmya* in Vindhyaśinī temple is another example of the anthropological approach.

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 Dharmasāstra*. 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 Maḥiṣāsura, 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).² 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 Narāin 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 Pujā in Bengal. Unlike the town of Vishnupur, Bānāras is a non-Bengālī 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 Pūjā 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 Purāna*. 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

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 (*balī*), which in Banāras is singularly associated with Durgā. The Durgā Kuṇḍ temple is the only one in Banāras generally sanctioned as a place for such sanguinary offerings.⁴ 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

⁴I 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 Banārasī 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 Bengālī 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Bānāras 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Gopīnāth 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.⁵ 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

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 Banāras 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" (*videśī*), 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, *sādhus* (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 (*śuddha*) 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, Christopher Justice and Patricia Seymour, were watching Durgā Pūjā images being made by the craftsmen in Bengāli Tolā, 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

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 Gauṛī 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 Rāvaṇa 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 *Rāmāyaṇā*, 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 Mahālakṣmī, Mahāsarasvatī, and Mahākālī). 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 is 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 Durgā 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 Durgā devotees engaged, and if these behaviours were informed or shaped intrinsically by their conceptual images of the Devī. To my surprise, despite the variations of worship patterns which I observed, I also found a frustrating consistency in the interpretations offered by devotees. Durgā 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 Devī 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 Durgā 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 Devī 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 Durgā 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 Banāras provides a range of devotional options from which devotees may freely choose. If their families originated from places other than Banāras, 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. Bengāli aspects of Durgā worship are particularly influential in Banāras, but these too are undergoing modifications as they are adopted by non-Bengāli 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 Durgā worshippers, are part of the corpus of conceptual images of the Devī. 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, renunciators), 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 (*karmakāṇḍī*)," said Ācārya Purusottama Panditji when I pressed him for an interpretation. "If you want to know what 'the demon' is, a man like Kārpātriji 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.⁸ 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

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

⁹See for instance, Ginsburg (1980), Singer (1972), Brown (1981), and Badone (1990).

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.¹⁰ 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

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 Māhātmya* or the *Durgā Saptasatī*. 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 Banāras about Durgā 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 Bhojpurī 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. Durgā was such a source. I will refer back to Shanti throughout the study in arguments I will make concerning some of the roles Durgā 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 (*patti/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 bhole*). 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 ghāt. I was born near Daṣāśvamedha ghāt.

-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 (*bekār*). 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 nahim diya*)]. My life is good

now.

I: What do you think the condition is among Indian women? Is their life good?

S: In Banāras, there are very few widows (*pati/sāi binā*), 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 barthe 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 (*tagade*) 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 *sādhu*, 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 (*agarbattī*), cloth scarf (*cunri*), cardamon sweets (*ilāyaci 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 *roṭī*, 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 *sūdra*), 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 Kuṇḍ temple and its subsidiary shrines. Through this examination of architechtonic 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, Kālī) 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Kuṇḍ 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 *pūjā* 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 (*paṇḍal*) 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 Saptaśatī*, 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 Saptaśatī* 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, *pūjā*, 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 Banāraśi homes and some of the oldest public *paṇḍals*. 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 Bengālī 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 DURGĀ TEMPLE

Location

The Durgā temple stands south of Banāras's busy downtown crossing of Godaulia, on one of the two main roads leading to Banāras Hindu University (please refer to Diagram 1). This road, called Durgā Kuṇḍ Road, is named after the temple's landmark water tank (*kuṇḍa*), a one acre large, square structure finished with stone walls. The temple itself is striking because of its location beside the *kuṇḍa* 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 Banāras. Chunar, the source of much of the stone which graces the homes and temples of Banāras, 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 Durgā 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 (*maṇḍapa*) fashioned with ornate stone pillars, the temple may be seen as belonging to the northern or *nagara* style of architecture.¹¹

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

¹¹This 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 kuṇḍa*) 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 *sārī*, 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 (*garbhagr̥ha*) located within the spire bearing structure of the temple known as the *śikhara*. This is the structure originally constructed by Rānī Bhavānī, the pious Bengālī queen and generous patron of the post-Islamic Hindu revival in Banāras. A porch (*mandapa*) adjoins its western face. Although *śikhara* and *mandapa* appear to be one continuous structure, they were built in successive stages, eighty to a hundred years apart. The *mandapa* 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 *garbhagr̥ha* is blocked by a three foot high marble barricade within which those acting as priests (*pūjāri*) 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 (*rori*) 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 *garbhagr̥ha* is an ornate silver structure, said to house the ancient shrine and image of the Devī.¹² The *śikhara* is multi-spired (*anekāṇḍaka*), possessing many small spires (*karna śr̥ṅga*) which culminate in a single, large, central spire (*urah śr̥ṅga śikhara*). 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 (*kalaśa*) and trident (*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 Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, Kṛṣṇa Gopāla, and Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa are carved in niches the south, east, and west faces, at the base of the *śikhara*, suggesting a Vaiṣṇava orientation on the part of the original builders. The doors to the *garbhagr̥ha* 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 (*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 Gaṇeśa and two female figures, probably Gaṅgā and Yamunā.

Interpretive Observations

One of the symbolic features of the temple most frequently mentioned by both priests and worshippers concerns the *śikhara*. The five uppermost spires (the central and four subsidiary ones at the cardinal directions) are said to represent the five gross elements (*mahābhūta*) 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

¹²Literally meaning "womb room" or "house of the embryo," the *garbhagr̥ha* 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 (*brahmāṇḍa*), 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 purāṇic 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 Sāṅkhya/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 Sāṅkhya/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.¹³ In traditional Sāṅkhya/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,

¹³A 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 Sāṅkhya 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 (*amṛta*), 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 Sāṅkhya/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 Sāṅkhya scholar Swami Hariharānanda Āraṇya (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 Mahiṣāsūramardīnī (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 (*pūjāri*) of the temple, who minister to the Devī most intimately. Ram Prasad Dubey, current chief *pūjāri* of the temple, said,

I cannot and will not draw the image behind the mask. It is a *yantra*. It is a triangular (*trikoṇa*) *yantra*, not the Durgā Yantra. Also there are footprints (*carāṇa*) on the wall. At one time there was a desire to install a *mūrti* 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.

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

the Bengāli queen [Rānī Bhavānī] made a Yantra of Twenty (*bīsa yantra*) and installed that in the temple. There is no image (*mūrti*). 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 *sārī* 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 (*trikoṇa*) 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 Kuṇḍ, 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 pīṭha*) 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, 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

¹⁵For 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 Śītalā Prasad Chaubey, former priest (*pūjāri*) of the Durgā Kund temple, articulate certain opinions common among the Devī'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 (*vastupuruṣa*). 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 *śikhara*, 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 *vastupuruṣa*. 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 *śikhara*, 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).

Śītālā 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 Kuṇḍ 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*, *bīja*) of a *yantra*.¹⁶ The entire temple with its ochre paint is the Devī shrouded in a red *sārī*. This is precisely why many devotees are often insistent in referring to the temple as Durgājī, not as Durgā Kuṇḍa or Durgā Mandir.¹⁷ Durgā is immanent within the *kuṇḍa* 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 *maṇḍala* is identified with the cosmos, the deity, and the human religious practitioner. As an example of a *maṇḍala*, she offers a diagram of the Śrī Yantra. See Sanjukta Gupta (1988).

¹⁷*Jī* 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, "Duṃ." 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,

¹⁸See Khanna 1979:148 and Mus 1935.

¹⁹My 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 *kunḍa*. Although it is nowadays little used for bathing, the pond was likely the original site of the Devī's presence. The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, to which I was frequently referred by temple priests, tells of the merit of bathing in Durgā Kuṇḍ 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 Kuṇḍ. 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 *kunḍa* 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 *kunḍa* when Rānī Bhavānī, the Bengālī queen who built Durgā Mandir, first arrived upon it. Perhaps it tended to dry out during extended periods of drought. The association of *kunḍas* with goddesses is quite ancient. D. C. Sircar (1948 [1973]), in his study of the Śākta *pīthas*, abodes or

²⁰See Verse 87, in *Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Skanda Purāṇa)*, Gurumaṇḍala Granthamālaya No. XX, Vol. IV (Calcutta, 1961), p. 521.

²¹"*Dacoit*" is the word commonly used to describe bandits and highway robbers who still roam the more lawless parts of the Indian countryside. Dacoitry 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 Śrīraṅgam 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 *kundās* 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 liṅga*) of a deity, or the places from which creation emerges (*yonipīṭha*).²⁴ Durgā Kuṇḍ was and still is one such *yonipīṭha*.

The area around Durgā Kuṇḍ 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 *tulasī* plant is considered a consort of Viṣṇu, and the goddess Śītālā is often worshipped as a *nīm* tree. Durgā herself is worshipped in certain important rituals as a cluster of nine plants (*navapatrikā*) (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 Laṅka. It is

²³After 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).

²⁴See Bagchi (1980) and Kinsley's (1987) chapter, "Goddesses and Sacred Geography," in *Hindu Goddesses* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), pp. 178-196.

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 Kuṣmaṇḍa or Kuṣmaṇḍi Devī. After Durgā, this is precisely the next most common epithet by which the Devī of Durgā Kuṇḍ is known. Durgājī is renowned as Kuṣmaṇḍa Devī through her association with the cluster of Banāras'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 *kuṇḍa* 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 unduly 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 Kuṣmaṇḍa 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 Kuṣmaṇḍa 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 Śīva, 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 purāṇic myth in which Śīva creates Bhadrakālī and the male demon Vīrabhadra to destroy the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) of Dakṣa Prajāpati, his father-in-law.²⁷ Dakṣa had insulted his daughter, the goddess Satī, Śīva's wife, and resulted in her death. Dakṣa was beheaded by Vīrabhadra and Bhadrakālī lapped up his blood with her lolling tongue. Eventually Dakṣa recanted and asked Śīva's forgiveness. His head was replaced by the head of a goat and he became a devotee of Śīva.²⁸ 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, Śīva (on behalf of the goddess), via Vīrabhadra, 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.²⁹

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

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

²⁹Kramrisch (1981:68-70), from the study of Vedic and Purāṇic 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 Śīva slays the goat headed demon Vāstupa. In a gracious act, Śīva then gives the "dimensionless, demonic phantom, tenuously though intimately related to himself, a name of its own, Vāstupa, and alots 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-maṇḍala*, 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 Saptaśatī* (Seven Hundred [Verses] to Durgā), the most important text utilized in Devī worship. The *Durgā Saptaśatī*, also called the *Devī Māhātmya* (Glorification of the Goddess), or the *Caṇḍī* ([Text of the Fierce Goddess] Caṇḍī) still circulates as an independent text, and is included in the *Markaṇḍeya 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 Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, Durgā turned black with anger and from her forehead the dreadful goddess Kālī emerged. She destroyed the demons, thus earning the epithet Cāmuṇḍā, and continued in the fray. At a later point, when confronting the demon Raktabīja, 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

sacrificial plot and at the foundations of temples re-enacts the movement of the demon Vāstupa into the very fabric of sacred architecture. But furthermore, Durgā, herself, is that very permeating presence which gives form and structure to the edifices of humans and gods.

³⁰*Durgā Saptaśatī*, Chapters 7 and 8. Versions of the Raktabīja myth are also found in the *Vāmana Purāṇa* 44.30-38, *Kūrma 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 (*guṇa*) 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 (*ahimsā*) is well known. It is not clear to what extent the notion of *ahimsā* 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 Śāstric 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 *pūjāri* of Durgāī, 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 Bengālīs 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 Bengālī 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

³⁴See 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 guṇa*, it heightens the profile of this aspect of the *guṇa* triad within the conceptual image of Durgā.

Two other goddess images share the shrine with Bhadrakālī. One is a small Durgā *Siṃhavāhinī* (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 Kuṇḍ 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 *pūjāri* 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.³⁶ 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

³⁶See, for instance, J. Allan, et al (1964:139). On the rivalries between various kings and the ruler of Banāras, see Moti Chandra (1962).

a close relationship between the power of the royalty and the Devī. While it is clear that this "Tantric Kālī" 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 Narasiṃha as the family or dynastic deity (*kula-devatā*), they also identified themselves with Śiva as Pampeśvara, the Lord/husband of the sacred river goddess Pampā (1986:125). It is quite likely that this "Tantric Kālī" 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 Bhadrakālī 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 Bhadrakālī 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 Kālī" 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 Bhadrakālī 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 Kālī" is nude and wears a garland of human heads. She is squatting upon Śiva's supine naked body holding his long erect penis (*liṅga*) in two of her six hands. The *liṅga* 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 Kālī on a bloody rampage, tongue extended, atop the reclining body of Śiva cry out for interpretation. The interpretation generally encountered is that when Kālī was in the grips of an uncontrollable blood-lust and about to destroy the cosmos, Śiva laid down on the battlefield in front of her. When she trampled upon him and realized that this was her spouse, Kālī stuck out her tongue in embarrassment.

This interpretation has always struck me as unsatisfactory since Kālī'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 Kālī standing or squatting in sexual union atop an ithyphallic prone Śiva. The "Tantric Kālī" image is particularly fascinating and illuminating because it makes explicit a connection between semen and blood.³⁸ The "Tantric Kālī" 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. Kālī 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 *maṇḍala*. A *maṇḍala* 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

³⁷*Durgā Saptasatī*, Chapter 9.

³⁸O'Flaherty offers substantial evidence from purāṇic 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-saṁhita 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 Lakṣmī 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. Knowledgeable 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 Tilaparṇeśvara (Lord of Sandalwood), considered to be one of Kaśī'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 explicit Devī symbols, such as the *kunda*, 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 Śāstras* (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 amorphous blobs (*pinḍa*) 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 Rānī Bhavānī, who based her actions on cues given by the Devī (e.g., a dream and the natural demise of the sacred pipal 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 *darśana* 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 (*siddhapīṭha*).

The foregoing incidents illustrate the volitional aspect of *śakti*, which is referred to as the Devī's *icchā*. While Sāṅkhya/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 Sāṅkhya/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 (*aṣṭadala*) 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 Durgā in the inner sanctum, by touching the marble footprints (*pāduka, carāṇa*) placed at the doorway. The lotus is the cardinal contact point of the devotee with the Devī in her entirety as the temple complex. As the *liṅga* is the sign of Śiva, the lotus is the *yoni* of the Devī, the matrix from which all creation blossoms.

The bas-relief of Durgā as Mahiṣasuramardinī (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 (*śikhara*). The image recalls the extremely important mythic tale of Durgā's victory over the powerful and arrogant shape-shifting demon Mahiṣa, the Buffalo. Rivalled in popularity only by the epic tale of Rāma's victory over the demon Rāvaṇa, Durgā's battle with the Buffalo Demon is perhaps the best known of mythic battles between good and evil. The tale, recounted in the *Durgā Saptaśatī* follows in the tradition of Indra's victory over the demon Vṛtra.

The items which crown the *śikhara*, although standard elements in temples to male or female deities nevertheless have significant associations with the Devī. The *āmalaka* or myrobalan/gooseberry, though serving as a protective capstone, carries the symbolism of healing. It has a prominent place in 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 Devī during elaborate worship rituals (*pūjā*). The jar (*kalaśa*), thought to contain the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*) is another common symbol through which the Devī is worshipped. The trident (*triśūla*), although most often associated with Śiva, is an ancient goddess symbol. The goddess Satī, 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 Satī in a small park, not far from Durgāji. The central image of Satī 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 (*svāstika*) used to represent Satī, Durgā, and other Hindu goddesses in shrines and on sacrificial offerings (卐 , 卍). Significantly, the *Durgā Saptaśatī* (11.50) explicitly refers Bhrāmarī Devī, 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 śakti*). 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 Bhadrakālī, Lakṣmī, and Sarasvatī. This goddess triad is not infrequently referred to as Mahākālī, 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. Lakṣmī 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, Lakṣmī 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 Kukkūṭeśvara Mahādeva is mentioned in the *Śrīmat Devī Bhāgavata*. He was a *brāhmaṇa pūjāri*, 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 *pūjāri* went to pay homage (*pranāma*) 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 *pūjāri*, 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 Kāśī 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.⁴³ 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

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 pūjāri*, Kukkūṭeśvara Mahādeva's fate revealed something of Kukkūṭeśvara's dedication to the Devī, his purity, his efficient expiation of previous bad *karma*, and his ultimate deification. These are aspects with which the *pūjāri* identifies and through which he finds meaning. In a variant version of the tale the Devī offers to restore the life of Kukkūṭeśvara 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 Kukkūṭeśvara 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 *pūjāri* may hear the footfalls of Kukkūṭeśvara's wooden sandals as he walks to the *garbhagrha* to worship the goddess.

Kukkūṭeśvara Mahādeva's story provides *pūjāris* in particular with special status. His is the shrine of a deified human, the highest state achievable by any Durgā devotee. There is no explicit divine male consort shrine of Durgā present at Durgājī. 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 Durgājī, but this Caṇḍa Bhairava, one of eight protectors of Banāras, is paired with the Bhadrakālī 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 (*smaśana*) 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 Tilaparṇeśvara

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 Kukkūṭeśvara Mahādeva.

(Lord of Sandalwood), one of Kāśī's twelve Rudras (see Figure 5).⁴⁵ His shrine is located outside the main quadrangle and is possibly quite old. This temple is also known as Jaleśvara/ī (Lord/Lady of the Waters), causing some confusion with the nearby Jvaleśvara 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 (*kunḍa*) a foot or two deep, is slowly submerged by worshippers, who fill up the *kunḍa* with sprinkled consecrated water (*abhiṣeka jala*).⁴⁶ The temple also contains a Gaṇeśa 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 Kukkuṭeśvara 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

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 Kāśī 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 *pūjāris* 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 *brāhmaṇas*, 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 Prasadjī 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 *brāhmaṇas* who do not value the overt display of such this-worldly 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, Kukkuteśvara 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 Gaṇeśa who, although identified as Durgā's son, does not derive his divinity primarily from her substance but from his own inherent qualities. Gaṇeśa is certainly represented at Durgājī. On the northeast corner of the site of Durgājī one finds the Mahāmāyā Śītalā Mandir, the temple of the Gaṇeśa called Durgā Vināyaka, 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 Bhiṅgā is also said to have rebuilt the Durgā Vināyaka Mandir and a tantric Śiva shrine on the southeast corner of Durgā Kuṇḍ. The Durgā Vināyaka is one of the city's important Gaṇeśas. It is an old and renowned temple, mentioned in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* as the thirty-first spot to visit on the *pañcakrośī* pilgrimage route. There are one hundred and eight important spots to visit on this famous pilgrimage circuit which circumscribes Banāras. Gaṇeśa (Vināyaka, "the Remover [of Obstacles]") is highly revered in the city due, in part, to his identity as leader (*īśa*) of Śiva's gang (*gaṇa*) 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 Gaṇeśa via Pārvatī, Śiva's spouse, when discussing Gaṇeśa's origins. Pārvatī fashioned Gaṇeśa 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, Gaṇeśa's head was replaced with that of an elephant.⁴⁸ The Durgā-Gaṇeśa relationship is more explicit in the image cluster worshipped during Durgā Pūjā celebrations where he is often referred to as her son.

There are Gaṇeśas of little consequence in some of the other shrines on the site of Durgājī. 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 vermilion Gaṇeśa, a white marble, multi-hooded serpent deity, called Śeṣanāga (on occasion identified as Śiva, "Sankara jī"), and a small *liṅga* and Nandi (Śiva's bull mount) which are placed in front. The Gaṇeśa and Śeṣanāga are said to have

⁴⁸A version of this myth is found in the *Śiva Purāna* 2.4.13.

been installed by a certain Prem Shah, from a shoemaker's (*mochī*) family. Cobblers 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 (*varṇa*) 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 *pūjāri* 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 Devī'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 Hinduism (Hinduism) 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 Durgā. The *naubhat khāna* 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 khāna* which faces Durgā Kuṇḍ Road now houses a small *pān* stall, a favorite meeting place for the owners (*mahant*), priests (*pūjāri*), workers, and devotees.

Pān, also called *tāmbūla*, is a preparātion chewed with addictive relish throughout Southeast Asia, and especially in India, where the Banāras style is famous. Plain (*sada*) *pān* consists of a leaf of the *betel* vine, originally cultivated by the *barāi* caste (*jāt*), and sold by the *tamboli jāti*. Onto this is spread a liberal amount of catechu (*katthā*), 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 Banāras men prefer their *pān* with some tobacco and slaked lime (*cunām*). The resulting headiness (*naśa*) contributes an acceptable, even commendable, trait in the character of the Banārasī male, called *mastī*.⁴⁹ It is characterized by a easy-going, heavy eye-lidded, mildly euphoric intoxication associated with the city's patron deity, Śiva. *Pān* is also chewed by Banāras 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, *tāmbūla* is an offering which, from the sattvic perspective, can diminish the status of the deity who accepts it. Hanumān and Durgā are among the deities who accept it. Hanumān, at the immensely popular Sankata Mochana temple, is offered *tāmbūla* daily, while Durgā is offered *tāmbūla* during parts of the Durgā Pūjā worship rituals during Navarātra.

Although it is purely coincidental, the *pān* stall is located in the *naubat khāna*, directly in front of the Durgā image in the inner sanctum allowing everyone who comes

⁴⁹The trait is also acceptable, although the practice is less common, among Banārasī women. See, for instance Shanti Devi's interview in the Introduction.

to purchase the preparatōn 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 Durgājī, 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 (*pīṭha*) 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 Durgājī, certain temples such as those at Khajuraho, have numerous and ubiquitous depictions of the Devī's lion on the body of the temple. These leogryphs or *śārdūlās* are each different, symbolizing the magical transformations of *māyā*. Human warriors battle against the *śārdūlā* in what appears to be inevitable defeat. The placement of leogryphs on the temple walls testify to the presence of the Devī's *śakti* 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

⁵⁰Stella Kramrisch makes similar identifications of the *śārdūlā* and lion with *śakti* through evidence drawn from Vedic sources. "The *śārdūlā*, 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 vedī*) in Vedic ritual

The more northern of the two Gāhadvāla styled temples which flank the entrance to the inner courtyard has no name. It houses three central *liṅgas* on the floor and an assortment of other images most in great disrepair. These include a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa *mūrti*, a Gaṇeśa, and an image of the solar deity, Sūrya, after whom it is occasionally named.⁵¹ Flush with Durgā Kuṇḍ, in the outer courtyard, is a newer Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temple, housing a *liṅga* in an outer right alcove, with central *mūrtis* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. There are two shops located in the outer courtyard. The larger of these belongs to Om Prakash Agarawal, a Śākta merchant (*baniyā*) 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 (*dāna*). 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 (*dharmasālā*), which contains a well, the drinking water source for visiting pilgrims (*yātri*).

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 kuṇḍa*), 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" (*Śatapatha 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.

⁵¹A 1930 manuscript in Bhārat Kalā Bhavan in a listing of one hundred and twenty six hierophanies (*tīrtha*) to be visited during the month of Śravaṇa (*śravaṇa masa snana prarambhah*), enumerates ten (#50-60) in the Durgā Kuṇḍ area. These are #50 Durgā Kuṇḍ, #51 Durgā Vināyaka, #52 Durgā Devī, #53 Kālarātrī (this would likely be the Bhadrakālī in Durgāmandir), #54 Caṇḍa Bhairav (also in Durgāmandir), #55 Dvāreśvarajī (this is Jvalharesvara/ri or Jvaresvara/ri), #56 Sūrya Karneśvarjī (possibly the Sūrya temple at Durgājī), #57 Kukkuteśvarjī, #58 Jaṅgliśvarjī (Lord of Jungle People; Location: unknown), #59 Tilaparnesvarajī, and #60 Mukteśvarjī (Lord of Liberation; Location: unknown). See Pandit Sudarsanlal Trivedi Vaidya Śāstri (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 Durgājī, not far from the shrine of Kukkuṭeśvara Mahādeva is the small temple of Jvalhareśvara/ri and a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa Mandir. The Jvālhareśvara/ī 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. Jvālhareśvara/ī means "The Deity who Removes the Heat of Fever (*javāla*). " The deity is also called Jvāleśvara/ī (Lord/Lady of Fever) or Jvareśvara/ī, and Dvāreśvara/ī (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 Viṣṇu, 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 Jvālhareśvarī or Jvāleśvarī 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 *javālin*. The Lakṣmī-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 Rāvaṇa. He is also known in Banāras as an "incarnation of Śiva" (*ṣaṅkar suvan*) through the famous lines of the *Hanumān Cālīsa* (Forty Verses to Hanumān), composed by Tulsidas.⁵² The *avadhi* dialect of Hindi, used by Tulsidas, in composing the highly popular, *Rāmacaritamānasa* (The Lake of Rama's Acts), and the *Hanumān Cālīsa*, makes the translation of *ṣaṅkar suvan*, ambiguous. The colour, or radiance of Śaṅkara are other possible

⁵²See for instance, *Hanumān Cālīsa of Goswami Tulsidas* (1989).

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 Karṇī Mātā, located near Bikaner, Rajasthan, which is home to thousands of rats. At Karṇī 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.⁵³ 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 (*ahaṅkāra*), 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 (*mīṭhāṭ*). 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 *kunḍa* 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 *pūjāri* of the Śītalā temple, Śītalā Prasād Chaubey, was a *pūjāri* at Durgājī until his expulsion some years earlier. Also the chief *pūjāri* 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 *pūjāri*, 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 (*pūjā*), 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 (*kaṣṭa*), 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 Śīva, 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 Mahiṣāsūramardīnī (She who Crushes the Demon Buffalo), in which the goddess is depicted engaged in the process of vanquishing the demon. The identification between Śīva 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 Vaiṣṇava 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 Vaiṣṇava *sakti* or as Śīva'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 *brāhmaṇas* 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 diagrammatic Durgā Yantra possesses male and female elements. The bells, the sculpted lions, Gaṇeśa 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 *kunḍa*, 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

⁵⁴See Chandra 1962:32-34 and Eck who places this worship at "early in the first millennium B.C." (1982:51).

⁵⁵According to Eck, as early as 2,500 years ago, in the *Gr̥hyasūtras* of Hiranyakeśin (II.7.10.6) Śiva is referred to as the Lord of Kāśī (Kāśīśvara Śiva) (1982:68).

protean forms of the *yoni* and the *yantra*, which are important symbols in Devī worship.⁵⁶ 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-māhātmya* or *Durgā Saptasatī*, 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.⁵⁷ 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 Safī or Pārvatī, who are not unequivocal representations of Durgā (see Kinsley 1986:36). Similarly, the eighth century images of the dreadful Cāmundā or the tenth century weapon-wielding Vaiṣṇavī 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

⁵⁶See 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 Kālī or Caṇḍī. See A. S. Altekar 1937:27 in which he refers to *Epigraphica Indica* IX:69.

invasions.⁵⁸

Jayachandra, the king of the Gāhadvālas, the dynasty which ruled Banāras in the twelfth century was defeated in 1193/4 by the Muslim armies of Muhammad Ghūrī. A thousand temples in Banāras 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 Banāras 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 Banāras that pre-dates the time of Aurangzeb in the seventeenth century" (Eck 1982:84). Had there been any major temples to Durgā in Banāras 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 suppressed 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Banāras 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 purāṇic sources to which devotees and temple officials point.

⁵⁸Some examples are found in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan (Nos. 153, 177) at Banāras 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 Purāṇic Mythological Background⁵⁹

Diana Eck points out how detailed geographical descriptions may constitute portions of glorifications of place (*sthalamāhātmya*).⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹

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

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

⁶⁰See for instance, Diana Eck 1980:81-101.

⁶¹A good example, in print, of such efforts is found in Kuber Nath Sukul (1977).

it is considered to have timeless authority.⁶² The *Kāśī 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 Kuṇḍ cleanses one from the sins accumulated in nine rebirths (*navajanma*).⁶³ Furthermore, the Devī is particularly pleased with sacrificial offerings, which, although not stated explicitly, are most likely construed as blood sacrifices (*mahābali*).⁶⁴ These two references strongly link the Devī of the *Skanda Purāna* 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 *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* also recounts how the Devī got her name.⁶⁵ 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 Kālarātrī, one of her energy manifestations (*śakti*) as a messenger to tell the demon to desist. However, when Kālarātrī (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 (*vindhyacalakṛtālayam*), 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,

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

⁶³*durgākunde naraḥ snātvā sarvadurgārtihārīnīm/
durgām sampūjya vidhivannavajanmāghamutsrjet// 87//*
See *Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Skanda Purāna)*, Gurumaṇḍala Granthamālaya No XX, Vol.IV (Calcutta: 1961:521).

⁶⁴*nāśayisyati vighnaughānsumatiñca pradāsyati
mahāpūjopahāraiśca mahābalinivedanaiḥ/
dāsyatyabhāṣṭadāsiddhim durgā kāśyām na saṁśayaḥ
pratisaṁvatsaramtasyāḥ kāryā yātrā prayatnataḥ/85.*
See *Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Skanda Purāna)*, (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.

⁶⁵The story is told in great detail in Chapters 71 and 72 of the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*.

finally killing him while he assumed the shape of a buffalo (*mahāmahīṣarūpa*). She took the name Durgā (the Unassailable) from the demon she had conquered.

The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 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 Khaṇḍa* 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 Vindhya. The most prominent temple to the goddess under the epithet of Vindhyaśinī Devī in those mountains is located near Mirzapur, some eighty kilometers upriver from Banāras. A local legend says that after slaying the demon Durgama, the Devī rested at Durgā Kuṇḍ, thus sanctifying the place. When the great sword (*asi*) slipped from her hand, it split open the Aśī river, which lies just south of Durgā Kuṇḍ in the direction of Vindhya.⁶⁷ Thus this legend links the cult of Vindhyaśinī Devī to the Devī of Durgā Mandir. The purāṇic tale suggests that although the Devī may have had her abode in the Vindhya she is ever-present in Banāras as Durgā with her *śaktis*.

The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* myth expands upon a passage found in the most important Śākta devotional scripture, the *Durgā Saptaśatī*, which is contained within the *Markaṇḍeya Purāna*. 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 Khaṇḍa* 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 Saśī, the spouse of Śiva. When

⁶⁶*sā durgāśaktibhiḥ sārḍham kāśīm rakṣati sarvataḥ/
tāḥ prayatnena sampūjyāḥ kālarātrimukhā naraiḥ//88//*
See *Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Skanda Purāna)*.72.520-21.

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

⁶⁸*Durgā Saptaśatī*, 11.43-46.

Satī 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 *pīṭhas*. Some worshippers claim that the Durgā Mandir is built on the site where Satī'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 *pīṭhas* vary considerably. Most Banārasī familiar with the Satī myth hold that the Viśālākṣī temple in the city rather than Durgā Mandir is such a Devī *pīṭha* since it is listed in many compilations including the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (VII.30.55-84) and the *Matsya Purāṇa* (XIII.26-56).

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

I found that although the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* is cited by temple priests to authenticate the ancient sanctity of the temple site, identified through the demon Durga myth, the *kunḍa*, the blood sacrifices, and the Nine Durgā pilgrimages, these officials prefer another purāṇic 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

⁶⁹The association of this myth with the Durgā Kuṇḍ 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 purāṇic 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-Nārāyaṇa 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 purāṇic 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.

Līlāvātī, 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, Līlāvātī'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*), "Klīm." 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 Sudarśana.

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 *bīja*, 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.⁷² 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.⁷³ Sudarśana was successfully restored to the throne in Ayodhyā where he, too, established and encouraged Durgā worship.

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

⁷²*nagare 'tra tvayā mātāḥ sthātvyam mama sarvadā/
durgādevīti nāmnā vai tvaṃ śaktiriha samsthitā//15//
rakṣā tvayā ca kartavyā sarvadā nagarasya ha/
yathā sudarsanastrāto ripusaṃghādanāmayāḥ//16//
tathā 'tra kartavyā vārāṇasyāstvayāmbike/
yavatpurī bhavedbhūmau supraṭiṣṭhā susamsthitā//17//*

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

⁷³*subāhurapi kāśyāṃ tu durgāyaḥ pratimāṃ śubhām/
kārayitvā ca prāsādam sthāpayāmāsa bhaktitāḥ//41//
tatra tasyā janāḥ sarve premabhaktiparāyanāḥ/
pūjāṃ cakrurvidhānena yathā viśveśvarasya ha//42//*

See *Devī Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇam*.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 Banāras is the Annapūrṇā Mandir which is visited by most Banārasis 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 Śāśikalā, his widowed mother Manorāmā, 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. Manorāmā 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 Śāśikalā 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 Manorāmā 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. Manorāmā, 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 *Durgā Saptasatī*), was again called upon to slay Śumbha and Niśumbha (the Third Episode).⁷⁴ 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 *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 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.⁷⁵ 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 Śatrujit link them with the demons. Thus when Subāhu, the king of Kāśī, establishes Durgā worship at Banāras, he is actually setting a human precedent, but merely re-establishing her presence there.⁷⁶

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

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

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

⁷⁶Here 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 Purāna* was composed by a "Smārta 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 Vaiṣṇava 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?⁷⁷ Did Rānī 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 Bengālī 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.

Rānī Bhavānī

Durgājī was constructed by a pious Bengālī queen in the 18th century C.E., a heroine of the Hindu revival at that time. Rānī (or Mahārānī) 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.⁷⁸ It earned her the epithet *Ardha Bangleśvarī* (Mistress of Half of Bengal).

Rānī 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

⁷⁷ C. M. Brown points out the possibility of multiple authorship ("a small group of Goddess devotees from Bengal") for the initial *purāna* (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 Bengālī community in the Bengālī Tolā 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 Banāras.⁷⁹ She appears to have spent substantial amounts of time and money in the city, re-establishing the holy places of Banāras 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 Banāras 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 *dharmasālās* in the city, among these the Omkāreśvar temple, Bhavānīśvara temple (which bears an inscription dating her deed at 1735 C.E.), Lāt Bhairav temple, and the Jai Bhāvānī Barī of Bengālī Tolā. She is known to have "built" or paved the Pañcakrośī 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 Tīrtha, Kurukṣetra, Pushkar, Shanku Dhara, Piscach Mochana, and Durgā *kundas* among others. An inscription testifies to her renovation of Kardameshvar Kuṇḍ, the first overnight stop on the Pañcakrośī 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 Bengālī residents of Banāras. 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 *zamīndārī*, 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 *kuṇḍa 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 Śakti worship in Banāras 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 Tripurabhairavī came to be known as "brahmapurī" due to the large number of *brāhmaṇas* living there.

Rānī Bhavānī's actual deeds are legendary in Banāras, and her legendary deeds equally numerous.⁸¹ 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, Daśapraharaṇadhārinī (She who holds Ten Weapons), an epithet of Durgā (R. Bhattacharyya 1986:1-4). Her equally pious daughter, Tārā Sundarī has come to be identified with the goddess Tārā. Tārā Sundarī is said to have spent most of her time in worship at the Jai Bhavānī Mandir in the Bengālī 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 Kālī/Tārā. The shrine is infrequently visited, except by the extremely devout, often young women, who blur the distinction between the goddesses Kālī and Tārā, and the princess.⁸²

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 Bengālī tradition of early marriage as evidenced by her daughter's widowhood at fourteen.

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

⁸¹Among 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 Devī in privacy. She is also supposed to have died soon after the construction of the Durgā temple was completed.

⁸²This 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 Bengālis but among Banārasis 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 Rānī Bhavānī and her daughter, coming as they did from royal families, *satī*, 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 *satī* among the *brāhmanas* 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 *Strīdharmapaddhati*, 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 (*strī*). They may either choose to be widows or *satīs* (1989, 1991). To choose widowhood "implies that

⁸³A pertinent and prominent debate concerning *satī* 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 *satī*, by burning on her husband's pyre. He called an assembly of *brāhmanas* to determine the possibilities of remarriage. The *brāhmanas* said it was permitted by the scriptures. Rāja Krishnachandra Ray, however, a powerful landholder in the district of Nadia, called another council of *brāhmanas* who overturned the decision, saying that widow remarriage was forbidden (S. Roy 1991:11). Rāja Krishnachandra Ray was a contemporary of Rānī Bhavānī and an extremely influential figure in Bengāli culture in the eighteenth century. He is credited with being one of the first to institute the grand-scale celebrations of Durgā Pūjā during the autumn Navarātra in 1757.

⁸⁴A detailed discussion of the practice of *satī* 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 (*pravrajyā, vidhavādharma*)" (Leslie 1991:189). While *satī* 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 Saptaśatī* 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.⁸⁵ 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 Daśapraharadhārīnī (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 Kuṇḍ. The Devī already abided there since she defeated the demon Durgama, and was re-established there by king Subāhu after she helped him to defeat his enemies.

⁸⁵A main theme of the *Durgā Saptaśatī* 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 *Devī Bhāgavata Purāna* 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 (*pūjāri*), and there is no inscriptional 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 *kuṇḍa* at Kardameshvara temple in Khandwa on the Pañcakrośī pilgrimage route.⁸⁶ 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 Pañcakrośī pilgrimage route, and to have made *pakka* the *kuṇḍa* 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, Kāśī Viśvanātha.⁸⁷ Professor Krishna Deva, renowned for his monumental work on the *nagara* Chandella temples of Khajuraho,

⁸⁶There are inscriptional plaques testifying to her involvement in these projects.

⁸⁷Personal communication. Kāśī Viśvanātha, also called the Golden Temple because of its gilded *sikhara*, 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 Ahalyabāi of Indore (Eck 1982:135). Ahalyabāi 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.⁸⁸

A map of Banāras, made in 1822 by the British scholar James Prinsep, shows numerous natural clay banked (*kaccha*) ponds.⁸⁹ In this map, the Durgā *kunḍa* and nearby Kurukṣetra *kunḍa* 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 *śikhara*-bearing structure, the *pakka kunḍa*, and a wall and pillared pilgrim rest-house (*dharmasālā*) 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 Tilaparnesvara, 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)⁹⁰ He talks of the construction of the porch (*mandapa*) 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 *mandapa* (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

⁸⁸Personal communication. Raja Jai Narain Ghoshal 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.

⁸⁹A copy of Prinsep'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.

⁹⁰Sherring 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 *dharmasālā*, 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 Gaṇeśa and the white marble Śeṣanāga 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 Bhadrakālī in the southwest corner.⁹¹ 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 Ṭhaṭheri bazaar. According to Rām Prasād Dubey, the chief *pūjāri* of Durgājī, "each took six months to cast." He also stated that the *dharmasālā* 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)⁹² 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 *kunḍa*,

⁹¹Sherring refers to this image as the golden-faced goddess Bāgeśwarī, 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 Bhadrakālī 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 Bhadrakālī shrine room. This image is occasionally referred to as a "Tantric Kālī." It is surprising that he does not mention the Caṇḍa Bhairava also located in the same shrine room and of larger proportions. He also makes no reference to the Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī images.

⁹²Nita Kumar 1988:57-60 describes the metalworkers of Banāras as belonging to either the Kaserā or Ṭhaṭherā caste. Although Ram Prasad referred to them as Ṭhaṭheras (*ṭhaṭherā log*), Kumar points out that most do not like this designation. They claim to belong to the warrior class (*kṣatriya*) since they were armourers for Kṣatriya 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 overlaid 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 Kuṇḍ). 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 (*pūjāri*) 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 Kuṇḍ temple directly by Rānī Bhavānī or at a somewhat later date by the temple's appointed

⁹³According to Ram Prasad this was done during the ministry of Kamalapati Tripathi, a renowned freedom fighter and former editor of the Banāras newspaper, *Āj*. His popularity in the city was evidenced by the large numbers who turned up for his cremation at Maṅikārnīkā Ghāt 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.

custodians. It is also not uncommon for *pūjāris* to inherit a temple in the absence of the owners (*mahant*). For instance, certain temples are cared for by a single pious *pūjāri* who performs service (*seva*) for the deity. The trickle of worshippers who pass by may leave scarcely enough food or money (*dakṣiṇā*) for the *pūjāri*'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 *pūjāri* 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Śrī 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 Kṛṣṇa 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

⁹⁴These sons are named Mohan, Bholā, 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 Kṛṣṇa 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 Dubey, 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 Śravaṇa, 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 Durgājī. 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 Durgājī 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 *dharmaśālās* 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 *pūjāri*, 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 *pūjāris*, and another boy about his own age, named Keshava Prasad, who later became senior *pūjāri*. Keshava Prasad and Ram Prasad became fast friends. Ram Prasad had learned to recite the *Durgā Saptasatī* 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 (*pūjā*) 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 *pūjāris*. 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 *pūjāri* 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 *pūjāris* at Durgājī. No doubt, they were the two *pūjāris* mentioned by Ram Prasad on his arrival at the temple. According to Śītalā Prasad, these *pūjāris* were also the managers of the temple. A conflict soon arose over the management of funds, and the Dubey's took over the temple management. Eventually Śītalā Prasad Chaubey was also ousted from his role as *pūjāri*

at the Durgā Mandir.

There is something in the preceding account to suggest that the Chaubeys were the traditional *pūjāris* of Durgāī, 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 *pūjāris*. 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 *pūjāris*. It is speculative to suggest that the Chaubeys (or preceding *pūjāris*) were the traditionally ordained (by Rānī Bhavānī) managers of the temple. Yet temple management is often left in the hands of the *pūjāri*. It is equally speculative to suggest that the Dubeys were the traditionally ordained (by Rānī 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 *pūjāri*, 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 *ārati*, on occasion.⁹⁵

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 (*rort*) 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

⁹⁵Subhas'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 *Rāmāyaṇā* and *Durgā Saptasatī* from his father's elder brother, but his father taught him the *havan pūjā*. The offerings which go into the *havan*, he says, are mentioned in the *Durgā Saptasatī*, and particular *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 (*sādhana*). He left Durgā Mandir and started the Koḍimāi Mandir. Koḍimāi 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 *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 *cannabis* (*gañja*) 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 camouflauge-colored canvas umbrella for his shrine, and other paraphenalia, 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 *sārī* 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 pipal 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 *mūrti* 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 Sarasvatī, 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 Gaṇeśa (e.g., Durgā Vināyaka), Bhairava (e.g., Caṇḍa Bhairava), Śīva/Rudra (e.g., Tilaparneśvara), 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 Śīva, from the majority of the devout Śāktas who frequent the temple I heard no such dependent identification. There are Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa 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-Kṛṣṇa temple by the *kuṇḍa*, and a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa 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 Śīva. 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 *pūjāri* 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 Bhavānī and her daughter Tārā Sundarī exemplify this dramatic behaviour. Rānī Bhavānī'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 Sundarī 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 Bhavānī. 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 sacrality. 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 "grass-roots" lore concerning this temple will percolate upwards with time to be incorporated into the legends of the purāṇically 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 Durgājī. 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 (Sāṅkhya/Yoga), or in which pure spirit or consciousness (*cit śakti*) 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 *śakti* 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 *śakti* 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 *sattva 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 guṇa*, 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 Kuṇḍ temple in Banāras. The daily routine is described through the activities of the most senior priest (*pūjāri*) 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 (*sr̥ṅgāra*) 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 Saptaśatī*, 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*.⁹⁶ 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 (*garbhagrha*). It is now about four o'clock. He unlocks its north door and rings

⁹⁶The 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.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ 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 (*puṣpa*) and perfume (*itra*). Today, he is happy that there is jasmine (*cameli*) perfume to offer Mā. He sprinkles red powder (*kuṅkuma, rorī*) on the *yantra*, and then offers Mā sweet, uncooked food. This consists of small cardamom seeds encrusted in sugar (*ilāyacī dāna*), raisins (*kiśamiśa*), 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 (*srñgāra*) Mā. He attaches a *sārī* and the gold mask of Durgā over the *yantra* on the wall.⁹⁹ 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

⁹⁷Ram Prasad, the other *pūjāris*, 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.

⁹⁸Larger 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.

⁹⁹This 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 (*maṅgala darśana*) and make their offerings which may include flowers, incense sticks (*agarbattī*), red scarves (*cunri*) and coconuts (*nāriyala*). The *pūjāri* 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 (*puṣpamālā*), lights a multi-wicked *ghi* (clarified butter) lamp. This flame-worship (*āratī*) 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 *āratī* 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 (*karpūra*) 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."¹⁰⁰ Some fall to the ground in respectful prostration (*praṇāma*), while latecomers toss their flowers into the sanctum in offering. Then all hurry to the side, where a *pūjāri* 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 *āratī* that the first light of dawn begins to appear, and the

¹⁰⁰Ram Prasad may utter verses from the *Durgā Saptasatī* which he chooses spontaneously. Sometimes he says nothing. There is no formal series of liturgical prayers for Durgā in this temple. Each *pūjāri* is free to say or do what he wishes. Most often, *pūjāris* may utter some verses (*śloka*) from the *Durgā Saptasatī* since the text is known to all of them. During the devotional service of offerings, simple statements such as, "These are fragrant flowers. Salutations to Durgā," may be made.

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 (*manauti*) 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.¹⁰¹ 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 *kunḍa*, 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 Saptaśati*, 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 *ārati* at eight o'clock. This *ārati* is often accompanied by the beating of large, hand-held swing drums (*damaru*) and

¹⁰¹Many temples have their *garbhagrhas* 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 *ārati*, devotees are scattered around the temple's inner courtyard chatting with friends, or engaged in private worship. Some may be reciting the *Durgā Saptasatī* in a corner, while others are perhaps making offerings at the fire oblation pit (*havan kuṇḍa*). Just after *ārati*, 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 (*miṭhāi*). Mā eats chilies, but does not eat garlic and onions (*pyāḥ*). She is fond of sweets such as sweet balls (*ladū*) and hunks of unrefined cane sugar (jaggery, *gur*). She eats such fruit as bananas and oranges, but does not eat fish and meat.¹⁰² 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 (*śaraṇa ārati*) 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 *pūjāri* may hear footsteps and sounds within the locked inner courtyard and locked inner sanctum. It is thought to be the spirit of Kukkuteśvara 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

¹⁰²Mā's food is prepared by the *pūjāris* 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 (*śuddha/sattva*) items, and reveals as much about the *pūjāri*'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." Durgājī 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 tamasic 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 Śāstric literature and so add spice to the somewhat bland sattvic diet. Durgājī's diet was not always as it is now for I have heard that in the earlier years she was offered rajasic and tamasic 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 *pūjāri* 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 Mahiṣa'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 Kālī atop the passive, reclining Śīva, conveys this message. Śīva, 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* Kukkūṭeśvara 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 supernatural 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 (*praṇāma*) 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 (*āratī*), 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 *dhotī*." Hands are washed before handling the flowers used for

¹⁰³Versions of this myth are found in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* 62.24-27, 30-32, 41-43, 49. Also in *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* 36-38 and *Bṛhaddharma 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. *Pūjā* essentially induces a transformation of status in the devotee. It is in these upward currents that friction occurs.

A *brāhmaṇa* 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 (*prasāda*), devotees actually incorporate consecrated matter into their bodies. The sattvic *brāhmaṇa* faces a problem when seeing the deity accepting flesh and blood offerings, which are considered non-sattvic. To a tantric *brāhmaṇa*, 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 *brāhmaṇa*. The deity's status would thus diminishes from such a *brāhmaṇa* 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 Durgājī, 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 Bhadrakālī or the Yoginīs. In effect, Bhadrakālī 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 guṇa* (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 (*pṛthivī*), 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 (*sr̥ṅgāra*), and on the festival of Annakūṭa.¹⁰⁴ To the *mahants*, worshippers, workers, and shopkeepers, however, there is a difference, because Tuesdays (*maṅgalavara*) and to a lesser extent, Saturdays (*śanivāra*), 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 (*maṅgalā*) and Saturn (*śani*), both dangerous, inauspicious planets. Durgā is

¹⁰⁴During 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.

¹⁰⁵Śiva'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 Mahisamardinī, 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 Mithāi Lāl, dominated the activity on Tuesdays at Durgājī. He would work close to the fire pit (*havan kuṇḍa*), 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

¹⁰⁶*Maṅgalā*, the name of the planet Mars, means "auspicious." Nevertheless, according to the science of astrology (*jyotiṣa*), 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., Viśālākṣī temple in Banāras) and *navagraha* worship is part of some goddess centred rituals (e.g., mass recitations of the *Durgā Saptasatī*). 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 Maṅgalā or Mangalī, and Maṅgalacandikā is the name of one of her nine fierce forms (*Candī*) 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 karne 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 Durgājī, 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 Durgājī, unless their sectarian affiliation is relevant to the discussion.

Among the people who worship at Durgājī, 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 Saptasatī*. 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 Kaiṭabha 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*, *jādū*, 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 *liṅga* 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 (*dharmasālā*) 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

¹⁰⁷Turner (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 Kuṣmāṇḍā Devī is also one of Kāśī'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 Kuṇḍ, and makeshift stalls selling *pūjā* items (i.e., coconuts, scarves, camphor, cardamom sweets (*ilāyacī dāna*), incense sticks (*agarbattī*), and thread (*maulī*)) 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 (*muṇḍana*) 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 (*prasāda*) 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 Kuṇḍ. 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.¹⁰⁸ I was told how once a young man was found hanged within the inner courtyard of Durgājī on the morning after Dīpavalī (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 Kuṇḍ.

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 *Durgā Cālīsā* (Forty [Verses] to Durgā) a popular devotional hymn in the style and language of Tulsidas's *Hanumān Cālīsā*, she is worshipped as Mātāṅgī.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 Sāṅkhya-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

¹⁰⁸See 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 *Agni Purāna* 110, and the *Padma Purāna* 5.60.1-127.

¹⁰⁹*Matamgi dhūmāvati mātā/
Bhuvaneśvari baḡalā sukha dātā//15*
The entire Śrī Durgā Cālīsā is carved on marble slabs which surround the Bhadrakālī shrine at Durgājī.

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 fortnights (*pakṣa*), one in which the moon waxes bright (*śuklapakṣa*), and the other in which it wanes darkly (*kr̥ṣṇā pakṣa*). Added to these waxing and waning wings are the days of full moon (*pūrṇimā*) and new moon (*amāvasyā*).

Tradition holds that the eighth (*aṣṭamī*) and eleventh (*ekadaśī*) lunar days (*tithi*) of either the dark or bright fortnight are favored by the goddess. So are *pūrṇimā* 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 kr̥ṣṇā pakṣa*) is special for Kālī. I was unable to discern any difference in worship activity at Durgājī 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

¹¹⁰Since a lunar day (*tithi*) begins and ends with the rising and setting of the moon, it may fall completely within a solar day, or overlap two solar days. This increased the complexity of my task as I tried to discern changes in worship patterns at the temple on special lunar days. Since the Durgā temple normally functions on a solar daily cycle and is closed at night, it can prove problematic for devotees who wish to worship there systematically according to the lunar calendrical cycle. Their worship patterns are further complicated by the presence of inauspicious constellations (*nakṣatra*) which are found among the twenty-seven "lunar mansions" through which the moon passes. One would need the services of a skilled astrologer to adhere to the regular lunar cycle of worship. The lunar months are named after twelve of the twenty-seven *nakṣatras*.

Such cyclical worship based on the lunar system is occasionally followed by particular caste (*jātī*) groups. R. and S. Freed mention how the potter *jātī* (*kumhar*) worship Durgā in the north Indian village of Shanti Nagar on every bright eighth. The bright eighth of the month of Caitra, is a minor festival, called Devī ki Karahi (Cooking Pot of the Goddess) for all *jātīs* in the village. (On this and the Hindu calendrical

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 Śravana, 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 Sṛṅgāra, the Āśvina Navarātra, Annakūta, 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 Holī since some devout Durgā-worshipping tantrics perform a special ritual with Śākta 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

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 Devī'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 the city of Banāras.¹¹¹ 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Devī'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.

¹¹¹On the sacred city of Banāras as a *yantra* or *maṇḍala*, 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 (*kr̥ṣṇā pakṣa*). In the month of Bhādrapada (which falls in August or September), the second day of the dark fortnight (*dvitīyā kr̥ṣṇā pakṣa*) is considered, according to the head *pūjāri*, 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 Banāras (Kāśī 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-smearred body of a newborn infant. The *pañcānga*, a calendar which lists the religious activities prescribed for particular days, cites the second of Bhādrapada as a day for an all night vigil (*rātrī 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.¹¹²

¹¹²Kajalī 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 *pūjāris*, Vindhyaal temple in Mirzapur is the site where this tradition still continues. A three-night *rātrī jagarana* is held at Durgā Mandir, however, during the annual decoration (*sr̥ṅgāra*) twelve days later. Vindhyaal temple's tradition of the *rātrī jagarana* on the Second of Bhādrapada is perhaps related to the connection between Vindhyaasini Devī and the Kṛṣṇa myth cycle suggested by C. Vaudeville 1982.

Diana Eck (1982:266) mentions that the third of Bhādrapada is called Kajalī Tīj, "Black Third." It is the yearly celebration (*sr̥ṅgāra*) of Visālāksī Devī in Banāras and known as the birthday of Vindhyaasini 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 Āśvina Navarātra.

Sṛṅgāra

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

Twelve days later, on the fourteenth of Bhādrapada, Durgā's greatness is eulogized (*barāt*) 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).¹¹³ 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 purāṇic 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, Kāṁṣa.¹¹⁴ Kāṁṣa 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 Kāṁṣa's plan, Viṣṇu asked Durgā for help. Kāṁṣa killed the first six of Devakī's offspring.¹¹⁵

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

¹¹³The close relationship between these two deities (Kālī and Kṛṣṇa) is examined at length by Kinsley (1975).

