

The Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā – A contemporary pilgrimage in Banāras

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The yātrā, a recent development of the Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti, is organized approximately once a year and takes one day to complete. It covers the sites available in Banāras – fairly large temples as well as small shrines – connected with the individual goddesses of the late 10th century conception of the Daśa Mahāvidyā.s. The ten individual Devī.s – namely, Kālī, Tārā, Tripurasundarī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Chinnamastā, Tripurābhairavī, Dhūmāvātī, Bagalāmukhī, Mātāṅgī and Kamalā – are described as predominantly fierce (ugra). The group figures prominently in several Tantric texts, but remains almost unspoken of in Purāṇic literature. A brief explanation of the concept of the Daśa Mahāvidyā.s as well as of the individual Devī.s, as contained in literature and iconography, will follow. Since each member possesses more facets than is possible to present here in detail, these descriptions should be considered introductory in nature. Banāras shows the highest concentration of sites connected with individual Mahāvidyā.s in India. This may be an important reason for the emergence of a “Mahāvidyā pilgrimage”; a yātrā unheard of in classical literature and unique to contemporary Hinduism. The organizing samiti’s history as well as the history and background of the Mahāvidyā pilgrimages will be presented. Following the pilgrims’ path, an introduction and observation of the goddesses and sites visited on the yātrā as well as their respective locations within the sacred space of Banāras shall be undertaken. The varying significance of the goddesses in question and their particular status and function within the contemporary religious structure of Banāras will be specified and compared with the evidence of the textual background in order to illustrate continuities or changes in the development of the individual Mahāvidyā’s concepts.

The first reference mentioning the Daśa Mahāvidyā.s occurs in a Tantric source from the 10th century, the *Kamakāla Khaṇḍa of Mahākāla Samhitā* (Kinsley, 1998: 1). The

group and its individual members, to a great extent, embody concepts and identities considered obscure and even subversive in non Tantric – Purāṇic as well as contemporary – Hinduism. In addition, some of the Devī.s possess benign (saumya) characteristics. However, it is clear they are fundamentally affiliated with a Tantric concept and figure largely in Tantric texts. Important sources including *Lakṣmītantra*, *Mahānirvāṇatantra*, *Rudrayāmala*, *Tantrasāra* or *Śaktisaṅgamatantra* characterize the Devī.s as presented below. In their respective mythology and cult they are often connected with radical attributes, habits and conditions regarded as polluting outside of the Tantric concept. The list of ten includes: 1) goddesses with a considerable significance outside of the group – namely, Kālī, Tripurasundarī (as Śrīvidyā) and Kamalā (as Lakṣmī); 2) goddesses with a limited cult of their own – namely, Tārā, Bhuvaneśvarī and (Tripurā-) Bhairavī; and 3) goddesses who almost never appear apart from the group – namely, Chinnamastā, Dhūmāvatī, Bagalāmukhī and Mātāṅgī. Those members who also figure outside the group still display a unique character as Mahāvidyā. “Although some of the Puranic deities have a place in the Tantric pantheon, their character and conception are totally different.” (Bhattacharyya, 1999: 320). The images of the individual Devī.s considerably vary. In medieval sources they show respective mythologies, attributes, habits and, of course, a respective Tantric cult. Their association with either benign (saumya) or wild (ugra) aspects varies – the latter predominating clearly. What unites them all, for instance, is their association with strong magical powers (siddhi), which they may pass on to their devotees. In addition, all are said to maintain the cosmic order and are often identified with the concept of Durgā-Mahādevī in mythology and cult (Kinsley 1998: 18-22). Only very seldom the Mahāvidyā concept is connected to a Vaiṣṇava background. One of this rare mentions occurs in the 9th to 12th century Pāñcarātra text *Lakṣmītantra* – Mahāvidyā is depicted here as emanation of Mahālakṣmī (Bhattacharyya 1999: 60). And, as Bhattacharyya (1999: 242) has put it: “It appears that during this period Tantric elements began to act more effectively on the major existing religious systems. ... in the philosophical speculations of the Southern Vaiṣṇavas, the doctrine of Śakti was able to find place. Subsequently, it became so influential that a need was felt to bring the ten Avatāras of Viṣṇu into relation with the ten celebrated Tantric Mahāvidyās.” This was achieved by simply identifying one Avatāra with one Mahāvidyā respectively. Such lists are found for instance in the *Toḍalatantra* (Goudriaan and Gupta 1981: 81),

Munḍamālatantra (Kinsley 1998: 20) or *Guhyātiguhyatantra* (Sircar 1973: 48 and Bhattacharyya 1999: 242). But typically the goddesses are connected with Śiva. Even here the unusual character of the goddesses clearly shows: independent as wives, they dominate, control and at times even threaten Śiva. In spite of their marked individuality, the Daśa Mahāvidyā.s then are all related to a number of items and subjects.

