

## The Glory of the Goddess-Devi Mahatmyam

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“Like Aswamedha in Yagnas, Hari in Devas, Saptasati is in Stotras”

---- Damara Tantra

Traditionally the ‘*Devi Mahatmyam*’ is a portion of the *Markandeya Mahapurana*. The *Devi Mahatmya* is variously known as *Sri Durga Saptashati*, *Sri Chandi or Saptashati*. It is referred to as *Saptashati* as it comprises of seven hundred mantras. It is more popularly known as *Chandi* because it describes the glory of the Goddess as *Chandika*, the terrible. Like the god *Rudra*, the Goddess too has two forms- a malevolent form and another benevolent form. In Her terrible form She destroys the evil demons. Yet in Her destruction, one can see the light of a resplendent regeneration too. This resplendent and benevolent form is Her compassionate form as the Mother of the Universe. Among the sacred texts that laud the glory of the Mother, *Lalita sahasranamam* and *Devi Mahatmyam* are most popular. Both are considered to be extremely auspicious and powerful as tools of transformation. Both can be recited daily. Whilst *Lalita sahasranamam* describes the victory of the Goddess over Bhandasura, the *Devi Mahatmyam* describes the victory of the Goddess over the asuras Madhu-Kaitabha, Mahishasura and Shumbha-Nishumbha.

‘*Devi Mahatmyam*’ literally means ‘Glory of the Goddess’. Simply put the word ‘Devi’ means ‘Goddess’. While the word ‘devi’ may be used to refer to any goddess, here it is used to denote the Supreme Goddess adored as the Divine Mother of the entire universe. The *Devi mahatmyam* is a highly occult text. “Only those who have inner eyes will perceive the hidden truths; others know not”. It is held that Markandeya the seer of this myth had seen the ever-existent glory of the goddess with the inner eye. Sri Bhaskararaya named his commentary on the *Devi Mahatmyam* as ‘Guptavati’ thus denoting the hidden and highly occult nature of *Devi mahatmyam*.

The Meru tantra proclaims that even Vishnu knows only three-quarters of the inner sense, Brahma knows half, Vyasa knows only a quarter while others know only a fraction of the true significance of the *Devi mahatmyam*. Part myth and part philosophy, the text addresses some very important existential questions that have plagued mankind since time immemorial. Whilst its stories can be taken as metaphors relating to our own psycho-spiritual landscape as well the challenges we face in life, there isn’t a single approach to the *Devi Mahatmyam* or the *Chandi*. The various hymns to the Goddess in the *Devi Mahatmyam* inspire us to devotion for the personal forms of God as Mother while “its deeper, philosophical and esoteric interpretation leads us to the realization of God as the impersonal supreme reality”.

## God as Mother

This brings us to an interesting question. Is God male or female? Most religions say male, few religions say female, while some might say neither. Hinduism makes room for various conceptions of ultimate reality in which the feminine is one of the prominent ones. The Supreme Being is both nirguna (without form) and saguna (with form). As nirguna it is beyond the confines of gender. However as saguna the Divine can be masculine or feminine. The Devi Mahatmyam, being a Sakta text, conceptualizes ultimate reality as feminine. Though other schools or world-views too speak of the immanent nature of the goddess, the Sakta world-view is explicit in establishing the Goddess or the Feminine as the ultimate transcendent reality as well. Instead of Brahman, here it is Adya Sakti, the Mother of all origins, the matrix of the unborn.

Goddess worship does not belong to any particular cult. It is true that the Sakta places the feminine at centre stage. However the Goddess is worshipped by all irrespective of any distinction. In fact it is Shakti worship that is a common feature of most Hindu schools irrespective of whether they are Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta or Ganapatya. The Divine Mother is synonymous with Shakti, the unifying force of existence. Shakti is the Divine Power of creation, sustenance and transformation. In other words Shakti worship is nothing but worshipping the inherent Power of the Supreme Divine. According to a particular view prevalent among both scientists as well as spiritualists everything in the universe is a manifestation of imperishable energy. According to the Shakta this energy is nothing other than the manifestation of the Divine Shakti, which exists in every form of our existence. Since this Shakti (Power or Energy) cannot be worshipped in its essential nature, it is worshipped through various symbolic manifestations that symbolise Shakti in its various phases. Thus truly speaking, all beings of the universe are Shakti worshippers, for there is none in this world who does not love power or energy in some form or the other.

Various forms like Durga, Chandi, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Maha Saraswati are but Her divine forms. Each form of the Devi has a distinctive role meant for a definite purpose. Yet every form is also identified as the Ultimate Reality of the universe. Each form of the Divine Mother is thus an embodiment of the Supreme Divinity. One form may appear different from the other. But in spirit, each such form is one more manifestation springing from the One Source, verily the Supreme Primordial Prakriti. She is the One without the second, the Unmanifest. Hers is the Cosmic womb that gives birth to the entire universe. She not only begets the universe but also resides in it through Her power of veiling. Behind the veils of the myriad deities in human and non-human forms, there is the One formless Being call it what you want to, be it Brahman, or Satchidananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss) or the Supreme Being or simply Being.

## The Devi Mahatmyam as Sruti or Revealed Knowledge

*“Just as the Vedas have no beginning, so is Saptasati considered”*

--- Bhuvaneswari samhita

Though the Devi Mahatmyam constitutes chapters 81-93 in the Markandeya Purana, it is not merely treated as a part of a purana. It has an intrinsic independent status by itself. It does not derive its significance from its Puranic background. It is a full-fledged scripture by itself. Part narrative and part hymn, the Devi Mahatmyam combines the strengths of both the oral and written traditions. On one hand it is like a synthesis of many myths from many sources, skilfully integrated into a single narrative and thus incorporates the best of the puranic approach. On the other hand it also displays the bardic style of the vedic approach that combines the best of preliterate and literate strengths of expression, in so far as the hymns are concerned. Although the four hymns are integral to the narrative, they are markedly different in quality. Sri Bhaskararaya the most famous of all commentators affirms the hymns as being drsta (seen), rather than as being krta (made), thus awarding them the exalted status of revealed knowledge (sruti) generally accorded only to the Veda.

Unlike the Purana that has the status of being an auxiliary limb (upanga) of the Veda, Devi Mahatmyam has attained the status of sruti, the very status accorded to the Veda. The Devi Mahatmyam or Saptasati is treated just like a vedic hymn with rsi, metre, devata, and viniyoga. The Katyayani tantra considers each verse of the Devi Mahatmyam as a mantra. In fact there are some who affirm that every word of the text is a mantra. Besides the whole text is treated like one maha mantra. Though three-fourths of the scripture deals with description of battles and their associated narratives even these contents are considered to be mantras. There are 537 sloka mantras (full slokas), 38 ardha-sloka mantras (half slokas), 66 khanda mantras (part of a sloka), 57 uvacha mantras and 2 punarukta mantras, thus totalling 700 altogether.

The actual number of verses in the text is only 518, not 700 as stated by some modern writers. The number 700 is thus not related to the number of verses, but indicates the total number of mantras in the Devi Mahatmyam. Though the details of the break up of the mantras are not important for simple recitation, these details are important for Chandi Homa, Japa and Archana. Apart from these 700 mantras, there are other covert mantras within the text. At times mantras are encoded into the narrative. Exploring the encoded mantras is beyond the scope of the present work as it is possible only through an exclusive commentary written with the aim of exploring the Devi Mahatmyam as a great mantramaya text. The popularity of the Devi Mahatmyam can be inferred from the sheer number of commentaries by several traditional scholars. There were at least sixty five commentaries on the Devi Mahatmyam, though all of them are not available today. The book with seven commentaries (Santanavi, Pushpanjali, Ramasrami, Nagesi, Guptavati, Durgapratipa and Damsoddhara) is quite well known and easily available. Apart from this there are some excellent commentaries in other regional languages too.

As already stated earlier the Devi Mahatmyam interweaves four elegant hymns in between the ghastly narratives of bloodshed and slaughter. Whilst the majority of the verses in the text are in the simpler anushtup metre, the hymns bring into play more elegant metres such as vasantatilaka and upajati also, thus creating an elegant, complex, rhythmic sinuosity when sung. The hymns are not only devotional and poetic, but also philosophical and sublime. These four hymns are so sweet, powerful and uplifting that if possible, they should be chanted in the original, even if one cannot chant the whole text. Moreover as mantras their power works through their vibration. One may chant at least these four hymns in order to derive immense benefit from the power of the Devi Mahatmyam as a text of powerful mantras. It is for this reason that the four hymns have been appended at the end. Along with the original hymns in Sanskrit, English transliteration as well as translation has been given for the four hymns.

### **Various levels of Truth in the Devi Mahatmyam**

The Devi Mahatmyam speaks to us in various ways at various levels. On the face of it the text is a chronicle of the battle between the Goddess and her divine manifestations on one side and the demons (asuras) on the other. Each episode of the *Devi mahatmyam* narrates a different battle that becomes increasingly complex as the story unfolds in each episode. Like other sacred myths this battle too does not happen on the physical earth plane. It happens at another level of reality, on another plane. The significance of the story cannot be fully appreciated by those who hold the physical plane as the only reality. Truth and reality are not necessarily synonymous. Something does not have to be real at a physical level for it to be true. Moreover there are various levels of truth. All sacred myth has various levels of truth. First is the external cosmic level that is often symbolic of an astronomical event or cosmic phenomenon. Next is an inner psychological level that symbolises the play of various forces within the human mind. This is the inner psychological level. The third is a transcendent level that is indescribable in ordinary everyday language. Then there is a fourth level that combines the previous three levels simultaneously into the paradoxical and varied nature of reality. At this level the external, internal and transcendent levels are not mutually exclusive. They co-exist simultaneously as one single mysterious and paradoxical phenomenon.

Myth is a very effective ancient way of teaching. What cannot be conveyed through philosophical discussions and logical debates can be transmitted more easily through myth and metaphor. Sacred myth speaks to us in multiple ways both rational and non-rational. Thus at one level the Devi mahatmyam chronicles the battle between the Devi and the asuras. At another level it deals with the battle of life. At yet another level it deals with the inner battle between the divine and the demoniac forces within the human psyche, between the positive and negative. The battlegrounds represent our own human consciousness, and its events symbolize our own experiences. The demons are symbolic of the psychic forces within the shadow. They represent all the evils in the external world that have been internalized. Whatever has been internalised in turn again manifests externally in our life. The Divine Mother is our own true being, our inherent divinity and wholeness. Her clashes with the demons symbolize the outward and inward struggles we face daily. The Devi, personified simultaneously as the one supreme Goddess and also the many goddesses, confronts the demons of ahamkara or ego (our mistaken notion of who we are or what we identify ourselves with), of excessive tamas and rajas, that in turn give birth to other demons of

excessive craving, greed, anger and pride, and of incessant citta vrttis (compulsive inner thought processes springing from past karmic residue). In the ultimate sense the dichotomy between the bad and the good is also a false one. There is no duality. Both are part of one single paradoxical reality. The text drives home this truth so beautifully. We will see more on this at an appropriate place.

### **Samkhya-Yoga and the Devi Mahatmyam**

Apart from being a text of Mantras the Devi Mahatmyam is also considered to be an esoteric text on Yoga sastra. The gunas are given as far as Samkhya-Yoga is concerned. As per this view, *Prakrti* (Nature) is the primal material constituent. Whilst the Devi Mahatmyam accommodates the Samkhyan view, its view of *Prakrti* is unique in that it conceptualizes the material world itself as supremely divine, identifying it with the Goddess Herself. In spite of certain differences, the Tantric concept of Shiva and Shakti is similar to that of Purusha and *Prakriti* in Samkhya, or Brahman and Maya in Advaita.

As per the Samkhyan view Purusha is inert while *Prakrti* is ever changing. *Prakrti* is productive (*prasava-dharmi*) because of the ‘*Gunas*’, which are the modes of being and are relatively objective, ultimate constituents of experience. *Prakrti* is constituted by three modes or qualities (*gunas*) - *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. At the level of *Moola Prakrti* (Undifferentiated original state of *Prakrti*) the three *gunas* are in equilibrium. The moment this equilibrium is disturbed the *gunas* are thrown out of balance leading to an unremitting cycle of changes or evolution. *Mahat* which is the first evolute of *Prakrti* consists of the three *gunas* in a constant state of disequilibrium. *Sattva* is characterized by brilliance, knowledge, equanimity and lightness. *Rajas* is characterized by movement, dynamism, ambition, attachment and reactivity or *raga*. *Tamas* is characterized by ignorance, delusion and inertia, the power of resistance. The entire manifest world is subject to the influence of the three *gunas*.

### **Brahma Vidya and Sri Vidya**

Brahma Vidya is the knowledge of Brahman while Sri Vidya is the knowledge of the Goddess. Both are considered to be the same. The Paramatman represented through the Pranava -OM - in Brahma Vidya, is represented by the seed sound “hrim” in Sri Vidya. The seed (bija) mantra “hrim” is called Maya bijam or Bhuvaneshvari bijam. Just as the tree, the flower, and the fruit, emerge from the seed, so also do the three different aspects of the Devi - namely, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati emerge from the seed mantra “hrim”. Refer the chapter on Sahasranama for more on Sri Vidya

### **The three Gunas and the three Primal Goddesses**

Because the Chandi integrates three major narratives in its portrayal of the glory of the goddess, the *Chandi* naturally falls into three parts corresponding to the three *gunas*- *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Thus the entire text of thirteen chapters is grouped into three sections

comprising of three major episodes (caritras) each one describing the glory of one of the three different aspects of the Supreme Goddess, three Goddesses identified as Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. Although they are represented as three distinct images, they are virtually one and worship of one form is adored as the worship of the other forms. This holds true not only for the three Goddesses, but also for all other forms of the Goddess.

The Devi Mahatmyam describes an inner pilgrimage or tirtha yatra. This inner pilgrimage is graduated into three major phases, though there are other minor milestones within these three major phases. The beginning of each episode of the Chandi is like a vihara or halting place, where we rest and review the next part of the journey. Thus there are three major viharas in the inner pilgrimage where the spiritual aspirant reflects on his or her world-view, value system, strengths and weaknesses, and goals and strategies in life. Ideally there is a gradual transformation of outlook, attitude and constitution of one's being, facilitated by the insights gleaned during the inner pilgrimage, with each of the three points being a landmark in the inner psychic topography. Thus the transformation of the aspirant is threefold in line with the three gunas and the challenges specific to each guna.

As already stated above the threefold transformation of the spiritual aspirant is presided over by three aspects of Shakti- Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati- each presiding over a specific guna. These primal manifestations of Shakti should not be confused with Kali, Lakshmi and Saraswati who are deities in their own right. The three primal manifestations – Mahakali (Tamas), Mahalakshmi (Rajas) and Mahasaraswati (Sattva)- are beyond the regular pantheon of gods and goddesses and represent the Primordial (Adi) Shakti in Her threefold manifestation through the corresponding gunas, unlike Parvati, Lakshmi and Saraswati who are the feminine counterparts of corresponding male gods Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, in other traditions. Whilst each god has a sakti, the Devi Mahatmyam avoids characterizing such forms as being merely consorts, for the Goddess is Sakti, Power itself, beyond the realm of being a consort to anyone.

### **The benefits of reciting Devi Mahatmyam**

The greatness of the Devi Mahatmyam is extensively explained in several texts such as Rudra Yamala, Marichikalpa, Meru Tantra, Kataka Tantra, Chidambara Rahasya etc. The Devi Mahatmyam has the ability to grant the fruits as per the upasana. A sakama upasaka (one who does sadhana with a specific desire or goal in mind) achieves whatever he aspires for while a nishkama upasaka (one who does sadhana without any expectation or desire) achieves moksha, as revealed in the story. Suratha the king was bestowed with unmixed prosperity whereas the merchant Samadhi was conferred with divine knowledge according to their own aspirations. If Sri Candi is pleased, she confers on her devotees both earthly prosperity as well as supreme knowledge (sā yācītā ca vijñānaṁ tuṣṭā ṛddhiṁ prayacchati, DM, 12. 37). *Matsya Purana* prescribes recitation of Candi three times for cure from physical ailments, five times for relief from malefic planets; seven times for relief from impending disaster; nine times for ensuring peace; eleven times for winning royal favours; twelve times for overpowering foes; twenty five times for release from prison; thirty times for cure from

cancer; a hundred times for relief from great dishonour; one thousand times to mitigate loss of wealth and for steady prosperity etc.

### **Chandi Parayanam- Guidelines for Recitation**

In Chandi sadhana parayana or the recital of the text is considered more important than the japa of any mantra. Though the navakshari mantra is chanted, it is chanted as an integral part of the recital of the text. Traditionally the entire text of thirteen chapters is recited in Sanskrit. There is an obligatory prelude (purvabhaga) as well as a postlude (uttara bhaga) to the central text of thirteen chapters. The navakshari mantra is also an integral part of Chandi parayanam. Traditionally recitation of the Chandi is a serious and complete sadhana in itself and requires initiation from a Guru.

Most people are content with chanting selected slokas of the text or chanting the Durga Saptashloki (seven verses) which contains the essence of Chandi, apart from a devout reading of the myth in a language that they are familiar with. Chanting selected slokas for specific results is a practice that is quite common. Swami Sachchidananda who had initiated me in Chandi parayana had instructed me to prescribe certain slokas as remedies for problems. Accordingly I have been prescribing the chanting of certain slokas as remedies since the last ten years or so.