¹¹⁴The account which follows is a paraphrased summary given jointly by Prakash Sabarwala (pseudonym) and his father, shopkeepers in the Durgā Kuṇḍ 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 *Harivaṁśa*.

¹¹⁵There 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 Kṛṣṇa with Yaśodā's child, the baby Durgā. The baby Durgā was taken out at night and her head smashed upon a rock.¹¹⁶ After the baby was killed by Kaṁṣa, a bright, terrifying form of Durgā, beautiful but with many weapons flew up into the sky and cursed Kaṁṣa. She said he would be killed by Kṛṣṇa and then went to stay at Vindhyacal.¹¹⁷

According to Ram Prasad Dubey, the head *pūjāri* of Durgā Mandir, who has a strong Vaiṣṇava orientation, the red scarf (*cunri*) placed on the Devī's head, on the second of Bhādrapada could symbolize Durgā's birth when the baby goddess's head was dashed on the rock by Kaṁṣa. 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 Bhādrapada, then why was Kṛṣṇa's birthday celebrated six days later, I asked? Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī, as the name suggests, is celebrated on the eighth of the waning fortnight of Bhādrapada. One answer offered by a devotee was that although Kṛṣṇa was born before the Devī, Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī 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 (*pūrṇimā*) of Śravaṇa, 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 Kṛṣṇa and Durgā. On Rakṣa Bandhana, the *pūjāri* 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

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

¹¹⁷The renowned temple of Vindhyavāsīnī, 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 *pūjāri*'s gesture here is best understood as a sign of the protective relationship between *brāhmanas* and *kṣatriyas*, or between Durgā and royalty. Durgā is a symbol of royal power.¹¹⁸ The *pūjāri*'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-Kaṁṣa 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 Kuṇḍ 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.¹¹⁹ 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

¹¹⁸Divine 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 Rāmlīlā celebrations 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 Rāvaṇa.

¹¹⁹All Śākta devotees are quite familiar with the Mahiṣa myth as it occurs in the *Durgā Saptāśatī* (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.¹²⁰ 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 Kaṃṣa 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 *sr̥ṅgāra* festival which takes place on the thirteenth to the fifteenth of Bhādrapada.¹²¹ 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 *māhātmya* with devotion and "proclaim" (*kīrtayiṣyanti*) the destruction of Madhu and Kaitābha, 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 *sr̥ṅgāra* we see a clear example of Devī worship on the fourteenth (of Bhādrapada). There is recitation of the *Rātrī Sūkta* and other appendages (*aṅga*) of the *Durgā Saptasatī* and thus "proclamation" of the Devī's demon slaying exploits. Here therefore, calendrical timing more strongly links the *sr̥ṅgāra* to the second myth cycle

¹²⁰Devotees often told me that the collective *śakti* 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 Purāṇas 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 Purāṇic (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.

¹²¹The 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 (*amāvasyā*). 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 *Sr̥ṅgāra*

The term *s̥ṅgāra* 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.¹²² The *s̥ṅgāra* 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.¹²³ The radiant beauty of Durgā is central to the sentiment of the *s̥ṅgāra* at the temple.¹²⁴ This dimension of captivating beauty and sexual allure resonates strongly with the themes of the second myth cycle, because the demon Mahiṣa, 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 *s̥ṅgāra* is further substantiated by the presence, in the not-to-distant past, of numerous prostitutes (*veśya*) and dancing girls who visited the

¹²²In Sanskrit poetics, *s̥ṅgāra* is one of eight to ten *rasas*, aesthetic sentiments. It is the erotic mood which corresponds to the basic emotion (*sthayi-bhava*) 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.

¹²³The *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 Gaṅgā 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.

¹²⁴The term *s̥ṅgāra* also means the kind of clothing which is suitable for amorous purposes (Monier-Williams 1986 [1899]:1087).

temple at this time.¹²⁵ 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 *sr̥ṅgāra* 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.¹²⁶ 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 *Rāmāyaṇā*). 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 Udāl, 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 Saptaśatī* are framed on precisely this story line where Durgā, collectively "fathered" by the gods, is a symbol of their joint power and

¹²⁵Prostitution in Banāras was commonplace until a few decades ago when it was strongly suppressed. The Dāl Maṇḍī 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.

¹²⁶I 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 Śaradā, to whom he finally offered his life, by self-decapitation. The lengthy oral ballad, parts of which are well-known among Banārasī Śāktas, abounds with episodes of battles fought to obtain brides.

suzerainty over the cosmos. The desire of Śumbha, Niśumbha and Mahiṣa 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 (*ratnabhujā*).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 (*durga*). 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 impregnability.

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 Kṛṣṇaite, post-Kaṁṣa, 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 Saptaśatī* 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., Mahiṣāsura-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 Śrīngāra

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 *śrīngāra*. Its silver and brass is polished, the *śikhara* 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.

¹²⁷See *Durgā Saptaśatī* 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.¹²⁸ 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 *pūjāri*, Ram Prasad, waves a large censer of one

¹²⁸The 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 *garbhagrha*, 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 *garbhagrha* 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 *daṇḍasvāmi*) 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 (*pradakṣiṇā*) of the temple, within the inner courtyard, taking *darśana* of Gaṇeśa, Rudra Bhairava, Śrī Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī and Bhadrakālī. At the back of the temple, they often reach up and devoutly touch the centre of the eight-petalled lotus (*aṣṭadala 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

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

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

¹³¹This is called *daṇḍavat praṇāma*, literally "salutation like a staff."

energy of the *rajas guṇa*.¹³²

Devotional Performance during the Śrīngāra

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 Sūkta* parts of the *Durgā Saptaśatī*.¹³³ These *brāhmaṇas* are commissioned by the temple management to perform this recitation and received a gratuity.¹³⁴ 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 Saptaśatī* text to the goddess of Durgā Mandir.¹³⁵ 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 *śrīngāra* 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

¹³²Significantly, I was told by a *brāhmaṇa*, according to his understanding of orthodoxy, that the *daṇḍasvāmīs* and other *sannyāsis* should not be present at the temple to attend the *śrīngāra* celebration. Their renunciation of worldly existence is supposed to include freedom from the worship of the divine in manifest forms. Carrying the staff (*daṇḍā*) of renunciation and having already undergone the rituals of their own death, they are supposed to seek the formless Brahman 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.

¹³³Technically, this is not part of the main body of the *Durgā Saptaśatī*, but is merely appended to most recitations. Most devotees who are familiar with the *Durgā Saptaśatī* only through hearing it being recited consider this Vedic hymn to belong to it.

¹³⁴These reciters (*pāṭha karnevala*) are generally competent *brāhmaṇas* who may serve as *pūjāris* in other small temples in the city, or specialist technicians of ritual worship (*karmakāṇḍī*).

¹³⁵By commissioning the recitation of the *Rātrī Sūkta*, the temple affirms the prestigious identification of the Devī with the Vedic hymn and deity.

night-long vigils (*rātrī jagarana*). 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 *sr̥ṅgāra*. 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 *sr̥ṅgāra* 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 *sr̥ṅgāra* attracted a royal audience as evidenced by the Devī's mask, donated by the king of Nepal, for use during this celebration. The *sr̥ṅgāra* 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 *sr̥ṅgāra* 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, aficionados 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 Durgājī's *srñgāra* 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, Durgājī mainly attracts local artists and thus remains one of the few centres of uncommercialized cultural performance. Typical performances include *śhnai*, *sītār*, and *tabla* recitals, male and female vocals of classical *rāgas*, and dance (normally *katthaka*). 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 *srñgāra* allowed me a better understanding of their relationship with the Devī. Performers come to Durgā's *srñgāra* 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 *srñgāra*, 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 *sr̥ṅāra*. Music professors and students from Banāras Hindu Univeristy, poets, and professional performers familiar with the city's night life brush shoulders with *sādhus*, *sannyāsis*, 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 *sr̥ṅāra* 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 *sr̥ṅāra*. 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 *sr̥ṅāra*, 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 Mīnākṣī, 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 Mīnākṣī'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).

courtyard of Durgājī at any time. I have, however, observed males dance spontaneously before the goddess at other Devī temples in India.¹³⁸ 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 *sr̥ṅgāra*. 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.¹³⁹ 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.¹⁴⁰

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

¹³⁸In 1990, at the temple of Avarī 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. Avarī Mātā has her abode in a village near Chittaurgarh, Rajasthan and is renowned for her healing powers.

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

¹⁴⁰Śumbha and Niśumbha, Madhu and Kaitabha, and Mahiṣa 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 Mohinī 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., Śābaras) and warriors (*kṣatriya*), 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 supernormal power (*siddhi*) to stay awake when necessary. A common epithet of Durgā is Siddhidātrī (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 (Uṣas) 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 Caṇḍī and Vindhyavāsini) among the tribal Śābaras mentioned in Bānabhaṭṭa's *Kādambarī* and Vākpati's *Gaudavaḥo*, 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 *Markaṇḍeya Purāṇā* (LXXXV.11ff) where Durgā has long been identified with a series of feminine nouns, such as *cetanā* (consciousness), *nidrā* (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 enmeshed 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 śakti*, or *vidyā śakti*, one of the triad of qualities of the supreme *śakti*.

The knowledge (*jñāna/vidyā*) conveyed by Durgā is towards a full understanding of her nature. Thus is it 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 intelligensia of the city pay their respects to Durgājī. 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 (*dāna*)."

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 *tamas guṇa*. *Manas* processes the perceptions of the five senses as they

buddhi (intellect) several times in the *Markaṇḍeya Purāna*. He points out that throughout the *Brahmāvaivarta Purāna*, 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 Saptaśatī* 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 (*mamatāvarṭte*) 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 Saptaśatī*, 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 *sr̥ṅgāra* 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 (*artha*) 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 (*mahātāpasvin*), 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

¹⁴⁴See, for instance, the *Śiva Purānā*, 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.

Durgāṣṭamī

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

Between the *sr̥ṅāra* 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 Kuṇḍ temple. These are Durgāṣṭamī, Jivat Putrikā, and Mātṛ Navamī. During Durgāṣṭamī, which is also known as Rādhāṣṭamī, women may take special vowed observances (*vrata*). In Durgā worship, these *vratas* 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.

Jivat Putrikā

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

Also called Jūtīya Vrata, Jivat Putrikā is an elaborate ritual performed by women for the longevity (*jivat*) 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 (*pitṛ 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 Saptaśatī* (Chapter 8), the Matr̥s are the feminine energy manifestations (*śakti*) of the male gods and include Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumarī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Nārasimhī, and Aindrī. Caṇḍikā (Durgā) herself produces a *śakti* of horrifying appearance who is called Śivadūtī, since she enlists Śiva as her messenger (*dūt*).

The mythic episode is interesting for several reasons. The Devī herself produces a *śakti*, indicating that the entities known as *śaktis*, although mostly derived from the male gods are not merely aspects of *their* power. The Devī's *śakti*, Śivadūtī, 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 (*śakti*) of all the male gods

¹⁴⁵See Kinsley 1986:151-160.

¹⁴⁶See also Kinsley 1986:151.

emanate from the Devī.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.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 (Śāktas) 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 Banāras. 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 *Durgā Saptasatī* by groups of *brāhmaṇas*, and the establishment of the Devī in a jar (*ghaṭa*) are discussed in Chapter Three. What is particularly noteworthy is that during Āśvina

¹⁴⁷See *Durgā Saptasatī*, Chapters 8.11 to 10.5.

¹⁴⁸The 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 Kāśī *maṇḍala*) 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 Āśvina or Śārādīya Navarātra (or *navarātri*) occurs in the month of Āśvina (September/October) which is one of the two months of the autumn (*śarada*) season.¹⁴⁹ 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.¹⁵⁰ 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 daṁṣṭrā*).¹⁵¹ 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.¹⁵² 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 (*naimitika*).

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 (*aṣṭamī*) of the nine day festival commemorates the goddess Saṭī'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 Rāvaṇa. In the Saṭī myth, Saṭī's father, Dakṣa, held a large Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) to which all the gods were invited.¹⁵³ Saṭī and her spouse, Śīva, were not invited due to Dakṣa's unfavorable appraisal of Śīva, a deity whose demeanour and habits were repugnant to the Vedic gods. Saṭī, in her innocence, thought the absence of an invitation was an oversight, and against Śīva's advice, attended the *yajña*. There she was ignored or spurned by her father and returned to Śīva at his abode on Kailāsa, humiliated.¹⁵⁴ To atone for this humiliation, Śīva, from a lock of his matted hair, created the auspicious hero, Vīrabhadra, and Saṭī created Bhadrakālī (Auspicious Kālī). 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 Rāvaṇa, the great demon devotee of Śīva, who had abducted Sītā.¹⁵⁵ On the advice of the ṛṣi Nārada, Rāma performed the worship of Durgā, although not at its traditional time in the spring. This

¹⁵³My 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.

¹⁵⁴In many devotees' versions of this myth, Saṭī killed herself and Vīrabhadra, created by Śīva, was the only agent of retribution.

¹⁵⁵I 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 Durgājī and Banāras while enroute back to Calcutta from Almora where they had vacationed. They said that this story is found in the *Kālikā Purāna*.

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.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 *sr̥ṅgāra* 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 (*pīṭha*), 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 preparatōn for the large numbers of people who will be visiting, the temple authorities construct a wooden barrier dividing the porch in half, sepāratīng 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

¹⁵⁶Incidentally, 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 Saptasatī*. The Durgās are not merely listed but, a fact whose significance should not be overlooked, they are sequentially ordered from Śailaputrī (Daughter of the Mountain), the first, to Siddhidātrī (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, Kuṣmāṇḍā.¹⁵⁷ 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 *darśana*. In another place, dressed in brilliant monocolour silk *luṅgīs*, sits a group of men, relaxed yet expectant. Ram Prasad, the *pūjāri*, has entered the *garbhagrha* and has begun the morning *pūjā* for the goddess. Other devotees have gathered, men and women, waiting on the porch.

¹⁵⁷Durgājī'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.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 Saptasatī* 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 *āratī*.¹⁵⁹ By the end of the day twenty to fifty thousand people have visited Durgājī. The range reflects the devotional rhythm during Navarātra. Thus the first day (*pratipada*) sees large numbers of devotees at Durgājī. The numbers are again large on the fourth day when Durgā Mandir is highlighted as Kuṣmāṇḍā 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.

¹⁵⁸For instance, the men in the silk/satin *luṅgīs* 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 Durgājī, 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.

¹⁵⁹I 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 *āratīs* 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.

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.¹⁶⁰ 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 Rāvaṇa, 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 Kaṁṣa, 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 Rāmlīlā which takes place with much pomp and grandeur in Banāras. Various neighbourhoods stage their own Rāmlīlās (Play of Rāma), reciting the adventures of Rāma as told in the *Rāmāyaṇās* and enacting certain well-known episodes in the mythic accounts. Of all the Rāmlīlās, 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 Rāmlīlā 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 Kaṭayas of several neighbourhoods in the city. They enact the episode in which Lakṣmaṇa cuts off the nose of Rāvaṇa's sister, Śūrpaṅkhā. The Rāmnagar

¹⁶⁰My 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.

Rāmlīlā terminates on Vijayā Daśamī with the celebration of Rāma's defeat of Rāvaṇa. A large paper and wood effigy of Rāvaṇa 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.¹⁶¹

In many ways, Vijayā Daśamī is a celebration not of one or the other mythic episode, but of Victory herself, personified as the Devī.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. Attendants 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 (*aṣṭamī*). 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, Rāmlīlā 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 Rāmlīlā is waning in Banāras. People, perhaps correctly, attribute this trend to the advent of television in the city. The televised serialization of the *Rāmāyaṇā* 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 Rāmlīlā 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

¹⁶¹I have seen how in certain towns in Maharashtra the Rāvaṇa image is set ablaze by shooting flaming arrows into it.

¹⁶²One of the epithets of Durgā is Vijayā (Victory). See *Mahābhārata*, Virāṭa 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 Rāvaṇa.

century, and perhaps fifty or so in the early seventies, now twenty years later there are over one hundred and fifty.¹⁶³

Lakṣmī Pūjā

[Fourth of the Waning Fortnight of Kārtikeya (October/November)]

With the exception of Annakūta, the religious festivals which take place between Vijayā Daśamī and the spring Navarātra are tangential but related to Durgā worship. For instance, I discuss festival days, such as Holī, 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 Kuṇḍ temple on days sacred to those deities. My discussion of their festivals illustrates how the yearly cycle orchestrates the waxing and waning of the *maṇḍalas* of other deities as well as Durgā. The Durgājī *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 *yantra* contracts, after Navarātra, it is not isolated from the religious activity which is occurring in the rest of Banāras. Durgājī's *yantra* is intersected by the expanding *maṇḍalas* 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 (*lakṣmī paṭṭā*) on which the goddess and her mount, the owl (*ullū*), are

¹⁶³It 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 Bengālī Tolā district of the city.

painted.¹⁶⁴ She is worshipped with the standard sixteen item devotional service (*ṣoḍaśa upacāra*) and fire oblations (*havana*), 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 guṇa*, one of the triad of qualities of Prakṛti. The *rajas guṇa* balances the flow between the *sattva* and *tamas guṇas* in two directions. Prakṛti, through it, moves from unity, via creation, to diversity and eventually to dissolution. The *rajas guṇa* 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 Gaṇeśa.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴Lakṣmī, 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 "ullū" 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.

¹⁶⁵It 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 Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed god. Lakṣmī is almost always associated with Gaṇeśa in the Durgā Pūjā image cluster. However, I was told that certain Bengālī castes such as the *vaidyas* associate Kārtikeya with Lakṣmī, and Gaṇeśa with Sarasvatī in the Durgā Pūjā image cluster.. One explanation lies in the ambiguous spousal relationships of Gaṇeśa, who is sometimes considered to be a "bachelor," although he is often thought of as having two wives, ṛddhī (Accomplishment) and Siddhī (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 *yoginīs* and the *mātrkāś*. 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 Banārasīs this is like a New Year's celebration. Homes are freshly painted and new clothes are purchased. To some Dīpāvalī is a celebration of Kṛṣṇa's defeat of Narakāśura, but to most Banārasīs it commemorates Rāma's victorious return to Ayodhyā after his defeat of Rāvaṇa (which was celebrated on Vijayā Daśamī). For the Bengālī 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

Bhadrakālī at Durgājī gets her share of attention, particularly by tantrics. The Lakṣmī shrine in Durgā Mandir being much newer, gets far less attention on this day.

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

Annakūṭa

[First of the Waxing Fortnight of Kārtikeya (October/November)]

The day following Dīpāvalī is the festival of Annakūṭa, 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 Annakūṭa, means "mountain of sustenance" and is linked primarily with Kṛṣṇaite and Śākta myth cycles.¹⁶⁶ The first myth recalls the incident when Kṛṣṇa, who had produced a bounty of food on the hill, Govardhana, in Vṛndāvana, aroused the jealousy of Indra.¹⁶⁷ While Kṛṣṇa and his friends were enjoying a sumptuous meal on the mountain, Indra caused a

¹⁶⁶Annapūrnā is the name of one of the tallest and most visible peaks in the Himālayas.

¹⁶⁷This is a composite of a few versions I heard in casual conversations with visitors at Durgājī on the festival day.

storm to rage.¹⁶⁸ Kṛṣṇa protected his cowherd friends by holding up the mountain with a single finger.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 Kāśī.¹⁷⁰ Here she began to distribute food in vast quantities to the needy of the whole world. Finally, Śiva himself, starved of food (*anna hīna*) and love (*kāma hīna*), arrived in Banāras as a naked (*vastra 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 Kāśī. 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.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 (*kiśamiśa*). An afternoon *āratī* is held after which children, mendicants (mainly itinerant *sādhus* and *daṇḍasvāmis*), and devotees collect the blessed food distributed by the temple (*prasāda*). Disgruntled devotees point out how two qualities of

¹⁶⁸One visitor said Indra caused it to rain for seven days and Kṛṣṇā held the mountain aloft for seven days.

¹⁶⁹This 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 Bhārat Kalā Bhavan museum (No. 147). See photograph in Eck 1982:66.

¹⁷⁰I 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 Banāraśi 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.

¹⁷¹One 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 Annapūrṇā at her temple at the end of Viśvanātha lane (*gali*). However, it is clear that Durgājī is also identified with Annapūrṇā. During Annakūṭa, the Annapūrṇā 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 *sr̥ṅgāra*. It suggests that the goddess "born" at the *sr̥ṅgāra* is the same one worshipped during Annakūṭa. The Durgā Kuṇḍ and Annapūrṇā 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 *kuśmāṇḍā* 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 Bhrātr̥ Dvītīyā (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, Bhrātr̥ Dvītīyā 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 *kuṇḍa*, 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

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

¹⁷³A 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 *darśana*, 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.

Jagaddhātrī 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 (Jagaddhātrī) is mainly celebrated in Bengālī homes.¹⁷⁴ The goddess is worshipped three times on a single day at the traditional juncture periods (*sañdhya*), dawn, high noon, and dusk with simplified versions of the elaborate Durgā Pūjā rituals which are performed on the seventh (*saptamī*), eighth (*aṣṭamī*), and ninth (*navamī*) 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 Mahiṣamardinī flanked by Gaṇeśa, 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 Jagaddhātrī 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 (*sañkranti*) of Kārtikeya in honor of the god Kārtikeya. Kārtikeya, also called Skanda (and Murugan in South India where he is very

¹⁷⁴I was told by several Banārasīs of Bengālī background that the most famous centre of Jagaddhātrī Pūjā is in Bengal, at Candanagar, near Calcutta. The following description of the celebration comes from these sources. The Jagaddhātrī Pūjā appears to be a Bengālī equivalent of the harvest celebrations of Annakūta.

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 (*mahiṣāsura*) to Skanda.¹⁷⁵ This mythological deed is eventually attributed to Durgā whose mythological exploits in the *Durgā Saptasatī* 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.¹⁷⁶ Devotees generally worship him in their home shrines.

Bhairavaṣṭamī

[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 Kuṣmāṇḍā 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

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

¹⁷⁶Skanda-Kārtikeya's popularity in Banāras diminished after the Gupta period. See P. K. Agrawala (1967).

gateway into the sacred city.¹⁷⁷

Hari Utthāna Ekādaśī

[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.¹⁷⁸ 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 Saptasatī* (Chapter One) and *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (I.6-9) recounts how Brahmā, the creator god, when threatened by the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha, 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.

¹⁷⁷Kinsley discusses the role of such goddesses as Gaṅgā 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 *maṇḍala* of Kāśī.

¹⁷⁸Also see the festival of Hari Ekādaśī, below.

During the Rāmlīlā period of festivities, the Durgā Kuṇḍ 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 Purāna*, 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 *vīṇā*.

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 (*ṣoḍaśa upacāra*) and fire oblation (*havan*).¹⁷⁹ 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 (*puṣpāñjali*) 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 (*āratī*), paid reverence (*praṇāma*), and delivered (*visarjana*) into the Gaṅgā.

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

¹⁷⁹She may also be worshipped with *ṣoḍaśopacāra* and no *havan*, or a ten-part devotional service (*daśopacāra*) and a thrice-repeated flower salutation (*puṣpāñjali*). 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 Mahākālī. 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. Gaṇeśa, 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 Maharashtra, his clay image is disposed of into nearby waters. Perhaps this disposal owes to his ambivalent nature, for Gaṇeśa is a deity who not only removes obstacles but may also create them.¹⁸⁰ Thus it might be too dangerous to have Gaṇeśa around always. Durgā, as this study reveals, embodies a surprising array of qualities among which is included a dangerous fearsome nature like Gaṇeśa. Her stay, during the Durgā Pūjā, is also short.

¹⁸⁰A comprehensive discussion of Gaṇeśa 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 Phalguṇa (February/March)]

This great night of Śiva (*mahāśivarātri*) is hardly considered a *pūjā*, and is better known as a pledged devotional activity (*vrata*).¹⁸¹ 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 Caṇḍa Bhairava, one of the city's eight guardians, at Durgājī draws people there. So does the *liṅga* of Kukkūṭeśvara Mahādeva. Inevitably people also take *darśana* of the Devī on this occasion.

I heard from Banārasīs 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 (*gaṅgā 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.¹⁸² 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

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

¹⁸²I 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 (*ghrta/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 (*bhāṅg*) may be consumed.¹⁸³ The practice is not restricted to males, although women consume less *bhāṅg* 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 (*katha*), or songs of praise (*stotra*) such as the *Mahimanā Stotra* or *Śiva Sahasranāma* may take place.

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

¹⁸³The 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 Pārvaṭī is casually engaged in stringing a necklace of severed human heads. Afficionados of *bhāṅg* jokingly interpret the very name of the city, Banāras, as meaning "preparing *bhāṅg*" (*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 (*gañja*) 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 Śailaputrī (Daughter of the Mountain) and Pārvaṭī (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 injected in a mixture of other pure foods. The ground hemp leaf (*bhāṅg*) is often eaten in a little sweet ball (*ladū*) 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 *ṭhaṇḍhāt* (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 *bhāṅg*, mixed with water, straight up with a squeeze of lime juice. Other preparations such as *bhāṅg* almond biscuits (*nanketai*), sold in discreet locations, are also available in the city. On the recreational uses of *bhāṅg* among the artisans of Banāras, see Kumar (1988).

Śiva's spouse solidifies her importance among Śaivites.

Holī

[Full Moon of Phalguṇa (February/March)]

Holī vies with Dīpavalī as the biggest festival in Banāras among the non-Bengālī Hindu community. On Holī huge bonfires are lit all over the city. Boys and young men cavort around the fires and move in groups, yelling obscenities (*gāllī*) and rough-housing with whomever they encounter. The mood is mischievous and the result is mayhem. Copious quantities of *bhāṅg* 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.¹⁸⁴ 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.¹⁸⁵

Holī 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.¹⁸⁶

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

¹⁸⁵These 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 Hoḷī.

Certain Durgā-worshipping Śākta tantrics, who perform private ritualized spiritual practices (*sādhana*) on Hoḷī, admitted that they include the five element (*pañcatattva*) *pūjā* normally associated with what is called the left-hand (*vāmācārā*) tantric path (*mārga*). This *pūjā* involves the ritual participation in five things which are normally considered impure or prohibited. Since Hoḷī typically is a festival of reversal, or of anti-structure, when the traditional hierarchy of values is temporarily dissolved before being reconstituted anew, the *pañcatattva* 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 (*mamsa*), fish (*matsya*), intoxicating beverages (*mada*), and parched grain snacks (*mudra*), and sexual intercourse (*maithuna*). The *pañcamākāra/pañcatattva* ritual may be performed within a circle (*cakra*) of practitioners (*sādhaka*), but the tantrics 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 tantrics expressed disgust when I asked them about this interpretive elaboration on the varieties of the *maithuna tattva*. In this ritual, substantial amounts of *bhāṅg* are consumed, quite in keeping with the public celebration of Hoḷī. The *bhāṅg* is called Vijayā (victory), which is an epithet of Durgā, reinforcing her

¹⁸⁷A classic description of the festival of Hoḷī 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 Hoḷī, 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.¹⁸⁸ 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 Āśvina 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, Durgā 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 Svārociṣa Manvantara.¹⁸⁹ This myth, often called the frame story for the

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

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

*śaratkāle mahāpūjā kriyate yā ca vārṣikī/
tasyāṃ mamaitanmāhātmyaṃ śruvā bhaktisaminvitaḥ//12*

manuṣyo matprasādena bhaviṣyati na saṃsayah//13

demon-slaying exploits of the Devī, is contained in the *Durgā Saptaśatī* (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 Kolāvidvamsin 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 (*vaiśya*) Samādhi, 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 Durgā, as the source of delusion who if propitiated grants pleasures (*bhoga*), heaven (*svārga*), and ultimate fulfillment (*apavarga*) (1.34-44).

In order to obtain a vision of the Devī, 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 Devī, 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).

Devotees familiar with the *Durgā Saptaśatī* who disagree with the above interpretation, agree with the verses' reference to autumn worship but believe that Suratha and Samādhi's worship was during the spring. Many reciters of the text do not understand the Sanskrit text exactly, knowing the approximate content through oral tradition or vernacular translations or summaries. It is possible that the connection of Suratha with Caitra comes from verse 1.4 of the *Durgā Saptaśatī* which states that Suratha was born in the family of Caitra.

*svārociṣe 'ntare pūrvam caitravamśasamudbhavaḥ/
suratho nāma rājābhūtsamaste kṣitimāṇḍale//4*

Those who are aware of the myth cycle of Rāma's worship of Durgā and his awakening of the goddess at the abnormal time (*akāla bodhana*), feel that this spring period is the traditional time for Devī worship.

Another myth concerns Rāvaṇa's worship of Durgā.¹⁹⁰ Rāvaṇa, the demon king of Laṅka, 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 Rāvaṇa he had to gain the favour of Durgā and so invoked her at a different time (the autumn) and asked Rāvaṇa to preside as the priest (*purohita*). This myth of Rāma and Rāvaṇa'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 (Laṅka), the *brāhmaṇa* (Rāvaṇa), and the god Śiva was supplanted or supplemented by Devī worship associated with the autumn (Śarada), the North (Ayodhyā), the *ksatriya* (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 (*paṇḍal*) where large straw and earth images of the goddess are established and worshipped.¹⁹¹ In the few Bengālī homes which still celebrate the Āśvina Navarātra elaborately, there is no elaborate *pūjā* during the spring festival. Devotees (Bengālī and other) who do perform home worship of the Devī at this time restrict themselves to establishment of the goddess

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 āśrama in Banāras, where the Durgā Pūjā ritual is celebrated in identical fashion during both Navarātras with a large image of Durgā as Mahiṣāsūramardīnī.

in an earthen jar (*ghaṭa*) and recitation of the *Durgā Saptāśatī*. The virtual absence of public, community organized, *paṇḍal* 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 Banāras.¹⁹² 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 Śrīngāra Gaurī, the fourth of the Nine Gaurīs, is the same as Kuṣmāṇḍā 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

¹⁹²The newspapers of Banāras, 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.¹⁹³ At the end of the nine days, the grains in the earth altar have sprouted and these sprouts are sometimes worn behind the ear.¹⁹⁴

The rural participation in Durgā 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.¹⁹⁵ 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.¹⁹⁶ 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 Saptasatī*, 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

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

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

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

¹⁹⁶These 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 Saptasatī*, 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 Saptasatī*.

The Rama-Rāvaṇa myth of the origin of the Āśvina 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 āṣāḍha (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 Banārasīs 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, Kṛṣṇa, to abduct and wed her, one of the legitimate forms of marriage for a warrior.¹⁹⁸ Subhadrā is also known as Ekanāmsā (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 Kṛṣṇa'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 (Kṛṣṇa) sister. The myth of Subhadrā's abduction and marriage by Arjuna parallels the myths of the *Durgā Saptaśatī* 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 Kṛṣṇa, 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 Āṣāḍha (June/July)]

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

¹⁹⁸A 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.¹⁹⁹ The period of Viṣṇu's sleep in the yearly calendrical cycle reenacts the larger cycle of cosmic dissolution called the *pralaya*.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 Saptasatī* (1.49-53) and the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (I.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 Kaitābha. 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.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

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

²⁰⁰There 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.

²⁰¹In 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 Śravaṇa, followed by Durgā's birth and *sr̥ṅgāra* in Bhādrapada, Mahālakṣmī Vrata, the Āśvina Navarātra, Dīpāvalī or Kālī Pūjā, Annakūta, and Jagaddhātṛī 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.

Śravaṇa Mela

[The Entire Month of Śravaṇa (June/July)]

This is a month long fair which takes place mainly on the grounds of the Durgā Mandir.²⁰² It draws thousands of people from the neighbouring villages who visit Śiva temples (primarily Viśvanātha) on Mondays, and Devī temples (primarily Durgājī) on Tuesdays. The grounds of Durgājī 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 Durgājī, 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 Banāras offers.²⁰³

²⁰²While Durgājī's land used to be the main location of the fair grounds, the Śravaṇa 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 Devī'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 Devī's presence is palpable and her grace accessible. It is a place of power and supernormal attainment (*siddha pīṭha*). 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 *kunḍa*, 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.²⁰⁴ 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 (*śānti*). 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

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 *kunḍa* and the temple are in fact thought of as the Devī. During the *sr̥ṅgāra*, 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 *kunḍa* 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 (*pīṭha*) 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 Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva, the legendary *pūjāri* who was sacrificed to Durgājī. By being sacrificed, Kukkuteśvara 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, Kukkuteśvara 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 Kukkuteśvara Mahādeva occasionally goes to

the *garbhagr̥ha* at night, they say it is to perform a traditional priestly *pūjā* 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 (*ādvaita*) 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.²⁰⁵ 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 Saptasatī*, 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.²⁰⁶ Their livelihood, in those days of kingly warfare, would have depended on the quality of their workmanship, which, in turn, would have

²⁰⁵I have encountered non-Śākta Hindus who refer to Durgā as the cause of disease.

²⁰⁶Kumar refers to the *kṣatriya* class claims made by the *kasera* caste of metalworkers in Banāras (1988:58).

depended on Durgā's grace.²⁰⁷ 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 (*āyudha 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 Samādhi, 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

²⁰⁷As previously mentioned, the *ṭhathera jāti* 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 (*āyudha*) and armour (*kavaca*) were well employed. From the Śākta perspective, recalling the notion of *śakti* 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 Saṭī 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., Maḥiṣa). Through their activity, they rectify a cosmic imbalance. Dakṣa, hierarchically supreme, has sunk in divinity (become demonic) due to his treatment of Saṭī (hierarchically low, but spiritually supreme). Saṭī creates a divine "demonic form," Bhadrakālī, who destroys this demonic divine form (Dakṣa) restoring the spiritually supreme (Saṭī, 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, Maḥiṣa 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, Maḥiṣa'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 Maḥiṣa'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 (*siddhidātrī*). 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 Maḥiṣa 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 Śakta 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., Jagaddhātṛī, Annapūrṇā, Kuṣmāṇḍā). 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 Gaṇeśa, 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., Gaṇeśa, 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 *śakti*, 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 Kuṇḍ 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 (*pitṛ pakṣa*). On the ninth day of that fortnight, known as the Ninth of the Maternal Ancestors (*mātr navamī*), 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.²⁰⁸ 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 publically 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

²⁰⁸Banāras 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 Banāras's religious culture. The city exudes its own character which is readily recognized as distinctly Banārasī. 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 "Banārasīpan" (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 Banārasīs (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.²⁰⁹ Were one to depict the religious character of Banāras with broad brush strokes, one would note that Śīva is clearly the prominent deity in Banāras. B. Saraswati (1975:49-50) correctly notes that the adjectives which Banārasīs apply to themselves, such as *masti* (pleasantly inebriated) or *phakkarpan* (carefreeness), are equally applied to Śīva. Indeed the whole of Kāśī is "allegorically known as *mahashmashan* (the great cremation ground) - the playground of Shiva" (Saraswati 1975:50). Banārasīs both implicitly and explicitly identify themselves as descendents of Śīva or as members of his cohorts (*gana*). Of course, Banārasīs 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 Śīva. Naturally, it is the Śākta strand which is most active in goddess worshipping activities during Navarātra, but

²⁰⁹A comprehensive summary of the cultural traditions of Banāras are found in B. Saraswati (1975). Saraswati briefly traces the origins of and continuities within Banārasī 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 Banārasīs.

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 *ghata*, 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.²¹⁰ 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).²¹¹ 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 (*simhavāhint*), or in her form as Crusher of the Buffalo Demon (Mahiṣāsūramardinī). 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 *Caṇḍī Pāṭha* (Recitation to Caṇḍī), but again, most devotees with whom I spoke used the epithets Caṇḍī and Durgā as synonymous appellations for the same goddess.

important goddesses such as Lakṣmī 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 Saptasatī*, 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 Āśvina Navarātra has led to an almost synonymous application of the term Durgā Pūjā for the Āśvina 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 *mandālas*, 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 Saptasatī* 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 *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*,

an important section of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, is essentially a glorification (*māhātmya*) 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 (*śakti*), 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 purāṇic 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 purāṇic 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 Kuṇḍ 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

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 (*agarbattī*); (4) a flame (*dīpa*) waved before the image, generally clarified butter (*ghi*) or camphor (*karpūra*) ignited in a clay lamp; and (5) some edible food (*naivedya*), often a sweet (*mithāī*) 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

²¹³A pseudonym.

sunrise, or they may decide to consume only curd (*dadhi*), 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*: *Aiṃ Hrīm Klīm Cāmuṇḍāyāi Bicce*. 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 *paṇḍal*, 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 *śrṅgāra*? 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 Navamī.

My question: Why do you fast?

√: 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 *śrṅgāra* 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 Durgā, the daughter of the mountain, as a young virgin who is about to begin menstruation. *Śrṅgāra* is a type of water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) with a leathery black skinned, horned (*śrṅga*) 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 *kuṣu cāval*, which I understood to be a type of brown, or unprocessed rice.

II. Establishing the Jar (Ghaṭa)

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 (*ghaṭa* 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 *ghaṭa*. 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 *sārī*. "We think that Durgā comes to live inside this jar," said a young *brāhmaṇa* wife when describing their family's *pūjā*. The jar is worshipped with the five-part devotional service (*pañca 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 Saptasatī* 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.²¹⁴ The jar may be set upon an altar which is an elaborate mystical diagram (*maṇḍala*) 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 (*pañca ratna*) 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 (*kāṇḍa 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 Saptasatī* 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 *ghaṭa*.²¹⁵ These installations are often followed with the worship of the sixteen maternal ancestors (*ṣoḍaśa mātṛkā*), which are represented by sixteen spots

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

²¹⁵Gaṇeśa may be worshipped in the form of a betel nut bound in string, which signifies his *yajñopavīta* (sacred thread), and Gaurī (or Ambikā) is worshipped in the form of a lump of cow dung.

of vermilion on a flat surface.²¹⁶

Significantly, there is no installation of a *ghaṭa* at Durgājī, although *ghaṭas* are enshrined at most other Devī temples. When asked why the *ghaṭa* is not installed at Durgājī, the chief *pūjāri* said it was unnecessary, since Durgājī was an abode (*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 Kuṇḍ 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 *yantra* whose sphere of influence (*maṇḍala*) encompasses the whole of Banāras during Navarātra. Each *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 Tiwari²¹⁷, a devout Śākta given to intellectual reflection on his practices, said:

You may interpret the jar (*kalaśa*) 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.

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

²¹⁶The 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.

²¹⁷A 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 Devī in a Temple

A: Darśana

Many devotees choose to worship the Devī 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 Devī in Banāras, whether present in a permanent temple icon or a temporarily established form such as the *ghaṭa*, 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). Devī 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

²¹⁸On 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 *pūjāri*. The *pūjāri* 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 (*puspamālā*) 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 (*ṣoḍaśa 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 tie-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 (*ilāyact 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 *pūjāri* 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 *prasāda*. The entire coconut or half of it is returned to the devotees as *prasāda*. 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 *carana 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 *brāhmanas*, 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 Sūkta* 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, Prakṛtī, 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 Purāna* 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 *pūjās*, 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.²²⁰ Durgā is, after all, perceived to be within the constituent elements of the *pūjā* offerings. In the scent of the sandalwood paste, the incense, and the fresh flowers, devotees are smelling the body of the Devī. Therefore, in *pūjā*, the gross (*mahābhūta*) and subtle elements (*tammātra*) of creation (i.e., the *pūjā* 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 *pūjā* 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.²²¹ In the act of circumambulation, prostration, the recitation of prayers, and the eating of *prasāda*,

²²⁰Banārasī 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.

²²¹See Kumar (1988:89,95) for a discussion on the relationship between defecation and bathing (*nipaṭanā-nahānā*) in Banārasī 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 (*ṛtṣnāna*)), and have donned clean clothes.

the action faculties are fully involved in the process of temple *pūjā*. These faculties, in turn, through concentrated devotion, are integrated with the inner faculties of consciousness (i.e., mind (*manas*), ego (*ahaṅkāra*), 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 *pūjā*'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 *pūjā* 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 *pūjā* 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 *pūjā*, 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 Śākta 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

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.²²⁴ Kukkuṭeśvara Mahādeva, the most renowned human sacrifice at the Durgā Kuṇḍ 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 Śāradā, in the city of Mahoba.²²⁵ 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

²²⁴Vogel (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.

²²⁵A 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 Saptaśatī*, worship Durgā with blood from their limbs, but not through decapitation. The goddess Kālī is normally shown grasping a human head which she has severed.

Significantly, the most frequently encountered image (although these are not very common in Banāras) of voluntary self decapitation is that of the goddess Chinnamastā.²²⁶ Chinnamastā severs her own head and nourishes herself and her attendants from the flow of blood. The fruit offerings in *pūjā*, 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 *ghaṭa*, 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 *pūjā* or the items offered to these symbolic underpinnings. To them, *pūjā* 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 *pūjā*, I suggest, is revealed in its expanded form, especially as it is interpreted by its specialist performers (*karmakāṇḍī*), the priests

²²⁶A 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 (*mahāvīdyā*), 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, *pūjāris* 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 (*mundaṇa*) of a child's hair (see Figure 9). *Mundaṇa* 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 (*saṃskāra*) 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 *saṃskāra* 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 (*ātā*) 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 *muṇḍana*. In these more elaborate celebrations, I occasionally noticed gifts of a new *sāṛī* given to a woman in the party. One of the barbers who often performed *muṇḍanas* at Durgājī said he thought it was the husband's sister who most often got such a gift. *Muṇḍana*, like many Hindu *saṃskāras*, 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

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

²²⁸A 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 (*pinḍa*), and discarded. Since the hair is formed into a *pinḍa* (symbolizing the body in such acts as the *sapinḍikaradāna* parts of the death ritual (*śrāddha*)) and occasionally discarded into a sanctified place, like a *kunḍa*, it is appropriate to interpret it as some form of sacrificial offering, although its meaning is vague. Whether the *pinḍa* 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 (*muṇḍana*) 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 *muṇḍana* 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 (*ghaṇṭa*) 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 Banāras. His act parallels Rānī Bhavānī's building of Durgājī and follows in the tradition of charitable giving (*dāna*). Unlike Rānī 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 Banāras temple worship, and at present appears to be sanctioned by tradition and temple authorities in only one place, the Durgā Kuṇḍ 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. Gaṇeśa Rāma Mallika*. Edited by Dhruva Agravāla. Vārānasī: 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 *kunḍa*" 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

²³¹The 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 (*khukharī*). 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 *pūjāri* 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 Devī, 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 Devī, and which sacrificers then, in turn consume. By eating the offerings of their own lives, consecrated by the Devī'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.²³² 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 Devī'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

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 *tamas 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 *tamas 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 kuṣmāṇḍā melons.²³³ 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.²³⁴ Mythologically, the male gods produced the Devī with spiritual effulgence which flowed from their foreheads or mouths. Male offspring

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 verisons of the philosophy believe that the semen originates there" (1980:46).

are valued as the containers of the seed which continues the lineage. In Kuṇḍalinī Yoga philosophy, the male principle, Śiva, resides in the head, the female principle lies dormant below.²³⁵ 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 than 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 (*dakṣiṇā*) 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

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 (*dharmasālā*) 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 (*pūrt*), curried vegetables (*sabji*) like potatoes (*ālū*) or okra (*bhīndī*), 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 Banāras.

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 Badrīnāth or Vaiṣṇo 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 Saptasatī

As previously mentioned the recitation (*pāṭha*) of the *Durgā Saptasatī* (also called the *Devī-Māhātmya*, or the *Caṇḍī Pāṭha*) 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 (*sādhana*) 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, *sādhana* is spiritual practice in the form of yogic acts, or devotional service, to compel the deity to satisfy the devotee's request. *Sādhakas*, 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 Saptaśatī*. 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 Saptaśatī* once through, on its own.²³⁶ 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 *Rātri Sūkta* (Hymn to the [Goddess] Night) from the *Ṛg Veda* (10.127) is recited just before commencing the main text. After the main text, the reciter reads the *Devī Sūkta* (Hymn to the Goddess) from the *Ṛg Veda* (10.125), and the remaining three appendages. These are the *Prādhānika Rahasya* (Mystery of the Supreme [Prakṛtī]), the *Vaikṛtika Rahasya* (Mystery of the Modifications), and the *Mūrti Rahasya* (Mystery of the Forms).

²³⁶The text 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 (*bīja*), or even just one seed syllable (*bīja*). The entire text can thus be recited quickly, or frequently. *Bījas* may be mixed with regular verses in combination with "boxing" (*samputa*), generating innumerable variations.²³⁷ Some variations may have the reciter stand and perform a full prostration between each verse (*dandapraṇāma paṭha*), or perform recitations before a continually burning lamp (*dīpakapraṇāma paṭha*).

Although tradition holds that only males should recite the *Durgā Saptasatī*, 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

²³⁷According to Coburn, Cynthia Humes (whose work is still in progress) identifies over forty "taxonomically distinct types of recitation of the *Saptasatī*," 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 (*sādhana*), 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 Saptaśati* 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 (*māhātmya*) of the Devī brings immeasurable benefits.

Closer inspection of the ritualized recitation of the *Durgā Saptaśati* 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 (*vaikṛti*) is reintegrated with its highest source (*pradhāna*). I concur with Thomas Coburn's suggestion that devotees

encounter the goddess through the *Durgā Saptaśatī* 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 Saptaśatī* enjoys tremendous status and is incorporated into the *Markaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, the appendages (*aṅga*) are not found in any of the *purāṇas* to which they were ascribed. However they are considered to be part of the corpus of purāṇic literature and are frequently found together with printed versions of the *Durgā Saptaśatī*. Most non-reciting devotees, who are familiar with the text through listening to it, consider the *aṅgas* to be part of the text. The *Devī 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 *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (III.19.34-37), the widowed queen Manorāmā 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,

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 *Durgā Saptaśatī*.

The *Devī Argalā*, 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 *Argalā* is "Grant (me) the form (or an appearance), grant victory, grant fame, destroy (my) enemies" (*rūpaṃ dehi jayaṃ dehi yaśo dehi dviṣo 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 *Argalā*, 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 *Kīlaka*, is the fastening pin or bolt which unlocks or unleashes the power of the main text.

The *Rātrī Sūkta* and *Devī Sūkta* which respectively precede and follow the *Durgā Saptaśatī* 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 (*guṇa*) 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 Navadurgā 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

²⁴⁰Translations 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 Saptaśatī*. 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 (*navapatrikā*) worshipped during Navarātra, or the names attributed to the nine virgin girls worshipped during *kumārī 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 Saptaśatī* itself, but from the *Devī Kavaca*, an appendage (*aṅga*) to the text. The *Devī Kavaca* is virtually undistinguished from the *Durgā Saptaśatī* in the minds of most devotees. The *Devī Kavaca* states:

*prathamam śailaputrī ca dvītyam brahmacārīnī/
trītyam candraghaṇṭeti kūṣmāṇḍeti caturthakam//3//
pañcamam skandamāteti saṣṭham kātyāyanī ca/
saptamam kālarātrī mahāgaurī cāṣṭamam//4//
navamam siddhidātrī ca navadurgāḥ prakṛtitāḥ
uktānyetāni nāmāni brahmaṇaiva mahātmanā//5//*

The first is Śailaputrī, and the second is Brahmacārīnī,
The third Candraghaṇṭā, the fourth Kuṣmāṇḍā,
The fifth Skandamātā and the sixth Kātyāyanī,
The seventh Kālarātrī and the eighth Mahāgaurī,
And the ninth is Siddhidatrī. These are proclaimed the Nine Durgās.
These names were uttered verily by the supreme Brahmā.

The *Kāśī 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 (*vindhyacalakṛtālaya*) slew the demon Durga, and after adopting his name came to reside together with her eight energy manifestations (*śakti*) in Banāras.²⁴² One of those *śaktis* is named Kālarātrī, linking this myth's cluster of Nine Durgās to the cluster in the *Devī Kavaca*. The *Kāśī 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 *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 72.82-86.

at Durgā Kuṇḍ and that her eight *śaktis* 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 Khaṇḍa*. The current locations of the Nine Durgās of the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage are as follows:

1. Śailaputrī: (also called Saileśvarī Devī) is located on the northern most edge of the city at Madhiya Ghāṭ on the Varana River.
2. Brahmācāriṇī: (also called Choti Durgājī, "little Durgā") is near Durgā Ghāṭ at House Number K 22/71.
3. Candraghaṇṭā: (also called Citraghaṇṭā) is at Lakhichautara Gali off Chowk at House Number Ck 23/24.
4. Kuṣmāṇḍā: (also called Bari Durgā, "Big Durgā") is at the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple.
5. Skandamātā: (also called Vagīśvari) is in Jaitpura, east of Nāg Kuan.
6. Kātyāyanī: is located in Ātmavīreśvara Temple.
7. Kālarātrī: (also called Kālī) is in Kālikā Gali.
8. Mahāgaurī: (also called Annapūrṇā) is in the Annapūrṇā temple besides Viśvanatha temple. (Some consider Saṅkaṭa Devī to be Mahāgaurī.)
9. Siddhidatrī: (also called Siddhayogeśvarī or Siddheśvarī) is south of Maidagin, west of Kāla Bhairava 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 *garbhagrha* for the first sight of the goddess as early as three o'clock in the morning. Several stalls selling offering

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 (*rātra*) dimensions of the festival (*navarātra*) and the Devī (Rātrī, 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 *pūjāri* ministering to the Devī. He is engaged in some variant of a sixteen-part devotional service (*ṣoḍaśa 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 *pūjāris* have to hold the throng at bay outside the *garbhagrha*. 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" (*Mā ko mālā do*), yell others. Most have brought coconuts which are smashed by the *pūjāri*. 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 *pūjāri* and *mahant*, simply known as Mahārāj, as many as fifty thousand people will visit the temple that day.²⁴⁴ The numbers will

²⁴⁴I cannot confirm these numbers although they are not unreasonably inflated. Counts I have made at the Durgā Kuṇḍ 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 Śailaputrī 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 Kuṣmāṇḍā (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/Kāśī *maṇḍala*, making itself highly available in the locations of their temples, throughout Navarātra, but most intensely, on each Durgā's particular day. So while some

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

²⁴⁶Among these less frequented temples are Śailaputrī, Brahmācārīnī, Candraghaṇṭā, Skandamātā, and Siddhidatrī.

²⁴⁷A detailed description of worship patterns throughout the year, including the Navarātra celebrations, at the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple (Durgājī) is given in Chapter Two. Durgājī is often called Baṛī 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 Banāraśi 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. Śailaputrī

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

Śailaputrī 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,

²⁴⁹A textual version of this myth is found, for instance, in the *Śiva Purāna*, Rudra-saṃhitā 3.5.31.

²⁵⁰The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, Chapters 71 and 72, tells how the Devī, who dwelt in the Vindhya mountains (*vindhyacalakṛtālayam*) took up residence in Banāras under the name Durgā, a name she adopted after slaying the demon Durga. Most devotees at Durgājī make some kind of connection between the goddess in Banāras, and Vindhyavāsīnī 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 Banārasī 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 Vindhyavāsīnī (*Vindhyavāsīnt Cālīsa*), both of which are placed at the entrance of the Bhadrakālī shrine at Durgājī. The neighbouring presence of these hymns fortifies the connected identity of these two goddesses.

²⁵¹The 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. Brahmācārīṇī

"She who moves in Brahman." The term *brahmācārīṇī* is the feminine form of *brahmācārī* and has two main meanings.²⁵² It refers to celibacy, and to the first stage of life during which the student (*śiṣya*) 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 *brāhmaṇa* youth, Durgā as Brahmācārīṇī 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 Brahmācārīṇī'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 Brahmācārīṇī 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, Brahmācārīṇī is a virgin who lives continually in close contact with Brahman, experiencing/manifesting the pure qualities (*guṇa*) of existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*).

3. Candraghaṇṭā

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

²⁵²These 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 Saptasatī* 2.21). In battle with the demon Śumbha's armies, Durgā (Ambikā) rings her bell in tandem with her lion's roar. Kālī'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 (*ghaṇṭa*).

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

4. Kuṣmāṇḍā

This is another enigmatic epithet of Durgā, one translation of which is "The Pumpkin Gourd." The *kuṣmāṇḍā* 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 Kuṣmāṇḍā Devī could thus mean "The Goddess to whom Kuṣmāṇḍās are Offered."

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

²⁵³*hinasti daityatejāmsi svanenāpūrya yā jagat/
sā ghaṇṭā pātu no devī pāpebhyo 'naḥ sutāniva//* 11.26

and eating the melons the people endured the drought. This legend links Kuṣmāṇḍā Devī with the myth of the goddess Śākambharī referred to in the *Durgā Saptaśatī*, 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' (*śatakṣī*). (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" (*śākambhartī*).

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)²⁵⁴

This series of three epithets (Śatākṣī, Śākambharī, and Durgā) appear to belong to a single phase of manifestation of the Devī connecting the epithet Durgā to the previous two epithets.²⁵⁵ Certainly Śatākṣī and Śākambharī 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 *kuṣmāṇḍā* 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 *kuṣmāṇḍā* melon. Thus the epithet Kuṣmāṇḍā Devī could also mean "The Goddess who is the Kuṣmāṇḍā Pumpkin Gourd."

