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Sri Aurobindo's Fourfold Vision of the Mahāśakti: Correspondences in Vedic, Purāṇic, and Stotra Literature

R. S. Hariharan [1]

ABSTRACT

Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother* (1928) articulates a fourfold vision of the Divine Śakti: Maheśvarī (Wisdom), Mahākālī (Strength), Mahālakṣmī (Harmony), and Mahāsarasvatī (Perfection). These are presented as real conscious forces with their own existence, temperament, and cosmic function, not symbolic personifications or doctrinal constructs. This paper undertakes a comparative study across three strata of Sanskrit literature: the Vedic Saṃhitās, principally the Ṛgveda; the Purāṇic corpus, principally the *Devī Māhātmyam*; and the stotra kāvya tradition, including Śaṅkarācārya's *Saundaryalaharī* and *Mahiṣāsura Mardini Stotram*, and Vedānta Deśika's *Śrīstuti*. It shows that the same realities described by Sri Aurobindo are present across each stratum, each expressed in the symbolic and devotional language appropriate to its age and purpose. The paper further demonstrates that Sri Aurobindo's explicit identification of Maheśvarī as a fourth aspect resolves a structural tension within the *Devī Māhātmyam*'s triadic scheme, a tension that the text itself does not resolve. The argument proceeds not from any claim of textual derivation, but from the recognition that the same realities, namely Wisdom, Force, Beauty, and Perfection as real powers of the one Mahāśakti, are present in the tradition and receive clear philosophical formulation in Sri Aurobindo's account.

Keywords: Sri Aurobindo, Mahāśakti, *Ṛgveda*, *Devī Māhātmyam*, fourfold vision.

Introduction: The Real Character of the Vedic Gods

Sri Aurobindo opens *The Secret of the Veda* with a philosophical declaration that is foundational to this paper's argument. He writes in Chapter III: "the Rig Veda itself, indeed, asserts that the gods are only different names and expressions of one universal Being who in His own reality transcends the universe; but from the language of the hymns we are compelled to perceive in the gods not only different names, but also different forms, powers and personalities of the one Deva. The monotheism of the Veda includes in itself also the monistic, pantheistic and even polytheistic views of the cosmos" (*Secret*, ch. III). This is not an externally imposed reading. It is a description of the Vedic vision itself, which holds simultaneously that the gods are real, distinct personalities with their own forms and functions and that they are genuine expressions of the one supreme Deva. Neither their plurality nor their unity cancels the other. Both are irreducible facts of the Vedic understanding.

T. V. Kapali Sastry, who wrote his Sanskrit commentary *Siddhānjana* on the Ṛgveda along the lines of Sri Aurobindo's understanding, confirms this from his own direct study of the texts. In *Further Lights on the Veda and the Tantra*, completing his sustained analysis of Agni's character in the Saṃhitā, he concludes: "the Gods cease to be allegorical representations of mere attributes of the Godhead, but reveal themselves as substantial Realities, Powers, Personalities of the Supreme One; they are no longer personifications of mere forces of Nature, but Beings at their back and top functioning indeed in the Universe as Cosmic manifestations of the Supreme Godhead" (*Further Lights* 72). Earlier in the same work, on the general character of the Vedic pantheon, he states: "the Gods are distinct personalities with their respective activities; while each is important in his place and fulfils his purpose and is indispensable for the governing of the Cosmic order" (*Further Lights* 30). On the specific question of how to characterise the Vedic understanding of natural phenomena and their presiding powers, he is equally precise: "it is not correct to say that the people of the Vedic times deified or personified the forces of Nature; rather they believed that there were Gods who presided over the Sun and the Moon, the Earth or Heaven, the Fire, the Storm, the sacred Rivers and other visible bodies in the physical universe" (*Further Lights* 1).