The recitation of the entire text of 13 chapters can be done in several ways:

- All 13 chapters continuously in one sitting
- In a span of three days as given below
  - Day 1 - Chapter 1*
  - Day 2 - Chapters 2, 3, 4*
  - Day 3 – Chapters 5 to 13*
- In a span of nine days -One reading of the text in three days as above, followed by two more repetitions in the next six days thus completing three readings of the text in nine days
- In a span of 7 days as given below
  - Day 1 - Chapter 1*
  - Day 2 - Chapters 2 & 3*
  - Day 3 - Chapter 4*
  - Day 4 - Chapters 5, 6, 7 & 8*
  - Day 5 - Chapters 9 & 10*
  - Day 6 - Chapter 11*
  - Day 7 - Chapters 12 & 13*
- If there is no time to read all thirteen, at least Madhyama Charitra (chapters 2, 3, 4) can be recited.

Any of the above methods can be adopted in reciting the Chandi. *Those who are not initiated but still wish to benefit from Chandi sadhana can follow the same procedure except that they may read the translated story in English or any other language as a spiritual practice. Even the myth itself is very powerful and therapeutic. Those who are not initiated can devoutly read the myth and chant the Saptashloki. The Goddess will shower Her grace on those who do this with faith.* Those who wish to do complete parayana of Chandi can pray to the Goddess as it is only Her grace that can lead them to an accomplished Guru who can initiate them into a full-fledged parayana.

Sri Sri Chandi should be read with firm faith, devotion and correct pronunciation. Tuesday, Friday and Saturday are auspicious week days for the reading of Sri Sri Chandi. The 8<sup>th</sup> day (Ashtami), 9<sup>th</sup> day (Navami) and 14<sup>th</sup> day (Chaturdasi) are the best lunar days for reciting the text. The nine days of Durga puja during Autumnal equinox (Sharad Navaratri) and Spring equinox (Vasanta Navaratri) are very auspicious times of the year. Those who cannot do regular parayana can read the Chandi at least on selected auspicious weekdays, lunar days or the Nine nights.

The traditional way of reciting the Devi Mahatmyam has been given below. Obviously those who are not initiated are not required to follow it. They may just follow the remaining guidelines except for reciting the whole text in Sanskrit. They can just read the translation of the thirteen chapters without the navakshari japa, purvabhaga and utara bhaga. The whole text has to be audibly recited. It should not be silently read. During the time of reading, one should not talk, think, sleep, sneeze, yawn or spit, but read with full concentration on Devi. One should not stop in the middle of a chapter and the book should be placed on a stand, preferably a copper plate. At the beginning and end of each chapter bells are to be rung. Before reciting the text, it is necessary to do the Sankalpa and Sri Devi Puja.

The place where the text is recited becomes flooded with waves of vibration, purifying the whole place, and invoking the presence of the very Devi. Though initially it is unconscious, through regular sadhana a conscious dialogue starts between the Goddess and the devotee. Her Grace protects the devotee and guides him through his own prarabdha, fulfilling the immediate wants in life as and when necessary and eventually the supreme goal of life.

The recitation should be in the following order:

- Kavacham
- Argala Stotra
- Keelakam
- Navakshari japam
- Ratri Suktam
- Devi Mahatmyam
- Navakshari mantra japam
- Devi Suktam
- Rahasya trayam
- Kshama Prarthana

The order of recitation is slightly different in different traditions. Moreover the Devi Suktam and Ratri suktam have alternate tantric/pauranic versions apart from the vedic suktas. Apart

from regular recitation of the text there is another practice of following a fixed number of recitations by a Chandi Homam. Like any other ritual this will require trained priests to conduct it. For instance during the Sata Chandi Yajnam, the first four days are devoted for 100 Chandi Parayana by ten priests as per the following schedule, followed by Chandi Homam on the final day.

<b>Day</b>	<b>Parayana</b>	<b>Navakshari Japa</b>
1	Once	4,000
2	Twice	3,000
3	Thrice	2,000
4	Four times	1,000
5	Chandi Homan	
Total/ Priest	10 times	10,000
Grand Total	100 times	100,000

## **The Glory of the Goddess**

### **First episode (Pradhama Caritra) –**

#### **Chapter 1**

Two unlucky losers meet in a forest. The first is a king by the name of Suratha who protected his people treating them as his own children. He is defeated in a battle by enemies though they were a small force. On his return to his kingdom he is again attacked by powerful enemies. The king now bereft of strength is further robbed of his treasury and army by his own wicked ministers. Deprived of his kingdom, king Suratha rides alone on horseback into a dense forest. There he comes to the hermitage of sage Medhas. Graced by the disciples of the sage the hermitage is inhabited by wild beasts tamed of their ferocity. After spending some time at the hermitage, overcome by a deep attachment to what he considered as his own, the king is worried about his kingdom, his chief elephant, his followers and his treasury.

Overcome with attachment, he thought, “I do not know whether the capital which was well guarded by my ancestors and recently deserted by me is being guarded righteously or not by my servants of evil conduct. I do not know what care my chief elephant, heroic and always elated, and now fallen into the hands of my foes, will get. Those who were my constant followers and received favour, riches and food from me, now certainly render service to other kings. The treasures which I gathered with great difficulty will be squandered by those ceaseless spendthrifts addicted to improper expenditures”.

Near the hermitage of the sage the king saw a merchant, and asked him: “Who are you? What is the reason for your coming here? Wherefore do you appear as if afflicted with grief and

depressed in mind?” Hearing the empathetic enquiry of the king, the merchant bowed respectfully and replied to the king. “I am a merchant named Samadhi, born in a wealthy family. I have been cast out by my unworthy sons and wife, through greed for my wealth. My wife and sons have misappropriated my riches, and made me devoid of wealth. Cast out by my trusted kinsmen, I have come to the forest grief-stricken. Dwelling here, I do not know anything about the welfare of my sons, kinsmen and wife. How are my sons? Are they of good conduct or of evil ways?”

Thereupon the king asked the merchant, “Why is your mind affectionately attached to those covetous folks, your sons, wife and others, who have deprived you of your wealth?” The merchant replied, “This very thought has occurred to me, just as you have uttered it. But what can I do? Unable to detach my mind bears deep affection to those very persons who have driven me out in their greed for wealth, abandoning love for a father and attachment to one's master and kinsmen. Although I know it I do not comprehend how the mind is prone to love even towards worthless kinsmen? On account of them I heave heavy sighs and feel dejected. What can I do since my mind does not become harsh towards those unloving ones?”

Then the merchant Samadhi and the noble king Suratha together approached sage Medhas and after observing the etiquette worthy of him and as was proper, they sat down and conversed with him. The king said: “Sir, I wish to ask you one thing. Pray, reply to it. Not being under the control of my intellect, my mind is afflicted with grief. Though I have lost the kingdom, I have an attachment to all the paraphernalia of my kingdom. Though I know the actuality how is this sense of ‘mine’ afflicting me like an ignorant man, O best of sages? And this merchant has been disowned by his children, wife and servants, and forsaken by his own people; still he is inordinately affectionate towards them. Thus both he and I, drawn by attachment towards objects whose defects we do know, are exceedingly unhappy. How is it that even the knowledgeable are deluded? This delusion besets me as well as him, blinded as we are in our ability to discern.”

*As his name implies (medhas: intelligence or wisdom), sage Medhas is a wise man, the seer who knows. Here knowledge, intelligence and wisdom are not merely intellectual but intuitive and insightful as well. The wise sage does not start advising them directly. Instead he addresses their predicament indirectly as a wise counsellor would in this sort of a situation.*

The sage replied to the king’s query as follows. “Sir, every being has the knowledge of objects perceivable by the senses in various ways. Some beings are blind by day, and others are blind by night; some beings have equal sight both by day and night. Human beings are certainly endowed with knowledge, but they are not the only beings to be so endowed, for cattle, birds, animals and other creatures too cognise. The knowledge that men have, birds and beasts also have; and what they have men also possess; and the rest like eating and sleeping is common to both of them. Look at these birds, though they are themselves afflicted by hunger and are aware of it, because of delusion, they are engaged in feeding grains into the beaks of their young ones. Human beings too are, attached to their children expecting in return. Do you not see this?”

“Even so men are hurled into the whirlpool of attachment, the pit of delusion, through the power of Mahamaya the Great delusion, who makes the continuance of the cycle of worldly existence possible. Marvel not at this. This Mahamaya is the Yoganidra, the Superconscious sleep of Vishnu, the Lord of the world. It is by her the world is deluded. Verily she, the

Bhagavati, the Mahamaya entangles humans into delusion forcibly drawing the minds of even the wise. She creates this entire universe, both moving and unmoving. It is she who, when propitious, grants the best to humans and shows the way for their final liberation. She is the supreme knowledge, the cause of final liberation, and eternal; she is the cause of the bondage of transmigration (samsara) and the sovereign over all lords”.

The king said, “Venerable sir, who is that Devi whom you call Mahamaya? How did she come into being, and what is her sphere of action, O sage? What constitutes her nature? What is her form? Wherefrom did she originate? All that I wish to hear from you, O you supreme among the knowers of Brahman.” The seer replied, “That Goddess is eternal, without beginning. The entire world is her embodiment. By her all this is pervaded. Nevertheless she incarnates in manifold ways; hear it from me. Though she is eternal, she is said to be born in the world, whenever she manifests herself in order to accomplish the purposes of the devas.”

*Thereafter the sage narrates the first myth related to the manifestation of the Devi in her universal form as Maya or YogaMaya. Here the Devi is central to the creation myth. She is the power that induces Lord Vishnu’s deep slumber on the waters of the cosmic ocean prior to the manifestation of the Universe, in its continuous cycles of manifestation and dissolution. Each such cycle of creative manifestation, sustenance and dissolution constitutes a Kalpa.*

At the end of a Kalpa when the universe was one vast stretch of ocean with the waters of the deluge, the adorable Lord Vishnu was in a state of deep mystic sleep (yoganidra), stretched out on Adi Sesha the thousand hooded primal serpent of Time. Two terrible demons Madhu and Kaitabha, sprung into being from the ear wax or waste (mala) of Vishnu's ears, and sought to slay Brahma, the father of beings. Brahma who is sitting in the lotus at Vishnu's navel, then extols the Great Goddess Yoganidra requesting her to withdraw from Vishnu so he may awaken and slay the demons.

*This hymn by Brahma (**Brahma-stuti**), also known as the **Tantrika Ratri Suktam** is the first of the four famous hymns in the Devi Mahatmyam. The Devi is extolled by Brahma as the incomparable Goddess -Vishnu’s Yoganidra, the queen of cosmos, the supporter of the worlds, the cause of the sustenance and dissolution alike.*

There upon, the Devi who herself causes delusion, withdrew herself from every part of Vishnu’s body, and appeared before Brahma, who takes birth from the Unmanifest. Released from the influence of YogaMaya, Lord Vishnu awoke and saw those two evil demons Madhu and Kaitabha, of exceeding power, with eyes red in anger, endeavouring to devour Brahma. Thereupon the all-pervading Lord Vishnu got up and fought with the two demons for five thousand years, using his own arms as weapons. The two demons, frenzied with their exceeding power, and deluded by Goddess Mahamaya, exclaimed to Vishnu, “Ask a boon from us”.

*How intoxicating and blinding can power and strength be!*

Lord Vishnu said “If you are satisfied with me, you must both be slain by me now. What need is there of any other boon here?” The two demons thus bewitched by Mahamaya, gazing at the entire world turned into water, told the lotus eyed Lord Vishnu, “Slay us at the spot where the earth is not flooded with water”. Saying “Be it so”, Lord Vishnu, the great wielder

of conch, discus and mace, took them on His loins and there severed their heads with His discus. Thus Mahamaya herself appeared when praised by Brahma.

*Thus ends the first chapter - "The slaying of Madhu and Kaitabha" - of Devi Mahatmya in Markandeya Purana. The first chapter is the only chapter of the first episode. In this chapter the stage is set for the narration of the glory of the Goddess through another story, that of two losers- namely the king and the merchant. The slaying of Madhu and Kaitabha is also narrated in the same chapter by sage Medhas to the deposed king Suratha and the ruined merchant Samadhi.*

## **Middle episode (Madhyama Caritra) - Chapters 2, 3 and 4**

*The second episode of the glory of the Goddess is constituted by the second, third and fourth chapters- 'The Slaughter of Mahishasura's Armies', 'The Slaying of Mahishasura' and 'The Devi Stuti', respectively. The second episode narrates how the mother Goddess helped the gods by killing Mahishasura who took many different forms, including that of a buffalo.*

### **Chapter 2**

Of yore when Mahishasura was the lord of asuras and Indra the lord of devas, there was a war between the devas and asuras for a full hundred years. In that the army of the gods was vanquished by the mighty demons. After conquering all the devas, Mahishasura became the lord of heaven. Driven away from their homes the vanquished devas headed by Brahma, the father of beings, went to the place where Siva and Vishnu were. The devas then narrated the story of their defeat wrought by Mahishasura in detail. "He (Mahishasura) himself has assumed the jurisdictions of Surya, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Chandra, Yama and Varuna and of other gods too. Thrown out from heaven by that evil-natured Mahisha, the hosts of devas wander on the earth like mortals. All that has been done by the enemy of the devas, has been related to you both, we seek shelter under you both. May both of you be pleased to think out the means of his destruction". Thus spoke the devas.

Vishnu and Siva were greatly angered on hearing the tyranny of Mahishasura. As their faces became fierce with frowns there issued forth a great light from the face of Vishnu who was full of intense anger, and from that of Brahma and Siva too. A very great light sprang forth from the bodies of Indra and other devas as well. All this light united together. The devas saw there a concentration of light like a mountain blazing excessively, pervading all the quarters with its flames. Then that unique light, produced from the bodies of all the devas, pervading the three worlds with its lustre, combined into one and became a female form; the manifestation of the lights of other devas too combined into the auspicious being of the Goddess. Then looking at her, who had come into being from the assembled lights of all the devas, the immortals who were oppressed by Mahishasura experienced great joy.

Drawing forth a trident from his own trident Shiva presented it to her; Vishnu brought forth a discus out of his own discus and gave it to her. Varuna gave her a conch, Agni a spear; and Maruta gave a bow as well as two quivers full of arrows. Indra, lord of devas, bringing forth a thunderbolt out of his own thunderbolt and a bell from that of his elephant Airavata, gave them to her. Yama gave a staff from his own staff of death and Varuna, the lord of waters, gave her a noose. Brahma, the lord of beings, gave a string of beads and a water-pot. Surya placed his own rays on all the pores of her skin, while Kala gave her a sword and a spotless

shield. The milky ocean gave her the best ornaments and garments, Vishwakarma gave her a brilliant axe, various missiles and an unbreakable armour. The ocean gave her unfading lotus garlands to wear and a very beautiful lotus to be held in her hand. Himavan gave her various gems and the lion as her vehicle. Kubera the lord of wealth gave her a drinking cup always full of celestial wine.

Honoured with ornaments and weapons by the remaining gods too, the Goddess roared with loud laughter again and again. The entire sky was filled with her immeasurable stupendous roar and great was the echo that reverberated. All the worlds were frenzied and the oceans raged. The earth quaked and the mountains rocked in the wake of the Warrior Goddess, the great unity of the innate powers (saktis) of all the gods. "Victory to you," exclaimed the gods in joy to her, the lion-rider. The sages extolled her bowing their bodies in salutation. Seeing the three worlds agitated the foes of the gods, marshalled all their armies and rose up together with uplifted weapons. Exclaiming in wrath, Mahishasura rushed towards that sound, accompanied by innumerable asuras. Then he saw the Goddess pervading the three worlds with her effulgence. Making the earth bend with her footstep, scraping the sky with her diadem, shaking the nether worlds with the twang of the bow-string, she stood there covering all the quarters with her thousand arms.

Then began the battle between that Devi and the enemies of the devas, in which the quarters of the sky were illumined by various arrows and missiles hurled at each other. She, the Goddess Durga, the embodiment of the lethal energy of divine anger turned against evil, set herself to destroy the armies of Mahishasura. Mahishasura's general, a great asura named Chiksura and Chamara fought, equipped with the fourfold complement of armies of asuras. A great asura named Udagra with sixty thousand chariots, and Mahahanu with ten million chariots waged the battle. Asiloman, another great asura, with fifteen million chariots and Baskala with six millions fought in that battle. Privarita with many thousands of elephants and horses, and encircled by ten million chariots, fought in that battle. An asura named Bidala fought in that battle surrounded by five billion chariots. And other great asuras, thousands in number, surrounded with chariots, elephants and horses fought with the Devi in that battle.

Mahishasura was encircled by many billions chariots, horses and elephants in that battle. Other asuras too fought in the battle against the Devi with iron maces and javelins, with spears and clubs, with swords, battle-axes and halberds. Some hurled spears and others nooses. They began to strike her with swords in order to kill her. Showering her own weapons and arms, Goddess Chandika too, quite playfully, cut into pieces all those weapons and arms. With gods and sages extolling her, showing no signs of fatigue on her face, the Goddess Isvari hurled her weapons and arms at the bodies of the asuras. The mount of the Goddess, the lion, shaking its mane in rage, stalked amidst the armies of the asuras like a blazing forest fire. The sighs which the Goddess Ambika, fighting in the battle, heaved became at once her battalions by hundreds and thousands.