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

²⁵⁴Coburn's (1991:78) translation.

²⁵⁵This is confirmed by the verses of the *Mūrti Rahasya*, one of the limbs of the *Durgā Saptaśatī*.

Kuṣmāṇḍā or Kuṣmāṇḍī is a well-known *yakṣī* (a female tree or water spirit) companion of the twenty-second Jaina Tīrthaṅkara. Also called Kuṣmāṇḍinī Devī or Ambikā, she appears identical to the goddess Durgā (M. N. P. Tivārī 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).

Kuṣmāṇḍās 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*).²⁵⁶ Just as Durgā is sometimes called Bhūtanāyikā (Leader of the Elemental Spirits), the epithet Kuṣmāṇḍā Devī, could mean "Goddess of the Kuṣmāṇḍā 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 *Harivaṃśa* where the term is the "name of a demon causing disease."²⁵⁷

The term *kuṣmāṇḍā* 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 Saptasatī* by Gita Press (1980:20) which explains that "within her [Kuṣmāṇḍā Devī's] belly, rests the whole of hot worldly existence" (*tāpayukta saṃsāra 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" (*kuṣma*) "egg" (*aṇḍa*) recalls the Cosmic or World Egg, the Brahmāṇḍa, within which the manifest creation resides.

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

²⁵⁷Durgā is referred to as Kuṣmāṇḍā in the *Harivaṃśa*. More remote meanings of the term are "the name of the verses in the *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* xx, 14ff., *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*" (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 (*senāpati*). 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 Brahmācāriṇī 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 Durgājī 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 ṣanmukha (six faced). The Kṛttikās are often identified with the Mātṛs, mother goddesses of benevolent and malevolent natures.²⁶⁰

Thus Durgā as Skandamātā, incorporates the myths, characteristics, and identities of the Mātṛs, 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

²⁵⁸See 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 Purāna*, Chapters 158-60, and the *Vāyu Purāna*, III.10.35-48.

²⁵⁹See the *Śiva Purāna* 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 Saptaśat* 4.7).

²⁶⁰See, for instance, the *Mahābhārata*, Vana-parva, 215.16-18.

in others. Skanda's mythology seems to predate the Devī of the *Durgā Saptaśatī*. 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, Maḥiṣāsura, whom she spears with her lance (*śūla*), 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 Banāras 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 *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* X.1.7 along with the goddesses Vairocanā, Durgī, and Kanyākumārī. This could explain her association with Durgā. Kātyāyanī is the name of one of Yajñavalkya's wives (Maitreyī is the other) in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. The *Harivaṃśa* refers to the worship of a cluster of goddesses which includes Kātyāyanī, and interestingly, two of the other Nine Durgās (i.e., Kālarātrī and Kuṣmāṇḍī).²⁶²

²⁶¹A 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 (Vanadurgā) 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, Maḥiṣī.

²⁶²The *Āryastavas* of the *Harivaṃśa* list Kālarātrī, Nidrā, Kātyāyanī, Kauṣikī, Virūpā, Virūpākṣī, Viśalakṣī, Mahādevī, Kaumarī, Caṇḍī, Dakṣī, Śivā, Kālī, Bhayadā, Vetālī, Śakunī, Yoginī, Bhūtheadhātṛī, and Kuṣmāṇḍī, 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 Saptāśati*, 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 *Kālikā Purāṇa*, which relates how the goddess Durgā created sixty-four *yoginīs* and nine crore (*nabakoti*) Kātyāyanīs to kill demons on the battlefield.²⁶⁴ Thus the Kātyāyanīs appear associated with the sixty-four *yoginīs* and the number nine. This association is reinforced by evidence from the Causaṭha Yoginī Temple at Hirapur which contains images of sixty-four *yoginīs*, 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 *purāṇas*" which tell how a mass of *tejas* emitted by the gods was placed in the hermitage of the sage (*muni*) Kātyāyana, 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 Saptāśati* 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 Pārvaṭī 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 Purāna*, 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 (1986 [1957]:555) is to designate an elderly or middle-aged widow dressed in a red *sāṛī*.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 ṛg Vedic *Rātrī Sūkta*. The second translation links the goddess with Kālī, who appears as a wrathful emanation from the forehead of the great goddess (i.e., Durgā) in the *Durgā Saptasatī* (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

²⁶⁵Also see Monier-Williams (1986 [1899]:270).

²⁶⁶Popular lithographs which circulate in Banāras, depict Kālī on such a rampage.

(Monier-Williams 1986:278).²⁶⁷

The most compelling association of Kālarātrī 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, Kālarātrī, to ask the demon Durga, who had usurped the power of the gods, to surrender. The demon Durga tried to seize Kālarātrī 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 Durga, assumed his name, and with her eight energy manifestations, including Kālarātrī 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.²⁶⁸ 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*).²⁶⁹ 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 (*kṛṣṇa*) as a result, is thus known as Kālikā ("little dark one") and returned to her abode in the Himālayas (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 Kauśika tribe.

²⁶⁷In the *Kathāsarisāgara* (XX.104), it is the name of a *brāhmaṇa* woman skilled in magic.

²⁶⁸An account of Pārvatī's austerities is found in the *Śiva Purāṇa*, Rudra-saṃhitā 3.23.19-34.

²⁶⁹A textual version is found in the *Śiva Purāṇa*, Vāyavīya-saṃhitā 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 *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (100.68-72) and *Kṛtya Kalpataru, Tīrtha Vivecana 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 comparison 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 (*trītyā śukla pakṣa*), especially during the months of Śravaṇa (July/August) and Caitra (March/April). The Gaurīs are:

1. Mukhanirmālikā Gaurī: ("The Pure Faced") located near Gayā Ghāt.
2. Jyeṣṭhā Gaurī: ("The Eldest") located west of Jyeṣṭheśvara. {At Bhūta Bhairava, House Number 63/24. See *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 63.14}.
3. Saubhāgyā Gaurī: ("The Auspicious One") located in Ādi Viśveśvara temple enclosure.
4. Srñgārā Gaurī: ("The Adorned") in Viśvanātha Temple.
5. Viśālakṣī Gaurī: ("The Wide-Eyed") in Viśālakṣī temple near Dharmeśvara at Mīr Ghāt. {See *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 70.13-14; 79.77}
6. Lalitā Gaurī: ("The Amorous") near Lalitā Ghāt.
7. Bhavānī Gaurī: ("Wife of Bhava") at the Rāma temple besides the Annapūrnā temple.
8. Mañgalā Gaurī: ("The Auspicious") at Rāma Ghāt in House Number K 24/34. {*Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 49.86-88}.
9. Mahālakṣmī Gaurī: ("Great Fortune") at Lakṣmī Kuṇḍ. {At Misir Pokhara. See *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 70.65-67}.

If Mahāgaurī (Annapūrnā 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.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.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.

²⁷⁰Note Roussel's characterization of Durgā as the daughter of Śiva, mentioned in the Introduction.

²⁷¹This 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 Kuṣmāṇḍā and Candraghaṇṭā are placed together with more common ones such as Śailaputrī and Mahāgaurī. If Candraghaṇṭā 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 Saptaśati*," 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 (*pṛthivī bhūta*). This is Śailaputrī 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), Brahmācārīnī 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 *ghaṇṭa*. This fire has the power to cause division or separation. Thus Candraghaṇṭā is the active principle within the fire element (*agni bhūta*) of nature (1984:39). Kuṣmāṇḍā means "possessed of motion." It thus identifies the goddess with the active principle of the air element (*vāyu bhūta*). Kuṣmāṇḍā, the text suggests, means "movable egg (*aṇḍa*)," 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 (*bīja*), 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 janimī*) 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 Jagaddhātṛī (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. Kālarātṛī 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 Kālarātrī (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. Siddhidatrī is the active principle in the subtle element of the ego (*ahañkāra*). The *ahañkāra* is that element in a being which fashions a sense of the individual self (*jīvātman*) as well as the larger, all-encompassing self (*parabrahman*) (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, Śailaputrī, Brahmācārīnī, Candraghaṅṭā, and Kuṣmāṇḍā, represent the active principle (*kriyātmaka*) within the four gross elements (*tattva*) 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 Prakṛtī, who is the seed (*bīja*) or mother (*mātā*) of all creation. The remaining four forms of the Nine Durgās, Kātyāyanī, Kālarātrī, Mahāgaurī, and Siddhidatrī 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 *brāhmaṇa* 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, Śailaputrī, the new-born baby girl; Brahmācārīnī, . . . ; Kuṣmāṇḍā, the pregnant woman and Kātyāyanī is the mature woman; . . . and Siddhidatrī, 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, auratē 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 (*putrī*) born from stone (*silā*), she is a symbol of the mountain and of the earth. Brahmācārīnī is the young girl child. She moves (*cārya*) in the purity of Brahman. She is a virgin. Candraghaṅṭā is the girl who has reached puberty and has begun menstruation. The term *ghaṅṭa*, 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, Śaśikalā, Candraghaṅṭā can mean, "She who has the Periods (cycles, phases, digits) of the Moon."²⁷² Candraghaṅṭā is the girl/woman who experiences a menstrual cycle and is capable of reproduction. It begins her association with blood.

Kuśmāṇḍā is the ovulating, fertilized, and pregnant woman. Large-bellied, round like a pumpkin gourd, she holds the egg (*aṇḍa*) 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

²⁷²In the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* III.17ff, Śaśikalā 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. Siddhidatṛī 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 Devī 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 Candraghaṅṭā) 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 Kuṇḍ temple is dressed in a different coloured *sārī*. The eldest temple priest dresses the Durgās as follows: Śailaputrī and Brahmācāriṇī wear saffron yellow; Candraghaṅṭā wears light pink or red; Kuṣmāṇḍā, Skandamātā, Kātyāyanī, and Kālarātrī wear red. Mahāgaurī wears saffron yellow, and Siddhidatṛī 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 Devī, since it is the colour of purity (Śailaputrī), continence and celibacy (Brahmācāriṇī), and ascetic renunciation (Mahāgaurī). The pink or red *sārī* of Candraghaṅṭā 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 (Kuṣmāṇḍā), nurturing (Skandamātā), protecting (Kātyāyanī), and

destroying (Kālarātrī) stages of womanhood. Siddhidatrī, 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 Sundarī, 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 Sundarī). Rānī Bhavānī certainly exemplified the ideals of pious generosity and material giving (*dāna*), virtues which resemble the image of Durgā as Siddhidatrī, the giver of material boons. One might suggest that Tārā Sundarī, through the claims made about the benefits of prayer at her burial place (*samādhi*) which some devotees refer to as a seat of attainment (*siddhapīṭha*), exemplifies spiritual giving. In this respect she resembles Durgā Siddhidatrī in her aspect as the giver of spiritual boons. Both mother and daughter have come to be identified with the Devī herself: Tārā Sundarī as the goddess Tārā or Kālī, and Rānī Bhavānī as Durgā through her epithets of Lokamātā and Daśapraharadhāriṇī.

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, *yoginī*, 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 (*gṛhastha*) is often considered the most excellent (*jyeṣṭha āśrama*).²⁷³ Saubhāgya is the fortunate condition of finding the ideal husband or an auspicious state of wifedom (*saubhāgyavat*) which is in direct contrast to widowhood. Saubhāgyā Gaurī could represent the woman who has found her ideal marital match. Śṛṅgāra means adornment, and is also the sentiment of erotic love. Śṛṅgārā 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

²⁷³Jyeṣṭhā does represent the first or seniormost wife of a man with many wives according to the *Srīdharmapaddhati*, 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.²⁷⁴ 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.²⁷⁵ 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.²⁷⁶ Durgā is an ideal model of independence and marital fidelity for women, as well as a source of protective strength for their spouses.²⁷⁷

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 Devī'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 consummation 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

²⁷⁴Some pertinent aspects of Shanti Devi's life are included in an interview which is partially transcribed in the Introduction.

²⁷⁵Östör points out how members of the fishermen (Jele) caste claim a special relationship with Durgā (1980:34).

²⁷⁶It 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.

²⁷⁷In 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 Bhava 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 *darśana* at the *garbhagrha* 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.²⁷⁸ 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 *garbhgrha*. 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 *yātrā* 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

²⁷⁸Such 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 *siddhapīṭhas*, seats of supernatural 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 Purāna* tells how Durgā and her eight *śaktis* 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 (*Kāśī maṇḍala*). Śailaputrī 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 Devi 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 Saptasatī* 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 (*kīrtayisyanti*, *uccāryam*) or recite (*pathyate*) the text will be freed from misfortune (12.2-9). It is particularly beneficial if the recitation be heard (*śroṣyanti*) 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 (*balipradāna*), the performance of worship (*pūjā*), the fire rite (*agnikārya*), and the great festival (*mahotsava*) (12.9). She is especially endeared to sacrificial worship (*balipūjā*) 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 Saptasatī* (*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 Saptaśatī* 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 (*paṇḍal*, *maṇḍapa*) 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 (*paṇḍal*) are erected and where clay images of Durgā and other attending deities are worshipped, a few groups in Banāras set up a pavilion (*maṇḍapa*) as a sanctuary (*ayatana*) in which goddess worship consists primarily of recitation of the *Durgā Saptaśatī* 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 *maṇḍapa* 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 kuṇḍa*) may be set up within the *maṇḍapa*. 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 (*karmakāṇḍī*) who oversaw the

²⁷⁹See, for instance, Fritz Staal's (1983) detailed account of the Vedic fire ritual.

"One Hundred Recitations of the *Durgā Saptaśati*" (Sat Caṇḍī Pāṭha) organized by the Mā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī 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 Mahiṣāsūramardīnī (an epithet of Durgā), located near Lolārka Kuṇḍa. "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 *brāhmaṇas*). It is noteworthy that it was performed, not just for the community, but for the well being of the whole world (*viśva kalyāṇa*). Ten *brāhmaṇas* 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 *brāhmaṇas* are employed. In another location in the city, one hundred *brāhmaṇas* 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 *brāhmaṇas* 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.²⁸⁰

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 (*triguṇā 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 Īśāna 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 *sarvatobhadra maṇḍala* (Orb of All Auspiciousness) made out of coloured rice. In the Īśāna corner, a nine planet (*navagraha*) altar is constructed. There is no jar atop this altar, but a small jar representing the innumerable (*asaṅkhyāta*) Rudras is placed at the side. The altar in the Agni corner is to the Yoginīs. Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī are located in the jar which is situated atop the *yoginī maṇḍala*. Beside this altar a small jar is established for Varuṇa. Against the altar a plaque with seven vermilion spots leans. These represent the seven mothers (*sapta mātṛka*). Sixteen areca (*supāri*, betel) nuts are strewn at the base. These represent the sixteen mothers. Their child, Gaṇeśa, 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

²⁸⁰Although 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 (*kṣetrapāla*) 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 (*prithivī*), 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 *Kuṇḍasuddhi*, 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 Saptaśatī* 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, Varuṇa, 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 *kuṇḍa* depends on the objective of the ritual. When special desires are wished for (*sakāma*), a *yoni* shaped *kuṇḍa* 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 *kuṇḍa* 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 Sādhana

Ravi Kumar (a Śākta practitioner)²⁸²: 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 (*sādhana*) 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*), *sādhana* 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.

Sādhana 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 *ghaṭa*, recitations of the *Durgā Saptaśatī*, 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 *sādhana*, 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 *sādhana* often lies in a combined display of knowledge, will power, and endurance. The spiritual practitioner (*sādhaka*) 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 *sādhaka* 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 (*paṇḍal*) which are erected during Durgā Pūjā. These *paṇḍals*, quite significantly, constitute new touchstones of sacrality for Śākta *sādhakas*.

²⁸²A pseudonym.

The most frequently performed item of spiritual practice for a *sādhaka* during Navarātra, however, is the recitation of the *Durgā Saptaśatī*. 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 (*samputa pāṭha*). In the *samputa pāṭha*, every verse of the *Durgā Saptaśatī* 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 Saptaśatī* exist, where every verse of the text, which is considered to be a sacred utterance (*mantra*), is reduced to a seed syllable (*bīja*). 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 *mahāniśā 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 Saptaśatī* 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 Saptaśatī* 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 Saptaśatī Mandir in Nagwa, in the south of Banāras, is a most dramatic example of personal Śākta *sādhana*. 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 (*dacoit*) 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 Saptaśatī* 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 *kuṇḍalinī* yogic practice.²⁸³ 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.²⁸⁴

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

²⁸³According 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 *kuṇḍalinī* yogic practice within the context of the Durgā Pūjā ritual.

²⁸⁴Several 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 Saptasatī*. 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 Ūdal, who worshipped the goddess Śāradā. A

typical song roughly translates as follows:²⁸⁵

Bhavānt̄ re deviyā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

Likhi-likhi cithiyā je asurā paṭhavai he
A demon is writing many letters [saying]
Durgā se karavi ham viyāha
"I will marry Durgā."
Bhavānt̄ re deviyā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

Likhi-likhi cithiyā je devī jī paṭhavai he
The Goddess writes to him [saying]
Asurā ke karavi ham saṁhār
"I will destroy the demon."
Bhavānt̄ re deviyā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

Ūmā re atariyā caḍhi maiyā je nihār lī.
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 [unnās] āvai ghoravā.
Elephants [in the lead] and horses are coming.
Bhavānt̄ re deviyā!
Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

Ek hāthai lihī maiyā dhāl.
In one hand Mother took the shield.
Ek hāthai lihī maiyā taravārīyā
In one hand Mother took the sword.
Larat-larat maiyā rath me [sathailo]
Riding on a chariot, Mother begins fighting them.
Bhavānt̄ re deviyā!
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 Banārsi friend who was unable to provide any further clarification.

Asurā ke [kailī] samhār re
 All the demons are destroyed.
Bhavānī re deviyā!
 Hail Goddess Bhavānī!

VIII. Public (Sarvajanīnā) Worship

The final major visible form of Durgā worship in Banāras is that of public (*sarvajanīnā*) Durgā Pūjās. Business or religious organizations such as the City Hall or the Rāmakṛṣṇa Mission, community groups or specially formed clubs such as the Bengali Tola community or the Student's Club organize, collect money, and stage public Durgā Pūjās along the lines of the elaborate home Durgā Pūjās discussed above. This phenomenon is growing so rapidly that the city of Banāras has restricted the number of public Durgā Pūjās which can be held. With the costs of private Durgā Pūjās becoming prohibitively high, and with the gradual decay of the feudal system of private patronage, community celebration of Durgā Pūjā is on the rise.

The pattern of worship at community celebrations is essentially similar to that described in Chapter Four although the public Durgā Pūjās 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 (*paṇḍal*) 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 Navarātra.

Interpretation of Symbols and Worship Patterns during Navarātra

The key symbol of the *yantra* enables us to recognize that during Navarātra the orb of the Devī's influence expands from her permanent abodes in the city to encompass the entire sacred circle of Banāras (*Kāśī maṇḍala*). Because Durgā Kuṇḍ temple does not install the goddess at this time of year it tacitly claims that Durgājī is the centre of the

yantra and the permanent abode of the Devī in Banāras. Also, since the temple serves as the sole sanctioned place where the blood sacrifices offered by any of the city's *pūjās* 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 *pūjā* 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 *maṇḍalas* 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 *pūjā* 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 Devī is established are not necessarily or solely places of ultimate liberation (*tīrtha*), but they are places of power and accomplishment (*siddha 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 Devī. These devotional and sacrificial themes are at the heart of Devī *pūjā*.

In *pūjā*, the substance of the Devī is offered back up to her, but there are two dynamics which operate in the ritual. First the Devī 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 Saptasatī* 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 *kunḍa*, 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 Durgājī expands to encompass the whole of the Kāśī *maṇḍala*, 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 Saptaśatī* (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 Rāvaṇa reinitiated the worship of the Devī in the spring. Rāma, the warrior incarnation of Viṣṇu, initiated the autumn worship of Durgā by invoking her aid in the slaying of Rāvaṇa.²⁸⁶ The *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (III.30.23-26) tells us that these god-like human worshippers, on the advice of the sage Medhas were reenacting a ritual which had been performed earlier still by the seers (*ṛṣi*), Bṛgu, Vaśiṣṭha, Kāśyapa, and Viśvāmitra, and the deities Indra, Nārāyaṇa, and Śīva in an earlier cycle of creation. In these myths, *ṛṣi*s 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. Purāṇic tales relate how the kings Subāhu and Sudarśana, 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 *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa* 1.18-22.

respective cities.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.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 *zamīndār*s), the earliest instance of this celebration is traced to a period almost a hundred and fifty years earlier. A Banāresi friend of Bengali heritage, an organizer of one of the oldest public Durgā Pūjās in the city recounted the following story.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.²⁹⁰

Lakṣmī Kant was one of the earliest known landlords (*zamīndār*) in Bengal.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 Brahmānanda Giri and Atmaram Giri, two spiritual preceptors at the Kālīghāt

²⁸⁷These myths are recounted in detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

²⁸⁸Inscriptional 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. (Mahiṣāsūramardīnī images in Bharat Kālā Bhavan).

²⁸⁹His information was derived from Raga Rammohan Roy, "Bangla Pracintomo Durgā Pūjā," *Navakalola* (Calcutta: 31st year, Pūjā Issue, 1990).

²⁹⁰I have inserted some supporting or conflicting accounts from textual histories where pertinent.

²⁹¹According to S. Roy, Laksmikanta Gangopadhyaya was born in 1570. He founded the Sabarna Roy Choudary family, whose members were the first *zamīndār*s of the region of Calcutta (1991:198).

temple in Calcutta.²⁹² Jio left for Banāras to become a world-renouncer (*sannyāsin*) and eventually became famous under the name of Kamadeva Brahmācari. Meanwhile Lakṣmī 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.²⁹³ 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 Banāras and became a student of Kamadeva Brahmācari, Lakṣmī 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.²⁹⁴ In gratitude to his mentor (*guru dakṣina*), Man Singh gave Lakṣmī Kant, Kamadeva Brahmācari'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.²⁹⁵ Thus Lakṣmī Kant was one of the major landlords (*jaiḡirdār/zamīndār*) in Bengal. Together with Bhavānanda of Nadia and Jayānanda of Bhansbedia he became one of Bengal's three tax collectors.²⁹⁶

Lakṣmī Kant, who had grown up in Kālīghāṭ temple, was familiar with the regions around Calcutta. Calcutta was made up of three villages: Colicatta, Sutanuti, and

²⁹²The family hailed from Halisahar in the north of the *zamīndārī* known as "Twenty-four Parganas" (S. Roy 1991:198). The Kālīghāṭ temple complex was built by Rāja Basanta Roy (198).

²⁹³According to S. Roy (1991), Laksmikanta was adopted by Rānī Kamalā, the younger wife of Rāja Basanta Roy (builder of Kālīghāṭa 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."

²⁹⁴According to S. Roy, Man Singh's trip to quell Pratapaditya's rebellion in Bengal took place in 1612. (1991:8).

²⁹⁵S. Roy identifies these districts (*pargana*) as Magura, Khaspur, Kālīkāṭa, Paikan, Anwarpur, and Hetegarh.

²⁹⁶S. Roy mentions that Laksmikanta 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 Āt Cala, named after the distinctive eight pairs of pillars in its construction. It was at Āt Cala in Barisha in 1610 that Lakṣmī Kant and Basanta Rai Choudary celebrated the first autumn Durgā Pūjā.²⁹⁷ They reenacted the primordial act of invoking and worshipping Durgā out of time (*akāla bodana*) initiated by Rāma for the destruction of Rāvaṇa. 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 Āt 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 Āt Cala. These villages constituted the city of Calcutta and became the seat of British Power in India.²⁹⁸ 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.

²⁹⁷According 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 Āt Cala are found in Nair 1986:I.

²⁹⁸The Rai Choudary family still celebrates Durgā Pūjā in a new structure built beside the historic Āt Cala. This Durgā Pūjā 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 (*chāga bali*), one on Saptamī, three on Aṣṭamī, and nine on Navamī. A buffalo (*mahiṣa*) is also offered. Bodhana is performed nine days before ṣaṣṭhi.

According to A. C. Roy, an eminent historian of Bengal, Rāja Krishnachandra, a contemporary of Rānī Bhavānī, "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).²⁹⁹ In 1756, Siraj-ud-daula attacked Calcutta and defeated the British at their outpost there.³⁰⁰ 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 Rāja Krishnachandra, and others, to oust Siraj from power (S. Roy 1991:203).³⁰¹ 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, Rāja Krishnachandra Rai of Nadia and Rāja Navakrishna (of the Rai Choudhary family) of Śhova Bazaar are reputed to have initiated grand scale celebrations of the Āśvina (September/October) Durgā Pūjā. These celebrations obviously marked their own ascendancy to power, in alliance with the British, against their Muslim overlords. The Durgā Pūjās were open to the general public and this initiated the tradition which now flourishes in Bengal, Banāras, and throughout India. These grand celebrations of Durgā Pūjā by powerful *zamīndārs* in Bengal occurred not long before the construction of the Durgā Kuṇḍ Mandir in Banāras, by Rānī Bhavānī,

²⁹⁹According to certain Bengali scholars in Banāras, Siraj-ud-daula is reputed to have abducted the young widowed daughter of Rānī Bhavānī, Tārā Sundarī, an act which angered many members of the Hindu nobility. He released her due to the public outcry which ensued.

³⁰⁰This 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.

³⁰¹Apparently, Rānī Bhavānī opposed the conspiracy (S. Roy 1991:203; R. Bhattacharyya 1986:14).

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 Lakṣmī Kant's grandfather, Kamadeva, who left for Banāras to pursue the religious life, and Rānī Bhavānī's extensive patronage of the Banārasī 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 Banārasī 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., Rāja Krishnachāḍra Rai and others) and Śhova Bazaār (i.e., Rāja 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

³⁰²The *kāyasthas* correspond to the *ṣṭriya* or warrior class in Hindu society. In the *kāyastha* Tarun Kanti Basu's words, "Some *kāyasthas* were taken as *ṣṭriyas*. *Kāyasthas* don't belong to the original *varṇa* system. Nobility, *zamīndārs*, and so on were there, and they were taken as *ṣṭriyas*."

³⁰³The 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 Banāras home located in the Chaukhamba quarter of the city, where it continues to the present day. Initially a small affair, the *pūjā* grew when Ānandamayī'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 Durgā Pūjā in Banāras 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 Durgā 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 Vivekānanda. The Mitra family, through marriage, united with the Basu family, also great patrons of culture. Sivendra Nath Basu (Santhu Babu) was a renowned *vīṇā* 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 (*śṛṅgārāsana*). 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 Rāvaṇa. Śiva is said to accompany Durgā/Pārvatī on her return from

the Himālayas 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 Banāras. 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Durgājī, where they are listed among the patrons of the temple. Their patronage of Durgājī, and their use of that temple as a location for performing the blood sacrifices of their *pūjā* forges a fundamental connection between Durgājī and the domestic worship of the goddess. By having performed their blood sacrifices at Durgājī, 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 Kuṇḍ temple, that Durgājī is the actual recipient of every Durgā Pūjā celebration in the city. The site of Durgājī is acknowledged as the centre of the *yantra* which encompasses all of Banāras 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 Banāras. 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 (*ṣatkona*) from the 108 *ghi*-lamps which are traditionally offered to the Devī (see Figure 17). The worship of young virgin girls is performed on the seventh, eighth, and

³⁰⁴According to Mr. Basu, it is possible that a branch of the famous Tagore family in Pathuriaghata, Calcutta also includes them.

ninth days. During the immersion (*visarjana*) procession, everyone walks barefoot to the waters of the Gaṅgā. The images are carried in palanquins by hand. Two rare birds, Nilakanṭhas, a type of blue-jay, are released. Nilakanṭha 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 Devī 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 Kāśī as the city which grants spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*) to those who die within its sacred perimeter, 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).

³⁰⁵This 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.

³⁰⁶I 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 Banāras 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 Banāras to spend his own last days.³⁰⁷ 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 Banāras. They say that they will continue the tradition of holding Durgā Pūjā in the ancestral home in Banāras. 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.

³⁰⁷The Bengali population in Banāras 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 Banāras, 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 Durgā 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 autumns 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 Banāras (Public)

If you come from any *paṇḍal*, 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 Himālaya.³⁰⁹

The public celebrations of Durgā Pūjā in Banāras developed as an offshoot of the elaborate domestic *pūjās* staged by the wealthy Bengali *zamīndār* 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Banāras. 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

³⁰⁹An organizer at Durgotsava Sammilini, the oldest public Durgā Pūjā in Banāras.

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 Caṇḍī 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 Caṇḍī Path program just like that one, on *ṣaṣṭhī*. But his is best. For us, Durgā Pūjā starts with this Maliya Caṇḍī 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 Saptasatī*. 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 *āgamani*, *Mahālaya*, or *Mahiṣamardinī* 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 *ṣaṣṭhī*.

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 (*sarvajantīnā*) *pūjās* are also called *bārvari pūjās*. The word *bara* 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

³¹⁰Although some people speculated that the Saradotsava Sangha (Gathering of the Autumn Festival), located across the Vijayānagar Bhavan in Bhelupura 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 Durgotsava 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.³¹² 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 Rāmakṛṣṇa 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

³¹²Conversations 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 Durgā and all her attending deities are connected together in a single unit called the *pratimā*.

The third group, exemplified by the enormous *paṇḍal* at Hathivar Market in Lahurabir and the Durgā 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 *dhūnuci* 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 *pūjāri* perform the worship, and may socialize around the *paṇḍal* 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 Durgā 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 *zamīndārs* did the same in a bigger way. They had big boozing parties, with dancing girls, and so on during Durgā Pūjā. 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 Saptamī, Aṣṭamī, and Navamī have created new "pilgrimage circuits" in the city. These circuits to the temporary Durgā temples and images are less clearly defined than, but parallel to, the Nine Durgā Pilgrimage circuit in which people visit the city's permanent Durgā temples and images. The swell of people making their way to some of the huge temporary *paṇḍals* is greater than the crowds which visit any of the permanent Durgā temples during Navarātra. The main roads in downtown Banāras 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 *paṇḍals*, 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 *paṇḍal* at Lahurabir? It is huge. The images are very beautiful." Such comments are typical. When one considers the number of visitors to these *paṇḍals*, 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 Durgā which has actually taken place in these pilgrimages is more abstract than the perceptual contact offered by the *paṇḍals* and *mūrtis*. 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 *Mahābhārata*, in which the eldest of the five Pāṇḍava 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."³¹³ It is precisely this vision of unassailable strength, which derives from the united sentiments of the people, that is a constituent in the *darśana* 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 (*darśana*) 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.³¹⁴

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 *sañkalpa* (intentional vow). In the domestic *sañkalpa*, 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

³¹³Translation from Pratap Chandra Roy (n.d.:Vol. VIII). The six types are the fortresses formed by a desert (*marudurgam*), by water (*jaladurgam*), by earth (*prthvidurgam*), by a forest (*vanadurgam*), by a mountain (*parvatadurgam*), and by human beings (*manuṣyadurgam*). See *Mahābhārata*, Śānti Parva, Chapter 56.35. Quoted in Mani 1975:254.

³¹⁴In 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 (*jātī*) and lineages (*gotra*).

Ritual Manuals

The rituals pertaining to the Bengali style of domestic Durgā Pūjā are described in a manual called the *Purohita Darpaṇa* (Mirror for the Priest), which contains the techniques for most other *pūjās* as well. The *Purohita Darpaṇa* 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 hand-written) version. The majority of *purohitas* in the public *paṇḍals* use commercial editions.³¹⁶ The Durgā Pūjā ritual is influenced by purāṇic prescriptions on goddess worship, specifically from the *Devī Purāṇa*, the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, and mostly from the *Bṛhannandikeśvara 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

³¹⁵It is a Sanskrit text written in Bengali script.

³¹⁶The 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 virtuous, 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 (*caturāśramadharmā*). 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 *upanāyana saṃskāra*. Most of the Śākta *purohitas* whom I have met began learning to chant the *Durgā Saptasatī* 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.³¹⁹

General Comments on Pūjā

Every specific *pūjā* (*viśeṣa 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.³²⁰

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

³¹⁹Most *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.

³²⁰Satyabrata 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, ṣaṣṭhī, 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 vrkṣa*). 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 ṣaṣṭhī, 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 (*darpaṇa*) and a sword (*khadga*).

The seventh day, Mahāsaptamī (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 Gaṇeśa and various attendant deities. The rituals of Mahāsaptamī 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, Mahāṣṭamī (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 (*tithi*). 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, Mahānavamī (Great Ninth). Durgā Pūjā ends with the worship of the Devī as the Unconquerable One, Aparājitā, and the immersion (*visarjana*) of the clay images on the tenth day (Vijayā Daśami).

Although the Durgā Pūjā activities are performed mainly by the *purohita*, the

yajamāna and other members participate in varying degrees according to their inclination. Women help in the preparātion of food, youngsters may ring bells during the flame worship (*āratī*). 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 Durgā 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 Durgā 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 Mahāṣaṣṭhī. 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 maṇḍala*. I was told that the *yantra* represents the Devī, who is the source and portal of her own manifestation. Upon this *yantra*, the

³²¹Interview with S. K. Rai Choudhary of Durgotsava Sammilini (Sept 27, 1990).

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 *sāṛī*. The jar is anointed with sandal paste, given steadiness (*sthīrī karaṇa*), and its sacred perimeter demarcated (*kāṇḍa ropanam*).

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 (*manas*), ego (*ahaṅkāra*), and intellect (*buddhi*) and finally into sentient primordial matter (*prakṛti*). This purification is performed through the method of Kuṇḍalinī Yoga. The goddess Kuṇḍalinī, who lies dormant at the base of the subtle body is awakened and allowed to rise through the central energy channel (*sūṣumnā*) via various energy vortices (*cakra*) until she unites with the supreme reality (*adīśakti/paramaśiva*) 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 *ghaṭa* which by incorporating all those symbolic elements becomes her "body cosmos." It is from this state of passive presence and support of the cosmos (*jagaddhātrī*) 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 (*śākta 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 (*antarmātrkā 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 (*saṃhāra 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 *pīṭha 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 *ṛṣyādi nyāsa* he secures (*kīlaka*) 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 Gaṇeśa 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 "Hrīm," 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.³²² 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

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 (*guhyaṅti guhya goptrī*). 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 (*ṣaṣṭhī*) 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 purifactory transformation of his body (*bhūta śuddhi*) after driving away the inimical spirits. Transforming himself into an abode and portal for the Devī, he worships Gaṇeśa 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 *ghaṭa*, the conch shell, and the *bilva vṛkṣa*, 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 (*khadga*) and the

mirror (*darpaṇa*), 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 *ghaṭa*, 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 "quickenings" 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 *purohita*, 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 *purohita* 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, Cāmuṇḍā, 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 *purohita* now moves from the location of the *bilva* tree or from the shrine

where the *bodhana* and *adhivāsa* were taking place to the temple where the clay image is to be installed. He draws a *yantra* on the floor and establishes another *ghaṭa* on a small earthen altar which he constructs upon it. He then moves the *ghaṭa* 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 *adhivāsa* to all the images in the cluster, including the buffalo demon, *Mahiṣāsura*. The *Devī*'s power (*śakti*) 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 *kṣatriya* families which staged the *pūjās*, 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 *kṣatriyas* 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 indispensable, 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 Devī'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 skilful 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 *navapatrikā*. He now proceeds to bathe the *navapatrikā* (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

³²³I 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.³²⁴ 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.³²⁵ 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 Mahāsaptamī.

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 pāpam 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 (*harapriye*). She is the abode of beauty/glory (*śrīniketā*), the giver of life (*prāṇadāyini*) 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

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).

³²⁵See Hesterman (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 *sārit*, 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 *ghaṭa* which was installed earlier). She is placed next to the image of Gaṇeśa, 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 Gaṇeśa, makes Durgā's connection to Gaṇeśa more complex. Although most worshippers consider Gaṇeśa, 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 Gaṇeśa 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 Gaṇeśa is appropriate, since the elephant-headed god "has his origins among the thick-set, fat-bellied, beneficent *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 (*darpaṇa*) 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.

³²⁷This 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 Devī's image is bathed in the mirror, the mirror itself is cleansed. Innumerable aspects of the image of the Devī are revealed in the process, and the devotees' perceptions are steadily heightened, dramatically deepening the experience of *darśana*.³²⁸

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 (*bhṛṅgāra*). 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 Devī. 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 vermilion 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 (*pūjālaya*). 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,

³²⁸According to early Hindu texts, a reflection in water or a mirror represents the soul of a person. See *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka* 6.2, 8.7 and *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 3.24. On the pervasive use of the term "mirror" as a symbol of illusory reality and indirect perception, see Wayman (1974).

worshipping the spiritual teachers, and performing the appropriate imprintments (*nyāsa*), the *purohita* meditates on Durgā and makes a special offering (*viśeṣa argha*). He worships Gaṇeśa and the other deities. An important dimension of this worship is that Gaṇeśa is here installed as a *ghaṭa* which is placed before his clay image in the cluster.³²⁹ It was not absolutely clear to me if the other deities are also represented by the same *ghaṭa*, but its presence in the ritual reinforces the interpretation that the *ghaṭa* 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 *ghaṭa*'s presence suggests that from this cosmic egg (*brahmāṇḍa*) 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 (*caḅsur 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

³²⁹A North American Hindu acquaintance who on occasion performs a simplified version of the Durgā Pūjā for a community there, in which only a single *ghaṭa* is installed at the beginning of the ritual, once told me that the *ghaṭa* represented Gaṇeśa. It is clear that he was identifying this Gaṇeśa *ghaṭa* 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.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 (*sagūṇa*) 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 (*ṣoḍaśopacāra*). Commencing by offering the Devī a seat (*āsana*), he moves through offerings of water for washing her feet (*pādya*), general food offerings (*naivedya*) and specific ones which include a honeyed mixture (*madhūpārka*), betel nut (*tāmbūla*), and sweet balls (*modaka*). These are normally followed with frequent offerings of water for sipping (*ācamanīya*). Amid these food offerings are the standard offerings of bath water and clothing. A number of feminine accoutrements are also offered such as ornaments (*alaṅkara*), 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 (*āratī*). At

³³⁰The 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 *ārati*. 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 liason 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.

³³¹In the *Durgā Saptasatī* (8.22-27) the *śakti* of the goddess Caṇḍikā herself, a gruesome deity known as Śivadūtī, 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 beneficence 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 Nārāyaṇa 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 Kālī 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:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Pre-menstrual girls | May prepare Uncooked Food offerings to minor deities. |
| Menstruating unmarried women | May not prepare food offerings. |
| Married women | May prepare Cooked Food offerings to minor deities. |
| Widows | May not prepare food offerings. |
| Post-menopausal married women | May prepare Cooked Food offerings to minor deities. |
| Initiated women | May prepare Cooked Food offerings to Durgā and Kālī. |

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 (*piṣṭaka*), 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 (*daṣopacāra*). He invokes Brahmānī into the plantain, Kālikā into the *kacvī*, Durgā into the turmeric, Kārtikī into the *jayantī*, Śivā into the *bilva*, Raktadantikā into the pomegranate, Śokarahitā into the Aśoka, Cāmuṇḍā 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 Gaṇeśa with an elaborate devotional service. He repeats the procedure for Nārāyaṇa and Śiva, Kārtikeya, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, the mounts (*vāhana*) of the deities, the snake (*nāga*), Durgā's lion mount (*mahāsimha*), and the demon Maḥiṣāsura (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 (*puṣpāñjali*). 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 Devī with purified flowers.

The *purohita* has effected the difficult task of enabling the Devī 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.

Mahāṣṭamī

The rituals of Mahāṣṭamī are essentially repetitions of those of Mahāṣaptamī. The *purohita* performs the purifications of the place of worship and the worship materials. He purifies himself through appropriate imprintments and after the meditative visualization of Durgā, repeats the bathing ritual of the clay image using the mirror. He proceeds to worship Gaṇeśa 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 *ghaṭa* 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 Sarvatobhadra Maṇḍala 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 *maṇḍala* by invoking and worshipping the eight *śaktis* of Durgā into the eight petals of the lotus. Starting with the east and moving in a clockwise direction, he invokes Ugracandā, Pracandā, Candogrā, Cāṇḍanayīkā, Candā, Candavatī, Candrūpā, and Aticandikā respectively. He then invokes and worships the sixty four *yoginīs* into the centre of the sacred instrument. It is noteworthy that he next worships goddesses who "dwell in other regions/countries" (*nānādeśanivāsini*) universalizing the forms of the Devī in the *maṇḍala*. All goddesses, named or unnamed, are thus accounted for in this ritual. The *purohita* invokes and worships the Mothers (*mātr*) Brahmānī and Maheśvarī in the northeast corner of the *maṇḍala*, Kaumārī and Vaiṣṇavī in the southeast, Vārāhī and Nārasimhī in the southwest, Indrānī and Cāmuṇḍā in the northwest, and Kātyāyanī in the centre. He worships Candikā and the Nine Durgās (unnamed) and then Jayantī and other goddesses.

Leaving the *maṇḍala* temporarily, the *purohita* moves to the worship of Durgā's weapons (*āyudha pūjā*). The location of the *āyudha pūjā* within the *maṇḍala* 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 *maṇḍala* are, like her weapons, aspects of her power. They are her *śaktis*. The *purohita* worships the trident, sword, discus, sharp arrow, the *śakti* 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 *maṇḍala* process extends the symbolic dimensions of the instrument. The diagram represents not only Durgā's powers but her attributes and adornments. Returning to the

maṇḍala, the *purohita* worships in the four cardinal directions, the young lads (*baṭuka*), 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 *maṇḍala*. The Mahāṣṭamī rituals end with the worship of Durgā as the entire *maṇḍala*.

A *maṇḍala*, 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, *maṇḍalas* are to be seen as multi-dimensional. Temples may be seen as three-dimensional *maṇḍalas*. *Maṇḍalas* represent spheres of power and the *sarvatobhadra maṇḍala* represents the expansive benevolent influence of the goddess. From the seed of her cosmic body (represented by the *ghaṭa*) the Devī germinates and sprouts (represented by the *bilva vrkṣa* and *navapatrikā*) and then takes up her abode in the anthropomorphic living earthen image (*mūrti*). From here, symbolized by the flowering of the *maṇḍala*'s lotus petals and its checkerboard matrix, Durgā expands to the farthest recesses of the cosmos. The *yoginīs*, mothers, and every feminine conception of deity are her weapons (*āyudha*), her powers (*śakti*), while the male deities are her ornaments (*bhūṣaṇa*). 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

³³²Zimmer'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*, *maṇḍala*, 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 Maḥiṣāsura 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 Durgā Pūjā. After quickly performing the necessary purifications, the *purohita* meditatively visualizes a dreadful form of Durgā as Cāmuṇḍā/Kālī. The goddess is worshipped with a sixteen part devotional service but the significant addition is the blood sacrifice of a goat (*chāga balī*) or surrogate offering of a *kuṣmanda* 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. Baṭuka, the *yoginīs*, the *kṣetrapālas*, and Gaṇeśa 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.³³⁴ 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 *kumārīs* are fed a sweet (*halvā*) made from coarsely ground flour (*sūjī*), 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 *kumārīs*, 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 Navamī, brings an end to their fast and the Navarātra rituals. I was curious about how the *kumārīs* felt during this ritual and was given this answer by a former *kumārī*:

My older two sisters, my younger sister, and I, and our friends would often be chosen as *kumārīs*. 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 *kumārī* and the virginal Durgā, I suggest, changes after the Navarātra fast to mature ripened or

³³⁴The following description and comments derive from a mother and daughter in a *brāhmaṇa* family.

cooked food, a symbol of the fertile Durgā.³³⁵ 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 pūjā*. 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 (*guṇa*) of nature (*prakṛti*) are thrown out of balance. *Sattva guṇa* is diminished while the *tamas* and *rajas guṇa*

³³⁵Unripe 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 Banāras, 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, *guṇa*-balanced substance. Flesh, often associated with the dark (*tamas*), polluted, and obscuring quality of nature, and blood, symbol of the passionate, energetic quality (*guṇa*) 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 Pūjās 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, Mahiṣāsura. 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,

³³⁶Compare 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).

³³⁷In 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 *brāhmaṇas* derive from the head/mouth of Puruṣa, and the *kṣatriyas* from his arms. In a similar vein, Śākta 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. "Mahiṣāsura represents our animal instincts," said one devotee. The late *siddha yogi*, Svāmi Sukhānanda Mahārāja of the Durgā Saptāśatī 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 Mahiṣāsura 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 Saptāśatī* myth of Mahiṣāsura's destruction tells us how the demon changed shape many times before being slain. He assumed the form of a buffalo (symbol of *tamas guṇa*)

(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 (*vṛtti*) 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 Ostner 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, Mahāsīmha, is *rajas* at the service of the purified *sattva* consciousness. This interpretation is reinforced in the Raktabīja episode within the *Durgā Saptasatī* (8.39-62). The demon Raktabīja (He whose Seed is Blood), when injured by the Devī's *śaktis*, the Mothers (*mātr*), spawns thousands of identical forms, one from

³³⁸I 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 Cāmuṇḍī as his consort. This imagery links Durgā via her wrathful emanation Kālī, whose epithet is Cāmuṇḍī/Cāmuṇḍā, to Yama. Furthermore, it also links Durgā, via her epithet of Mahāvidyā to the Buddhist goddess Prajñā-pāramitā, 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 Kālī/Cāmuṇḍā 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 (*asrīmadoddhatah*)(8.62). It is interesting to note that the destructive *rajas guṇa* has moved from the demon's now bloodless body through Kālī/Cāmuṇḍā (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 śuddhi*), 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 samsāric 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 (*kumārī*), 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 *kumārī* to mother, a transformation of utmost importance in the preservation of the cosmic order.³³⁹

When the *kumārī* 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

³³⁹Infertility is an example of a biological obstacle. An example of a social danger is marriage to an inappropriate suitor.

³⁴⁰One 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 *puṣpa*) in a woman" (O'Flaherty 1980:33).

³⁴¹One finds the notion of life feeding on life in the earliest Hindu religious texts. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.6 states "*etavad va idam sarvam annam caivānnadās ca*" (Thus everything is just food and the slave of food). In Vedānta philosophy, *anna* is the grossest of the body's five sheaths (*kośa*) 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 *yajña*, 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 Chinnamastā (She Whose Head is Severed), who is often included in lists of the Ten Mahāvidyās.³⁴² In most images, Chinnamastā, astride copulating male and female figures (often identified as Kāma and Ratī), 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 Chinnamastā 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 Chinnamastā, 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*). Chinnamastā'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

³⁴²One of the only Chinnamastā 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 Gaṇeśa, who is present in the Durgā Pūjā ritual as a *ghaṭa* and as a clay image.³⁴⁴ Gaṇeśa is created by the Devī from rubbings of her skin. The severing of Gaṇeśa's head is indirectly the severing of the Devī's head, since Gaṇeśa, like all manifestations of nature, is part of her creation. Other surrogate offerings such as the *kuṣmāṇḍā* 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 Añkālamman 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).

³⁴⁴*Ghaṭas* 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 Saptasati* in Chapter Three), Gaṇeśa, 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 Gaṇeśa.

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 *ghaṭa* 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-Vajrayoginī (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 Śākambharī 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 Durgā 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.

³⁴⁵As 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).

Mahānavamī Pūjā

The Mahānavamī rituals repeat those performed on Mahāsaptamī. The special variant is the Fire Oblation (*homa*) (see Figure 18). A fire pit called a *sthaṇḍila* is constructed according to ritual specifications (see Diagram 6). Various deities and aspects of the goddess are worshipped in sections of the *sthaṇḍila* 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 saṃyuktam kṛdā bhava samānvitam*) (i.e., Brahmā) after her post menstrual purificatory bath (*ṛtusnātam*). While uttering this verse, the *purohita* collects fire from an ember and kindles tinder which he lays down into the *sthaṇḍila*. 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 *idā*, *piṅgalā*, and *suṣumnā* energy channels of the subtle body. The *purohita* next makes offerings of *ghi* using the great mystical utterances (*mahāvyaḥṛti*). 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 (*triśūla*) of Durgā (and Śīva), represents such triads as the three *guṇas* and the tripartite aspects of manifest *śakti*, namely the energies of desire (*icchā*), 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 (*dakṣiṇam kāñcanamūlyam*). He allays any

faults which may have occurred during the procedure and then extinguishes the fire. Ashes from the *homa* are use 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 (*daṣopacāra*). He then prays that the Devī's grace confer fulfillment on any rituals which may have been performed inadequately. Next he dislodges the jar (*ghaṭa*) 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 Nirmalyavāsini (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 Uchchiṣṭacāṇḍālinī (She who is the Impure

Outcaste).³⁴⁶ Like *nirmalyam*, *ucchiṣṭa* carries the meaning of impure remnants from the sacrifice. *Caṇḍālinī*, picks up on common epithets of Durgā as Caṇḍa, the Fierce One, while at the same time associating her with the *caṇḍāla*, 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 Cāmuṇḍā, with her eight *śaktis*, 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 tiṣṭha 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" (*ucchiṣṭa/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 (*darpaṇa*), which is a form of the Devī, in water and touching the altar of the clay image he again dismisses Durgā, as the beloved

³⁴⁶This is also a synonym of the goddess Mātāngī, one of the Ten Mahāvidyās, whose name means a female of the outcaste group.

of Śāṅkara, 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 Aparājitā (She who is Invincible). Resonating with the notions of victory (*vijayā*), this *pūjā* is generally performed on the tenth *tithi*. The goddess as Aparājitā 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 Mahiṣa in the entire ritual, but especially at the end affirms the importance of his role in the cosmic drama. Alf Hildebeitel (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 Durgā Pūjā towards Mahiṣāsura 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 Mahiṣāsura 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 *śārdūla*, a mythical leogryph in battle with a courageous warrior. Often referred to as a heraldic symbol of the ruling dynasty, discerning interpreters see it as the heroic battle of the individual against the overwhelming power of Māyā.³⁴⁷ The *śārdūla*, 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 Mahiṣa 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. Mahiṣa 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

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.³⁴⁸ 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 Kālī Pūjā some weeks later.

While most accounts of Durgā Pūjā end on Vijayā 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 pleasantries. This eleventh day celebration is called Vijayā Sammilini. Rāma fought a battle against Rāvaṇa. 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 Vijayā Sammilini. On Vijayā 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 Durgājī to consecrate the weapons on Mahāṣṭamī. 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 (*āyudha*) *pūjā*.

to visit the temple of Vindhyavāsini 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 Banāras 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 Banārasis 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 Banāras 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 (*pañca 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 Devi. 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 *liṅga* 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. *Pūjā*, 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 *liṅga*) 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. Adepts (*sādhaka*) demonstrate their powers through lengthy and numerous recitations of the *Durgā Saptasatī*, 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. Worshipers 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 (*ahaṅkāra*), 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 śakti*), 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 (*ārati*) 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

³⁴⁹I witnessed only minor examples of people being visibly flooded with Durgā's *śakti*. 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 *śakti* during Navarātra.

On the ninth day, after twelve noon, . . . , the men plant a *triśūla*, flag, and *ghaṭa* in the road of the village and commence a *homa* there. They skewer a lime on the *triśūla*. As they sing *bhajanās* some fall into a trance state, their heads shake, their faces become red, and some jump and demonstrate their powers. Some pull out the *triśūla*, 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 activities of the *camārs* [the leather workers].

spiritual insight (symbolized by the "wisdom eye") of the devotee.³⁵⁰ The Durgā 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.

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 (*jñāna*), 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 *śakti*, 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, Durgā 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 *śakti* through space. Śakti also operates through time. Time is, of course, an inevitable source of change, one that ultimately leads to the dissolution of all things. Durgā offers security through the disruptions which may accompany seasonal change. She protects her devotees from the jaws of death (*yamadamaṣṭra*), seasons when disease is rampant. Devotees from the villages surrounding Banāras, who live agriculturally-based lives which are highly dependent on orderly cycles of nature, propitiate Durgā 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 Durgā functions as a stabilizing matrix within which her vital energy, designated as feminine, can develop. Although Durgā'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. Durgā 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 Śakti develops, and as a "model for" the independent female.

Durgā'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 *mahāvīdyā*.³⁵¹ 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.³⁵² 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 (*śūnya*, *bindu*), all of objective reality can be enumerated.³⁵³ 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 (*yonī*) of the Devī, equilateral triangles can generate more complex forms such as hexagons and

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 *mahāvīdyā*, 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 (*śūnya*, *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 Saptasatt* (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 (*āyudha*), 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

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 pratiṣṭha*). 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 *kunḍa* the central position of the *liṅga* is undeniable.³⁵⁸

Attempting to understand this combination of *liṅga* and *kunḍa* 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 *liṅga*. 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 *liṅga* within the *kunḍa*, in such Śākta thought, is simply the Devī as Jaleśvarī, for the goddess incorporates both male and female attributes.³⁵⁹

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

³⁵⁸A possible explanation for the feminine appellation of the *liṅga* 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 *liṅga* 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.

³⁵⁹Incidentally, 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.