This understanding of the devatā as a real, distinct conscious power of the one supreme Godhead governs this paper's comparative method. The four Aspects of the Mother that Sri Aurobindo describes in *The Mother* are to be understood in exactly the same way. Maheśvarī, Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī are real conscious individualities of the one Mahāśakti,

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1. *Assistant Professor, Centre for Ancient History and Culture, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, Email: rshariharan@hotmail.com*

not doctrinal categories or devotional fictions. Sri Aurobindo states this plainly: they are "portions and embodiments of her divinity through whom she acts on her creatures, orders and harmonises her creations in the worlds and directs the working out of her thousand forces" (*Mother* 14).

The purpose of this paper is to set Sri Aurobindo's characterisation of the four Aspects alongside the relevant passages in three strata of Sanskrit literature. The claim is not that Sri Aurobindo derived his vision from these texts. The claim is that the same realities he describes are present and attended to across the whole body of Sanskrit literature, each stratum naming them in the language of its own age: in mantra in the Ṛgveda, in the narratives of the Purāṇas, and in the philosophical poetry of the stotra tradition. Sri Aurobindo's account in *The Mother* gives these the precision of a direct philosophical formulation.

The paper proceeds in five sections. Section 2 outlines Sri Aurobindo's fourfold vision and its philosophical basis. Sections 3 through 5 examine the Vedic, Purāṇic, and stotra strata in turn. Section 6 draws the argument together.

Sri Aurobindo's Fourfold Vision: Philosophical Basis

The fourfold vision appears in Chapter VI of *The Mother*, its longest and most developed chapter. Sri Aurobindo introduces the four Aspects as follows:

> "Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play. One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes and it is these powers that they bring with them into the world, manifest in a human disguise in their Vibhutis... To the four we give the four great names, Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati." (*Mother* 17-18)

Three features of this passage are philosophically significant and bear directly on the comparative analysis that follows.

First, the four Aspects are described as "Powers and Personalities"; the same terms Sri Aurobindo uses for the Vedic gods. They are real individualities of the one Mahāśakti, not symbolic conveniences. Sri Aurobindo is unambiguous: "the Mother is one but she comes before us with differing aspects; many are her powers and personalities, many her emanations and Vibhutis that do her work in the universe" (*Mother* 14). The plurality is real, the unity is real, and neither dissolves into the other.

Second, the four attributes form a mutually conditioning and complete expression. Sri Aurobindo states: "Wisdom and Force are not the only manifestations of the supreme Mother; there is a subtler mystery of her nature and without it Wisdom and Force would be incomplete things and without it perfection would not be perfect" (*Mother* 20). Wisdom without force remains passive; force without beauty becomes ungoverned; beauty without precision is transient; precision without wisdom is mechanical. The four together constitute the full dynamic of the Mahāśakti's self-expression in the world.

Third, the typology is not grounded in the Sāṃkhya framework of the three *guṇas*. This point is developed in Section 4.3. For the present it is sufficient to note that Sri Aurobindo's four Aspects are powers of the *parā* Śakti, the transcendent divine Conscious Force that stands above and prior to the three *guṇas* of *aparā prakṛti*. This marks his most significant structural departure from the *Devī Māhātmyam*'s framework.

The Vedic Stratum

a. The Method of Reading

Sri Aurobindo argues in *The Secret of the Veda* that the Ṛgvedic hymns operate on a double register simultaneously: the outer and cosmic and the inner and psychological. This is not an imposed interpretive framework but a construction the Vedic poets themselves deliberately built into the hymns. The psychological sense, as Sri Aurobindo demonstrates across the text, is more coherent and consistent across the body of the Saṃhitā than the naturalistic reading that European scholarship had applied.

Kapali Sastry, approaching the same texts from his own Vedic scholarship, reaches the same conclusion about the nature of the gods. They are real presiding powers, not personifications: "The Gods are distinct personalities with their respective activities" (*Further Lights* 30). "They are not mere names but are different Powers, have different functions, distinctive signs that

mark them out featuring their Personalities, yet not absolutely separate from but closely allied to one another, not apart from the sole Supreme Truth, the Godhead but definite manifestations of That indefinable" (*Further Lights* 16). The Vedic correspondences identified below are read from this standpoint.

