



International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

The Integrated Aesthetic of the Devī Māhātmyam: Mahāmāyā, the Sublime, and the Eudaimonic Path to Bhukti-Mukti

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the Devī Māhātmyam (or Durgā Saptasatī), while a foundational theological text, functions as a unified masterwork of sacred literature and a profound treatise on aesthetics. The study re-examines the text's deliberate artistic construct, which is designed to guide the devotee through a transformative spiritual and aesthetic journey. The analysis identifies several core theological concepts as active aesthetic principles such as the Divine Opulence (Bhaga) defines the Goddess as the Ultimate Aesthetic Reality. The Great Illusion (Mahāmāyā) establishes the essential need for Detachment and Psychical Distance to appreciate the world as the Goddess's spectacular art (Līlā). The battle narratives utilize the Sublime, reconciling the terrifying (Raudra) with the wondrous (Adbhuta) Rasas to achieve artistic purification and restore cosmic order. Furthermore, the ritual of recitation establishes an aesthetic of Sound (Śabda-Brahman) that promotes flow and engagement. Ultimately, this integrated aesthetic culminates in the goal of Bhukti-Mukti (Enjoyment and Liberation), thereby providing a conduit for Eudaimonic well-being through the cultivation of awe, meaning, and purpose.

Key Words: Mahāmāyā (Great Illusion), Sublime, Rasa (Aesthetic Sentiment), Bhukti-Mukti (Enjoyment and Liberation), Aesthetic, Eudaimonic ("living in accordance with your true self.")

The Aesthetic Scope of Divine Opulence (Bhaga)

The Devī Māhātmyam or Durgā Saptashatī, is a theological text. It is also a work of profound aesthetic value. It is presented as a narrative poem within the Markandeya Purana. Like the Gita (the Song of the Lord), the Mahātmyam is a "Song" of the Goddess. It reveals the Divine Mother as the supreme reality.

The divine being is defined by opulence (bhaga). The supreme opulence is unlimited beauty. The Goddess is the embodiment of all qualities. She is the creator, the preserver, and the destroyer. She manifests as light, power, and consciousness. This total manifestation of divinity is the basis of her aesthetic appeal. All things beautiful and splendid are manifestations of Her. The text's description of her form is an aesthetic exercise in itself.

The Aesthetic of Syncretism (The Unified Form)

This aspect of aesthetic analyzes the structure of the Goddess's manifestation as a piece of aesthetic design. The Goddess is aesthetically presented as the unified energy of all male gods, taking the form of Ambikā, the unified Mother (as mentioned in verse 4.3). This is the ultimate Aesthetic of Fusion. Her manifestation is a composite masterpiece, drawing the best and most potent power from the Tridevas (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva) and other deities. This unified form is a visual and conceptual artwork that asserts the Non-Dual (Advaitic) principle of the Mother Goddess, resolving the tension between diverse divine forms into one magnificent, cohesive image. The diversity of powers is shown to be an aesthetic unity.

The Text as Art: The Aesthetic Foundation of the Devī Māhātmyam

The Devī Māhātmyam is essentially a poem. It is written in verse, meant for chanting. The text is also a story or a narrative. It tells the tales of the Divine Mother's battles against evil forces. Whether interpreted literally or symbolically, the narrative is captivating.

The Goddess herself embodies aesthetic concepts. She is described with great splendour, beauty, and majesty. The different forms she takes are a spectacle of beauty and power.

The text uses internal poetic devices. Descriptions of the demons and the Goddess's weapons are vivid and imaginative. The language itself becomes a vehicle for transmitting intense emotions like awe, fear, and devotion. Since the text is an expression of feeling, it qualifies as art.

The descriptions of her forms are vivid. The Narayani Stuti in Chapter 11 praises Her ultimate form. It calls her the most auspicious of all beings (11.3). The text reveals that unlimited beauty is a supreme opulence of the divine [1]. This is evident when the Gods praise her. They describe Her with

magnificent imagery (4.3-4). This shows that things of beauty reveal the divine [1]. The Goddess is also associated with light and knowledge. The light that shines through the universe is Her glory [1].