1.58). Like Varuṇa, Durgā is associated with darkness (as Rātrī) and the waters.³⁵⁶ 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 (*māyīn*) (Vṛtra) by means of *māyā*" (Eliade 1991:100). In the myths of the *Durgā Saptaśatī* (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.³⁵⁷

The relationship between Durgā and Varuṇa/Rudra is further affirmed in the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple where one finds the shrine of Jaleśvara/ī, 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 Jaleśvarī by devotees, an epithet which initially caused me some puzzlement, for unlike the ambiguous gender of the image of the Jvārahareśvara/ī image in a nearby shrine, Jaleśvarī is clearly a *liṅga* (see Figure 5). On further examination, I noticed that the *liṅga* is located within a *kuṇḍa*, and in rituals to invoke rainfall during periods of drought, this *kuṇḍa* is slowly filled with water which is sprinkled on the *liṅga*. But despite the

³⁵⁶Varuṇa is often associated with the overarching sky or with the waters. According to Bhattacharji (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 Śataksī, "She who has a Hundred Eyes." The term for eyes (*spaśa*), eventually became *paśa*, the snare or noose with which Varuṇa bound the wicked. According to the *Durgā Saptaśatī* (2.22), Durgā bears Varuṇa's noose.

³⁵⁷This 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 Saptasati* (1.11-44). In what is often referred to as the frame story, the king Suratha and the merchant Samādhi 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 (*samsāra 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 Dumézil, Eliade notes that the sovereign Vedic deity Varuṇa uses as his supreme weapon, the "*māyā of Asura*," which is depicted as a noose (*pāśa*). 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 Varuṇa 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 Varuṇa, the deity Indra, liberates people from the bondage of Varuṇa, 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 Varuṇa, Durgā is called the great demoness (*mahāsuri*) who controls with the power of magical illusion (*māyā*) (*Durgā Saptasati*

³⁵⁵The 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 Dumézil (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 Sevāśram 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 (*bodhana*) 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 *pūjā* 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 Saptasatī*. 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 (*pāṭha 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 (*manautī*) 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 (*pīṭha, 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 Devi's power wells up are the days affected by the grip (*graha*) of detrimental planetary influences and those days dedicated to dangerous deities like *yoginīs* and *mātrkāś* 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 Navaratra. 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 *śakti* 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 Śakti 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 Kālī 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 Mīnākṣī loses her third breast (a symbol of her abnormal femininity) when she encounters Śiva Sundareśvara.

In contrast to the above notion, the taming or corraling influence of female energy on destructive male energy is found in a myth concerning Pārvaṭī and Śiva. Pārvaṭī wins Śiva's attentions and through marriage breaks his intense solitary austerities and moves him into the order of domestic life. See *Śiva Purāna*, Rudra-saṃhitā 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 Prakṛtī. 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 Śailaputrī, the chaste virginal Brahmācārīnī, and the newly menstruating Candraghaṅṭā, she is under the control of her father.³⁶¹ However, the commencement of the menstrual flow of blood has brought with it a disruption to the stable social order.³⁶² 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 Satī we see the disfunctional enactment of this transition.³⁶³ Śiva is the unwanted suitor who wins the hand of Satī. Dakṣa, her father, does not accept the new conditions. Dakṣa dishonours Śiva by not inviting Satī (or Śiva) back to Dakṣa's home to participate in his great sacrifice. Satī disobeys Śiva and attends Dakṣa's great celebration. Dakṣa dishonours Satī and Śiva destroys him. In contrast, the proper divine precedent takes place when Satī next incarnates as Pārvatī. She longs for Śiva, 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

³⁶¹The 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).

³⁶²Menstruation 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 1989:254).

³⁶³A textual version of this myth is found in the *Śiva Purāṇa*, Rudra-saṃhita 2.11-2.42.

parents' homes. The demon-slaying myths of the *Durgā Saptasatī* 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 Kuṣmāṇḍā, she may give birth either to male (functional) or female (somewhat dysfunctional) 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 dysfunctionally, the Devī, too, produces the male child Gaṇeśa from her own body. Gaṇeśa, 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. Gaṇeśa'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 Gaṇeśa and Skanda are portrayed as the Devī's children, although Gaṇeśa, 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 purāṇic 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 Kāśī 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 Kālarātrī, 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 Kālarātrī/Cāmuṇḍā 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 Siddhidatrī, 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 Saptaśatī* 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 Banāras. 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 Durgā might have served as a divine model. Every year Pallavi comes from Calcutta to spend several weeks in Banāras to celebrate Durgā Pūjā at the family home in Chaukambha (see Figure 17). As a scion of one of the great families who perform Durgā Pūjā, 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 Navarātra 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 *satis*, 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., Navarātra). 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 (*kumārī pūjā*) (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 Durgā Pūjā 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.³⁶⁵ 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 forbearance, 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.³⁶⁶ 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

³⁶⁵In 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.

³⁶⁶One 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.³⁶⁷ 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 Durgā Pūjā 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 Saptasatī*, 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 Saptasatī* image of Durgā promotes chastity and independence.

Among unmarried girls, just past the stage of *kumārīs*, I was told that Sītā offered

³⁶⁷The 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.³⁶⁸ 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.

³⁶⁸ Among Bengali girls, Behulā is as influential a model of womanhood as Sītā. The story of Behulā 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, Añjali Lahiri. Durgā Pūjā 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 Behulā, the beautiful daughter of a merchant. Behulā had been cursed by a *brāhmaṇa* woman that her husband would die of a snake bite on his wedding night. Behulā 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 Behulā 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. Behulā blamed Chāndo for Lakhindar's death, saying that he was not a worshipper of Manasā. Behulā, 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 Behulā proved her loyalty to her husband even after his death, Behulā 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.

Behulā parallels Sītā in her loyalty to her husband, but differs from Sītā in certain respects. Behulā 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. Behulā'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 Mahiṣa, or Śumbha and Niśumbha, 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 Kāśī, 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

³⁶⁹One could suggest that Durgā is the model for Sita's fidelity when in the clutches of Rāvaṇa. 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.

³⁷⁰Prior 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. Maḥiṣa, 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 Kuṇḍ temple was built by the widowed queen Rānī 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 (*maṇḍala*) and has synchronized with the flow of *śakti* 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 protectors. During Navarātra, the sacred *maṇḍala* of Banāras, whose perimeter is circumambulated by worshippers on the Pañcakrosi 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"

(1989:133).

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 meaninglessness 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 (1989:137).

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 Babu³⁷² 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 maṇḍala*. 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

³⁷²A pseudonym.

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 Rāmā'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. Rāmā'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 Brāhmanic 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 Mahiṣa myth of the *Durgā Saptaśatī* 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 Devī, 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 Devī to demoness (*rakṣaṣī*).

When feelings of fear arise, or misfortune strikes, the Devī is close at hand. The climactic points in the Durgā Pūjā ritual (e.g., *ārati*, *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 Devī.

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 Devī 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 Kuṇḍ 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 (*śṛṅgāra*), and the festival of Annakuṭa, 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 (*maṇḍala*) of Banāras.

The flowering of the Durgā *yantra* during Navarātra into the whole of the Kāśī *maṇḍala* 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 Kāśī *maṇḍala*, which turn out to be one and the same. Since Kāśī 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 Banāras 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 (*tīrtha*), 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 Saptasatī*, 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 *kunḍa*), 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 Mahāṣṭamī, 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 Prakṛtī), 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-Śākta 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 Prakṛti 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 marginally 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 (*āratī*). 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 Devī 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 Kuṇḍ 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 Devī 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 Devī. Although this triad, at first sight, appears to be radically different, there are pervasive notions which unify them. Demon and Devī 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 Devī 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 Durgājī *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 Mahiṣa, 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 Banārasīs as the interplay of the three *guṇas*.³⁷³ 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

³⁷³My research supports B. Saraswati's observation that the idea of the three *guṇas* is pivotal in Banārasī culture. Saraswati, in what he denotes the Nilakaṇṭha Syndrome, defines four concentric "fortresses" which must be penetrated for an element to become part of the mainstream of Banārasī 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 *triguṇas* - *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 *triguṇas* and no compromise could ever be effected in interpreting this law" (1975:66). From this perspective, Durgā is well entrenched in the heart of Banārasī 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 Saptaśatī* 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-Banāraśi, 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 Ānandamayī Mā Āśrama, Bhārat Sevāśrama Saṅghā, and the Rāmākṛṣṇa 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 Darpaṇa* (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 Purāṇic 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 *yajamana*. 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 *yajamana* 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 *Brhannandikeśvara 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 (*sāmānya 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 (*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.

Durgā Pūjā

The detailed description of the Durgā Pūjā ritual which follows is derived primarily from discussions with Pandit Hemendra Nath Chakravarty, a Banārsi 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 Darpaṇa* 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 "Hrīm," 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 (*Nitya Pūjā*)

Before the *purohita* can begin to perform the preliminary duties (*sāmānya vidhi*) for Durgā Pūjā, he should perform his personal obligatory daily rituals (*nitya 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 *nīm* 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 (*pinda*). 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.⁵ 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 (*viśeṣa*) *pūjās*.⁶ 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.

⁵There 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 *istadevatā*, or if he was preparing for the Durgā Pūjā ritual.

⁶The 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 (*ṣaṣṭi tithi*) may only last for a few hours after dawn on the sixth solar day of Navarātra, and the entire *ṣaṣṭi 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 (*Sāmānya Vidhi*)

Ācamana (Sipping of Water)

A *kośā*, a specially shaped copper vessel, is filled with fresh pure water.⁷ Water is scooped into the palm with the smaller copper *kuśī* and sipped three times while repeating the *mantra* "Om Viṣṇuḥ, Om Viṣṇuḥ, Om Viṣṇuḥ," and then the mouth is ritually wiped with a *mudrā*.⁸ This procedure is called *ācamana*. If, as in this case, the special (*viśeṣa*) *pūjā* to be performed after this *sāmānya 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., *matsya 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*.

Om ātma tattvāya svāhā
Om vidyā tattvāya svāhā
*Om śiva tattvāya svāhā*⁹

Om svāhā to the supreme reality that is Ātma
 Om svāhā to the supreme reality that is Vidyā
 Om svāhā to the supreme reality that is Śiva¹⁰

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:¹¹

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 *kuśī*, makes this offering (*argha*) to the Sun.¹² 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.

⁹*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.

¹⁰*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.

¹¹The *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.

¹²*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 *arghapātra* may be implicitly understood as another form of the Devī.

Jalasuddhi (Purification of Water)

Next, the *purohita* draws a *yantra* with the seed (*bīja*) syllable in the centre. If he is to be performing Durgā Pūjā that day he may use a goddess *yantra* and *bīja*. 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.¹³ 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 *añkuśa* (goad) *mudrā*, the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, and other holy rivers (*nādi*) are delivered into the *kośā*.¹⁴

*Om gaṅge ca yamune caiva godāvarī sarasvatī/
narmade sindhu kaverī jale 'smiṇ sannidhiṃ kuru.*

Om! May the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā, and others like the Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaverī come to this water.

Its fulfillment is symbolized by the *dhenu* (cow) *mudrā*.¹⁵ The *kośā* is then covered with the *matsya* (fish) *mudrā*.¹⁶

¹³This is called *ankuśa* (goad) *mudrā*.

¹⁴The goad (*añkuśa*), 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 Viṣṇu 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 *kuśa* 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.¹⁷ Touching the flowers, which are kept in a plate set on a tripod to his right, he utters:

*Om puspe puspe mahāpuspe supuspe puspasambhave/
puspacayāvākīrṇe ca huṃ phaṭ svāhā.*

Om! [Through the utterance of the mystic syllables,] "Huṃ phaṭ" 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 hrīm ādharāśaktaye kamalāsanāya namaḥ.

Then touching the seat he says:

āsanamantrasya meruprṣṭharṣiḥ sutalam chandah kūrmodevatā āsanopaveśane viniyogaḥ.

The approximate meaning of this combined act and utterance is:

Om! Uttering "Hrim" [I offer this flower] to this seat of lotus, the supreme supporting power [i.e., the goddess]. Its sage is Meruprṣṭha, the metre is Sutala, the presiding deity is the Tortoise, and its application is the function of sitting.¹⁸

Then with folded hands he recites:

Om pṛthvi tvayā dhrta lokah devī tvam viṣṇunā dhrtā!

¹⁷For Durgā Pūjā, the red hibiscus or China rose (*japā*) is common.

¹⁸Meruprṣṭha 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 *pātāla* 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*.

tvam ca dhāraya mām nityam pavitraṃ kuru cāsanam.

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 (*prāṇāyāma*) using various *mantras*. In this *prāṇāyāma*, the sacred *mantra*, Om (*om-kāra*) is not used. Other seed syllables (*bīja*) are utilized. The energy vortices (*cakra*) within the body are purified with *mantras* so the dormant potential energy (*kuṇḍalini*) 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 *anga 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 (*vetāla*), and a host (*gaṇa*) of other such pernicious beings.²²

²⁰Some *purohitas* suggest that Ādya Śāṅkarācārya, the great 7th or 8th century C.E. reviver of Hinduism, founder of the Hindu monastic (*maṭha*) system, and proponent of a philosophy of non-dualistic understanding (*advaita vedānta*) prescribed these practices. Śāṅkara 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 Śākta 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:

Om kartavyesmin durgāpūjana karmaṇi
Om puṇyāham bhavanto bruvantu

Om! On the occasion of this ritual to be performed for Durgā, would you please utter "Om puṇyāham" (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:

Om kartavyesmin durgāpūjana karmaṇi
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:

Om kartavyesmin durgāpūjana karmaṇi
Om ṛdhiṃ bhavanto bruvantu

Om! . . . would you please utter "Om ṛdhiṃ" (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. *Śiddha* is rice which is first boiled, dried, and then husked. This is popular in Bengal and is not used in rituals.

The *brāhmaṇas* repeat:

Om ṛdhyatām. Om ṛdhyatām. Om ṛdhyatām. (Let there be prosperity.)

When finished he says, with folded hands:

*Om sūryaḥ somo yamaḥ kālāḥ sandhye bhūtānyaḥ kṣapah/
pavano dikpatir bhumir ākāśaḥ khacarāmarāḥ/
brahmyam śasanam asthāya kalpadhvam iha sannidhim.
Om tat sat ayamārambhāḥ 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 *brāhmaṇas*, 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 rājānam varuṇam agnim anvārabhāmahe/
ādityam viṣṇum sūryam brāhmaṇanca brhaspatim/
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 Rg Veda *brāhmaṇa* 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 is worshipped with a combination of Vedic,

Purāṇic, 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 (*sāmānya vidhi*) prior to Durgā Pūjā it reads as follows:

Viṣṇurom tat sadadya āśvine māsi kanyārāśisthe bhāskare śukle pakṣe saptamyām tithau vārabhya mahānavamīm yāvat amukagotra (kaśyapagotra for the purohitas whom I consulted) śrī . . . devaśarmā (here varieties of desires wished for through the performance of the pūjā may be introduced) sarvāpacchānti pūrvaka dīrghāyustva paramaiśvarya atula dhana dhānya putra pautrādya navacchinna santati mitra vardhana śatrukṣayottarottara rājasammānādyabhīṣṭa siddhaye paratra deviloka prāptaye ca (śrīdurgāprītikāmo vā) yathopakalpitopaharaiḥ devīpurānokta vidhinā saptamī vihita rambhādi navapatrikā snāna praveśa mṛṇmaya śrīdurgāpraveśa mahāsnāna gaṇapatyādi nānādevatā pūjāpūrvaka vārṣika śarat kālīna śrī bhagavaddurgāpūjā chchāga paśu balidāna mahāṣṭamī vihita mṛṇmaya śrīdurgāmahāsnāna gaṇapatyādi nānādevatā pūjāpūrvaka śrībhagavaddurgāpūjā chchāgapaśu balidāna mahāṣṭamī mahānavamī sandhikāla vihita gaṇapatyādi nānādevatā pūjāpūrvaka śrī bhagavaddurgā pūjā chchāgapaśu balidāna mahānavamī vihita mṛṇmaya śrīdurgāmahāsnāna gaṇapatyādi nānādevatā pūjā chchāgapaśu balidāna pūrvaka śrī bhagavaddurgā pūjanamaham kariṣye.²⁴

Om Viṣṇu! Today, in the month of Āśvina, in the Kanya (Virgo/virgin) constellation (*āśvina nakṣatra*), 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 Purāna*, I shall follow all the rituals prescribed there, namely: the navapatrikā, installation, entering the temple, getting Devī Durgā to enter the temple, the great bath, and performing the rituals to Gaṇeśa 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 *brāhamaṇa* 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 *ātmanepadi* 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 (*mahāsaptamī*), the bathing of the clay moulded Śrī Durgā, Gaṇeśa, etc., and after that a goat sacrifice (*balidāna*) will be offered. Again at the juncture of the eighth and ninth *tithi* (*mahāṣṭamī mahānavamī sandhikāla*) Gaṇeśa 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 (*mahānavamī*) the whole process will be repeated.

While reciting this *saṅkalpa*, the *purohita* places his right hand over the *kuśī* which 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 drawn from the *Ṛg Veda*, symbolically linking the entire ritual procedure (*pūjā*) to Vedic sacrificial (*yajna*) antecedents.

Om devo vo dravinodāḥ pūrnām vivaṣṭāsīcam udvā siñcadhvam upa vā pṛnadhvam ādidvo deva oḥate/

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 (*tithi*) of the nine lunar *tithis* of Navarātra.²⁵

²⁵As previously mentioned, the *sāmānya 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*, *puṣpa śuddhi*, purification of palms and fingers of the hand (*kara śuddhi*), preparation of the vessels for *argha* (*arghapātrapratipatti*), *sāmānya argha*, offerings to *dikpālas*, *prānāyāma*, *bhūta śuddhi*, *mātrka nyāsa*, *kara nyāsa*, *aṅga nyāsa*, *antarmātrkā nyāsa*, *vahya mātrkā nyāsa*, *pītha nyāsa*, *ṛsyadi nyāsa*, *aṅga nyāsa* (again), *kara nyāsa* (again), *caḥsur dāna*, *prāna pratiṣṭha*, *avāhana*, *dhyāna* of the deity, *manasa pūjā*, preparation of the vessels for *viśeṣa argha*, *viśeṣa argha*, *dhyāna* of the deity, and detailed *pūjā* of the deity.

Since Durgā Pūjā is rather elaborate, *purohitas* modify the *sāmānya 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 (*ṣaṣṭhi*) 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 (*pañcamī*).

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 śarat kālīna śrī bhagavad durgā bodhana karmadhikāra pratibandhaka pāpāpanodana kāmaha om devi tvam ityādi mantrādvya 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 prākṛtam cittam pāpākrāntam abhūnamama tanniḥ svārāya cittānme papam. Humḥ phaṭ ca te namaḥ!

²⁶Most devotees claim that Rāma's worship of the Devī during Āśvina was the "human" precedent for such worship. In the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāna*, the sage (*ṛṣi*) Narada tells Rāma how both *ṛṣi*s (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 navasaksinaḥ.

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 "Hum 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 (*krodhadṛṣṭi*), mimicing 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 (*puṣpa*) in it, he makes another *sañkalpa*. This is the same as the previous long *sañkalpa* up to *yathopakalpitopaharaiḥ*, and it then proceeds as follows:

. . . devi purānoktavidhinā, bilva vṛkṣa, vāriṣika śarat kālīna, śrī bhagavad durgā pūjāṅgabhūta nānādevatā pūjā pūrvaka śrī durgāyāḥ bodhanamaham karisyē.

. . . 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 *sañkalpa* also mentions that Durga is to be invoked into a wood-apple (*bilva*) tree (*vṛkṣa*). This tree, also called the *bel*, has leaves in triads, resembling a trident (*triśula*), 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 vṛkṣa*, the next set of rituals will take place.

The *purohita* now reads the *sañkalpa 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 (*ghata*) is one of her manifest forms. In compelling ways, one can observe in the *ghatasthāpana* the recreation of the body cosmos of the Devī herself.

First, a low altar of soft clay is built in front of the *bilva* tree.²⁸ It is built over a *yantra*. While some homes have a very elaborate ritual diagram (*ālpanā*) drawn, more often it is the *purohita* who will draw an eight-petalled (*aṣṭadala*) lotus. On occasion, the *sarvatobhadra maṇḍala* (Diagram of a All Auspiciousness) may be used.²⁹ He utters the following Vedic *mantra* while preparing the soil altar.

*Om bhūraṣi bhūmirasi aditirasi viśvadhāya viśvasya bhuvanasya dhartrī pṛthvibīm yaccha pṛthvibhim dr̥ṇha pṛthibim mān himsī.*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 *purohita* next sprinkles five grains (*dhānyamasi*) on the altar: paddy, wheat,

²⁷In many temples which house Śiva *liṅgas*, the goddess is recognized as the *yoni* in which the *liṅga* stands. Often, a *ghata*, a clay pot, is suspended above the *liṅga* and its sanctified water (*amṛta*) is allowed to drip slowly upon the *liṅga*. This *ghata* is clearly the Devī, identified through certain notions, such as the descending Gaṅgā Devī who flows through Śiva's locks. The *ghata* often contains Gaṅgā water or its metaphor.

²⁸Grain will be planted in this altar which symbolizes the goddess as earth and soil.

²⁹Here the *yantra* symbolizes the Devī as the unmanifest cosmic matrix from which this particular manifestation emerges.

³⁰It comes from *Yajur Veda* 13.18 (Hirnyapāda, svt 10.406).

³¹The 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 Viṣṇu. 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.³² He utters:

*Om dhinuhi devān dhinuhi yajñam/
dhinuhi yajña patim dhinuhi mām yajañyam.*

Nourish the gods, nourish the oblation, nourish the lords of the oblation, nourish me the sacrificer also.³³

The jar (*ghaṭa*), particularly shaped with a wide circular mouth, narrow neck, and full round body, is placed on the altar as the *purohita* recites:³⁴

*Om ājighra kalasam mahyā tvā viśantvindhavah/
punarurjā nivartasva sānaḥ sahasraṃ dhuksyrudhārā payasvatt/
pūnarmā viśatadraviḥ.*
[Vedic verse]

He next fills the jar to the neck with clean water, uttering:³⁵

*Om varuṇasyotthambhanamasi varuṇasya skambha sarjanisthaḥ/
varuṇasya ṛtasadanyasi varuṇasya ṛtasadanamasīda.*
[VS.4.36; ŚB.3.3.4.25]

Ideally, in the next step, five jewels (*pañcaratna*) are to be placed into the water.

³²These 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.

³³The symbolism of nourishment resonates with the notions of the goddess as Annapūrṇā (Replete with Sustenance) and Śākambharī (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.

³⁴The 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.

³⁵The 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 *yajñādumbara* (a twig commonly used in fire oblations).³⁷ He utters:

*Om dhanvanā gā dhanvanājim jayema/
tivrāḥ samado jayema/
dhanuḥ śatorapakāmam kṛnoti 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:

*Om yāḥ phalinī ryā aphaḷā apuspā yaśca puspiniḥ/
brhaspatī prasūtāstā no muñcatvañghm hasaḥ.
[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:

³⁶This procedure is occasionally completely omitted as the cost of staging such *pūjās* 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.

³⁷The 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 represents the process of growth of life, through the symbolism of the sap or blood which flows through them.

³⁸The 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.

³⁹This 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 (*triśūla*), and has even been identified, by some devotees, with the *pranava*, "Om."

*Om sindoriva prādhvane sūghanāso vātapramiyah patayanti yahvāh/
ghrtasya dhārā aruṣo na vājī kaṣṭha bhindan nurmibhiḥ pinvamānaḥ.*

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.⁴⁰

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 yuvā suvāsāḥ parivīta āgāt sa u śreyān bhavati jāyamānaḥ/
taṁ dhīrāsah kavayah unnayanti sādhyā manasa devayantaḥ.*
[RV.3.8.4a; AB.2.2.29a]

He sprinkles the top of the *Devī* with *dūrvā* grass saying:

*Om kāndāt kāndāt prarohanti puruṣaḥ paruṣaḥ pari/
Evā no dūrve pratana sahasreṇa śatena ca.*
[VS.13.2a; ŚB.7.4.2.14; TA.10.1.7a]

And with flowers (*puspa*), saying:

*Om śriṣca te lakṣmiṣca patnyā ahorātre parśve nakṣatrāni rūpamaśvinau vyāttam/
iṣanniṣaṇa mumma iṣāṇa sarvalokaṁ ma iṣāṇa.*
[VSK.35.22n]

And with sandalpaste (*gandha*), saying:

*Om gandhadvārām dūrādharṣam nityapuṣṭāne karīṣiṇīm/
iśvarī sarvabhūtānām tvāmihopahvaye śriyam.*
[RVKh.5.87.9a; TA.10.1]

Sthirī Karaṇa (Giving Steadiness)

When the jar (*kalaśa*) is established, the *purohita* proceeds to the ritual of *sthirī 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 vermilion 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.

⁴⁰This is a Vedic verse [RV.4.58.7]

*Om sarvatīrthodbhavaṃ vāri sarvadeva samamvitam/
imam ghaṭam samāruhya tiṣṭha devaganaiḥ saha/
sttām sthīm sthīro bhava vidvāṅga āsurbhava vājyarvan pṛthurbhava suṣadastvamagni
purīṣavāhanah.
[Vedic Verse]*

Next, he recites the *Gāyatrī Mantra* one to ten times over the jar.

*Om bhur bhuvah svah 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 prarohantī puruṣah puruṣah pari/
evā no dūrve pratanuḥ sahasrena śatenaca.
[VS.13.20a; ŚB.7.4.2.14; TA.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 (*bīja*) 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 "*Hrīm*," and fills it with the *mantra*

⁴¹The 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 cordoning 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*:

*Om gaṅgādyāḥ saritaḥ sarvāḥ sarāmsi jaladā nadāḥ/
hradāḥ prasravanāḥ punyāḥ svarga pātāla bhūgatāḥ/
sarva tīrthānt 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 "*Strīm.*" Anointing it with vermillion, he utters "*Raṃ.*" Placing the flowers, he utters "*Yaṃ.*" When placing the *dūrvā* grass, he utters the seed (*bīja*) syllable of Durgā, "*Dum.*" Sprinkling the jar with water, he says "*Om,*" and striking it with *kuśa* grass he utters the *mantra*, "*Hum phaṭ 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 (*bīja*) 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:

*Om ādhara śaktaye namaḥ/
Om kūrṃāya namaḥ/
Om anantāya namaḥ/
Om pṛthivyaī namaḥ.*

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 pātra*) which will be used for the sacred offering, namely the *kośā*, while uttering "Phaṭ."⁴³ He fills it with water, uttering "Om." Worshipping the water in the vessel, he utters:

*Am sūrya maṇḍalāya dvādaśa kalātmane namaḥ/
Um soma maṇḍalāya soḍaśa kalātmane namaḥ/
Maṃ vahni maṇḍalāya daśa kalātmane namaḥ.*

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.
Maṃ! Salutations to the disc of fire consisting of ten subtle elements (digits).⁴⁴

At the head of the *kośā*, the *purohita* places *dūrvā* grass, flowers, and sandal paste.⁴⁵ Then he stirs it well with his middle finger.⁴⁶ He performs the *mudrās* of the goad (*añkuśa*), the cow (*dhenu*), and the fish (*matsya*) uttering:

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 (*sāmānya vidhi*), the smaller copper *kuśī* 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 *dūrvā*, 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 (*pṛthivī*). 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 *añkuśa 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 gaṅge ca yamune ca godāvarī sarasvatī narmade sindhu kaverī jalesmin sannidhim kuru.

Om! May the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, 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*).

Bhūtapasarana (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 bhūtaḥ bhūvisamsthītāḥ/
ye bhūtāḥ vighna kartāraste naśyantu śivāñṭayā.*

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 (*trikoṇa*) 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 kṣetrapālādīḥ bhūtaganebhyoḥ namaḥ.*

Om! These flowers and fragrances are offered with obeisance to the group of protectors of the field and the host of elemental spirits.

Placing some *māśa* (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 eṣaḥ māśabhaktabalaye namaḥ.

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 eṣaḥ māśa bhakta balih/
Om kṣetrapālādīḥ bhūtaganebyoḥ namaḥ.*

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 dānavāh rākṣasāśca ye śāntim kurvantu te sarve imam grhantu mad 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 vetālāśca piśācaśca rākṣasāśca sarīṣṛpaḥ apasarpantu te sarve narasinghena tāditāḥ.

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 Hrīm, Klim, Dum, or Om are uttered during the yogic activity.

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.

Bhūta Śuddhi (Purification of the Elements)

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 (*bīja*). Thus:

Earth (*prthvī*) is made of the syllable *Laṃ*.
 Water (*jala*).....*Vaṃ*.
 Fire (*agni*).....*Raṃ*.
 Air (*vāyu*).....*Yaṃ*.
 Ether (*ākāśa*).....*Haṃ*.

Furthermore, these five *bhūtas* are connected with five of the body's energy vortices (*cakra*). Thus:

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| <i>Mūlādhāra</i> | is associated with | <i>prthvī</i> |
| <i>Svādhīsthana</i> | is associated with | <i>jala</i> |
| <i>Manipura</i> | is associated with | <i>agni</i> |
| <i>Anāhata</i> | is associated with | <i>vāyu</i> |
| <i>Viśuddhi</i> | is associated with | <i>ākāśa</i> |

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.⁴⁸ 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 (*jīvātman*), 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 (*kunḍalinī*) which abides in the *mūlādhāra cakra*. He allows the *kunḍalinī* to snake upwards along the central energy channel (*susumnā*). On its journey, the awakened *kunḍalinī* traverses the lower energy *cakras* until it reaches the heart *cakra* (*anāhata*) from where the limited self (*jīvātman*) is carried up by her (*Kunḍalinī* is personified as a goddess) to the *sahasrāra*. The thousand-petalled lotus is

⁴⁸He 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 (*jīvātman*) is made to unite with that supreme Brahman (*parātman*) in the pericarp of that lotus.

During the raising of *kuṇḍalinī* 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 (*bīja*) "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 *bīja*, repeating the *prāṇāyāma* sixteen times. Next, taking the *bīja*, "Raṁ," he inhales it with the colour red through the right nostril to a count of four. Holding the *bīja* "Raṁ" with the breath, he visualizes a sinful person (*pāpapurūṣa*) residing in his body.⁵⁰ Then he vividly imagines the *pāpapurūṣa* burned by the *bīja* "Raṁ," while the

⁴⁹This supreme reality is envisioned as the union of the goddess Kuṇḍalinī with the supreme Śiva, or is thought of non-dualistically as the supreme goddess.

⁵⁰The *pāpapurūṣa* is generally visualized on the left side of the belly.

breath is held.⁵¹ 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.⁵²

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 sr̥ṅgātā chirah susumnā pathena jīvaśivam paramaśivapade yojayāmi svāhā.
Om yaṃ liṅgaśarīram śoṣaya śoṣaya svāhā.
Om raṃ saṅkoṣā śarīram dāhā dāhā svāhā.
Om paramaśiva susumnā pathena mūla sr̥ṅgataṃ ullāsollasat ullasat jvala jvala prajvala prajvala haṃ saḥ so 'ham svāhā.

These are concerned with uniting the limited self (*jīvaśiva*) with the supreme self (*paramaśiva*) 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 (*koṣā*). 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

⁵¹The Sanskrit syllable, "ra" (*refa*), 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 *pāpapurūṣa*.

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 Kuṇḍalini 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., *mūlādhāra* or *pṛthivī*), it becomes solidified. The body is then immaculate and composed of adamantine substance.

alphabet (*mātrkā*) upon his transformed body.⁵³ In this process various charged syllables (*varṇa mayī*) are placed in different limbs of the gross body thus transforming it into a body composed of charged sound vibrations (*varṇa mayī tanu*).⁵⁴ He begins by saying:

Asya mātrkā mantrasya brahmaṛṣṭh gāyatrīcchando mātrkā sarasvatī devatā halo bījāni svarāḥ śaktayaḥ mātrkā nyāse viniyogaḥ.

This is a general statement of the presiding sage (*ṛṣi*), meter (*chandas*), deity (*devatā*), and application (*viniyoga*) of the procedure, and is explained in his following utterances.⁵⁵ 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 brahmane ṛṣaye namaḥ.

Om! Salutations to the sage Brahmā.

Touching his mouth, he says:

Om gāyatrīyai ccandase namaḥ.

Om! Salutations to the meter Gāyatrī.

Touching his heart, he says:

Om mātrkāyai sarasvatīyai devatāyai namaḥ.

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 (*śabda*). By imprinting his immaculate body (transformed through *bhūtaśuddhi*) 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 (*bīja*). 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 (*yonī*), and the vowels as the fertilizing seed.

Touching himself at the lower back just above the region of the anus, he says:

Om halbhyoḥ bījebhyoḥ namaḥ.

Om! Salutations to the seed consonants.

Touching the sides of his thighs and sweeping down to his ankles, he says:

Om svarebhyoḥ śaktibhyoḥ namaḥ.

Om! Salutations to the energy vowels.

Then passing his hands over his whole body, palms facing forward he says:

Om klīm kīlakāya namaḥ.

Om! Salutations to the bolt Klīm.⁵⁶

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*:

Om am kam kham gam gham nam am aṅguṣṭhabhyām namaḥ.

Om im cam cham jam jham nam im tarjanībhyām svāhā.

Om um taṁ thaṁ daṁ dham nam um madhyāmabhyām vaṣat.

Om em taṁ thaṁ daṁ dham nam aiṁ anāmikābhyām huṁ.

Om om paṁ phaṁ baṁ bhaṁ muṁ auṁ kaṁiṣṭhābhyām vaṣat.

Om am yaṁ raṁ laṁ vaṁ śaṁ ṣaṁ saṁ haṁ kṣaṁ aḥ karatala pṛṣṭhābhyām astrāya phaṭ.⁵⁷

⁵⁶This magical formula "*Klīm*" unleashes or unlocks the power of the *mantras* which have been fixed with a bolt/pin/nail (*kīlaka*) ("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 *Durgā Saptasatī* is called the *Kīlaka* and is recited just before the text itself. Normally the *kīlaka* 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 *kīlaka* 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, *kīlaka bījas* 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.

⁵⁷The endings *namaḥ*, *svāhā*, *vaṣat*, *huṁ*, *vaṣat*, and *phaṭ* are called the *jāti* and are used in *kara nyāsa* and *anga 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 (*aṅguṣṭha*) 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: . . . *hr̥dayāya namaḥ*.

Pointing to the head with the fingertips of the hand: . . . *śirase svāhā*.

Pointing to the top-knot with the tip of the thumb: . . . *śikhāyai vaṣaṭ*.

With both hands embracing the body: . . . *kavacāya hum*.⁵⁸

With three fingers indicating the three eyes (middle finger pointing to the third eye): . . . *netratrayāya vaṣaṭ*.

Moving his hands around each other and slapping the palm of the left hand briskly with two fingers of the right hand he says: . . . *karatala pr̥ṣṭābhyām astrāya 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 (*vr̥ddhi*) form, "long a" (i.e., *ā*) This envelopment (*samputa*) of consonants by vowels unifies and empowers them. A similar procedure is used in certain forms of recitation (*samputa pāṭha*) of the *Durgā Saptasāṭt*. In the index fingers (*tarjanī*), 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 *vr̥ddhi* "ai" are imprinted on the un-named or ring fingers (*anāmika*). On the little fingers (*kanīṣṭha*), he places the labials and corresponding nasal, enclosed by the vowel "o" and its *vr̥ddhi* form "au." Finally in the backs (*pr̥ṣṭha*) and palms of his hand (*karatala*), he places the semivowels, sibilants, and conjunct consonant, "kṣa" contained between the nasal (*anusvara*) and aspirated endings (*visarga*).

⁵⁸The body is here referred to as an armour (*kavaca*). This is because it has already been transformed (through *bhūtaśuddhi*) into adamantine substance. An important quality of this bodily material, conveyed through the term, *kavaca*, is its impenetrable, unassailable (*durga*), and protective nature.

⁵⁹The 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 (*kaṇṭha mūla*). Visualizing a sixteen-petalled lotus there, he places all the fourteen vowels, *anusvara* and *visarga* in the following manner. Sandwiching each between "Om" and "namaḥ," he proceeds saying:

Om am namaḥ, om āṃ namaḥ, om im namaḥ, om īṃ namaḥ, om um namaḥ, om ūṃ namaḥ, om ṛṃ namaḥ, om ṛīṃ namaḥ, om lm namaḥ, om līṃ namaḥ, om em namaḥ, om aiṃ namaḥ, om om namaḥ, om aum namaḥ, om aṃ namaḥ, om ah namaḥ.

Next at the energy plexus of the primal sound (*nāda*), (*anāhata cakra*), the seat of the limited self (*jīvātman*), located in the region of the heart, he visualizes a twelve petalled lotus. There he imprints the first twelve consonants, saying:

Om kaṃ namaḥ, om khaṃ namaḥ, om gaṃ namaḥ, om ghaṃ namaḥ, om ṅaṃ namaḥ, om caṃ namaḥ, om chaṃ namaḥ, om jaṃ namaḥ, om jhaṃ namaḥ, om ṅaṃ namaḥ, om ṭaṃ namaḥ, om ṭhaṃ namaḥ.

In the region of the navel, at the *maṇipūra cakra*, he visualizes a ten petalled lotus and places the next ten consonants:

Om ḍaṃ namaḥ, om ḍhaṃ namaḥ, om ṇaṃ namaḥ, om taṃ namaḥ, om thaṃ namaḥ, om daṃ namaḥ, om dhaṃ namaḥ, om naṃ namaḥ, om paṃ namaḥ, om phaṃ namaḥ.

In the region of the base of the male sexual organ, at the *svadhiṣṭhāna cakra*, he visualizes a six petalled lotus, and places the next six consonants and semi vowels:

Om baṃ namaḥ, om bhaṃ namaḥ, om maṃ namaḥ, om yaṃ namaḥ, om raṃ namaḥ, om laṃ namaḥ.

At the base plexus (*mūlādhāra cakra*), the seat of the serpent energy (*kundalini*), 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:

Om vaṃ namaḥ, om śaṃ namaḥ, om ṣaṃ namaḥ, om saṃ namaḥ.

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.

Om haṃ namaḥ, om kṣaṃ namaḥ.

Bahir/Bahya Mātrkā Nyāsa (External Imprintment of Syllables)

Having completed this internal *nyāsa* through meditative visualization and *mantra*, the *purohita* proceeds to perform an external placement of syllables, with the aid of physical action. He begins with a meditative visualization and manifestation (*dhyana*) of *mātrkās* thus:

*Pañcāśallipibhir vibhakta mukha doḥ panamadhyā vakṣasthalām/
bhāsvan mauli nivaddha candrasakalām āpīna tuṅgastanīm/
mudrām akṣa guṇam sudhādhyā kalasam vidyāñca hastambujair vivhrāṇam visada
prabhām trinayanām vagdevatam 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 face, 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 *rudrākṣa* [beads] and the *mudrā* (here the *purohita* assumes the *vaikhānasa 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 *purohita* follows the same procedure as the external *matrka nyāsa* but in reverse.⁶⁰

Pīṭha Nyāsa (Imprintment of Seats)

The *purohita* now assigns the various seats or abodes (*pīṭha*) of the goddess to appropriate body parts.⁶¹ Touching his heart, he says:

⁶⁰Through this process he enfolds the vibrational body of the goddess into his own.

⁶¹The term, *pīṭha* (altar or seat), is commonly associated with the legend of the goddess Saṁī, the parts of whose body are scattered over the Indian subcontinent. The location of each of her body parts is a *pīṭha* of the goddess, the most important being at Kāmarūpā where the sexual organ (*yoni*) of Saṁī fell. L. Renou and D. C. Sircar (1973), point out the relationship between the notion of *pīṭha* and the sexual organ of the Devī, symbolically akin to the *liṅga* of Śiva. Thus the *pīṭha* 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 pīṭhas*. The Durgā Mandir in Banāras is frequently referred to as such a *siddha pīṭha*, and the stone lotus icon which is reverentially

Om ādhara śaktaye namaḥ/
Om kūrmāya namaḥ/
Om anantāya namaḥ/
Om pṛthivyai namaḥ.
Om kṣtra samudrāya namaḥ.
Om śvetadvīpaya namaḥ.
Om maṇimandapāya namaḥ.
Om kalpavrkṣāya namaḥ.
Om maṇivedikāya namaḥ.
Om ratnasimhāsānāya namaḥ.

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.⁶²

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Touching his | right shoulder, he says: | <i>Om dharmāya namaḥ.</i> |
| | left shoulder | <i>jñānāya</i> |
| | right thigh | <i>vairāgyāya</i> |
| | left thigh | <i>aiśvaryāya</i> |
| | mouth (opening of face) | <i>adharmāya</i> |
| | left flank | <i>ajñānāya</i> |
| | navel | <i>avairagyāya</i> |
| | right flank | <i>anaiśvaryāya</i> |
| | heart | <i>anantāya</i> |
| | | <i>padmāya</i> |

Om! Salutations to righteousness, knowledge, dispassion, royal power, wickedness, ignorance, passion, base weakness, the endless serpent, the lotus.⁶³

He then says:

Am arkamaṇḍalāya dvādaśa kalātmane namaḥ.
Um somamaṇḍalāya ṣoḍaśa kalātmane namaḥ.

touched by devotees as their most intimate contact point with the Devī is also called the Devī *pīṭha*.

The *pīṭha nyāsa* will again be repeated during the special offering (*viśeṣa 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 *viśeṣa argha* the *nyāsa* will be performed on a conch shell which represents the *pīṭha* of the goddess.

⁶²The *pīṭhas* referred to here are not the commonly understood sacred places of the goddess as enumerated in the *Pīṭhanirṇaya* or purāṇic 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.

⁶³The Devī's ambivalent nature is clearly indicated in these abodes.

*Mam vahnimanḍalāya daśa kalātmāne namaḥ.*⁶⁴

Kara and Aṅga Nyāsa

The *purohita* repeats the imprintment on the hand and limbs.

Ṛṣyadi Nyāsa (Imprintment of the Revealer and Others.)

He utters:

*Śirasi brahmaṇe ṛṣāye namaḥ.
Mukhe gāyatrīyai cchandase namaḥ.
Hṛdāya durgāyai devatāyai namaḥ.
Guhye duṃ bījāya namaḥ.
Pādāyoh duṃ śaktāye namaḥ.
Sarvaṅgeṣu klīm klāka namaḥ.*

Salutations to the revealer Brahmā in the head, to the meter Gāyatrī in the mouth, to the goddess Durgā in the mouth, to the seed syllable Duṃ in the anus (literally, the hidden part, also understood as the *mūlādhāra*), to the śakti Duṃ in the two feet, and to the fastening pin Klīm 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 *bīja* "Hrīm."

This completes the *bodhana* rituals prior to actually awakening the Devī.

⁶⁴The 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.⁶⁵ Taking a flower from the flower plate, he performs the meditative visualization (*dhyāna*) of Gaṇeśa.⁶⁶

*Om kharvam sthūlatanum gajendra vadnām lambodaram sundaram/
prasyandam madhugandha lubdha madhūpa/
vyalola gaṇḍasthālam danta ghaṭa vidāritārurudhiraiḥ sindūra sobhākaram/
vande śailasutāsutam gaṇapatim siddhipradam karmasu.*

I pay obeisance to the son of Parvatī, the daughter of Himālaya. 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.⁶⁷

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.⁶⁸ It is then placed on the top of his head. The *purohita* then performs the *dhyāna* again with a flower placed on a tripod.⁶⁹

⁶⁵The 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 Parvatī's chambers.

⁶⁶I 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.

⁶⁷This *dhyāna* is considered to be the most commonly used one to Gaṇeśa. It identifies Gaṇeśa as Parvatī's (*śailasutāsutam*) son. It reinforces the identification between vermillion and blood. Vermillion (*sindūra*) is traditionally used to decorate elephants (*sindūratilaka*). The word *sindura* (with a short "u") also means elephant. Gaṇeśa is propitiated as the "remover of obstacles."

⁶⁸Among the ritualists with whom I studied, the *dhyāna mudrā* was interchangeably referred to as the *yoni mudrā*.

⁶⁹The *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 Gaṇeśa 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! Gāṃ! Obeisance to Gaṇeśa."⁷⁰

Eṣa gandhaḥ/ Om gāṃ gaṇeśāya namaḥ.

2. Taking a most excellent flower (*sacchandanam puspam*), he worships Gaṇeśa, saying:

Etat sacchandanam puspam/ Om gāṃ gaṇeśāya namaḥ.

3. Taking incense (*dhūpa*), such as camphor (*karpūra*), he offers it saying:

Eṣa dhūpaḥ/ Om gāṃ gaṇeśāya namaḥ.

4. He next worships with light from a flame, perhaps using a lamp (*dīpa*) of clarified butter (*ghī*), saying:

Eṣa dīpaḥ/ Om gāṃ gaṇeśāya namaḥ.

5. And lastly he makes a small offering of food (*naivedyam*), such as a piece of sugar cane, or a piece of banana, saying:⁷¹

Etan naivedyam/ Om gāṃ gaṇeśāya namaḥ.

He finishes the Gaṇeśa *pūjā* with:

Om devendra maulimandāra makarandakanaruṇāḥ vighnān harantu devendra caranambuja 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 upācara*) 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"Gāṃ" is the seed syllable (*bīja*) of Gaṇeśa.

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 *naivedyas* may correspond to the number of deities present in the murtis, but may also be offered to deities present in disembodied form. To offer *naivedyas*, 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 gandapuspe / *Om śivadi pañcādevatābhyo namaḥ.*
 / *Om ādityādi navagrahebhyo namaḥ.*
 / *Om indrādi daśadikpālebhyo namaḥ.*
 / *Om matsyādi daśavatārebhyo namaḥ.*
 / *Om gaṅgāyai namaḥ.*

Since he is performing the *pūjā* in Banāras, he adds:

/ *Om viśvanāthāya namaḥ.*
 / *Om annapūrṇāya namaḥ.*

Continuing with:

/ *Om nārāyaṇāya namaḥ.*
 / *Om lakṣmyai namaḥ.*
 / *Om sarasvatyai namaḥ.*

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 Annapūrṇā, to Nārāyaṇa, to Laksmī, to Sarasvatī.⁷²

Bhūtapasarana (Removal of Inimical Spirits)

Taking some white mustard seed, he utters the *mantra*:

*Vetālāśca piśācaśca rākṣasāśca sarīśrpāḥ/
 apararpantu te sarve ye cānye vighnakārahāḥ/
 vināyakā vighnakarāḥ mahogrā yajñadviso piśitāsanāśca/
 siddhārthakāḥ vajrasamāna kalpaiḥ mayā nirastāḥ vidiśaḥ 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

⁷²The *purohita* may add as many deities as he desires here, often including his chosen personal deity (*iṣṭadevatā*). He definitely makes offerings to all the deities present in the *yajamana*'s home shrine.

⁷³The 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

He places a tripod on the diagram.⁷⁷ The *viśeṣa argha* is not prepared in the *kośā* or *kuśī* as in the case of the *sāmānya argha*, but in a conch shell.⁷⁸ The conch (*saṅkha*) is purified with water and the *mantra*, "Hum phaṭ." The *purohita* then places it on the tripod worshipping both the conch and the tripod with flowers and sandalpaste while uttering, "These flowers and fragrances (*ete gandhapuṣpe*)." He fills it with water saying:

*Aṃ sūrya maṇḍalāya dvādaśa kalātmāne namaḥ/
Um̐ soma maṇḍalāya śoḍaśa kalātmāne namaḥ/
Maṃ vahni maṇḍalāya daśa kalātmāne namaḥ.*

Aṃ! Salutations to the disc of the sun consisting of twelve divisional elements.
Um̐! Salutations to the disc of the moon consisting of sixteen divisional elements.
Maṃ! Salutations to the disc of fire consisting of ten subtle elements (digits).⁷⁹

At the open tip of the conch, he places flowers, *dūrvā* grass, *kuśa* grass, sandal paste, and washed rice, while uttering the Durgā *bīja*, "Dum̐." He covers the conch with *dhenu mudrā*, transforming the water into ambrosial nectar (*amṛta*), and with *matsya mudrā*, to signify its completion. Then inserting his middle finger into the conch, in the *aṅkuśa mudrā*, with a vigorous stirring motion he utters:

Om gaṅge ca yamune ca . . .

inducing the sacred rivers to flow into the vessel.⁸⁰ He then repeats the seed syllable of

⁷⁷The tripod is an important ritual apparatus and may be quite ornate. Among its symbolic referents are the various triads of primary qualities (*triguṇa*) through which the Devī as Prakṛti or *Śakti* manifests, namely *sattva*, *rajas*, or *tamas guṇa*, or *icchā*, *jñānā*, and *kriyā śakti*.

⁷⁸Unlike the conch shells used for blowing into (in worship and battle), these are left naturally sealed at one end.

⁷⁹The *praṇava* 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 *praṇava* 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.

⁸⁰See the previous discussion of *sāmānya argha* 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 *prakṣaṇi pātra*, the container from which water is offered to the deity.⁸²

Durgā Avāhana (Invocation of Durgā)

Bhagavatī Durgā is then invoked (*avāhana*) into the conch with this *mantra*:⁸³

*Hrīm bhagavati durge devi iha āgaccha/
iha tiṣṭha iha tiṣṭha/
atra adhiṣṭhānam kuru
mama pūjām grhaṇa.*

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 rakṣaṇi 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 *viśeṣa*) 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 (*śodaśa 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 *kośā*. 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 "*bhāgavati*," 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).

ṣodaśa Upacāra (Sixteen Part Devotional Service)

The *purohita* worships Durgā with sixteen aspects of devotional service (*ṣodaśa upacāra*). Each has an appropriate *mantra*.⁸⁵ 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/uttarīya* (offering an outer garment to the Devī)
10. *ābhūṣana/ābharana* (ornamenting the Devī)
11. *gandha* (anointing the Devī with fragrances)
12. *puspa* (offering flowers)
13. *dhūpa* (offering fragrances)
14. *dīpa* (worship with a flame offering)
15. *naivedya* (food offerings)⁸⁶
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) Tree⁸⁷

The *purohita* now worships the *bilva* tree with the *mantra*:

Om bilva vrkṣāya namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the *bilva* tree.

⁸⁵What 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.

⁸⁶These may be fruit (*phala*), homemade food or *racanā* (*lai/taja*; H/Skt), *ladū* and other sweets (*mithai*), betel nut (*tambula*), *pānarthodaka*, and so on.

⁸⁷The 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 (*pañca upacāra*) to it.⁸⁸

Bodhana of Durgā in the Bilva Tree

The *purohita* now prays:

*Aim rāvaṇasya vadhārthāya rāmasānugrahāyaca/
akāle brahmanā bodho devyāstvayi kṛta purā.*

Aim! For the purpose of killing Rāvaṇa, and for showing grace to Rāma, the great Brahmā awakened you, divine lady, untimely, in the holy past.⁸⁹

*Ahamapyāśvine tadvad bodhayāmi sureśvarīm/
dharmārtha kāma mokṣāya bhavaśobhane.*

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.)

*Śakreṇa saṅgabodhya svarajyamāptam tasmādahamtvām pratibodhayāmi/
yathaiva rāmena hato daśāsyasthaiva śatrūn vinipātāyāmi/
devi caṇḍatmike caṇḍi caṇḍavighraha kārini/
bilva śaktam samasṛtya tiṣṭha 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 Rāvaṇa 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*, *puṣpa*, *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 Rāvaṇa'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 *Devī Bhāgavata Purāna*, 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 kṣetrapālodayaḥ sarve sarvaśānti phalapradāḥ pūjā vighnavināśāya mama gr̥hñantvimam 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. *māṣa/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 māṣa bhakta baliḥ/ Om kṣetrapālādibhyoḥ namaḥ.

This is a sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse.
Om! Obeisance to the guardians of the field and others.

Prayers to the Bhūtas (Elementals) and other Spirits

With folded hands he prays:

*Om bhūta daitya piśācaśca gandharva rakṣāsām gaṇāḥ/
siddhim kurvantu te sarve mama gr̥hñantvimam 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 māṣa bhakta baliḥ/ Om bhūtādibhyoḥ namaḥ.

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 *bhūtapasarana*, 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 Siddhidātṛī (Bestower of Attainment) and Bhūta Nayikā (Leader of the Elementals). Durgā is also referred to as the Great Demoness (*mahāsurtī*) (*Durgā Saptasatī* 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.⁹²

Once again with folded hands, he prays:

Om dākinī, yoginī caiva mātaro devayonayah nānārūpadharānityam mama grhantvimam balim.

Om! Dākinīs, yoginīs, mothers, and all those who are born of the divine (*devayoni*), who always assume different forms, should receive my offering.⁹³

With the actual offering, he says:

Eṣa māṣa bhakta balih/ Om dākinyādibhyoḥ namaḥ.

This is a sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse.
Om! Obeisance to the dākinīs and others.

Next he prays:

Om ādityādi graha ca kuṣmāṇḍā rākṣasāśca indrādyāścaiva dikpāla mama grhantvimam balim.

All the planets, beginning with the sun, those called kuṣmāṇḍās, raksasas, protectors of the quarters, like Indra and others should receive my offerings.⁹⁴

With the offering, he says:

Eṣa māṣa bhakta balih/ Om ādityādibhyoḥ namaḥ.

This is a sacrificial offering of a portion of pulse.
Om! Obeisance to the sun and others.⁹⁵

Invocation (Avāhana) of the Bilva Tree

The *purohita* now invokes the divine *bilva* tree to manifest in the *bilva* tree on the

⁹²These offerings appear to bring a measure of pollution onto the *purohita*, which he must remove through the purifying power of flowing water.