Energized by the power of the Devi, these battalions fought with battle-axes, javelins, swords and halberds, destroying the asuras. Of these battalions, some beat drums, some blew conches and others played on tabors in that great martial festival. The Goddess killed hundreds of asuras with her trident, mace, showers of spears, swords and the like, and threw down others who were stupefied by the noise of her bell. Binding others with her noose, she dragged them on the ground. Some were split into two by the sharp fall of her sword, and others, smashed

by the blows of her mace, lay down on the ground while some who were severely hammered by the pestle vomited blood. Pierced in the breast by her trident, some fell on the ground.

In the battlefield, the asuras who afflicted the gods were caught in a flood of arrows and were pierced all over by arrows. Resembling porcupines, they breathed their last. Some had their arms cut off, some others their necks. Heads of others rolled down while some others were torn asunder in the middle of their trunks. Some great asuras fell on the ground with their legs severed. Some rendered one-armed, one-eyed, and one-legged were again rent into two by the Goddess. And others, though rendered headless, fell and rose again. Some of these headless trunks danced there in the battlefield to the rhythm of the battle drums. The trunks of some other great asuras whose heads had been severed just then, shouted at the Devi “Stop, stop”, with their swords, spears and lances still in their hands.

That part of the earth where the battle was fought became impassable with the asuras, elephants and horses and chariots that had been felled. Streams of blood from the asuras, elephants and horses flowed immediately like large rivers amidst that army of the asuras. As fire consumes a huge heap of straw and wood, so did Ambika destroy that vast army of asuras in no time. And her carrier-lion, thundering aloud with quivering mane, prowled about in the battlefield, appearing to search out the vital breaths from the bodies of the enemies of the gods. In that battlefield the battalions of the Goddess fought in such a manner with the asuras that the gods were pleased and showered flowers from heaven.

*Thus ends the second chapter – ‘Slaughter of the armies of Mahisasura’- of Devi-Mahatmya in Markandeya Purana.*

### **Chapter 3**

Seeing that army being slain, Ciksura, the great asura general, proceeded in anger to fight with Ambika. The asura rained showers of arrows on the Goddess in battle just as a cloud showers rain on the peak of Mount Meru. Then the Goddess playfully cutting asunder the volley of arrows, killed his horses and their driver with her arrows. Forthwith she broke his bow and banner flying aloft, and with swift arrows she pierced the body of that asura whose bow had been broken. His bow shattered, his chariot smashed, his horses killed and his charioteer slain, the asura armed with sword and shield jumped at the Goddess. Swiftly he struck the lion on the head with his sharp-edged sword and hit the Devi also on her left arm. His sword broke into pieces as soon as it touched her arm. Eyes reddened with anger he took the spear and hurled the resplendent weapon at Bhandrakali, as though he was hurling the very orb of sun from the skies. Seeing the spear coming upon her, the Devi hurled her spear. It shattered his spear into a hundred pieces, as it did likewise with the great asura.

When the very valiant general of Mahisha, was slain, Camara, the afflictor of the gods came forward mounted on an elephant. He too hurled his lance at the Devi. Ambika quickly assailed it with a grunt, made it lustreless and fall to the ground. Seeing his lance broken and fallen, Camara, full of rage, hurled a spear, and she broke that also with her arrows. Then the lion, leaping up and seating itself at the centre of the elephant’s forehead, engaged itself in a hand to hand fight with that enemy of the gods. Fighting, the two then came down to the earth from the back of the elephant, and fought very animatedly dealing each other terrible blows. Then the lion, springing up quickly to the sky, and descending, severed Camara's head with a blow of its paw.

Udagra was killed in the battle by the Devi with rocks, trees and the like. Karala was brought down by her teeth, fists and slaps. Enraged, the Devi pulverised Uddhata with the blows of her mace. She killed Baskala with a javelin and destroyed Tamra and Andhaka with arrows. The three-eyed Supreme Isvari killed Ugrasya, Ugravirya and Mahahanu too with her trident. With her sword she struck down Bidala's head from his body, and dispatched both Durdhara and Durmudha to the abode of Death with her arrows.

Seeing his army being destroyed thus, Mahisasura terrified the troops of the Devi with his buffalo form, hitting some by muzzle, trampling some by the hooves, lashing at some with his tail, and tearing others with his horns. Some he laid low on the face of the earth by sheer speed, some by his bellowing and wheeling movement, and others by the blast of his breath. Having laid low her army, Mahisasura rushed to slay the lion of the great goddess. This enraged Ambika. He too, of great valour, pounded the terrain with his hooves in rage, tossed about the mountains with his horns, and bellowed terribly. Crushed by his whirling speed, the earth crumbled to pieces. Lashed by his tail, the ocean flooded everywhere. Pierced by his swaying horns, the clouds went into pieces. His heaving breath lifted the mountains up in the sky in hundreds and brought them down.

Seeing the great asura bloated with rage advancing towards her, Chandika assumed an angry mood in order to slay him. She flung her noose over the great asura and bound him. Thus bound in the great battle, he relinquished his buffalo form. Then suddenly he became a lion. As soon as Ambika cut the head off, he took the appearance of a man with sword in hand. Immediately the Goddess cut asunder the man along with his sword and shield. Then he became a huge elephant and pulled her lion with his trunk roaring loudly. As he was dragging, the Devi cut off his trunk with her sword. The great asura then resumed his buffalo form and shook the three worlds with their movable and immovable objects.

An enraged Chandika, the Mother of the worlds, quaffed again and again a superb drink, her eyes becoming red. The asura too intoxicated with his strength and valour roared and threw mountains at Chandika with his horns. She reduced those mountains to powder with a volley of arrows. She spoke to him, her words faltering and the colour of her face rising due to the intoxication of the drink. The Goddess said, "Roar, roar, O fool, for a moment till I drink this wine. Soon the gods are going to roar in this very place, when you get slain by me". Exclaiming thus, she jumped and landed herself on that great asura, crushing his neck under her foot and struck him with her spear. Thereupon, caught under her foot, Mahishasura managed to emerge partly from his own buffalo mouth. Being completely overcome by the valour of the Goddess only half of his self could emerge. Fighting thus with his half-revealed form, the great asura was beheaded and slain by the Goddess with the sword. Then, crying in consternation, the entire army of asuras perished. The entire hosts of gods exulted at this. The gods along with the divine seers lauded the Goddess, the gandharva chiefs sang and the beavies of apsaras danced in celebration of Mahishasura's end.

*Thus ends the third chapter -'The Slaying of Mahishasura'- of Devi-Mahatmya in Markandeya Purana.*

## Chapter 4

When the most valiant and wicked Asura and his armies were slain by the Goddess, the hosts of gods headed by Indra lauded her, their necks and shoulders reverently bent, and bodies rendered beautiful with horripilation and exultation.

*This is the longest and most eloquent of the Devi Mahatmyam's four hymns. Known as the Shakra-distuti (praise by Indra and the host of gods), it illumines the themes of good and evil, fate and free will, karma and divine grace. This hymn constitutes the fourth chapter of the Devi Mahatmyam. The hymn praises Durga as "good fortune in the dwellings of the virtuous and misfortune in the abodes of the wicked." While this verse explicitly entails reward and punishment by a personal deity, implicitly it points to an impersonal balancing principle at work in the universe- the law of karma. Either ways the message is the same: our deeds have consequences. The hymn further proclaims that the Mother's intentions are most gracious even toward evildoers. Her nature is to subdue the misconduct of the wicked. Through her inconceivable grace, even wrongdoers who have committed great evils that may well ensure them of long torments for their evil deeds are purified in battle by the touch of her weapons and are brought to beatitude. In destroying the demons the Goddess destroys the evil samskaras within us.*

Thus the supporter of the worlds was praised and worshipped with celestial flowers, perfumes, unguents and heavenly incense by the devas. Benignly serene in countenance she spoke to the obeisant gods. The Devi said, "O devas, choose whatever you desire of me". The gods responded, "Since our enemy, this Mahishasura, has been slain by you, O Bhagavati everything has been accomplished, and nothing remains to be done. And if a boon is to be granted to us by you, O Maheshvari, whenever we think of you again, please destroy our direct calamities. And, O Mother of spotless countenance, whatever mortal shall praise you with these hymns, may you, who have become gracious towards us, also be gracious to him and bless him to be fortunate, O Ambika!" Goddess Bhadrakali who was thus propitiated by the gods for their own sake and that of the world, said "Be it so" and vanished from their sight.

*Thus ends the fourth chapter - 'The Devi Stuti'- of the Devi-Mahatmya in Markandeya-Purana.*

## Final episode (Uttama Caritra) - Chapters 5 to 13

*In the final episode referred to as the uttama caritra, sage Medhas narrates the story of the demons Shumbha and Nishumbha. This time the cast of characters is much larger and the metaphorical significance is subtle but not difficult to comprehend. This story too has a familiar beginning.*

## Chapter 5

Two demons, named Shumbha and Nishumbha, have dispossessed the gods, stripped them of their powers and appropriated their wealth and privilege. Indra's sovereignty over the three worlds and his portions of the sacrifices are taken away by the Shumbha and Nishumbha, by force of their pride and strength. The two powerful demons take over likewise, the offices of the Surya, Chandra, Kubera, Yama, and Varuna. The same happens to Vayu's and Agni's portfolios as well.

Deprived of their lordships and sovereignties, expelled by the two mighty asuras, the gods thought of the invincible Devi. "She had granted us the boon: 'Whenever in calamities you think of me, that very moment I will put an end to all your worst calamities'". Resolving thus, the devas went to Himavat, lord of the mountains, and there extolled the Devi, who is the illusive power of Vishnu.

*This is the third hymn in the text. Also known as **Aparajita-stuti** or **Tantrika Devi Suktam**, in this hymn there are more than twenty slokas beginning with 'ya devi sarva bhuteshu', indicating that the devi is present in all creatures as consciousness, as power, as intellect, as memory, as sleep, as delusion, as desire, as activity, as prosperity, as forgiveness, as faith, as loveliness, and so on, reminding us of the Vibhuti Yoga of Gita. This beautiful hymn is a powerful meditation by itself, a combination of meditation, affirmation and mantra.*

The devas said: 'Salutations to the Devi, to the Mahadevi. Salutations always to her who is ever auspicious. Salutation to her who is the Primordial Prakrti and the ever Benign. To Thee we offer our humble obeisance...'

While the gods were thus engaged in extolling the Unvanquished (Aparajita) Goddess, Parvati came there to bathe in the waters of the Ganga. She, the lovely-browed, enquired of the gods, "Who is she that is being extolled here?" An auspicious goddess, sprung forth from her body sheath (kosha) and spoke, "This hymn is addressed to me by the assembled devas routed in battle and set at naught by the asuras Shumbha and Nishumbha." Because that Goddess emerged from Parvati's body sheath (kosa:sheath), she is glorified as Kaushiki in all the worlds. After she had issued forth, Parvati became dark and was called Kalika (dark) and took her abode on mount Himalaya.

Then, Chanda, and Munda, the servants of Shumbha and Nishumbha, saw Ambika (Kausiki) who had assumed a surpassingly charming form. They both told Shumbha: 'O great king, a certain woman, most surpassingly beautiful, resides there shedding lustre on mount Himalaya. Nobody has ever seen such supreme beauty anywhere. Ascertain who that Goddess is and take possession of her, O Lord of the asuras! A gem among women, of exceedingly lovely limbs, stands, making the quarters luminous by her lustre. You ought to see her. O Lord, whatever things are there in the three worlds, all of them, gems, jewels, elephants, horses etc., are now in your mansion. You have seized every precious possession from the likes of Indra, Brahma, Kubera, Varuna, and Yama. Nishumbha has all kinds of gems born in the ocean. Agni too given you a pair of garments purified by fire. Thus, O Lord of asuras, all gems have been seized by you. Why this auspicious lady, a jewel among women has not been taken by you?'

On hearing these words of Chanda and Munda, Shumbha sent the great asura Sugriva as messenger to the Goddess. He said, “Go and tell her thus in my words and do the thing in such a manner that she may quickly come to me in love”.

Sugriva went to the very beautiful spot on the mountain where the Devi was and spoke to her in fine and sweet words. The messenger said, “O Devi, Shumbha, lord of asuras, is the supreme sovereign of the three worlds. Sent by him as messenger, I have come here to your presence. Harken to what has been said by him, who has vanquished all the foes of the asuras and whose command has never been transgressed even by the devas. He says ‘All the three worlds are mine and the devas are obedient to me. We look upon you, O Devi, as the jewel of womankind in the world. You who are such, come to me, since we are the enjoyers of the best objects. Take to me or to my younger brother Nishumbha of great prowess, O lady of wavering glance, for you are in truth a jewel. Wealth, great and beyond compare, you will get by accepting me. Think over this in your mind, and become my wife’.”

Durga the adorable and auspicious, by whom this universe is supported, said serenely, “You have spoken truth; nothing false has been uttered by you in this matter. Shumbha is indeed the sovereign of the three worlds and likewise is also Nishumbha. But how can that which has been promised go false? Hear what promise I had made already in my immaturity. ‘He who conquers me in battle, vanquishes my pride and is my match in strength in the world shall be my husband’. So let Shumbha come here or Nishumbha of great strength. Vanquishing me here let him easily win my hand in marriage. Why delay?”

The messenger said, “O Devi, you are haughty. Talk not so before me. Which man in the three worlds dare stand before Shumbha and Nishumbha? All the devas verily cannot stand face to face with even the other asuras in battle. Why mention you, O Devi, a single woman? When the gods headed by Indra could not stand in battle against Shumbha and other demons, how will you, a woman, face them? On my word alone, you go to Shumbha and Nishumbha. Let it not be that you go to them with your dignity lost by being dragged by your hair”.

The Goddess said, “It is true. Shumbha is strong and so is Nishumbha . What can I do since there stands my ill-considered vow taken long ago? Go back, and tell the lord of asuras carefully all that I have said. Let him then do whatever he considers proper”.

*Thus ends the fifth chapter – ‘Devi's conversation with the messenger’- of the Devi-Mahatmya in Markandeya-Purana.*

## **Chapter 6**

Hearing the words of the Devi, the indignant messenger hastened back and related them in detail to the king of the daityas. Hearing the report from his messenger, the enraged asura monarch told Dhumralochana, a chieftain of the daityas, “O Dhumralochana, hasten together with your army and fetch that shrew here by force, unnerving her by dragging her by her hair. If anyone else stands up as her saviour, let him be slain, be he a god, a yaksa or a gandharva.”

As commanded by Shumbha, the asura Dhumralochana, marched past quickly, accompanied by sixty thousand asuras. On seeing the Goddess stationed on the snowy mountain, he

shouted, "Set out to the presence of Shumbha and Nishumbha. If you do not go to my master now with love, I shall take you by force, unnerving you by dragging you by the hair." The Goddess replied, "You have been sent by the lord of the daityas. You are strong and backed by an army. If you take me by force what can I do?"

On hearing her words, Dhumralochana rushed towards her. The Goddess reduced the demon to ashes by a mere heave of her breath (humkara). Seeing Dhumralochana turned to ashes, the enraged army of demons showered on Ambika sharp arrows, lances and battle-axes. Then the lion, the mount of the Goddess, shook its mane in anger and roaring most terrifyingly, pounced on the army of asuras. It slaughtered some demons striking with its paw, tearing out the bellies of some with its claws, others with its mouth, and some by a stampede with its hind legs. In a moment, the entire army was destroyed by the enraged and noble lion that bore the Goddess as her vehicle.

Hearing that the demon Dhumralochana was slain by the Goddess and that the entire army was destroyed by the lion of the Goddess, Shumbha, the lord of the asuras became furious. His lips quivering, he commanded the two mighty asuras Chanda and Munda, "O Chanda, O Munda, go there with large forces, and quickly bring her here, dragging her by her hair or binding her. If you are unsure of that, then let the asuras strike her in battle with all the weapons. When that shrew is wounded and her lion stricken down, seize that Ambika, bind her and bring her quickly".

*Thus ends the sixth chapter – 'The Slaying of Dhumralochana' - of Devi-Mahatmya in Markandeya Purana.*

## **Chapter 7**

Then at his command the asuras headed by Chanda and Munda, marched in fourfold array, fully armed. They saw the Devi, smiling gently, seated upon the lion on a lofty golden peak of the great mountain. On seeing her, some of them got excited and made an effort to capture her, and others approached her, with their swords drawn and bows bent. Thereupon Ambika became terribly angry with those foes, and in her anger her countenance then became dark as ink. Suddenly, Kali of the terrible countenance, armed with a sword and noose, emerged forth from the surface of Ambika's forehead that was fierce with a frown. Holding a strange skull-topped staff, decorated with a garland of skulls, clad in a tiger's skin, very appalling due to her emaciated body, with a gaping mouth and tongue lolling out fearfully, with deep-sunk reddish eyes, she filled the quarters with her roars.