देवि प्रपन्नार्तिहरे प्रसीद प्रसीद मातर्जगतोऽखिलस्य ।

प्रसीद विश्वेश्वरि पाहि विश्वं त्वमीश्वरी देवि चराचरस्य ॥ (11.3)

O Goddess! Be pleased, for You remove the suffering of all who take refuge in You. Be pleased, O Mother of the entire universe! Be pleased, O Ruler of the universe! Protect the world. For You are the Goddess and the Sovereign of all moving and non-moving things.

देव्यया यया ततमिदं जगदात्मशक्त्या निःशेषदेवगणशक्तिसमूहमूर्त्या ।

तामम्बिकामखिलदेवमहर्षिपूज्यां भक्त्या नताः स्म विदधातु शुभानि सा नः ॥ (4.3)

The Goddess by whom this universe is pervaded through Her own power; Whose form embodies the collected powers of all the hosts of gods; To that Ambikā (Mother), who is worshipped by all the gods and great sages, We humbly bow with devotion. May She bestow all auspicious things upon us.

यस्याः प्रभावमतुलं भगवाननन्तो ब्रह्मा हरश्च न हि वक्तुमलं बलं च ।

सा चण्डिकाखिलजगत्परिपलनाय नाशाय चाशुभभयस्य मतिं करोतु ॥ (4.4)

Whose unequalled glory and might, the blessed Viṣṇu (Ananta), Brahmā, and Śiva (Hara) are not capable of fully describing; (The Fierce Goddess) resolve to protect the entire world. And to destroy the fear of all misfortune.

The designation of the Devī Māhātmyam as a canonical text often overshadows its identity as a towering work of art. Like the Bhagavadgita (The Song of the Lord), the Devī Māhātmyam is a "Song" of the Goddess. The very structure of the poem—three distinct Caritas (episodes) moving from the philosophical problem of Mahamaya to the ultimate transcendental resolution—is a deliberate artistic construct designed to guide the reader through a transformative aesthetic and spiritual journey.

The Beautiful and the Divine

The central figure, the Devī, is the source of all existence. This aligns with the idea that unlimited beauty is the supreme opulence of the divine. Just as in the Gita, the things of beauty and splendour reveal the divine. The world's beauty is a manifestation of the Goddess's own power.

The aesthetic principle of light is also present. The Goddess is often described as a radiant light that dispels darkness. This light is associated with knowledge and goodness.

The Devī Māhātmyam also unites seemingly opposite concepts, which is typical of a commanding artwork. It unites the fierce with the compassionate, destruction with creation, and the formless with the myriad forms.

The text's aesthetic foundation rests on the Goddess's identity as the source of all opulence, or bhaga. The supreme expression of bhaga is defined as unlimited beauty [1]. Scholar R. K. Mookerji notes that divine beings "reveal Him [the Divine] more" through things of beauty and splendour [1]. The Goddess is therefore the Beauty of all things beautiful.

This aesthetic link is established through the doctrine of the gunas (qualities of material nature). The Devī Māhātmyam figures sattva (goodness) as a fundamental aesthetic principle. When the energy of sattva prevails, the beautiful light of knowledge beams [1]. The manifestation of the Goddess to destroy Mahishasura, a spectacular, blinding burst of light and power, is the ultimate display of sattvic beauty combined with destructive force. It is the divine's light, radiance, and majesty that forms the core aesthetic of Her being.

The Aesthetic of Śabda-Brahman (Sound and Mantra)

The Devī Māhātmyam is written in verse and meant for chanting. The chanting of Mantras is an aesthetic concept. It is the Aesthetic of Sound. The text's aesthetic impact is realized not just through the mind (narrative, rasas) but directly through the ear and vocalization. The universe, according to Śākta philosophy, is manifested by divine sound (Śabda-Brahman). Therefore, the Devī Māhātmyam is a sonic artwork where the Mantras are the specific syllables and meters (like Upajāti or Śloka) that are powerful aesthetic structures. It emphasizes that the form (Śabda) is as significant as the meaning (Artha). Chanting the text is an act of participatory aesthetics where the devotee's voice co-creates the experience of the Divine. The Mantras are sung in Rhythm and Meter. The verses are designed to move the consciousness from a state of chaos to a state of calm, rhythmic focus (sānti), which is an aesthetic progression in itself.