⁹³The *devayoni* are celestial beings who are divinely born and include among their ranks the fountainheads of sciences (*vidyādhara*), the *kinnaras*, heavenly damsels (*apsaras*), and others.

⁹⁴The 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.

⁹⁵The 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 (*mahāsurti*) in the *Durgā Saptasatī*.

altar where it will be worshipped as Durgā.

Om meru mandara kailāsa himavat śikare girau jātah śrī phalavr̥kṣatvam ambikāyāh sadā priyah śrī śaila śikhare jātah śrī phalaḥ śrī nīketanaḥ netabyo 'si mayā gaccha puḥyo durgā svarupataḥ.

Born from Meru, Mandara, and Kailāsa, at the top of the Himālaya mountains, you tree called "*śrīphalavr̥kṣa* (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 Śaila, 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 Ropanam (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 kāṇḍāḥ kāṇḍāḥ . . .

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 goptrī tvam gr̥hān asmat kṛtam japam siddhir bhavantu me devī tvat prasādam maheśvarī.

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 Śailaputrī (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 Lakṣmī.

⁹⁷See interpretation in the previous section on *kāṇḍā ropanam*. 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.⁹⁸

Worship of Durgā

Now the *purohita* says:

Om sarva maṅgala maṅgalye śive sarvārtha sadhike śaranye tryambake gaurī nārāyaṇī 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.⁹⁹

Om viṣṇurom tat sadadya āśvine māsi śukle pakṣe śaṣṭhyām tithau kṛtaitat bhagavad durgāyāḥ bodhana karmani yad vaigunyam jātam taddoṣa praśamanāya viṣṇu smaraṇamaham kariṣye.

Om! Whatever I have done regarding the *bodhana* rituals of goddess Durgā on this day of *ṣaṣṭhi* 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:

Om adya āśvine māsi śukle pakṣe, ṣaṣṭhayam tithau kṛtaitat bodhana karmā acchidram astu

Om! Today, on this day of *ṣaṣṭhi* on the bright fortnight in the month of *Āśvina*, may this ritual called *bodhana* be free from all defects.

One of the attending *brāhmaṇas* may reply:

Astu!

So be it.

⁹⁸In the worship of a male god the meritorious action of *japa* is offered to the right side.

⁹⁹This complements the *saṅkalpa* 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 *adhivāsanam* (or *adhivāsa*) is the process through which the essence of the deity first, and subtly, permeates the image into which she will be invoked.¹⁰⁰ The *adhivāsa* ritual is performed to the *ghaṭa* 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 puṣpena . . .*). If time and energy permits, he may perform the entire *adhivāsa* anointings again to the *murtis*.¹⁰¹

If the *ṣaṣṭhi tithi* 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 (*pañcamī*). 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 rājānaṃ varuṇam agniṃ anvārabhāmahe/
ādityam viṣṇum sūryam brāhmaṇanca brhaspatim/
Om svasti svasti svasti.*

¹⁰⁰An 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.

¹⁰¹The ritual allows one to see the process and mediums through which Durga manifests.

[SV.191a]

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 śubhādhivāsana 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 yajjāgrato dūram udaiti daivam tadu suptasya tathaivaiti/
dūram gamam jyotiṣām jyotirekam tanme 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.

Bhūtapasarana (Removal of Inimical Spirits)

Taking some white mustard seed in his hand and saying:

Om vetālāśca . . .

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 (*bhūtagaṇa*) with *pādyā* (water for washing the feet) and *argha* (*dūrvā* grass, flowers, and rice), saying:

*Etat pādyam/ Om bhūtagaṇebhyoḥ namaḥ.
Idam argham/ Om bhūtagaṇebhyoḥ namaḥ.*

Then, taking a prepared mixture of unhusked pulse (*māṣa*), curd (*dadhi*), etc. (*māṣa bhakta bali*), he says:

*Om bhūta preta piśācaśca ye vasantayatra bhūtale/
te grhñantu mayā datto balim eṣa prasādhitaḥ/
pūjitaḥ gandhapuspādyaḥ balibhistarpitāstathā/*

deśād asmad viniḥ sr̥tya pūjām pasyantū mat kṛtām.

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 māsa bhakta balih/ Om bhūtebhyoḥ namaḥ.

Āsana Śuddhi

After washing his hands (*kara śuddhi*), he purifies his seat (*āsana*).

Bhūta Śuddhi

Through *prāṇāyāma* 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*, *dīpa*, and *naivedya*) he worships Gaṇeśa, the five gods beginning with Śiva, and others. He thus

¹⁰²The 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 (*śabda*) 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

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 (*ghaṇṭa*) which he rings continuously. A special drum called the *dhāk* is also sounded continuously. The overall effect during the *adhivāsa* is a "quickenning" 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!

¹⁰³The *dhyāna* description will be given later.

¹⁰⁴A 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.

¹⁰⁵This is Durgā embodied in the *bilva* tree.

durge devi samutiṣṭha aham tvam adhivāsaye.

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 durādharṣam nityaprṣṭām karṣiṇīm/
śvarīm sarva bhūtānām tāmihopahvaye śrīyam/
anena gandhena bhagavad durgāyāḥ (navapatrikāyaśca)¹⁰⁷ śubhādhivāsanam (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 mahi triṇāmavarastu dyuksam mitrasyāryamnah/
durādharṣam varunasya/
anāya mahyāḥ bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*

[SV.1.192a; RV.10.1.185a]

3. Sandal paste (*gandha*) again.

*Om bhadrā indrasya rātayah/
yo asya kāmam vidhato no raṣati mano dānāya codayan/
anena gandhena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*

[RV.8.62.1a-6e; AV.20.58.2b; SV.2.670b]

4. Small stone (*śila*).

*Om vi tvadāpo na parvatasya prṣṭhādukthebhi ragne janayanta devāḥ/
tam tvā girah suṣṭutayo vājayantyajim girvavāho jigyurasvāḥ/*

¹⁰⁶If *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 *kuśa* grass with which to touch the offerings, *ghata*, and other images.

¹⁰⁷As previously mentioned, the *purohita* will repeat the entire *adhivāsa* (or a greatly curtailed symbolic equivalent) to the *navapatrikā* and the clay *mūrtis*. 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*.

anaya śilayā bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .
[RV.6.24.6a; SV.1.68a]

5. Unhusked rice (*dhānya*).

*Om dhānāvantaṁ karambhinam apūpavantaṁ ukthinam/
indra prātarjuṣasvanah/
anena dhānyena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*
[RV.3.52.1a; SV1.210a]

6. *Dūrvā* grass.

*Om yajjāyathā apūrvya maghavan vrtrahatyāya/
tat pṛthivīmaprathaya tadastabhñā uto divam/
anayā dūrvayā bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*
[RV.8.89.5a; SV.2.779a]

7. Flower (*puspa*).

*Om pavamāna vyaśnuhi raśmibhi vājasātamaḥ/
dadhat stotre suvīryam/
anena puspena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*
[SV.2.662a]

8. Fruit (*phala*) (e.g., myrobylan/gooseberry (*haritakī*)); dried fruit may be substituted.

*Om indram naro nemadhitā havante yatpāryā yunajate dhiyastāḥ/
śūro nrjātā śravasaśca kāma ā gomati vraje bhajā tvam nah/
anena phalena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*
[RV.7.27..1a; SV.1.318a]

9. Curd (*dadhi*) in a small container.

*Om dadhikrāvno akāriṣam jiṣṇo raśvasya vājinah/
surabhi no mukhā karat praṇa āyumsī tāriṣat/
anena dadhnā . . .*
[RV.4.39.6a; SV.1.358a]

10. Clarified butter/*ghi* (*ghṛta*).

*Om ghṛtavālī bhuvanānām abhiśriyorvī pṛthvī madhudnghe supēśasā/
dyāvā pṛthivī varunasya gharmanā viṣkabhite ajare bhūrretasā/
anena ghṛtena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*
[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 vṛddhaśravāḥ/
svasti naḥ pūṣā viśvavedāḥ/
svasti na stārksyo 'riṣṭanimiḥ/
svasti no brhaspatir dadhātu/
anena svastikena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*
[RV.1.89.6a; SV.2.1225a]

12. Vermillion (*sindūra*).

*Om sindhorucchavāse patayantamuṣṇam hiranyapāvāḥ paśumapsu grbhñate/
anena sindūrena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*
[RV.9.86.43c; AV.18.3.18c; SV.1.564c]

13. Conch shell (*śaṅkha*).

*Om sa sunve yo vasūnām yo rāyāmānetā ya idānām/
somo yaḥ suksitīnām/
anena śaṅkhena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*
[RV.9.108.13a; SV.1.582a]

14. Collyrium (*kajjala*).

*Om aṅjate vyaṅjate samaṅjate kralūm rihanti madhvā bhaṅjate/
anena kajjalena 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 brhato rocanād adhi/
ayā bardhasva tanvā girā mamā jātā sukrato pṛṇa/
anayā rocanayā . . .*
[RV.8.1.18a; SV.1.52a]

16. Yellow mustard (*siddhārtha*).

*Om eṣa uṣā apūrvyā vyucchati priyā divaḥ/
stuṣe vamaśvinā brhat/
anena siddhārthena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*

17. Gold (*kāñcana*).

*Om tam gūrdhayā svarṇaram devāso devamaratim dadhanvire/
devatra havyamūhiṣe/
anena kāñcanena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*

18. Silver (*raupya*).

*Om yadvarco hiranyasya yadvāvarco gavāmuto/
satyasya brahmano varca stena mām sam srjāmasi/
anena raupyena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .
[AvS.4.10a]*

19. Copper (*tāmra*).

*Om vanmahāmasi sūrya vadāditya mahāmasi/
mahante sato mahimā paniṣtam mahnā deva mahāmasi/
anena tāmrena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*

20. Whisk from yak's tail hair (*cāmara*).¹⁰⁸

*Om vāta ā vātu bhesajam śambhu mayobhu no ḥrde/
prāṇa āyumsi tarīṣat/
anena cāmarena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .
[RV.10.186.1a; SV.i.184a]*

21. Mirror (*darpaṇa*).

*Om āditpratnasya retaso jyotiḥ paśyanti vāsaram/
paro yadīdhyate divi/
anena darpaṇena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .
[RV.8.6.30a; SV.1.20a]*

22. Lamp (*dīpa*).

*Om āyurjyotiḥ ravijyotiḥ/
uhovā evārkajyotiḥ/
anena dīpena bhagavad durgāyāḥ . . .*

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

¹⁰⁸A *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 udyallikāmarocayah/
imāllokāmarocayah/
prajābhūtarocayah/
viśvambhūtarocayah/
anena praśastipātreṇa bhagavad durgāyāḥ. . .*

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 Khadga (Sword) and Darpaṇa (Mirror)

During this *adhivāsa* ritual, the *purohita* anoints the sword (*khadga*) which will be used for the blood sacrificial offering (*bali*) or its substitute (e.g., a type of melon (*kuṣmāṇḍā*)). He also anoints the mirror (*darpaṇa*) 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 *bilva* tree, also called Śrīphala.¹¹⁰ 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 Brahmāṇī.
2. Māna (a broad leaved plant): Symbolizes the goddess Cāmuṇḍā.
3. Kacvī (or Kaccī) (a black stalked plant): Symbolizes the goddess Kālikā (dark complexioned).
4. Haridrā (turmeric): Symbolizes Durgā (golden complexioned).

¹⁰⁹While 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.

¹¹⁰More will be said about the *navapatrikā* later in the ritual.

5. Jayantī (a kind of creeper): Symbolizes Kārtikī.
6. Śrīphala (a *bilva* branch containing two fruits resembling breasts): Symbolizing Śivā.
7. Dādimah/mī (pomegranate): Symbolizing Raktadantikā.
8. Aśoka (a large shady tree; in Caitra it blossoms with small red flowers): Symbolizes Śokarahitā.
9. Dhānya (paddy plant): Symbolizes the beneficence of Lakṣmī.

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 sadhike śaranye tryambike gaurī nārāyaṇī
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 maṇḍala*. He covers it with earth, and sprinkles it with five kinds of grain (*pañca śasya*). He establishes a jar (*ghaṭa*) 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 (*ghaṭasthāpana*) is done rapidly, he may use the Tantric method previously mentioned.

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 *kaṭhamo* 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, Siṅgha, and Mahiṣāsura. 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 (*sārvajanīna*) *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 Mahiṣāsura. The devotion paid to Mahiṣa during Durgā Pūjā 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 cordoning off sanctified space, is done privately, with the *yajamāna* in preparation for the rituals of the following day.

SAPTAMĪ

Varaṇa (Selection of the Purohita)

The *purohita* begins with his everyday (*nirya*) 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/
durgāyai devyai dhimahi/
tanno devi pracodayāt.*

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 (*gokarṇa mudrā*), and says:

Om viṣṇuḥ/ om viṣṇuḥ/ om viṣṇuḥ.

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
karmadāyīne idamargham/
Om śrī sūryāya namaḥ.*

Om! I pay obeisance to the Sun, associated with all glory, the supreme reality, shining, the progenitor 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 javākusumasañkāśam kāśyapeyam mahādyutim/
dhvāntārim sarvapāpāghnam praṇato '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.¹¹²

Then looking at the *purohita*, he says:

Om sādhu bhavān āstam.

Om! May you be seated comfortably.

The *purohita* answers:

Om sādhvahamāse.

Om! I am well seated.

Yajamāna:

Om arcayisyāmoh bhavantam.

Om! I shall pay reverence to you.

Purohita:

Om arcaya.

Om! You may go ahead.

The *yajamāna* then takes sandalpaste, a flower, two pieces of cloth (an upper and lower garment)¹¹³, a sacred thread (*yajña sūtra*), a seat (e.g., a woolen blanket), a *kuśāsana* (seat made of *kuśa* grass), a silver ring (*angulīyaka*), betel leaf and nut (*pan*), and places these into the hands of the priest.

He asks the priest (the *purohita* is referred to as *ācārya* in these prayers) to uncover his knee, and taking *dūrvā* grass, a flower, and washed rice in the *kuśī* in his left palm. Covering it with his right palm, he touches it to the knee of the *purohita* as a sign of obeisance, and recites this oath (*sañkalpa*):¹¹⁴

Om viṣṇur namo 'dya āśvine māsi śukle pakṣe saptamī tithāvārabhya mahānavamim yāvat

¹¹²The *purohita* appears to be identified with the Sun through this *arḡha* offering. The Sun, as previously noted, is the formless Brahman.

¹¹³These may be of silk, artificial silk, or pure cotton. They will be worn later by the *purohita*.

¹¹⁴This 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 saṅkalpita durgāpūjāna karmani ācārya karma karṇāya amuka gotram śrī amuka devaśarmānam gandhadibhir abhyarcya bhavantamaham vr̥ṇe.

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 vr̥to 'smi.

Om! I have been chosen.

Yajamāna:

Om yathāvihitam ācārya karma kuru.

Om! Please perform the Durgā Pūjā ritual according to the method.

Purohita:

Om yathajñām 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 karaṇa*.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.¹¹⁶ He then makes a common offering (*sāmānya argha*), purifies the flowers (*puṣpa śuddhi*), and his seat

¹¹⁵The *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.

¹¹⁶See the relevant *mantra* under *sāmānya vidhi* section in the Offerings to *Brāhmaṇa* Attendants 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 Saptamī, Aṣṭamī, and Navamī. This is the same one uttered before the *bodhana* rituals on ṣaṣṭhi. 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 his 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 (Īśana) 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 (*pādya*), water for rinsing the mouth (*ācamana*), offerings (*argha*), etc.

Then with folded hands, he utters:

*Om bilva vrkṣa mahābhāga sadā tvam śaṅkara priyah/
grhītvā tava śakāñca durgāpūjā karomyaham/
sakha cchedodbhavam duḥkham nacakāryam tvayā prabho/
devai grhītvā teśākhām puḥyā 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."¹¹⁷

Then taking a knife, he utters the *mantra*:

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:

*Om putrāyur dhana br̥dhyartham nesyāmi candikālayam/
bilva śākhān samāsr̥tya lakṣmīm rājyam prayacchāmi/
āgacchacaṇḍike devī sarva kalyāṇa hetave/
pūjān grhaṇa sumukhi namaste śaṅkara priye.*

Om, for the purpose of the increase of sons and wealth, I shall take you to the temple of Caṇḍikā, after making your abode in the branch of the *bilva* tree, you please endow me with wealth and kingship. Please, O Caṇḍika, 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.¹¹⁸

With this *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 *navapatrikā*. The *bilva* branch, called Śrīphala, possesses two fruit which resemble breasts. It is lashed to the plantain (*kadalī*) which is also about three to four feet in height. These two plants give the *navapatrikā* body its form. The other plants are smaller and are wound like creepers around these and tied into place.

Bathing of the Navapatrikā

The *purohita* makes a preparation of turmeric and oil (just a pinchful) and smears the body of the *navapatrikā* saying:

Om kosi katamosi kasmai tvā kāyatva suśloka sumāṅgala satyarājan/

¹¹⁷The prayer suggests a divine precedent for the act wherein the gods themselves took a branch of the *bilva* tree and worshipped it as Durgā.

¹¹⁸The goddess Caṇḍikā is identified with Durgā as the *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 *ghata* rituals hope to induce fertility, the *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.¹¹⁹

*Om nānārūpadhare devi divyavastrāvagun̄hite/
tava lepana matreṇa sarva pāpam vinaśyati.*

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.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:

*Om bhur bhuvah svah tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yoḥ nah
pracodayāt.*

He who gives birth to the three worlds (bhuḥ, bhuvah, svah), the glorified light of that progenitor of the worlds, we meditate on that light, who may guide our intellect.

2. For the cow dung:

Om gāvaścidghā sāmānyavaḥ saḥjātyena marutaḥ savandavaḥ rihate kakubho mithaḥ.

3. For the cow milk:

Om gavyoḥ ṣuṇo yathā purāśvayota rathayā varivasyā mahonām.
[RV.8.46.10a; SV.1.186a]

4. For the cow curd (*dadhi*):

Om dadhi krāvno akāriṣan jiṣnoraśvasya vājinaḥ surobhino mukhā karat praṇa āyumiṣi

¹¹⁹The passage (Vedic) reflects the speculative awe in the face of the mystery of existence characteristic of some Ṛg Vedic hymns and Upaniṣadic literature.

¹²⁰The mysterious divine presence is identified as the Devī, 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 Devī with the turmeric and oil mixture. The *purohita* is also indirectly alluding to the upcoming bathing of the *navapatrikā* in a variety of substances.

tāriṣat.

5. For the *ghi* (*ghṛta*):

*Om ghṛtavatī bhuvanānām abhiśriyorvī pṛthvī madhudughe supeśasā/
dyāvā pṛthvī varuṇasya gharmanā viśabhite ajare bhūri retasā.*

Then he utters a *mantra* for the purification of the whole mixture:

Om dyaurāpaḥ kaṅikradam sindhorāpo marutaḥ mādayantām dharmajyotiḥ.

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 *kuśodoka mantra*. This is the *mantra* for water infused with *kuśa* grass.

For the honey, he utters:

*Om madhu vātā ṛtāyate madhu kṣaranti sindhavaḥ/
mādhvīr naḥ santrosadhīḥ/
om madhu naktamuto sasa madhu mat pāṛthivam rajah/
madhu dyaurastu naḥ pita/
madhu mānno vanaspatir madhumām astu sūryah/
sadhvīrgāvo bhavantu naḥ/
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 hrīm caṅḍikāyai namaḥ. Obeisance to Caṅḍikā!

With cowdung:

Om gām gauryai namaḥ. Obeisance to Gaurī!

With milk:

Om hrīm trinetrāyai namaḥ. Obeisance to She who Possesses the Third Eye!

With curd:

Om hrīm bhairavyai namaḥ. Obeisance to Bhairavī!

With ghi:

Om hrīm bhuvaneśvāyai namaḥ. Obeisance to Bhuvaneśvari!

Then he bathes it in water touched with *kuśa* grass saying:

Om hrīm pārvatyaī namaḥ. Obeisance to Pārvatī!

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 kadālī tarusamsthāsi viṣṇūvakṣah sthālāśraye/
namaste navapatrī tvam namaste caṇḍānāyike.*

Om! You, who abides in the breast of Viṣṇu, are abiding in the plantain tree (*kadālī*).¹²¹ I bow to you, O divine nine plants. You are representing Caṇḍānāyikā (one of the forms of Caṇḍī).

2. Water from a tank:

*Om kacchivam sthāvarsthāsi sadā siddhi pradāyint/
durgārupena sarvatra snānena vijayaṃ kuru.*

Om! You are called *kacci*.¹²² You remain in immovable objects and you are the giver

¹²¹The term *kadālī* is also used to describe a beautiful woman. A myth tells how the *yogi* Gorakhnāth rescued his master Matsyendranāth who was made a prisoner by the women of Kadālī. Gorakhnāth 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.

¹²²Also called *kacvi* (*Arum colocasia*), the plant is cultivated for its fleshy edible root.

of all kinds of attainments in the form of Durgā.¹²³ Through this bathing of yours bestow victory upon us.

3. Dew:

*Om haridre hararūpāsi śaṅkarasya sadā priyā/
rudrarūpāsi 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:

*Om jayanti jayarūpāsi jagatām jayahetave/
namāṇi tvām mahādevi jayam dehi gr̥he 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. Sarvaśadhi water (mixture of herbs):¹²⁴

*Om śrīphala śrīniketo 'si sadā vijaya bardhana/
dehi me hitakā māṁśca 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:

*Om dāḍimīyaghavināśāya kṣunnāśāya ca vedhasā/
nirmītā phalakāmāya prasīda tvam harapriye.*

Om! O you pomegranate (*dāḍimī*), 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.

¹²³This 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.

¹²⁴The mixture consists of powdered herbs and can be purchased at a shop which supplies materials for *pūjā*.

7. Scented perfumed water:

*Om sthirābhava sadā durge aśoke śokahariṇi/
mayā tvam pūjitā durge sthira 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:

*Om māna mānyesu vrkṣeṣu mānantiyaḥ surā suraiḥ/
sthirātyāmi mahādevīm mānam dehi 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 sesamum oil:

*Om lakṣmīstvam dhānyarūpāsi prāṇinām prānadāyini/
sthirātyantam hi no bhūtvā grhe kāmāpradā bhava.*

Om! You are Lakṣmī 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:

*Om devyāstvāmabhiṣiñcantu brahmaviṣṇumaheśvarāḥ/
vyomagaṅgāmbupūrṇena ādyena kalasena tu.*

Om! Let Brahmā, Viṣṇu, 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

¹²⁵Śiva is also known as *vyomakeśa* (He whose Hair is the Void/Sky).

2. Rain water:

*Om marutaścābhiṣiñcantu bhaktimantah suresvarim/
meghāmbu paripūrṇena dvitīya 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.¹²⁶

3. Water from the Sarasvatī river (collected from Prayāga):¹²⁷

*Om sārāsvatena toyena sampūrṇena surottamām/
vidyādharaścābhiṣiñcantu tritīya kalasena tu.*

Om! Let Vidyādhara bathe you, the supreme of all divine ladies, with water from the third jar filled to the brim from the Sarasvatī river.¹²⁸

4. Water from the sea:

*Om śakrādyaścābhiṣiñcantu lokapālāḥ samāgatāḥ/
sāgarodakapūrṇena 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 paripūrṇena padmarenu sugandhinā/
pañcamenabhiṣiñcantu nāgāśca 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 himvaddhemakūtādyāścābhiṣiñcantu parvataḥ/

¹²⁶The Maruts are wind gods mentioned in the Vedas who are generally associated with Rudra.

¹²⁷Prayāga is a city at the confluence (*saṅgam*) of three holy rivers, the Gaṅgā, the Yamunā, and the Sarasvatī, each of which is a goddess. Mundane geography reveals that only the first two rivers meet at this place, but the Sarasvatī is a divine river which flows underground.

¹²⁸The Vidyādhara are celestial beings who are possessors and revealers of knowledge (*vidya*). They are shown subordinate to the Devī, one of whose epithets is Mahavidyā.

nirjharodaka pūrṇena saṣṭhena kalasena tu.

Om! May the mountains, beginning with the Himālaya, Hemakūtā, and others, bathe you with the sixth jar full of water collected from waterfalls (or fountains).

7. Water from different holy spots:

*Om sarvatīrthāmbupūrṇena kalasena sureśvarīm/
saptamenābhiṣiñcantu ṛṣayaḥ 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 vāsavaścābhiṣiñcantu kalasenaṣṭamena tu/
aṣṭamaṅgala samyukte durge devi namo 'stute.*

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.¹²⁹ 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 Gaṇeśa 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 Gaṇeśa.¹³⁰

¹²⁹The 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 (*aṣṭamaṅgala*) 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.

¹³⁰Gaṇeśa is often thought of as unmarried. At times he is paired with two wives, *buddhi/ṛddhi* 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 Gaṇeśa. In one myth related to me, Gaṇeśa wanted a wife and was tricked into marrying the *kala bou*. Only later did he discover that she was a plant. Gaṇeśa, with his pot-belly and his ambivalent qualities of creating obstacles or being benevolent, mirrors, in form and character, Kubera, the god of the *yakṣas* and of riches. The *navapatrikā* is very much a tree-sprite (*yakṣi*) form of the goddess, and thus is appropriately paired with Gaṇeśa.

Mahāsnāna (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 prajāḥ paśu vasūni ca/
brahmā prajñāṅca medhāṅca 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 udvartayāmi devī tvām mṛṇmaye śrīphale 'pi ca/
sthīrātyantam hi no bhūtvā gr̥he kāmāpradā 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

¹³¹Sometimes 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 *yonī* shaped and carries the same triadic representations of the tripod.

¹³²It 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.

¹³³This implicitly makes a link between the Devī as *bilva* tree, *navapatrikā*, and the image in the mirror.

¹³⁴He 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 Bhr̥ṅāra

Taking water in a spouted water container (*bhr̥ṅāra*), the *purohita* utters these *mantras* one after another as he pours them on the mirror's surface.¹³⁵ It represents devotional service to the Devī by a wide variety of divine beings.

*Om ātreyī bhāratī gaṅgā yamunā ca sarasvatī/
sarayur gaṇḍakī puṇyā śvetagaṅgā ca kauśikī/
bhogavatī ca pātāle svarge mandākinī tathā/
sarvāḥ sumanaso bhūtvā bhr̥ṅārāḥ snāpayantute.*

Om! O river Ātreyī, Bhāratī, Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Sarayu, Gaṇḍakī, Śvetagaṅgā, 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, may they bathe you with a *bhr̥ṅāra*.

*Om surāstvāmabhiṣiñcatu brahmaviṣṇumaheśvarāḥ/
vāsudeva jagannāthastathā sañkarṣaṇaḥ prabhuh/
pradyumnaścāniruddhaśca bhavantu vijayāya te/
ākhaṇḍalo 'gnirbhagavān yamo vai nairtistathā/
varuṇa pavanaścaiva dhanādhyakśastathā śivah/
brahmaṇā sahito śeṣo dikpālāḥ pāntu te sadā.*

Om! Let all the heavenly beings, like Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśvara, Vāsudeva, who is the lord of the universe, and Sañkarṣana, the lord, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha bathe you and stand for your victory.¹³⁶ May the guardian deity of the east (i.e., Indra), Agni, Yama, Nair̥ti, Varuṇa, and Pavana, the keeper of wealth (i.e., Kubera), and Śiva, Brahmā, along with Śeṣa, protect you all the time.

*Om kīrtirlakṣmirdhrtirmedhā puṣṭiḥ śraddhā kṣamā matih/
buddhir lajjā vapuh śāntistustīḥ kāntiśca mātaraḥ/
etāstvāmabhiṣiñcantu rāhu ketuśca tarpitāḥ.*

Om! May these Mothers (*mātr*), reputation (*kīrti*), wealth (*lakṣmi*), forbearance (*dhrti*),

¹³⁵The *bhr̥ṅāra* is a vessel traditionally used in the consecration of kings.

¹³⁶Vāsudeva, Sañkarṣana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, are four generations of deities related to Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa. In Pañcarātra philosophy they are the four arrays (*vyūha*) of consciousness.

memory (*medhā*), nourishment (*puṣṭi*), faith (*śraddhā*), forgiveness (*kṣamā*), intuition (*matī*), intellect (*buddhi*), bashfulness (*lajjā*), comeliness of form (*vapu*), peace (*śānti*), satisfaction (*tuṣṭi*), and delicate beauty (*kānti*) bathe you properly. And also Rāhu and Ketu.

*Om ṛṣayo munayo gāvo devamātara eva ca/
devapatnyo dhruvā nāgā daityāścāpsarasām gaṇāḥ/
astrāṇi sarvaśāstrāṇi rājāno vāhanāni ca/
auśadhāni ca ratnāni kālasyāvayāśca ye/
Om saritaḥ sāgarāḥ sailāstīrthāni jaladā nadāḥ/
devadānavagandharva yakṣarākṣasapannagāḥ/
ete tvāmambhiṣīcantu dharmakāmartha siddhaye.*

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, *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, 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 sindhu bhairavaśomādyā ye hradāḥ bhūvi samsthitāḥ/
sarve sumanaso bhūtvā bhrṅgāraiḥ snāpayantu te.
Om kurukṣetraṃ prayāgaśca akṣayo vaṭasamjñakah/
godāvartī viyadgaṅgā narmadā maṇikārnikā/
sarvānyetāni tīrthāni bhrṅgāraiḥ snāpayantu te.
Om takṣakādyāśca ye nāgāḥ pātālatalavāsinaḥ/
sarve sumanaso bhūtvā bhrṅgāraiḥ snāpayantu te.
Om durgā caṇḍeśvartī caṇḍī vārāhī kārtikī tathā/
harasiddhā tathā kālī indrāṇī vaiṣṇavī tathā/
bhadrakālī viṣālākṣī bhairavī sarvarūpīnī/
etāḥ sumanaso bhūtvā bhrṅgāraiḥ snāpayantu tāḥ.*

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 Kurukṣetra, Prayāga, where the deathless banyan tree exists, the river Godāvartī, the river in the sky, Narmadā, and the holy Maṇikārnikā, after coming over here should bathe you with the *bhrṅgāra*.

Om! The serpents beginning with Takṣaka, who live in the nether world, with all willingness of their mind, should bathe you with the *bhrṅgāra*.

Om! Durgā, the most dreadful among the terrific forms, Vārāhī, Kārtikī, Harasiddhā, and Kālī, Indrāṇī, Vaiṣṇavī, Bhadrakālī, Viṣalākṣī, and Bhairavī, assuming various forms, having intentions of goodwill, should bathe you with this *bhrṅgāra*.¹³⁷

¹³⁷It 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 goddess

Bathing with Waters poured from the Śaṅkha (Conch Shell)

The *purohita* takes up a conch shell (*śaṅkha*) and bathes the mirror in different waters poured from it while reciting appropriate *mantras*.¹³⁸ He says, "This is a bath" (*etat snānyam*) before each *mantra*.

Water from the Gaṅgā:

*Om mandyākīnyāstu yadvāri sarvapāpaharam śubham/
svargasrotaśca vaiṣṇavyam snānam bhavatu tena te.*

Om! The water of river Mandyākinī, auspicious and the remover of all kinds of sins, and the rivers of the heavens belonging to Viṣṇu, let your bathing be done by them.

Hot water:

*Om pavitram paramam coṣṇam vahnijyoti samanvitam/
jīvanam sarvapāpaghnam bhrṅgāraiḥ snāpayantvimām.*

Om! The holy hot water housing the light of fire and life itself, and a remover of all sins, let it bathe you with *bhrṅgāras*.

He also recites a Vedic verse:

Om āpo hi sṭhā mayo bhuvastāna ūrje dadhātana mahe raṇāya cakṣase.

Water mixed with gold:

*Om pṛthivyām svarṇarūpeṇa devāstḥanti vai sadā/
sarvadoṣavināśārtham snāpayāmi maheśvarīm.*

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 pāpanāśinī/
snānenānena 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 Śāradā and the destroyer of sins. By this ritual bathing, O Goddess, you should become the giver of boons.

Plain water:

Om yah 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 devasyatvā . . .

Water mixed with fruit:

Om agna āyāhi . . .
[RV.6.16.10a; SV.1.1a]

Water with plain sugarcane juice (Devī Gāyatrī Mantra):

Om nārāyaṇyai vidmahe bhagavatyai 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:

Devī Gāyatrī Mantra.

With *aguru* (a substance like sandalwood), camphor (*karpūra*), and silt from the banks of the Gaṅgā:

Devī Gāyatrī Mantra.

With sesame oil:

Om Hrīm cāmuṇḍāyai namaḥ.

Om! Hrīm ! Obeisance to Cāmuṇḍā.

Then with a special oil (*Viṣṇu taila*) made by an Ayurvedic firm.

Om Hrīṃ cāmuṇḍāyai namaḥ.

Then with water infused with five pungent flavours (*pañcakaṣāya*), obtained from the bark/fruit of five different trees:

Om Duṃ durgāyai namaḥ.

Om! Duṃ! Obeisance to Durgā.¹³⁹

Water from a waterfall:

Om caṇḍavatyai namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to Caṇḍavatī.

Water from a Coconut:

Devī Gāyatrī Mantra.

Dew:

Devī Gāyatrī Mantra.

Water from the sea:

Devī Gāyatrī Mantra.

Water infused with *sarvaśadī* (all herbs):

*Om yāḥ ośadhīḥ somarājñīrvahvīśata vicakṣaṇaḥ/
tāsāmtvamaśyuttamāraṃ kāmāya śamhrde.*

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.

¹³⁹This is the root (*mūla*) *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 vermilion on the mirror and writes a seed syllable in the centre.¹⁴⁰ 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.

Bhūtapasarana (Appeasement of Inimical Spirits)

The *purohita* now commences an appeasement of the spirits, saying:

Etat pādyaṃ/ etat sacandana puṣpam/ om bhūtebhyaḥ namaḥ.

This is an offering of water for the feet.

¹⁴⁰This 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 ghorarūpebhyo ghoratarebhyaḥ siddhibhyaḥ sādhyādibhyo bhūtebhyaḥ namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the dreadful, to the more dreadful, and to those who are called *siddhis* and *sādhyas*.

Then he recites these verses:

Om bhūtapreta piśācaśca . . . (See bodhana)

And makes an offering of curd mixed with unhusked pulse on a *bilva* leaf (*māṣa bhakta bali*).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*, "Phaṭ," seven times, and then utters the verses:

*Om apasarpantu te bhūtaḥ ye bhūtā bhūmipālakāḥ/
bhūtānānavirodhena durgapūjām karomyham.
Om vetālāśca . . . (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 bhūtebhyo namaḥ. 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 namaḥ.

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

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 *purohita* now utters the *mantra*:¹⁴²

Om caṇḍike cala cala cālaya durge pūjālayam praviśa.

Om! O goddess Caṇḍī, 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*:

Om gaṅgādyā saritaḥ . . .

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:

Om gange ca yamunā . . .

And he stirs the water with his middle finger (*aṅkuśa mudrā*) inducing the salvific (*tīrtha*) 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 *purohita* now purifies the flowers (*puṣpa śuddhi*), his seat (*āsana śuddhi*), and performs the common offering (*sāmānya argha*). He also performs the purificatory transformation (*bhūta śuddhi*) of the gross and subtle elements of his body.

¹⁴²It is as if he directs the Devī from the *bilva/navapatikā* to the sanctified space of the clay image.

Pūjā of Gaṇeśa and Other Deities

Purification of Worship Area and Materials

The *purohita* prepares to worship Gaṇeśa and the other deities before moving onto the worship of Durgā herself. He begins by uttering:

Haṃ Him Huṃ Phaṭ

and looks at all the materials present there with a fierce divine look (*krodhadṛṣṭi*, *divyadrṣṭi*), purifying them.

Bhūtapasarana (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 *bīja* "Phaṭ," 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 (*antarikṣa*).

Worship of the Gurus (Spiritual Teachers)

The *purohita* then makes obeisance to three lines of spiritual teachers (*guru*). With his palms pressed together (*praṇāma*) and held by his left shoulder, he worships his human teachers with:

*Om gurubhyo namaḥ.
Om paramagurubhyo namaḥ.
Om parāparagurubhyo namaḥ.*

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 parameṣṭhī gurubhyo namaḥ.

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 namaḥ.

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 namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the revealer/sage Nārada in the head.

On his lips:

Om mukhe gāyatrīcchandase namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the metre Gāyatrī in the mouth.

On his heart:

Om hrīm hr̥daye durgāyai devatāyai namaḥ.

Om! Hrīm! 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

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 *prāṇāyāma* with the seed syllable, "Hrīm .". He then imprints his hands and limbs (*kara* and *aṅga nyāsa*) with the appropriate seed syllables. Next he performs *pīṭha 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 ṣoḍaśopacāra*).

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, *dūrvā* 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 (*śaṅkha*). Next he repeats the Durgā seed (*bīja*) *mantra*, "Dum," eight times over it.

He then utters:

*Om ihāgaccha/
iha tiṣṭha/
iha sannidehi/
iha sannirudhyasva/
atrādhistanam kuru mama pūjānam 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.¹⁴⁴

Worship of Gaṇeśa (as a Ghāṭa) and Other Deities

The *purohita* now places an installed jar called the Gaṇeśa *ghāṭa* in the north-east corner (i.e., in front of the Gaṇeśa image).¹⁴⁵ Next he performs the imprintment of hand and limbs (*aṅga* and *kara nyāsa*) with the following *mantras*, while performing the appropriate *mudrās*. He says

Gāṃ gūṃ gūṃ gāṃ gāṃ

while passing his hands over each other and finishes with a clap while uttering, "gaḥ." He now performs the meditative visualization (*dhyāna*) of Gaṇeśa first with a flower clasped in the *dhyāna mudrā* by his heart. He places it on his head and mentally offers worship. He then places the flower before him (on the *ghāṭa*) and after repeating the *dhyāna*, and the above *mantra* (*ihāgaccha/ iha tishta . . .*) performs an actual five or ten part devotional service (*pañca* or *daśopacāra*). He concludes his worship of Gaṇeśa with an obeisance (*namaskāra*), uttering:

*Om devendra maulimandāra makaranda kaṅārunaḥ/
vighnān harantu devendra caraṅāmbuja reṇavaḥ.*

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.

¹⁴⁴ The traditional interpretation is that the combination of *mudrā* and *mantra* "āgaccha" is invocation (*āvāhana*); "tiṣṭha" brings about establishment or steadying of the deity (*sthāpantī*); "sannidehi," causes the deity to come near (*sannidhāpanī*); and "sanniruddha," arrests (*sanrodhani*) the deity causing it to remain face to face (*sanmukhikarāṇī*). The *mudrās* and *mantra* should be accompanied by concentrated (*dhāraṇa*) mental visualization (*dhyāna*).

¹⁴⁵This worship of Gaṇeśa as a *ghāṭa* links him to Kubera, to *yakṣas*, to fertility, and vegetation, and the Devī. The *ghāṭa* is shaped like the round belly of Gaṇeśa, and the coconut head may be implicitly connected to Gaṇeśa's decapitation.

In that same *ghaṭa*, 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 (*ghaṭa*) 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 (*pīṭha nyāsa*). Again he performs *kara* and *aṅga nyāsa*. In the *aṅga nyāsa* he imprints the words of the Durgā Mantra (*Om durge durge rakṣaṇi svāhā*) onto various parts of his body which is undifferentiated from the body of the goddess. He says:

Om durge hṛdayāya namaḥ.
Om durge śirase svāhā.
Om rakṣaṇi śikhāyai vaṣaṭ.
Om svāhā kavachāya huṃ.
Om durge durge rakṣaṇi netratraya vausāṭ.
Om svāhā astrāyā phaṭ.

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 jaṭājūta samāyuktāmardhendukṛtaśekharām/
locanatraya samyuktām pūrnendu sadṛśānanām/
atasīpuspa (taptakāñcana) varṇabhām supraṭiṣṭhām sulocanām/
navayauvana sampannām sarvābharaṇa bhūṣitām/*

¹⁴⁶This 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.

*sucārudāśanām tadvat pīnonnatapayodharām/
 tribhaṅgasthāna samsthānām mahiṣāsūramardinīm/
 mr̥ṇālāyata samsparsā daśabāhusamanvitām/
 trīśūlam dakṣiṇe dhyeyam khadgam cakram kramādadhah/
 tikṣṇavānam tathā śaktim dakṣiṇeṣu vicintayet/
 khetakam pūrṇacāpaṅca pāśamaṅkuṣameva ca/
 ghaṇṭam vā paraśum vāpi vāmataḥ sanniveśayet/
 śiraschedodbhavam tadvaddānavam khadgapāṇinam/
 hr̥dī sūlena nirbhinnam niryadantra vibhuṣitam/
 raktāraktī kṛtaṅgaṅca raktaviṣphuritekṣanam/
 veṣṭitam nāgapaśena bhrūkuṭī bhīṣanānām/
 sapāśavāmahastena dhṛtakeśaṅca durgayā/
 vamaḍrudhiravakraṅca devyāḥ siṃham pradarśayet/
 devyāstu dakṣiṇam pādamaḥ samam siṃhoparisthatam/
 kiñcid ūrdhvam tathā vāmam aṅguṣṭham mahiṣopari/
 stūyamānanca tadrūpamamaraiḥ sanniveśayet/
 ugracandā pracandā ca candogra candānāyikā/
 candā candavati caiva candarūpāti candīkā/
 aṣṭābhīḥ śaktibhistābhīḥ satatam pariveṣṭitām/
 cintayet jagatām dhātrīm dharmā kāmārtha mokṣadam.*

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 *atasī* flower (in some variants "like molten gold" (*tapta kāñcana*)).¹⁴⁷ 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 Mahiṣa. 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 *śakti* (a kind of weapon). These should be meditated to occupy her right hands. And one should place on the left side the *khetaka* (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, Durgā 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 *śaktis* (attendant feminine powers) named Ugracandā, Pracandā, Candogrā, Candānāyikā, Candā, Candavati, Candarūpā, and Aticandīkā. The aspirant should meditate on her as the protectress of the world and the bestower of virtue,

¹⁴⁷The *atasī* is the dark coloured flower of the hemp plant.

fulfilment of desire, the desired end, and also liberation.

The *purohita* then utters:

*Om bhur bhuva svar bhagavati durge devi svagaṇasahite
ihāgaccha/
iha tiṣṭha/
iha sannidehi/
iha sannirudhasva/
mama pūjām gṛhāṇa.*

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 sadaṅga nyāsa* (imprintment of the six limbs consisting of the five fingers and palms), he recites:

Hrām hrīm hrūm hraiṃ hrauṃ

and ends by slapping the first few fingers of the right hand into the left palm while uttering, "*hraḥ*."

With his hands suitably charged, he places one on the image (or reaches it with a length of *kuśa* grass¹⁴⁸) and prays:

Om āgaccha madgrhe devi aṣṭābhiḥ 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 śatruḥaya jayaprade/
bhaktitaḥ pūjāyāmi 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 samāgaccha sānnidhyamiha kalpaya/
yajñabhāga gṛhāṇa tvam aṣṭābhiḥ śaktibhiḥ saha.*

Om! O goddess Durgā, come over here and show your presence beside me along with

¹⁴⁸Such 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 śaktis. Please receive the share/portion of the oblation.

*Om śāradīyamimām pūjām karomi kamalākṣṇe/
ājñāpaya mahādevi daityadarpa nisūdani.*

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 samsārārṇava duṣpāre sarvasura nīkrntani/
trāyasva varāde devi namaste śāṅkarapriye.*

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 devāḥ yāḥ hidevyaśca calitāḥ yāscalanti hi/
āvāhayāmi tām sarvān caṇḍike parameśvari.*

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 Caṇḍikā.

*Om prāṇan rakṣa yaśo rakṣa putradārādhanam sada/
sarvarakṣakarī yasmād tasmāttvayi 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 yajñe 'smin yāvat pūjām karomyaham/
śailānanda kare devi sarvasiddhiṅca 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 caṇḍike devi sarvakalyāṇa hetave/
pūjām grhāṇa sumukhi namaste śāṅkarapriye.*

Om! O goddess Caṇḍikā, please come for the purpose of well-being of all. O beautiful faced one, the beloved of Śāṅkara, I pay obeisance to you, please receive our offering.

*Om āvāhayāmi devi tvām mṛṇmaye śrīphale 'pi ca/
kailāśa śikharāddevi vindhyādrer himaparvatāt/
āgatyā bilvaśākhāyām caṇḍike kuru sannidhim/
sthāpitāsi mayā devi pūjāye tvām prasīda me/
āyurārogyam aiśvaryaṃ dehi devi 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 Kailāśa and from Vindhyā hill, or from the Himālaya. 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 caṇḍātmike caṇḍi caṇḍavighraha kārini/
bilvaśākhām samāśritya tiṣṭha devagaṇaiḥ 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 hamsaḥ śucisadvasurantarikṣa sad hotā vediśad atithi duroṇa sat/
nr̥ṣad varasad vyomasad avjāgojā r̥tajā adriḷā r̥tam br̥hat.
[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.¹⁴⁹

*Om pra tad viṣṇuḥ stavate vīreṇa m̥rgo na bhīmāḥ kucaro giriṣṭhāḥ/
yasyoruṣu triṣu vikramaneṣvadhikṣiyanti bhuvanāni viśvāḥ.*

*Om viṣṇur yoniḥ kalpayatu tvaṣṭa rūpāni p̥imśatu/
ā siñcatu prajāpatir dhātā garbham dadhātu te.*

Tat savitur varenyam

*Om tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pustibardhanam urvarukamiva bandhanan mytyor
murksiya ma mrtat.
[RV.7.59.12]*

Om! Tryambaka we worship, sweet augments of prosperity. As from its stem the cucumber, so may I be released from death, not reft of immortality.¹⁵⁰

He then reads the Devī Gāyatrī. Following this he utters more verses:

*Om devi tvam jagatām mātāḥ sṛṣṭi samhārakārini/
patikāsu samastāsu sannidhyamiha kalpaya.*

¹⁴⁹Griffith 1963:17.

¹⁵⁰Griffith 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 pallavaiśca phalopetaiḥ śākhābhīḥ suranāyike/
pallave samsthite devi pūjām grhṇa prasīda 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/
sthīrātyantaṃ hi no bhūtvā ghṛe kāmāpradā 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 caṇḍike caṇḍarūpāsi suratejomahāvale/
praviśya tiṣṭha yajñe 'smiṇ yāvat pūjām karomyaham.*

Om! O Caṇḍikā, 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 (*yajña*) 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.

¹⁵¹In the installation of any *murti* in a place of worship (*pūjālaya*) 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.

Prāna Pratiṣṭha (Installation of Vital Energy)

The *purohita* next installs vital life energy (*prāna*) into the image. He begins by touching the heart of the *murti* with a flower, saying:

Om aiṃ hrīm krom gāṃ rām lām vām śām śām sām haum hām saḥ durgāyāḥ prāna iha prāṇaḥ.

Om! Let the vital energy (*prāna*) come through the utterance of these syllables.

Om aiṃ hrīm krom, . . . , haṃ saḥ durgā devyaḥ jīva iha stitha.

Om! Let the soul (*jīva*) of Durgā come through the utterance of these syllables.

Om aiṃ hrīm krom, . . . , haṃ saḥ durgā devyaḥ sarvendrīyāṇi iha stitha.

Om! Let all sense and motor organs come with the utterance of these syllables.

Om aiṃ hrīm krom, . . . , haṃ saḥ durgā devyaḥ vākmanaścaksuḥ stvak śrotra ghrāna prāna iha gatyā sukham ciraṃ 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 juṣṭāmāyasya brhaspatir yajñamimam tano tu/
aristam yajñam samimam dadhatu viśvedevāsa iha mādhyantam om pratiṣṭha.
Asyai prāṇaḥ kṣarantu ca/
asyai devatā saṅkhyai 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.

¹⁵²This process of installation of life in the clay image is crucial in understanding the significance of Durgā Pūjā (or any *pūjā*). Just as the Devī 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 *puja*. In so doing the devotee and deity meet (half-way so to speak) in a communion which has been facilitated by the *purohita*.

¹⁵³The *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 śriviṣṇave 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 (*ṣoḍaśopacāra*).¹⁵⁵

1. Āsana (Seat)

With folded hands he says:

*Om āsanam gr̥hna cārvaṅgī nānā ratna vinirmitam/
gr̥hānedam jagannātaḥ prasīda 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 (*adhipati*), 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 namaḥ.
Om durge iha svāgatam? Svāgatam astu.*

Om! Dum! Obeisance to Durgā.
Om! Durgā, do you feel welcome here? Be welcome here.

3. Pādya (Water for Washing Feet)

Taking some water in the smaller copper ladle (*kuśī*), he offers it to Durgā for washing her feet:

*Om pādyaṃ grhṇa mahādevi sarva duḥkhā pahārakam/
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 dūrvākṣata samāyuktam bilva pātram tathā param/
śobhanam śaṅkhapātrastham grhṇāṅrghyam harapriye/
nānā tīrthodbhavam vāri kuṅkamādi suśītalam/
grhṇāṅrghyam idam devi viśeṣvari namo'stute.*

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. Ācamānīya (Water for Sipping or Rinsing the Mouth)

Offering some water in the *kuśī*, he utters:

*Om mandakinyāstu yadvāri sarvapāpaharam śubham/
grhṇāncamanīyam tvam mayā bhaktyā niveditam/
idam āpo mayā bhaktya tava pānitaleverpitam/
ācāmāye mahādevi pṛīta śāntim prayacchame.*

Om! The water that has come from Mandakinī 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: *kaṭora*) of brass or silver containing honey (*madhu*), *ghi* (*ghṛta*), and curd (*dadhi*). He first purifies it by saying:

*Vam madhuparkāya namaḥ. Vam! Obeisance to the madhuparka.*¹⁵⁶

He then utters:

*Om madhuparkam mahādevi brahmādyaih parikalpitam/
maya niveditam bhaktyā grhāṇa 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 Ācamanīya (Again)

7. Snānīyam (Bathing)

The *purohita* offers Durgā water for bathing, saying:

*Om jalañca śītaḥ svaccham idam śuddham manoharam/
snānārtham te mayā bhaktyā kalpitam pratigrhyatām.*

Om! Cool, clear, pure, nice water I have arranged for your bath. Please accept it.

7a. Punar Ācamanīya (Again)

8. Vastra (Clothing)

Offering a new *sārī*, after purifying its (with the *bīja*, "Vam.") he says:

*Om bahutantu samāyuktam paṭṭa sūtrādi nirmītam/
vāso devi suśuklañca grhāṇavaravarnini/
tantusantāna samyuktam rañjītam rāgavastunā/
durge devi bhaja prītiṃ vāsaste paridhīyatam.*

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

¹⁵⁶Solids 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 Ācamānīya (Again)

9. Alaṅkāra (Ornamentation)

The ornaments are first purified and then offered. (A small silver ring may be offered as a token of ornaments):

*Om divya ratna samāyuktāḥ vahnibhānusamaprabhāḥ/
gātrāṇi śobhayisyanti alaṅkārah sureśvari.*

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:

*Om śaṅkhaṅca vividhaṃ citraṃ bāhunāṅca vibhūṣaṇam/
mayā niveditam bhaktyā śaṅkhaṅca pratigṛhyatām.*

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:

*Om śarīrante na jānami ceṣṭāṃ naiva ca naiva ca/
mām rakṣa sarvato devī gandhā netān gṛhāna 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. *alaktaka/āltā*), 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 Devī go to the *purohita* who probably turns them over to his wife. In large religious community *pūjās* (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 (*puṣpamāla*) to the goddess, he says:

*Om puṣpam manoharam divyam sugandham devanirmītam/
hr̥dyam adbhūtam āghreyam devi dattam pragrhyatām.*

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

*Om vanaspati rasa divyo gandhādhyah sumanoharah/
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:

*Om agnir jyotiravijyotiścandrajyotistathaiva ca/
jyotiṣāmuttamo 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:

Om candanena samāyuktam sindūram bhālabhūṣanam/

¹⁵⁸This 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.

¹⁵⁹Stick incense (Hindi: *agarbatti*) is considered unsuitably meagre.

*rūpadyutikaraṃ devi caṇḍike gr̥ṇa mastake.
Om caṇḍikayai vidmahe bhagavatyai dhimahi tanno gauri pracodayāt.
Om idaṃ sindūratilakam/
Om durge durge rakṣaṇi svāhā/
Hrīm durgāyai devyai namaḥ.*

Om! This vermilion is associated with sandal paste.¹⁶⁰ It decorates the forehead and manifests illumination of the form. O Caṇḍikā, please accept this on your forehead.
Om! Caṇḍī Gāyatrī
Om! Purification and Obeisance.

