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Retrofitting a Vedic Origin for a Classical Hindu Goddess

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Many Hindu deities as known from classical sources (i.e. from the epics, Purāṇas, and later religious literature and iconography) have a very slender profile in the Vedic texts, appearing in only a few passages and often represented in ways that seem peripheral to their full, classical personae. Ritualists and devotees steeped in that older literature took pains to connect those deities to Vedic mantras and rites, in order to validate them with the prestige of venerable orthodoxy as well as to provide a basis for Brahmin priestly roles in their worship. The case of the goddess Durgā is particularly striking in this respect, since her Vedic “footprint” is so small. This study carefully examines the Durgā Sūkta and related materials to show how Taittirīya and Ṛgveda Brahmins went about supplying a Vedic liturgy for Durgā worship. This account complements the one recently proposed to show how Atharvan priests in the service of rulers drew on Atharvavedic traditions to present Durgā as a patron goddess of arms and military strength.

INTRODUCTION

Bihani Sarkar has observed that the early history of Durgā worship has largely remained “*terra incognita*,” and although progress has been made in the last two decades, only some of the tenuous threads connecting the goddess to the Vedic tradition have only partially been teased out.¹ Alexis Sanderson (2004: 255–62, esp. nn. 70–71), for example, has called attention to the appearance of the Navarātri festival as a ritual of worshipping Durgā or Bhadrakālī, on the sword and along with the weapons and insignia of the king, performed by the royal chaplain (*purohita*) to give the king victory, as prescribed in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* (2.158.1–8), the *Nilamatapurāṇa* (780–82), and the *Āṅgirasakalpa*. This coincides with a lustration of the elephants and horses attested in *Atharvavedaparīśiṣṭa* 17.1.1–8 and 18.1–3. The office of *purohita*, as we know both from Brahmanical normative sources² and from inscriptions,³ was one that was supposed to be occupied by a Brahmin expert in the *Atharvaveda*, in order that he might draw on Atharvan ritual means to empower and protect the king; hence the emphasis on Durgā’s role in military matters.

Author’s note: A version of this material was presented as a paper for the Navarātri Seminar during the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, November 18, 2018. I have benefited from comments by Ute Hüsken, Michael Brattus Jones, Caleb Simmons, and Saran Suebsantiwongse.

1. Sarkar 2012: 325; post-Vedic early sources have been discussed by Sarkar 2017, Yokochi 2004, and Couture and Schmid 2001: *Harivaṃśa* (57.35–36), *Mahābhārata* (4.5.29ff. and 6.22.6ff.), the old *Skandapurāṇa* (60.46), *Kādambārī* (pp. 30–31), and *Harṣacarita* (p. 126).

2. Beginning with *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 1.9.9, *Yājñavalkya Dharmasāstra* 1.309 (313 in older editions), and *Atharvaveda Parīśiṣṭas* 8.1.3 and 21.6.1. For further textual citations, see also Sanderson 2007: 204–5, and nn. 28 and 29.

3. For examples, see the Neulpur copper-plate grant of Śubhākaradeva, eighth or ninth century (Banerji 1919–20; Tripathy 2000; Furui 2009: 327, ll. 25–26; 328, ll. 39–41), the Suvarṇakārikādaṇḍa copper-plate II of ca. 876/877 (Mukherji 1997–99, 2000; Furui 2009), the Chandravati charter of 1093 (Sahni 1917–18), and the Goa copper-plate grant of Tribhuvanamalla of 1107 (Khare 1951; Desai 1953–54 [1958]). These are discussed by Schmiedchen 2007: 361–69 (see nos. 12, 15b, 19, and 21 in her appendices I and III).