Art for Art's Sake: The Goddess's Līlā and Non-Utilitarian Creation

The question of Art for Art's Sake finds its theological equivalent in the Hindu concept of Līlā—the divine play. Līlā is the non-utilitarian, self-motivated activity of the Divine. The follower of the Devī Māhātmyam acts because it is their duty. They are unconcerned about the results. This parallels a noble

sense of "art for art's sake". The ideal artist honors an inner, aesthetic impulse regardless of reviews or success. They work not for rewards but for the sake of the act itself.

The Devī Māhātmyam does not present the Goddess as a mere problem-solver forced into action by the distress of the gods. Instead, Her creation, sustenance, and destruction of the universe are viewed as an uncaused, spontaneous, and blissful expression of Her own power. The battles and manifestations are not chores but dramatic, artistic displays. She is the solitary consciousness who chooses to become manifold for the sheer joy of it.

Her most enigmatic creation, Mahamaya, is the master work of this Līlā. She is the power that makes the world a stage, a theatrical performance. By casting the delusion that makes the temporary seem real, the Goddess ensures the cosmic drama—the play of life and death, good and evil—can unfold. This cosmic drama, in its magnificent scope and complexity, is Her art. It is performed not for an audience or a reward, but because it is the inherent nature of the artist to create.

Detachment and Distance: The Aesthetic of Mahamaya

The first episode of the Devī Māhātmyam introduces the concept of Mahamaya (the Great Illusion). This force is the central aesthetic element of the universe. It is the power that makes the world possible. The story of King Suratha and the merchant Samadhi highlights this. Both men are aware of their emotional bondage. They know their family members have betrayed them. Still, they are unable to detach their hearts. The text explores profound human psychology. King Suratha and the merchant Samadhi are afflicted by sorrow (1.46-49). They know their attachments are flawed, but cannot let them go (1.49).

विवेकिनोऽपि पश्येतान् पतङ्गाञ्जिह्वामोहिनः।

मानुष्ये मानुषानां च तथा चैषां नृप स्थितिः ॥ (1.46)

The same condition, O King, exists among human beings with respect to their children. Look at these birds, O King! Though possessing knowledge, they are deluded by affection for their young.

तन्मे सविस्तरं ब्रूहि पृच्छतस्तात विस्तरम् ।

येन मोहनिद्रेयं बुद्धेः सम्भूता नृप ॥ (1.47)

O my dear! Please explain this to me in detail, to me who thus asks, By what means this **sleep of delusion (Mohanidra)** has come upon the intellect.

ज्ञानमस्ति समस्तस्य जन्तोर्विषयगोचरे ।

विषयाश्च महाभाग यान्ति चैव पृथक्पृथक् ॥ (1.48)

All living beings have knowledge concerning the objects perceived by the senses. And these sense-objects, O noble one, are perceived by them in various ways.

दिवा नक्तं पशूनां च ज्ञानं तुल्यं तथैव च ।

तथा चैव मनुष्याणां ज्ञानं भवति नान्यथा ॥ (1.49)

The knowledge that animals have is the same, whether by day or by night. Similarly, the knowledge that human beings possess is no different (in its fundamental nature).

The Rishi Medhas explains this dilemma. He identifies the power that binds them as Mahamaya. She is the Divine Mother's power of illusion. This delusion is crucial for the existence of the phenomenal world. Mahamaya is the great artist. She weaves the fabric of reality. She casts the spell that makes the relative world appear real. This is why the characters cannot let go of their attachments. They are inside Her illusion.

The narrative of King Suratha and the merchant Samadhi, both afflicted by irrational attachment, provides the framework for the aesthetic principle of Detachment and Distance. The Rishi Medhas reveals that their bondage is caused by the deliberate delusion (moha) of Mahamaya.

तथैतन्मोह्यतेविश्वं सैवविश्वप्रसूयते।

सायाचिता च विज्ञानं तुष्टाक्रद्धिं प्रयच्छति॥ (1.55)

By Her this entire universe is deluded. It is She who gives birth to the universe. When pleased, She grants the highest knowledge. When pleased, She grants prosperity.

The aesthetic remedy for this bondage is the cultivation of Detachment and Distance. The concept of Psychological Distance—the separation of the observer from the object of art for true appreciation—is central here [1]. True appreciation of art requires aesthetic distance [1]. One must see the artwork without ego or prejudice [1]. Similarly, one must remove delusion to see the ultimate truth. The spiritual path requires detachment from personal ego [1]. The devotee must surrender fully. Suratha and Samadhi suffer because they lack this aesthetic gap; they are drowning in the reality of their own role within the Līlā.