The first reference – the 10th century Tantric text *Kamakāla Khaṇḍa of Mahākāla Saṃhitā* – mentions all goddesses except Dhūmāvātī. The majority of the Tantric Sanskrit sources dealing with the group describe the individual Devī.s and their respective cults, including essentially the same central subjects. Especially two components play a central role here: the individual Tantric ritual of the respective goddess is described, and her mythological as well as philosophical background relates her to Mahādevī. Especially in her stotra.s and dhyāna-mantra.s noticeable every individual goddess is associated with Durgā-Mahādevī in her function as demon slayer, even though the goddesses show considerable differences in other contexts. The main component, Tantric ritual, is presented following recurrent formalized structures. Nearly all of these explanations include: viniyoga, nyāsa.s, dhyāna-mantra(s), kavaca, stotra, śatanāma-stotra, sahasranāma-stotra, hṛdaya. Viniyoga and the different nyāsa.s are part of the practical cult; they inform about single steps. Dhyāna-mantra.s describe the appearance and attributes of a deity in a “short version” for mental reflection and meditation. Kavaca, the different stotra.s and hṛdaya present the characteristics (habits, behaviors, likes, dislikes, etc.) as well as the outer appearance of a deity, often in poetical form. Stotra.s also often support the theology of the goddess in question. In their stotra.s and dhyāna-mantra.s, in particular, the individual goddesses adopt many epithets of Mahādevī; mainly those associated with the protecting, maintaining and nourishing qualities. This basically covers everything necessary for the practical cult, and illustrates the character and outer appearance of the respective goddess. The restriction of most of the textual sources on ritual complicates the understanding of the historical development for the individual Mahāvidyā.s. In general modern studies not only on the historical background but on virtually every aspect of the Devī.s are rare or, in the most cases, even completely absent. Exceptions are the three goddesses figuring prominently also outside the group: Kālī, Tripurasundarī and Kamalā. The only comprehensive introduction to the group and its members up to the present is David Kinsley’s book entitled *The Ten Mahāvidyās. Tantric*

Visions of the Divine Feminine (1998). I herewith join the author “in the hope that it will encourage other scholars to undertake more detailed studies of the group and of its individual members” (Kinsley, 1998: 2).

Kālī as ādi (primary) Mahāvidyā plays a central and, in many aspects, paradigmatic role among the group. Even her iconographical attributes – for instance, the garland of skulls or the blood-stained sword – show her confrontation with realities considered prohibited and dreadful by Hindu society. Because she is independent of existing norms she challenges them. Thus she is a liminal figure existing at the edge of society. Among all individual Devī.s of the group, Tārā resembles Kālī the most. Differing from her Buddhist concept, which depicts her as a mainly mild character, in Hinduism she is often potentially dangerous. But Tārā is understood as a creative and benign energy, as well. She, for instance, liberates her devotees by helping them across the river or ocean of saṃsāra, and here again reminds us of the Buddhist Tārā. Tripurasundarī, also called Lalitā, Śrī or Śrīvidyā, was a well-known goddess of South Indian and Kaśmīrī Tantrism, in particular, before she was included in the Mahāvidyā.s. She is first mentioned in a Tamil source from the 7th century, and from the 9th century onwards also figures in Sanskrit texts. Her main duty is the protection of cosmic stability, but, de facto, she is in charge of all three major cosmic functions: creation, maintenance and destruction. She is depicted as richly dressed and ornamented and erotically attractive. As the essence of welfare (saubhāgya) she nourishes and at times is identified with the earth. But more than any other Mahāvidyā, Bhuvaneśvarī is associated with the earth and creative powers. For instance, she often is identified with the basic elements (mahābhūta) and physical existence (prakṛti). Her origin can be traced back to the goddess Prapañceśvarī (lit., “mistress of the fivefold world”) described in the *Prapañcasāra Tantra* of Śankara, early 9th century. Prapañca is the fivefold nature forming creation: ether, fire, water, wind and earth. Bhuvaneśvarī like Śrīvidyā also appears as an attractive figure nourishing the world. She is worshipped especially for material welfare, but to her devotees may also grant the special magical power she possesses: to bind and control others. Chinnamastā had no cult of her own prior to the Mahāvidyā.s, but, like Tārā, figures in Tantric Buddhism. Her iconography presents her as surely the most terrifying member of the group. From the severed throat of her self-decapitated body flow three streams of blood, nourishing her own severed head, which she holds in her hand, and the yoginī.s Dakinī

and Varṇinī accompanying her. The naked goddess, dressed only in a garland of skulls, stands on the couple Rati and Kāma engaged in “reversed” sexual intercourse (Rati sitting or lying on top). The symbolic contents of this unique iconography are interpreted as mainly referring to spiritual freedom (her nakedness) and the combination of creation and destruction (sexual love next to skulls) (see, for instance, Benard 2000: 92-111; Satpathy, 1991: 145-147 and Satpathy, 1992: 61). In particular, she leads her devotee on the path of liberation (mukti). Also Tripurābhairavī, one of many forms of Bhairavī, presents benign and fearful aspects side by side. This is apparent, for instance, in the attributes she holds in her four hands, which only at first seem contradictory: noose, goad, manuscript and rosary. Dhūmāvātī, the only widow goddess in the Hindu pantheon, is the mistress of poverty and misfortune. Permanently angry, unsatisfied and resentful, especially towards (happily) married couples, she symbolically lives in quarrel and strife and in ruined and deserted places. Accompanied by her vāhana, the crow, as an outsider beyond any social bonds, she sits on a cart without draught animals and literally rides to nowhere. Her devotees typically ask for a merciless destroying of their enemies. Bagalāmukhī, also called Pītāmbarā, is invoked mainly to kill enemies or to bring them under control. Her iconography explains how: pulling out the tongue of her demon enemy she controls him by controlling his speech. She hinders him from speaking and threatens him with a mace. Mātāṅgī, who has many sub-forms, also grants the siddhi to control enemies. Furthermore, she is characterized in mythology as well as in living cult by a special attitude toward pollution and the lower castes, both of which she is closely connected to (see Kinsley, 1998: 209-222). Kamalā like Lakṣmī endows her worshipper with material riches and enjoyments. The main iconographical attributes – lotus, elephant and heavy jewellery – accompany both goddesses alike. But several of Kamalā’s epithets also present a martial side, which is completely absent in the case of Lakṣmī (see Kinsley, 1998: 228-232). Kamalā also nearly loses her Vaiṣṇava relationships. Even though lists attempting to correspond the Mahāvidyā.s with Viṣṇu’s Avatāra.s exist since the *Lakṣmītantra*, dated 9th to 12th century (Bhattacharyya 1999: 242), and prevail up to the present (see, for instance, Yaśpāl, 1998: 6), Vaiṣṇava connections of the Mahāvidyā.s remain unusual. Later in this article, we will present the religious reality in contemporary Banāras by introducing the goddesses along with their temples and shrines, trying to find particular aspects and functions they are connected with today. Such a comparison of

textual backgrounds with exemplary contemporary contexts supports the examination of the development of continuities or changes, respectively, in the concepts of the individual Mahāvidyā.s.