b. Aditi, Varuṇa, and Maheśvarī

Sri Aurobindo identifies Aditi, the supreme goddess of the Ṛgveda, as "the supreme or infinite Consciousness, mother of the gods" (*Secret*, ch. XIII 131). She is *a-diti*, the undivided, the boundless, the mother of all the Ādityas, the solar powers of cosmic truth. She appears in the Ṛgveda as the one who contains all without being diminished, the infinite that excludes nothing. Ṛgveda 1.89.10 invokes her:

अदितिर्द्यौरदितिरन्तरिक्षमदितिर्माता स पिता स पुत्रः ।
विश्वे देवा अदितिः पञ्च जना अदितिर्जातमदितिर्जनित्वम् ॥

[Aditi is the sky, Aditi is the atmosphere; Aditi is the mother, she is the father, and she is the son. All the gods are Aditi, and the five classes of beings are Aditi; whatever has been born is Aditi, and whatever is yet to be born is Aditi.]

The verse holds, in compact mantra form, the quality that Sri Aurobindo names as Maheśvarī's most characteristic possession: omniscient compassion that excludes nothing. He writes of Maheśvarī: "Nothing can move her because all wisdom is in her; nothing is hidden from her that she chooses to know; she comprehends all things and all beings and their nature and what moves them and the law of the world and its times and how all was and is and must be" (*Mother* 18). And further: "all are to her eyes her children and portions of the One, even the Asura and Rakshasa and Pisacha and those that are revolted and hostile. Even her rejections are only a postponement, even her punishments are a grace. But her compassion does not blind her wisdom or turn her action from the course decreed; for the Truth of things is her one concern, knowledge her centre of power and to build our soul and our nature into the divine Truth her mission and her labour" (*Mother* 19). Aditi in Ṛgveda 1.89.10 is the mantra-body of this same principle: the infinite that holds all, governs all, and excludes nothing from her encompassment.

Varuṇa, Aditi's great son and the cosmic upholder of *ṛta* (truth, the law of cosmic order), carries the quality of Maheśvarī into the dimension of governance and correction. His hymns, notably Ṛgveda 7.86 to 7.89, are among the most inward and psychologically searching passages in the Saṃhitā. The seeker does not pray for rain or cattle. He confesses his unknowing, acknowledges Varuṇa's all-seeing knowledge, and asks only for the removal of what obstructs truth. Sri Aurobindo describes Maheśvarī as one for whom "the Truth of things is her one concern, knowledge her centre of power" (*Mother* 19). Varuṇa's entire character in the Saṃhitā is precisely this: governance of the cosmos through the knowledge of truth, sight that holds all without partiality, correction of what obstructs *ṛta*. The same power is named and characterised in both.

c. Indra and Mahākālī

Sri Aurobindo's reading of Indra in *The Secret of the Veda* identifies him as the divine mind-power whose central function is to break through the forces of obscuration and release the imprisoned light. He writes that "Indra, the Divine Mind-Power takes their secret wealth from the powers of the Ignorance" (*Secret* 227). The principal force of obscuration against which Indra acts is Vṛtra. Sri Aurobindo gives the literal sense of the name: "Vritra means the opponent, obstructer or enfolding coverer" (*Secret* 140). At the level of inner significance, "Vritra must be the power that obstructs and prevents the free movement of the illumined rivers of the Truth, obstructs the impulsion of the Truth in us, *ṛtasya preṣā*, the luminous impulsion, *jyotiṣmatīm iṣam*, which carries us beyond the Night to the immortality" (*Secret* 202). Indra's battle with Vṛtra is therefore the concentrated force of the truth-consciousness shattering every formation that stands between the seeker and his divine inheritance.

Sri Aurobindo writes of Mahākālī: "Not wideness but height, not wisdom but force and strength are her peculiar power. There is in her an overwhelming intensity, a mighty passion of force to achieve, a divine violence rushing to shatter every limit and obstacle. All her divinity leaps out in a splendour of tempestuous action; she is there for swiftness, for the immediately effective process, the rapid and direct stroke, the frontal assault that carries everything before it" (*Mother* 19). This is structurally Indra's function: the concentrated, irresistible divine force that shatters Vṛtra and releases the light.