Kali devoured the army of the foes of the gods, falling upon them impetuously and slaughtering the great asuras in that army. Devouring some, crushing others, chewing most frightfully with her teeth, she pounded the entire army of the mighty wicked asuras. Seeing the entire army of asuras laid to the ground in a moment, Canda ran towards the terrible Kali. While Canda showered arrows at her, Munda hurled discuses in thousands at her eyes. The numerous discuses entering her mouth shone like so many orbs of the Sun as Kali just swallowed them. Laughing fiercely, Kali of the terrible countenance mounted the great lion and rushed at Chanda. Seizing him by his hair, she severed his head with her sword. Seeing

Chanda being slain, Munda also rushed at her. Striking him furiously with her sword, she felled him too to the ground.

Seeing the most valiant Chanda and Munda vanquished, the remaining army became panicky and fled in all directions. And Kali, holding the heads of Chanda and Munda in her hands, approached Chandika and said, "In this sacrifice of battle, here have I brought you the heads of Chanda and Munda the great beasts. Shumbha and Nishumbha, you shall yourself slay." Thereupon, seeing the two great asuras Chanda and Munda brought to her, the auspicious Chandika, said to Kali these playful words, "As you have brought me both Chanda and Munda, you O Devi, shall be famed in the world by the name Chamunda.

*Thus ends the seventh chapter – 'The slaying of Chanda and Munda' - of Devi-Mahatmya in Markandeya Purana.*

## **Chapter 8**

When Chanda and Munda were laid low and many of the battalions of the asuras destroyed, the lord of the asuras, the mighty Sumbha, with intellect clouded by rage, commanded the marshalling of all the asura armies. "Now, let the eighty-six Udayudhas with all their forces and uplifted weapons, and the eighty-four Kambus, along with their own forces, set out for battle. Let the fifty asura families of Kotiviryas and the hundred families of Dhaumras go forth at my command. Likewise let the asura clans, Kalakas, Daurhrdas, the Mauryas and the Kalakeyas hasten at my command and march forth ready for battle". Issuing these orders, Sumbha, the lord of the asuras, the cruel despot, set out surrounded thousands of huge forces.

Seeing that most terrible army advancing, Chandika filled the space between the earth and the sky with twangs of her bow-string. Thereon her lion roared very loudly. Ambika amplified those sounds with the clanging of the bell. Filling the quarters with roars from her gaping mouth, Kali suffused the sounds of the bow-string, lion and bell by her terrific roars. On hearing that roar the infuriated armies of the asuras surrounded the lion, the Goddess (Chandika) and Kali on all the four sides. Meanwhile, in order to ensure the annihilation of the enemies of the gods and also for the well-being of the great gods, there issued forth, endowed with exceeding valour and strength, Shaktis from the bodies of Brahma, Shiva, Guha, Vishnu and Indra, Whatever was the form of the Godhead, whatever his ornaments and vehicle, in that very form his Shakti advanced to fight the asuras.

In a heavenly chariot yoked by swans came Brahma's Shakti carrying a rosary and water-pot (kamandalu). She is called Brahmani. Maheshvari arrived, mounted on a bull, holding the great trident, with huge serpents for bangles, with the digit of the moon as an ornament. The mother Kaumari came in the form of Guha, riding on a fine peacock wielding the spear in her hand, to attack the asuras. Likewise seated upon Garuda, holding conch, club, bow and sword in hand, came Vaishnavi, the Shakti of Vishnu. Varahi, who assumed the incomparable form of Hari as the sacrificial boar, also came. Narasmih too arrived, assuming a form like that of Narasmih, half-woman and half-lioness, bringing down the constellations by the toss of her mane. Likewise the thousand-eyed Aindri, holding a thunderbolt in hand and riding on the lord of elephants arrived just like Indra.

Thereupon Shiva, surrounded by those shaktis of the devas, said to Chandika, “Let the asuras be killed forthwith by you for my gratification”. Then, from the body of the Goddess issued forth the most terrific Shakti of Chandika, exceedingly fierce and yelling like a hundred jackals together. She, the invincible, told Shiva, of smoke-hued matted locks, “Go, O lord, as an ambassador to the presence of Sumbha and Nisumbha. Tell the two arrogant asuras and the other asuras assembled there for battle- ‘Let Indra obtain the sovereignty of the three worlds and let the gods partake the oblations. You go to the nether world, if you wish to live. But if through pride of strength you are anxious for battle, then come by all means. Let my jackals be satisfied with your flesh’.” Since that Devi appointed Shiva himself as her ambassador, thenceforth she became renowned in this world as ‘Shiva-duti’.

Hearing the words of the Devi communicated by Shiva, those great asuras, on their part, were filled with indignation and repaired to the place where Katyayani stood. Then in the very beginning, the enraged foes of the gods showered arrows, lances and double-edged swords on the Goddess.

The Goddess cut asunder playfully those arrows, spears, lances and battle-axes hurled by them, with powerful arrows shot from her full-drawn bow. Then, Kali stalked about, in front of Sumbha, tearing the foes to pieces with her spear and mashing them with her skull-topped staff. Whomsoever Brahmani attacked, she made those enemies bereft of valour and prowess by sprinkling on them the water from her water-pot. Maheshvari slew the daityas with her trident, Vaisnavi, with her discus and Kaumari, with her lance. Torn to pieces by Aindr’s thunderbolt which come down upon them, the demons the offspring of diti and danu, fell on the earth in hundreds, streams of blood flowing. Pounded by blows from the snout of the boar-formed goddess Varahi, wounded in their chests by the point of her tusk and rent by her discus, the asuras fell down. Filling the sky and the quarters with her roars, Narasmihi, roamed about in the battle, devouring other great asuras torn by her claws. Dispirited by the violent laughter of Shivaduti, the asuras fell on the earth as she promptly devoured those who had fallen down.

Seeing the enraged band of Mothers (Matru ganas) crushing the great asuras by various means, the troops of the enemies of gods took to their heels. Noticing the fleeing demons assailed by the Matru ganas, the great asura Raktabija strode forward to fight in wrath. No sooner a drop of blood from Raktabija’s body fell on the ground than a great asura of his very stature would spring forth on the earth. With mace in hand the great asura fought with Indra's shakti . Then Aindri struck Ranktabija with her thunderbolt. As blood flowed profusely from Raktabija, who was wounded by the thunderbolt, there arose from his blood, combatants of his stature and might.

As many drops of blood fell from his body, so many persons with his valour, strength and prowess came into being. And they who took birth from his blood, too fought with the Mother-goddesses more terribly, hurling formidable weapons. Again when Raktabija’s head was wounded by the thunderbolt, his blood flowed, and from that blood were born thousands more. In the battle Vaisnavi struck him with her discus. Aindri hit the great asura with her mace. The world was pervaded by thousands of great asuras of his stature, born from the blood that flowed out of the cut inflicted by Vaisnavi’s discus. Kaumari struck him with her spear and Varahi with her sword. Maheshvari assaulted him with her trident. And the enraged Raktabija struck the Mother-goddesses individually as well as severally with his club.

Hundreds of asuras came into being from the stream of blood that fell on the ground as he received multiple wounds by the lances, spears and other weapons. The entire world was pervaded by the asuras who took birth from the blood of Raktabija. The gods were intensely alarmed at this. Seeing the devas dejected, Chandika laughed and said to Kali, "O Chamunda, keep your mouth wide open. And with this mouth quickly take in the drops of blood generated by the blow of my weapon and also the great asuras born of the drops of blood of Raktabija. Roam about in the battlefield, devouring the great asuras born from his blood. Thus this demon shall perish, losing all his blood. As you go on devouring them, other fierce asuras will not be born".

Having enjoined her thus, the Goddess then struck Raktabija with her spear. Thereupon Kali drank Raktabija's blood with her mouth. Rightaway Raktabija struck Chandika with his mace. The the blow did not cause her even the slightest pain. On the other hand, blood flowed profusely from the stricken parts of his body and from wherever it flowed Chamunda (Kali) swallowed it with her mouth. And Chamunda devoured the asuras born from the blood in her mouth, as she carried on with drinking his blood. The Goddess smote Raktabija with her spear, thunderbolt, arrows, swords, and double-edged swords, while Kali went on drinking his blood. Hit by a multitude of weapons that made him lose all his blood, the great asura Raktabija eventually fell on the ground. Thereupon the gods attained great joy. The Mother-goddesses who emerged from them danced drunk with the asura's blood.

## **Chapter 9**

After Raktabija was slain and other asuras were killed in the fight, the asura Shumbha and Nishumbha gave way to unbounded wrath. Enraged on seeing his great army slaughtered, Nishumbha rushed forth with the chief forces of the asuras. In front of him, at his back and on his sides great asuras, biting their lips in ire advanced to slay the Goddess. Having fought with the Mother-goddesses, the great warrior Shumbha too arrived in fury, accompanied by his forces, to slay Chandika.

Then commenced a severe combat between the Devi on one side and, Shumbha and Nishumbha on the other, from whom rained a most tempestuous shower of arrows on her like showers from two clouds. With a shower of arrows Chandika quickly split the arrows shot by the two asuras and hit the two lords of asuras on their limbs with a multitude of weapons. In the ensuing combat Nishumbha hit the lion of the Goddess on the head, upon which the Goddess destroyed his weapons one after another. Then the asura Nishumbha, bloated with anger, seized the spear and that also, as it came, the Goddess powdered with a blow of her fist. Then Goddess laid the advancing Nishumbha to the ground, striking him with a torrent of arrows.

When the mighty Nishumbha was thus laid flat on the ground the exceedingly angry Shumbha set out to slay Ambika. Standing in his chariot and pervading the entire sky with his long and incomparable eight arms holding excellent weapons, he shone. Seeing him advancing, the Goddess blew her conch, and made an extremely unbearable twang of her bow-string. She filled all the quarters with the sound of her bell that rang the death-knell to the splendour of the entire armies of asuras. Then the lion filled the heaven, the earth and the ten quarters of the sky with loud roars, which made the elephants abandon their violent rut.

Thereupon, Kali leapt up striking the sky and the earth with both her hands. All the previous sounds were drowned in that sound. Sivaduti burst into a thunderous and ominous laughter, terrifying the asuras and Shumbha flew into an utmost rage. No sooner had the Mother said “Stand fast, O evil-natured one”, the gods stationed in the sky cheered, “Victory to thee”.

The spear, flaming most terribly and shining like a mass of fire, hurled by the advancing Shumbha, as it was coming along, was put out by a great firebrand from the Goddess. The interspace between the three worlds was pervaded by Shumbha's war cry, but the dreadful thunder-clap of the Goddess smothered that too. In hundreds and thousands the Goddess and Shumbha split the arrows shot by each other. Then the enraged Chandika struck him with a spear. Wounded therewith, Shumbha fainted and fell to the ground. Then regaining consciousness, Nisumbha seized his bow and struck with arrows the Goddess, Kali and the lion.

Putting forth ten thousand arms, the lord of the asuras covered Chandika with ten thousand discuses. Then the Goddess Durga, the destroyer of difficulties and afflictions, became angry and cut asunder those discuses and arrows with her own arrows. Thereupon Nisumbha, accompanied by the army of asuras, swiftly seizing his mace, rushed forward to kill Chandika. As he was rushing at her, Chandika broke his mace to pieces with her sharp-edged sword. Then he seized the spear and rushed forth. Quickly Chandika pierced him in the heart with a swiftly hurled spear. From Nishumbha's heart that was pierced issued forth another person of great strength and valour, exclaiming “Stop”. As he emerged the Goddess severed his head with her sword, laughing loudly. Thereupon he fell to the ground. The lion then devoured those asuras whose necks he had crushed with his fierce teeth, while Kali and Sivaduti devoured others. The Mother-goddesses Kaumari, Brahmani, Maheshwari, Varahi, Vaishnavi and Aindri, put to naught many asuras, as Kali, Sivaduti and the lion devoured others, while some asuras fled from the battle.

## **Chapter 10**

Seeing his brother Nishumbha, who was dear to him as his life, slain and his army being slaughtered, Shumbha spoke in fury, “O Durga, wicked and possessed by pride in your strength, do not be conceited. You fight dependant on the strength of others and yet think highly of yourself”. The Goddess said, “In this universe, I alone exist. Who else is there besides me? Look, O wicked one, these manifestations of mine merge into my own self!” Then all those goddesses headed by Brahmani merged in the body of the Goddess. Then Mother Ambika alone remained there. The Goddess said “The many manifestations, which I manifested here by my own power, have been withdrawn by me, and now I stand alone. Be steadfast in combat”.

Then began a dreadful battle between them both, the Devi and Shumbha, while all the devas and asuras looked on. With showers of arrows, with sharp weapons and frightful missiles, both engaged again in a combat that frightened all the worlds. The asura king broke the hundreds of divine missiles that the Goddess launched, with neutralising weapons. The great Goddess too playfully destroyed all the celestial missiles shot by him. In the fierce combat that ensued, the Goddess destroyed Shumbha's weapons one by one, then his horses, chariot, bow and mace, fighting gallantly. In spite of the last of his weapons being destroyed by the Goddess, the distinguished asura leaped at her swiftly, bringing his fist down on her heart.

Then the Goddess hit him on the chest. Wounded by the blow of her palm, the king of asuras fell on the ground. Rising up again without delay, the king of asuras, leapt up towards the sky, seizing the Goddess. There too Chandika fought with him without any support. Then much to the wonder of the siddhas and the sages Shumbha and Chandika fought as never before, wrestling with each other in the sky.

After wrestling with him for a while, the Mother Goddess Ambika lifted him up, whirled him around and flung him down to the earth. Thus thrown to the ground, the wicked asura rose swiftly on reaching the ground, and rushed forward raising his fist, intending to kill Chandika. Seeing the lord of all the asura-folks approaching, the Goddess chucked him down to the earth piercing him on the chest with a spear. Pierced by the pointed spear of the Goddess, he fell lifeless on the ground, shaking the entire earth with its oceans, islands and mountains.

When that wicked one was slain, everything became clear and propitious, the universe regained its original state of perfect peace, and the sky became clear. Flaming portent-clouds that were in evidence earlier, vanished and the rivers kept within their courses after Shumbha's collapse. As he had been slain, the minds of all the hosts of gods were filled with joy and the celestial musicians (gandharvas) sang sweetly. Others played their musical instruments and the bevy of celestial nymphs (apsaras) danced. Likewise the winds blew favourably and the sun became resplendent.

## **Chapter 11**

When the great lord of asuras was slain there by the Goddess, Indra and other gods headed by Agni, lauded Goddess Katyayani, illuminating the quarters with their moon-like faces, cheerfully as their wishes had been fulfilled.

The Goddess said "O host of gods, I shall grant a boon. Choose whatever boon you desire in your mind. I shall grant it for the welfare of the world".

The gods said "O Sovereign of all, in this very manner, you should accomplish the destruction of our foes and also the pacification of all the afflictions of three worlds".

The Devi said "In the time of Vaivasvata Manu, when the twenty-eighth yuga has arrived two other great asuras, Sumbha and Nisumbha will be born. Then born from the womb of Yasoda, in the home of cowherd Nanda, taking abode in the Vindhya mountains, I shall destroy them both. Again, I shall incarnate on earth in a very terrible form and shall slay the descendants of asura Vipracitti. When I devour those fierce asuras, the descendants of Vipracitti, my teeth shall become red like the flower of pomegranate. Therefore, when lauding me, the gods and the mortals shall always speak of me as Raktadantika, the red-toothed.

And again when there is no water for a period of hundred years on account of failure of rains, propitiated by the sages, I will be self-manifest on the drought-ridden earth, but not womb-

begotten. Then I shall behold the sages with a hundred eyes and so mankind will glorify me as the 'hundred-eyed'. O gods, then till the rains set in, I shall maintain the whole world with life -sustaining vegetables born out of my own body. I shall then be famed on the earth as Sakambhari. At that very period I shall slay the great asura named Durgama. Thereby I shall have the celebrated name of Durgadevi.

Again, assuming a terrible form on the mountain Himalaya, I shall destroy the demons for the protection of the sages. Then all the sages, shall praise me with their bodies bent in reverence. Then I shall have the celebrated name of Bhimadevi. When the asura named Aruna works great havoc in the three worlds, I shall take the form of a cluster of innumerable bees and shall slay the great asura for the good of the world. Then people shall laud me everywhere as Bhramari. Thus whenever trouble arises due to the advent of the danavas, I shall incarnate for the for the accomplishment of the destruction of the foes”.

## Chapter 12

The Devi said, “With a concentrated mind, whoever shall pray to me constantly with these hymns, I shall without doubt put an end to all his troubles. Whoever extols my deeds relating to the destruction of Madhu and Kaitabha, the killing of Mahishasura and likewise the slaughter of Shumbha and Nishumbha, whoever listens devotedly with a focused mind, to my glories sung in this Mahatmyam, on the eighth, the fourteenth and on the ninth days of the fortnight, to them nothing bad shall happen, nor calamities that arise from wrong doings nor poverty nor separation from beloved ones. Neither fear from enemies, robbers, kings, nor from weapons, fire and floods. Hence this, my Mahatmyam, must be chanted by those of concentrated minds and listened to constantly with devotion, for it is the supreme way to well-being”.

“This Mahatmyam will quell all sufferings due to epidemics, as also the three types of calamities<sup>1</sup>. I will never forsake and the place of my sanctuary where this poem is duly chanted every day, there I shall certainly be. When offerings are made, during worship, in fire-rituals and on great festivals, this Mahatmyam should be entirely chanted and heard. I shall fondly accept the sacrifice, the worship and the fire-ritual thus done, whether they are done with appropriate knowledge or not”.