The following presentations are based, in addition to the passages referring to textual sources, on interviews and specific observations undertaken by the author. In 2002 and 2003 more than thirty members and sympathisers of the committee as well as pilgrims of the Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā.s were interviewed. The vast majority of interviews, altogether several hundred, were conducted with Pūjārī.s and devotees of temples and shrines dedicated to the Daśa Mahāvidyā.s in Banāras and Rāmnagar between 2001 and 2003. The field research focused on the temples and shrines of Dhūmāvātī, Tripurābhairavī and Bhuvaneśvarī. The author attended the Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā.s of 2002 and 2003.

The Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti was officially registered in 1999, though as an unnamed association it has existed since 1979 (Sarasvatī, 2001: 249). At that time, a group of individuals started organizing a small number of well-known yātrā.s, textually sanctioned predominantly by the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, for the public in Banāras. The group was headed by a disciple of the famous Svāmī Karapātrījī, Daṇḍī Svāmī Hariharānanda Sarasvatī, belonging to the Daṇḍī group of the Daśanāmī sect. Disciples, children and admirers of that generation's organizers felt a need to uphold and extend this tradition. Their effort to gather knowledge about the gods, temples, shrines and pilgrimages of Banāras and the localization and listing of temples and routes finally enabled them to organize a broad variety of yātrā.s, and culminated in the founding of the Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti. The president is a famous and honoured ascetic of Kāśī, Daṇḍī Svāmī Śivānanda Sarasvatī. Like Svāmī Hariharānanda he is associated with the Sārasvatī order at the Kālīmaṭha at Lakṣmīkuṇḍa (for details concerning the complicated history of succession in the maṭha, see Sinha and Saraswati, 1978: 279-284). The founding history of the committee by today's members is traced back directly to the legendary Svāmī Karapātrījī. For instance he, along with Svāmī Śivānanda Sarasvatī is depicted on top of most of the yātrā-lists distributed among the pilgrims. He is told to have inspired the present chairman to found a samiti in order to animate people to undertake pilgrimages (Sarasvatī, 2001: 249). Svāmī Śivānanda Sarasvatī is the author of several compilations on the religious tradition of Kāśī, and in his books also treats

different yātrā.s, mainly of the Purāṇic period, and in particular of the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, in detail. Because of his status and education he is considered an expert in religious knowledge and is generally accepted as guru and mārg darśak (guide) by members of the association as well as by pilgrims. Twelve honorary members from different levels of society and different castes work for the association today, including ascetics, priests, a lawyer, an accountant, etc. (for the full list of names and posts see Sarasvatī, 2001: 250). Many of them also financially support the work of their committee. One of the founders – today’s main organizer and guide, Umāśankara Guptā – stated that since 1999 he has spent ca. 14.000 Rupees on the committee work.

Date and Total	Brāhman	Kṣatrīya	Vaiśya	Yādava	Niṣada	Foreign Researcher	not confirmed
26.02.2000 48 yātrī.s	16	-	7	2	1	5	17
02.09.2001 26 yātrī.s	6	-	7	4	1	-	8
10.11.2002 22 yātrī.s	6	2	6	3	-	2	3
11.05.2003 22 yātrī.s	7	1	9	-	-	2	3

Fig. 1 - Date and caste-affiliation of the participants of all yātrā.s

The association’s aims are twofold. The yātrā.s are conducted primarily, of course, for religious reasons. It is important to the samiti that they are completely open to all who are interested. All levels of society and all castes are welcome, including Harijan.s. Women constitute a large number among the pilgrims. Most of the participants are Brāhman and Vaiśya (see Fig. 1) with simple financial backgrounds. Participation is free of charge. Five to ten percent of all yātrī.s repeatedly participate in one chosen pilgrimage. The second important aim is to awaken sensibility for cultural heritage among the public and to maintain endangered religious sites. During yātrā.s and in newspaper articles on specific pilgrimages, information on damaged sites is provided openly. The committee has no political or governmental affiliations. Permission for the entry of restricted religious locations, as necessary in some yātrā.s, is provided through its official registration. The samiti is by far the largest public yātrā organizer in Banāras. Only one other association, the Pañcakrośī Dattāra Yātrā Samiti, can be considered similar in its

work and objectives; however, its offers are limited to approximately five different yātrā.s per year. Pilgrimages in groups – which of course are very common in Kāśī, especially among pilgrims from outside the city – are normally limited to certain individuals, and pilgrims are liable for expenses. Differentiating from this, the Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti mainly addresses the public resident in the city and offers participation free of charge. It allows and enables people with very different backgrounds to form unorthodox pilgrimage groups and to jointly worship. It provides information to interested yātrī.s about the cultural and religious history of the pilgrimage as well as the sites and deities visited. Today the Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti offers a variety of more than fifty different pilgrimages. Most of them are still well-known “classical” yātrā.s from Purāṇic texts, particularly from the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*. But also a number of “modern”, not textually sanctioned, pilgrimages have emerged recently. They often combine sites included in different “classical” lists or, as in the case of the Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā, sites that are dedicated to a group of deities or mythical beings. The main purpose of such contemporary “invented” pilgrimages is to enable an interested public, regardless of social, caste or gender affiliations, to worship among like-minded devotees. As the large number of organized yātrā.s and attending pilgrims proves, the committee found an adequate possibility to reach a broad public.

