

The Originality of *Devīmāhātmya*, Demonstrated in the Episode of the Appearance of Kauśikī

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The *Devīmāhātmya* (DM), an independent volume of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, is the precursory piece dealing with worship of the goddesses, conceiving them as *śakti*-s. It is almost certain that this volume was composed in the northern part of India during the period of 400 to 600 A. D. The DM is well constructed in both the matter and the form, in which it unites all the goddesses under the particular supreme goddess Ambikā or Caṇḍikā. In this paper I will examine the originality of DM, which, though based on myths in purāṇas, shows its particular character on many points. I will take the episode of the appearance of Kauśikī as an example.

In chapter 5 of the DM, the gods conquered by the demons Śumbha-Niśumbha recollect the goddess who have killed Mahiṣa, and ask for her help by offering her a song of praise. Hearing this, she appears in front of them again, slipping off from the skin (*kośa*) of Pārvatī, and is called Kauśikī. Pārvatī turns dark and is called Kālikā (5. 37-41). We should take notice of the change of Pārvatī's color here. When we refer to the last two verses of chapter 4, which tell us that Ambikā would be born again from Gaurī in order to kill Śumbha-Niśumbha, it is obvious that Pārvatī has transformed from Gaurī, the fair goddess, into Kālikā, the dark one. Kauśikī, on the other hand, is the fair goddess, as she was born from Pārvatī's fair skin. She is identical with Ambikā. And chapter 2 tells us that she has been given the brightness of the sun, and that she is the mass of gods' *tejas*-es.

Among some other purāṇas this episode appears as a part of the story of Tāraka, which is shared in the *Padmapurāṇa* (PP), the *Matsyapurāṇa*, and the *Skandapurāṇa* in common¹⁾. Brahmā orders Rātrī to enter the womb

of Menā, Pārvatī's mother, and dye the embryo dark. It results that Pārvatī is born into a dark goddess. Made fun of about her dark skin by her husband Śiva, she decides to go to Himālaya and perform religious austerity. This satisfies Brahmā, and he allows her to regain her own fair skin. The dark skin thrown off by her is turned into Kauśikī. Here, in contrast with the corresponding scene in the DM, Pārvatī changes from a dark goddess into a fair one. As the dark skin is the transformation of Rātrī herself, Kauśikī is identical with Rātrī, or the dark goddess.

Then, which of the two episodes above is nearer to the archetype? The Anukramanī on the Rātrīsūkta (*Rgveda* 10.127)²⁾ is regarded as a clue to this question; it seems to say that Kuśika-Saubhara composed this Rātrīsūkta, or they used to worship Rātrī with it as priests. This indicates the possibility of Rātrī's being called Kauśikī because of her close relation to the lineage of Kuśika. The literature in which "Kauśikī" as a goddess's name first appears is the episode of Kṛṣṇa's birth in the *Harivaṃśa* (H)³⁾. "Kauśikī" in this episode is an epithet of Nidrā, and it says that she is "as dark as the skin-color of Kṛṣṇa" (H 47.39). This Nidrā is identical with Rātrī, who is called Nidrā in Vaiṣṇava context and called Rātrī in other contexts. Considering this, we can recognize that "Kauśikī" was an epithet of Nidrā or Rātrī, and Kauśikī was a dark goddess. The PP is, therefore, nearer to the archetype than the DM with regard to the episode of Kauśikī's appearance.

The above leads us to another question why the composers of the DM reversed the color contrast between the two goddesses. They must have known that Kauśikī is identical with Nidrā, because in the DM 5.6 Kauśikī, when hearing the song of praise, is called "Viṣṇumāyā", which indicates the goddess Yoganidrā of Viṣṇu or Mahāmāyā found in chapter 1. Therefore they made the change intentionally. In the H it was already said that Kauśikī hears a prophecy by Viṣṇu that she would have her sanctuary in Mt. Vindhya and kill two demons Śumbha-Niśumbha there⁴⁾. The composers of the PP, by making Kauśikī's appearance totally dependent on Pārvatī's regaining her fair color, could make Kauśikī's all accomplishments

including the slaughter of the demons belong to Pārvatī, and make Kauśikī an inferior manifestation of Pārvatī, which I think was their intention. The next paragraph, in which Viraka praises Pārvatī calling her goddess who has the power to kill Śumbha-Niśumbha on a lion's back⁵, also shows their intention of making Kauśikī subject to Pārvatī. On the contrary, I believe, the composers of the DM succeeded in making Pārvatī subject to Kauśikī by reversing the contrast of colors, leaving Pārvatī ignorant of the whole situation. Moreover, Vindhyavāsini is described in the DM 11.36 as another decent of Ambikā in future. As a result Vindhyavāsini is distinguished from Kauśikī and the peculiarities of the former are cut off from Kauśikī except the slaughter of the two demons. In this way the composers of the DM could omit the local limitation of Mt. Vindhya and the relationship between Kauśikī and Kṛṣṇa found in the part of the H above mentioned.

Thus we have compared the DM with other purāṇas by taking the episode of Kauśikī's appearance as an example.⁶ From the above it follows that the composers of the DM granted their work a particular originality by creating their original goddess and by implying monotheism based on the female concept, *śakti*.

1) *Padmapurāṇa* Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa 41, 87-92. cf. *Matsyapurāṇa* 157, 13-19.; *Skandapurāṇa* 1, 2, 29, 45-53ab.

2) rātriḥ kuśikaḥ saubharo rātrir vā bhāradvājī rātristavaṃ gāyatram / J. Scheftelowitz, Die Apokryphen des Ṛgveda (Khilāni). Breslan, 1966, p. 112.

3) H 47, 47. This sentence says that "Kauśikī" is derived from the family name Kuśika. It supports the supposition with regard to the relation between Rātri and Kuśika.

4) H 48, 48-49. cf. H 65, 51-57.

5) *Padmapurāṇa* Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa 41, 113-114.; *Matsyapurāṇa* 158, 15-16.

6) This episode is said in the following too. *Vāmanapurāṇa* 28, 22-28.; *Śivapurāṇa* Umāsaṃhitā 47, 11-14.; *Vāyavīyasamhitā* 1.25.38-46.; *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* 5, 22, 43-23, 8.

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