“During the time of the Great worship in ‘autumn<sup>2</sup> as well as the beginning of the New Year<sup>3</sup>, those who hear this Mahatmyam of mine with devotion shall be surely delivered from all troubles and be blessed with riches, grains and children. Listening to this Mahatmyam, to the

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<sup>1</sup> Adhyatmika, Adhibhautika and Adhi-daivika are the three types of Calamities

<sup>2</sup> Sarad Navaratri Maha Pooja done for nine nights beginning from autumnal equinox’ popular as the Devi Navaratri during Dusshera

<sup>3</sup> The Hindu New Year is at the time of spring equinox when the vasanta navaratri are celebrated starting from New Year day (Ugadi) on Chaitra Shukla Pratipada and culminating on Sri Rama Navami

auspicious manifestations of mine, and my feats of prowess in battles, one becomes fearless. Enemies perish, welfare accrues and families rejoice for those who listen to this Mahatmyam of mine. My Mahatmyam should be listened to everywhere, at a propitiatory ceremony, on seeing a bad dream, and for planetary afflictions. Thereby troubles subside, as also the terrible afflictions of planets. The bad dream turns into a good one”.

“It will result in the pacification of children under the grasp of bala grahas. It is the best promoter of friendship amongst men when there is a break in relationships. It destroys most effectively the strength all evil-doers. Verily demons, ghosts and ogres are destroyed by its mere chanting. This Mahatmyam of mine chanted in its entirety makes a devotee very close to me. By means of finest flowers, arghya and incenses, and by perfumes and lamps, by feeding Brahmanas, by oblations, by sprinkling consecrated water, and by various other offerings and gifts, if one worships day and night for a full year, the satisfaction that I get, the same is attained by reciting or listening but once to this Mahatmyam of mine”.

“Hearing the story destroys sins, and grants freedom from illness. The recital of my manifestations affords protection from evil spirits. If my exploits of exterminating the wicked demons in battles are heard, people will have no fear from enemies. Let the hymns recited by you, and those by the divine sages, and those by Brahma bestow an auspicious in thought. Lost in a desolate area in a forest, or surrounded by a forest fire, or encircled by robbers, or captured by enemies in a desolate spot, or pursued by a lion, tiger, or wild elephants in a forest, or sentenced to death by the orders of a wrathful king, or imprisoned, or caught in a boat tossed by winds on the high seas, or facing a volley of arrows in the most terrible battle, or amidst all kinds of dreadful troubles, or afflicted with pain, - remembering this story of mine, saves one from the predicament. By my power, animals like lions, robbers and enemies, flee from a distance from one who remembers this story of mine”.

The Sage (Medhas) said “Having thus spoken, the great Chandika, of fierce prowess, vanished on that very spot even as the gods were gazing at her. Their enemies having been destroyed, the gods, relieved of uncertainty in their minds, began to enjoy their shares in yagnas and wield their authorities as before. With Shumbha and Nishumbha of great prowess slain by the Goddess, the remaining demons were off to the netherworlds. Thus O King, the Goddess, although eternal, manifesting again and again, carries out the protection of the world. By her this universe is deluded, and it is she who gives birth to this universe. When entreated, she bestows supreme knowledge, and when propitiated, she confers prosperity. This entire cosmos is pervaded by the great Goddess in the form of Mahakali and Mahamari.

At one time She is Mahamari, the destroyer and at another time She, the unborn, becomes this creation. She herself, the eternal Being, sustains the beings at other times. In times of prosperity, She is verily Lakshmi, who bestows prosperity in the homes of men and in times of misfortune, she herself becomes the goddess of misfortune, and brings about ruin. When lauded and worshipped with flowers, perfumes and incense, she bestows wealth, offspring and an auspicious mind bent on Dharma.

## Chapter 13

The Sage Medhas said “O King, this sublime glory of the Goddess has been narrated to you. Such is the glory of the Goddess by whom this world is upheld and sustained. Likewise She, Vishnu-Maya, the illusive power of Lord Vishnu, confers knowledge. By her, you, this merchant and others of discerning intellect are deluded. Others have been deluded in the past and many others will be deluded in the future. O great King, take refuge in her, the supreme Isvari. She indeed when worshipped bestows on men enjoyment, heaven and liberation from transmigration.

Markandeya said to his disciple Bhaguri, “Hearing the sage Medhas’ words, O great sage, King Suratha who had become despondent due to excessive attachment, the sense of ‘mine’, and the dispossession of his kingdom, prostrated before the illustrious Rishi of sever penances and immediately repaired to perform austerities. The merchant too went with the king. They repaired to the sandy banks of a river in order to obtain a vision of the Mother. The king and the merchant practised penances, chanting the supreme Devi-sukta.

Having made an earthen image of the Goddess on the sands of the river, they both worshipped her in the image with flowers, incense, fire-rituals and ritual offerings of water. Abstaining from partaking food, with only one thought, their minds fixed on her, with concentration, they both offered sacrifices sprinkled with blood drawn from their own bodies. When they, propitiated her thus for three years, exercising self-control, Chandika, the upholder and sustainer of the world, became pleased, appeared before them and spoke to them. “O King, whatever you prayed for, and O delight of your family (referring to the merchant), whatever you too prayed for, receive all that from me. Well-pleased, I bestow those boons to you both”.

Then the King chose a kingdom that would be imperishable even in a future life, while in this life, he sought strength to destroy the strength of his enemies and thereby the restoration of his own kingdom. But the wise merchant, whose mind was full of dispassion for the world, chose the knowledge, which releases one from the attachment of ‘mine’ and ‘I’.

The Goddess said “O King, in a few days you shall obtain back your own kingdom after slaying your foes, and it will not be lost thereafter. After your death, you will attain another birth through the Sun god, and shall be a Manu on earth by name Savarni. O the best amongst merchants, I grant you the boon, which you have desired of me. Supreme knowledge shall be yours, for your self-fulfilment.

Markandeya said “Having thus granted both of them the boon that they desired, the Goddess vanished forthwith, as they were extolling her with devotion. Thus, Suratha, the best of warriors, having attained the boon from the Goddess, shall obtain another birth through Surya and shall be the eighth Manu named Savarni”.

## **The inner metaphorical significance of the Devi Mahatmyam**

Now let us examine the significance of the Devi Mahatmyam or Saptashati from the level of inner psychic reality. The Devi Mahatmyam begins with Markandeya narrating how a virtuous king named Suratha, dispossessed of his kingdom meets the merchant Samadhi who too has been dispossessed of his wealth and cast out by his own wife and children. Instead of finding tranquillity amid the peaceful and spiritual surroundings of the sage Medhas' hermitage, they are plagued by thoughts of loss, betrayal and attachment to the past. Together they approach the wise sage Medhas, whose task it is to awaken them to a higher spiritual awareness. The king, the merchant and the sage are archetypal characters that reside in all of us to differing degrees, characters with whom we can identify to varying degrees.

### **The King, the Merchant and the Sage as allegories to the Body, Mind and Intellect**

Suratha is "one who has a good chariot" (su: good; ratha: chariot). The body is the chariot while the Self is the rider. "The Self is the rider, and the body the chariot; the intellect is the charioteer, and the mind the reins" (Katha Upanishad 1. 3. 3). Man does the journey of life through the cycle of samsara with the chariot (ratha) of the body. In this long cycle of innumerable births called samsara chakra, man goes through countless lives. The cycle of samsara and its inevitable sufferings goes on as long as man does not realize that it is the Self (Atman) that is the rider and not the body or mind or pseudo-self. Unfortunately we continue to suffer till we realize this. According to the world-view of the Devi Mahatmyam, it is the Goddess who is the Supreme Self. Hence as the Supreme Self She is the rider. Born a warrior (kshatriya) Suratha is endowed with a strong physique, a good body. By virtue of his strength, he is capable of protecting himself as well as others. Initially he has all the material enjoyments that come naturally to a king. Yet he loses them later on in life as one would expect in an impermanent and temporal world. This loss coupled with his continued attachment is the cause of his suffering. Till then all along he had not realized that the Goddess, the Supreme Self is the rider. So in spite of everything he was not truly a "Su"ratha or one with a good chariot.

Samadhi, on the other hand is a merchant (vaishya). The word 'samadhi' indicates an integrated or concentrated or focussed mind, a mind that is absorbed in meditation ('sam': together or integrated; 'a': towards; and 'dha': to hold). In other words the word 'samadhi' denotes a focused or concentrated mind, a mind in meditation. As his name indicates, Samadhi, the merchant is single-minded or one-pointed in his pursuits. Being a merchant initially his focus is on wealth. Because he has the natural ability to be focused, he attains his goal-material wealth. In the first half of their lives the king and the merchant pursue their goals- power and riches-respectively and they attain their goals. Both the king and the merchant are good by nature. The king protects his subjects like his own children while the noble merchant shares his prosperity with his whole family. But power and riches are not permanent in this ever-changing world. As is often the case both of them lose their hard-earned and well deserved power and riches. Cheated by people whom they trusted, they realise the limitations of worldly life. Apart from fate, their own relatives cheat them. In fact the merchant's wife and sons misappropriate his wealth and cast him out. In spite of their

good characters and abilities they end up as losers. Having experienced deceit, cunningness and heartbreak, both the king and the merchant are deeply disappointed but not disillusioned. They still cling to those very things and the people that have abandoned them. Even then their hearts cling to their old associations. They are unable to detach their minds.

The king and the merchant are archetypal characters. We are all a bit like the king and the merchant. We all share their predicament. At some point of time we all experience suffering, hurt and loss. At times our close friends, relatives, and family members fail us. In spite of our deep hurts we still cling on to our old ways and old associations. We fail to discern. We fail to learn from our past. Instead we simply brood over the past constantly reliving our miseries in the present. The king and the merchant find themselves in the hermitage of a great sage in whose hermitage even wild beasts have successfully tamed themselves of their ferocity. Yet the king and the merchant find it hard to awaken their abilities to discern or be dispassionate. Here again we share their plight. Most of us go to a temple or an ashram or a spiritual retreat or a great saint only to find that the mind is still under the conditioning of the past. We worry about our losses and hurts. It would be good if we could reflect rather than brood over our losses and hurts. This is our predicament.

Returning back to the merchant Samadhi, though he had the natural inborn ability to engage his mind in meditation, in single minded pursuit, it did not bring him happiness. Instead the end result was unhappiness. Why? He concentrated on wealth alone. The object of his single-minded pursuit was only material wealth. You always get what you pursue with a focused mind, whatever you meditate on you attain that. The merchant focused on the riches of material existence. The external world is impermanent (anitya). Existential suffering is an inevitable consequence of existence. Permanent happiness cannot come from an impermanent, phenomenal, material world. Lasting happiness is possible only through the eternal (nitya) or the spiritual. The only unchanging principle in this ever changing world is the Supreme Self, the Divine Mother. She is the only object of meditation that can bring lasting happiness, both in the present and hereafter. Unless the chariot (body), the reins (mind) and the intellect (buddhi), all serve the rider's (Self) purpose, the chariot is useless.

Thus Suratha (a good chariot) and Samadhi (a concentrated or focused mind) cannot serve their true purpose, cannot find true happiness till they meet the sage Medhas (intellect or insight or knowledge), who can lead them to the Goddess, to the Supreme Self. 'Medhas' is another word for 'buddhi' or 'intellect'. As per the Kathopanishad (1. 3. 3) buddhi or medhas is the charioteer. Now this is a perfect combination. An awakened intellect or awareness, a focussed mind capable of deep meditation, a strong and healthy body, together they can easily attain the best. Under the wise guidance of the sage Medhas, the king Suratha and the merchant Samadhi attain the best knowledge, knowledge of the Goddess, knowing whom they can the attain best. Medhas can now raise their awareness from an ordinary, worldly awareness to a higher, spiritual awareness of the Goddess, the Supreme Self. And this is what happens finally. Eventually at the end of the narrative, the king and the merchant are fully inspired to seek the Goddess. Retiring to the bank of a river, they meditate and worship the Divine Mother devotedly. After three years she appears to them and offers each a boon. Suratha, who has unfinished business, asks for the return of his earthly kingdom, followed by an imperishable kingdom in the next life. The merchant Samadhi, on the other hand, has grown wise and dispassionate. He has become free from worldly attachment. His mind is now fixed only on Supreme knowledge, the Goddess. So he asks for the supreme knowledge that will dissolve the bondage of worldly existence. This is true Samadhi. All other forms of

Samadhi are incomplete, save Nirvikalpa Samadhi. This is the true significance of the three main characters with whom the Devi Mahatmyam begins and ends. Now let us examine the actual myth of the Goddess and her martial exploits.

As must be evident by now though the Devi mahatmyam is seemingly a narrative of the battle between the Devi and the asuras, there is a deeper significance to these demons and the battles. At one level it is also an allegory to the inner battle between the divine and the demoniac forces within the human psyche, between the positive and negative. The battlegrounds represent our own human consciousness, and its events symbolize our own experiences. The demons are symbolic of the psychic forces within the shadow. The Divine Mother is our own true being, our inherent divinity and wholeness, our very Self. Her clashes with the demons symbolize the outward and inward struggles we face daily. The Devi, personified simultaneously as the one supreme Goddess and also the many goddesses, confronts the demons of ahamkara or ego (our mistaken notion of who we are or what we identify ourselves with), of excessive tamas and rajas, that in turn give birth to other demons of excessive craving, greed, anger and pride, and of incessant citta vrttis. Thus the myth is an allegory to what is happening within our own consciousness, to the transformation of human consciousness. The threefold transformation of consciousness is described in the three sections or episodes of the Devi Mahatmyam.

### **First episode-The inner meaning of Madhu-Kaitabha myth**

The first episode reveals the power of tamas, the power of delusion, how in our ordinary state of being, we are all deluded. The first episode reveals the Primordial Mother Adi Sakti or Moola Prakrti in her dark, deluding aspect (Tamas) that ensnares humankind through the psychological afflictions of ignorance and attachment, through the influence of tamas and rajas. It teaches us about the nature of reality at the most basic primordial level. Maha Vishnu has to awaken from the state of primal sleep in order overcome the original demoniacal forces, Madhu (tamas) and Kaitabha (rajas). This is possible only through Maha Maya's grace, only if She frees Vishnu from the influence of Yoga Maya, the primordial inactive state predominated by cosmic Tamas.

There are two ways to understand Madhu and Kaitabha. One is suggested by the Mahabharata's version of the same myth where it is stated that the asura Madhu is of tamas while Kaitabha is of rajas. The Harivamsha version too suggests a similar interpretation by having the two asuras themselves declare, "By us is all this covered over with tamas and rajas. Thus Madhu and Kaitabha are the two original demoniacal forces of tamas and rajas. They try to overcome the creative and sattvic force (Brahma). All the three gunas are born simultaneously before the very beginning of a Kalpa. In fact the word 'kalpa' is the same as in the other related word 'sankalpa' that is suggestive of 'will' or 'resolve'. A Kalpa happens by the resolve or will of the Supreme Being. A Kalpa is one of the many continuous cycles of creative manifestation, sustenance and dissolution that happen by the sankalpa (will or resolve) of the Supreme Being, who in some creation myths is equated with Lord Vishnu. Madhu-Kaitabha emerge from the mala (dirt or waste) from Vishnu's ears. The ears are

symbolic of sound or Sabda which is another name for Nada that marks the start of cosmogenesis.

The three gunas are part of the same cosmic process of manifestation. Ever since creative manifestation starts the three gunas are in a state of disequilibrium, wherein they struggle towards ascendancy. The three gunas are part of the same veiling power of Prakrti or Maha Maya. Together they form the three strands that bind us to ignorance. However over a period of time Sattva is like a burnt rope because by its very nature it brings knowledge. That is why initially the ascendancy of Sattva is preferred over tamas and rajas. A burnt rope or a rope that will sooner or later be burnt cannot bind us for long. But till it is fully burnt even this rope can be binding. On the other hand the ascendancy of tamas and rajas are undesirable at all stages. As per classical Ayurvedic theory tamas and rajas are in fact manasika doshas that can act as psychological afflictions. They can potentially spoil (dosha: that which can darken or spoil) the psyche by leading to many other psychological afflictions. That is why the Supreme Being (Lord Vishnu) has to save sattva (Brahma) by subduing tamas (Madhu) and rajas (Kaitabha). But this is possible only through Maha Maya's grace, only if She frees Vishnu from the influence of Yoga Maya, the primordial inactive state predominated by cosmic Tamas.

The other approach to understanding Madhu and Kaitabha is etymological. Madhu denotes something sweet. Madhu is in fact the actual word for honey while Kaitabha denotes an insect. Thus Madhu and Kaitabha are honey and the honey bee. This world and its fruits are an extension of the Divine Mother's very own manifestation. In a way She is not separate from the world that is created by Her own Self. But if one hankers after the fruits of the world without being able to see Her behind this world or its fruits, sooner or later the inevitable result of this obsession with gathering honey is pain. Honey and the sting of the bee are inseparable. If you want honey you should dare the inevitable sting of the insect. We are all busily engaged in collecting one more drop of honey telling ourselves that this is the purpose of our lives. The more honey we collect the more the stings on our swollen faces. But we endure the pain of the sting preparing ourselves for the next drop of honey.