This Atharvan role for Durgā is extended by identifying her with the figure Āsurī, who shares the name of (and thus personifies) the black mustard seed. The *āsurikalpa* offerings make her the divine recipient in the “six hostile rites,” important ritual services that the Atharvans provided to rulers (*Atharvavedaparīśiṣṭa* 35, *Paippalādavaśāṣaṭkarmapaddhati*; Magoun 1889). Sanderson (2007: 211 n. 45) explains:

Āsurī is already present in Atharvavedic tradition in the Āsurikalpa of *Atharvavedaparīśiṣṭa* 35. Indeed the latter, or a version of it, is probably what is mentioned in *Mahābhāṣya* on 4.1.19 under the name *āsurīyaḥ kalpaḥ*. The *Parīśiṣṭa* gives the Mantra used here in the Āṅgīrasa collection but without a goddess of this name and no liturgical elements borrowed from or prefiguring the Tantric. There and in the Āṅgīrasa text *āsurī* is the name of the Indian Black Mustard plant *Sinapis ramosa* Roxb. (MAGOUN 1889, pp. 171–172), which is ground into a meal out of which an effigy of the enemy is fashioned as the focus of hostile sorcery, being smeared with ghee, chopped up, and offered in the sacrificial fire (35.1.6–7: *hantukāmo hi śatrūṃś ca vaśīkurvaṃś ca bhūpatīn | āsurīślakṣṇapīṣṭājyaṃ juhuyād ākṛtiṃ budhaḥ | arkendhanāgnīm prajvālya chittvāstreṇākṛtiṃ tu tām | pādāgrato 'ṣṭasahasraṃ juhuyād yasya vaśy asau*). In the Āṅgīrasa text all this is retained but the character of the ritual is transformed by superimposing a Tantric cult of a goddess who bears the plant's name and is equated with Durgā.

Along similar lines, the *Śivadharmasāstra*, one of the earliest works (late sixth century) composed to teach lay Śaivism and especially to inculcate royal patronage of Śaivism, includes a long chapter detailing many varieties of pacification rites (*śānti*) designed to appease hostile forces of all sorts and secure the kingdom. This chapter assigns Durgā worship to the ninth day of the lunar cycle (6.129cd): “the very terrifying Ninth Tithi, which is proclaimed to belong to Durgā!” (*navamī tithir atyugrā durgāyāḥ parikīrtitā*).⁴ The ninth continues to be associated with Durgā, in particular the bright ninth of Āśvina, the last day of the fall Navarātri festival.

LOOKING FOR DURGĀ IN OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACES IN THE YAJURVEDA AND ṚGVEDA

In the Yajurvedic ritual sphere, by contrast, Durgā appears in quite a different context, which has not attracted as much attention. Durgā is invoked there alongside other female divine powers (notably Manasvatī) in expiations for ritual defects in domestic rites, according to two codes that appear to reflect “late” redaction (*Baudhāyanagrhyasūtra* 4.8.2, *Āgñiveśyagrhyasūtra* 9.2).

A likely first-millennium CE supplement to the Baudhāyana school's code, the *Baudhāyanagrhyasēśasūtra* (BGŚS 3.3), prescribes monthly votive worship of Durgā (*durgākalpa*) as a means of obtaining blessings. Durgā, described as “Lady” (*bhagavatī*), is invoked into her image as “Āryā Raudrī” (*om āryāṃ raudrīm āvāhayāmīti āvāha*). The image is presented a grass seat and a sacred thread, and then bathed and honored with scents, flowers, incense, and lamps, and praised with the eleven names Āryā, Raudrī, Mahākālī, Mahāyoginī, Suvarṇapuṣpī, Vedasamkīrtī, Mahāyajñī, Mahāvaiṣṇavī, Mahābhagavatī, Manogamī, Śaṅkadhāriṇī. These names invoke an ecumenical theology encompassing both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava conceptions of divinity. As with other image-worship liturgies in this text, the mantras are “old standards” drawn from the Taittirīya Yajurveda canon (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, and *Āraṇyaka*), interspersed with post-Vedic ritual elements.⁵

Then fire-offering material (*havis*) is first presented “to Bhagavatī Durgā Devī” with the Śāvitrī stanza—the emblem of Vedic piety—and then the remainder is offered in the fire,

