

After completion of the series on Shrimad Bhagavadgita, which took more than 3.5 years, we will now embark on a new series called “**Devi Mahatmyam**” (*The Glory of the Divine Mother*).

Devi Mahatmyam.

Glory of The Divine Mother

Part-1: Introduction

Devi Mahatmyam is a Hindu religious text describing the Goddess as the supreme power and creator of the universe. **Devi Mahatmyam** is also known as the **Durgā Saptashatī** (दुर्गा सप्तशती) or **Chaṇḍī Pāṭh** (चंडीपाठ). The text contains 700 verses (and hence the name *Saptashati*), the same number of verses as Shrimad Bhagavadgita. It is arranged into 13 chapters and is one of the most important texts of *Shaktism* (Goddess worshipping) tradition within Hinduism. These 13 chapters depict three aspects of the Divine Mother: (1) Mahākālī (Chapter 1), (2) Mahālakshmi (Chapters 2-4), and Mahāsaraswati (Chapters 5-13). Devi Mahatmyam is a text extracted from **Markandeya Purana**, and constitutes the latter's chapters 81 through 93. The

Purana is dated to the ~3rd century AD, and the Devi Mahatmyam was added to the Markandeya Purana either in the 5th or 6th century AD.

The framing narrative of Devi Mahatmyam presents (a) a dispossessed king, (b) a merchant betrayed by his family, and (c) a sage whose teachings lead them both beyond existential suffering. The sage instructs by recounting three different epic battles between the Devi and various demons (the three tales being governed by, respectively, Mahākāli, Mahālakshmi, and Mahāsaraswati). Most famous among them is the story of *Mahishasura Mardini* – Devi as the "Slayer of the Buffalo Demon" – one of the most ubiquitous images in Hindu art and sculpture, and a tale known almost universally in India. The three tales are allegories of outer and inner experience. The evil adversaries of the Goddess symbolize the all-too-human impulses, such as pursuit of power, or possessions, or delusions such as arrogance. The Goddess wages war against this. Like the philosophical and symbolic battlefield of the Bhagavad Gita, the Devi Mahatmyam's symbolic killing grounds target human frailties, and the Goddess targets the demons of ego and dispels our mistaken idea of who we are. Most hymns present

the Goddess's martial exploits, but these are surpassed by verses of another genre, viz., the hymns to the Goddess. The hymnic portion of the text balances the verses that present the spiritual liberation power of the Goddess.

As an independent text, *Devī Māhātmyam* has acquired a number of "**Angas** (limbs or subsidiary texts or appendages)" over the years. These *angas* have been associated with the text since the fourteenth century. The *angas* are chiefly concerned with the ritual use of *Devī Māhātmyam*. There are two different traditions in the Anga Parayana. One is the Trayanga Parayana, which includes *Devi Kavacham*, *Argala Stotram*, and *Keelakam*. The other is the Navanga Parayana, which includes *Nyasam*, *Avahanam*, *Namani*, *Argalam*, *Keelakam*, *Hrudayam*, *Dharam*, *Dhyanam*, and *Kavacham*. The Navanga format is followed in Kerala and some other parts in South India. Directly before and after the *Devīmāhātmya* itself, two ancient hymns are customarily chanted as a kind of auditory jewel box, symbolically to enclose it and separate it from the *angas*.

The Vedic *Devīsūktam* ("Hymn of the Goddess," R̥g Veda 10.125) is the *Devī*'s own unequivocal

revelation of herself as the Divine Mother and transcendent reality.

The Vedic *Rātrisūktam* (“Hymn to Night,” Rig Veda 10.127) praises the starry night as the beautiful goddess Rātri, who brings rest to all creatures; at the same time it asks for protection from predators that lurk in the darkness. Here is a brief description of the three major *Angas*:

Devi Kavacham - The Devi Kavacham consisting of 61 Shlokas is in Markandeya Purana. This Kavacham (armour) protects the reader in all parts of his body, in all places and in all difficulties.

Argala Stotram - Here Rishi Markandeya tells his disciples in 27 inspiring couplets on the greatness of Devi. She has been described in all aspects and names and at the end of each Shloka, prayer is offered to Devi for material prosperity, physical fitness, fame and victory.

Keelakam - Here also Rishi Markandeya tells his disciples, in 16 Shlokas, the ways and means of removing obstacles faced by devotees, while reading Devi Mahatmyam.