It is our ignorance that keeps us busily engaged in this perpetual cycle of gathering more honey daring more stings. This simple insight can be the start of the loosening of the grip of the world over the Self. It is so simple yet immensely powerful, the power of Maha Maya. One needs discernment (viveka) and dispassion (vairagya) to see through this beautiful play of Maha Maya. And that happens only through Divine grace, or through great merit in many lives, or through the grace of a Sadguru. Suratha the king and Samadhi the merchant find a Sadguru in the sage Medhas who can lead them to this insight by revealing the glory of Maha Maya to them. Understanding the true nature of this world is important to be able to see the Supreme Being behind this manifest world. Otherwise the world can be a source of much misery and pain through its lure of honey and the inevitable pain of the sting. That is why the wise sage Medhas preferred to narrate the Madhu-Kaitabha myth to the king and the merchant when they seek his counsel since their predicament is surely related to the lure of the things of this world and the inevitable pain that they have experienced from it.

**Note:** The esoteric interpretation is not an afterthought as some might think after seeing varying interpretations by enthusiastic writers. The esoteric interpretation is inherent to the myth as will be evident when one examines the myth through various approaches. In fact multiple approaches lead us to the same interpretation. Etymological examination of the

words used, cross-scriptural references, oral teaching from the Guru, various commentaries and finally the inner experiences that a practitioner goes through, all these provide more authority to the esoteric interpretation. Interestingly all these approaches are in harmony and point to a nearly precise esoteric meaning of the Devi Mahatmyam. Some writers have interpreted the demons and other allegories arbitrarily. But as affirmed here the interpretation cannot be loose or arbitrary and has to harmonise all the five approaches delineated above. It is not enough if an allegory makes spiritual or psychological sense if it is not etymologically in line. Nirukta too must agree. This is the approach used consistently in this book. For instance let us examine the esoteric interpretation of Madhu-Kaitabha. Honey is sweet. It is heavy. Any sweet in less quantity is sattvic, but in excess it is tamasic and thereby dangerous. Madhu is thus potentially tamasic. The insect (Kaitabha) is famous for its busyness. “Busy as a bee” is a common expression. Busyness is inherent to rajas. Thus Kaitabha is rajas. As one can see the etymological interpretation is in line with the cross-scriptural references from the Mahabharata that clearly equate Madhu and Kaitabha with tamas and rajas. Of course the psycho-spiritual interpretation too fits very well with the creation myth of Madhu-Kaitabha and Brahma.

## **Second Episode-Mahishasuramardhini myth**

This is the second episode where the same Adi Sakti manifests Herself as Durga and overcomes Mahishasura the buffalo headed demon who is half human and half beast. The demon is partly a pasu (animal or beast) and partly a human and thus has the dangerous ability to disrupt cosmic order and harmony. Overcoming this powerful combination of beastly nature and human competence requires a fiery and dynamic form of Shakti, one that can combat worldly *rajas* through divine *rajas*.

Technically the Primal form of the Mother that presides over Rajas is referred to as Maha Lakshmi whose coral complexion identifies Her clearly as the Devi’s Rajasic *vyashti*. Mahishasura too is the epitome of Rajas. But unlike the Devi’s divine rajas, Mahishasura’s rajas is of a negative nature. His rajasic energy controls him and impels him to destructive acts, whereas Durga controls her own fiery splendor. She is an embodiment of the wrath of all the gods. Her *rajas* is protective of her devotees and intent on destroying evil. Her anger is divine anger that fights the demons.

Of the three *gunas* only *Rajas* has two faces or two dimensions to it. One is a purely negative and gross expression that seeks material pleasures while the other is a divine and subtle expression that takes the individual inward, closer to the Supreme Being. Both are goal oriented except that demoniac *rajas* seeks only *kama* (desire or craving) and *artha* (material prosperity) while divine *rajas* seeks the fulfilment of righteous desires, all round divine prosperity and eventually *moksha* (the reference here is to the four goals of life). This difference in the direction of focus or goal is the main difference between the two types of *rajas*. *Rajas* can bridge *Tamas* and *Sattva*. Lower order *Rajas* is closer to *Tamas*, while higher order *Rajas* is closer to *Sattva*. Lower order *Rajas* serves the purpose of *Tamas* and is potentially in danger of pulling us into the quagmire of *Tamas*. Higher order *Rajas* serves the purpose of enabling *Sattvavajaya* or enabling *Sattva* to take over the other *gunas*.

## Esoteric meaning of the battle between the gods and the demons

First let us examine the theme of the battles between the gods and the demons as revealed in the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and Adi Shankara's commentary. The word Sanskrit word for gods is 'devah', which denotes light or the function of illumining. Commenting on the verse "devāsūrā ha vai yatra samyētire" (Chandogya Upanishad, 1. 2. 1), Adi Shankara affirms that the gods stand for such functions of the senses (indriya vrttis) as are illumined by scriptures. The demons or asuras who are opposed to the gods, stand for tendencies that are opposite to the illumining functions, and are of the nature of darkness. Thus the war between the gods and the demons actually refers to the perpetual conflict between the forces of light and darkness, between righteous and unrighteous urges. Thus there are two opposing psychic forces within all of us. The roots of these two types of urges are traced to the Sanchita karmas of innumerable lives. While we experience only Prarabdha karmas allotted for a particular lifetime, the Sanchita karmas indirectly influence us as our samskaras.

Esoterically speaking the gods symbolise the positive samskaras of innumerable lifetimes resulting from all the righteous karmas that are oriented towards the Supreme Self, while the demons symbolise the negative samskaras of innumerable lifetimes resulting from all the unrighteous karmas that are contrary and in conducive to our orientation to the Supreme Self. Thus interpreting the battles between the gods and demons on these lines is in order wherever references to the battles between the gods and the demons occur in the Vedas and the Puranas. The righteous and unrighteous samskaras have also been referred to as daiva sampada (divine wealth or divine tendencies) and asura sampada (demoniac wealth or demoniac tendencies) in the Bhagavad Gita (in the sixteenth chapter titled 'daivasura sampdvibhaga yogah'). Here Divine tendencies have been referred to as Divine wealth (sampada: wealth) and demoniac tendencies as demoniac wealth. Elaborating this idea further the Bhagavad Gita declares that the Divine are deemed for liberation or Self-realization and the demoniac for bondage.

Returning back to Mahishasura's myth, the Devi Mahatmyam tells us that long back when Mahishasura was the lord of asuras and Indra the lord of devas, there was a war between the devas and asuras for a full hundred years. Now that we know who the gods and demons are, it is not difficult to understand why the span of the war is for hundred years. This is the approximate upper limit of human life span. Thus the conflict between the righteous and unrighteous samskaras goes on as long as we are alive. And in that war, as the Devi Mahatmyam tells us, the army of the gods is vanquished by the mighty demons and Mahishasura becomes the lord of heaven. He himself assumes the jurisdictions of Surya, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Chandra, Yama and Varuna and of other gods too. Now what does this mean?

As already stated the gods are the presiding deities for various indriyas and their functions- Surya over eyes, Indra hands, Agni over speech, Vayu over skin, Chandra over the mind, Yama over anus, Varuna over tongue and so on. The gods stand for the respective indriya vrttis. All these senses and their functions are hijacked by Rajo-guna serving the purpose of nourishing asuric tendencies. This is the meaning of Mahishasura assuming lordship over all jurisdictions of the gods. Under the influence of Rajo-guna all psychological and sensory functions are focused only on the gross and the material, having lost the original orientation to the Supreme Being. The task, therefore, is to once again reclaim the original state. But this can be achieved only by uniting together all the powers of the gods and orienting them back to the Supreme Being. This is exactly what happens in the story.

## **The vanquished gods collectively surrendering to the Devi**

The gods first approach Brahma who leads them to Vishnu and Shiva. There is a significance in the gods first approaching Brahma. As per Hindu mythology Brahma was born from a lotus that grew at Lord Vishnu's navel. Here Vishnu signifies Consciousness while the lotus signifies flowering or blossoming of Consciousness. Brahma being born from the nabhi-kamala (navel chakra) of Vishnu is clearly a Puranic allusion to Kundalini and the Chakras. The nabhi is the vedic equivalent to what is known as known as the Manipura chakra in the tantric system. Below the manipura chakra is asura kshetra (field of demoniac consciousness), while daiva kshetra (field of divine consciousness) starts from manipura. Thus the very awareness of the conflict between the righteous and unrighteous samskaras and the need to overcome asuric samskaras, starts with the manipura. Now that spiritual awareness has started blossoming it will lead to the coming together of all the spiritual samskaras, the coming together of the powers of the gods. Brahma leads the gods to Vishnu and Shiva. Vishnu and Shiva too symbolise specific psychological functions like the other gods. In the symbolism of Devi Mahatmyam, the Devi is obviously the Supreme Being or Supreme Self, whereas Vishnu and Shiva symbolise prana shakti and gnana shakti respectively.

What happens when all the powers of all the gods come together? As the Devi Mahatmyam reveals, all the radiance from all the gods coalesced into the auspicious form of the Goddess. The tejas that emerges from the gods is not their creation but the Devi's natural indwelling presence. Thus what coalesces into the Devi's auspicious form is actually Her own power. The gods do not relinquish their power or weapons, even as their varied powers reunite in the Devi. This is a sublime philosophical abstraction of simultaneous divine immanence and transcendence. Now that the collective power of the gods is united against Mahishasura and his armies, the gods can be assured of their inevitable victory.

## **Mahishasura and his Generals- Rajo-guna and its Asura sampada**

Mahishasura symbolises the powerful combination of human competence and beastly nature. As already stated he stands for Rajo-guna. While Kaitabha is also rajas, he comes as a twin of Madhu (tamas), at the level of origination. Unlike Kaitabha who is of the nature of rajas, Mahishasura is the epitome of Rajo-guna. He has sixteen asuras who lead various battalions of armies. They stand for various demoniac traits or tendencies and are Mahishasura's assets or wealth. Together they are all asura sampada or demoniac wealth or assets (see the chapter on Daiva sampada and Asura sampada for more).

If Mahishasura has to be subdued his generals have to be eliminated first, his demoniac wealth has to be destroyed first. But the asura armies vastly outnumber the gods. Commenting on the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad's (1, 3) account of a similar conflict between the gods and the demons Adi Shankara tells us that the gods are always less in number while the demons are more. So what to do? There is only one way out- absolute surrender to the Supreme Goddess. Nothing less than total surrender will bail them out of their difficulty. And this is precisely what the gods do.

As already stated if Mahishasura has to be subdued his generals have to be eliminated first, his demoniac wealth has to be destroyed first. Hence the Goddess and her lion start destroying these asuras one by one. While each of the sixteen asura generals and their esoteric significance is important in its own way, two among them deserve special mention- Durdhara and Durmukha who fight till the last. Only after Durdhara and Durmukha are destroyed can the Goddess finally fight the asura lord Mahishasura. In fact they find place even in the Mahishasuramardhini stotram ('durdharadharṣiṇi durmukhamarṣiṇi harsarate'). Such is their negative significance for spiritual life.

If Mahishasura is *Rajas*, Durdhara and Durmukha are 'desire' and 'anger'. As the Bhagavad Gita (3. 37) affirms, Rajas begets desire and anger. In fact most often anger is related to desire. When the fulfilment of desire (Kama) is frustrated by an obstacle, frustration turns into anger (Krodha). Desire itself is rooted in Rajas and aggravates it further. In fact 'Durdhara' literally means 'irresistible' while 'Durmukha' means ugly or hideous or bad faced. True enough it is very difficult to resist desire, while anger transforms the most beautiful face into a hideous one! ('Durmukha' can also mean 'bad-mouthed' or 'abusive' which too denotes anger) Desire is by nature insatiable and is the most important of the six inner enemies (arishadvargas) along with its comrade- Anger (Krodha). Since Rajas begets desire and anger, they are the last to go before Rajas. That is why they fight till the last. Once desire is eliminated, Sattva guna (the Divine forces of Light) can easily prevail over Rajo guna.

However do not underestimate Mahishasura (Rajo-guna) and his army. Rajo guna (Mahishasura) and its associated vrttis (Mahishasura's armies) wield great power over the psyche. They are the result of the impressions of innumerable lifetimes and choices made in those lives, choices that have become embedded in our psyche as stubborn psychological traits. To make matters worse most of us waste away this precious life without any conscious awareness of what is happening within. As the Bhagavad Gita (7. 19) reveals, it is only at the end of innumerable births that the wise person takes refuge in the Supreme Being, realising that the Supreme Being is all that is. And rare is such a great soul. Most of us carry on with our deluded lives without realising that life is not just about relationships, money, power and material pursuits. For the majority spiritual life is only an extension of the deep-rooted material approach. Even those who are interested have only a shallow interest, quite often it being a mere coping mechanism for the stress of daily living. For some spirituality is a pursuit that they reserve for their old age, for their retired lives.

Compelled by our asuric tendencies we waste the best time of our lives pursuing purely material goals, wasting away our greatest potential, postponing it continually. It is only a few wise ones who awaken to the truth that the Supreme Being is all that is, that have a conscious awareness of the war between the gods and the demons. Bringing this inner conflict into conscious awareness, the serious practitioner surrenders completely to the Supreme Goddess just as the gods did in the Devi Mahatmyam. Progressively the gods are reinstated in their rightful place by the replacement of asuric wealth with divine wealth. This needs the grace of Mahalakshmi who can bestow daiva sampada or divine wealth to Her devotee. The practitioner who is endowed with divine wealth is now fit for attaining liberation. Even if one does not attain liberation in this birth, the samskaras and the merit acquired during this lifetime are carried in a potential form into the next lives when they shall bear fruit automatically. However for those who are unwavering from the goal the accumulation of divine wealth shall set them free in this very life. Spiritual victory is in sight.

### **Mahishasura's eightfold fury**

Returning back to Mahishasura's myth, seeing his armies destroyed by the Devi an enraged Mahishasura starts terrifying the Devi's hosts. And how does Mahishasura destroy the Devi's forces- in eight ways. These eight ways are the purely negative expression of rajas. Hitting some by muzzle, trampling some by the hooves, lashing at some with his tail, tearing others with his horns, by sheer speed, by bellowing, by wheeling, and by the blast of his breath, Mahishasura destroyed the Devi's forces. This eightfold unleashing of Mahishasura's rajas is comparable to eightfold maithuna or eightfold sexual union, which a Brahmachari is strictly advised to avoid. Here a word on Brahmacharya is in order.

Brahmacharya means to move, learn and live in the 'Way of Brahman or higher Awareness'. 'Conducting oneself in higher awareness' is not just about sexual continence, not just about controlling sexual desire but about also about gaining mastery over all the indriyas. Among other things it is also largely about bringing the indriyas (senses) under effortless control. Thus one of the goals of Brahmacharya is reaching a state where one is not troubled by the indriyas anymore. However this state of freedom from the indriyas comes effortlessly only after intense practice or abhyasa. Till one achieves effortless mastery over the indriyas one has to make intense efforts. Hence initially we are advised to avoid eightfold indulgence of the indriyas. The eight ways of sensual indulgence: Smaranam (thinking of it), Kirtanam (talking of it), Keli (playing around), Prekshanam (seeing), Guhya-bhashanam (talking in secrecy), Sankalpa (wishing for), Adhyavasaya (determination towards), Kriyanishpatti (actual accomplishment). These are the eight ways in which Rajas destroys the divine forces before one can even gauge its destructive influence. That is why the unleashing of Mahishasura's rajas too has eightfold fury. After destroying the Devi's forces by his eightfold rajas, Mahishasura rushes forward to slay her lion. The Goddess Ambika becomes enraged at this.

### **The lion as the sadhaka who has taken to the path of dharma**

The lion is none other than the sadhaka who has taken to the path of dharma. It is none other than the practitioner, the jiva, you and me. Since the devotee has already surrendered to the Goddess and is on the path of dharma, the Mother will protect him as her own child. Now starts the real fight between the Devi and the lord of the asuras. To meet the challenge the Goddess heightens Her own *rajas*. However unlike Mahishasura's destructive and egoistic rage Her anger is divine or righteous anger that counters demoniac or unrighteous anger. Initially the practitioner counters lower order material rajas through higher order spiritual rajas. One has to remove a thorn with the help of another thorn, as the adage goes. We come across instances of the lion's fury too, in both the second and third episodes though more elaborately in the third episode. This is the sadhaka's spiritualized higher order *rajas* or *sattvic rajas* which counters the destructive influence of material lower order *rajas* of the asuras. The two faces of *rajas* is an interesting theme that the Devi Mahatmyam portrays time and again through powerful metaphors.

### **Mahishasura changing his form many times before finally being beheaded**

During the combat Mahishasura changes his form many times, undergoing a series of metamorphosis. This is the very nature of desire, of rajas. We think that we have rooted out a particular psychological compulsion only to discover that it still existent albeit in a different form. We move from one addiction to another, from one compulsive behaviour to another, as long as the original inner emotional issue is not resolved. The Devi's weapons appear ineffectual as long as Mahishasura keeps changing forms. She triumphs over him only when he emerges in his original form, as She pins him down under her foot. Only then does She behead him finally with Her sword, destroying the deadly combination of human competence and beastly nature.