Sri Aurobindo adds what makes Mahākālī irreducibly maternal and not merely a power of destruction: "For she too is the Mother and her love is as intense as her wrath and she has a deep and passionate kindness. When she is allowed to intervene in her strength, then in one moment are broken like things without consistence the obstacles that immobilise or the enemies that assail the seeker" (*Mother* 19-20). The Ṛgvedic Indra carries the same dual quality. He is the warrior against Vṛtra and the friend (*sakhā*) of the devotee. His wrath is directed at what obscures; his care is directed at the one who calls upon him. The destroyer of obstacles and the inner sustainer of the devotee are the same force apprehended from two positions.

d. The Vedic Sarasvatī and Mahāsarasvatī

Sri Aurobindo writes that "The symbolism of the Veda betrays itself with the greatest clearness in the figure of

the goddess Saraswati" (*Secret* 91). Of all the Vedic deities, Sarasvatī is the one whose inner psychological character is least concealed by the outer naturalistic description. She is, he writes, "plainly and clearly, the goddess of the Word, the goddess of a divine Inspiration" (*Secret* 91). The key term in Sri Aurobindo's reading of her is *dhī*, which he identifies as the illumined intelligence, the thought-power of the truth-consciousness rather than thought in the ordinary sense (*Secret* 91-100). *Ṛgveda* 6.61.4:

प्रणो देवी सरस्वती वाजेभिर्वाजिनीवती । धीनामवित्र्यवतु ॥

[May the divine Sarasvatī, rich in nourishment, bearer of all vital energy, come forth to us. She who is the protectress of all illumined intelligence (*dhī*), may she protect us.]

Dhīnām avitrī: the protectress of the formed, illumined intelligence. Sri Aurobindo describes Mahāsarasvatī in terms that are structurally the same principle seen from a later vantage: "The science and craft and technique of things are Mahasaraswati's province. Always she holds in her nature and can give to those whom she has chosen the intimate and precise knowledge, the subtlety and patience, the accuracy of intuitive mind and conscious hand and discerning eye of the perfect worker" (*Mother* 22-23). The Vedic Sarasvatī who protects and gives *dhī* is the same real power Sri Aurobindo names as Mahāsarasvatī: the guardian and giver of the formed intelligence that executes without error. Sri Aurobindo quotes and translates the three-goddess formula of *Ṛgveda* 10.110.8 in Chapter IX of *The Secret of the Veda*. The verse:

आ नो यज्ञं भारती तूयमेत्विळा मनुष्वदिह चेतयन्ती । तिस्रो देवीर्बर्हिरेदं स्योनं सरस्वती स्वपसः सदन्तु ॥

[May Bharatī come swiftly to our sacrifice; may Iḷā awaken our consciousness here as she does for humankind. May all three goddesses sit upon this blissful sacred grass, and Sarasvatī, the doer of perfect works (*svapasaḥ*), among them.]

Sri Aurobindo translates: "May Bharati come speeding to our sacrifice and Ila hither awakening our consciousness (or, knowledge or perceptions) in human wise, and Saraswati, — three goddesses sit on this blissful seat, doing well the Work" (*Secret* 95). The rendering of *svapasaḥ* as "doing well the Work" points precisely to the quality Sri Aurobindo names in Mahāsarasvatī: "Nothing short of a perfect perfection satisfies her and she is ready to face an eternity of toil if that is needed for the fullness of her creation" (*Mother* 23).

Ṛgveda 2.41.16 expresses the devotee's prayer to this power in its most direct form:

अम्बितमे नदीतमे देवितमे सरस्वति ।
अप्रशस्ता इव स्मसि प्रशस्तिमम्ब नस्कृधि ॥

[O best of mothers, best of rivers, best of goddesses, Sarasvatī: we are as those without the power of right and accomplished expression. O Mother, create in us that power.]