16. Kajjala (Collyrium)

He offers collyrium on a *bilva* leaf to the Devī, saying:

*Om namaste sarvadeveṣi namaste śaṅkarapriye/
cakṣusāmañjanaṃ hr̥dyam devi dattam pragr̥hyatām.*

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:¹⁶¹

*Om āmānnaṃ ghrtasamyuktaṃ phalatāmbula samyuktaṃ/
mayā niveditaṃ bhaktyā āmānnaṃ pratigr̥hyatām.*

Om! This uncooked food (*āmānnaṃ*) 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 phalamūlāni sarvāṇi grāmyāranyāni yāni ca/
nānāvidhasugandhīni gr̥ṇa devi mamāciram.*

Om! Fruits and roots which have come from villages and grew in the forest, they have

¹⁶⁰A spot of vermilion 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 palmyra 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.¹⁶²

18. Bilva Pātra (Wood-apple Leaf)

Next he offers *bilva pātras* to the goddess.¹⁶³

*Om durge durge rakṣaṇi svāhā/
Hrīm durgāyai devyai namaḥ.*

19. Pānārtha Jalam (Water for Drinking)

The *purohita* offers clear water for drinking:

*Om jalaṅca śītaḷaṃ svacchaṃ sugandhi sumanoḥaram/
mayā niveditaṃ bhaktyā pāntyaṃ pratigrhyatām.*

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*):

*Om phalapātra samāyuktam karpūreṇa suvāsitaṃ/
mayā niveditaṃ bhaktyā tāmbulaṃ pratigrhyatām.*

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:

*Om namaste sarvadeveśi namaste sukha mokṣade/
dūrvāṃ grhāṇa devi tvam māṃ nistāraya sarvataḥ.*

¹⁶²The *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 Śābaras.

¹⁶³Since such items as the conch shell (*śaṅkha*) 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 amrtodbhavam śrīyuktam mahādevapriyam sada/
pavitram te prayacchāmi śrīphalīyam sureśvari.*

Om! I am giving you this pure sacred thing born of the *bilva* (*śrīphala*) 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 sūtreṇa grathitam mālyam nānāpuṣpasamanvitam/
śrīyuktam lambamānañca grhāṇa parameṣvari.*

Om! This garland has been woven by means of a thread (*sūtra*). 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. Pādya, Argha, Punar Ācamanīya

Again he offers water for her feet (*pādya*), *dūrvā* grass and washed rice (*argha*), and water for sipping (*ācamanīya*).

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.¹⁶⁵ The *purohita* now offers that cooked food to the Devī, the *navapatrikā*, and other deities present, praying:

*Om annam caturvidham devi rasaiḥ ṣadbhiḥ samanvitam/
uttamam prāṇadañcaiva 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*).¹⁶⁶

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.

*Om gavyasarpīḥ samāyuktam nānāmadhura samāyuktam/
mayā niveditam bhaktyā paramānnam pragṛhyatām.*

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. Piṣṭaka (Cakes)

Then the *purohita* offers *piṣṭaka* (i.e., cakes of different kinds, always cooked):

*Om amṛtayaīḥ racitam divyam nānārūpa vinirmitam/
piṣṭakam vividham 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.

¹⁶⁵This 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 Kālī, 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.

¹⁶⁶The 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 samyuktam śarkarādi vimiśṛitam/
suramyam madhuram bhojyam devi dattam pragṛhyatām.*

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. Pānīyam Jalam (Water for Drinking)

Again he offers drinking water (*paniyam jalam*) to the Devī.

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 nārāyaṇi
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 Brahmānī in the plantain (*rambha*), saying:

*Om rambhādhiṣṭhātri brahmāni
ihāgaccha iha tiṣṭha atrādhiṣṭhanam kuru mama pūjām gṛhāṇa.
Om rambhādhiṣṭhātryai brahmānyai namaḥ.*

Om! O Brahmānī, who abides in the Rambha (plantain), come here, stay here, take up residence here. Please accept my worship.

Om! Obeisance to Brahmānī 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:

¹⁶⁷These may be made from coconut or puffed rice mixed with molasses.

¹⁶⁸This is taken from Chapter 11 of the *Durgā Saptasatī*.

*Om durgē devi samāgaccha sannidhyamiha kalpaya
rambhārūpeṇa sarvatra śāntim kuru namo 'stute.*

Om! O goddess Durgā, 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.¹⁶⁹

2. He repeats the procedure for the Kacvi (*Arum colocasia*) plant, invoking the goddess Kālikā:¹⁷⁰

*Om kacvādhiṣṭhatri kālike
ihāgaccha iha tiṣṭha atrādhiṣṭhanam kuru mama pūjām grhāna.
Om kacvādhiṣṭhatryai kālikāyai namaḥ.*

and worshipping her with:

*Om mahiṣāsura yuddheṣu kacvībhūtāsi suvrate/
mama cānugrahārthāya āgatāsi harapriye.*

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.

3. In the turmeric (*haridrā*) he invokes Durgā:

*Om haridrādhiṣṭhātri durgē
ihāgaccha iha tiṣṭha . . .
Om haridrādhiṣṭhātryai durgāyai namaḥ.*

and worships her with:

*Om haridre varade devi umārūpāsi suvrate
mama vighnavināśāya prasīda tvam harapriye.*

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.

¹⁶⁹Rambha, I was told, is also the name of a heavenly damsel (*apsaras*) considered to be the most beautiful woman in Indra's paradise.

¹⁷⁰The *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.¹⁷¹

*Om jayantyadhiṣṭhātri kārtiki
ihāgaccha . . .
Om jayantyadhiṣṭhātrayai kārtikyai namaḥ.*

and worships her saying:

*Om niśumbha śumbhamathane sendraiḥ devagaṇaiḥ saha/
jayanti pūjītāsi tvam asmākaṃ 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.¹⁷²

5. In the wood-apple (*bilva*) tree, he invokes the goddess Śivā:

*Om bilvavrksādhiṣṭhātri sive
ihāgaccha . . .
Om bilvavrksādhiṣṭhātrayai śivāyai namaḥ*

offering obeisance with:

*Om mahādevapriyakaro vāsudevapriyah sada/
umāprītīkaro vrkṣa bilvarūpo namo 'stute.*

Om! Whatever you do is always favoured by Śiva and Vāsudeva.¹⁷³ O tree, you cause delight to Umā. I pay obeisance to you who are in the form of the *bilva*.

6. He invokes the goddess Raktadantikā (She whose Teeth are Bloodied) in the pomegranate (*dādimī*) saying:

*Om dādimiyadhiṣṭhātri raktadantike
ihāgaccha . . .
Om dādimiyadhiṣṭhātrayai raktadantikāyai namaḥ.*

¹⁷¹Jayantī 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.

¹⁷²The word *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.

¹⁷³Here the *bilva* (*śrīphala*), and thus the Devī, is explicitly connected to both Śiva and Viṣṇu (as Vāsudeva).

worshipping her with:

*Om dādīmi tvam purā yuddha raktabījasya sammukhe/
umākāryam kṛtam yasmādasamakam varadā bhava.*

Om! O Pomegranate (*dādīmi*), in former times, while warring against Raktabīja you have done the duty handed over by Umā well. Therefore, please be the bestower of boons on us.

7. In the Aśoka tree, he invokes the goddess Śokarahitā:¹⁷⁴

*Om aśokādhiṣṭhātri śokarahite
ihāgaccha . . .
Om aśokādhiṣṭhātrayai śokarahitāyai namaḥ*

paying obeisance with:

*Om haraprītīkaro vrkṣa hyaśoka śokanāśanaḥ/
durgāprītīkaro yasmān māmaśokam 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 Cāmuṇḍā in the Māna, saying:¹⁷⁵

*Om mānādhiṣṭhātri cāmuṇḍe
ihāgaccha . . .
Om mānādhiṣṭhātrayai cāmuṇḍāyai namaḥ*

and propitiates her with:

*Om yasya patre vaseddevi mānavrkṣaḥ śacīpriyaḥ/
mama cānugrahārthāya pūjām grhāṇa praśīda me.*

¹⁷⁴Śokarahitā 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 Kālīngas 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 Māna 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.¹⁷⁶

9. In the rice paddy (*dhānya*), he invokes Lakṣmī:

Om dhānyādhiṣṭhātri lakṣmi

ihāgaccha . . .

Om dhānyādhiṣṭhātrayai lakṣmyai namaḥ

worshipping her with:

Om jagataḥ prāṇa rakṣārtham brahmaṇa nirmītam purā/

umāprīti karam dhānyam tasmāttvam rakṣa mām sadā.

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*:

Om navapatrikāvasinyai durgāyai namaḥ.

Om patrike navadurge tvam mahādeva manorame/

pūjām samastām sanīgrhya rakṣa mām tridaśeśvari.

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*):

| | | | |
|--------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| In the | East, | Indra: <i>Ete gandhapuṣpe/</i> | <i>Om indrāya namaḥ.</i> |
| In the | SE, | Agni: | <i>Om agnaye namaḥ.</i> |
| | South, | Yama: | |
| | SW, | Nirṛti: | |
| | West, | Varuṇa: | |
| | NW, | Vāyu: | |
| | North, | Kubera: | |
| | NE, | Īśāna: | |
| | Zenith, ENE, | Brahmā: | |
| | Nadir, WSW | Ananta: | |

¹⁷⁶The 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 Durgā 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 (*praṇāma*) *mantra* which he utters while making a respectful bow.¹⁷⁷

Gaṇeśa

The *purohita* begins with Gaṇeśa, meditating thus:

*Om kharevaṃ sthūlatanuṃ gajendra vadanam lambodaram sundaram/ . . .*¹⁷⁸.

He invokes Gaṇeśa into the image with:

*Om gaṇeśa
ihāgaccha/
iha tiṣṭha/
iha sannidehi/
iha sannirudhasva/
mama pūjām grhāṇa.*

completing the invocation with:

Om gāṃ gaṇeśāya namaḥ.

He gives eyesight (*caḥsur dāna*) to the deity and installs vital energy (*prāṇa pratiṣṭha*).

He worships Gaṇeśa with devotional service ending with an obeisance (*praṇāma*) *mantra*:¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷In this *praṇāma*, he kneels and bows so that his hands and forehead touches the floor.

¹⁷⁸See *bodhana* for the full *dhyāna* and its interpretive translation.

¹⁷⁹Generally, on Saptamī, 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 Gaṇeśa. (*Ete gandhapuspe/ om gaṇeśāya namaḥ*). " These attending deities will each be worshipped at least once during the subsequent days with a full sixteen-part devotional service (*ṣoḍaśopacāra*).

*Om devendra maulimandāra karakanda kaṇāruṇaḥ
vighnān harantu heramba caraṇāmbuja reṇavah.*

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 śaṅkhacakraḡadāpadmadharam kamalalocanam/
śuddhasphaṭikaśaṅkāśam kvacinnilāmbujacchavim/
garuḡopari ca dhyāyet śuklapadmāsanam harim/
śrīvatsavakṣasam śāntam vanamālādharam param/
keyūrakundaladharam kirīṭa mukūtojjvalam/
lakṣmī sarasvatī kāntam sūryamaṇḡala 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 Garuḡa. And this Hari should be meditated upon as seated on a white lotus. His chest is covered with a *śrīvatsa* 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 (*kirīṭa*). He is the beloved of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī and is seen inside the orb of the moon.

His devotional service ends with this obeisance (*praṇāma*) *mantra*:

*Om namo brahmanyadevāya go brāhmanahitāya ca/
jagaddhitāya kṛṣṇaya govindāya namo namaḥ.*

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 *brāhmaṇas*. He is very awe-inspiring. I pay obeisance to Kṛṣṇa and Govinda repeatedly.

Śiva

Śiva is invoked and meditated upon with this *dhyāna*:

*Om dhyānenityaṃ maheśam rajatagirinibham/
cārucandrāvataṃsam ratnākalojjvalāṅgam/
paraśumṛgavarābhṛtihastam prasannam
padmāsīnam samantāt stutamamaragaṇaiḥ
vyāghrakṛttivāsānam viśvādyam viśvabṛjyam
nikhīlabhayaharam pañcavaktram triṇetram.*

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 kāraṇatrāyāhetave/
nivedayāmi cātmānam tvam gatih parameśvaraḥ.*

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 agnivarocasamudārādīndraputrīsutam/
śāntam śaktidharam sadānanamalam kṛtam/
bhāsā nirjita hemakuṅkumagarudgorocanā śailajam/
dhyāyeddairya kulārdanam suramudam tam kartikeyam maham.*

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

¹⁸¹Kārtikeya's traditional weapon is the *śakti*, which means energy or power. In the *Durgā Saptasatī*, 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.¹⁸² By his brightness, he has surpassed the brightness of gold, saffron (*kuṅkuma*), cow's bile (*gorocanā*), and resin (*śailaja*).¹⁸³ One should meditate on him as the defeater of the host of demons. He who elates the hearts of gods is Kārtikeya.¹⁸⁴

He finishes the devotional service with this obeisance *mantra*:

*Om kārtikeya mahābaga gaurīhrdaya nandana/
kumāra rakṣa mām deva daityārdana namo 'stute.*

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.

Lakṣmī

Then Lakṣmī is meditated upon:

*Om kāntyā kañcana sannibhām himagiriprakhyaiścaturbhi gajaiḥ/
hastat kṣipta hiraṇmayāmrtaḥṭair āsicyamānām śriyam/
vibhrāṇām varam abjayugmam abhayam hastaiḥ kirītojjvalām/
kṣaūmābaddhanūtambabimbalalitām vande 'ravindasthitām.*

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.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*:

*Om dhanam dhānyam dharām dharmam kīrtimāyuryaśah śriyam/
turaḡān dantiputrāṅśca mahālakṣmī prayacchame.*

¹⁸²Although this *dhyāna* depicts Kārtikeya with six faces, the clay *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 (Gaṇeśa 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 Gaṇeśa.

¹⁸³The feminine form of "*śailaja*" is an epithet of Pārvatī/Durgā. In this context the word appears to refer to a yellow substance found in the mountains. Most likely, it is benzoin, a hard fragrant yellowish balsamic resin from trees (genus *Styrax*), used in incense preparations and medications.

¹⁸⁴The male gods are given ritual precedence over the female deities. Gaṇeśa always enjoys first worship.

¹⁸⁵The *dhyāna* corresponds to the form of Lakṣmī more commonly called Gajalakṣmī (Lakṣmī with Elephants). It supports the placement of the elephant-headed god Gaṇeśa beside her in the Durgā Pūjā image cluster.

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 taruṇaśakalamindorvibhrati śubhrakāntiḥ/
kucabharanamitāṅgī sannīṣannā sitābje/
nijakara kamalodyallekhani pustaka śrīḥ/
sakalavibhavasiddhaiḥ pātu vāgdevatā naḥ.*

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 viśālakṣi vidyām dehi namo 'stute.*

Om! O 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 sāṅgo pāṅgāyai savāhanāyai durgāyai namaḥ.

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 sarpāya namaḥ/ Om mayurāya namaḥ/ Om muṣikāya namaḥ.

¹⁸⁶The peacock is the *vāhana* of Kārtikeya, though it is also associated with Sarasvatī. The mouse is the mount of Gaṇeśa. 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.

Mahāsimha and Mahiṣāsura

Both the great lion (*mahāsimha*) mount of Durgā and the demon Mahiṣa, have been meditated upon, and brought to life, in the Durgā *dhyāna* (see before). He reinvoles the lion with:

Om vajranakha damstrāyudhāya mahāsimhāya hum phaṭ namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the great lion, armed with teeth and nails like thunderbolts.

He makes offerings to Mahāsiṅgha ending with the *mantras*:

*Om simha tvam sarvajantūnām adhipo 'si mahābala/
pārvatīvāhana śrīman varam dehi namo 'stute.
Om āsanañcāsi bhūtānām nānālañkāra bhūṣitam/
merusṛṅga pratikāsam siṃhāsana 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 mahiṣāsuraḥ namaḥ. 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 durgāyai namaḥ.

Ārati

Next he performs an *ārati* to Durgā using the following items.¹⁸⁷ He waves

¹⁸⁷The term "*arati*" is most often used synonymously with "*dīpovacāra*" (devotional service with a lamp). It is related to (even possibly derived from) the word "*ārātrika*" which refers to worship at night (*rātri*), 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 (*puṣpa*) 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

*Om durgām śivām śāntikarīm brahmānīm brahmaṇapriyām/
sarvaloka pranetrīṅca pranamāmi sadā śivām/
maṅgalām śobhanām śuddhām niṣkalām paramām kalām/
viśveśvarīm viśvamātām caṅḍikām pranamāmyaham/
sarvadevamayīm devīm sarvalokabhayāpahām/
brahmeśa viṣṇunamitām pranamāmi sadā umām/
vindhyasthām vindhyānilayām divyasthāna nivāsinīm/
yoginīm yogamātāṅca caṅḍikām pranamāmyaham/
tśānamātaram devīm tśvarīm tśvarapriyām/
praṇato 'smi sadā durgām saṃsārārṅnavatārīnīm/
ya idam paṭhati stotrom śṛṇuyād vāpi yo naraḥ/*

verbal root, *aram*, meaning "to take delight." This latter connotation seems appropriate for the activity described here.

¹⁸⁸Normally these are new items of clothing (Hindi: *sārī* or *dhoti*) 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*).

¹⁸⁹A 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.

¹⁹⁰This 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 Saptasatī*, or the *Durgā Stava*, a *Mahābhārata* hymn attributed to Yudhiṣṭhira.

sa muktaḥ sarvapāpebhyo modate durgayā saha.

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 Brahmānī, the dynamic aspect of Brahmā 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 Vindhya mountains and having an abode in the Vindhyas 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 Īśāna (Śiva).¹⁹² 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.

Puṣpāñjali (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. Every one wants to make an offering to the Devī, 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.¹⁹³

First, the *purohita* utters:

*Mahiṣagṇi mahāmāye cāmuṇḍe mundamālini/
āyurārogya vijayam dehi devi namo 'stute.*

¹⁹²Īśānamātā 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 Īśāna) himself.

¹⁹³Often the *namaskāra mantra* of Durgā is used.

O Cāmuṇḍā, the great deluder, bearing the garland of skulls, you are the slayer of Mahiṣāsura. Bestow on me longevity, health, and victory. I pay obeisance to you.

And finishes with:

*Eṣaḥ sacandanabilvapatrapuṣpāñjaliḥ namo bhagavatyai durgāyai devyai namaḥ.*¹⁹⁴

This is an adoration with fragrant flowers and *bilva* leaves. Obeisance to the goddess Bhagavatī Durgā.

When this is complete, the devotees throw the flowers towards the image.¹⁹⁵

Second:

*Candanena samālabdhe kuṅkumena vilepīte/
bilva patra kṛtā pīḍe durge ham śaraṇam gataḥ.*

Eṣaḥ sacandena bilvapatra . . . namaḥ.

Being anointed with sandalpaste and smeared with saffron (*kuṅkuma*), being overlaid by *bilva* leaves, I am surrendering myself to Durgā.

Third, he utters:

*Puṣpam manoharam divyam sugandham devanirmitam/
hrdayam adbhutam āghreyam devi dattam pragṛhyatām.*

Eṣaḥ sacandena bilvapatra . . . namaḥ.

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 *Durgā Stuti* for people to repeat.

Next then utters:

¹⁹⁴Since many people in the audience are not initiated, the *purohita* feels they have not earned the right to say "Om" or "Aim." Normally women and *śudras* (even if initiated), and the uninitiated, are not supposed to say "Om." Thus the more general, "Namaḥ" is used.

¹⁹⁵Often a large copper plate is used in front of the image with a sandal (*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 *añjali* generally refers to the classic gesture of prayer made by pressing the palms together, fingers extended. In *puṣpāñjali*, the flowers are held between the palms. The palms are then raised over and behind the head and the flowers thrown with both hands.

*Āyurdehi yaśodehi bhāgyam bhagavati dahime/
putrān dehi dhanam dehi sarvān kāmāṁśca dehime.*

*Bhagavati bhayocchede bhava bhavāni kamade/
śaṅkari kauṣiki tvam he kātyāyani namostute.*

*Harapāpaṃ hara kleśaṃ hara śokaṃ harāśubham/
hara rogaṃ hara ksobhaṃ 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, Kauṣikī, and Kātyāyanī. 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 sādḥike/
śaranye tryambake gauri 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 (Mahāsaptamī). The *purohita* returns home. Some time during the night he may return to the place of worship (*pūjālaya*) to prepare the *maṅḍala* which will constitute a major part of the worship ritual on the following day, Mahāṣṭamī.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶The epithet *Tryambakā* is somewhat ambiguous. It may refer to the triple form of the Devī as Mahālakṣmī, Mahāsarasvatī, and Mahākālī, or to the Devī as mother of the trinity, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.

¹⁹⁷I was told that the prescription for drawing this *maṅḍala* is found in the *Devī Purāna*. 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 *maṅḍala* which they have previously drawn and which is repeatedly reused for this purpose.

MAHĀṢṬAMĪ

The worship on the eighth day (*aṣṭamī*) of Navarātra, is essentially a repetition of the rituals performed on the previous day (*saptamī*). The significant difference lies in the worship of Durgā in the form of a complex *maṇḍala*. This Maṇḍala of All Auspiciousness (*sarvato bhadra 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 *śaktis* which were mentioned in the Durgā *dhyāna*, namely, Ugracandā and other goddesses are worshipped.

The *purohita* arrives at the place of worship (*pūjālaya*), and sipping water three times (*ācamana*) makes himself pure. He makes a frowning glance (*krodha/divyadrṣṭi*) to everything around uttering, "Ram̐ riṃ ruṃ phaṭ." He proceeds by doing everything which was done during Saptamī, including:

1. *sāmānyārgha*
2. *āsanaśuddhi*
3. *puspaśuddhi*
4. offering at least flowers and fragrances to Gaṇeśa, Śiva and the other gods, Aditya and the other *navagrahas*, the *daśāvatara*, etc.
5. *bhūtaśuddhi*
6. *nyāsas*
7. *prāṇāyāma*
8. *pīṭhanyāsa*
9. *Durgā dhyāna*
10. He takes the mirror (*darpaṇa*) 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:

Ete gandhapuṣpe/ duṃ durgāyai namaḥ.

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 vermilion 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 Aṣṭamī.

14. He invokes Gaṇeśa again, and after making a *dhyāna* of him, he proceeds to worship him with *daśopacāra*.

15. He follows this with *Śivādi pañcādevatā* worship.

16. *prāṇāyāma* again

17. *ṛsyādi nyāsa*

18. *karanyāsa*

19. *aṅganyāsa*

20. *Durgā dhyāna* again (internal)

21. *viśeṣārgḥa* (conch shell worship)

22. *pīṭhanyāsa*

23. *karanyāsa*

24. *aṅganyāsa*

25. *Durgā dhyāna* again (external)¹⁹⁹

Note: There is no *prāṇa pratiṣṭha* performed on Aṣṭami, since the images are already imbued with life.

26. He now worships the Devī with *ṣoḍaśopacāra*, as on Saptamī.

27. The *purohita* performs *śadaṅganyāsa* and worships the *bilva* tree and the

¹⁹⁸This 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., *ghaṭa*, 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 *maṇḍala*.

Sarvatobhadra Maṇḍala

See Diagram Four

The *purohita* has drawn the *maṇḍala* the previous night on the floor in front of the image. Alternately, he may bring a previously drawn *maṇḍala* 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 *śaktis* referred to in the Durgā *dhyāna*, who are said to accompany the goddess always.²⁰¹

Ugracaṇḍā

The petal facing east is for the *śakti* Ugracaṇḍā. He invokes her there with:

*Om hrīm śrīm ugracaṇḍe/ ihāgaccha ihāgaccha
iha tiṣṭha iha tiṣṭha
iha sannidehi iha sannidehi
iha sannirudhyasva iha sannirudhyasva
mama pūjām grhāna.*

He worships her with *pañca* or *daśopacāra*, uttering her *mantra*:

*Eṣa gandha/ Om hrīm śrīm ugracaṇḍāyai namaḥ.
Eṣa puṣpam/
Eṣa dhūpaḥ/*

²⁰⁰Truly adept ritual specialists, may perform the invocations while drawing the relevant parts of the *maṇḍala*. On occasion, the entire clay image cluster sits upon the *sarvatobhadramāṇḍala*. The *maṇḍala*, which enjoys such an eminent position in the worship ritual, is clearly an important embodiment of the deity.

Śāstric injunctions, I was told, normally prohibit the worship of images and *yantras* or *maṇḍalas* in the same ritual. The Durgā Pūjā disregards this strict formality.

²⁰¹The *purohita* may visualize these *śaktis* if he is aware of their forms. I was told that their colours are mentioned in the *Kālikā Purāna*, as follows: *Pracaṇḍā* is black; *Caṇḍogrā* is blue; *Caṇḍanayikā* is white; *Caṇḍā* is smoky coloured; *Caṇḍavātī* is blue; *Caṇḍarūpā* is black; *Aticaṇḍikā* is white; and *Ugracaṇḍā* is bright (like the noonday sun).

*Eṣa dīpah/
Etan naivedyam/*

and ends with a gesture and *mantra* of obeisance (*praṇāma*):

*Om ugracaṇḍā tu varadā madhyāhnārka samprabhā/
sāme sadāstu vradā tasyai nityam namo namaḥ.*

Om! O Ugracaṇḍā, 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 gaṇa samsthite/
sarvā nanda kare devi tubhyam nityam namo namaḥ.*

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 sarvabhūtābhayapradā/
devi tvam sarva kāryesuvaradā bhava śobhane.*

Om! Your beauty/affluence (*lakṣmī*) 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 sṛṣṭi sthitinām nāca deveśa varadāyini/
kalikalma śanāśaya 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.

Caṇḍā

In the west, the *śakti* Caṇḍā is invoked and worshipped:

*Om devi caṇḍātmike caṇḍi caṇḍārivijayaprade/
dharmārthamokṣade durge nityam varadā bhava.*

Om! O goddess, you have assumed the form of Caṇḍā, who is the giver of victory over the enemy called Caṇḍa.²⁰² You are the bestower of *dharmā*, *artha*, and *mokṣa*. O Durgā, always be the giver of boons to me.

Caṇḍavatī

In the northwest, Caṇḍavatī is invoked and worshipped.

*Om yā srṣṭi sthiti samahāra guṇa traya samanvitā/
yā parāḥ śaktayas tasyai caṇḍavatyai namo namaḥ.*

Om! The one who is associated with the three attributes of creation, preservation, and dissolution and the one transcends those powers (*śaktis*), I pay obeisance to that Caṇḍavatī.

Caṇḍarūpā

In the north, Caṇḍarūpā:

*Om caṇḍarūpātmikā caṇḍā caṇḍikā caṇḍanāyikā/
sarva siddhi prade devi tasyai nityam namo namaḥ.*

Om! All the forms of Caṇḍā, Caṇḍikā, and Caṇḍanāyikā have assumed the form of Caṇḍarūpā. She is the bestower of all attainments. I always pay obeisance to her.

²⁰²The reference is to the Devī's destruction of the demon generals Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, in the battle with Śumbha and Niśumbha (see *Durgā Saptasatī* 6.17-7.23). In the *Durgā Saptasatī* version it is Kālī who destroys them and obtains the epithet, Cāmuṇḍā. The word "caṇḍa" means fierce and its more common feminine form, "caṇḍī," is associated with Durgā. Here, the less common feminine form "caṇḍā" is attributed to the *śakti* who destroyed Caṇḍa.

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.

Aticaṇḍikā

In the northeast, Aticaṇḍikā:

*Om balārka nayanā caṇḍā sarvadā bhaktavatsalā/
caṇḍāsurasya mathani varadastvaticāṇḍika.*

Om! Aticaṇḍikā has eyes like the morning sun. She looks tenderly on her devotees. She who has trampled down the demon Caṇḍa 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:

Om catuṣaṣṭayogini/ ihāgaccha ihāgaccha . . .

He then worships each of them saying:

Ete gandapuspe, etc./ Om hrīm klīm nārāyanai namah.
(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 *Brhannandikeśvara Purāna* follows: Nārāyaṇī, Gaurī, Śākambharī, Bhimā, Raktadantikā, Bhrāmarī, Pārvaṭī, Durgā, Kātyāyanī, Mahādevī, Caṇḍagantā, Mahāvidyā, Mahātapā, Sāvitrī, Brahmāvadīnī, Bhadrakālī, Viśālakṣī, Rudrānī, Kṛṣṇā, Piṅgalā, Agnijvālā, Raudramukhī, Kālarātrī, Tapasvinī, Medhasvanā, Sahasrakṣī, Viṣṇumāyā(1), Jalodarī, Mahodarī, Muktakesī, Ghorarūpā, Mahāvāyū, Śrūtī, Smṛtī, Dhṛtī, Tuṣṭī, Puṣṭī, Medhā, Vidyā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Aparnā, Ambikā, Yoginī, Ḍākinī, Sākinī, Hākinī, Nākinī, Lākinī, Tridaśeśvarī, Mahāsaṣṭhī, Sarvamaṅgalā, Lajjā, Kauśikī, Brahmānī, Maheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Aindrī, Nārasimhī, Vārāhī, Cāmuṇḍa, Śivadūtī, Viṣṇumāyā(2), and Mātrkā.²⁰³

²⁰³The list possesses sixty-five names, although Viṣṇumāyā 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 Caṇḍikā is listed three times, and Kātyāyanī twice. It includes some of the *śaktis* previously invoked in the petals, suggesting its unsuitability. The *yoginīs* are: Brahmānī, Caṇḍikā(1), Raudrī, Gaurī, Indrānī, Kaumārī, Bhairavī, Durgā, Nārasimhī, Caṇḍikā(2), Cāmuṇḍā, Śivadūtī, Vārāhī, Kauśikī, Maheśvarī, Śāṅkarī, Jayantī, Sarvamaṅgalā, Kālī, Karālinī, Medhā, Śivā, Śākambharī, Bhimā, Śāntā, Bhrāmarī, Rudrānī, Ambikā, Syāmā, Dhatri, Kātyāyanī(1), Svāhā, Svadhā, Pūrṇā, Mahodarī, Ghorarūpā,

The *purohita* finally invokes the group of them together.²⁰⁴

Om koti yoginīgaṇaḥ/ ihāgaccha ihāgaccha . . .

Worship of Deities from other Regions²⁰⁵

The *purohita* utters:

Om hrīm śrīm nānādeśanivāsīnibhyoḥ devībhyoḥ namaḥ.

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 *maṇḍala*:

Om hrīm śrīm brahmānyai namaḥ.

and pays obeisance with this *mantra*:

*Om caturamukhiṃ jagaddhātriṃ haṃsārudham varapradāṃ
sr̥ṣṭī rūpāṃ mahābhāgāṃ brahmaṇīṃ 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 hrīm śrīm maheśvaryai namaḥ.

and pays obeisance with:

Mahākālī, Bhadrakālī, Kapālīnī, Kṣemaṅkarī, Ugracaṇḍā, Caṇḍogra, Caṇḍanāyikā, Caṇḍā, Caṇḍavafī, Caṇḍī, Kālarātrī, Mahāmohā, Priyaṅkarī, Balavṛddhikarā, Balapramathinī, Manonomanī, Sarvabhūtaḍamanī, Umā, Tārā, Mahānidrā, Vijayā, Jayā, Śailaputrī, Caṇḍikā(3), Caṇḍaghaṇṭa, Kuṣmāṇḍā, Skandamātā, Kātyāyanī(2), Kālaratrī, and Mahāgaurī.

²⁰⁴It is conceivable that here he is invoking not just the group of sixty-four, but the full collection of *yoginīs*, said to number in the crores (i.e., ten millions) (*koti*).

²⁰⁵I was told that some elements of this and the next worship rituals are drawn from prescriptions in the *Devī Purāṇa*.

*Om vṛṣārudhām śubham śuklām trinetṛām varadām śivam/
māheśvarīm namamyadya sṛṣṭi saṁhāarakārinīm.*

Om! Maheśvarī 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 Maheśvarī today, who is the agent of creation and destruction.

Kaumārī

In the southeast, he invokes Kaumārī:

Om hrīm śrīm kaumāryai namaḥ.

and pays obeisance with:

*Om kaumārīm pītavāsanām mayūrvaravāhanām/
śakti hastām sītāṅgīm tam namāmi varadām sadā.*

Om! Kaumārī 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.

Vaiṣṇavī

Vaiṣṇavī is also invoked in the southeast corner:

*Om hrīm klīm vaiṣṇavyai namaḥ.*²⁰⁶

and paid obeisance with:

*Om śaṅkha cakṛ gadā padmadhārinīm kṛṣṇarūpinīm/
stithi rūpām khagendrasthām vaiṣṇavīm tām namāmyaham.*

Om! Vaiṣṇavī bears the conch, discus, club, and lotus. She is of the form of Kṛṣṇa. She signifies maintenance. She is seated on Garuḍa. I pay obeisance to Vaiṣṇavī.

Vārāhī

In Banāras, Vārāhī is invoked into the southwest corner.²⁰⁷

Om hrīm klīm vārāhyai namaḥ.

and paid homage with:

²⁰⁶Notice the use of *klīm* instead of *śrīm* for the Mātṛs related to forms of Viṣṇu.

²⁰⁷There are certain regional variations.

*Om vārāha rupinīm devīm damstrodhrīa vasundharām/
subhadām pitavāsanām vārāhīm 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 hrīm klīm nārasimhyai namaḥ.

and pays obeisance with:

*Om nṛsimharūpinīm devīm daitya danava darpaham/
subham subhapradam narasimhim 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.

Indrānī

In the northwest corner of the *maṇḍala*, Indrānī is invoked.

Om hrīm śrīm indrānyai namaḥ.

and paid obeisance with:

*Om indrānt gajakumbhasthām sahasaranayanojjvalām/
namāmi varadām devīm sarva deva namaskṛtām.*

Om! Indrānī 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.

Cāmuṇḍā

Cāmuṇḍā is also invoked in the northwest corner.

Om hrīm śrīm cāmuṇḍāyai namaḥ.

and worshipped with:

*Om cāmuṇḍāmuṇḍamathanim muṇḍamālāpośobhitām
atītahāsa muditām namāmyātma vibhūtaye.*

Om! Cāmuṇḍā is the destroyer of the demon Muṇḍa. 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 kātyāyanyai namaḥ.

paying her obeisance with:

*Om kātyāyanīm daśabhujām mahiṣāsuramardinīm
prasanna vadanām devīm varadām tām namāmyaham.*

Om! Kātyāyanī, possessing ten arms, crushed the demon called Mahiṣa. She has a smiling face, and is the giver of boons. I pay obeisance to her.

Caṇḍikā and the Nine Durgās²⁰⁸

Then taking flowers, the *purohita* utters this verse:

*Om caṇḍike navadurge tvam mahādevamanorame
pūjām samastām saṅgrihya rakṣamām tridaśeśvarī.*

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 *maṇḍala*, with the *mantra*:

Om hrīm śrīm navadurgāyai namaḥ.

Om! Hrīm! Śrīm! Obeisance to the Nine Durgās.

Jayantī and other Goddesses

The *purohita* now invokes Jayantī and other goddesses with:

Om hrīm śrīm jayantyai namaḥ. (Repeated for each of the other goddesses)

He does so for Maṅgalā, Kālī, Bhadrakālī, Kapālinī, Durgā, Śivā, Ksamā, Dhātrī, Svāhā, and Svadhā.

²⁰⁸I was told that the *Devī Purāna* 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 triśūlāya namaḥ.

and then pays obeisance:

*Om sarvāyudhānām prathamō nirmītaśtvam pinākina
śūlat śulam samākṛṣa kṛtvā muṣṭigrahaṃ 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

Khaḍga (Sword)

Om khaḍgāya namaḥ.

*Om asirviśāsanah khaḍga stikṣṇdhārodurāsadaḥ/
śrīgarbho vijayaścaiva 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 namaḥ.

*Om cakra tvam viṣṇurupo 'si viṣṇu pāṇau sada sthītaḥ/
devi hastasthito 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.

²⁰⁹This refers to the myth of the creation of Devī, which is recounted in the *Durgā Saptasatī* 2.19, where Śiva arms her with a trident produced from his own.

Tikṣṇavāna (Sharp Arrow)

Om tikṣṇavānāya namaḥ.

*Om sarvāyudhānām śreṣṭho 'si daityasenānisūdana
bhayebhyaḥ sarvato rakṣaḥ 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 namaḥ.

*Om śaktistvam sarvadevānām guhasyaca viśeṣataḥ/
śaktirūpeṇa sarvatra rakṣām 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 namaḥ.

*Om yaṣṭi rūpeṇa khetatvaṃ vairisaṃhāra kārakah/
devīhastha sthithonīyaṃ mama rakṣām 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 namaḥ.

*Om sarvāyudha mahāmātra sarvadevārisūdanah/
cāpam mām sarvataḥ rakṣa 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

²¹⁰There is a pun here. The weapon (and the Devī) is the *śakti* (power) of all the gods.

²¹¹The staff is generally associated with Yama, Śiva, and Kālī. It is more commonly called the *khatvaṅga*. The club (*gadā*) is associated with Viṣṇu.

me from all sides.

Añkuśa (Goad)

Om añkuśāya namaḥ.

*Om añkuśo 'si namastubhyam gajānām niyamaḥ sadā/
lokānām sarva rakśārtham vidhṛtaḥ pārvatī 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 gaṇṭāya namaḥ.

*Om hinasti daityatejāmsi svanenāpūrya yā jagat/
sa ghaṇṭā pātuno devi pāpebhyoḥ naḥ sūtāniva.*

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 mahātīkṣṇa sarvadevāri sūdanaḥ/
devihastasthithonityam śatruksāya 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.

Nāgapāśa (Serpent Noose)

The *purohita* now worships the serpent noose weapon which is wrapped around the image of the demon Mahiśa.

Om nāgapāśāya namaḥ.

*Om pāśatvam nagarūpo 'si viṣapūrno viṣodarah/
śatrūnam duhsahahanityam nāgapāśam 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 Caṇḍikā as Bearer of All Weapons (Sarvāyudhadharinī)

He pays obeisance to Caṇḍikā herself with the *mantra*:

Om hrīm śrīm sarvāyudhadharinyai namaḥ.

*Om sarvādhānam śresthāni yāni yāni tripistape/
tāni tāni dadhatyai caṇḍikāyai namo namaḥ.*

Om! You are the bearer of all those excellent weapons which exist in heaven. I pay obeisance to that Caṇḍikā over and over again.

Worship of the Devī's Ornaments

Then he worships the ornaments worn by the goddess, by uttering:

Om kirītādī devyaṅgabhūṣanebhyoḥ namaḥ.

Om! I pay obeisance to all the ornaments on the goddess's body, beginning with the crown, and so on.

Worship of the Baṭukas (Young Lads)

Once again the *purohita* goes to the *maṇḍala* and on the eastern side he offers flowers to the Baṭukas, saying:²¹²

Om śrīm siddhaputra baṭukāya namaḥ.

Om! Śrīm! Obeisance to Baṭuka, son of Siddha (Attainment).

On the south:

Om śrīm jñānaputrabaṭukāya namaḥ.

Om! Śrīm! Obeisance to Baṭuka, son of Jñāna (Knowledge).

West:

Om śrīm sahajaputrabaṭukāya namaḥ.

²¹²The Baṭukas, or Baṭuka Bhairavas, are fierce boy forms of Śiva. They could be considered male counterparts of the Kumārīs. I was told that Baṭuka, 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 *Bṛhannandikeśvara Purāna*, there are five *baṭukas*. The *Kālikā Purana* talks of four while the *Devī Purāna* does not refer to the number.

Om! Śrīm! Obeisance to Baṭuka, son of Sahaja (Friendship).

North:

Om śrīm samayaputrabaṭukāya namaḥ.

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: | <i>Om hetukāya kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.</i> |
| NE: | <i>Om tripuraghnāya kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.</i> |
| East: | <i>Om agnijihvāya kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.</i> |
| SE: | <i>Om agnivetālāya kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.</i> |
| South: | <i>Om kālāya kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.</i> |
| SW: | <i>Om karālāya kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.</i> |
| West: | <i>Om ekapādāya kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.</i> |
| NW: | <i>Om bhīmanāthāya kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.</i> |

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) <i>Om asitāṅgāya bhairavāya namaḥ.</i> |
| | b) <i>rurave</i> |
| South: | a) <i>caṇḍāya</i> |
| | b) <i>krodhāya</i> |
| West: | a) <i>unmattāya</i> |
| | b) <i>bhayamkarāya</i> ²¹³ |
| North: | a) <i>kapāline</i> |
| | b) <i>bhīṣanāya</i> |
| Centre: | <i>samhārine</i> |

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 PŪJĀ

The *purohita* must finish the Mahāṣṭamī *pūjā* before Sandhi *pūjā*, a requirement which may greatly reduce the time and ritual elaboration of the Aṣṭami worship. The Sandhi *pūjā* occurs at the point of confluence of the eighth (*aṣṭamī*) and ninth (*navamī*) lunar days (*tithi*). This juncture's duration is forty-eight minutes, composed of the last twenty-four minutes of the *aṣṭamī tithi* and the first twenty-four minutes of the *navamī tithi*.²¹⁴ The juncture, which may occur at day or night, is considered highly auspicious. The entire *pūjā* 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 (*ācamana*), utters the *svasti vācanam*, performs *āsanaśuddhi*, and offers flowers to Gaṇeśa and other deities. Then making a *nyāsa* of the *mātrkāś*, followed by *prāṇāyāma*, he worships Durgā as Cāmuṇḍā. To do so he takes a flower in his hands in *dhyāna mudrā* and meditates:

*Om kālī karāla vadanā viniskrāntāsi pāśinī/
vicitra khaṭvaṅgadharā naramālā vibhūṣanā/
dvīpi caramaparīdhānā śuskamāmsāḥ bhairavā/
atīvistāravadanā jīhvā lalannbhiṣā/
nimagnā rakta nayanā nādā pūrīta dinamukhā.*

Om! She is Kālī, deadly black, very dreadful faced, emerging with a sword and noose in her hands, holding a strange staff (*khaṭvaṅga*) 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.

Cāmuṇḍā is then worshipped mentally according to regional differences.²¹⁵ Most

²¹⁴A *tithi* is divided into equal divisions called *daṇḍas*. Twenty-four minutes is the duration of one *daṇḍa*.

²¹⁵Since the *dhyāna* is short, it is appropriate for Sandhi *pūjā*. I was told that the *dhyāna* of Cāmuṇḍā is different in the *Bṛhadnandikeśvara Purāṇa*.

significant here is the decision regarding the inclusion of a blood sacrifice.

The *purohita* then performs a *viśeṣārgha* (conch-shell worship) in the same manner as performed on Saptamī. He repeats the *dhyāna* of Durgā as Cāmuṇḍā and offers the sixteen part devotional service (*ṣoḍaśopacāra*), of which the blood sacrifice may be a part, with this *mantra*.²¹⁶

Om krīm hrīm cāmuṇḍārūpāyai namaḥ.

Om! Krīm! Hrīm ! 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 (*darpaṇa*).²¹⁷

The sacrificial animal, normally an uncastrated male goat, is bathed. The *yajamāna* places a red garland on its neck and puts vermilion 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 (*pādya*), saying:

²¹⁶Due to time limitations, the *purohita* does not recite the lengthy *mantras* normally used in the rituals of the other days.

²¹⁷This could strengthen the interpretation that the Devī, who is the cosmic Creatrix, 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 Banāras. 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 Durgājī is the recipient of the worship performed by each of the many groups in the city.

Etat pādyam/ om chagapaśave namaḥ.

This is *pādyam*. Om! Obeisance to the goat animal.

He utters this Vedic *mantra* in its ears:

Om paśupāsaye vidmahe viśvakarmaṇe dhīmahi 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, "Hrīm," on the vermillion.²¹⁸ He worships the iron sword with the *mantra*:

Om hrīm kālī kālī vajreśvari lauha daṇḍa namaḥ.

Om! Hrīm! O Kālī, O Kālī, thunderbolt goddess, iron staff, obeisance.

Then he utters this *mantra* and offers flowers to the top of the sword.

Hum vāgiśvarībrahmābhyāṃ namaḥ.

Hum! Obeisance to Vagiśvarī (the goddess of speech) and Brahmā.

To the middle:

Hum lakṣmīnārāyanābhyāṃ namaḥ.

Hum! Obeisance to Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa.

To the hilt:

Hum umāmaheśvarābhyāṃ namaḥ.

Hum! Obeisance to Umā and Maheśvara.

Then to the entire body of the sword:

Om brahmāviṣṇuśivaśaktiyuktāya khadgāya namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the sword, united with Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Śaktī.

Then the priest makes a *praṇāma* to the sword, saying:

*Om khadgāya kharadhārāya śakti kāryārthatatpara/
paśuschedyastvayā sīghraṃ khadganātha namo 'stute.*

Then taking some sesamum, *tulasi* leaf, and *kuśa* grass in the *kuśī*, he reads an oath:

²¹⁸In the Bengali tradition a special secret way of writing the seed syllable is used.

*Om viṣṇur namo adya āśvine māsi śukle pakṣe vārāṇast kṣetre sandhyam tithau amuka
gotra amuka devaśarma amuka gotrasya amuka devaśarmaṇaḥ śrī durgā priti kāmah
imam chagapaśuṃ vahni daivatam durgā devatāyai tubhyam ghataisve.*

And with folded hands he prays:

*Om balim gr̥hṇa mahādevi paśuṃ sarvaguṇānvitam/
yathoktena vidhānena tubhyam astu samarpitam.*

Then taking up the sword in both his hands and uttering:

Aiṃ Huṃ Phaṭ

he severs the neck of the goat with a single stroke.²¹⁹

Vedic Procedure of Balidāna

*Om vārāhī yamunā gaṅgā karatoyā sarasvatī/
kāverī candrabhāgāca sindhu bhairava śonagah/
ajāsnāne maheśāni sānnidhyamiha kalpaya/
Om pṛṣṭhe pucche lalāṭe ca karṇayoḥ jaṅghayostathā
medhre ca sarva gātreṣu muñcantu paśudevatāḥ.*

Om! O rivers, Vārāhī, Yamunā, Gaṅgā, Karatoyā, Sarasvatī, Kaverī, Candrabhāgā, Sindhu, Bhairava, and Śonagā, 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 verses²²⁰:

1. *Om agniḥ paśurāsīt tenayayanta sa etam lokom ajayat/
yasmin agniḥ sate loko bhaviṣyati tam yesysi pivaitā apah.*

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 vāyuh . . . /
yasmin vāyuh . . .*

Om! In the beginning, Wind was an animal, . . .

3. *Om sūryah . . . /*

²¹⁹He may alternately release the goat with a small release of blood from a cut made in the goat's ear.

²²⁰These are said to come from the *Yajur Veda, Vājasanīya Saṃhitā*.

yasmin sūryah . . .

Om! . . . the Sun was an animal, . . .

Then he utters:

Om vācam te sundhāmi
Om prāṇa
Om cakṣus
Om śrotram
nabhim
medhram
payum
caritram
vāk ta āpyāyatām
manas
cakṣus
strotram

*Yat te krūramyadāsthitam/
 sthitam tat te āpyāyatām.
 tat te niṣṭhāyatam
 tat te śuddhatu
 sama hobhyah svāhā*

*Om aiṃ hrīm śrīm candramāṇḍalādhithita vigrahāyai/
 paśurūpa caṇḍikāyai imam paśum prokṣayāmi svāhā.*

*Om paśupāśaya vidmahe śiraśchedāya dhīmahi/
 tannah paśuh pracodayāt.*

*Om paśupāśa vināśāya hemakūṭa sthitāya ca/
 parāparāya parameṣṭhine huṅkārāya ca mūrtaye.*

Then he binds the animal to a sacrificial stake (Y - shaped at the top), placing its neck in the V, and says:

*Om meghākāra sthambha madhye paśum bandhaya bandhaya sasṛṅga sarvā vayavam
 paśum bandhaya brahmāṇḍa khaṇḍarūpinam paśum bandhaya bandhaya.*

He severs its head in a single stroke saying:

Aiṃ huṃ phaṭ svāhā.

Surrogate Offerings

As a substitute, a *kuṣmāṇḍa* melon, sugarcane, a plantain, a cucumber, etc., may

be offered. To sanctify these offerings, he may say:

Om kuṣmāṇḍa balaye namaḥ.
Om iksudaṇḍa balaye namaḥ.
Om kadaliphala balaye namaḥ.
 and so on.

He marks an effigy of a human figure (called a *svastika*) on the fruit, and cuts its in a single stroke, across the centre of the figure.²²¹

Offering of the Head to Durgā

After the head of the goat is cut, the head is brought back near the *purohita*, with some blood, and placed before the altar facing north.²²² A *ghi* lamp is lit atop the head and the *purohita* says:

Eṣa sapradīpa cchāga sirṣa balih/ om durgā devatāyai namaḥ.

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 *purohita* offers the blood thus:²²³

Eṣa samamṣa rudhira balih/ om durgā devatāyai namaḥ.

This is a sacrificial offering of blood with flesh.
 Om! Obeisance to Goddess Durgā.

²²¹The *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 Kuṣmāṇḍa Devī which could mean "Goddess who is a Kuṣmāṇḍa". 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.

²²²The actual slaughter of the goat may take place at the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple, and is performed by another person, such as a worker at the temple. Most of the *pūjāris* 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).

²²³Sometimes a portion of flesh (*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 Batuka:

Ete gandhapuṣpe/ om huṃ vaṃ batukāya namaḥ.

and then one of the portions:

Eṣa samamsarudhira baliḥ/ om huṃ yāṃ batukāya namaḥ.

The second portion to the Yoginīs:

. . ./ om huṃ yāṃ yoginibhyoḥ namaḥ.

The third to the Kṣetrapālas:

. . ./ om huṃ kṣetrapālāya namaḥ.

And the last to Gaṇapati (Gaṇeśa):²²⁴

. . ./Om huṃ gāṃ gaṇapataye namaḥ.

The *purohita* concludes the blood sacrifice ritual with:

Om aiṃ hrīṃ śrīṃ kauśiki rudhire ṇa āpyāyatām.

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 vārāṇasī kṣetra amuka gotra
śrī amuka devaśarma śrī durgā pritikāmah/ Etan aṣṭodara śata samkhyakan prajjvalitān
dīpān śrī cāmūṇḍarūpāyai durgāyai tubhyamaham sampradade.*

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 Cāmuṇḍa.

Kumārī Pūjā (Worship of Virgins)²²⁵

Young girls before puberty are invited to the place of worship.²²⁶ They are to be worshipped as living forms of the Devī.²²⁷ The *purohita* makes an oath (*saṅkalpa*):

Om viṣṇurom tat sadadya...śukle pakṣe... amuka gotra, amuka devaśarma gauri prītikāmah gaṇapatyādi nānādevatā pūjā pūrvaka kumārīpūjānamaham karisyē.

Om! . . . , in order to please Gaurī, after worshipping Gaṇeśa 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 *sāmānyārgha*, *āsanaśuddhi*, and so on. He does *mātrkā nyāsa* and offers flowers to Gaṇeśa 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 śrīm kumāryai namaḥ.

He does *prāṇāyāma*, *aṅganyāsa*, *karanyāsa*, and then does a *dhyāna* of the goddess Kumārī.

*Om kumārīm kamalārudhām trinetrām candraśekharām/
tapta kāñcana varnādhyām nānālaṅkara bhūṣitām/
raktāmbara paridhānām raktamālyānulepanām/
vamenābhayadām dhyāyet dakṣiṇena 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 *yajamāna*'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 Kāśmiri Śaivism where one encounters the phrase: *icchā śakti umā kumārī*. The *icchā* spoken of here transcends the triad of manifest *śaktis*, namely, conscious will (*icchā*), knowledge (*jñānā*), 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.²²⁸

He offers worship mentally and then repeats the *dhyāna* actually performing the sixteen-part devotional service (*ṣoḍaśopacāra*).

The *purohita* next offers flowers to Kauśikī, Gaṅgā, Sarasvatī, Yamunā, Vegavatī, Nārādā, Vaiṣṇavī, Viṣṇu, Padmā, Śaṅkhā, Śvetadīpā, Pavanā, Ghorā, Ghorarūpā, Menakā, Kamalā, Siṃhāsanā, and Cakrā. He then recites the verse:

*Om! āyurbalam yaśo dehi dhanam dehi kumārike/
sarvaṃ sukhaṃ ca me dehi prasīda parameśvari/
namaste sarvato devi sarva papapraṇāśini/
saubhāgyam santatim dehi namastute kumārike/
sarva bhīṣṭa prade devi sarvapat vinivārini/
sarvaśānti kare devi namastestu kumārike/
brāhmī maheśvarī raudrī rīpatritayadhārini/
abhayañca varam dehi narāyaṇi namo 'stute.*

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 Nārāyaṇī.

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*:

*Om viṣṇurom tad sadadya, . . . , amuka gotra amuka devaśarma kumārīpūjā
sāṅgatārtham dakṣiṇāmidam kañcana mūlyam śrī viṣṇu daivatam yathā sambhava gotra
nāmne brahmaṇayā aham dadāmi.*

He finishes with:

²²⁸The 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.

kr̥tāitat kumārī pūjācchidramastu.

Om! . . ., a value of gold is given to the *brāhmaṇa* for fulfilling this *kumari pūjā*.

The maiden is then fed with dainties or well-cooked food and sent away.²²⁹

²²⁹The traditionally recommended numbers of virgins to be worshipped are one, nine, seventeen, one hundred and eight or more. However, there is often just one *kumārī* chosen to represent all others who are present. The rituals are performed to her.