Advertisement of the yātrā.s forms a central point of the samiti’s activities. Nearly all Banārsī newspapers report about the planned yātrā.s beforehand, and publish short summaries after the event. Lists with the respective routes are distributed to temples, shops, etc. In addition, word-of-mouth advertising, mainly among neighbours or during morning baths at the Gaṅgā, is common and effective. Among the participants of the Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā 2003 for instance 6 persons stated that they found the advertisement from a newspaper, 3 persons got informed by neighbours, 3 persons during a bath at the Gaṅgā and 2 persons directly contacted the committee. Approximately thirty yātrā.s are annually organized and conducted. Most of the pilgrimages, for practical reasons, take place on Sundays, unless attendance is restricted to or recommended in certain periods of the year (as, for instance, in the Navadurgā Yātrā (Kāśī Khaṇḍa 72.81-88), the Navagaurī Yātrā (Kāśī Khaṇḍa 100.67-74) and the Pañcakrośī Yātrā (Kāśī Rahasya)). The idea is to reach a broader public and to enable people employed during the week to participate. The number of participants depends on the name recognition of

each yātrā, and varies considerably, starting below ten and reaching up to several hundreds, for instance, in the renowned Navadurgā Yātrā. Since the foundation of the samiti, the variety of yātrā.s conducted has gradually increased. No maps are used by the committee. Recommendations for connecting individual sites on the route through the galī.s are provided by Svāmī Śivānanda Sārasvatī. His book *Kāśī Gaurava* (1993) by the samiti is accepted as the main textual source for the yātrā.s.

1)	Mā Kamalā (Lakṣmī) Devī	D. 50/40 Lakṣmīkuṇḍa
1a)	<i>Kālī Devī</i>	
2)	Mā Dhūmāvati (Dhūpcaṇḍī) Devī	12/34 Dhūpcaṇḍī, Nāṭī Imlī
2a)	<i>Narasinha Ṭīlā</i>	
3)	Mā Jvālāmukhī	Golādīnānātha, Jālpādevī C.K. 64/27
3a)	<i>Kāśī Devī</i>	
3b)	<i>Kālabhairava</i>	
4)	Mā Bhuvaneśvarī Devī	C.K. 1/21 Paṭnīṭolā in the temple of Śrī Agnīśvara Mahādeva
4a)	<i>Siddheśvarī Devī</i>	
4b)	<i>Candrakūpa</i>	
4c)	<i>San̄kaṭā Devī</i>	
5)	Mā Tripurasundarī Devī	C.K. 7/124 Siddheśvarī (next to San̄kaṭājī)
6)	Mā Bagalāmukhī (Pītāambarā) Devī	rising staircase at the first street-corner from San̄kaṭā, C.K. 2/38
7)	Mā Tārā Devī	Lalitāghāṭ, in a small temple D. 1/58
8)	Mā Rājarājeśvarī Devī	Rājarājeśvara Maṭha, Lalitāghāṭ D. 2/58
9)	Mā Lalitā Devī	Lalitāghāṭ, in a small temple at the top of the stairs, D. 1/67
10)	Mā Chinnamastā Devī	Teliyānā, Jaṅgamabāḍī D. 35/221-e
11)	Mā Tripurābhairavī	Tripurābhairavī Galī, 5/23
12)	Mā Kālikā Devī	Kālikā Galī, D. 8/17
13)	Mā Annapurṇā Devī	the temple of Annapurṇā
13a)	<i>Viśvanātha</i>	
13b)	<i>Jñānavāpīkuṇḍa</i>	

Fig. 2 - Official printed list of the yātrā route since 2002, as handed out to all participants. Italics mark the main additional sites visited, which are not directly connected to the Daśa Mahāvidyā.s and did not appear in the printed list.

The first Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā, conducted by the Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti, took place in February 2000. As in many other cases, the *Kāśī Gaurava* – which includes a list of Daśa Mahāvidyā sites in Banāras (Sarasvatī, 1993: 147-150) – provided the impetus for the development of this pilgrimage. The initial two yātrā.s of 2000 and 2001 (for the exact dates of all yātrā.s see Fig. 1) followed most of the book's data. The list given there slightly deviates from the list used by the committee since 2002, as presented in Fig. 2. The book names not thirteen, but ten individual Devī.s. For Tārā and Kālī different sites are given. Siddheśvarī, not listed by the samiti, is interpreted here as

