

# Victorious Durga, The Buffalo Slayer

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Before you the gods humbly bow.  
Your arm has never known defeat.  
You are the wisdom of the Book of Books.  
*How came you to appear,  
Robed in a tiger skin, standing  
on the black head of a wild buffalo...?*<sup>1</sup>

One of the primary deities of Hinduism is the Goddess, the embodiment of shakti or cosmic energy. She has many names and forms such as gentle Parvati, heroic Durga, or bloodthirsty Kali. These various forms, though they may seem to Westerners separate and distinct, are all properly understood as multiple manifestations of the supreme Goddess.

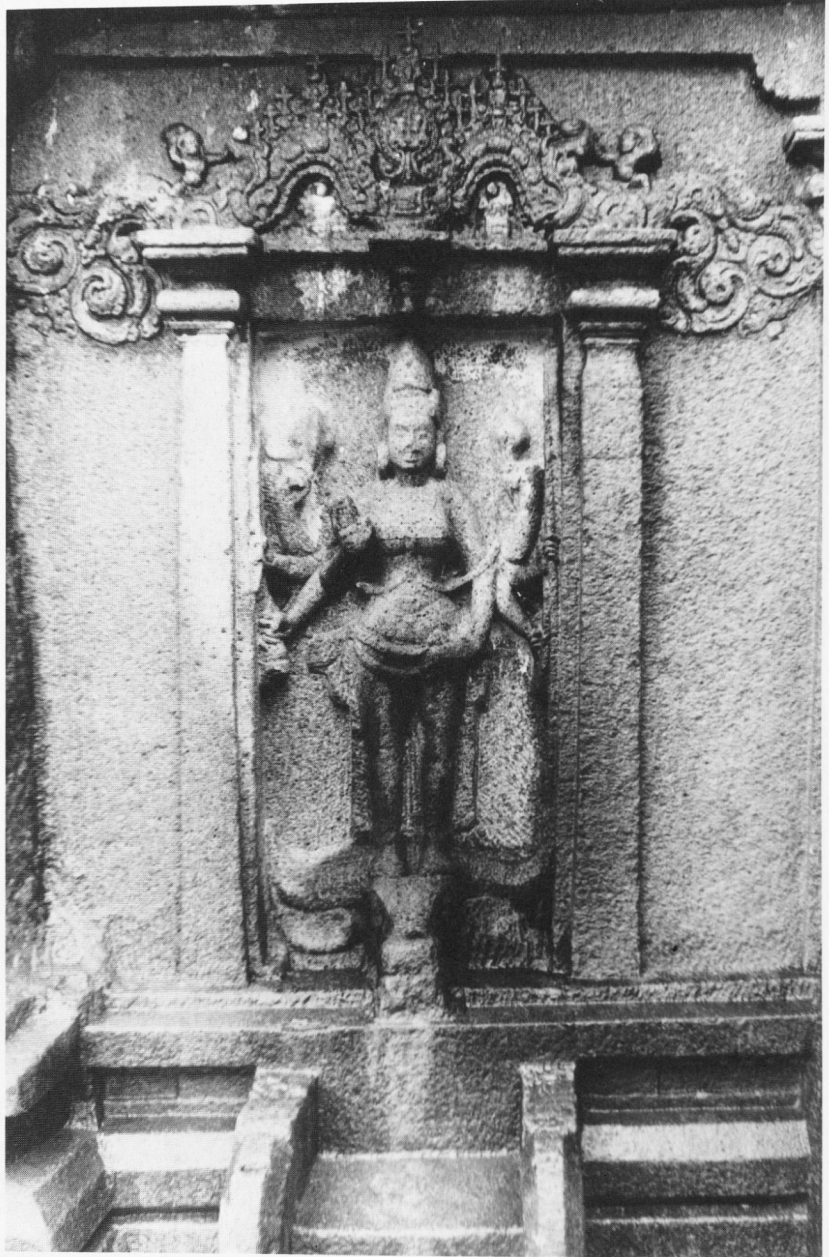
A sculpture of Durga has recently been acquired by the University of Missouri–Columbia, one that exemplifies an icon type of great antiquity and importance in Tamilnadu in South India (fig. 1). Standing with both feet firmly planted in the *samapāda* pose reserved for sovereign deities, the female warrior is said to embody the collective fiery substance (*tejas* or shakti) of the entire Hindu pantheon as externalized and directed against Mahisha—“Buffalo,” the prince of demons.<sup>2</sup> Durga’s autonomous character as denoted by this hieratic posture is in marked contrast with her alternative, perhaps better known, identity as the subservient Parvati, Shiva’s quiescent wife. Insofar as the sculpture depicts her triumph as a *fait accompli*, it exemplifies what art historians have called the Victorious Durga type, one of four iconic variations on the theme of Mahishasuramardini, literally, Crusher-of-the-Buffalo-Demon.<sup>3</sup>