Mahishasura's episode reveals that through active struggle, through divine rajas, we can overcome enslavement to the indriyas, and live righteously in harmony with the world. It also reveals to us the two faces of rajas and the two kinds of wealth that we may seek in our lives. One is divine while the other is demoniac. Those who seek demoniac wealth take to the purely negative and demoniac expression of rajas and are deemed to be bound further and to suffer in the quagmire of perpetual desire, while those who take to a positive expression of rajas seek divine wealth and are eventually deemed for liberation from suffering of all kinds.

### **Third Episode-**

By the time we come to the third episode the demons are more complex and subtler. This time the chief demons are Sumbha (*Asmita*: "I"/ "Me", the pseudo-self) and Nisumbha (*Mamata*: "Mine", the attachment to things that the false self clings to) who along with their generals Canda (pra-vritti or extraverted psychic energy), Munda (ni-vritti or introverted psychic energy), Dhumralochana (distorted perception) and Raktabija (citta vrttis or incessant compulsive thought processes), are a formidable force to reckon with. Overcoming these subtler demons requires a luminous, benevolent and beautiful manifestation, one that can enlighten and liberate. This is the manifestation as Maha Sarasvati predominated by Sattva.

This myth too has a familiar beginning. Two demons, named Shumbha and Nishumbha, have dispossessed the gods, stripped them of their powers and appropriated their wealth and privilege. Then the gods go to mount Himalaya and extol the Unvanquished Aparajita Devi recalling Her assurance that She would intervene whenever remembered in times of misfortune. Synchronistically Parvati devi comes there at the same time to bathe in the waters of Ganga and enquires innocently as to whom the gods are extolling. An auspicious form of the Goddess, Kaushiki, emanates from the selfsame Parvati and answers that the hymn is addressed to her. Parvati becomes dark and is henceforth known as Kalika or Kali. She will play major role in the future course of events along with the auspicious form of Ambika. Thus the Goddess has two forms- one auspicious and the other terrible. Parvati's two forms remind us of Shiva who too has a terrible form as Rudra apart from his usual auspicious form. This twofold complementary nature of Divinity as both the auspicious and the terrible highlights the play of light and dark. Both are aspects of the Supreme Being.

There are two other interesting phenomenon at work here. First is the phenomenon of Synchronicity. Parvati seems to come there by coincidence. Though seemingly a coincidence her arrival then and there is very meaningful. Meaningful coincidences are what Synchronicity is about. Synchronicity is behind not only oracular prognostication but also

how prayers work. At times Divine intervention can be direct, displaying a seemingly causal relation to prayers and mantras. At other times Divine intervention occurs in a non-causal synchronistic manner. Either way prayers work. Most importantly we are connected to everything else around us. Our minds and lives are not separate from the minds and lives of others in the universe. There is underlying indivisible holistic unity.

Secondly Parvati's innocent query suggests that she is not aware of what is happening, at least consciously. But surely, as an embodiment of the Supreme Goddess, wouldn't She be consciously aware? Though not conscious, the emanation of Kaushiki who answers Parvati is Her own Shakti, a projection of Her own unconscious powers. At an individual conscious level we have limited powers, limited by embodiment in a mind-body that constrain the otherwise unbounded and limitless reservoir of all powers. At an unconscious level we are potentially connected to the collective. There is oneness and abundant potential at this level. But in our normal waking state of consciousness we are largely unaware of our unbounded potential and our connection to the collective. In other states of consciousness such as dream, deep sleep and meditation we are better connected to this level. One may argue that this particular context in the Devi Mahatmyam involves the Goddess not a human being. However remember that everything about the gods and demons has relevance for us, for what happens in our own psyche.

The Supreme Goddess is the Mother of the Universe, identical with the Brahman of Vedanta, and with the Atman of Yoga. But this is at the transcendental level. No doubt the Goddess is the Supreme Self, but She is also the collective Self. At the relative and phenomenal level, where there is awareness of one's own individual personality or ego, even Her manifestations follow the same law, the same order that is seen in the rest of the universe. The various emanations of the Goddess combine both the transcendental and phenomenal levels of truth to varying degrees. It may not be inappropriate to suggest that while ultimately at the transcendental level She is the Supreme Self or Brahman, in her manifestations as other goddesses She is also the Transcendental in the Phenomenal. In other words She is the Transcendental, She is the Phenomenal and She is also the Transcendental in the Phenomenal. This is the uniqueness of the Shakta world-view. Sri Ramakrishna describes how the relative or phenomenal emerges from the absolute or transcendental and falls back into it. Brahman may be compared to an infinite ocean, without beginning or end. Just as, some portions of the ocean freeze into ice through intense cold, and formless water appears to have form, so through intense love or faith of the devotee, Brahman appears to take on form and personality. But the form melts away again as the sun of Knowledge rises. Then the universe also disappears, and there is nothing but Brahman.

The beautiful and auspicious Kaushiki form of the Goddess is all Sattva. Unlike the slayer of Mahishasura who is the collective embodiment of the divine anger or divine rajas of all the gods, Kaushiki is a Sattvic manifestation. This time the demons are even more sophisticated. Action, contemplation and knowledge are the three stages through which we have to pierce through the veil of *Prakriti* or three *Gunas*. Madhu-Kaitabha are the mala (dirt or waste) from Vishnu's ears and thereby predominantly represent Tamas. Mahishasura and his generals represent Rajo-guna. But Shumbha-Nishumbha and their generals represent the limitation of buddhi, which is another name for sattva. The word sattva also denotes the mind apart from the guna of sattva. It is easy to understand why one has to overcome tamas and rajas as it is accepted that they are manasika doshas. But why is there a need to transcend even Sattva, one might ask. As described in the commentary on the first episode, the three gunas are part of

the same cosmic process of manifestation, they are part of the same veiling power of Prakrti or Maha Maya. Together they form the three strands that bind us to ignorance. Since Sattva is potentially akin to a burnt rope, since it brings knowledge, initially the ascendancy of sattva is preferred over tamas and rajas. A rope that will sooner or later be burnt cannot bind us for long. But till it is fully burnt even this rope can be binding. We will examine this further using another analogy- that of a lantern. But first let us understand Shumbha and Nishumbha.

The root word 'bha' in the names of Shumbha and Nishumbha means 'light'. However their light is not real like the light from the sun. It is merely reflected light. Just as Sun represents the self and light in astrological language, Moon represents the mind and reflected light. Sattva is another name for the mind. Buddhi is the highest function of the mind. However buddhi is not the same as the Self or Atman. Shumbha is none other than 'Asmita' (sense of 'I' or 'Me'), the pseudo-self that identifies the self with non-self whereas Nisumbha represents *Mamata* (sense of 'Mine'), or the attachment to things that the false self clings to through identification with other objects. Nishumbha is the brother of Shumbha. One follows the other closely. Where there is this sense of 'I' automatically there will be a sense of 'mine' as an extension of the false sense of selfhood. That is why Shumbha and Nishumbha are inseparable brothers.

Patanjali (Yogasutra, 2.6) defines 'Asmita' as "dṛḡdarśanaśaktyorekātmatevāsmitā". 'Dṛḡ' is the Seer or Purusha or Pure Consciousness. 'Darśanaśakti' denotes 'the power of observing', which is none other than Buddhi or 'intellect'. 'Ekātmata' means identifying as one. In other words 'Asmita' is the ignorance or mistake of identifying Buddhi as Purusha or Atman. In other words misidentification of the mind as the Self gives rise to a false sense of self. This false sense of self is 'Asmita'. Although it may seem that buddhi and purusha are identical, in reality they are not. This can be illustrated using the analogy of a lantern. If the Self is the wick or the source of light, buddhi is the glass chimney. From a distance though it appears as if the glass chimney is the source of the light, close observation will reveal the burning wick as the true source of light. Likewise a yogi whose consciousness is functioning beyond the manomaya kosha, knows that the mind is not identical with the Self as his consciousness has awakened to the level of the vijnanamaya kosha.

Buddhi is the instrument of intelligence that discerns, questions, reasons, determines and wills. Though buddhi is the highest faculty of the human mind and possesses the potential power of divine revelation, it is still a limited manifestation of consciousness. Buddhi is also an evolute of Prakrti and thus cannot be identical to Purusha or Consciousness. The mind when viewed through the distorting lens of *Avidya* or ignorance, becomes the basis for a false sense of identity. This pseudo selfhood is 'Asmita'. The basis for 'asmita' is a false notion that buddhi is identical to the Atman. However an acutely focused Sattvic buddhi is very helpful in reflecting Self/Consciousness just as a clear chimney can transmit the light of the wick very clearly.

Since sattvic intellect can reflect the light of Consciousness clearly, it also poses the danger of an aspirant falsely thinking that he has attained the Atman, that he is Self-realized. A sattvic and refined intellect is undoubtedly very important for reflective thinking and discernment. However that is not the end of the path. Such a sattvic buddhi is of tremendous value in overcoming the tyranny of tamas and rajas. So in the earlier stages sattva is glorified. That which was desirable in the earlier stages in the past is detrimental in the present. Now even Sattva is an obstacle.

If tamas can be compared to a brick wall and rajas to stormy winds that toss about the mind in a tempest, sattva is like a glass wall. One can see through a glass wall, but cannot walk through. What we see through the glass wall helps us in inferring the presence of the light on the other side. But to reach or merge with the source of the light one has to eventually overcome the glass wall too. This is where buddhi too fails. Moreover the false sense of selfhood at this stage can lead to subtler demons such as pride of knowledge, false pride in having attained the self, false sense of immortality, all arising from knowledge that is not truly ultimate. One starts taking pride in one's sadhana. In the place of pride in material riches, pride in spiritual riches starts swelling the ego. Earlier the pride was grosser, easily detectable and thereby easier to accept. Spiritual pride is subtler, not easily detected and hard to accept.

In a way the aspirant at this stage has some achievements to his credit compared to others who are still struggling with grosser issues related to tamas or rajas. However as long as the klesas continue to afflict an individual suffering is a definite possibility. Asmita along with the sense of Mamatva, is among the five causes of suffering. Total freedom from suffering is not possible as long as there is this sense of 'I' and 'mine' which becomes the focal point for all citta vrttis. The tyranny of Shumbha and Nishumbha is subtler compared to the tyranny of Mahishasura. Moreover Mahishasura did not seek the hand of the Devi, did not talk of marrying the Goddess. He just rushed to war compulsively, compelled by his fiery rajas. But Shumbha and Nishumbha being more advanced asuras, having some light in their nature, at least in so far as their ability to show at least reflected light, mistake that they are equal to the Goddess or even superior. That is why they confidently court a marriage proposal. But first how do they come to know of the Goddess? Through Chanda and Munda. What do these two asuras denote? Chanda means 'fierce' or 'passionate' while Munda denotes a 'shaved head'.

Generally a shaved head is symbolic of vairagya or withdrawal. Vairagya can be true dispassion or it can also be sensitive withdrawal due to a bad experience. In the latter case it is not genuine vairagya but only withdrawal due to hurt, a negative reaction to an unpleasant experience. Here Munda being an asura, denotes reactive withdrawal from things that have been a source of suffering, not genuine vairagya. Chanda denotes 'passionate pursuit' while Munda denotes sensitive 'introverted withdrawal'. Here two specific behaviours have been selected to represent pra-vrtti and ni-vrtti, the two patterns of psychological and behavioural functioning. These two are the most common patterns of behaviour. One is hot pursuit of whatever is deemed attractive to the senses while the other is a sensitive withdrawal from those that hurt from past experience. These are the two principle movements of 'Asmita' the false sense of identity. One movement is outward exertion (pra-vrtti) while the other is inward withdrawal (ni-vrtti). Asmita reacts to external objects (be it people or material things) in one of these two manners. If my past experience or impression of the person or object is pleasant I pursue passionately. If it was unpleasant or hurtful I withdraw due to hurt, or in extreme cases I may develop intense dislike or hatred for the person or object. Thus pursuit and withdrawal are actually behavioural expressions or reactionary patterns to citta vrttis that trigger these two movements. Our responses to things or people fit into either of these patterns to varying degrees depending on the object in front of us. This is the symbolism of Chanda (Pravrtti or Extroverted Pursuit) and Munda (Introverted Withdrawal).

***Note:** Chanda and Munda as Pra-vrtti and Ni-vrtti are not the same as Extraversion and Introversion. Extraversion and Introversion are psychological tendencies that are neither positive nor negative whereas the symbolism of Chanda and Munda is related more to raga*

*(infatuation or attachment) and dvesha (aversion or dislike), which are among the five afflicting kleshas in Yoga psychology.*

It is Canda and Munda who see the Devi first and carry this news to Shumbha. They tell Shumbha about the beautiful goddess whose radiance illuminates the Himalayas. They flatter Shumbha with an account of his riches and powers, all stolen from the gods. Playing upon Shumbha's vanity, they suggest that he who is all-wealthy and all-powerful surely must also possess this jewel among women. There is a misconception that pravrtti should be eschewed. At this level of sadhana we realise that nothing is good or bad in itself. Even those that are deemed negative can be transformed to serve us positively. This is the Shakta approach. "One must rise by that which one falls" as tantra affirms. Canda and Munda are asuric as long as they serve Asmita, the false self. But it is the selfsame Canda and Munda, the two movements of vrttis that initially turn our attention to the Devi (the Supreme Self). the same pravrtti that can pull us into bondage can initially attract us towards liberation, towards self-realisation, though initially only as another goal to be sought. Likewise the same nivrtti that repels us from things that can cause suffering can bring true detachment or dispassion or genuine vairagya. As long as pravrtti and nivrtti serve the false self (Shumbha), they manifest as Raga (infatuation) and Dvesha (aversion), as Canda and Munda the two asuras. As already stated it is 'Pravrtti-Nivrtti' or the movement of citta vrttis that initially attracts us to self-realization, though as one more jewel to be sought. That is why Chanda and Munda bring news of the Devi (Supreme Self) who illuminates the Himalayas (gross body).

Parvati taking abode in the Himalayas suggests that the gross body is not an inert thing but the abode of the Self that illumines the mind-body. Even the gods come down to the himalayas to extol the Divine Self. The mountain is not just an immovable lifeless object but the abode of the immovable Self, the unchanging consciousness. The goddess (Self) illumines not just the Himalayas (body) but the entire universe. Canda and Munda try to tempt Shumbha by telling him that there is something beyond buddhi. Though they haven't recognised the Devi (Self) entirely they are right in their initial impressions that She is unsurpassable, a jewel among the best jewels, one to be truly sought. All other riches and beauties pale in comparison to the Devi (Self). Though they are drawn to the Goddess they haven't yet recognised Her Divinity. Now that Shumbha's inherent craving to accumulate the best of everything has been kindled, he wishes to claim her as his own, just as we want to possess all that we find attractive and desirable.

Shumbha first sends the smooth talking messenger Sugriva to court her. But is it possible to realise the Self only through intelligent words? No. But that is what we do after acquiring some knowledge. Mere eloquence or knowledge of the scriptures cannot bridge the gap between the Self and the false self. The Devi asks for nothing less than a combat between the Self (Devi) and the false self (Shumbha). Obviously the false self stands no chance. He would die at her hands. Indirectly the Devi is asking for nothing less than a sacrifice of the pseudo-self. How can one obtain the Supreme Self without the death of the false self? As expected the smooth talking Sugriva fails. Then he changes his tactics. He threatens to drag her by the hair. By sheer habit, we attempt to grab even the Self by the same worldly tactics. If smooth talking and diplomacy fail, we resort to force! Grabbing the Devi by the hair is also reminiscent of our initial approach to spirituality. Initially we pull the new found jewel of divinity into the world as if it were another thing to be possessed! We see it as one more resource, like any other worldly resource. Instead of rising to the level of the Self, we try to pull the spiritual to the level of the material world. But none of this will work.

Next, Shumbha sends Dhumralochana to fetch the Devi, kicking and screaming if need be. Dhumralochana means 'one of smoky vision', thus denoting distorted perception. Can distorted perception succeed? False knowledge arising from faulty thinking or distorted perception disappears instantaneously in the presence of the Self (Devi) just as darkness cannot exist in the presence of light. A mere humkara of the Devi is enough to kill Dhumralochana. And this is what happens precisely.

When Dhumralochana's brute force fails, Shumbha loses all reason and sends Chanda and Munda with a huge army to bring back "that vile woman" in any way or in any condition whatever. Notice how Shumbha who was infatuated by "the jewel among women" now hates "that vile woman." This is how raga (infatuation) and dvesha (aversion) are related to each other. That which is very desirable today can become despicable tomorrow! This is the work of raga-dvesha, this is the work of Chanda-Munda! Though Chanda and Munda initially act as afflictors, there is a possibility that one can sublimate their energies into friendly energies. Instead of serving the false self (Shumbha) Chanda and Munda can be made to serve the Supreme Self. But they have to be killed first before they lose their asuric identity. Death at the hands of Kali is symbolic of transformation. Once transformed by the fiery power of Kali they cease to be asuras. Thereafter they are merely an expression of our psychological energies, neutral energies that take the colour of our thoughts/emotions.