Apraśastāḥ: those lacking the capacity for right, accomplished expression and execution. This is the craftsman's prayer, not for inspiration in a vague sense but for the specific capacity to execute rightly, completely, and without the error that mars the work.

e. Uṣas, the Śrīsūkta, and Mahālakṣmī

Sri Aurobindo writes of Uṣas in Chapter XIII of *The Secret of the Veda*: "the illumining dawn of the higher or undivided Consciousness is always the dawn of the Truth" (*Secret* 131), and he identifies Uṣas directly as "the dawn of the illumination of the Truth" (*Secret* 133). She is the goddess who "comes manifesting the greatness," who brings with her joy and beatitude, who is described in the Ṛgveda as "the luminous leader of happy truths" (*Secret* 133). In Sri Aurobindo's reading, Uṣas is not merely the physical dawn but the power of the higher consciousness illumining the human being and making the light of truth desirable, bringing the soul toward it with joy rather than with effort of will alone.

The *Śrīsūkta*, appended to the Ṛgveda as a Khilasūkta, is the concentrated mantra-body of this principle in the Vedic tradition. Its fourth verse:

कां सोस्मितां हिरण्यप्राकारामार्द्रां ज्वलन्तीं तृप्तां तर्पयन्तीम् ।
पद्मे स्थितां पद्मवर्णां तामिहोपह्वये श्रियम् ॥

[I invoke that Śrī who smiles gently, enclosed in golden radiance, wet and tender (*ārdrā*), blazing with splendour, herself fulfilled and fulfilling all, seated upon the lotus, lotus-hued.]

The word *ārdrā*, wet and tender, names what distinguishes Mahālakṣmī's grace from Maheśvarī's vast compassion and from Mahākālī's fierce care: the warmth of direct and intimate touch. Sri Aurobindo writes: "to be close to her is a profound happiness and to feel her within the heart is to make existence a rapture and a marvel; grace and charm and tenderness flow out from her like light from the sun" (*Mother* 20). The *ārdrā* of the *Śrīsūkta* and Sri Aurobindo's "tenderness flowing like light from the sun" name the same quality in the two registers of mantra and philosophical prose.

Sri Aurobindo writes of Mahālakṣmī's demand: "Harmony and beauty of the mind and soul, harmony and beauty of the thoughts and feelings, harmony and beauty in every outward act and movement, harmony and beauty of the life and surroundings, this is the demand of Mahalakshmi. Where love and beauty are not or are reluctant to be born, she does not come" (*Mother* 21). The *Śrīsūkta*'s fifth verse addresses this condition directly, praying for the destruction of *alakṣmī*:

चन्द्रां प्रभासां यशसा ज्वलन्तीं श्रियं लोके देवजुष्टामुदाराम् ।
तां पद्मिनीमीं शरणमहं प्रपद्येऽलक्ष्मीर्मे नश्यतां त्वां वृणे ॥

candrāṃ prabhāsāṃ yaśasā jvalantīṃ śriyaṃ loke devajuṣṭām udārām |
tāṃ padminīmīṃ śaraṇam ahaṃ prapadye alakṣmīr me naśyatāṃ tvāṃ vṛṇe ||

I take refuge in that Śrī who shines like the moon, blazing with renown, adored by the gods, noble and magnanimous, embodiment of the lotus. May *alakṣmī* be destroyed. I choose you.

Alakṣmī is not merely material poverty. The word names the inner coarseness of spirit, the squalor of mind and life that makes a dwelling unsuitable for Śrī's presence. The prayer against *alakṣmī* is a prayer for the inner refinement that makes one capable of receiving her.

The Purāṇic Stratum: The Devī Māhātmyam

a. The Triadic Structure and Its Inherent Tension

The *Devī Māhātmyam*, embedded within the *Mārkāṇḍeya Purāṇa* (chapters 81 to 93), is the central Purāṇic statement of Śākta understanding. Its three narrative episodes correspond to three named forms of the Goddess. Mahākālī presides over the defeat of Madhu and Kaiṭabha (chapters 1 to 2), Mahālakṣmī over the defeat of Mahiṣāsura (chapters 3 to 5), and Mahāsarasvatī over the defeat of Śumbha and Niśumbha (chapters 6 to 13). Each episodic form is associated with one of the three *guṇas* of Sāṃkhya: Mahākālī with *tamas*, Mahālakṣmī with *rajas*, and Mahāsarasvatī with *sattva*.