The great antiquity of this particular configuration, Durga standing in victory upon Mahisha’s head, is evident from two unmistakable references to it in the *Śilappadikāram*—the one quoted above, and another which speaks of Korravai, literally “the goddess of victory,”<sup>4</sup> standing over the defeated buffalo’s bleeding neck.<sup>5</sup> Since the text dates no later than ca. 450,<sup>6</sup> and is thought to contain material that is several centuries older still,<sup>7</sup> this iconographic convention must have been established long before the oldest extant images of the type were



1. Victorious Durga, 9th–11th c., h. 1.410 m, Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri–Columbia, Acc. no. 86.81, gift of Mrs. Carol Brewster.

carved, in the seventh century. The apparent nonexistence of pre-seventh-century icons in Tamilnadu, whether of Durga or any other deity, has been explained by the hypothesis that only ephemeral materials were employed so long as the use of stone for icons was forestalled due to overriding funerary connotations that stone had carried in the region since megalithic times.<sup>8</sup>



2. Victorious Durga, *Trimurti Mandapam, Mahabalipuram, 630–668.*

The oldest extant prototypes of the Victorious Durga at Columbia date from the reign of the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I (630–668).<sup>9</sup> They consist of nine rock-cut images—seven at Mahabalipuram (e.g., figs. 2,3) and one each at Tiruchirapalli (fig. 4) and Singavaram (fig. 5).<sup>10</sup> Both their substantial number and iconographic variety seem to

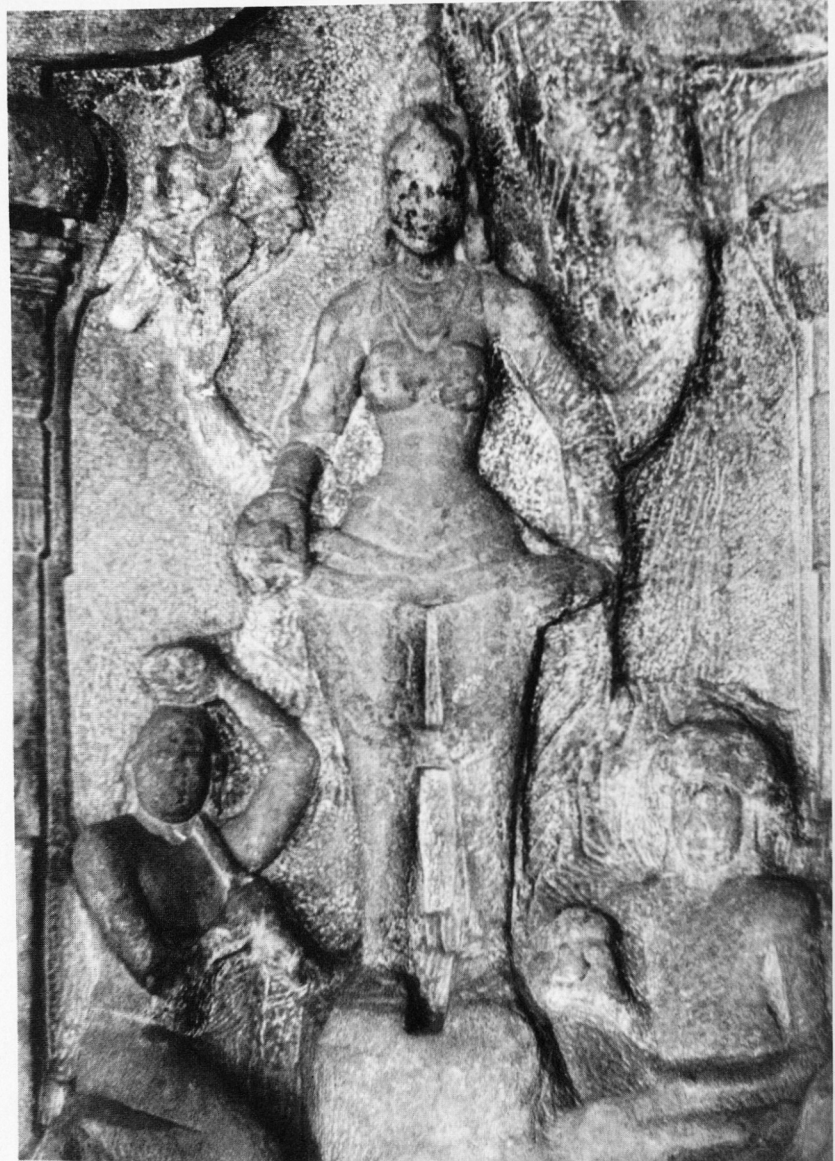


3. Victorious Durga with Attendants, *Adi Varaha Mandapam*, Mahabalipuram, 630–668.

confirm the impression derived from literature that the cult of Durga as guarantor of victory had risen to prominence in the region over the course of many earlier centuries.