MAHĀNAVAMĪ PUJĀ

The Mahānavamī rituals are identical with those performed on Saptamī, 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 (*dantakāṣṭhā*), completing the bathing ritual just as it was done on Saptamī. He then offers *māsabhaktabali* to the *bhūtas*. Next, he offers flowers, etc. to Gaṇeśa, 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 (*kunḍa*) where the oblation is to be held is called the *sthaṇḍila*. 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 *bīja mantra*, such as, "Dum," may be drawn on the *bindu*.²³¹

²³⁰A cubit is the length from the elbow to the finger tip.

²³¹This 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 *bīja 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 (*jñānā*), and action (*kriyā*). The ascending triangle is symbol of the male principle and generative organ (the *liṅga*). It symbolizes the triad of attributes of the male principle, namely, bliss (*ānanda*), 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 *sthaṇḍila* while uttering Durgā's *mūlamantra* and he strikes it with *kuśa* grass saying "Phaṭ," and sprinkles it with water saying, "Hum." Again uttering the *mūlamantra*, he says:

Om kuṇḍāya namaḥ.

He places fine lengths of *kuśa* grass in the *kuṇḍa* according to a particular pattern (See Diagram Six):

When this is done, he purifies the *sthaṇḍila* with sprinkling (*prokṣana*), striking (*tāḍana*), and spreading of water in it (*abhyukṣana*).

He worships the three lines of *kuśa* grass pointing east (i.e., at the extreme right) with:

| | |
|--------|-----------------------------|
| 1st | <i>Om mukundāya namaḥ</i> |
| middle | <i>Om īśānāya namaḥ</i> |
| last | <i>Om purandarāya namaḥ</i> |

To the three lines facing north, he pays obeisance with:

| | |
|--------|---------------------------|
| 1st | <i>Om brahmaṇe namaḥ</i> |
| middle | <i>Om vaivasvte namaḥ</i> |
| last | <i>Om indave namaḥ</i> |

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 ādhāraśaktyādi pīṭhadevatābhyo namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the deities of the abodes of the goddess, the Supreme Supporting Śakti

and dissolute 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 *bhūpura* is the barrier which separates the phenomenal world from the noumenal realm. The portals into the *bhūpura* 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 *sthaṇḍila* 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:

| | | |
|----|----------------------------|-----------------|
| SE | <i>Om dharmāya namaḥ</i> | (righteousness) |
| SW | <i>Om jñānāya namaḥ</i> | (knowledge) |
| NW | <i>Om vairāgyāya namaḥ</i> | (dispassion) |
| NE | <i>Om aiśvāryāya namaḥ</i> | (royal power) |

and in the sides:

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------|
| E | <i>Om adharmāya namaḥ</i> | (wickedness) |
| S | <i>Om ajñānāya namaḥ</i> | (nescience) |
| W | <i>Om avairāgyāya namaḥ</i> | (passion) |
| N | <i>Om anaiśvāryāya namaḥ</i> | (base weakness) |

and to the middle:

| | | |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Om anantāya namaḥ</i> | (endless serpent) |
| | <i>Om padmāya namaḥ</i> | (lotus) |

Then, also to the centre, he utters obeisance to the solar, lunar, and fire spheres and their divisional components:

Aṃ arkamaṇḍalāya dvadaśakalātmane namaḥ
Uṃ somamaṇḍalāya ṣoḍaśakalātmane namaḥ
Maṃ vahnimaṇḍalāya daśakalātmane namaḥ

Next, he offers flowers to the centre paying obeisance to each of the components parts of fire saying:

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Om pītāyai namaḥ</i> | (yellow) |
| <i>Om śvetāyai namaḥ</i> | (white) |
| <i>Om aruṇāyai</i> | (rose pink) |
| <i>Om dhūmrāyai</i> | (smoky) |
| <i>Om kṛṣṇāyai</i> | (black) |
| <i>tibrāyai</i> | (very fierce) |
| <i>sphuliṅganyai</i> | (sparkling) |
| <i>rucirāyai</i> | (lovely) |
| <i>jvālinyai</i> | (ripening) |
| <i>vahni āsanāya</i> | (fire as the seat) |

Then he makes a *dhyāna* of the goddess of speech, Vāgīśvarī:

Om vāgīśvarīm ṛtusnātām nilendī vara locanām vāgīśvareṇa samyuktām krīḍa bhāva samanvitām.

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 hrīm vāgīśvara sahita vāgīśvaryai namaḥ.

Om! Hrīm! Obeisance to the Lord of Speech united with the Lady of Speech.

The *purohita* then collects fire (from an ember) with the *mantra*, "Vauṣaṭ," and invokes/kindles the tinder with "*astrāya phaṭ.*" Saying:

Hum phaṭ kravyādevyaḥ 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 *kundā* three times, kneels down with both knees touching the earth, and places it with both hands into the *sthandila*. He offers it flowers, saying:

Om hrīm vahni mūrtaye namaḥ

Om vaṃ vahni cetanāya namaḥ

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 agniṃ prajvalitam vande jāta vedam hutāśanam suvaranam amalam sānnidhyam viśvāto 'mukham/ agneh tvam baladanām (varadanām) āsi.

Om vaiśvānara jātaveda ihāvaha lohīkākaṣa sarvakarmāṇi sādahaya svāhā.

He next offers obeisance to the the fire with flowers and sandalpaste:

Etat sacandanapuspam/ om agnaye namaḥ

and worships the aspects of fire and other deities with flowers:

Ete gandhapuspe/

Om agner 'hīranyādi sapta jivhābhyoḥ namaḥ

Om agner sadañgebhyoḥ namaḥ

Om agnaye jātavedase aṣṭamurtibhyoḥ namaḥ

²³²Sexual playfulness is implied in this *dhyāna*. Fire is perceived to be the play (*krīda*) 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.

Om brāhmyādyāṣṭaśaktibhyoḥ namaḥ
Om padmādyāṣṭanidhibhyoḥ namaḥ
Om indrādi lokapālebhyoḥ namaḥ
Om dhvajādyastrebhyoḥ namaḥ

Then taking two very thin-edged lengths of *kuśa* grass called *pavitrās*, 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.²³³ The right section of the plate is *idā*, the left is *piṅgalā*, and the middle is *susumnā*. 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 (*idā*), 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 somāya 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 agniṣomābhyām 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.

Mahāvyaḥṛti Homa (Oblation of the Great Mystical Utterances)

The *purohita* next makes an oblation called the *mahāvyaḥṛti homa*. The *mahāvyaḥṛtis* 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

²³³I was told that the *nadīs* exist not merely in the physical body of the human, but in the subtle bodies (*liṅga śarīra*) 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:

Prajāpatir ṛṣir gāyatrī chando agnir devatā mahāvyāhṛti home viniyogaḥ

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:

*Om bhūr svāhā/
Om bhuvah svāhā/
Om svaḥ svāhā/
Om bhūr bhuvah svaḥ svāhā.*

He repeats the process, for different metres and deities, saying:

*Prajāpatir ṛṣir uṣṇik chando vāyur devatā . . .
Prajāpatir ṛṣir anuṣṭup chando sūryo devatā . . .
Prajāpatir ṛṣir vr̥hāt chandaḥ prajāpatir devatā . . .*

Oblations to Durgā

The *purohita* now offers twenty-five ladles of *ghi* oblations into the fire with the *mūlamantra* of Durgā.

*Om durge durge rakṣaṇi svāhā.*²³⁴

Then the *purohita* conceives oneness of himself with the fire and the goddess Durgā, uttering:

Om vaiśvānara jātaveda ihāvaha lohitākṣa sarvakarmāṇi sādahaya svāhā.

and offers oblations three times with that *mantra*.²³⁵ He worships Durgā in this form with the *mūlamantra* offering up eleven oblations. He next offers oblations saying:

Om mūlamantrasya aṅgadevatābhyaḥ svāhā

Om āvaraṇa devatābhyaḥ svāhā

²³⁴Note the Vedic (rather than Tantric) form of the *mūlamantra*, where "Om" is used instead of other *bījas* like "Dum" and "Hrīm."

²³⁵This 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 (*sañkalpa*).

Om viṣṇurom tat sadadya āśvine māsi śuklepakṣe navamyāṃ tithau durgapūjā karmaṇi durge durge rakṣaṇi svāhā iti mantra karanakastottara śata sañkhyaka sājya bilva patra sannidbhir homāham kariṣye.

Om! . . . I will perform the fire oblation with one hundred and eight *bilva* leaves while uttering the *mantra* "*durge durge rakṣaṇi svāhā*."²³⁶

When the *bilva* leaf oblations have been given to the fire with the *mūlamantra*, the *purohita*, taking a flower, says:

Agneya tvam mṛḍanāmāsi. Agni, you are Mṛḍanāma.

Offering the flower to Agni he pays obeisance:

*Ete gandhapuṣpe/ Om mṛḍanamagnaye namaḥ.
Etat havir naivedyam/ Om mṛḍanāmāgnaya namaḥ.*

Pūrṇāhuti (The Final Oblation)

Taking a ladleful of ghi, the *purohita* stands up and says:

Prajāpati ṛṣir virād gāyatrī chanda indro devatā yaśas kāmasya yajantīya prayoge viniyogaḥ.

The revealer is Prajāpati, the metre is Virādgāyatrī, the deity is Indra, and the purpose is for the person desirous of fame.

Om pūrṇa homam yaśase juhomi yo 'asmai juhote varamasmai dadāti varam vr̥ṇe yaśasā 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.

²³⁶I was told that for the goddess Durgā, *bilva patra* and *ghi* is normally offered into the *homa*. On occasion, sesamum with *ghi* (*sājya tila*) is also used.

The *mūlamantra* 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:

Ete gandhapuspe/ om pūrṇa pātrānukalpa bhojyāya namaḥ.

Then while sprinkling water on the fire, he utters:

Om viṣṇurom tat sadadya āṣvine māsi śukle pakṣe navamyam tithau durgāpūjā karmaṅga homakarmani brahmakarma pratisthārtham dakṣiṇāmetat pūrṇa pātrānukalpa bhojyam brahmaṇe tubhyamoham sampradade.

Om! . . . this platter full of rice, pulses, spice, *ghi*, oil, and so on, representing full-food (*pūrṇa pātrānukalpa bhojya*), I offer to you, O *brāhmaṇa*.

Then he says:

*Etasmai kāñcanamūlyāya namaḥ
Etad adhipataye śrīviṣṇave namaḥ
Etad sampradānāya brāhmaṇāya namaḥ*

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 (*sañkalpa*) of monetary offering (*dakṣina*):

Om viṣṇurom, . . . , śukle pakṣe saptamūthavārabhya mahānavamīm yāvat durgāpūjā karmaṅga saṅgatārtham dakṣiṇāmidam kāñcanamūlyam śrī viṣṇu daivatam, yathā sambhava gotrānme brāhmaṇāya aham dadāmi.

Om! . . . for the completion of the Durgā Pūjā rituals from Saptamī to Navamī, 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 *sañkalpa*:

Om viṣṇurom, . . . , śukle pakṣe saptamūthavārabhya mahānavamīm yāvat durgāpūjāna karmani yadyat vaiguṇyam jātam tad doṣa praśamanāya viṣṇu smaraṇamaham kariṣye.

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 brahmaṇya devāya go brāhmaṇa hitāyaca 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 pṛthivī 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 kaśyapasya tryauṣam.

Om! May the three ages (longevities) of Kaśyapa be on you.

Throat:

Om yamadagnestryauṣam.

Om! May the three longevities of Yama and Angi be on you.

²³⁷The 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 tryauṣam.

Om! May the three longevities of these deities be on you.

Heart:

Om tanme astu tryausam.

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 surāstvāmbhīṣīcantu brahmāviṣṇumaheśvarah/
vāsudevo jagannāthastathā saṅkarṣano vibhuh/
pradyumnaścāniruddhaśca bhavantu vijayāya te/
Om ākhaṇḍalo 'gnīrbhagavān yamo vai nairtistathā/
varuna pavanaścaiva dhanādhyakśastathā śivah/
brahmanā sahito śeṣo dikpālāḥ pāntu te sadā.
Om kīrtirlakṣmirdhṛtirmedhā puṣṭiḥ śraddhā kṣamā matih/
buddhir lajjā vapuḥ śāntistuṣṭiḥ kāntiśca mātaraḥ/
etāstvāmbhīṣīcantu rāhu ketuśca tarpitāḥ.
Om ṛṣayo munayo gāvo devamātara eva ca/
devapatnyo dhruvā nāgā daityāścāpsarasām gaṇāḥ/
astrāṇi sarvaśāstrāṇi rājāno vāhanāni ca/
auśadhāni ca ratnāni kālasyāvayāśca ye/
Om saritaḥ sāgarāḥ sailāstīrthāni jaladā nadāḥ/
devadānavagandharva yakṣarākṣasapannagāḥ/
ete tvāmambhīṣīcantu dharmakāmartha siddhaye.²³⁹*

The *purohita* may now recite the *pradakṣina stotra*.

He has completed the rituals of Navamī and has finished for the day.

²³⁸The *mantra* may be either Vedic or Tantric. For Durgā Pūjā, the Tantric *mantra* is considered preferable.

²³⁹The translation is given in the Saptamī ritual of the bathing of the Devī with the *br̥nghāra*.

VIJAYĀ DAŚAMĪ

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*, *bhūtaśuddhi*, 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*).²⁴⁰ The *purohita* completes the ritual quickly (perhaps within one *daṇḍa* (twenty-four minutes)).

Then with folded hands, he says:

*Om vidhīhnam kriyāhnam bhaktihnam yedarcitam
pūrnam bhavatu tat sarvam tvat prasādān maheśvari.*

Om! 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 (*ghaṭa*) uttering:

Om hrīm 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 Nirmalayavāsīnī, saying:

Om nirmalayavāsinyai namaḥ.

²⁴⁰On Vijayā Daśamī it is customary, in many Banārasi homes, for people to offer, according to their family tradition, curd, *cāra* (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: *miṭhai*), too, are given to Durgā.

Om! Obeisance to the goddess Nirmalayavāsīnī.

He now brings some previously offered flowers and with the *samhāra mudrā* (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 Devī, saying:

Om ucchiṣṭacāṇḍālinyai namaḥ.

Om! Obeisance to the goddess Ucchiṣṭacāṇḍālinī.

He then says:

*Om uttiṣṭha devi cāmuṇḍe śubhām pūjām praṅgrhya ca/
kurusva mama kalyāṇam aṣṭābhiḥ śaktibhiḥ saha/
gaccha gaccha paramsthānam svasthānam devi caṇḍike/
yat pūjitaṁ mayā devi pari pūrānam tadastu me/
vraja tvam srotasi jale tiṣṭha gehe ca bhūtale.*

Om! O divine goddess Cāmuṇḍā, after receiving my auspicious rituals, arise, and along with your eight *śaktis* do good for me. Go to your highest place, O divine Caṇḍikā. 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.²⁴¹

Here he recites the following small hymn of praise (*stotra*).²⁴²

*Om janmayā upahr̥tam kimcit vastra gandhānulepanam/
tat sarvam upabhuktṛvā tvam gaccha devi yathā sukham/
rājyam śūnyam gr̥ham śūnyam sarvaśūnyam daridratā/
tvāmṛte 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 Devī's clay image may fall upon it. The *purohita* brings the mirror (*darpaṇa*) from the seat/platform of the image and immersing it into the water says:

²⁴¹This piece of the liturgy is crucial in aiding our understanding of the ritual of Durgā Pūjā. The Devī, 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 *ghaṭa* the following year.

²⁴²This is also called the *pradakṣiṇa stotra*, but no circumambulation of the image is performed at this time.

*Om minajja ambhasi sampujya patrikā varjita jale
putrāyurdhana vṛddhyartham sthāpitāsi jale mayā.*

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 durge devi jagganamātaḥ svathānam gaccha pūjyate/
prasīda bhagavatyamba trāhi mām bhava sāgarat/
yathā śaktyakṛta pūjā samaptā śaṅkarapriye/
gacchantu devatāḥ sarve dattva tu vanchitaṃ varam/
kailāsa śikhare rāmye samsthitā bhavasannidhau/
pūjitasī mayā bhaktyā navadurge surācite/
tam pragrihya varam dattva kuru kridam yathā sukham.*

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 *purohita* now performs the *pūjā* of the goddess as Aparājitā (Invincible). The *pūjā* should be performed only on the *tithi* of *daśamī* which is not associated with *ekadaśī*. Thus, if Vijayā Daśamī is in contact with the eleventh (*ekadaśī*) *tithi* 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 *purohita* 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 (*śephālikā*).

*Om śuddha sphaṭika saṅkaśām candra koti suśītalām/
varadābhaya hastāṅca śukla vastrairlaṅkṛtām/
nānā bharana saṃyuktam cakravākaiśca veṣṭitām/
evam saṃcintayan mantri devīm tām aparājitām.*

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 Cakravāka birds.²⁴⁴ 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.²⁴⁵

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.²⁴⁶

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.²⁴⁷ The *dhāk* drummer has the right to the the *navapatrikā*'s *sārī*. All other offerings go to the *purohita*.

²⁴⁴These birds (*Anas casarca*) are known for their mournful cries as they call from opposites sides of river banks for their mates.

²⁴⁵Some time intervals in every day are inauspicious. For instance, the Kala bela and Vara bela periods in the day should be avoided.

²⁴⁶These 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 Devī 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.

²⁴⁷The 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 *aparājītā* 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 Vijayā 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 (*praṇāma*) of Vijayā, 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 *aparājītā* 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 "*Bhagavatī prītaye*." 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

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>ācamanīya</i> | Ritual sipping of water. |
| <i>Ācārya</i> | Title of a religious teacher or one who supervises religious rituals. |
| <i>adharma</i> | Unrighteousness; not orthodox behaviour (<i>dharma</i>). |
| <i>adhivāsanam</i> | Anointing. A ritual performed during Durgā Pūjā. |
| <i>agarbattī</i> (H) | Incense sticks. |
| <i>ahañkāra</i> | The ego, or "I-maker." An element in consciousness. |
| <i>akāla bodhana</i> | Untimely awakening. Rāma's invocation of Durgā in the autumn. |
| <i>ākāśa</i> | Space, ether. One of the five constituent elements of creation. |
| <i>alañkāra</i> | Ornament. Ritual of ornamenting a deity. |
| <i>Ālhā</i> | Rajput hero in oral epics who offered his head to goddess Śāradā. |
| <i>āmalaka</i> | Myrobalan, gooseberry. Fluted member crowning temple spires. |
| <i>amāvasyā</i> | New-moon day according to the Hindu lunar calendar. |
| <i>Ambikā</i> | Endearing form of the term for mother (<i>ambā</i>). One of the most common epithets of the goddess in the <i>Durgā Saptasatī</i> . |
| <i>amṛta</i> | Ambrosia of immortality churned out of the ocean. |
| <i>ānanda</i> | Bliss. |
| <i>aṇḍa</i> | Egg. |
| <i>aṅga nyāsa</i> | Yogic imprintment (of vibrations, etc.) on the limbs of the body. |
| <i>anna/bhoga</i> | Food. Cooked food. |
| <i>Annapūrṇā</i> | She who is Replete with Sustenance. Goddess consort of Śiva as Viśvanātha in Banāras. One of the city's Nine Durgās. |
| <i>antarmātrkā nyāsa</i> | Ritual of inner imprintment. |
| <i>aparājītā</i> | Unconquerable |
| <i>apsarā</i> | Heavenly nymph. Often depicted sculpturally on temples. |
| <i>ārati</i> | Honorific passing of a flame before a deity. Also designates the entire process of devotional service and offerings to a deity. |
| <i>ārati lena</i> (H) | Partaking in the devotional flame after it has been offered. |
| <i>Argalā</i> | Bolt. |
| <i>argha</i> | Valuable offering. Also <i>arghya</i> . |
| <i>artha</i> | Achievement. Often equated with economic and material success. |
| <i>asmītā</i> | Egoism |
| <i>aṣṭadala kamala</i> | Eight petalled lotus. |
| <i>aṣṭamī</i> | Eighth day of a lunar fortnight (<i>pakṣa</i>). |
| <i>asura</i> | Demon. Originally meaning Supreme Spirit; applied to Varuṇa. |
| <i>Āśvina</i> | Autumn month (September/October) in which one of two annual nine night (<i>navarātra</i>) festivals of the Goddess is celebrated. |

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| <i>ātā</i> (H) | Flour (generally whole wheat). |
| <i>avatāra</i> | An incarnation. One of Viṣṇu's incarnations. |
| <i>avidyā</i> | Ignorance. |
| <i>āyudha</i> | Weapon. |
| <i>bahya mātrkā nyāsa</i> | A type of external yogic imprintment ritual. |
| <i>bali</i> | Sacrificial offering. |
| Banāras | City in Uttar Pradesh on the river Gaṅgā renowned as a religious centre. Also called Kāśī or Vārāṇasī. |
| Banāraśi | Residents of Banāras. |
| <i>bāraha</i> | Twelve. |
| <i>barāī karnā</i> (H) | To laud or praise. |
| <i>baṭuka</i> | Young lad. A fierce boy-form of Śiva. |
| Benares | Alternate spelling of Banāras. |
| Bengāli Tolā | A quarter in Banāras with a high Bengāli population. |
| Bhadrakālī | Gracious Kālī. Name of a fierce but auspicious goddess. |
| Bhairava | Fierce form of Śiva. |
| <i>bhajana</i> | Hymn. |
| <i>bhakta</i> | Devotee. |
| <i>bhakti</i> | Devotion. |
| <i>bhāṅg</i> (H) | Ground, fresh leaves of the hemp (<i>cannabis sativa indica</i>) plant. |
| Bhāvanī | Queen who built Durgā Kuṇḍ temple. Epithet of Annapūrṇā. |
| Bhojpurī | A dialect spoken by the residents of Banāras. |
| <i>bhr̥ṅgāra</i> | Spouted vessel used in royal consecration. |
| <i>bhūta</i> | An elemental spirit. |
| <i>bīja</i> | A seed. A germinal cause. |
| <i>bilva</i> | Wood-apple tree. Also called the <i>bel</i> tree. Sacred to Śiva. |
| <i>bilva patra</i> | A <i>bilva</i> leaf. |
| <i>bindu</i> | A drop. A point. Zero. |
| <i>bīsa</i> (H) | Twenty. |
| <i>bodhana</i> | Ritual of awakening the goddess Durgā. |
| <i>brahmāṇḍa</i> | Egg of Brahman. Universe. Primordial cosmic egg. |
| Brahmā | Creator god. |
| Brahmacarinī | Name of a goddess who is one of the Nine Durgas. |
| <i>brahmacarya</i> | First stage of life for a Hindu, characterized by study and celibacy. |
| <i>brāhmaṇa</i> | Member of the priestly class in Hindu society. |
| Brāhmaṇa | Ancient texts concerned with religious rituals. |
| <i>buddhi</i> | Discriminative intellect. A constituent element of consciousness. |
| <i>cakra</i> | Wheel, vortex. Energy plexus in the body. |
| <i>cakṣur dāna</i> | Ritual of giving eyesight to a divine image. |
| <i>cāmara</i> | Leather worker caste. |
| <i>cameli</i> (H) | Jasmine. |

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| Cāmuṇḍā | Name of a terrifying goddess often equated with Kālī. |
| candana tilaka (H) | Forehead anointing mark made with sandalwood paste. |
| Caṇḍī | She Who is Fierce. Name of a goddess. Epithet of Durga. |
| Caṇḍikā | Little Fierce One. Epithet of Durgā. |
| Candraghaṇṭā | Bell of the Moon. One of the Nine Durgās. |
| canna sabji (H) | Curried chick peas and vegetables. |
| carana | 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. |
| Citragehaṇṭā | 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. |
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| dandāsvāmi | Type of world renouncer who carries a staff. |
| dandavat praṇāma | A full prostration. |
| dacoit | Bandit. |
| dadhi | Curd. |
| dakṣiṇā | Monetary payment to a priest. |
| dāna | The act of charitable giving. |
| daṣopacāra | Ten-fold devotional service to a deity. |
| darpaṇa | Mirror. |
| darśana | Intimate perceptual contact with a deity. Temple worship. |
| Daśa Mahāvidyā | Ten Great Knowledges. A cluster of goddesses. |
| Devī | 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. |
| dhūṇuci | An incense container. |
| dhvaja | Flag. |
| dhyāna śloka | Verses describing a deity which are to be used for meditative visualization. |
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| dikṣa | Initiation. |
| dikpāla | Guardians of the Directions. |
| dīpa | Lamplight. |
| dugdha | Milk. |

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| Durgā Kuṇḍ | Sacred pond in Banāras. Site of a famous temple to Durgā. |
| Durgā | 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. |
| Durgā Mandir | Temple of Durgā. |
| Durgāji | Affectionate and honorific name of the goddess of Durgā Kuṇḍ temple in Banāras. |
| dūrvā | A resilient grass used in worship. |
| dvārapāla | Guardians of the Portal. |
| galī (H) | A narrow alley. |
| gālī (H) | An insult, abuse. Teasing comment often with sexual references. |
| gana | Gang. Group of spirits associated with Śiva and led by Gaṇeśa. |
| gandha | Fragrant ointments such as sandalwood paste. |
| gandharva | A celestial musician. |
| Gaṇeśa | Elephant headed god often considered to be the son of Durgā. |
| Gaṅgā | Name of a sacred river which is considered to be a goddess. |
| gaṅgājala | Water from the river Gaṅgā. |
| garbhagrha | House of the Embryo. The inner sanctum of a temple. |
| Gaurī | She who is White. Name of a goddess who is the spouse of Śiva. |
| Gāyātrī | Name of a goddess. <i>Mantra</i> uttered by <i>brāhmaṇas</i> . |
| ghanta | Bell. A period of time. An hour. |
| ghaṭ (H) | Landing on the bank of a river generally used as a bathing site. |
| ghaṭa | A jar or pitcher (<i>kalaśa</i>) in which a deity is ritually embodied. |
| ghaṭasthāpana | Ritual of establishing a jar which embodies a deity. |
| ghi (H) | Clarified butter. |
| ghṛta | <i>Ghi</i> . Clarified butter. |
| gotra | Family or lineage. |
| graha | Astrological bodies. Planets. |
| thandhāi | A "coldie." Intoxicating beverage prepared with cannabis leaves. |
| thathera | Caste of tinkers. Metal workers. |
| halvā | A sweet. |
| hariyālī | Sprouts of grain. |
| havan | Sacrificial fire. |
| havan kuṇḍa | Sacrificial fire pit. |
| hijara | A transvestite; an eunuch. |
| homa | Ritual oblations into the sacrificial fire. |
| icchā svayamvara | Marriage where a bride chooses her husband from a group of suitors. |
| icchā | Will or desire. One of the three qualities of power (<i>śakti</i>). |
| ilāyaci dānā (H) | Sweets of cardamon seeds coated with sugar and offered to deities. |
| iṣṭa devatā | Deity which a devotee preferentially chooses to worship. |

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| <i>īśvara</i> | Lord. God. |
| <i>itra</i> (H) | Perfume. |
| <i>jādū</i> (H) | Sorcery. |
| <i>jādū karne vala</i> (H) | Sorcerer. |
| <i>jāgara</i> | Wakefulness. |
| <i>jala</i> | Water |
| <i>jalebī</i> (H) | Spiral shaped syrup-filled sweet. |
| <i>janghā</i> | Thigh or other part of the leg. |
| <i>japa</i> | Ritual repetition of a sacred utterance (<i>mantra</i>). |
| <i>jātī</i> | Caste. Hereditary occupation and social group. |
| <i>jayantī</i> | A kind of plant. Name of a goddess. |
| <i>jī</i> | Affectionately respectful suffix added to persons' names. |
| <i>jīva</i> | An individual living being; the soul. |
| <i>jīvātman</i> | The soul or innermost self of a being. |
| <i>jñāna</i> | Transcendental knowledge. |
| <i>jñānendriya</i> | The organs of perception. The five senses. |
| <i>javāla</i> | Flame. |
| <i>jyotiṣa</i> | Astrology. |
| <i>kacaurī</i> (H) | Spherical pastry stuffed with spiced vegetables and pulses. |
| <i>kaccha</i> (H) | Raw, unripe. |
| <i>kajalī</i> (H) | A kind of song sung during the rainy season. |
| <i>kajjala</i> | Lampblack. Collyrium. |
| Kālarātrī | She who is the Dark Night. Name of one of the Nine Durgās. |
| <i>kalāṣa</i> | Jar; Pitcher (<i>ghaṭa</i>) in which a deity is ritually installed. |
| Kālī | Name of a dark goddess with a dreadful appearance. |
| <i>kāma</i> | Art of love. |
| <i>kāṇḍa ropanam</i> | Ritual of erecting staffs around a consecrated image. |
| <i>kanyā</i> | A virgin; an unmarried daughter. |
| <i>kara</i> | Hand. |
| <i>karma</i> | Action. A metaphysical principle of cause and effect. |
| <i>karmakāṇḍī</i> | A ritual specialist. |
| <i>karmendriya</i> | Action faculties. |
| <i>karpūra</i> | Camphor. |
| Kārtikeya | God of War. Son of Śiva. Also called Skanda. |
| Kāśī | Ancient and sacred name for the city of Banāras. |
| <i>kaṣṭha</i> | Difficult, problematic, dangerous, evil, bad. |
| <i>kṣatriya</i> | Member of the warrior class. |
| <i>katthā</i> (H) | Catechu; the tree from whose bark catechu is obtained. |
| <i>katthaka</i> | A type of classical dance popular in North India. |
| Kātyāyanī | Name of a goddess. One of the Nine Durgās. |
| <i>kavaca</i> | Armour. A type of hymn or formula recited for protection. |
| <i>khadga</i> | Sword. |

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| <i>khiciri</i> (H) | A meal of rice and lentils cooked together. |
| <i>khīra</i> | Food made from rice, milk, honey, and dried fruit. |
| <i>khukharī</i> | Nepali knife with curved blade. |
| <i>kīlaka</i> | Type of hymn/ <i>mantra</i> which locks or unleashes the power of subsequently recited formulas. |
| <i>kiśamiśa</i> (H) | Seedless raisins. |
| <i>kleśa</i> | Defilement. |
| <i>kośa</i> | A sheath. A large vessel used in worship rituals. |
| <i>kriyā</i> | Action. One of the three qualities of power (<i>śakti</i>). |
| <i>kṣetra</i> | Field; plot of land. |
| <i>kṣetrapāla</i> | Guardian of the Field |
| <i>kula devatā</i> | Family deity. |
| <i>Kund/kunḍa</i> | A well; water tank; natural pond. |
| <i>Kuṇḍalinī</i> | Name of a goddess identified with a serpentine energy in the body. |
| <i>kuṅkuma</i> | Saffron. |
| <i>kūśa</i> | A sacred grass with widespread use in ritual ceremonies. |
| <i>Kuṣmāṇḍā</i> | A kind of melon. Name of one of the Nine Durgās. |
| <i>ladū</i> (H) | A sweet ball. |
| <i>lākh</i> | One hundred thousand. |
| <i>Lakṣmī</i> | Goddess of good fortune and auspiciousness. |
| <i>liṅga</i> | Sign. The phallic symbol of Śiva. |
| <i>loka</i> | People. The world. |
| <i>lokapāla</i> | Guardian of the Worlds/People. |
| <i>luṅgī</i> | A cloth garment worn around the waist. |
| <i>Mā</i> | Mother. Epithet of Durgā. |
| <i>mada</i> | Intoxicant. Intoxicating beverage. |
| <i>madhuparka</i> | A honeyed mixture offered in <i>pūjā</i> . |
| <i>mahābali</i> | A great sacrifice. An animal or human sacrifice. |
| <i>mahābhūta</i> | One of the five gross elements (<i>tattva</i>). |
| <i>Mahādevī</i> | The Great Goddess. Epithet of Durgā. |
| <i>Mahāgaurī</i> | Great White Goddess. One of the Nine Durgās. |
| <i>mahāmantra</i> | Great formulaic utterance. |
| <i>mahāmohā</i> | Great Delusion. An epithet of Durgā. |
| <i>mahant</i> | The Great. Title of the owner of a temple. |
| <i>mahāsimha</i> | The Great Lion mount of Durgā. |
| <i>mahāsnāna</i> | Great Bathing ritual. |
| <i>mahāsuri</i> | Great Demoness. An epithet of Durgā. |
| <i>māhātmya</i> | Greatness of Essence. A hymn of glorification. |
| <i>mahāvidyā</i> | Great Knowledge. Supreme Science. One of a cluster of goddesses. An epithet of Durgā. |
| <i>mahāvyaḥrī</i> | Great Utterance. |

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| Mahiṣāsura | Name of a buffalo demon slain by Durgā. |
| Mahiṣāsuramardinī | Crusher of the Buffalo Demon. Epithet of Durgā. |
| maithuna | Sexual union. |
| mālā | Garland. Rosary. |
| manas | Mind/Heart. Inner sense which perceives the workings of consciousness. |
| manauti (H) | A devotional pledge. |
| maṇḍala | A sphere of influence; a sacred diagram. |
| maṇḍapa | A temple porch. |
| mandira | Temple |
| maṅgala darśana | Auspicious first sight of a deity. |
| maṅgalavara | Tuesday. |
| mantra | Sacred utterance or formula. |
| manvantara | A great cycle of time. |
| marga | Path or way. |
| mamsa | Flesh or meat. |
| mastī (H) | Pleasantly inebriated, enjoying an altered state of consciousness, "high". |
| mātrkā nyāsa | Ritual of imprintment with syllables. |
| matsya | Fish. |
| maulī (H) | Untwisted thread, dyed red and used in worship. |
| maund (H) | A measure of weight. |
| māyā | Power of illusion which permeates the creation. |
| mela | A fair or gathering. |
| mīṭhāī (H) | A sweet; a confection |
| mokṣa | Liberation. Release. Ultimate goal in orthodox Hindu tradition. |
| muhallā (H) | A quarter of the city. |
| mukti | Liberation from worldly existence. |
| mūlamantra | Root or Primary sacred formulaic utterance. |
| muṇḍana (H) | Ritual first tonsure of a child. |
| muni | A sage. |
| mūrti | Image. Generally refers to the image of a deity. |
| muśkil (H) | Difficult. |
| nai (H) | A barber. |
| naimitika | An occasional rite. |
| naitika | Regular worship |
| naivedya | Offerings of morsels of food to a deity. |
| nakṣatra | Constellation. |
| namaskāra | Respectful salutation. |
| nanketai (H) | A type of almond biscuit. |
| nāriyala | Coconut. |
| naubhat khāna (H) | Temple hall in which a large drum is kept and beaten. |

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| <i>navadurga</i> | Cluster of goddesses called the Nine Durgās. |
| <i>navagaurī yātra</i> | Pilgrimage to the shrines of the Nine Gaurīs. |
| <i>navagraha</i> | Nine planets. |
| <i>navapatrikā</i> | Cluster of Nine Plants worshipped as a form of Durgā. |
| <i>navārna mantra</i> | Sacred formulaic utterance consisting of nine syllables. |
| <i>Navarātra</i> | Nine night goddess festival held in the spring and the autumn. |
| <i>nawāb</i> | Mughal viceroy. |
| <i>nirguna</i> | Without attributes or qualities. |
| <i>nirmalyam</i> | Cast off or withered flowers which have been offered to a deity. |
| <i>Nisumbha</i> | Name of a demon slain by Durgā. |
| <i>nityā pūjā</i> | Obligatory rituals of worship. |
| <i>nyāsa</i> | A ritual of yogic imprintment on the body. |
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| <i>ojha</i> | Spiritual healers. |
| <i>om-kāra</i> | The sacred syllable "Om." |
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| <i>pāduka</i> | Sandals. Images of the footprints of a deity. |
| <i>pādya</i> | Offering of water for washing the feet. |
| <i>pakṣa</i> | A fortnight. |
| <i>pakka</i> | Cooked. Refined or finished. |
| <i>pān (H)</i> | A preparation from betel nut and leaf which is chewed with relish. |
| <i>pañca upacāra</i> | Five-part devotional service. |
| <i>pañcagavya</i> | Five items which derive from the cow. |
| <i>pañcakrośī yātra</i> | Pilgrimage around the perimeter of Banāras. |
| <i>pañcamākāra</i> | Five items beginning with the letter "M" offered in Tantric ritual. |
| <i>pañcāmṛta</i> | Five nectars. |
| <i>pañcānga</i> | An almanac. |
| <i>pañcatattva</i> | Five elements. |
| <i>pañdal</i> | Temporary shrine established for Durgā Pūjā. |
| <i>pañjika</i> | An almanac. |
| <i>para</i> | Supreme. |
| <i>parabrahman</i> | Supreme Being. |
| <i>paramānna</i> | Supreme food. |
| <i>paramasiva</i> | The Supreme Śiva. |
| <i>paraśu</i> | Axe. |
| <i>parikrama</i> | Circumambulation. |
| <i>pāśa</i> | Noose. |
| <i>pāṭha karne vala</i> | One who recites a scripture aloud. |
| <i>phala</i> | Fruit. |
| <i>phul (H)</i> | Flower. |
| <i>phul ki mālā (H)</i> | Flower garland. |
| <i>piṇḍa</i> | A clump. |
| <i>piṅgalā</i> | One of the energy channels of the body. |

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| <i>pippal</i> | A large tree which is often venerated. |
| <i>pūha</i> | A seat or abode of the goddess. |
| <i>pitr</i> | Paternal ancestor. |
| <i>pradakṣiṇā</i> | Circumambulation. |
| <i>pradhāna</i> | The supreme form of Prakṛti. |
| <i>prahara</i> | An eighth part of a day. A watch of about three hours in duration. |
| <i>prajñā</i> | Wisdom. |
| <i>prakṛti</i> | Nature. Material existence. |
| <i>prāna</i> | Vital air. Breath. Vital energy. |
| <i>prāna pratiṣṭha</i> | Installation of vital energy into an image of a deity. |
| <i>pranāma</i> | A salutation. |
| <i>prāṇayāma</i> | Control of the vital airs. |
| <i>prasāda</i> | Blessing. Sanctified offerings. |
| <i>pratimā</i> | An image. The clay image cluster worshipped in Durgā Pūjā. |
| <i>pratipada</i> | The first day of Navarātra. |
| <i>pratyahāra</i> | Restraint of the senses. Concentration. |
| <i>preta</i> | Ghost. |
| <i>pr̥thivī bhūta</i> | Among the five gross elements, the earth element. |
| Pr̥thivī | The goddess Earth. |
| <i>pūjā</i> | Devotional worship rituals. |
| <i>pūjālaya</i> | Place of worship. |
| <i>pūjāri</i> | Priest. |
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| <i>purāna</i> | Genre of sacred texts containing mythic history. |
| <i>pūrī (H)</i> | Deep fried unleavened bread. |
| <i>pūrṇimā</i> | Full moon. |
| <i>purohita</i> | A priest. Ritual practitioner. |
| <i>puruṣa</i> | Person. Pure spirit. Consciousness. |
| <i>puspa</i> | Flower. |
| <i>puspamālā</i> | Flower garland. |
| <i>puspāñjali</i> | Veneration with flower offerings. |
| <i>putrī</i> | Daughter. |
| <i>pyāj (H)</i> | Onion. |
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| <i>rajas guṇa</i> | The quality of passion or activity. Symbolized by blood. |
| <i>rākṣasa</i> | A demon. |
| <i>rakta bali</i> | Blood sacrifice. |
| Raktabīja | Blood Seed. Name of a demon slain by Kālī. |
| <i>rasa</i> | Flavours. Emotions. |
| Rātrī | The goddess Night. |
| <i>rorī (H)</i> | A powder used to anoint the forehead. |
| <i>rotī (H)</i> | Bread. |
| <i>ṛṣi</i> | A celestial sage. |

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| <i>ṛṣyādi nyāsa</i> | A ritual imprintment a sage and other entities. |
| <i>ṛṭusnātam</i> | Post menstrual bath. |
| <i>rūpa</i> | Form. |
| <i>śabda</i> | Sound. Vibration. |
| <i>sabji</i> (H) | Vegetables. |
| <i>sādhaka</i> | Spiritual practitioner. |
| <i>sādhana</i> | Spiritual practice. |
| <i>sādhu</i> (H) | Holy man. |
| <i>sāg</i> (H) | Spinach or other leafy vegetables. |
| <i>sahasrāra padma</i> | Thousand petalled lotus; psychic centre at the top of the head. |
| <i>Śailaputrī</i> | Daughter of the Mountain. Name of one of the Nine Durgās. |
| <i>Śākta pīṭha</i> | Seat of the goddess. |
| <i>Śākta</i> | Goddess worshipping sect in the Hindu tradition. |
| <i>Śakti</i> | Power. Energy. Principle animating the cosmos. The goddess. |
| <i>śakti pīṭha</i> | A seat or place of power. |
| <i>Samādhi</i> | State of deep contemplative union with the object in consciousness. |
| <i>samosa</i> (H) | Name of a mythical merchant who worshipped Durgā. |
| <i>samputa</i> | Triangular pastry stuffed with spiced vegetables or meat. |
| <i>samskāra</i> | Boxed. Sandwiched. A method of scriptural recitation. |
| <i>saṅdhya</i> | Rites. Rites of passage. |
| <i>śani</i> | Confluence periods in the day: sunrise, midday, and sunset. |
| <i>śanivāra</i> | Saturn. |
| <i>saṅkalpa</i> | Saturday. |
| <i>Sāṅkhya</i> | Oath. |
| <i>saṅkranti</i> | Enumeration. Ancient philosophy often paired with Yoga. |
| <i>sannyāsa</i> | Passage of a heavenly body into a new astronomical configuration. |
| <i>sannyāsin</i> | The state of renunciation. |
| <i>sapta mātṛka</i> | A world renouncer. |
| <i>śaraṇa āraṭi</i> | Seven Mothers. A cluster of goddesses. |
| <i>śarada</i> | Flame worship performed before a deity is retired for the night. |
| <i>śārādīya</i> | Autumn. |
| <i>Sarasvatī</i> | Autumnal. |
| <i>śarbat</i> (H) | She who is Full of Juice. Goddess of creativity and the arts. |
| <i>śārdūla</i> | A refreshing beverage. |
| <i>sārī</i> | Leogryph. Representation of Śakti often sculpted on temple walls. |
| <i>sarvajanīnā</i> | Long single piece of cloth worn by Indian women. |
| <i>ṣaṣṭhī</i> | Relating to everyone. Communal. |
| <i>sat</i> | The sixth day of a lunar fortnight. |
| <i>Śatākṣī</i> | Being. Existence. A quality of the Absolute Brahman. |
| <i>ṣatkona</i> | She who has a Hundred Eyes. Name of a goddess. |
| <i>sattva guṇa</i> | Hexagon. Six pointed star. |
| | Quality of purity, stasis. Equated with spirit as opposed to matter. |

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| <i>saubhāgya</i> | Blessedness. Beauty. The state of being married. |
| <i>śehnai</i> | Reed-blown wind instrument. |
| <i>seva</i> | Devotional or other service. |
| <i>shephali</i> | A kind of flowering plant. |
| <i>siddha</i> | One who has attained. |
| <i>siddha pūṭha</i> | A seat or place of spiritual attainments |
| <i>siddhi</i> | Spiritual or other attainments. |
| Siddhidātrī | She who Gives Attainments. Name of one of the Nine Durgas. |
| <i>śikhara</i> | The head. Spired structure characteristic of North Indian temples. |
| <i>śīla</i> | A rock. Mountain. Virtue. Virtuous conduct. |
| <i>simhāsana</i> | Lion seat. A throne. |
| Simhavāhinī | She who Rides a Lion. Epithet of Durgā. |
| <i>śiṣya</i> | Student. |
| Śītalā | She who is Cool. Goddess associated with smallpox and cholera. |
| <i>sītār</i> | Stringed instrument. |
| Śiva | Auspicious. Great god of Hinduism. |
| Śivadūtī | She who has Śiva as a Messenger. Name of a fierce goddess. |
| Skanda | War god. Son of Śiva and Durga. Also called Kārtikeya. |
| Skandamātā | Mother of Skanda. Name of one of the Nine Durgās. |
| <i>śloka</i> | Sanskrit verse. |
| <i>śmaśāna</i> | Cremation ground. Abode of Śiva and other fierce deities. |
| <i>ṣoḍaśa mātrkā</i> | The Sixteen Mothers. A cluster of goddesses. |
| <i>ṣoḍaśopacāra</i> | A devotional service consisting of sixteen parts. |
| <i>somāvāra</i> | Monday. |
| <i>śrāddha</i> | Death rituals. |
| Śrī | Auspiciousness. Goddess of good fortune. Epithet of Lakṣmī. |
| <i>srīngāra</i> | Erotic sentiment. Decoration festival at temples such as Durgājī. A type of water chestnut eaten during certain fasts. |
| <i>sthalamāhātmya</i> | Glorification of a place. |
| <i>sthāna</i> | A place or abode. |
| <i>sthaṇḍila</i> | Fire altar. |
| <i>sthāpana</i> | Installation ritual. |
| <i>sthirī karaṇa</i> | Ritual of confirming the installation of a deity. |
| <i>stotra</i> | Hymn of praise. |
| <i>strīratna</i> | A jewel of a woman. |
| <i>śuddha</i> | Pure. |
| <i>śuddhi</i> | Purification. |
| <i>śūdra</i> | Labourer class ranked lowest in the orthodox Hindu hierarchy. |
| <i>sūkta</i> | Hymn of praise. |
| Śumbha | Name of a demon slain by Durgā. |
| <i>śūnya</i> | Emptiness. The Void. |
| <i>supāri</i> (H) | Betel nut pieces. |
| Suratha | Name of a mythical king who performed the Durgā Pujā. |

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| <i>suṣumnā</i> | The central channel of the psychic body. |
| <i>svārga</i> | Heaven. |
| <i>svāstika</i> | Sign of auspiciousness and well-being. |
| <i>tabla</i> (H) | A type of drum beaten with the hands. |
| <i>tamas guṇa</i> | The quality of inertia, dullness, and disintegration. |
| <i>tamboli</i> (H) | Caste of betel nut harvesters. |
| <i>tāmbūla</i> | The areca nut or betel nut. |
| <i>tanmātra</i> | The subtle attributes of elements by which they are perceived. |
| <i>tantra</i> | A genre of text and a religious philosophy. |
| <i>tantrika</i> | A follower of Tantic philosophy and religious practices. |
| <i>tapas</i> | Heat. Ascetic practice. |
| <i>tarpaṇa</i> | Water libations made to the ancestors. |
| <i>tattva</i> | Element. Constituent. Substance. |
| <i>tejas</i> | Spiritual effulgence, radiant energy, splendour. Semen. |
| <i>tilaka</i> | Mark anointing the forehead or other body part with sandalwood. |
| <i>tīrtha</i> | Holy place reputed to grant liberation from worldly existence. |
| <i>tīthi</i> | A lunar day. |
| <i>triguṇa</i> | Three qualities inherent within material creation (Prakṛti). |
| <i>trikoṇa</i> | Triangle. Symbol of the female reproductive organ, <i>yoni</i> . |
| <i>triloka</i> | The three world systems: heaven, earth, and the underworld. |
| <i>triśūla</i> | Trident. Weapon of Śiva. Symbol of the goddess. |
| <i>tulasī</i> | A sacred plant. Consort of Viṣṇu. |
| <i>ucchiṣṭa</i> | The remnants. Refuse. Impure leftovers from a sacrifice. |
| <i>ullū</i> (H) | Owl. |
| <i>upanāyana</i> | Ritual of investing a Hindu boy with the sacred thread. |
| <i>upāya</i> | Means or method. |
| <i>vāhana</i> | A mount. Vehicle. |
| <i>vaiśya</i> | Merchant class. |
| <i>vāmācārā</i> | The left-hand (heterodox) Tantric path. |
| <i>vara</i> | A boon. |
| Vārāṇasī | Sacred city on the river Gaṅgā. Also called Banāras or Kāśī. |
| <i>varana</i> | Worshipping. |
| <i>varṇa</i> | Colour. Class. |
| <i>vasanta</i> | Spring. |
| <i>vastra</i> | Clothing. Cloth. |
| <i>vastupuruṣa</i> | Being of the Foundations. Entity permeating architectural forms. |
| <i>vedī</i> | An altar. |
| <i>veśya</i> | Prostitute. |
| <i>vīṇā</i> | A stringed musical instrument. A lute. |
| Vidyā | She who is Knowledge. Epithet of the goddess. |

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| Vijayā | Victory personified as a goddess. |
| Vindhya vāsini | She who Dwells in the Vindhya Mountains. Epithet of Durgā. |
| visarjana | Dismissal. Ritual of sending away a deity. |
| viśeṣa argha | Special offering. |
| Viśvanātha | Lord of the Universe. Epithet of Śiva in Banāras. |
| Viṣṇu | Great deity in Hinduism. Preserver of the cosmic order. |
| vrkṣa | Tree. |
| vrata | Vowed devotional observance. |
| vṛtti | Transformations, modifications, modulations. |
| | |
| yajamāna | The patron or offerer of a sacrifice. |
| yajña | Sacrificial rite. |
| yajñopavīta | Sacred thread conferred on members of the upper three classes. |
| yakṣa/i | Demigods associated with nature. |
| yama daṁṣṭrā | Yama's teeth. The jaws of death. |
| yantra | Multidimensional mystical diagram embodying a deity. |
| yātra | Pilgrimage. |
| yoni | Female generative organ. Symbol of the goddess. |
| yoni pūṭha | Seat/abode of the goddess. Portal of creation. |
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| zamīndār | Proprietor of a landed estate. A landlord. |

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Abbreviations

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| AV | Atharva Veda |
| RV | Rg Veda |
| RVKh | Rg Veda Khila |
| SV | Sama Vedā |
| ŚB | Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa |
| TA | Taittirīya Āraṇyaka |
| TS | Taittirīya Saṃhitā |
| VS | Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā |
| VSK | Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā Khila |

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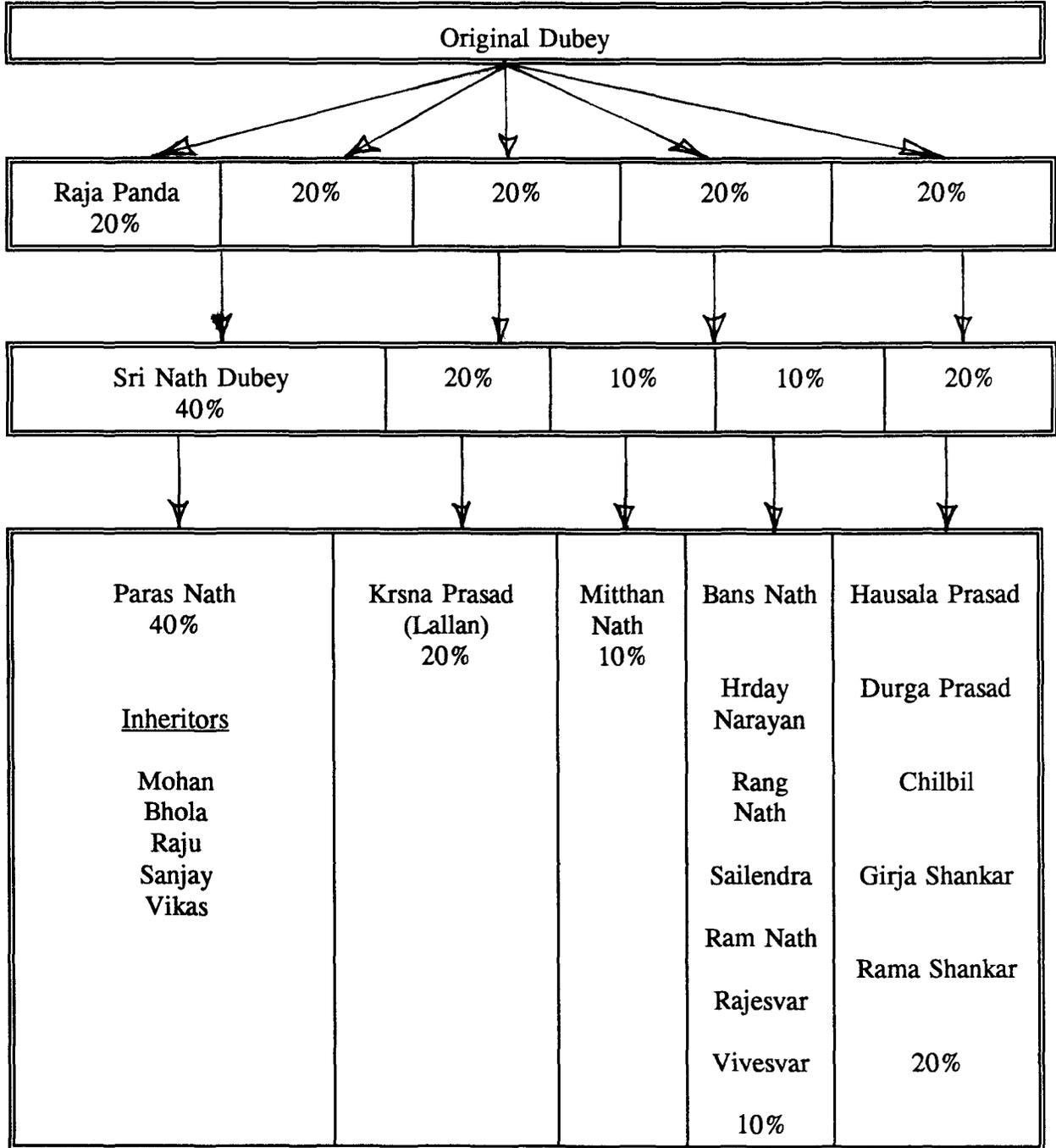
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CHART ONE