Mātaṅgī. Saṅkaṭhā, also not included in the samiti list, is interpreted as Chinnamastā. However, Annapurnā, not mentioned in the text, has appeared on the committee list since the first pilgrimage. As of 2002, two more Devī.s have been added to the list – Jvālāmukhī and Lalitā – bringing the total number of goddesses to thirteen. This arrangement of Devī.s and their respective sites in Banāras will surely remain a topic of discussion among a number of contributors, including, for instance, priests of the respective temples, organizers such as Umāśankara Guptā, academics and researchers such as Prof. Rana P. B. Singh and the pilgrims, themselves. Fig. 2 shows further that, in addition to the thirteen Devī.s, other sites not directly associated with them were also visited. Generally, in Hinduism, it is customary to pay homage to all deities present in a temple – not just the presiding deity – with at least a short greeting. Consistently, it is a common procedure in all the samiti pilgrimages to pay homage to important deities passed along the route. For instance, Kālabhairava is worshipped predominantly on Sundays, and the pilgrims of the group are always glad to seize the opportunity to take darśana of Kāśī's koṭvāl – even if the yātrā route has to be extended to pass his temple. As Annapurnā is included in the list of the thirteen goddesses, every pilgrim will almost instinctively feel the need to visit the nearby temple of Viśvanātha. He is not only the Lord of Kāśī and central point of most of the town's pilgrimages, he is also so closely associated with his spouse Annapurnā that worshipping her may remain ineffective without taking his darśana as well. The organizers are aware that with the Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā they do not follow textual traditions. All thirteen Devī.s and their respective temples or shrines, as included in the official list of sites, shall now be individually introduced. Their significance and status within the religious structure of Banāras as well as their particular characteristics and functions will be examined.

The Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā starts in the most important temple of Lakṣmī in Banāras, situated at the Lakṣmīkuṇḍa pond. The goddess is worshipped here in her typical function as bestower of material and family welfare. Her presentation in the sanctum is unique. It portrays her in a threefold form with Mahālakṣmī depicted dominantly in the centre, flanked by Mahākālī on the right and Mahāsarasvatī on the left; representing the Hindu triad of goddesses, symbolizing preserving, destroying and creating, respectively. The temple is famous for its sixteen-day-long Sorahiyā Melā, also called Mahālakṣmī Yātrā (Eck, 1989: 421; Gutschow and Michaels, 1993: 171). The festival, lasting from

śuklapakṣa 8 of Bhādrapada to kṛṣṇapakṣa 8 of Āśvina, is celebrated with a daily bath in the kuṇḍa and rituals in the temple and especially on its final day attracts thousands of devotees (Sherring, 2001: 191-192; Singh, 2002: 154-156; Sukul, 1974: 241-242; Sukul, 1977: 91-92). Except for a wall painting of the individual Mahāvidyā.s, surrounding the entrance of a side-shrine dedicated to the Devī.s Vaiṣṇava, Jīvitaputrikā and Śāradā, nothing connects the temple with the Tantric Kamalā. In the understanding of the priests and public, alike, a Purāṇic goddess is worshipped here (though, of course, folk elements are also included). The pilgrims of the Daśa Mahāvidyā Yātrā gather at this temple to take darśana of the first goddess on their list and to take the saṃkalpa vow; the only ritual during each yātrā organized by the samiti. Theoretically, of course, the yātrī.s can, individually, also conduct any chosen ritual for any chosen deity during the period of the pilgrimage. But the yātrā's actual aim for the pilgrims is to pay respect to the designated goddesses by taking their darśana. The deity is worshipped with the customary simple offerings taken to a temple (puṣpa, dhūpa, sindūra, ilaycīdāna, etc.), rather than with elaborate rituals. The committee's chairperson Daṇḍī Svāmī Śivānanda Sarasvatī now gives his blessings and the group starts to move through the galī.s to the respective sites. As the temple just visited and the area surrounding it houses a large number of shrines and images it seems consistent that Lakṣmī does not remain the only goddess worshipped here by the pilgrims. A mūrti of Kālī in the compound of Kālīmaṭha only a few meters away is visited next. This location does not appear in the official lists of the samiti and is just the first in a number of additional stops dedicated to deities on the periphery of the yātrā.

One of the longest passages of the yātrā leads to Dhūmāvātī in Dhūpcaṇḍī, a muhallā named after its predominant deity. She attracts a very large number of devotees, but is nearly insignificant outside the area (only Sherring (2001: 153) reports of a Pañcakrośī Yātrā including her). Even though all Pūjārī.s know about her Mahāvidyā background and special characteristics, in her temple she is clearly depicted as a benign manifestation of Devī. Her mūrti is presented in a form usual for Banārasi goddess-temples. Nothing for instance reminds of her most characteristic feature – her status as a widow. The image shows all attributes denoting a married goddess: she is dressed with jewellery, flowers and preferably in red colours. The majority of devotees visiting her temple today considers the Devī married, and her individual concept to a great extent is unknown to

them. The goddess generally is understood as the muhallā-devata by people worshipping here. Her functions as such most obviously include the field of family welfare. Several festivities with a family background celebrated in the temple supply evidence for this belief. During the Banārsi tradition of pūjāyā, for instance, newly wed couples seek the goddess' blessings for a happily married life. Even wedding ceremonies are held in the temple. The Pūjārī.s conduct two detailed ārātī.s daily, based on the purāṇic pañcopacāra pūjā. Additionally several, much shorter, "spontaneous" ārātī.s take place each day, their number depending on the number of visitors demanding this service but reaching up to one hundred or more. In this context the offerings brought by the public are handed over to the Pūjārī, who then presents them to the Devī in the sanctum with a short ārātī. The two main festivals of the temple, primarily it's "yearly decoration", Vārṣika Śṛṅgāra (on Caitra Ekādaśī, śuklapakṣa 11), but also "the fifth of spring", Vasanta Pañcamī (Māgha śuklapakṣa 5), attract a considerable number of devotees. The most important feature then is the exceptional intensive and careful decoration of the goddess, which culminates in a special experience of darśana for the public. On certain occasions Tantric rituals take place inside the temple. In the night of Dhūmāvātī Jayañtī on śuklapakṣa 8 of Jyeṣṭha, the month considered unlucky, Tantric adepts conduct japa of the goddess' name and a ritual following the medieval textual prescriptions for Dhūmāvātī's invocation in detail. The Pūjārī.s are not involved in these Tantric practices, but tolerate them in the temple.