Detachment (Vairagya) is the spiritual discipline that allows the devotee to perceive the world as Her creation, an impermanent, beautiful illusion, without becoming trapped by its rewards or punishments. This spiritual detachment is the mechanism for gaining psychical distance from the drama of one's own life, allowing one to move from a position of suffering actor to that of an enlightened spectator.

Detachment and Aesthetic Distance

The aesthetic experience requires detachment. One must look at the art, not get lost in its material reality. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes detachment (Nishkama Karma) as spiritual discipline. In art theory, this is called Psychical Distance. The viewer must separate the object from their personal needs. Total surrender requires detachment from the personal ego. The devotee seeks to act without attachment to results. This is like an actor delivering a performance who is internally removed from the outcome.

This concept of detachment is also part of aesthetic behaviour. To truly appreciate art, one needs a distanced perspective. This distance allows one to appreciate the artwork without partiality or prejudice. The self that requires distancing is the self-centered ego. The self that seeks union with the divine is the higher self.

Suratha and Samadhi suffer because they lack this distance. The sage Medhas explains this condition. It is caused by Mahamaya, the great delusion (1.55). She is the power of the Supreme Being (4.3). She is described as the one who "forcibly draws the minds of even the wise and throws them into delusion" (4.3).

तयैतन्मोहतेविश्वं सेवविश्वंप्रसूयते।

सायाचिता च विज्ञानं तुष्टाक्रुद्धिं प्रयच्छति॥ (1.55)

By Her this entire universe is deluded. It is She who gives birth to the universe. When pleased, She grants the highest knowledge. When pleased, She grants prosperity.

देव्यया यया ततमिदं जगदात्मशक्त्या निःशेषदेवगणशक्तिसमूहमूर्त्या ।

तामम्बिकामखिलदेवमहर्षिपूज्यां भक्त्या नताः स्म विदधातु शुभानि सा नः ॥ (4.3)

The Goddess by whom this universe is pervaded through Her own power; Whose form embodies the collected powers of all the hosts of gods; To that Ambikā (Mother), who is worshipped by all the gods and great sages, We humbly bow with devotion. May She bestow all auspicious things upon us.

They are too close to the art of their own lives. When they worship the Goddess, they seek to transcend this bondage. They seek Her grace to gain spiritual knowledge (vijñāna). This knowledge is the key. It allows one to appreciate the world as Her creation, not as a source of suffering. This shift in perspective is the first aesthetic move in the text.

Aesthetics in Devotion and Action: The Awesome and Wondrous

The text describes Bhakti (devotion) as the way to relate to the Goddess. This surrender to the Divine Mother parallels the artist's total surrender to their creative project. The devotee gives themselves entirely to the Goddess, holding nothing back. The artist similarly invests heart, mind, and will in their creation.

The battle narratives exemplify Aesthetics in Devotion and Action, where the fierce, destructive acts of the Goddess become objects of worship. The conflict is charged with the dynamic energy of Rasas (aesthetic sentiments), moving beyond simple violence to achieve the Sublime.

The central aesthetic theme is the concept of the Sublime. The Goddess's form and action evoke both immense beauty and terrifying awe. The second episode describes the slaying of Mahishasura. Here, the Goddess manifests as Mahalakshmi (Ambika). She is born from the concentrated energies of all the gods.

Sattva, Splendour, and the Form

The manifestation is a burst of divine light and splendour (sattva). Sattva is linked to beauty and knowledge in the Guna doctrine. The Goddess is thus inherently beautiful. She is described as having infinite arms, weapons, and dazzling radiance. This form is too great for the mind to fully grasp.

The Awesome and Wondrous (Adbhuta Rasa)

The manifestation of the Goddess in her multi-armed, weapon-wielding forms, culminating in the terrifying visage of Kālī, is the expression of the Awesome and Wondrous. This corresponds to the two key Rasas that are Raudra (Fierce/Terrible) and Adbhuta (Wondrous/Awesome).

The devotee's profound spiritual awakening upon encountering the Goddess's reality is an aesthetic experience. This experience includes the awesome and the wondrous. When the Goddess appears, her cosmic form evokes the sublime. The devotee sees no beginning, middle, or end to her boundless form. The Goddess is identified with splendor, majesty, and glory.