The text carries a structural tension it cannot resolve within its own triadic framework. Beyond the three manifest *saguṇa* forms, the *Devī Māhātmyam* also addresses the Goddess as the *nirguṇa* absolute, the unmanifest ground that transcends and contains all three episodic forms. This unmanifest ground is referred to in the text also as Mahālakṣmī. The same name thus refers both to the second episodic form (associated with *rajas*) and to the supreme transcendent ground (associated with none of the *guṇas*). The text cannot resolve this ambiguity because it lacks a distinct name for the fourth principle it points toward.

Sri Aurobindo's fourfold schema resolves this structurally. By naming Maheśvarī explicitly as a fourth Aspect and characterising her as the power of all-comprehending wisdom that is the ground and sanction of the other three active powers, he gives distinct identity to what the *Devī Māhātmyam* implies but cannot cleanly name. Maheśvarī is not another active power alongside the other three. She is the background consciousness from which the other three operate and to which they return. She corresponds structurally to the *Devī Māhātmyam*'s own *nirguṇa* Mahālakṣmī but is now named distinctly and characterised with philosophical precision, without the naming confusion the Purāṇic text cannot avoid.

b. The Paradox of Mahākālī in the Devī Māhātmyam

The eleventh chapter of the *Devī Māhātmyam* contains the *Nārāyaṇī Stuti*, in which the same verse-form recurs with a changing central epithet (*Devī Māhātmyam* 11.3-13):

या देवी सर्वभूतेषु शक्तिरूपेण संस्थिता ।
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः ॥

yā devī sarvabhūteṣu śaktirūpeṇa saṃsthitā |
namas tasyai namas tasyai namas tasyai namo namaḥ ||

She who abides in all beings in the form of Power: salutation to her, salutation to her, salutation to her, again and again.

The refrain recurs through the chapter with *śaktirūpeṇa* replaced successively by *kṣānti-rūpeṇa* (patience), *śānti-rūpeṇa* (peace), *śraddhā-rūpeṇa* (faith), and *buddhi-rūpeṇa* (intelligence). The fierce warrior who destroys Mahiṣāsura is the same as she who abides in all beings as their inner peace, their patience, their faith. Sri Aurobindo makes the same point about Mahākālī with full explicitness: "For she too is the Mother and her love is as intense as her wrath and she has a deep and passionate kindness. When she is allowed to intervene in her strength, then in one moment are broken like things without consistence the obstacles that immobilise or the enemies that assail the seeker" (*Mother* 19). And: "she is loved and worshipped by the great, the strong and the noble; for they feel that her blows beat what is rebellious in their material into strength and perfect truth, hammer straight what is wry and perverse and expel what is impure or defective" (*Mother* 20). The *Nārāyaṇī Stuti* and Sri Aurobindo's account attend to the same reality: the destroyer of obstacles and the indwelling sustainer of the devotee are one.

c. Sri Aurobindo's Departure from the Guṇa Framework

The *Devī Māhātmyam*'s association of the three Aspects with the three *guṇas* places them within the Sāṃkhya framework of the three qualities of *prakṛti*. Sri Aurobindo's fourfold vision does not map onto this framework, and the difference is not incidental. For Sri Aurobindo, the four Aspects are powers of the *parā* Śakti, the transcendent divine Conscious Force, not modes of *aparā prakṛti* conditioned by *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*. His Mahākālī is not the *tamas*-force of *prakṛti* but the divine force itself, the irresistible impulsion of the truth-consciousness toward its goal. She may work through *tamas* as the material she breaks, but she is not conditioned or constituted by it.

This distinction follows from Sri Aurobindo's consistent position in *The Life Divine* that the Divine Śakti in her true nature is *parā*, standing above and prior to the

three *guṇas* of *aparā* nature (*Life Divine*, CWSA Vols. 21-22). The four Aspects are manifestations of this *parā* Śakti. The *Devī Māhātmyam* points toward this same distinction through its *nirguṇa* Goddess, but does not develop it as systematically. Sri Aurobindo's framework gives to what the Purāṇic text implies a fully articulated philosophical basis.