The nearby Narasiṅha Ṭīlā was visited for the first time during the yātrā 2003. In the origin myth of the Dhūmāvātī mūrti and temple this is the location where the goddess in her search for a final place to settle met the Ṛṣi Durvāsa. Meditating on the mound (ṭīlā) he instructed the Devī to take her abode on the spot of today's temple. Presently on the mound an āśrama is constructing a building, already housing several recently installed idols. The āśrama has no connections with the temple of Dhūmāvātī. Because of its mythological connection with the goddess the samiti plans to include this location in the future route.

Jvālāmukhī (locally also called Jālpādevī), like Annapurnā, is not included in most medieval lists of Mahāvidyā.s. Instead, the original seat of the guardian deity in Kangara, Himachal Pradesh, is believed to be the twenty first Śākta Pīṭha; the place where Satī's tongue fell. The goddess there shows only a minor connection to the Mahāvidyā.s, who are painted on a side-building (Kinsley 1998: 16). Her temple in Banāras shows no

affiliation to the group. The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (72.13; 72.101) mentions her as one of the Śaktis protecting Kāśī, but today she has no special functions or significance beyond the neighbourhood.

A shrine of Kāśī Devī, as her name denotes one of the tutelary deities of the city, is passed along the way by the pilgrims and naturally is honoured by them. Though she is not connected to the Mahāvidyā.s and therefore not included in the yātrā, a short stop gives enough time to pay respect to her.

Also Kālabhairava is worshipped on each Mahāvidyā pilgrimage. As already stated Sunday, which is the usual day for the yātrā, is the special day of Kāśī.s koṭvāl. The yātrī.s even accept a short extension of the route to pass the god and to be able to take his darśana. Having his origin as a guardian and lord of death today he is rather worshipped for wellbeing in the material world. The god already figures in the mythology of the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (31). As his temple is located away from the contemporary religious centres of Banāras and is hard to find in the galī.s pilgrims from outside the city are seldom brought here by their guides (Eck, 1989: 233; Singh, 2002: 152). Today the god is popular mainly among the residents of the neighbouring areas. The two main festivals celebrated in his honour are Kālabhairava Yātrā on Bhādrapada Pūrṇimā and Aṣṭabhairava Yātrā on kṛṣṇapakṣa 1 to 8 in Mārgaśirṣa (Gutschow and Michaels, 1993: 161, 171, 173; Sukul, 1974: 252).

Bhuvaneśvarī is the fourth goddess on the samiti's list of Mahāvidyā.s. She has no temple or shrine of her own in a literal sense today, even though a small inscription in front of the building housing her mūrti shows her name. Her image is the main (and largest) one in a number of mūrti.s in a small sanctum in the ground floor of a private residence. But more important than the Devī here is the liṅga Agnīśvara, who shares the sanctum with her and for this reason is believed to be her husband. Mūrti and liṅga both are believed to be self-emerged, svayambhū. In contrast to the goddess, who is very rarely visited even from residents of the area, Agnīśvara is included in the Antagrha Yātrā (*Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 100.77-95) and attracts a number of devotees during these pilgrimages. The liṅga.s higher status in relation to the Devī is also emphasized by Agnīśvara.s mythological connection to important deities and their temples in the neighbouring area, namely to Vīreśvara and Saṅkaṭā, in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (10.42-11 and 82-84) or *Śiva Purāṇa* (Śatarudrasamhitā 13-15). Bhuvaneśvarī shows no such (mythological or other) relations reaching beyond her

own sanctum here. The Brāhman owners of the building daily in the morning worship Devī and liṅga with a very basic ritual. Otherwise Bhuvaneśvarī has, in fact, no devotees of her own in this contemporary Banārasī temple. No special festival is arranged here, and even the Navarātri period, usually highly celebrated in the city's goddesses temples, is marked by nearly no additions to the daily routine, which do not aim at or attract the public.

Nearby Siddheśvarī and the well Candrakūpa are located in the same compound also housing Candreśvara, one of the most important liṅga.s of the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (for instance 73), figuring more prominently than Viśvanātha in the text. The Devī today is the tutelary deity of the muhallā named after her, but is worshipped by most of the residents rather only on special occasions (for instance in association with different saṃskāras, like the muṇḍana). The liṅga is nearly forgotten and attracts no visitors of his own today. The big well in the centre of the first of two courtyards forming the compound is freely accessible. The sanctum of Siddheśvarī in the second, back courtyard is closed to the public, but a fence facilitates to take darśana. The former famous liṅga Candreśvara in a closed and dark, not illuminated side-shrine below earth level is hardly discernible from outside. Assistance and ritual service are obviously neglected here. The compound and its respective deities are visited by devotees almost only from the neighbourhood and, seldom, by few yātrī.s.