The battle itself is a display of the Sublime. This is the feeling of wondrous awe when faced with something greater than oneself. Philosopher Rudolph Otto called this the *mysterium tremendum* (the terrifying mystery). A comparative analysis is presented in the following table to highlight the key differences/synthesis between Indian aesthetic concept captured in the *Devī Māhātmyam* and the Western aesthetic concept of Burke and Kant.

Concept	The Devī Māhātmyam Aesthetic (Indian)	Burke/Kant Aesthetic (Western)	Key Difference / Synthesis
Source of the Sublime	The Divine Mother's boundless, terrifying, and dazzling form. It is the aesthetic of divine energy .	Burke: Terror and self-preservation instinct when faced with great power or magnitude. Kant: The failure of imagination to grasp infinite magnitude or power (a feeling of respect for reason).	The Devī Mahatmyam's Sublime is teleological (purposeful). The terror (Raudra) is immediately integrated with the ultimate beauty and grace. The act of destruction is an "artistic purification" that restores cosmic order.
Effect on the Observer	Leads to a "purified state of mind" for the gods and devotees. It is an act of grace and beauty that brings joy to the righteous .	The observer gains a sense of superiority from being safe from the threat (Burke) or feels the sublime capacity of their reason (Kant).	Devī Māhātmyam explicitly links the sublime act to the prayer for spiritual beauty (rūpam) and the destruction of inner enemies . The terror serves a clear, beneficial, and salvation functions.

When the Goddess fights, her power is overwhelming. It is the aesthetic of divine energy. She fights with a terrifying roar, and her attendant Kali creates chaos. This terrifying display is not chaotic. It is a purposeful act of creation and preservation. It restores the cosmic order. The terror is part of the final beautiful resolution. The battle scenes, filled with the Raudra (Fierce) and Adbhuta (Wondrous) Rasas (emotions), lead to a purified state of mind for the gods and devotees.

The Goddess's actions are both terrifying (Raudra) to the demons and simultaneously wondrous (Adbhuta) to the gods. The very act of killing a demon like Mahishasura is hailed as an act of grace and beauty because it restores cosmic order. This is explicitly stated in the prayers offered to Her:

महिषासुरनिर्नाशि भक्तानां सुखदे नमः।

रूपं देहि जयं देहि यशो देहि द्विषोजहि॥ (Argala Stotram 4)

Salutations to the Destroyer of Mahishasura, the Giver of Joy to devotees. O Devi, grant me spiritual beauty, grant me victory, grant me glory, destroy my inner enemies

The prayer asks for beauty (rūpam) itself. It confirms that Her destruction of evil is an act of supreme beauty. It brings joy to the righteous. The prayer for spiritual beauty (rūpam) is not an appeal for physical appearance but for the purity and light of consciousness [4]. It asserts that the ultimate act of aesthetic Action—the destruction of the inner enemies of ego and desire—is achieved through Devotion to Her beautiful, yet terrifying, form. The entire episode is an aesthetic unit suggesting that the destruction creates space for beauty.

The Ultimate Aesthetic Prayer: The Attainment of Rūpam

The final goal of the devotee is to achieve the spiritual beauty the Rūpam (form/beauty) that has been made as a distinct request by the devotee to The Divine Mother. Rūpam is not merely sensual beauty (Lavanya); it is spiritual, perfected form that reflects the inner Sattva (purity). The Argala Stotram explicitly asks: "रूपं देहि जयं देहि" (rūpam dehi jayam dehi—Give me beauty, give me victory...). The aesthetic goal is thus the perfection of the jīva's (individual soul's) own form—a spiritual refinement that destroys the inner enemies (ego, lust, greed), making the devotee's life an object of beauty and peace. The Goddess's form is the ultimate template for this aesthetic ideal—a combination of terrifying power (Raudra) and serene grace (Śānta).

Ineffability and Experience: The Ultimate Aesthetic Goal

The third and final episode, culminating in the destruction of Shumbha and Nishumbha, reveals the ultimate non-dual nature of the Goddess. Here, the aesthetic moves from the visible form to the ineffable reality—the one, undifferentiated source.