4. Bisschop 2018: 44, 106, 170.

5. Lubin 2016 analyzes the similarly hybrid character of the *pūjā* rites prescribed for Śiva and Viṣṇu in this text.

using the same eleven names. Further mantras are recited, beginning with a grouping there called the “Five Durgas” (*pañca durgāḥ*, so named in *BGŚS* 1.15.1 as well as in 3.3; the “durgas” shown here in bold):

jātavedase sunāvāma somam arātīyato ni dahāti vedaḥ |
*sa naḥ parśad ati **durgāṇi viśvā** nāveva sindhum duriṭāty agniḥ || 1*
tām agnivarṇāṇāṁ tapasā jvalantīm vairocanīm karmaphaleṣu juṣṭām |
***durgāṁ devīm** śaraṇam ahaṁ pra padye sutarasi tarase namaḥ || 2*
*agne tvam pārayā navyo asmānth svastibhir ati **durgāṇi viśvā** |*
pūs ca prthivī bahulā na urvī bhavā tokāya tanayāya śamyoh || 3
***viśvāni no durgahā** jātavedaḥ sindhum na nāvā duriṭāti parśi |*
agne atrivan manasā grṇāno 'smākaṁ bodhy avitā tanūnām || 4
prtānājītaṁ sahamānam ugram agniḥ huvema paramāt sadhasthāt |
*sa naḥ parśad ati **durgāṇi viśvā** kṣāmad devo ati duriṭāty agniḥ || 5*
pratno ṣi kam īḍyo adhvaṛeṣu sanāc ca hotā navyaś ca satsi |
svām cāgne tanuvaṁ pīprayasvāsmabhyaṁ ca saubhagam ā yajasva || 6
gobhir juṣṭam ayujo niṣiktaṁ tavendra viṣṇor anu saṁcarema |
nākasya pṛṣṭham abhi saṁvasāno vaiṣṇaviṁ⁶ loka iha mādayantām || 7 || 10.1.16⁷

1. For Jātavedas we will press soma. He will burn down the property of the hostile. He will carry us across all difficult passages, across difficult transits, as if with a boat across a river—Agni. (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014)
2. Her who has the color of fire (Agni), blazing with ardor, radiant, pleased with the fruits of rites, the goddess Durgā (Difficult-to-Reach), do I approach for protection. Reverence to the swift-crossing one, O very swift savior (*sutarasi*)!
3. O Agni, deliver us anew to the far shore, beyond all hardships, with your blessings. And become a wide fortress, thick and broad, for us, and luck and lifetime for our progeny and posterity. (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014)
4. Carry us across all difficult depths and difficult ways, o Jātavedas, as if across a river by a boat. O Agni, being sung with reverence as if by Atri, become the helper of our bodies. (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014)
5. The fight-conquering, overpowering Agni do we call with songs from the highest station; may he pass us across all difficult things; may divine Agni stride (?) across arduous things. (tr. Whitney 1905)
6. For as the ancient one to be invoked at the ceremonies, the Hotar both from of old and also anew, take your seat. Give pleasure to your own body, o Agni, and win good fortune for us through sacrifice. (tr. Jamison and Brereton 2014; here: “For you are the ancient one...”)
7. O Indra, may we pass over to you the Pervading (*viṣṇu*)—[you] satisfied with cattle, peerless, anointed, dwelling upon the back of the sky! Here in the world, may they gladden Vaiṣṇavī.

These stanzas, more commonly known as the Durgā Sūkta, appear together in the very last section of the late-Vedic *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, the final (tenth) book of which is transmitted independently among Atharvans as the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (*MNU* 6 / 164–77).⁸ Sāyaṇa’s comment on the beginning of *TĀ* 10 notes: “Just as the seventh and eighth chapters in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* are referred to as appendix chapters (*khilakāṇḍas*) by teachers, likewise this *Yājñikī Upaniṣad* too, also called *Nārāyaṇīyā*, has the form of an appendix, since it bears the marks of one. Whatever in the three divisions [of the Veda] remains to be said

6. The *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (*MNU*), in Varenne’s edition (1960), reads *saṁvasānaṁ vaiṣṇavaṁ*.