The presiding goddess of the area today is, unquestionably, Saṅkaṭā, one of the most significant Devī.s of Banāras. Her background is difficult to trace, because unlike most of the other famous deities of the city she does not appear in ancient texts. Her name denoting “difficulty, strait, danger to or from” probably points to an origin among a class of ambiguous deities of the folk tradition, thought of as both causing and removing dangers. Most likely she always was a goddess related to a mother cult, and also today she is often worshipped by especially women for family welfare. D. Eck (1989: 202-204) sees the goddess' roots in the Māṭṛkā concept and identifies her with Vikaṭā Māṭṛkā, who is called the “redeemer from all miseries” in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (97.40). Vikaṭā Māṭṛkā also figures explicitly as the protector of a child (*Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 83.26-41) in a complex mythological story centred around the neighbouring liṅga Vīreśvara praising and interconnecting several localities of this highly significant religious area (for the full story see *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* 82-84). Saṅkaṭā.s former surely independent character was related to

Durgā-Mahādevī in mythology and, clearly, also in iconography – a rather typical development for many Devī.s emerging from the folk-substratum. Firmly integrated part of her worship today, for instance, is the recitation of the *Devī Mahātmyā*. In the courtyard of the temple often large groups of Brāhman.s are seen, engaged by private persons to please the goddess, to respectively ask for the granting or thank for the fulfilment of a wish, by reciting her glory as demon slayer. Also the image here represents these exact features – her right foot rests on the beheaded demon. Her temple, with its spacious courtyard, offers the opportunity for a rest to the yātrī.s, who have now covered more than half of the pilgrimage’s distance.

The image of Tripurasundarī is the next to be visited, and is located in a shrine near the entrance of the temple of Saṅkaṭā. The small shrine is open only on certain occasions, but it is always possible to take darśana of the goddess from the outside through a fence. Her daily ritual is taken care of, and the goddess with elegant clothing and fresh flowers is carefully presented to the public. Some devotees believe her to be a sister of Saṅkaṭā. With no special functions and only a very limited significance of her own, Tripurasundarī, nevertheless, attracts considerable attention. The majority of people coming to worship Saṅkaṭā because of the shrine’s location, take darśana here as well.

Only a few steps away, the first floor of a private residence forms the temple of Pītāmbārā, as Bagalāmukhī is called here. Mūrti and the temple building are privately owned and managed by an old-established Gujarātī Brāhman family, who organize and finance all aspects of the ritual. Bagalāmukhī’s mythology and background are known to them and to many of the devotees. In the neighbourhood, the temple is considered an extremely powerful place, and an interesting mixture of Vedic-Purāṇic and Tantric traditions occurs here. Devotees who wish to gain control over enemies (especially in lawsuits) arrange invocations by Brāhman.s (the recitation of the *Devī Mahātmyā* is common) in order to please the goddess. Even though the form of the ritual has changed, the goddess clearly kept her characteristic function in accordance with the Tantric texts.

The shrine of Tārā could, despite an inscription denoting the Devī’s name, remain unnoticed because of its size and location. The small shrine is embedded in a wall on Lalitāghaṭ and is almost always closed. The goddess here is hardly known, and as she is not located in a residential area, she is not even worshipped by passers-by.

Rājarājeśvarī's mūrti is established nearby inside the Rājarājeśvara Maṭha, one of several pāṭhaśālā.s in Banāras run by the Paramahaṃsa ascetics. The self-contained temple for certain periods is open to and attracts a small number of public devotees, but the goddess' importance here lies in the connection with the Maṭha. Rājarājeśvarī's affiliation to the Mahāvidyā.s is known (Sukul, 1977: 328). She is worshipped here with elaborate non-public rituals, which are not discussed with outsiders but are based on the Tantric Śrīvidyā cult according to interviewed devotees.

Lalitā's location today is still the same as given in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (70.18), directly on the waterfront at the ghāṭ named after her. She was an important goddess included in famous pilgrimages (for instance the yātrā.s Pañcakrośī, Navagaurī and Antagrha). Her glory decreased and today her small shrine at the ghāṭ is visited nearly only during the mentioned pilgrimages. Any connection of the goddess to the Mahāvidyā.s is without significance for these yātrī.s and the Pūjārī, who daily conducts a basic Purāṇic ritual.

The pilgrims' path then leads to Chinnamastā. Her mūrti, in a small shrine attached to the outside of a private residence at street-level, depicts a beheaded goddess attended by a tiger or a lion, both heavily covered with sindūra. A very basic ritual is offered to the Devī, but the shrine is usually closed by a fence. She is one of a vast number of small deities in Banāras literally located in the galī. Like most of these she has no special function, and her shrine's location and minor size prevent an attraction of devotees even from the neighbourhood.

A ghāṭ and muhallā is named after Tripurābhairavī, denoting her past significance here even though the Devī and the liṅga Tripureśvara at her side do not figure prominently in texts praising Purāṇic Kāśī or in any yātrā. Today's small temple consisting of only one room is located directly above the ghāṭ on the main galī connecting the northern Viśvanātha and Chowk areas with the southern Daśāśvamedha area. Entry is reserved to the Pūjārī; the public may take darśana through a fence. This surely contributes to the fact that the goddess does not attract devotees coming especially for her, even though the temple is well-situated at a highly frequented lane. The temple's financial situation corresponds to this lack of devotees. Unlike for instance Dhūmāvatī, Tripurābhairavī and her temple has in fact no practical religious relevance for the people living in the muhallā named after her. The Pūjārī twice daily conducts a basic, but careful ritual – a pañcopacāra pūjā and āratī. On special occasions like on her main temple festival on

Kārttika Caturdaśī (śuklapakṣa 14) or on Navarātri recites from the *Devī Mahātmyā*. He knows about Tripurābhairavī's affiliation to the Mahāvidyā.s, but shares the common belief that Tantric practices are a dangerous matter and should be restricted to specialists. Kālikā Devī is a most famous Kālī in Banāras (for instance she is listed as Kālarātri in the Navadurgā Yātrā) worshipped throughout the year by many devotees. The goddess Kālī figures in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (45.38) as one of the city's sixty four Yoginī.s. Her temple is located near the city's main pilgrimage attractions Viśvanātha and Annapurnā and also houses a mūrti of Vindhyavāsinī. Both goddesses are optically depicted as equal here – their images and the respective sanctum around it have nearly the same size and are similarly decorated. Circambulation is only possible around the two Devī.s at once – consequently the public visiting the temple in every case worships both goddesses here. In the official temple ritual though often mainly one of them is worshipped at a time. Kālikā's Purāṇic ritual is conducted by a group of Pūjārī.s.