In addition to the pedestal-like employment of the buffalo head, a second feature of the Victorious Durga iconography of Tamilnadu that distinguishes it from Mahishasuramardini depictions elsewhere in India is its frequent association with self-immolating attendant figures. In both the *Adi Varaha* cave at Mahabalipuram and at Singavaram the devotee kneeling to Durga's right is shown drawing a blood-offering from his own wrist (figs. 3, 5). Even more frequent and macabre are representations of the ultimate sacrifice, self-decapitation. As in the lower cave at Tiruchirapalli (fig. 4), a figure gripping his topknot in the left hand while drawing a sword to his neck with the right is shown kneeling before Durga in the *Draupadi Ratha*, the *Varaha Mandapam*, and on the north wall of the eighth-century *Shore Temple*, all at Mahabalipuram, and also in north-facing niches of several Chola period temples.<sup>11</sup> Again, both the regional specificity and great antiquity of these sanguinary offerings to *Korravai*, the *victrix*, are confirmed in Tamil literature. In the *Silapaddikaram* a warrior-clan's hymn beseeches her to:

accept the blood that flows from our severed young heads,  
the price of a victory you granted  
to the powerful and valiant Eiyans . . .  
Accept the blood and flesh we offer you,  
in thanks for the great victories  
you showered on the Eiyans  
when they adventured out on raids  
to seize vast herds of cattle.<sup>12</sup>



4. Victorious Durga with  
Attendants, *Tiruchira-  
palli*, lower cave, late  
7th c.

Similarly, in the *Maṇimēkalai*,<sup>13</sup> a temple dedicated to Durga as Lady of the Forest is said to be surrounded by trees whose branches are “lowered by the weight of heads of men, who with unwavering mind have paid their ‘life debts’ by tying their heads to the branches and then cutting them off.”<sup>14</sup>

The earliest historical record of this grisly rite is dated to the year 20 of the last Pallava king, Kampavarman (c. 890). A memorial stone dated to that year at Mallam, Nellore District, depicts the kneeling donor in the final act of proffering his severed head by its hair.<sup>15</sup> The accompanying inscription registers a gift of land to his heirs and characterizes the decapitation as the culmination of a nine-fold offering of one’s own flesh to Bhatari (Durga).<sup>16</sup>

While textual references to comparable acts of abnegation may be cited from elsewhere in India,<sup>17</sup> in iconic form they are virtually



5. Victorious Durga with Attendants, *Singavaram*, late 7th c.

nonexistent beyond the borders of Tamilnadu and neighboring Karnataka. The only exception, to my knowledge, is a fifth-century terracotta from Mathura. It depicts a bearded ascetic about to sever his neck with a sword, but due to its fragmentary condition one cannot tell whether or not the goddess Durga was the intended recipient.<sup>18</sup>

The juxtaposition in Tamilnadu sculpture of these two motifs of decapitation, both in conjunction with Victorious Durga images, raises an unexpected question. Could they be related? Could there be on some—possibly subliminal—level, a correspondence in identity or role between the buffalo-demon Mahisha, as Durga's archetypal victim in myth, and her most stalwart human devotees in practice? Before attempting to formulate an explanation, it may be helpful to review first the significance of Durga's other attributes, as presented by the Columbia image.

Another standard attribute of a sovereign deity, in addition to the rigid *samapāda* stance, is supernumerary limbs.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the standard two-armed appearance of a goddess-as-consort to a superior male deity, independent manifestations of the Great Goddess in her own right have four or more attribute-displaying arms. The actual number of additional arms on a particular image is inconsequential: just a single extra pair is sufficient to recall to the text-informed eye an entire *viśva-rūpa*, or cosmic manifestation. According to the "Devī Māhātmya," for example:

[The demon Mahisha] saw the Devi filling the three worlds with her splendor, bending low the earth with the force of her strides, scratching the sky with her pointed diadem, shaking the nether worlds with the twang of her bowstring and standing there filling the ten directions of space with her thousand arms.<sup>20</sup>

Yet with equal authority other texts describe her alternatively as having four, eight, ten, eighteen, or twenty arms.<sup>21</sup> The variance is only quantitative. The number of *āyudhas* ("weapons") that she can be shown as wielding, eighteen of which are enumerated in the "Devī Māhātmya," is only a matter of artistic convention, not theology.<sup>22</sup> However, when only two of them can be shown, as in the Columbia image, they are invariably the *cakra*, or discus, and the *śaṅkha*, or conch-trumpet. Significantly, neither of these "weapons" figures in the subsequent narrative of actual combat with Mahisha and other demons, so they must be purely attributive in purpose.