7. Per the Bibliotheca Indica edition = 10.64–70 in the Bibliotheca Sanscritica edition.

8. Numbering as per the editions by Jacob 1888 and Varenne 1960, respectively.

relating to ritual, devotion, and *brahman*, all that is labeled as an appendix because of its miscellaneous character.”⁹

By “miscellaneous character” Sāyaṇa means the diversity of topics and deities addressed, but the description applies just as well to the content of this particular so-called hymn. Works such as the *Yājñikī/Mahānārāyaṇa*, the *Śvetāśvatara*, and the *Nīlarudra* date from a period when litanies were assembled, largely out of older Vedic parts, to honor minor Vedic deities who were gaining prominence, probably due to their having been identified with folk deities whose *pūjā*-style worship needed to be provided with authentic Vedic *mantras*. The Durgā Sūkta consists of seven stanzas drawn mainly from the *Ṛgveda*:

1. *RV* 1.99(.1)¹⁰
2. *RVkh* 10.127.12 (interpolated)
3. *RV* 1.189.2 (= *TS* 1.1.14.4)
4. *RV* 5.4.9 (= *TB* 2.4.1.5)
5. *AVŚ* 7.63.1 (*duritāny*: v.l. *duritāty TB*)
6. *RV* 8.11.10 = *AVŚ* 6.110.11 (both: *pratno hi*)
7. no parallel

Each of the first five stanzas includes some form of the word *durga*,¹¹ which seems to have been sufficient to justify its inclusion—precisely the principle on which the *Nīlarudra Upaniṣad* (a.k.a. *Sūkta*) was constructed (Lubin 2007), as well as many other late-Vedic litanies, including the Śrī Sūkta (Scheftelowitz 1921). Similarly, Geslani (2018: 35–39) argues that the *Kauśikasūtra* included several hymns in its groups of *śānti* mantras on the basis of their containing the likely unrelated term *śam*. The fifth stanza is itself named the “Durgā Sūkta” in some Atharvan manuscripts.¹² All of these occurrences of *durga*- are in the neuter plural, with *durgahā* in v. 4 representing the short Vedic neuter plural: vv. 1, 3, 4, and 5. The term thus does not denote a deity, but is a common noun meaning ‘difficulty, distress’. These stanzas, along with the sixth, are likely the oldest ones, and are all addressed to Agni Jātavedas, the ritual fire.

The second stanza, which is the only one to mention a goddess Durgā (*durgāṃ devīm*), is known to us also from a supplemental verse (*khila*) appended to *RV* 10.127, the famous Rātrī Sūkta (hymn to the Night).¹³ Like Agni in the other verses, Durgā is besought for aid against troubles:

tām agnivarṇāṃ tapasā jvalantīm vairocānīm karmaphaleṣu juṣṭām |
durgāṃ devīm śaraṇam ahaṃ pra padye sutarasi tarase namaḥ || 2

9. Pp. 752–53 in the BI edition: *yathā bṛhadāranyake saptamāṣṭamādhyāyau khilakāṇḍatvenācāryair udāhṛtau tathā nārāyaṇīyā vyākhyā yājñiky upaniṣad api khilakāṇḍarūpā tallakṣaṇopetatvāt | karmopāsanabrahmakāṇḍeṣu triṣv api yad yad vaktavyam avaśiṣṭaṃ tasya sarvasyābhidhānena prakīrṇakarūpaṃ khilatvam*; cf. the naming of the section at the end of the Durgā Sūkta: *iti sāyaṇācāryaviracite mādhamiye vedārthaprakāṣe yajurāranyake daśamaprapāṭhake nārāyaṇīyāparanāmadheyayuktāyām yājñikyām upaniṣadi prathamō ’nūvākaḥ |*

10. See *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtram* (*VaikhSmS*; Caland 1927) 1.4 and 6.17.

11. Although *durgahā* in v. 4 is etymologically distinct from *durga*, belonging to an independent stem *durgaha*, it has clearly been analyzed as a compound of *durga*-. I thank Stephanie Jamison for drawing my attention to this form.