The last Devī on the list, Annapurnā, today is the city's main goddess. The one “who is full of food” generously distributes her riches – she nourishes every inhabitant of Banāras and by her devotees is held responsible for the frequently stated fact that no person in this city ever dies of hunger. Her temple festival Annakūta, “mountain of food”, (on Kārttika śuklapakṣa 1) in a very picturesque manner clearly illustrates this character. Probably originating from a harvest festival practice literally mountains of especially sweets, but also of grain and of other food are then heaped in the temple. Food is also extensively distributed on this day. The spouse of Viśvanātha is visited by virtually every yātrī coming to the town and has, concerning her devotees as well as her temple management, strong South Indian relations (the image presently housed in the sanctum, for instance, in 1977 was donated by Śaṅkarācārya of Śrīgerī). Under the name of Bhavānī the goddess Annapurnā finds only a short mention in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (Sukul, 1974: 189 and Eck, 1989: 198). Purāṇic sources list her in the Yātrā.s Pañcakrośī and Navadurgā, and Tantric sources in a few cases add her to the Mahāvidyā.s (according to Bhattacharyya 1999: 320 the *Niruttārātantra*, Paṭala XV and *Mālīnīvijaya*, quoted in *Śāktānandarāṅgiṇī*, III or according to Kinsley 1998: 14 in the *Cāmuṇḍātantra*). Sukul (1974: 189) states that actually until the 16th century Bhuvaneśvarī was worshipped in Annapurnā's site. Several Śrīyantra.s are depicted in the temple, but the ritual conducted shows no Tantric elements.

The last, concluding darśana of the day by the yātrī.s is then taken at Viśvanātha, situated only a few meters away in the same lane. The temple of the "Lord of all", Kāśī.s presiding deity, is the by far most visited in the town, and forms the central point of most of it's pilgrimages – many start or end here. The god is closely associated with his spouse Annapurnā. Mythology and iconography in a similar matter state even Śiva.s dependence on her, when it comes to nourishment. For instance the market around both temples still today nearly overflows with depictions (modern colour-prints, but also carefully crafted batiks or brass images etc.) showing Viśvanātha reaching out his begging-bowl to her. The goddess often stands in an elevated position, holding a pot with food from which she fills her husbands bowl with a large spoon. So close is the interaction of both that worshipping her in the belief of many devotees remains incomplete or even ineffective without paying homage to Viśvanātha at the same time.

The yātrā finally comes to an end in the neighbouring Jñānavāpīmaṇḍapa, the area around the Jñānavāpīkuṇḍa well. According to the popular belief the liṅga Viśvanātha was hidden in this well after the destruction of the temple in 1669 and later was reinstalled in the new temple built by Āhalyā Bāi in 1777. In the opinion of some though the original liṅga still resides in the Jñānavāpīkuṇḍa. The area is preferred by tradition for the removal of the saṃkalpa. The group, after attending this last joint ritual marking the end of each successful pilgrimage, is discharged.

This description of the goddesses, temples and shrines visited on the yātrā presents a picture very far removed from the descriptions of the texts. Most of the goddesses seem so different from the concept presented in Tantric literature that one is inclined to wonder whether it is the same goddess at all. Nevertheless, the individual Mahāvidyā.s in contemporary Banāras are based on a Tantric concept emerging from the 10th century onwards, no matter how many and what kind of influences may have affected them since that time. Today, nearly all of the Devī.s in question not only invaded the Purāṇic sphere but are firmly integrated into it, thus following a common development in Hinduism. Only Pītāmbarā, Dhūmāvātī and Rājarājeśvarī to a very limited extend still show remnants of Tantric elements (in origin myths or ritual) in their temples. It seems that the individual Mahāvidyā.s in order to survive in the public awareness had to give up their Tantric affiliations, even to deny their origin. As may be expected, Pūjārī.s are more aware of the background of the deity they serve (even though in no case this showed any

practical, ritual or other, effects). The vast majority of devotees and yātrī.s however rarely knows about the Mahāvidyā concept, the respective goddess affiliation and far less about details from the textual background. They clearly imagine the goddesses as emanations of Mahādevī (except of course Lakṣmī, who has Vaiṣṇava relations) and worship them without exception with the blend of Purāṇic and Folk elements common to the city's Devī-temples. Interesting to note is which goddesses kept a certain continuity. If we exclude Rājarājeśvarī, who is rather an institution-bound than a public deity in her temple in Banāras and is worshipped accordingly, we find similarities for both remaining Devī.s, Pītāmarā and Dhūmāvātī. They both are Mahāvidyā.s who in textual sources almost never figure outside the group. Both show a clearly defined mythology which de facto restricts them to one single concept and function (the demon-fighter Bagalāmukhī controls enemies, the widow Dhūmāvātī harms or destroys them). And finally both are mainly invoked for their effective magical powers – for the siddhi of controlling respectively harming or killing enemies. As these two goddesses have no other than a Mahāvidyā background, and in it a particularly marked concept and function, it seems consistent that especially they were able to keep elements of their origin throughout their development. The other Mahāvidyā.s in fact less needed such a continuity in order to survive beyond a Tantric context. As they possess broader concepts per se they could emphasize alternative aspects already included or implied in the textual evidence – aspects more “appropriate” to a Purāṇic context.

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