Because they also happen to be two of the primary attributes of Vishnu, on one level they are clearly intended to proclaim Durga's sibling relationship to him. According to theogonies of the late epic period,<sup>23</sup> most notably the *Harivaṃśa*, Durga in her alternate form as Kali (i.e., Darkness or Sleep) was once born as the cross-uterine sister of Vishnu's dark avatar, Krishna. This came about when Vishnu decided to descend to earth as Krishna in order to oppose the evil King Kamsa. Vishnu planned to be born to Devaki, Kamsa's cousin. Kamsa, however, having heard that an offspring of Devaki's would kill him,

had each of her babies slain. To protect himself, Vishnu persuaded the goddess Sleep (Kali) to incarnate herself simultaneously in the womb of another woman. After the embryos were secretly exchanged, Devaki's surrogate daughter was killed instead of her actual son Vishnu-as-Krishna. For the assistance of the goddess Durga-Kali-Sleep, Vishnu blessed her as follows:

. . . I will do a favour for you to make your glory on earth equal to mine; you will be goddess of the whole world. . . . You will obtain an eternal place in the sky. . . . You will be dark like my own skin. . . . You will have four stout arms like my arms. . . . Your shining face will be the rival of the moon. A triple diadem will bind your shining hair. . . . You will be attended by throngs of grotesque ghosts, and by my command you will take a vow of eternal chastity and dwell in the triple heaven. . . . You will adorn the earth with thousands of residences [shrines dedicated to her]. With your retinue of ghosts you will receive an offering of sacrificial beasts on the ninth day of each month, for you will always be fond of sacrifices of flesh. . . . When men worship you you will protect them from capture, painful slaughter, the death of sons, loss of wealth, and danger of disease or death.<sup>24</sup>

Even the Tamil *Śilappadikāram*, a text at least coeval with the *Harivaṃśa*, refers to Durga as Vishnu's younger sister,<sup>25</sup> so it is perfectly understandable that they should share the discus and conch in South Indian iconography. But far less certain is the underlying connotation of these attributes, particularly when held by Durga.

In a thorough study Wayne Begley has concluded that an actual discoid weapon, in use in India until the nineteenth century, gave rise to *cakra* symbolism in Vaishnava iconography; solar, imperial, temporal, and other philosophical connotations were secondary accretions.<sup>26</sup> But is this conclusion equally relevant for Shakta circles, in which supreme deity is ascribed to Durga, the Great Goddess independent of her brother Vishnu or husband Shiva? Considering that she favors other weapons in her contest with Mahisha and his legions—a Shaiva trident first, with bow and arrows, sword, and club being mentioned next in frequency—why is the *cakra* given such prominence? Might it not be reminiscent of the quintessential aniconic symbol of Shaktism, the *śri-cakra*?

From the Shakta point of view, reabsorption in the Absolute as Mahashakti ("Great shakti") may be attained by awakening one's microcosmic *śakti* that lies dormant in the lowest of six *cakras* (or nodes) along the spinal column. Geometric diagrams or *yantras* are employed to visualize these *cakras* while others, and above all the *śri-cakra* or *śri-yantra*, are employed as meditational aids for generating the "intimate inner experience of the polar play and logic-shattering paradox of eternity and time."<sup>27</sup> Because the *śri-cakra*, engraved on a metal plate, is frequently enshrined in South India as an aniconic object for worship of the Goddess,<sup>28</sup> the ubiquitous appearance of a *cakra* in the hand of images of the Goddess may be



considered a didactic double entendre, signifying not only her kinship with Vishnu but her inherent identity as Mahashakti as well.

Likewise, it would be chauvinistic to insist that Durga's brother Vishnu be awarded initial proprietorship of the *sankha* or conch. In addition to its familiar heraldic significance as a trumpet of warriors<sup>29</sup>—curiously, Durga is never credited with using the one presented to her by Varuna—the *śaṅkha* is also said to symbolize, among other things, “the origin of existence . . . because of the longitudinal form of its opening, [to] signify the yoni [vagina], this especially when carried by Śiva or Pārvatī [i.e., Durga] and when used as an independent cult object.”<sup>30</sup>

In short, both *cakra* and *śaṅkha* may be considered primary attributes of the Goddess in her own right. In form, both are congruent with universal associations of the circular with the maternal. In function, they are also instruments of liberation: while the flaming discus (created by the god Agni, “Fire”) incinerates the forces of darkness, the sounding conch is said to dispel illusion.<sup>31</sup> Together they proclaim their wielder's identity as Source and Culmination, Mother-Ground of all being.