12. E.g., National Archives, Kathmandu, no. 4.2226 = NGMPP A 588/17; see Lubin 2007: 93–94 (re ms. E).

13. Although Scheftelowitz’s edition of the *Ṛgveda Khilas* (1906: 110–12) has fourteen stanzas in this *khila* hymn, the twelfth ends with a doubling of the last words, which marks a break. The second line of this “verse” appears to be proper.

For protection I approach the goddess Durgā (Difficult-to-Reach), who has the color of fire (Agni), blazing with ardor, radiant, pleased with the fruits of rites—reverence to the swift-crossing one, O very swift savior (*sutarasi*)!

The commentary on the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* that is attributed to Sāyaṇa explains the sequence by noting its purpose: “Now are stated mantras to be recited for the removal of what is undesirable ...” (*athāniṣṭaparihārārthena japyā mantrā ucyante*, BI edition, pp. 787–88). As Sāyaṇa recognizes, most of these *ṛc*-verses concern Agni, the ritual fire, as remover of bad things. Only the second addresses a female divinity called Durgā. Sāyaṇa explains it thus:¹⁴

dvitīyām ṛcam āha | tām agnivarṇām tapasā... sutarasi tarame namaḥ iti | yeyaṃ navadurgā kalpādiṣu mantrasāstreṣu prasiddhā, tām durgām devīm, ahaṃ śaraṇaṃ prapadye | kīdrśīm, agnisamānavarṇām, tapasā svakīyena santāpena, jvalantīm asmacchatrūn dahantīm, viśeṣena rocate svayam eva prakāśata iti virocana(h) paramātmā, tena dṛṣṭatvāt vairocaniṃ, karmaphaleṣu svargaśu putrādiṣu nimittabhūteṣu, juṣṭām upāsakasevitām | he sutarasi suṣṭu saṃsārataraṇe heto devi, tarase tārayatryai tubhyaṃ, namaḥ astu ||

It states a second *ṛc*-verse: *tām agnivarṇām ...* This ninefold Durgā [viz., Kumārikā, Trimūrti, Kāyānī, Rohiṇī, Kālī, Caṇḍikā, Śāmbhavi, Durgā, Bhadrā] is celebrated in mantra-works dealing with ritual and so forth. “I approach that goddess Durgā (Difficult-to-Reach) for protection.” What is she like? Having the same color as the fire (Agni), “blazing” (*jvalantīm*) = burning up our enemies, “with ardor” = with her very own ascetic fervor (*santāpena*). *Virocana* (the radiant, the sun) means the one who shines by himself, being especially radiant, i.e., the Supreme Self; [she is] *vairocani* because she is perceived by him. “Pleased” = attended by worshippers, “with the fruits of rites” = with those [acts] that aim at gaining heaven, cattle, sons, etc. O “very swift savior” = O well-praised goddess, means of crossing over the stream of rebirths! To you, “swift-crossing one” = savior, may there be “reverence”!

Sāyaṇa omits to comment at all on the final, seventh stanza, which suggests that it was absent from the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* as it was known to him. Moreover, it has no known parallels in the Vedic literature. Whatever its authenticity, its presence in the hymn may be due to a mention of Vaiṣṇavī, taken it seems as a feminine divine epithet.¹⁵ (Jacob’s 1888 edition of the *MNU* has a different verse in its place: *parastād yaśo guhāsu mama suparṇapakṣāya dhīmahi | śatabāhunā punar ajāyata suvo rājā sadhasthā trīṇi ca || MNU 6.8*, found only in Jacob’s mss. DEF [F: *sadhasthāt*].)