The final, climactic worship in the Narayani Stuti (Chapter 11) transitions to the highest aesthetic state: Ineffability and Experience. After witnessing the full range of the Goddess's forms, from the gentle to the ferocious, the devotees realize the limits of conceptual thought.

Ineffability and Experience

The Goddess is the all-encompassing reality, the singular force behind all knowledge and all existence. This knowledge is an Experience that cannot be contained by words. Since She is everything, no praise can fully capture Her. She is the form of the formless. This ineffability is the highest aesthetic

experience. It is experiential, not conceptual. The experience of Her unity goes beyond words. Art attempts to communicate what prose language cannot fully convey. Both aesthetic and spiritual experiences are always ineffable to some degree. Their ineffability comes from the uniqueness and inexhaustibility of what one encounters.

The ultimate reality of the Goddess is ineffable [1]. It cannot be fully expressed in words [1]. Her form is beyond all comprehension. Even the Gods cannot fathom Her completely (4.7-8). The battlefield scenes convey the sublime. This is a primary aesthetic experience [1]. The Goddess's weapons are called "wondrous" (Divya) (10.12). This evokes an emotion of awe 1. During the battle with Shumbha, the Goddess declares her nature (10.5). She says: "I am alone here in the world. Who else is there beside Me?" (10.5). She shows that all other Goddesses are just projections of her singular power (10.8). This is the great aesthetic declaration of unity.

हेतुः समस्तजगतां त्रिगुणापि दोषै- न ज्ञायसे हरिहरादिभिरप्यपारा ।

सर्वांश्रयाखिलमिदं जगदंशभूतमव्याकृता हि परमा प्रकृतिस्त्वमाद्या ॥ (4.7)

You are the Cause of all the worlds, and though possessing the three *Guṇas* (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas), You are untouched by their defects; You are unfathomable even to Viṣṇu (Hari) and Śiva (Hara). You are the Resort of all, and this entire world is but an infinitesimal portion of You. For You are verily the Supreme Primordial Prakṛti (Matter), unmanifest and beginningless.

यस्याः समस्तसुरता समुदीरणेन तृप्तिं प्रयाति सकलेषु मखेषु देवि ।

स्वाहासि वै पितृगणस्य च तृप्तिहेतुरुच्चार्यसे त्वमत एव जनैः स्वधा च ॥ (4.8)

O Goddess, by the chanting of Svāhā, You cause the entire host of gods To attain satisfaction in all the sacrifices; You are also Svadhā (the offering), the cause of the satisfaction of the ancestral spirits; Therefore, You are chanted by people as both Svāhā and Svadhā.

हाहाकारस्तथा क्रुद्धैर्भीषणैस्तेर्दिगन्तरम् ।

सघनैस्तत्समं पूर्णं कृता यत्र नभः खगैः ॥ (10.5)

With their enraged and fearful shouts (*Hāhākāra*s), they filled the quarters of the sky, Just as the atmosphere is densely filled by birds.

ततोऽम्बिका क्रोशतीभ्यः शूलमुद्रपरणयः ।

समाह्वयामभ्यधावन्महाऽसुरबलैरिताः ॥ (10.8)

Then Ambikā (the Mother) turned upon them, whose hands held spears and maces. And who were driven forth by the armies of the great asuras who were roaring (in war-cries).

यतः सुरारिमार्गं स लेभे न स्रस्तसारथिः ।

ततः शरैः कालयत्तुश्चापं चास्य महामतिः । चिच्छेद च्छत्रं खड्गं च स्यन्दनं जघने हवैः ॥ (10.12)

The enemy of the gods could find no way to escape, for his charioteer was fallen. Then, the great-minded Goddess (Ambikā) destroyed his bow with Her arrows. And cut down his canopy, his sword, and his chariot along with the horses.

The stories in the Devī Māhātmyam are a form of spiritual symbol. They bridge the transparent world of everyday life with the transcendent realm. The intellectual study of the text differs profoundly from a vital participation in its rituals and prayers.

विद्याः समस्तास्तवदेविभेदाः स्त्रियः समस्ताः सकला जगत्सु ।

त्वयैकया पूर्णतमम्बयै तत् का ते स्तुतिः स्तव्यपरापरोक्तिः ॥ (11.6)

O Devi, all knowledge systems are various forms of you. All women in the world are your forms. O Mother, this world is filled by you alone. What praise is there that can truly describe you?