It is neither pravṛtti nor nivṛtti that is the problem. Yoga is the restraint or stilling of citta vṛttis ("yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ", Yogasutra, 1. 2). And how can we achieve this stilling of citta vṛttis- only through constant practice and genuine detachment (vairagya), by constant practice (abhyasa) of non-reactivity (vairagya) (abhyāsavairāgyābhyām tannirodhaḥ, Yogasutra, 1. 12). Here is the key to the transformation of Chanda and Munda. The power of pravṛtti is channelized as abhyasa while nivṛtti can become true vairagya. This is how one can kill Chanda and Munda and transform their energies. In order to accomplish Goddess Ambika projects the terrible Kali from her own angry countenance.

Kali devours the armies of demons, falling upon them impetuously and slaughtering the powerful demons. Devouring some, crushing others, chewing most frightfully with her teeth, she pounds the entire army of the mighty and wicked asuras. The image of grinding teeth that is invoked thrice (7.11, 7.13, 7.15) reminds us of the wheel of Time (Kalachakra) that grinds all things to dust. Except for a change of gender Kali is none other than Kala, who is described by Arjuna in the vision of the cosmic form in the Bhagavad Gita (11. 24-31). Lord Krishna further confirms it by affirming that he himself is the world destroying Kala engaged in destroying the world (kālo'smi lokakṣayakṛtpravṛddho lokānsamāhartumiha pravṛttaḥ, 11. 32). Thus Kali is the same as Kala.

Kali accomplishes Her mission by severing the heads of Chanda and Munda and delivering them to Chandika who is none other than Ambika. Since Kali brought the heads of Chanda and Munda as battle trophies to the auspicious Chandika, Kali is henceforth famous as Chamunda. The destruction of Chanda and Munda needed the terrible Kali. But Shumbha and Nishumbha being more subtler spin-offs of intellect (buddhi) and ignorance (avidya), the auspicious and sattvic form of the Goddess is need to liberate them. That is why Kali tells Ambika, "In this sacrifice of battle, here have I brought you the heads of Chanda and Munda the great beasts. Shumbha and Nishumbha, you shall yourself slay." Once again we have the Goddess talking to Herself as both the terrible as well as auspicious forms are two different aspects of the selfsame Mother Goddess.

Upon news of the loss of two of his servants Canda and Munda, Shumbha marshals vast numbers of asuric hosts, clan by clan. Totally there are eight clans of demons who are marshalled by Shumbha. They are Udayudhas, Kambus, Kotiviryas, Dhaumras, Kalakas, Daurhrdas, Mauryas and the Kalakeyas. The eight asura clans represent the eight pasas. Pasa means 'bond'. According to Tantra Jiva or individual consciousness is bound by eight bonds or pasas. Jiva is limited by various constraints (kanchukas) and ashta pasas (eight bonds). When jiva becomes free of these constraints and limiting bonds, one becomes Shiva. One who is bound by *Pasa* (bond) is *Jiva*, while one who is free of the *Pasas* is *Sadashiva* ("*Pasa Yukta Bhavet Jiva Pasa Mukta Sadashiva*"). Sadhana is aimed at liberating individual consciousness (jiva) from these bonds. The boundless Consciousness is limited by these eight bonds giving rise to a false sense of self or 'Asmita'. That is why Shumbha (Asmita) calls upon the eight asura clans to fight on his behalf. This is the significance of the eight clans of asuras. The eight asura clans and the eight pasas or bonds are given below.

<i>Asura Sampradaya</i>	<b>Corresponding Ashta Pasa or Eight Bonds</b>
<i>Udayudhas</i>	<i>ghrna</i> : contempt
<i>Kambus</i>	<i>lajja</i> : shame
<i>Kotiviryas</i>	<i>bhaya</i> : fear
<i>Dhaumras</i>	<i>shanka</i> : doubt
<i>Kalakas</i>	<i>jugupsa</i> : disgust
<i>Daurhrdas</i>	<i>kula</i> : family, caste or group identity that becomes restrictive
<i>Mauryas</i>	<i>shila</i> : pride in one's morality that makes one judgmental towards others
<i>Kalakeyas</i>	<i>jati</i> : racial identity that leads to false pride and sense of superiority

Though some of the above bonds appear harmless on the face of it, potentially they can all be very restrictive and harmful. Some of these bonds such as fear, doubt, contempt and disgust are limiting influences on our consciousness and its expression. The remaining bonds such as group identity, racial identity and pride in one's morality lead to arrogance or a false sense of superiority over others. These eight bonds contribute to as well as sustain the false self. Unlike grosser demoniac traits like anger and greed that the aspirant can recognise more easily, the eight pasas are subtler and influence even those who have achieved some success in sadhana. Even those who are at a relatively more advanced state and have some achievements to their credit, can fall prey to these eight binding factors. One doesn't have to be predominantly rajasic or tamasic to fall prey to the influence of the eight pasas. Even sattvic people can slip into these limited ways of thinking or living. Pride in one's family, birth, race, spiritual lineage, morality, sense of shame, fear, doubt, contempt or disgust towards other spiritual approaches, are all highly limiting and can cause closed thinking. This is the tyranny of the eight clans of demons. To counter these eight asuric forces, Chandika (the Supreme Self) calls forth seven Shaktis. These seven Shaktis along with Kali counter the eight clans of asuras.

As the armies of the demons encircle Her, the Goddess multiplies Her forces calling forth seven Shaktis, who are seven aspects of our own consciousness. Thus Chandika and Kali, the twin aspects of the Goddess fighting the asuras, are now joined by the seven Shaktis of Brahma, Shiva, Kumara/Skanda, Vishnu, Indra, Varaha and Narasimha. There issued forth Chandika's own terrifying Shakti, who came to be known as Shivaduti since she sent Lord Shiva himself as her messenger to the asura lords. Together the nine Shaktis destroy the mighty asuras in no time. Who are these goddesses? Each goddess presides over a particular aspect of our consciousness and is linked to a graha (planet) in astrology. The nine Goddesses and their functions as aspects of Consciousness are given below.

<b>Goddess or Shakti</b>	<b>Graha</b>	<b>Aspect or Function of Consciousness</b>
<i>Chandika</i> or Her Shakti ' <i>Shivaduti</i> '	Sun	Soul or Self
<i>Maheshwari</i>	Moon	Mind
<i>Narasimhi</i>	Mars	Will
<i>Vaishnavi</i>	Mercury	
<i>Brahmani</i>	Jupiter	
<i>Aindri</i> or <i>Indrani</i>	Venus	
<i>Kali</i> or <i>Chamunda</i>	Saturn	
<i>Varahi</i>	Rahu	
<i>Kaumari</i>	Ketu	

The asura clans have been killed. The eight pasas have been cut asunder. Even Chanda and Munda are dead. With both Chanda (Pra-vrtti) and Munda (Ni-vrtti) dead, with both the outward and inward movements of citta vrttis having ceased, what remains to be done is only the stilling of the citta vrttis. Raktabija, who strides onto the battlefield after the death of Chanda and Munda, is none other than the citta vrttis. That Raktabija is symbolic of citta vrttis, becomes clear when we examine his unique power- whenever a drop of his blood falls to earth, another demon of identical size and strength springs up. In the battle, innumerable demons proliferate from Raktabija's spilt blood, terrorising and bewildering the gods. This is the nature of citta vrttis or thought processes. Each vrtti leads to one more as thoughts multiply in geometric progression. The same is true of desire too. Though the gods are bewildered by the ever-multiplying citta vrttis, Durga laughs knowingly. Is it better to conquer one desire by nipping it in the bud or to satisfy a thousand desires? This is a serious question that every aspirant needs to reflect over at some stage or the other.

Desire makes us human but it is also the source of all suffering. Desire is in the mind, as mental activity, as thoughts, as citta vrttis. When desire takes centre stage we often sit and watch helplessly wondering what we can do. How do we release from the endless cycle of desire, gratification or frustration? The gods too are bewildered and frustrated by the ever-multiplying Raktabija. Ambika knows the greatest truth of Yoga. Yoga is the stilling of citta vrttis (Yogasutra 1. 2). The best and only efficient method is to overcome the first desire, or first thought, rather than have to fight a thousand more. Conquering the original desire will release us from this endless cycle of desire, gratification, disillusionment and frustration. The all knowing Chandika instructs Kali to roam about on the battlefield quickly drinking the spilt drops of Raktabija's blood as she attacked him. As Kali drank Raktabija's blood simultaneously devouring the newly born demons who sprang from his spilt blood, the

bloodless Raktabija died promptly. Finally, only two demons remain- Shumbha and Nishumbha.

Shumbha and Nishumbha are the inseparable brothers. In a long battle sequence, the Goddess fights one-on-one first with Nishumbha, then with Shumbha, and again with Nishumbha. Nishumbha's character is not highlighted much so far apart from him being the younger brother of Shumbha, as dear as life itself to Shumbha. If Shumbha is 'Asmita' the false sense of self, Nishumbha is 'mamatva' or 'mamata'. Nishumbha is as dear as life itself to Shumbha because the identity of 'Asmita' the false sense of self, is shaped by its attachment (mamata) to body-mind, possessions, family and social roles, group affiliations, identity and beliefs too, among other adjuncts (upadhis). An upadhi is a defining attribute, a limiting qualification, a substitute, anything that maybe mistaken for something else. Thus while Shumbha represents subjective ego-awareness, Nishumbha represents the attachment to all its objective attributes. The Devi's battle sequence with the asura brothers is the inner conflict between the boundless Self and the limited sense of self or the subjective and limited notion of identity. Being inextricably linked the two demon brothers 'Asmita' and 'mamatva' fight, one rising up when the other is knocked out. If it is not 'Me' it is about 'Mine'. If it is not about 'Me' it could be about 'My' children or spouse or family or country or religion. But in the final reckoning, all this is of little value. As already explained earlier although it may seem that buddhi and purusha are identical, in reality they are not. The Self (Atman) is not the same as non-self (anatman). It is ignorance (avidya) that gives rise to the mistaken notion that the non-self is identical to the Self. Avidya is so powerful, pervasive and subtle, and is the root of all other kleshas. It is avidya that makes us mistake buddhi, which is also an upadhi, for the Self.

All these are appearances mistaken for reality- this is the actual definition for an upadhi. It becomes clear, when Nishumbha, in spite of all his apparent grandeur, is knocked senseless to the ground. Even so, he rises up in desperation, as a monster with ten thousand arms, suggestive of desperate grasping or clinging to the the countless fragments of all that one considers as one's own, the countless notions of 'mine' that sustain the notion of a separate self, that only serves to separate us from the Infinite One. This desperate instinctive grasping or clinging to the attachments of the limited self or ego-awareness is the final klesha, Abhinivesha. Abhinivesha is the most basic attachment to life that all living beings instinctually possess. It manifests as fear of death, as fear of death of one's individual existence, as fear of death of one's individuality, as fear that desperately clings to the innumerable fragments of non-self as the Self. All this is because of the misidentification of the Self with the ever-changing Prakrti or material nature.

As the Goddess (Self) penetrates the ten thousand armed monster's (Abhinivesha's) heart, the demon's essence appears one final time, pleading for the Goddess to stop, indicating how unrelentingly one clings because of this klesha. However no upadhi can last truly till the end before the Devi's sword of knowledge (gnana). Finally as She slays him, only Shumbha is left all alone, stripped of all the false things that he has identified himself with all along. With no other support Shumbha, the false self has to battle it out alone. The first six verses of the tenth chapter drive home the crux of the entire third episode.

Shumbha addresses the Devi as Durga (10.3), reminding us that She is the selfsame Goddess who killed Mahishasura earlier on in the second episode. Shumbha, the false self, is based on the erroneous notion of multiplicity and individuality. Shumbha sees only multiplicity and cannot recognise the unity of all existence. Perplexed by the multiple names used to refer to the Goddess- Devi, Chandika, Ambika, Kali, Chamunda, Brahmani, Maheshwari, Kaumari,

Vaishnavi, Varahi, Narasimhi, Aindri and a host of other names throughout the text, one might possibly forget that there is only one Goddess in the entire narrative. Shumbha too fails to recognise that the Devi is indeed one without a second. He refuses to recognise the unity of all existence as he chides Her for depending on the strength of others. Thereupon the Devi reveals that she is one without a second, saying “I alone exist in this universe. Who else is there besides me?” (10.5). This is the great dictum, the *Mahavakya* of the Devi Mahatmyam.

Following this proclamation of divine unity, She affirms that the many manifestations, are but projections of Her own power, as are all other forms she inhabits (10. 8). The truth of infinite Being and Oneness cannot be appreciated by the false self, for how can the false or individual self exist if it can realise Oneness? How can the limited notion of individuality exist alongside the unbounded, infinite Self? This is the delusional power of Mahamaya. Just as all the divine manifestations are projections of the Goddess, all the asuras are also projections of Asmita. Now that Shumbha is all alone, denuded of all the multiple projections of individual ego-awareness, the climax of the battle is between the limited self and the Supreme Self. But it is not a battle between equals though it looks like one on the face of it.

After exhausting all weapons, Shumbha and the Devi fight hand to hand in mid-air as never before, to the astonishment of the saints and sages! The combat with Shumbha is the rarest one, as Asmita is extremely elusive and stubborn. But the Devi’s Sattvic power can overcome the mightiest asuric force though after a short-lived play of power. Their battle is symbolic of a spiritual struggle that is beyond the realm of day to day existence. This is the significance of the metaphor of fighting in mid-air. Eventually the Devi kills him by piercing the asura with Her spear of knowledge (gnana). The death of Asmita, the false self, or limited ego-awareness, is nothing but the relinquishing of a limited identity. But in losing this limited identity one gains an unimaginably greater one- that of the Supreme Being. This final victory represents the realization of the true Self, the end of all multiplicity, the steady experience of Oneness, and the passage from an ever-changing becoming to Pure Awareness or Being. Finally one can now join the seer of the Svetasvatara Upanishad in affirming, “I know the unchanging, primeval One, the indwelling Self of all things, existing everywhere, all pervading, whom the wise declare to be eternal, free from birth” (3. 21).

॥ श्रीदुर्गासप्तश्लोकी ॥

|| śrīdurgāsaptaślokī ||

ॐ अस्य श्रीदुर्गासप्तश्लोकीस्तोत्रमहामन्त्रस्य

नारायण ऋषिः। अनुष्टुपादीनि छन्दांसि।

श्रीमहाकालीमहालक्ष्मीमहासरस्वत्यो देवताः।

श्री जगदम्बाप्रीत्यर्थं पाठे विनियोगः ॥

om asya śrīdurgāsaptaślokīstotramahāmantrasya  
nārāyaṇa ṛṣiḥ | anuṣṭupādīni chandāmsi |  
śrīmahākālīmahālakṣmīmahāsarvasvatyo devatāḥ |  
śrī jagadambāprītyarthe pāṭhe viniyogaḥ | |

ज्ञानिनामपि चेतांसि देवी भगवती हि सा ।

बलादाकृष्य मोहाय महामाया प्रयच्छति ॥ १ ॥

jñānināmapī cetānsi devī bhagavatī hi sā |  
balādākṛṣya mohāya mahāmāyā prayacchati | | 1 | |

दुर्गे स्मृता हरसि भीतिमशेषजन्तोः

स्वस्थैः स्मृता मतिमतीव शुभां ददासि ।

दारिद्र्यदुःखभयहारिणि का त्वदन्या

सर्वोपकारकरणाय सदाद्र चित्ता ॥ २ ॥

durge smṛtā harasi bhītimaśeṣajantoḥ  
svasthaiḥ smṛtā matimatīva śubhāṃ dadāsi |  
dāridryaduḥkhabhayahāriṇi kā tvadanyā  
sarvopakāraḥkaraṇāya sadārdra cittā | | 2 | |

सर्वं मंगल मांगल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थ साधिके ।

शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥ ३ ॥

sarva maṅgala māṅgalye śive sarvārtha sādḥike |  
śaraṇye tryambake gauri nārāyaṇi namo'stu te | | 3 | |

शरणागतदीनार्तपरित्राणपरायणे ।

सर्वस्यार्तिहरे देवि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥ ४ ॥

śaraṇāgatadīnārtaparitrāṇaparāyaṇe |  
sarvasyārtihare devi nārāyaṇi namo'stu te | | 4 | |

सर्वस्वरूपे सर्वेशे सर्वशक्ति समन्विते ।

भयेभ्यस्त्राहि नो देवी दुर्गे देवी नमोऽस्तु ते ॥ ५ ॥

sarvasvarūpe sarveśe sarvaśakti samanvite |  
bhayebhyastrāhi no devī durge devī namo'stu te || 5 ||

रोगानशेषानपहंसि तुष्टा रुष्टा तु कामान् सकलानभीष्टान् ।

त्वामाश्रितानां न विपन्नराणां त्वामाश्रिता ह्याश्रयतां प्रयान्ति ॥ ६ ॥

rogānaśeṣānapahaṁsi tuṣṭā ruṣṭā tu kāmān sakalānabhīṣṭān |  
tvāmāśritānān na vipannarāṇām tvāmāśritā hyāśrayatām prayānti || 6 ||

सर्वाबाधाप्रशमनं त्रैलोक्यस्याखिलेश्वरि ।

एवमेव त्वया कार्यमस्मद्वैरि विनाशनम् ॥ ७ ॥

sarvābādhāpraśamanam trailokyasyākhileśvari |  
evameva tvayā kāryamasmadvairi vināśanam || 7 ||

॥ इति दुर्गासप्तश्लोकी ॥

|| iti durgāsaptāślokī ||