The next (and penultimate) attribute of the Columbia Durga which must be deciphered before the sculpture's overall significance may be ascertained is the lion-head clasp of her girdle. This also is an attribute she shares with Vishnu in South Indian iconography generally, and by extension with many other regally dressed figures, including temple guardians.<sup>32</sup> Without any of the denotative ambiguity that surrounds the *cakra* and *śaṅkha*, and as obviously as the crown which Durga and Vishnu share, the lion-head clasp alludes to sovereignty. The “king of beasts” has been prevalent in Indian art since the third century B.C. when the Maurya Empire drew freely upon Persian imagery, if not upon Persian workmanship as well, following Alexander's conquest of Persepolis. Still more pertinent is the fact that the lion is in puranic literature (though not yet in the epics) identified as Durga's *vāhana* or vehicle.<sup>33</sup> The likelihood that this was a relatively late development—at least in South India—is hinted at in the same hymn of the *Śilappadikāram* that was quoted at the outset:

You came wondering on a stag  
that proudly bears black antlers.  
You hold in your bracelet-laden hands  
a sword dripping with blood  
after you killed the buffalo demon. . . .  
Why must you stand on a fierce lion  
whose eyes shoot darts of flame,  
holding in your frail hand  
a discus and a conch?<sup>34</sup>

Clearly by the mid fifth century, at the latest, a conflation was apparent between the indigenous or southern convention of a stag vehicle and Durga's northern, ultimately Mesopotamian, lion vehicle. The indigenous tradition did not easily capitulate. Twice during the seventh

century at the southern site of Mahabalipuram, in sculptural contexts that otherwise may be considered imbued with northern ideas, the deer and lion both wait upon Durga (e.g., fig. 3). A sculpture from Tanjavur District dated to the ninth century persists in showing exclusively the stag behind the goddess (fig. 6), and still in the mid tenth century both vehicles were being shown together.<sup>35</sup>

Though association of the warrior goddess with a lion may have been a relatively late intrusive element in South India, paradoxically,



6. Victorious Durga with Deer Vahana, from Tanjavur District, 9th c., Madras Government Museum.

its origin may be traced back to the very beginnings of civilization further west. Surely it is not coincidental that the most powerful goddess of Mesopotamia, Ishtar—patroness of warriors and of love—also rode a lion (fig. 7). The ancient Egyptians varied the theme only slightly by visualizing their goddess of war as a woman with a lion's head.<sup>36</sup> Several millenia earlier, in about 6000 B.C. at prehistoric Çatal Hüyük, a mother goddess was depicted seated upon a lion throne, while hunters besought her blessing by wearing talismans of leopard skin.<sup>37</sup>



7. Ishtar on Lion, from Tell Ahmar, 8th c. B.C., Musée du Louvre, Paris.

The final characteristic of victorious Durga icons which figures in this interpretation is their orientation to the north. Of course images removed from their original architectural context have lost this attribute. However, among images still in situ without known exception after the eighth century, when Durga appears among the images that ring the external walls of a Shiva temple, she is assigned a niche on the north wall of the *ardhamañḍapa* or antechamber.<sup>38</sup> While textual prescriptions for the orientation of all the images of deities in niches are known,<sup>39</sup> the rationale for their distribution is far from clear. With respect to Durga, Tartakov and Dehejia have observed that, given the easterly orientation of most Hindu temples, her position on the north wall is in keeping with her place as consort, to the proper left side of Shiva within the inner sanctum.<sup>40</sup> However, it has recently been found, in a survey of forty-six early Chola-period temples, that Durga faces north even on occidented, or west-facing, temples.<sup>41</sup> It is clear, therefore, that absolute directional placement overrides other considerations such as consort alignment or the sequence of circumambulatory encounter.

What, then, might the north orientation of the Goddess of Victory mean? Might it simply reflect consciousness of her alter-identity as Parvati, daughter of the Himalayas? Or with equal validity, might it not correspond to the epithet by which she is known in the Agama that specifies her north orientation, Vindhyavasini, lady of the Vindhya mountain range that lies to the north of the Deccan?<sup>42</sup> Perhaps. But another, not incompatible, explanation is suggested by analogies drawn from directional symbolism in other pan-Indian contexts. It may be recalled, for example, that for the performance of Vedic sacrifice one of the three fire altars was designated the *dakṣiṇāgni*,<sup>43</sup> or south-fire, and that its function, in part, was to protect the sacred precinct from threatening forces, whether spiritual or human, that were perceived as emanating from the south. With similar logic, Indra, when still the most powerful deity of the Indo-European “invaders” of the subcontinent, was designated regent of the south.<sup>44</sup> Later, presumably after all of India was more thoroughly Aryanized, Indra’s place was changed to the direction of dawning—east. Yet a lingering stigma was still associated with the south, as evidenced by the fact that Yama, god of death and buffalo-rider(!), became its regent.<sup>45</sup>