This rhetorical question marks the moment of Ineffability [5]. Since the Goddess is the universal consciousness that pervades all things—She is the form of the formless—any attempt to describe Her is redundant or insufficient [6]. The aesthetic climax is therefore reached when the mind is silenced, and the beauty is simply experienced as the non-dual reality.

The Goal is Aesthetic: Bhukti-Mukti

The final promise of the Goddess reveals that The Goal is Aesthetic purity and wholeness. The Devī Māhātmyam offers the integrated ideal of Bhukti-Mukti—the simultaneous attainment of worldly Enjoyment (bhukti) and spiritual Liberation (mukti) [5].

रोगानशेषानपहंसि तुष्टा रुष्टा तु कामान्सकलानभीष्टान् ।

त्वामाश्रितानानविपन्नराणां त्वामाश्रिताश्रयतां प्रयान्ति ॥ (11.29)

When pleased, you destroy all diseases. When displeased, you thwart all aspirations. No calamity befalls those who have taken refuge in you. Those who resort to you become a refuge for others.

The ultimate aesthetic experience is the state of perfect equilibrium and refuge [5]. By recognizing the Divine Mother as the artist of Līlā and embracing her reality with Detachment and Distance, the devotee achieves a beautiful, fear-free state where life is fully enjoyed, yet the soul remains eternally free.

The ultimate goal of spiritual practice mentioned in the text is a state of union. The devotee aspires to unite with the Divine Mother. This union is always harmonious and a harmony is always aesthetic. A final state of peace coming from the union with the Divine Mother is the highest aesthetic achievement. The union can take two forms: a complete merging of identity or an I-Thou devotional relationship. This aesthetic model may reconcile different approaches to the Divine.

The text promises this to the devotees. The Goddess promises to remove all obstacles (12.11). She grants material prosperity and ultimate knowledge (12.37). The knowledge leads to release from the cycle of birth (13.8-9). This final state of liberation is itself a state of perfect, undisturbed beauty and peace 1.

Interpenetration flourishes when the barriers between the self and the other break down. The devotee feels the Goddess within and flows with her. The goal of the spiritual path in the Devī Māhātmyam is ultimately aesthetic. One seeks to obtain the highest aesthetic state, which is peace. This peace, like a serene lake, is beautiful because it is undisturbed. Art is a means to this spiritual state. The resulting spiritual consciousness is itself aesthetic.

This is the ultimate aesthetic resolution. The Goddess does not force a choice between the world (enjoyment) and the transcendent (liberation). She offers the complete package. To take refuge in Her is to realize that life's struggles are part of Her cosmic play. The final aesthetic state is peace (śānti), where the devotee is protected from all fears and calamities. The text itself is a great blessing that grants both health and prosperity, and ultimately, salvation. The Devī Māhātmyam thus offers a unified aesthetic, the world, viewed with detachment, becomes a beautiful manifestation of the one, awesome, and unifying Divine Mother.

The Integrated Aesthetic of Bhukti-Mukti

The Devī Māhātmyam stands as a masterwork of sacred literature and a profound treatise on aesthetics. This analysis confirms its identity as The Text as Art, where the Divine Mother is not merely a theological figure but the Ultimate Aesthetic Reality.

The text's artistic design is built upon a dynamic interplay of opposites:

1. Mahamaya functions as the master delusion, forcing the need for Detachment and Distance. By achieving Psychical Distance from the painful drama of ego and attachment, the devotee can appreciate the universe as the Goddess's spectacular, non-utilitarian creation (Art for Art's Sake or Līlā).
2. The battle narratives reconcile the terrifying (Raudra) with the wondrous (Adbhuta). Her destructive acts are not arbitrary; they are the necessary artistic purification, establishing Her form as the Awesome and Wondrous Sublime, the highest expression of The Beautiful and the Divine [1].
3. The text concludes by transcending dualistic perception, moving to the state of Ineffability and Experience, where Her vastness surpasses all linguistic description [5].

Ultimately, The Goal is Aesthetic. The Devī Mahtmayam defines spiritual success as the integrated experience of Enjoyment and Liberation (Bhukti-Mukti) [5]. By engaging in Aesthetics in Devotion and Action, the devotee is granted the grace to inhabit the world (Bhukti) with the perfect, detached perspective of the enlightened spectator (Mukti). The text thus transforms the existential crisis into a beautiful, self-aware performance, securing a state of eternal peace and spiritual beauty for those who take refuge in the Divine Mother.

