

the mead, you fool! In a moment the gods will be howling at you when you die by my hand!" So speaking, the goddess flew up and trod on his throat with her foot, piercing him with her spear. Crushed by her foot, overcome by the power of that goddess, the demon came half-way out of his own mouth. Still battling in this way, he was felled by the goddess who cut off his head with her mighty sword. So that demon Mahiṣa, his army and his allies, who had so distressed the three worlds, were all annihilated by the goddess.

At Mahiṣa's death, all the gods and demons, mankind and all creatures living in the three worlds cried "Victory!" And when the entire army of the lamenting Daityas was annihilated, the whole host of the gods went into exultant rapture. The gods and the great celestial seers praised that goddess, while Gandharva lords sang aloud and hosts of Apsarases danced.

The Birth of Kālī and the Final Battle

As they had been commanded, the Daityas, led by Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, formed a four-fold army and sallied forth, their weapons raised aloft. They saw the goddess, smiling slightly, positioned on her lion atop the great golden peak of a mighty mountain. When they saw her, they made zealous efforts to seize her, while other demons from the battle approached her with bows and swords drawn. Then Ambikā became violently angry with her enemies, her face growing black as ink with rage. Suddenly there issued forth from between her eyebrows Kālī, with protruding fangs, carrying a sword and a noose, with a mottled, skull-topped staff, adorned with a necklace of human skulls, covered with a tiger-skin, gruesome with shriveled flesh. Her mouth gaping wide, her lolling tongue terrifying, her eyes red and sunken, she filled the whole of space with her howling. Attacking and killing the mighty demons, she devoured the armed force of the enemies of the gods. Seizing with one hand the elephants with their back-riders, drivers, warriors and bells, she hurled them into her maw. In the same way she chewed up warriors with their horses, chariots and charioteers, grinding them up most horribly with her teeth. One she grabbed by the hair of the head, another by the nape of the neck, another she trod underfoot while another she crushed against her chest. The mighty striking and throwing weapons loosed by those demons she caught in her mouth and pulverised in fury. She

ravaged the entire army of powerful evil-souled Asuras; some she devoured while others she trampled; some were slain by the sword, others bashed by her skull-topped club, while other demons went to perdition crushed by the sharp points of her teeth.

Seeing the sudden demise of the whole Daitya army, Caṇḍa rushed to attack that most horrendous goddess Kālī. The great demon covered the terrible-eyed goddess with a shower of arrows while Muṇḍa hurled discuses by the thousands. Caught in her mouth, those weapons shone like myriad orbs of the sun entering the belly of the clouds. Then howling horribly, Kālī laughed aloud malevolently, her maw gaping wide, her fangs glittering, awful to behold. Astride her huge lion, the goddess rushed against Caṇḍa; grabbing his head by the hair, she decapitated him with her sword. When he saw Caṇḍa dead, Muṇḍa attacked, but she threw him too to the ground, stabbing him with her sword in rage. Seeing both Caṇḍa and the mighty Muṇḍa felled, the remains of the army fled in all directions, overcome with fear.

Grabbing the heads of the two demons, Kālī approached Caṇḍikā and shrieked, cackling with fierce, demoniac laughter, "I offer you Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa as the grand victims in the sacrifice of battle. Now you yourself will kill Śumbha and Niśumbha!" Witnessing this presentation of the two great Asuras, the eminent Caṇḍikā spoke graciously to Kālī, "Since you have captured Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and have brought them to me, O goddess, you will be known as Cāmuṇḍā!" . . .

So speaking, the honorable goddess Caṇḍikā of fierce mettle vanished on the spot before the eyes of the gods. And all the gods, their enemies felled, performed their tasks without harassment and enjoyed their shares of the sacrifices. When Śumbha, enemy of the gods, world-destroyer, of mighty power and valor, had been slain in battle and the most valiant Niśumbha had been crushed, the rest of the Daityas went to the netherworld.

In such a way, then, does the divine goddess, although eternal, take birth again and again to protect creation. This world is deluded by her; it is begotten by her; it is she who gives knowledge when prayed to and prosperity when pleased. By Mahākālī is this entire egg of Brahmā pervaded, lord of men. At the awful time of dissolution she takes on the form of Mahāmārī, the great destructress of the world. She is also its unborn source; eternal, she sustains creatures in time. As Lakṣmī, or Good Fortune, she bestows wealth on men's homes in times of prosperity. In times of disaster she appears as Misfortune for their annihilation. When the goddess is praised and

worshiped with flowers, incense, perfume and other gifts, she gives wealth, sons, a mind set upon Dharma, and happiness to all mankind.