When the two directional gestalts are juxtaposed, a possible connection is suggested. Given the overwhelming evidence of Durga’s Dravidian origins—at least insofar as she is Korravai, goddess of victory<sup>46</sup>—might not her north orientation in South Indian temples mirror exactly the defensive posture taken by early Aryans toward the South? Might not the conceptual face-off between Yama and Korravai be a vestige of the age-old conflict between the northern Aryans and the southern Dravidians?

Though not conclusive, the appearance of a buffalo motif in the iconography of both Yama and Durga provides a tantalizing link, particularly in view of the buffalos’ antithetical meanings. While Durga’s archenemy is the buffalo demon Mahisha (in sacerdotal terms,

the buffalo has always been the victim of choice for blood sacrifice), Yama, the Aryan “controller” of death, is symbolized by a buffalo, insofar as Hindu *vāhanas* have totemic significance.<sup>48</sup> This is not to suggest that Yama and Mahisha were ever consciously equated—their mythic contexts are too far removed—but they may have had a common source in the realm of mundane and ritual observance. The dark water buffalo, if for no other reason than its contrast in color with the typically white *bos indicus*, the sacred animal of India par excellence, has long endured perceptions of being the specter of death.

Speaking of the obvious contrasts in color, species, and association with deities between water buffalo and *bos indicus*, it must be stressed that they have not passed unnoticed by the authors of puranic myth. In fact, the Victorious Durga image appears in an entirely different light when one reflects upon the dichotomy between Durga’s victim Mahisha and her husband Shiva, whose vehicle is the bull Nandi. According to David Shulman in a study of South Indian myth of unprecedented comprehensiveness, conflation of victim and husband does in fact sometimes occur.<sup>49</sup> In more than one retelling of the essential myth, after Durga cuts off Mahisha’s head, she is horrified to find a linga (the phallic symbol of Shiva) tied to his neck and must perform austerities to expiate the crime. Unwittingly, she had murdered a Shaiva devotee, if not Shiva himself in a temporary manifestation, as at least one version baldly surmises.<sup>50</sup>

Without beginning to reckon with the numerous ramifications of this perplexing role reversal, nor another by which Mahisha’s contest with the goddess begins with a sham courtship, it is sufficient for our purposes here to recall as a sort of validating paradigm the later and much-better-known Tantric images of Kali dancing upon Shiva’s corpse.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, sometimes Kali dances on the corpses of her devotees. This brings us back full circle to the early Tamil images of head-offerings to Korravai, both literary and sculptural. The recurrent association of self-decapitation with images of Durga standing on Mahisha’s head cannot be fortuitous. The two decapitations are, I submit, virtually interchangeable. In the words of a Calcutta respondent to the question of what Mahisha stands for metaphorically, the contemporary reply rings true to ancient (perhaps forgotten) archetypes: “he is us.”<sup>52</sup>