The only parallel for the Durgā Sūkta’s second stanza—which is the only one to mention *durgā devī*—is a stanza found in a few manuscripts of *Ṛgveda Khilas (RVKh)* 4.2, which supplements the famous Rātrī Sūkta of the *Ṛgveda* (10.127). Many of the *Ṛgveda Khilas* are old enough to be known to Yāska, who in fact cites *RVKh* 4.2.1 at *Nirukta* 9.29. However, the stanza appearing also in the Durgā Sūkta occurs in a series interpolated into the *khila*—a sort of *khila* to the *khila*. These stanzas (4.2.5–14) constitute a miniature liturgy to Durgā and end with a *phalaśruti* (announcement of the fruits of reciting them) that names the liturgy the “Durgā Stava,” and implicitly justifies its connection with the Rātrī Sūkta:

stoṣyāmi prayato devīm śaraṇyām bahvr̥capriyām |
śahasrasaṃmitām durgām jātavedase sunavāma somam || 5

14. Lemmas from the mantras are shown in boldface in the Sanskrit and in quotation marks in the translation.

15. Varenne’s edition of the *MNU* includes this stanza, occurring only in ms. *ān*, with the reading: *saimvasānam vaiṣṇavaṃ*.

*śāntyarthaṃ taddvijātīnām ṛṣibhiḥ samupaśritāḥ*¹⁶ |
ṛgvede tvam samutpannārātīyato ni dahāti vedāḥ || 6
 ye tvam **devi** prapadyanti brāhmaṇā **havyavāhanīm** |
avidyā bahuvidyā vā sa nah parśad ati durgāṇi viśvā || 7
 ye agnivarṇāṃ śubhāṃ saumyāṃ kīrtayiṣyanti ye dvijāḥ |
tān tārayati durgāṇi nāveva sindhum duritāty agniḥ || 8
durgeṣu viṣame ghore samgrāme ripusaṃkaṭe |
agnicoranipāteṣu duṣṭagrahanivārane duṣṭagrahanivāraṇy oṃ namaḥ || 9
durgeṣu viṣameṣu tvam saṃgrāmeṣu vaneṣu ca |
mohayitvā prapadyante teṣāṃ me abhayaṃ kuru teṣāṃ me abhayaṃ kurv oṃ namaḥ || 10
*keśinīm*¹⁷ sarvabhūtānāṃ pañcamīti ca nāma ca |
sā mām samāṃ diśāṃ devī sarvataḥ parirakṣatu sarvataḥ parirakṣatu oṃ namaḥ || 11
tām agnivarṇāṃ tapasā jvalantīm vairocānīm karmaphaleṣu juṣṭām |
durgāṃ devīm śaraṇam ahaṃ pra padye sutarasi tarase namaḥ sutarasi tarase namaḥ || 12
 [phalaśruti and ritual instructions:]

durgā durgeṣu sthāneṣu śaṃ no **devīr** abhiṣṭaye |
 ya imaṃ durgāstavāṃ puṇyaṃ rātrau rātrau sadā paṭhet || 13
 rātrīḥ kuśikāḥ saubharo rātrir vā bhāradvājī rātristavaṃ gāyatram |
 rātrīsūktaṃ japeṇ nityaṃ tatkāla upapadyate || 14

5. I will praise with devotion the **protective Goddess beloved to Ṛgvedins**, Durgā the thousand-fold. We will press Soma for Jātavedas! (?)
6. In order to pacify [dangerous forces] for those “twice-born,” you, relied upon by sages, arose in the Ṛgveda. He will burn down the property of the hostile.
7. Those Brahmins who approach you, **O Goddess who conveys offerings**, whether they are unlearned or well learned. He (!) will carry us across all difficult passages.
8. Those “twice-born” who will praise the fire-colored, bright, kindly one, Agni helps them get past difficulties, across difficult transits, as if with a boat across a river.
9. She (?) hinders the reach of bad things,¹⁸ in case of **difficulties**, rough ground, fright, battle, encounter with enemies, being beset by fire or thieves. (*pāda d bis*) *Oṃ namaḥ!*
10. In case of difficulties, adversity, battles, and forests, [people] approach [you] when they are in confusion. Protect me from those! (*pāda d bis*) *Oṃ namaḥ!*
11. May she—called Long-Haired [like Rudra] and of all beings the Fifth—may that Goddess protect me on all sides! (*pāda d bis*) *Oṃ namaḥ!*
12. For protection I approach the **goddess Durgā** (Difficult-to-Reach), who has the color of fire (Agni), blazing with ardor, radiant, pleased with the fruits of rites—reverence to the swift-crossing one, O very swift savior (*sutarasi*)! (*pāda d bis*)
- 13–14. **Durgā** (will aid one?) in all difficult places—O divine [waters], bless us for assistance!—who would always recite this auspicious Durgā Stava night after night.
 [anukramaṇī-type classification of deity = Night, sage = Kuśika, meter = Gāyatrī, etc.] One should continually repeat the Rātrī Sūkta whenever it is suitable.