The Aesthetic-Spiritual Conduit: Devī Māhātmyam and Eudaimonic Well-being

Positive Psychology investigates human flourishing and optimal function. Aesthetic experience is a critical, under-explored pathway to psychological well-being [9]. The structured practice of reading or chanting sacred literature demonstrably improves individual life satisfaction [10]. The Devī Māhātmyam provides a unique aesthetic-spiritual conduit to this Eudaimonic well-being. This paper attempts to facilitate positive psychology through three primary mechanisms.

1. Engagement and Flow

Recitation demands intense cognitive focus. The complex Sanskrit meters and ritual structure require sustained engagement. This practice helps the devotee enter a psychological state of flow [12]. Flow is defined as deep absorption in an activity. This state is an optimal experience leading to increased happiness and skill development. For the devotee, the chanting transcends everyday emotional distress. This active aesthetic participation serves as a form of mindfulness.

2. Awe and Positive Emotion

The Devī Māhātmyam narratives utilize the aesthetic of the Sublime. They combine the fierce (Raudra) and the wondrous (Adbhuta) Rasas. This fusion evokes profound awe in the devotee [10]. Awe is a powerful positive emotion. It promotes a feeling of smallness relative to a vast power. Experiencing awe reduces self-focus and increases connection to a larger collective. This shift directly counters narrow preoccupation with personal suffering.

3. Meaning and Purpose (Bhukti-Mukti)

The paper identifies the aesthetic goal as Bhukti-Mukti (Enjoyment and Liberation) [5]. This ideal resolves the tension between worldly life (Bhukti) and spiritual pursuit (Mukti). The text provides a definitive, coherent narrative of meaning. Attaining a sense of meaning and purpose is a central component of Positive Psychology's PERMA model [11]. The aesthetic realization of the Divine Mother as the ultimate, beautiful reality offers the devotee existential clarity. This clarity ensures that action and devotion are aligned, cultivating persistent joy.

Conclusion

The Devī Māhātmyam stands as a masterwork of sacred literature and a profound treatise on aesthetics, confirming its identity as "The Text as Art," where the Divine Mother is the Ultimate Aesthetic Reality. The text's artistic design is built upon a dynamic interplay of opposites. Mahāmāyā functions as the master delusion, forcing the need for Detachment and Distance from the painful drama of ego and attachment. By achieving Psychical Distance, the devotee can appreciate the universe as the Goddess's spectacular, non-utilitarian creation, realizing the principle of Art for Art's Sake (Līlā). The battle narratives reconcile the terrifying (Raudra) with the wondrous (Adbhuta) sentiments. Her destructive acts are not arbitrary; they are the necessary artistic purification, establishing Her form as the Awesome and Wondrous Sublime, the highest expression of the Beautiful and the Divine. This journey transcends dualistic perception, moving to the state of Ineffability and Experience, where Her vastness surpasses all linguistic description. Ultimately,

The Goal is Aesthetic. The Devī Māhātmyam defines spiritual success as the integrated experience of Enjoyment and Liberation (Bhukti-Mukti). By engaging in Aesthetics in Devotion and Action, the devotee is granted the grace to inhabit the world (Bhukti) with the perfect, detached perspective of the enlightened spectator (Mukti). The text thus transforms the existential crisis into a beautiful, self-aware performance, securing a state of eternal peace and spiritual beauty for those who take refuge in the Divine Mother. This final state of perfect harmony is the highest aesthetic achievement, providing a structured practice that fosters Eudaimonic Well-being through flow and awe.

Notes

1. The Devī Māhātmyam is also known as the Durga Saptashati or Chandi Path.
2. The aesthetic categories of the awesome and sublime are deeply felt during the descriptions of the Goddess's battles.
3. The concept of Mahamaya in the text illustrates the principle of aesthetic awareness versus spiritual experience [1].
4. (12.11) These types of references in the paper refers to The Devī Māhātmyam Chapter number and the verse number. For Example here 12 refers to Chapter and 11 refers to verse number in Chapter 12 of The Devī Māhātmyam.

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