- <sup>1</sup>Prince Ilangô Adigal, *Shilappadikaram* (The Ankle Bracelet), trans. Alain Daniélou (New York 1965) 80. Emphasis supplied.
- <sup>2</sup>The most definitive of several puranic tellings of the myth is the “Devī Māhātmya,” chapters 81–93 of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. For a complete translation, see V. S. Agrawala, *Devī Māhātmyam: The Glorification of the Great Goddess* (Varanasi 1963). For excerpts, see Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit* (New York 1975) 247–249; Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Purāṇas* (Philadelphia 1978) 237–238.
- <sup>3</sup>M. Seshadri, “Mahiṣāsūramardīnī; Images, Iconography and Interpretation,” *The Half-Yearly Journal of the Mysore University* 22/2 (1963). For a recent and even more thorough study, see Gary Michael Tartakov and Vidya Dehejia, “Sharing, Intrusion, and Influence: The Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Imagery of the Calukyas and Pallavas,” *Artibus Asiae* (1984) 287–345. See also Heinrich von Stietencron, “Die Göttin Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, Mythos, Darstellung und geschichtliche Rolle bei der Hinduisierung Indiens,” *Visible Religions* 2 (1983) 118–166.
- <sup>4</sup>“... from Korṇam, victory, but assumed by [the Tamil Lexicon] to come from the root Kol, kill, which gives a more sinister aspect to the goddess’; C. G. Diehl, “The Goddess of Forests in Tamil Literature,” *Tamil Culture* II (1964) 313.
- <sup>5</sup>*Śilappadikāram* 20: 34–35; *Shilappadikaram*, trans. Daniélou, 127. “Korṇavai must have been an indigenous [Dravidian] goddess, at least in her character as a goddess of war and victory who lives in a forest and dances the tuṇaṅkai. Certainly the northern goddess Durga is not associated with victory, and none of her names has that meaning’; George L. Hart, III, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil* (Berkeley 1975) 23–24. For other even earlier references to Korṇavai, see K. R. Srinivasan, “Some Aspects of Religion as Revealed by Early Monuments and Literature of the South,” *Madras University Journal* (1960) 151–154; C. G. Diehl, “Goddess of Forests” 308–316; T. V. Mahalingam, “The Cult of Śakti in Tamilnad,” in D. C. Sircar, ed. *The Śakti Cult and Tārā* (Calcutta 1967) 17–33.
- <sup>6</sup>Kamil Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature* (Wiesbaden 1974) 132.
- <sup>7</sup>The epic’s concluding narrative is synchronous with the reign of Sri Lanka’s Gajabāhu I (c. 171–193 A.D.), but some passages may well predate the Christian era. See Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan* (Leiden 1973) 37–38.
- <sup>8</sup>See K. R. Srinivasan, “Āndhras, Ikṣvākus, and Literary Sources,” in Michael Meister, ed., *Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture* (New Delhi 1983), I:13. See also his “Some Aspects of Religion,” 131–143.
- <sup>9</sup>The dating of Pallava antiquities is still disputed. For two recent alternatives, see Marilyn Hirsh, “Sources for the Figural Sculpture of Mamallapuram,” Ph.D. diss. New York University 1986; Michael Rabe, “The Monolithic Temples of the Pallava Dynasty: A Chronology,” Ph.D. diss. University of Minnesota 1987. For still earlier examples of the Victorious Durga type, with, however, less relevance because of regional differences, cf. a third-century terracotta fragment from Sannatti, Karnataka, and a fifth-century stone figure from Besnagar, Madhya Pradesh (Tartakov and Dehejia, “Sharing,” figs. 27–28).
- <sup>10</sup>Those not illustrated here include the cult figure and three exterior images on the Draupadi Ratha (Tartakov and Dehejia, “Sharing,” figs. 42–43; Meister, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, pls. 1–2), and a simpler variation of our fig. 3 at the Varaha Mandapam (Tartakov, pl. 45).

- <sup>11</sup>J.Ph. Vogel, "The Head-offering to the Goddess in Pallava Sculpture," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, University of London 6 (1932) 539–543; Douglas Barrett, *Early Cola Architecture and Sculpture: 866–1014 A.D.* (London 1974) pls. 32,53,60; Aschwin de Lippe, *Indian Mediaeval Sculpture* (Amsterdam 1978) pls. 240, 241, 253.
- <sup>12</sup>*Shilappadikaram*, trans. Daniélou, 83.
- <sup>13</sup>A companion and slightly later epic poem by Cittalai Cattanar, as yet untranslated.
- <sup>14</sup>*Maṇimēkalai* 6.55; Diehl, "Goddess of Forests" 315.
- <sup>15</sup>V. Venkatasubba Ayyar, *South Indian Inscriptions*, 12 (*The Pallavas*, 1943) pl. 6 no. 106.
- <sup>16</sup>Venkatasubba Ayyar, *Inscriptions* 50.
- <sup>17</sup>Heinrich von Stietencron, "Suicide as a Religious Institution," *Bhāratīya Vidyā* 27 (1969) 7–24; Robert J. Del Bonta, "Brahmasiraschedakamurti, Brahmahatya and Ritualistic Suicide in Medieval Karnataka," *Chhavi* 2 (Varanasi 1981) 119–122.
- <sup>18</sup>George Michell et al., eds., *In the Image of Man: The Indian Perception of the Universe through 2000 years of Painting and Sculpture* (New York 1982) fig. 256. Fig. 255 illustrates another solitary decapitant, but from Tamilnadu (said to date from the tenth century).
- <sup>19</sup>Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Indian Images with Many Arms," *The Dance of Shiva* (rev. ed., New York 1957) 79–84.
- <sup>20</sup>*Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 82.37–38; Agrawala, *Devī Māhātmyam* 51.
- <sup>21</sup>T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (1914; reprint Varanasi 1971), vol. 1, 2, 341–354.
- <sup>22</sup>*Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 81.19–31. After the male deities had conjured her out of their collective shakti they each presented her a weapon, viz., a trident from Shiva, a discus from Krishna, a conch from Varuna, a śakti from Agni, a bow and two quivers full of arrows from Vayu, a lightning bolt and the elephant Airavata's bell from Indra, the time-rod from Yama, a noose from Ocean, a rosary from the creator Prajapati, a jug from Brahma, a sword and shield from Time, an axe from Vishvakarma, lotuses from the Lord of Waters, and a cup of wine from Kubera. In addition she received a lustrous complexion from the Sun, imperishable garments and jewelry from the Milky Ocean, a lion mount from Himalaya, and a serpentine necklace from Shesha, lord of snakes.
- <sup>23</sup>I.e., the third through fifth centuries, during which the two great epics, the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, probably received their final interpolations, including two hymns to the goddess Durga in the latter (IV.6; VI.23), which are not accepted as part of the critical edition.
- <sup>24</sup>*Harivaṃśa* 47; O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* 208–210.
- <sup>25</sup>*Shilappadikaram*, trans. Daniélou, 77–78.
- <sup>26</sup>Wayne Begley, *Vishu's Flaming Wheel: The Iconography of the Sudarśanacakra* (New York 1974).
- <sup>27</sup>Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (New York 1946) 140.
- <sup>28</sup>Gopinatha Rao, *Elements*, 1:2, pl. 97; 327–332. Aniconic cakras exemplify the first of three shakta image types according to one South Indian tradition: viz., yoga (the *pitha*, altar or pedestal of Shiva, often containing a geometrical diagram); *bhaga* ("pleasurable" consort images at Shiva's left side); and *vīra* ("valiant" independent goddesses, generally installed along outer walls of a Shiva temple); H. Krishna Sastri, *South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses* (Madras 1916) 185–186.