Bhadrakālī and the Thieves

Once a certain Vṛṣala king who wanted children undertook a human sacrifice to Bhadrakālī. By chance the sacrificial victim escaped and his trail was followed by the king's attendants in the middle of a murky night. Not finding the victim in the dark, they happened by accident upon the son of an eminent Aṅgiras priest sitting in the "hero" posture, guarding the fields from deer, wild pigs and other animals. Noticing this blameless man and thinking they were fulfilling their master's desire, they bound him with a rope and led him to the sanctuary of the goddess Caṇḍikā, their faces blooming with joy.

According to their custom, the thieves fed him, anointed him, dressed him in unwashed garments and decorated him with ornaments, oils, garlands, *tilakas*, and other adornments. Equipped with offerings of perfume, lights, wreaths, parched grain, shoots, sprouts and fruit, they made the human victim sit amid the paraphernalia of bloodshed in front of Bhadrakālī to the noisy accompaniment of songs, hymns, drums and cymbals.

Then the king of the Vṛṣala thieves, preparing to make sacrifice to the goddess Bhadrakālī with the blood of a human victim, drew out a sharp, tooth-edged sword that had been charmed with magic spells. When the goddess Bhadrakālī saw what was happening before her eyes, the illicit immolation of the peaceable son of a brahmin seer who was a friend to all creatures, she judged this to be the most despicable act of men who glory in murder, who willfully follow the path of error while disdaining the family of the blessed Kālavīra, their minds puffed up with the greed of possession, with natures full of *rajas* and *tamas*.

When she saw these Vṛṣalas preparing the sacrifice, the goddess Bhadrakālī instantly jumped out of her image with a blazing body that was utterly unendurable with Brahmā's splendor. Ebulliently manifesting herself with her retinue, her dreadful swollen face flashing with indignation, wrath and ferocity, with knotted eyebrows, curving fangs and copper-red eyes, she sprang forth in fury, with murderous intent and hideous laughter. With the self-same sword of the king, the goddess severed the heads of those wicked thieves, and

she and her troops drank greedily from their necks that were streaming with blood. Staggering from excessive drink, she and her retinue sang, cavorted and played ball with the rolling skulls.

Truly, the transgression of the spells of the great always produces such fruit as this. It is no great wonder, Viṣṇudatta, that, even with the loss of his own head imminent, this seer was unmoved. For there is nothing to fear from any quarter whatsoever for those supreme ascetics, for the devotees of the blessed lord Viṣṇu who approach his feet for protection with minds friendly to all beings. The knots of their hearts bound tight in recollection of the Self, they can endure even such calamities as the loss of life, yet remain free from enmity and ever vigilant. Such men are protected in all the various vicissitudes of their lives by the blessed lord himself, even by means of the choice weapons of the enemies of the gods themselves!

Sarasvatī and King Navaratha

Navaratha was a king continually intent on righteousness and gift-giving and utterly devoted to virtue. Once while out hunting he saw a ferocious Rākṣasa. Filled with great fear, O bulls of seers, he fled. Enraged, that mighty demon Duryodhana, looking like fire, ran after him, a spear in his huge hand. Terrorized, King Navaratha spied not far ahead of him a fine refuge, the well-protected sanctuary of Sarasvatī. Reaching it at top speed, the wise king saw before his eyes the goddess Sarasvatī herself, and saluted her with bowed head and folded hands. This conqueror of enemies praised her with reverent words and fell like a log to the ground, saying, "I have come to you for help! I worship the great chaste goddess who is before me, the divinity of speech, who is without beginning or end. I praise the womb of the world, the excellent Yoginī, the supreme spouse of the Golden Embryo, the three-eyed, moon-topped goddess! I honor her who knows supreme bliss, a portion of the highest consciousness, the embodiment of Brahman. Protect me, supreme goddess, who has come to you for refuge!

Meanwhile, the furious lord of the demons had approached the sanctuary of the goddess Sarasvatī to kill the king. Arrogant with power, with spear raised aloft, he prepared to enter the retreat of the mother of the three worlds, which shone like the moon. At the same time, a mighty creature that blazed like the sun at the end of the Age appeared and split open the demon's breast with his pike, knocking