This Durgā Stava was certainly added after the composition of the *Khilānukramaṇī*, which specifies that *RVKh* 4.2 contains only four stanzas (i.e., vv. 1–4). Another clue to its late date is the use of the terms *dvijāti* and *dvija* (vv. 6 and 8). I pointed out in 2005, and Patrick Olivelle subsequently showed in more detail,¹⁹ that these technical terms were introduced only in the Dharmasūtras in connection with the newly devised “āśrama system.” Hence these

16. Read: *samupaśritā*?

17. Read: *keśinī*.

18. Read: *duṣṭagrahanivāraṇī*.

19. Lubin 2005: 87–88 and n. 23; Olivelle 2012.

stanzas cannot be older than the mid-third century BCE, and in fact are more likely at least a century or two younger.

The use of these ideologically marked terms is especially notable given the emphasis in vv. 5–8 on Durgā’s protection of fire-offering Ṛgvedic Brahmins whether they are learned or not (v. 7). This too is a clue that the goddess is being invoked here not to protect king and kingdom but the interests of the ritualists themselves. Patronage of Brahmins through gifts of food and land was often justified on the grounds of their learning and other professional virtues; here their ritually marked social status is asserted to be a sufficient basis for Durgā’s divine assistance.

Another connection between the two Durgā litanies is more cryptic. The final *pāda* of each of the first four stanzas of the interpolated Durgā Stava repeats one of the four *pādas* of the first stanza of the Durgā Sūkta (*pādas* a, b, c, and d, respectively, in order; underlined in the text above). This poetic jugglery—somewhat in the manner of an inept villanelle—explains the impression of *non sequitur* in these verses.

The two litanies also illustrate two steps in the process of constructing a Vedic mantra foundation for the Durgā cult—much as the *Śvetāśvatara* did for Rudra. Durgā emerges as a fiery female divine power associated with Agni in his protective role—fierce and austere, but tender toward her devotees. Little wonder that these mercurial and implicitly dangerous figures should be linked in later mythology.

CONCLUSION

In these Yajurvedic and apocryphal Ṛgvedic sources, we find Durgā in a context quite different from the military and royal milieu of the *Atharvaveda*. At first, she is almost conflated with Agni, or depicted as one of his forms, especially in his protective role, but she is also addressed under the names of a number of auspicious goddesses and as the consort of Rudra. The titles *bhagavatī* and *āryā* resonate with queenly dignity and Vedic orthodoxy, as do her association with the sacrificial fire and her special relationship with the “twice-born.” By the time we come, in perhaps the first centuries CE, to the *Baudhāyana Gṛhyaśeṣasūtra*’s Vedicized image ritual, she has become a wholly mild-mannered, blessing-bestowing, orthodox Lady, at home with Śrī and the consort-goddesses of polite society.