- <sup>29</sup>Cf. the catalog of conches in the opening chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, starting with Krishna's named Pancajanya.
- <sup>30</sup>Gösta Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religions* (Leiden 1976) 252–253.
- <sup>31</sup>According to the *Mahābhārata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* respectively; cf. Begley, *Flaming Wheel* 13, 24.
- <sup>32</sup>The oldest extant example belongs to the proper right door guardian of the Pallava cave temple at Mandagapattu, c. 600, De Lippe, *Mediaeval Sculpture* pl. 141.
- <sup>33</sup>“... when Durga mounts the lion in the Puranic age she does so to establish her sovereignty over minor theophanies of the mother-goddess”; Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony: Comprehensive Study of Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Purāṇas* (Cambridge 1971) 169.
- <sup>34</sup>*Shilappadikaram*, trans. Daniélou, 80–81.
- <sup>35</sup>De Lippe, *Mediaeval Sculpture* pl. 253; Barrett, *Cola Architecture* pl. 32.
- <sup>36</sup>Robert Graves, intro. *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, new ed. (London 1968), fig. p. 35.
- <sup>37</sup>James Mellaart, *Çatal Hüyük: A Neolithic Town in Anatolia* (New York 1967).
- <sup>38</sup>K. R. Srinivasan, “Some Aspects” 152; J. C. Harle, “Durga, Goddess of Victory,” *Artibus Asiae* 26: 3,4 (1964) 237–246.
- <sup>39</sup>K. R. Srinivasan, in “Some Aspects,” cites the *Vaikhānasa-Āgama*.
- <sup>40</sup>Tartakov and Dehejia, “Sharing” 316.
- <sup>41</sup>Shantanu Phukan, “Analysis of Iconographic Changes in 10th Century Chola Temples” (seminar paper, University of Chicago 1986) 16.
- <sup>42</sup>I.e., in the *Vaikhānasa Āgama* the name Vindhyavasini is used in the context of her north orientation; above, n. 39.
- <sup>43</sup>Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (Calcutta 1946) 1:23.
- <sup>44</sup>In the *Atharvaveda Saṃhita*, cited by J. N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (Calcutta 1956) 521.
- <sup>45</sup>Banerjea, *Development* 522.
- <sup>46</sup>Above, n. 5.
- <sup>47</sup>A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London 1963) 236.
- <sup>48</sup>“These vehicles or mounts (*vāhana*) are manifestations on the animal plane of the divine individuals themselves”; Zimmer, *Myths* 48. The best-known depiction of Yama upon his buffalo may be in the south gallery of Angkor Wat, where he is shown presiding over a vast “Last Judgment” scene. See also Susan Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (New York 1985) fig. 15.25.
- <sup>49</sup>David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myth: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in South Indian Tradition* (Princeton 1980) 177.
- <sup>50</sup>In the *Kālikāpurāṇa*; cf. Shulman, ch. IV.4, “The Murderous Bride,” esp. 185–186.
- <sup>51</sup>E.g., Philip Rawson, *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy* (New York 1973) pls. 17, 18, 22, 40–42, 44.
- <sup>52</sup>The anecdote is told by Edward Dimock, Bengal specialist at the University of Chicago.



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