OWNERSHIP INHERITANCE SCHEME AT DURGĀ KUṆḌA TEMPLE IN BANĀRAS



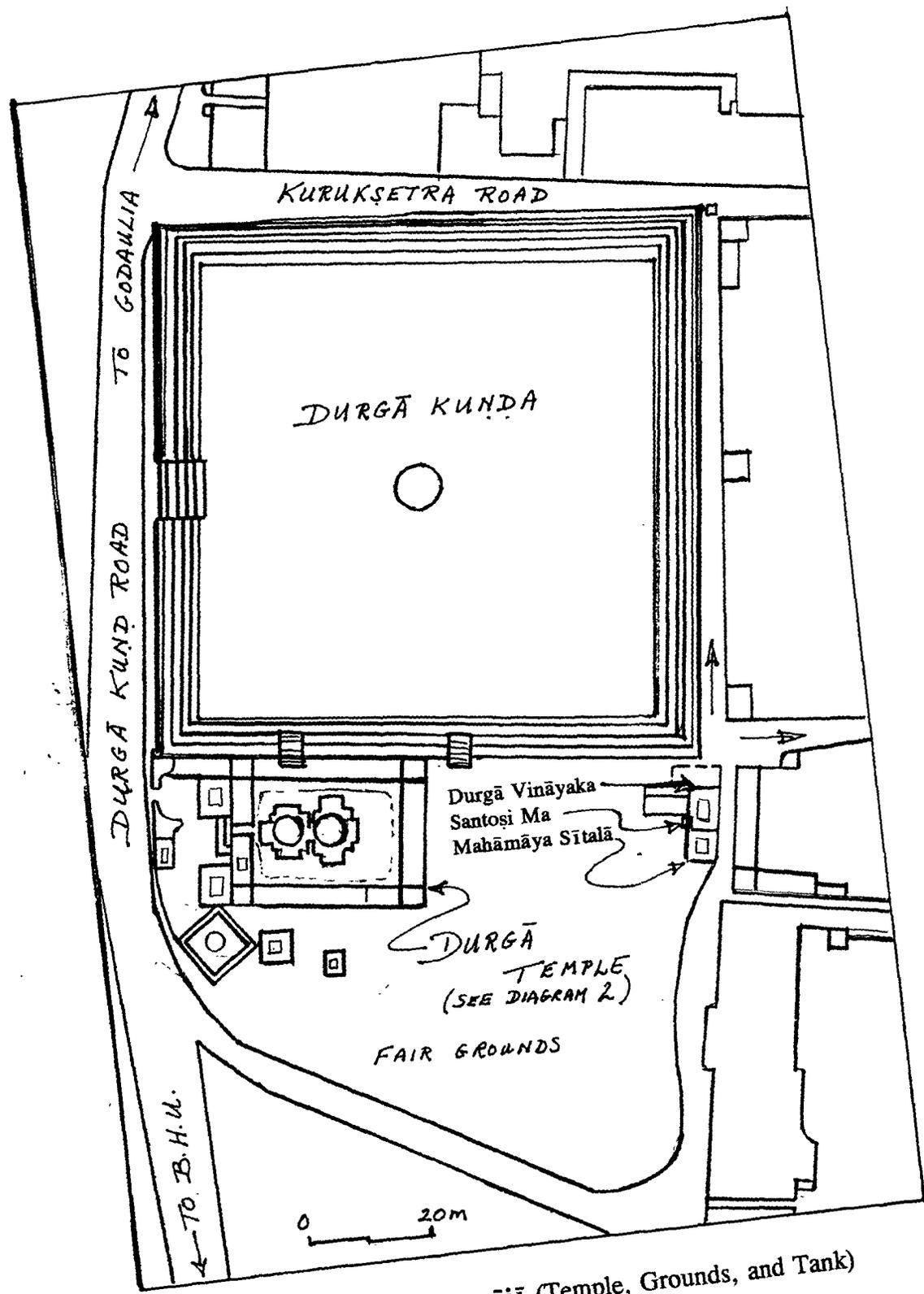


Diagram 1: Durgājī (Temple, Grounds, and Tank)
 COURTESY OF DR. RANA SINGH

- | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Durgā | 6. Fire pit (Havan kuṇḍa) | 12. Eight-petalled lotus | 18. Hanumān | 24. Brass bells |
| 2. Bhadrakālī, Caṇḍa Bhairava, "Tantric Kālī" | 7. Kukkūṭeśvara Mahādeva | 13. Lion pillar | 19. Bhairava | 25. Sanctified Water (Caranāmṛta) |
| 3. Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī | 8. Gaṇeśa, Śeṣanāga | 14. Stone lions | 20. Dvārapāla (Guards) | 26. Rudra Bhairava |
| 4. Sacrificial plot and pillar | 9. Jvalhareśvara/ī | 15. Brass lions | 21. Mahisāsūramardinī | 27. Maṇḍapa (porch) |
| 5. Tilparneśvara or Jaleśvara/ī | 10. Sūrya | 16. Naubhat Khāna (Drum room) | 22. Kṛṣṇa Gopāla | 28. Śikhara and Sanctum |
| | 11. Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā | 17. Dharmasālā (Pilgrim shelter) | 23. Lakṣmī-Narāyana | |

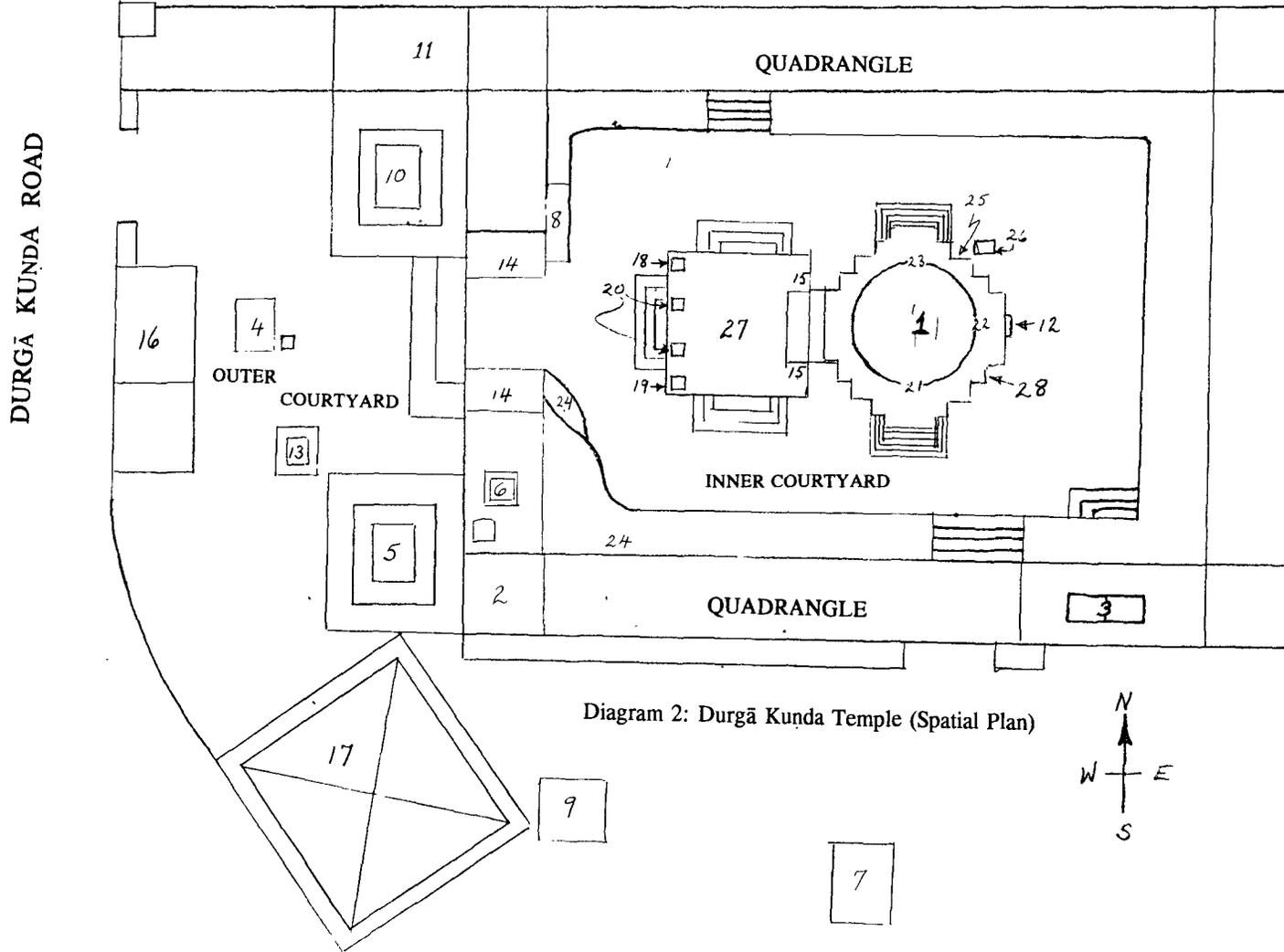


Diagram 2: Durgā Kuṇḍa Temple (Spatial Plan)

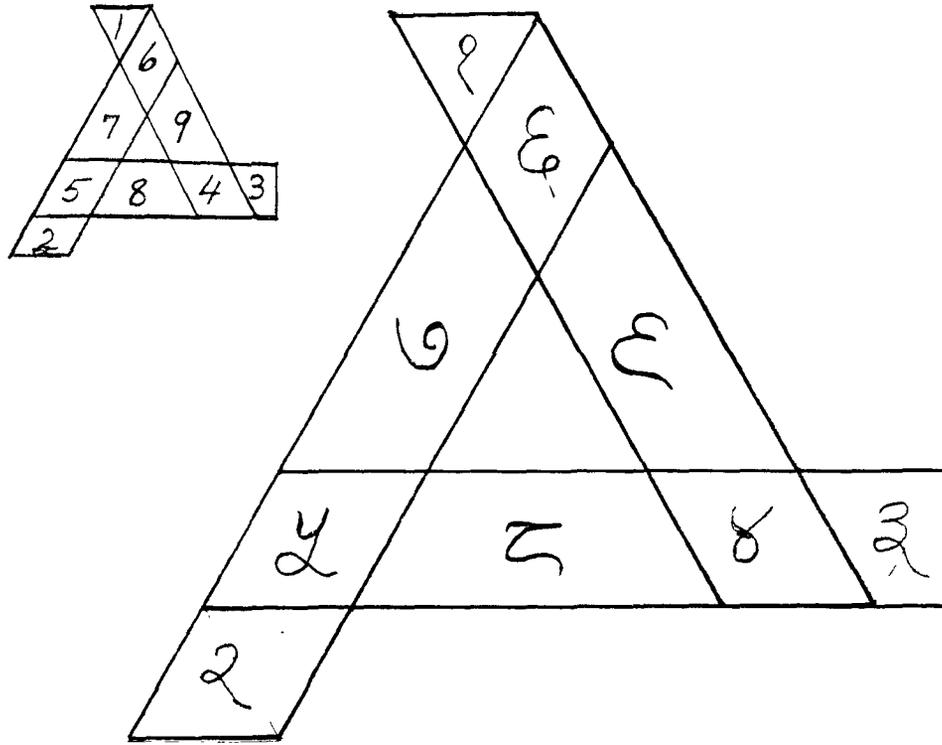


Diagram 3: (Above) **Durgā Yantra of Twenty (Bisa Yantra)**. The yantra contains the numerals from one to nine. The sequence of four numbers along any side add up to twenty. (Dotted lines indicate variant forms). (Below) **Durga Yantra**. (Circle at left indicates a common variant containing the seed syllable, *Dum*).

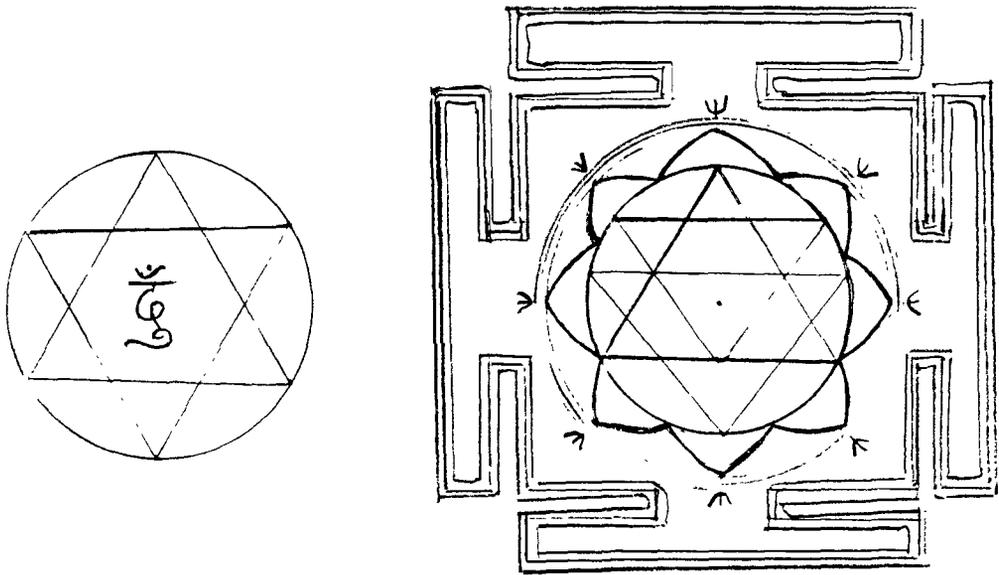




Diagram 4: *Saratobhadra Mandala*
(The Sacred Circle of All Auspiciousness)

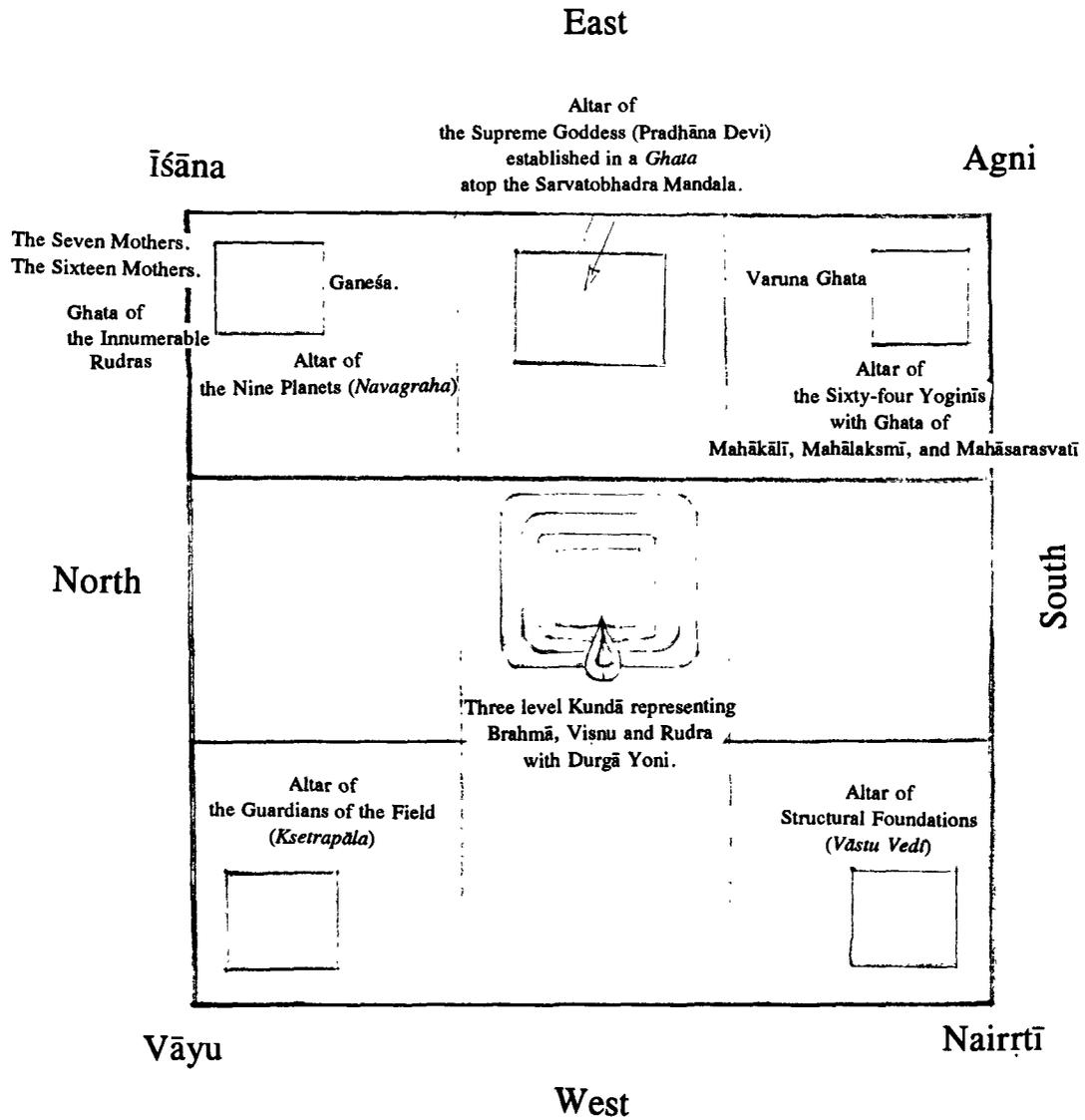
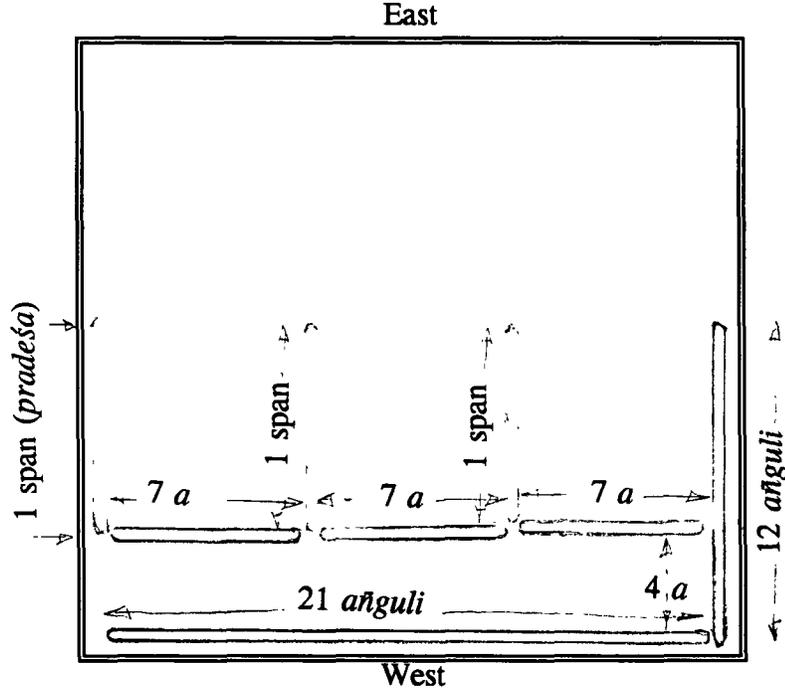


Diagram 5: Pavilion for the Group Recitation of the *Durgā Saptasatī*.

Note that the ground plan divides the pavilion into nine equal spaces with the fire pit (*havan kundā*) located in the central square. Oblations are made into the *yoni* located at the western edge of the fire pit.

**Diagram 6: Method and Layout of the Fire Pit (Sthandīla)
Used in the Durgā Pūjā**

Seated on the West side of the *sthandīla*, facing east, the *purohita* pours a thin layer of sand into it and places lengths of *kāśa* 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 pṛthvī devatāka pitavarṇa

This line is superintended by the deity Pṛthvī, 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 ṛṣi renustubh cando agnirdevatā utkara nirasane viniyogaḥ.

Om nirastaḥ paravasū

So saying he discards the *utkara* to the Northeast direction.

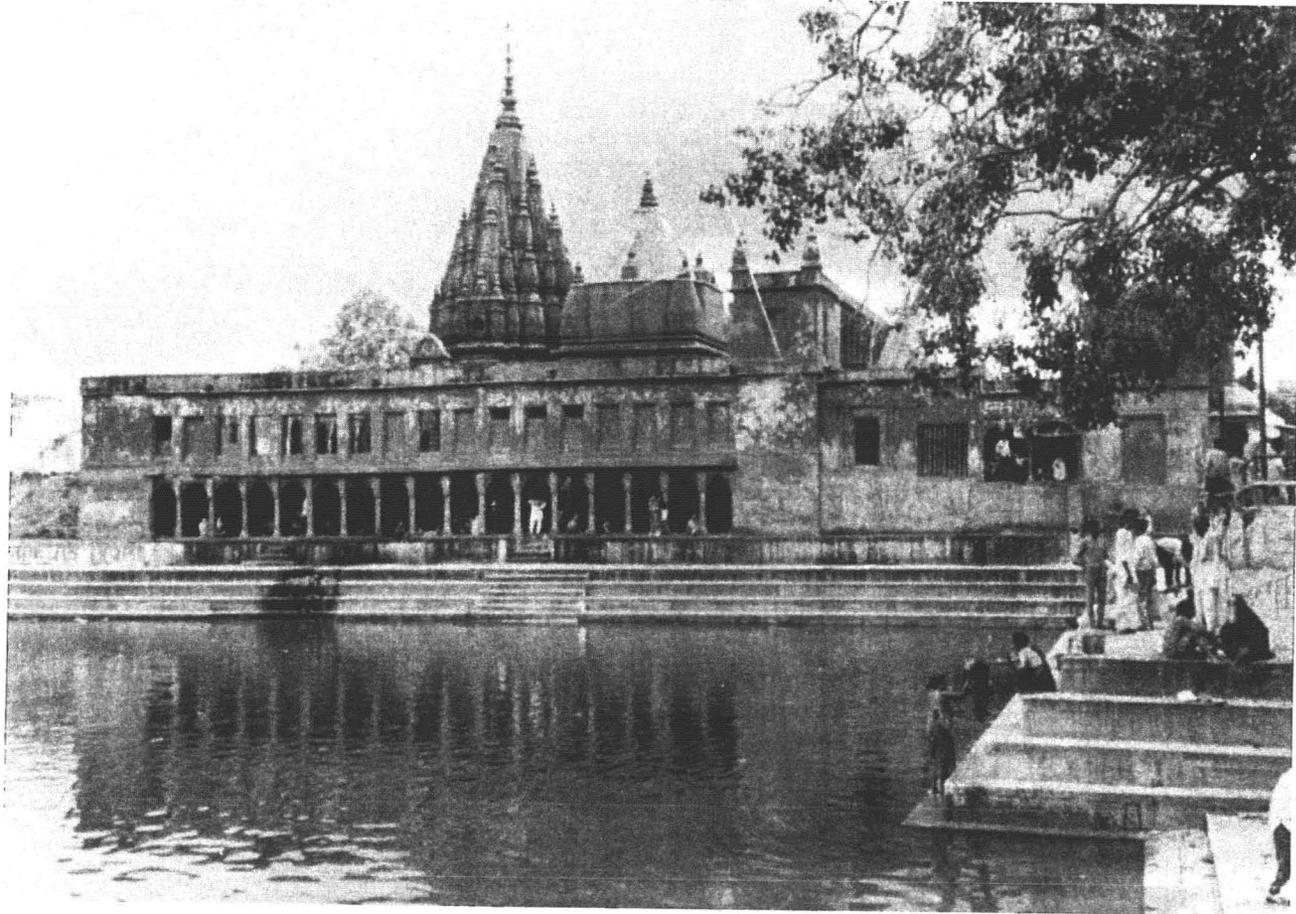


Figure 1: The **Durgā Temple and Kuṇḍā** as it appears today.

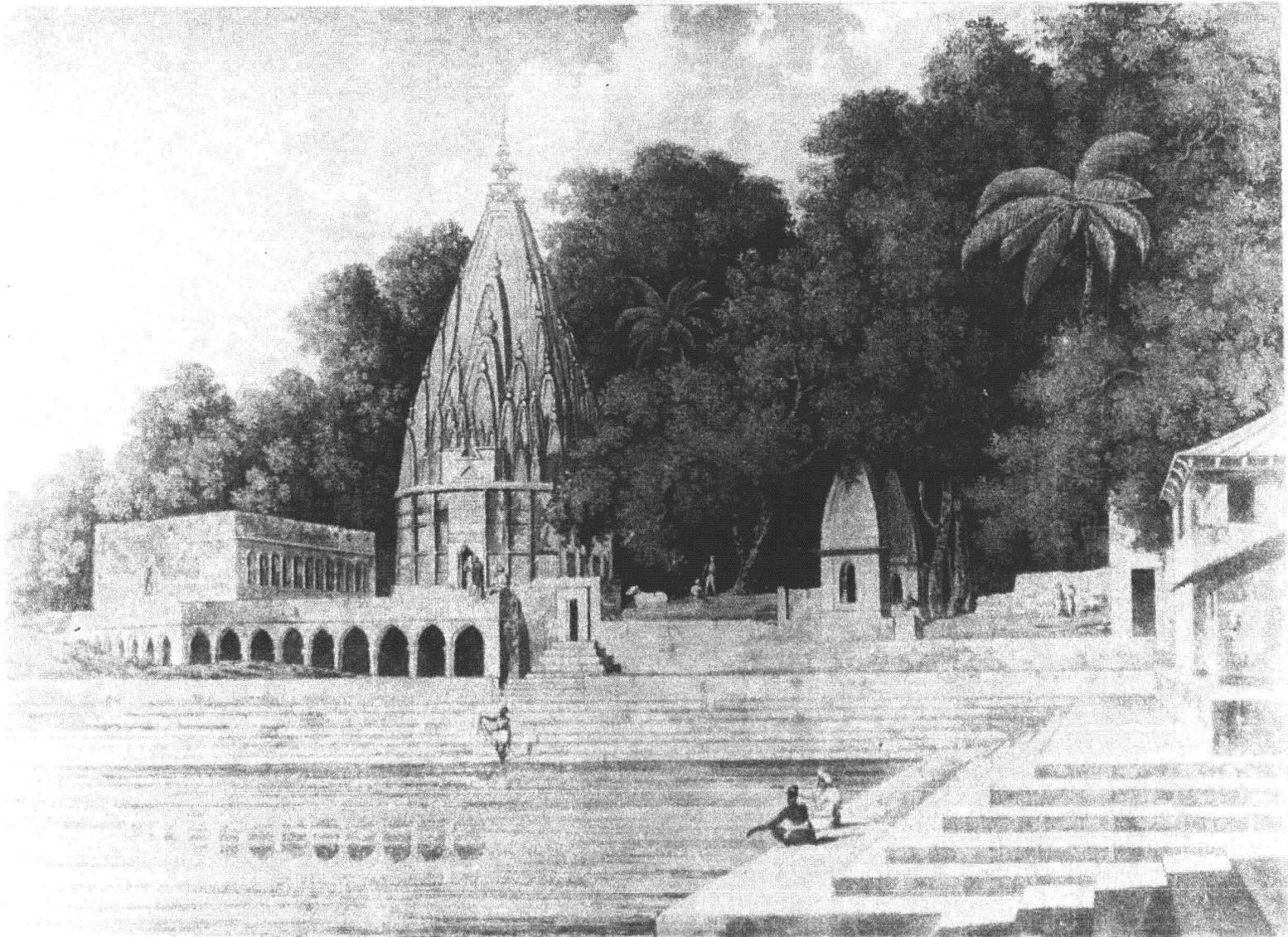


Figure 2: The Durgā Temple and Kuṇḍa sketched by Sutherland in 1838. (Courtesy of Bhārat Kalā Bhavan).



Figure 3: (Above) **Mask of the Goddess Durgā** in the inner sanctum of the Durgā Kuṇḍ temple.

(Right) **Bhadrakālī Mask** in Durgā temple.



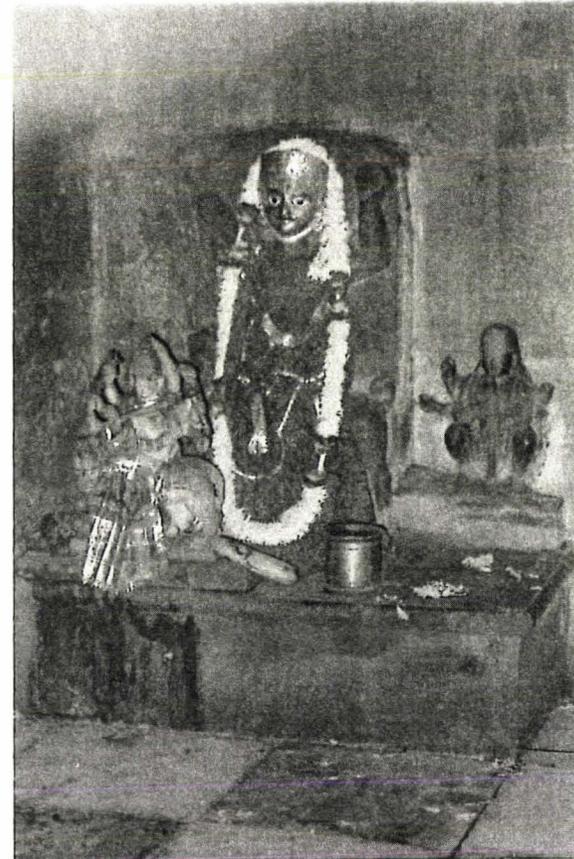


Figure 4: (Left) Nude, squatting, "Lajja Gaurī" fertility goddess image (From Badāmi Museum).
(Right) Caṇḍa Bhairava (centre), Durgā Siṃhavāhinī (left), and "Tantric Kālī" (right) images at Durgājī.

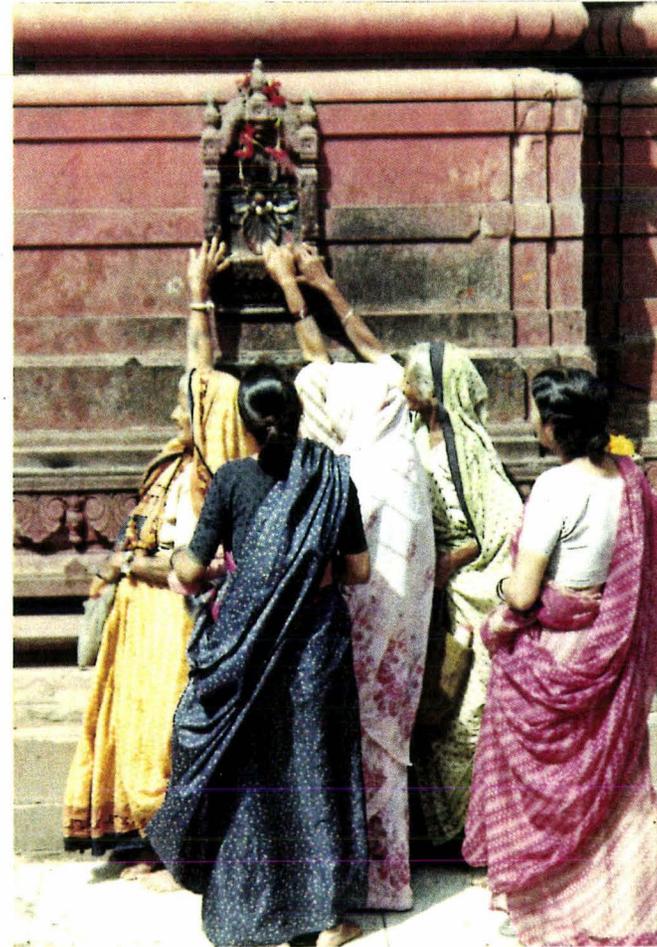
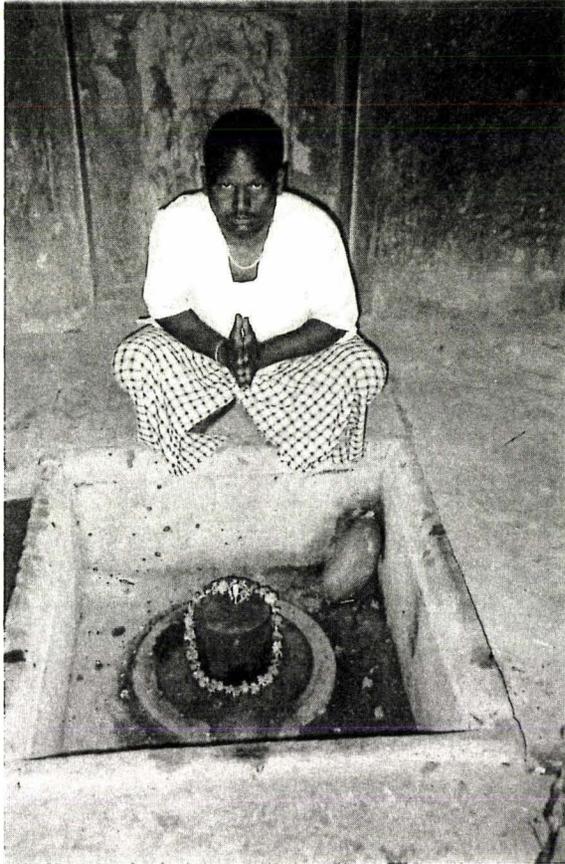


Figure 5: (Left) The Tank and *Linga* of Tilaparnesvara/Jalesvara/i at Durgā Kuṇḍ temple.
(Right) Female devotees touch and pivot around the Eight-Petalled Lotus image at Durgājī.



Figure 6: (Above) The Fire Pit (*Havan Kunda*) at Durgājī where sorcerers and healers may worship.
(Below) A Healer (*Ojha*) at Durgājī administers a therapeutic camphor flame to a patient.



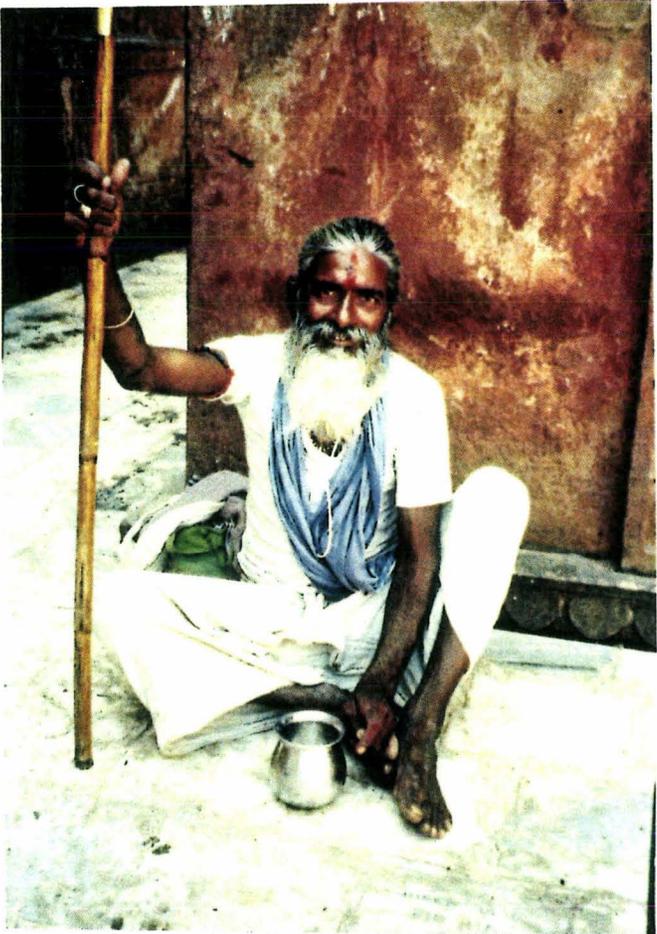


Figure 7: (Left) A **Religious Mendicant** at Durgājī.
(Above) **Female Mendicant** at Durgājī.

(Neither belong to a religious organization nor enter the inner courtyard of the temple)

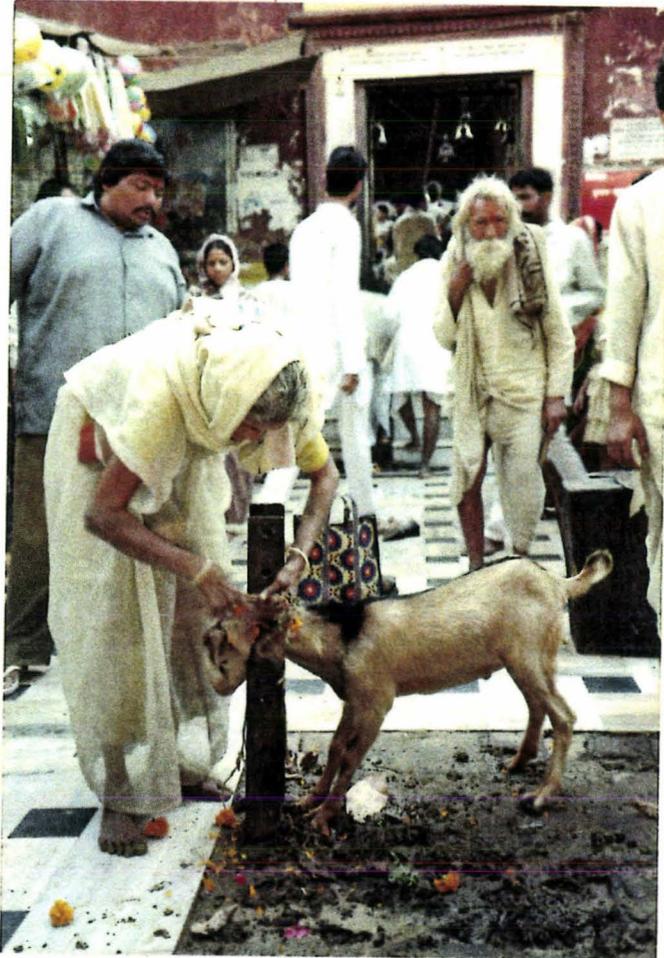


Figure 8: (Left) A woman tethers a **Sacrificial Goat** to the stake in the Sacrificial Plot.
(Right) The severed head is offered on the **Sacrificial Altar/Pillar** along with a camphor flame.

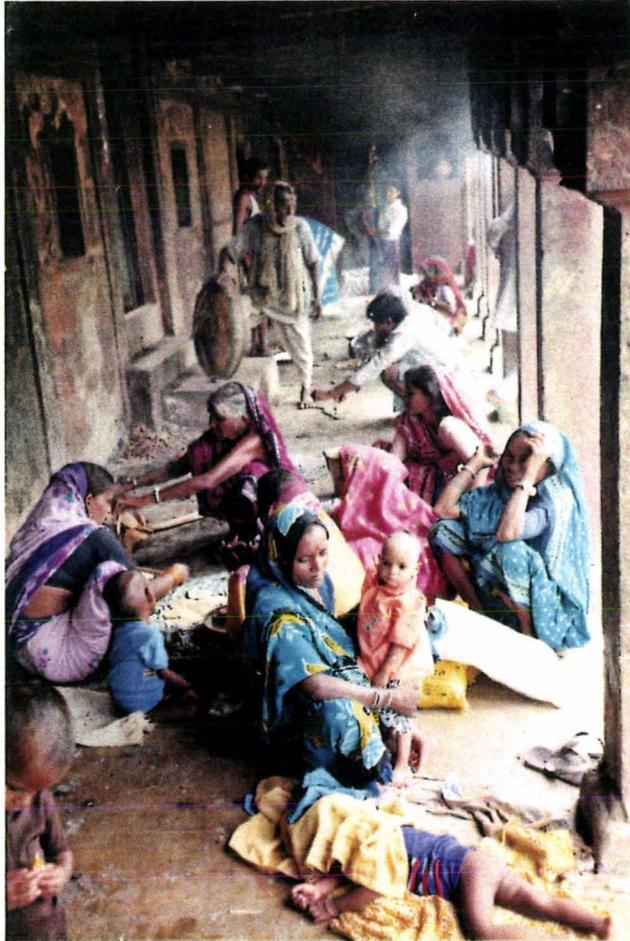


Figure 9: (Left) **Women (Pilgrims)** prepare food in the shelter (dharmasālā) by the tank at Durgājī.
(Right) **A Child's First Tonsure** is performed at Durgājī.



Figure 10: (Above) A Śākta Devotee recites the *Durgā Saptaśatī* in the presence of his son, who learns the text. (Below) A Spiritual Practitioner (*sādhaka*) performs his secret ritual by one of Durgājī's stone lions.





Figure 11: (Above) The Head Priest (Pūjāri) at Durgājī, Ram Prasad Dubey, performs his daily recitation of the *Durgā Saptasatī*. (Below) Group of *Brāhmāṇas*, commissioned to recite the *Durgā Saptasatī*.

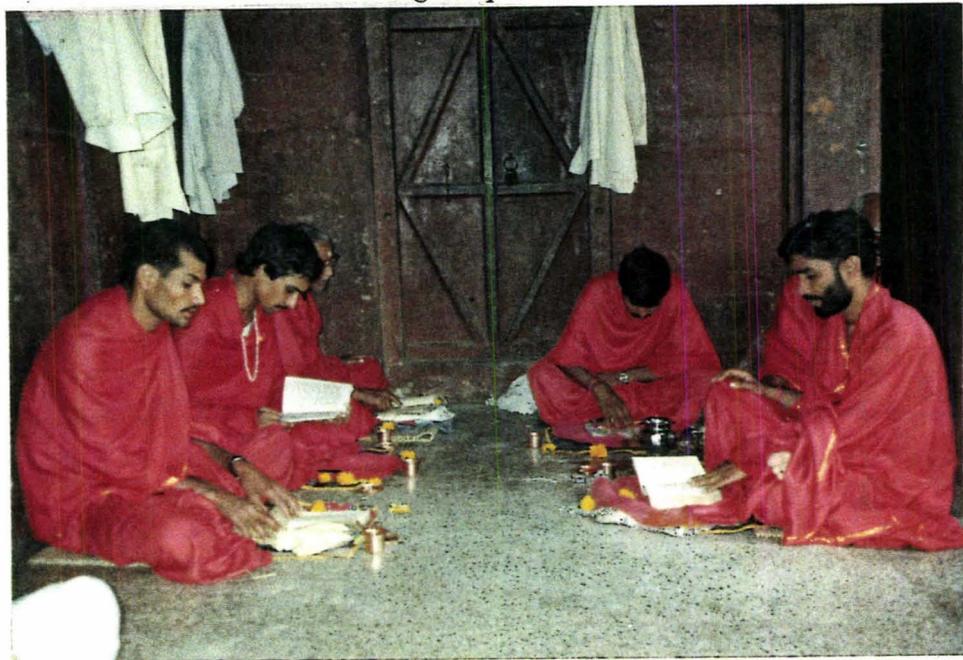




Figure 12: (Left) **Durgā Worshipper** roadside vendor.
The framed Durgā image would receive special
veneration during Navarātra.

(Above) **Shop selling Devotional Offerings** such
as coconuts, scarves, and incense.



Figure 13: (Above) **Durgā is Established in a Jar (Kalaśa).**
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 *sārī*.

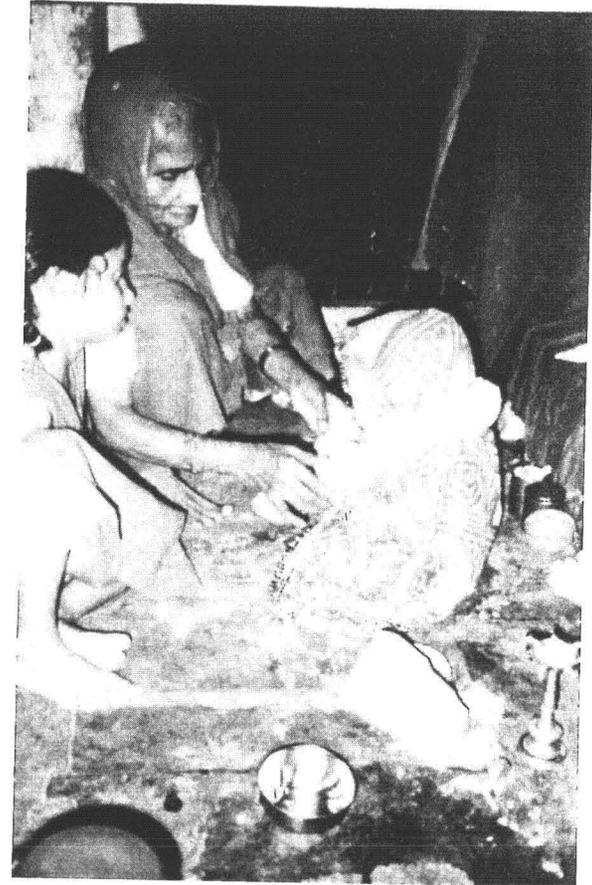




Figure 14: (Left) An Image Maker adjusts Durgā's Snake Noose (Nāga Pāśa) wrapped around the demon Mahiṣa. (Right) The Ritual Specialist (Purohita) begins to imbue the Durgā image cluster (*pratimā*) with life.

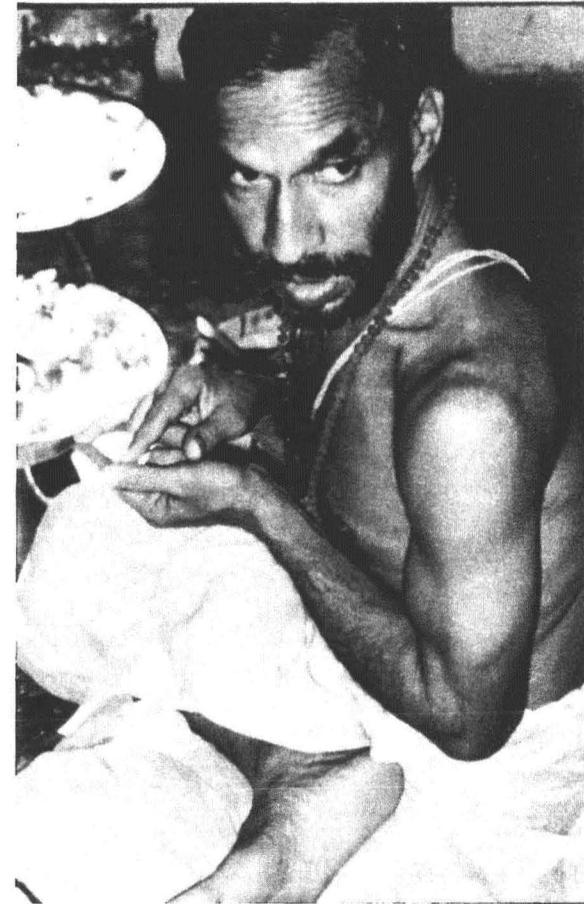
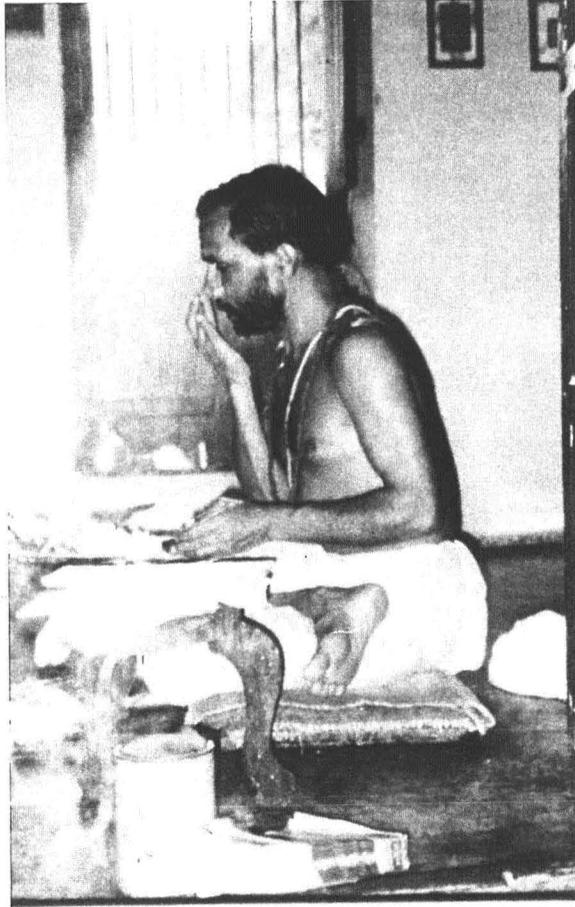


Figure 15: The ritual specialist uses a variety of techniques drawn from tantric yoga in the worship ceremony. Among these are: (Left) **Control of the Breath (Prāṇāyāma)** and (Right) **Ritual Gestures (Mudrā)**.

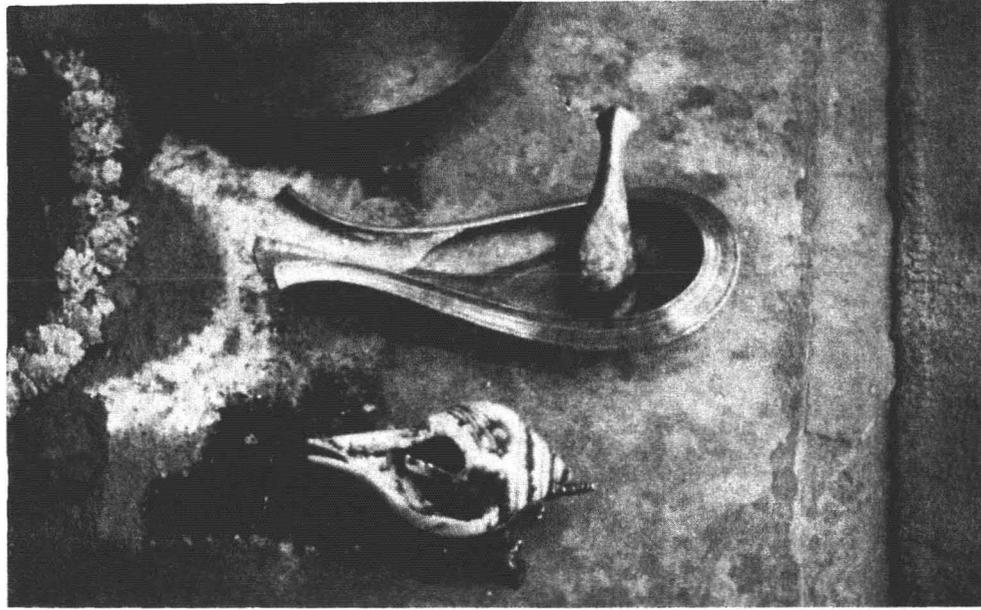


Figure 16: Some **Ritual Implements** used in **Durgā Pūjā**.

(Above) Conch shell and copper vessels resembling female generative organ (*yonī*). 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)

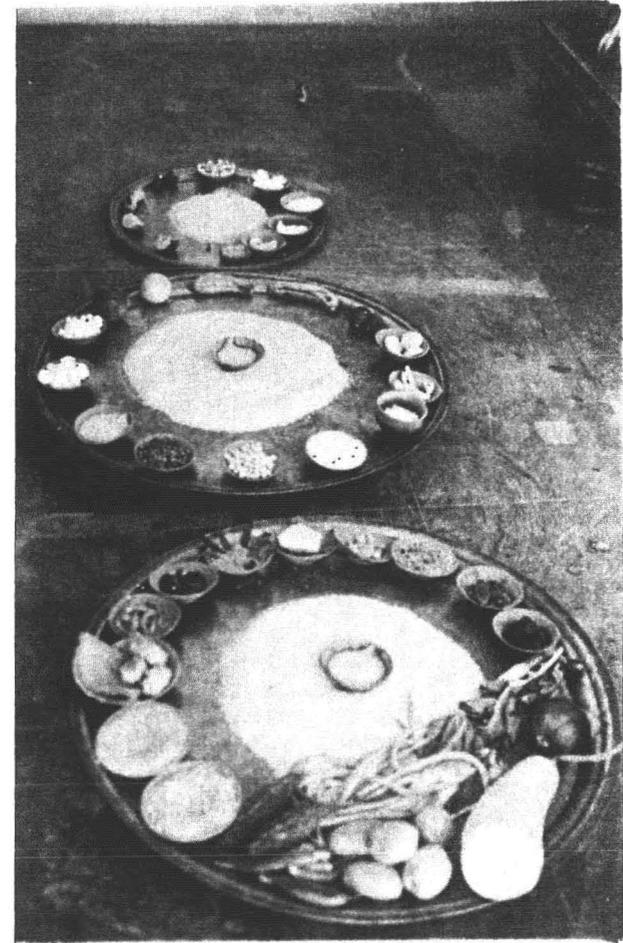




Figure 17: **Flame Worship (*Ārātī*) of Durgā**
(Above) The oldest elaborate home celebration
in Banāras at the Mitra family in Chaukhambha.
(Below) Lighting an offering of 108 butter lamps.
(Photos by Ruth Rickard)





Figure 18: (Above) **Durgā as the Cluster of Nine Plants (*Navapatrikā*)** is bathed by the *purohita*.
(Below) The **Fire Oblation** is performed by the *purohita* and the ritual patron (*yajamāna*).





Figure 19: (Above) The images have their **Mouths Smearred 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 Gaṅgā (*visarjana*).