In sum, we can distinguish two late-Vedic treatments of the goddess. There is an Atharvan one, which aligns her with the repertoire of the royal chaplain (*purohita*) and rites to augment the military strength of a king, as Sanderson has shown. Here we have noted a different, Taittirīya and secondarily late-Ṛgvedic, development that invokes her in Smārta expiations and, later, image cult—the latter largely an outgrowth of the former, as Marko Geslani has argued (2011, 2018). These Brahmin priestly authors fashioned a sort of Vedic “backstory” for what was likely a folk goddess, by associating her with Vedic mantras and epithets, some authentically old, plus others in a similar style but of more recent vintage. In the examples reviewed here, the old mantras were retroactively interpreted as (or mistaken for) allusions to the goddess, based on a hunch that a key word in the mantras was the basis of her name and that the entreaties directed to Agni must apply likewise to Durgā.

APPENDIX: HARTING’S TRANSLATION OF BGŚS 3.3

Now we shall explain the rite (of the worship) of Durgā.

Every month, in the forenoon of the day on which the moon stands in conjunction with the Kṛttikās, placing ready the requisites (for the worship, viz.) the sacred thread and red lotus flowers, preparing with cowdung a quadrangular *sthaṇḍila*, ‘a bull’s hide’ in size, sprinkling

it, being cloaked with purity, he should invoke Bhagavatī, (reciting the verse), ‘jātavedase’, etc. (TĀ, X, 1, 16), (and with the formula) ‘Om, I invoke the noble consort of Rudra’.

Having thus invoked her, he offers (her) a bunch of Kuśa grass (as a seat, reciting the verse), ‘tām agnivarṇām’, etc. (TĀ, X, 2, 1).

He offers (her) the sacred thread (with the verse), ‘agne tvam pārayā’, etc. (TS, I, 1, 14, m), (and then) bathes her, (reciting the) three (verses), ‘āpo hi ṣṭhā mayobhuvah’, etc. (TS, IV, 1, 5, b), the four (verses), ‘hiraṇyavarṇāḥ’, etc. (TS, V, 6, 1, a), (and) the chapter, ‘pavamānaḥ’, etc. (TB, I, 4, 8).

Having bathed (her), he worships her with the eleven names, ‘to Āryā, to Raudrī, to Mahākālī, to Mahāyoginī, to Suvarṇapuṣpī, to Vedasaṃkīrti, to Mahāyajñī, to Mahāvaiṣṇavī, to Mahābhagavatī, to Manogamī, to Śāṅkhadhārīṇī’, (and) with perfume, flowers, incense, and a lamp.

Having worshipped (her) with these names (in the formula), ‘Adoration to goddess so-and-so; adoration to goddess so-and-so’, he offers an oblation, (reciting) the Sāvitrī, (and with the formula), ‘To the adorable goddess Durgā I offer this oblation’.

Offering the remainder as a burnt-oblation, he should mutter the five Durgā (verses; i.e., ‘jātavedase’, etc.; TĀ, X, 64–68), and ten times (the formula), ‘svasti’. He should mutter (also the verses beginning with) ‘jāto yad agne’ (TS, I, 5, 11, e), ‘vaṣat te viṣṇo’ (TS, II, 2, 12, r), ‘vastoṣ pate’ (TS, III, 4, 10, a or b), ‘evā vandasva’ (TB, II, 5, 8, 4), ‘ā no niyudbhiḥ’ (TB, II, 8, 1, 2), ‘hiraṇyavarṇo abhayaṃ kṛṇotu’ (TB, II, 8, 4, 1), ‘aśvāvatīm’ (TS, IV, 2, 6, o), ‘tvam varuṇa uta’ (TB, III, 5, 2, 3), ‘bṛhaspate yuvam indraś ca vasvaḥ’ (TB, II, 5, 6, 3), ‘svasti na indro vṛddhaśravāḥ’ (TĀ, I, 1, 1), with (?) the eleven chapters (beginning), ‘śam ca me mayāś ca me’ (TS, IV, 7, 3).

Having removed the oblation (while reciting) the Sāvitrī, (and with the formula), ‘I remove the oblation for the adorable goddess Durgā’, he should give the remainder to Brāhmaṇas.

During a year he should worship (her in this way).

‘All desires will be fulfilled (of one who acts thus).’

Thus speaks the venerable Baudhāyana.

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