The Stotra Kāvya Stratum

a. The Saundaryalaharī and Maheśvarī

The *Saundaryalaharī*, attributed to Ādī Śaṅkarācārya, opens with the most philosophically exact statement of the Śakti's sovereignty in the stotra tradition. Verse 1:

शिवः शक्त्या युक्तो यदि भवति शक्तः प्रभवितुं न चेदेवं देवो न खलु कुशलः स्पन्दितुमपि ।
अतस्त्वामाराध्यां हरिहरविरिञ्चादिभिरपि प्रणन्तुं स्तोतुं वा कथमकृतपुण्यः प्रभवति ॥

[Only when united with Śakti does Śiva become capable of creating the universe. Without her, even he cannot stir. You are worshipped by Hari, Hara, and Viriñci. How then could one without accumulated merit be able even to bow to you, much less to praise you?]

V. K. Subramanian notes on this verse: "Creation is the result of the union of Śiva and Śakti, the power-holder and power. The formless Infinite becomes the myriad forms of life through power, śakti" (Subramanian 1). Sri Aurobindo writes of Maheśvarī: "Imperial Maheshwari is seated in the wideness above the thinking mind and will and sublimates and greatens them into wisdom and largeness or floods with a splendour beyond them. For she is the mighty and wise One who opens us to the supramental infinities and the cosmic vastness, to the grandeur of the supreme Light, to a treasure-house of miraculous knowledge, to the measureless movement of the Mother's eternal forces" (*Mother* 18). The sovereignty the *Saundaryalaharī*'s opening verse establishes, the Śakti as the ground and condition of all cosmic activity, is the philosophical basis of the quality Sri Aurobindo names in Maheśvarī.

Verse 24 of the same text extends this governance into the complete cycle of cosmic operations:

जगत्सूते धाता हरिरवति रुद्रः क्षपयते तिरस्कुर्वन्नेतत्स्वमपि वपुरीशस्तिरोदधे ।
सदापूर्वः सर्वं तदिदमनुगृह्णाति च शिव- स्तवाज्ञामालम्ब्य क्षणचलितयोर्भ्रूलतिकयोः ॥

[Brahmā creates; Viṣṇu sustains; Rudra destroys; Maheśvara causes even his own form to dissolve; Sadāśiva unceasingly bestows grace upon all. All of this proceeds only on the mandate of your brows at their slightest momentary movement.]

Subramanian notes: "This and the next two verses highlight the subordination of all gods to the Supreme Power" (Subramanian 14). The entire cycle of the *pañca-kṛtya*, the five cosmic acts of creation, preservation, destruction, concealment, and grace, proceeds on her mandate alone. Sri Aurobindo writes of Maheśvarī that her mission is "to build our soul and our nature into the divine Truth" (*Mother* 19). The *Saundaryalaharī* states the same governing authority at the scale of the cosmos.

The *Lalitāsahasranāma* adds two names that corroborate Sri Aurobindo's characterisation of Maheśvarī from within the Śrīvidyā tradition's own enumeration. The name *Sarvajñā* (the Omniscient, name 196) carries directly what Sri Aurobindo describes: "nothing is hidden from her that she chooses to know; she comprehends all things and all beings and their nature" (*Mother* 18). Bhāskarārāya's commentary, drawing on *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.9, explains: "One who perceives all and knows all. The *Devī Purāṇa* also: as she knows everything she is called Omniscient" (Ananthakrishna Sastri 112). The name *Sarvamaṅgalā* (the source of all auspiciousness, name 200) corroborates Sri Aurobindo's statement that even Maheśvarī's punishments are a grace. Bhāskarārāya's commentary quotes the *Devī Purāṇa*: "She gives all the good fortune longed for in the heart, all desired good objects, hence she is called Sarvamangala" (Ananthakrishna Sastri 113).

b. The Mahiṣāsura Mardini Stotram and Mahākālī

The *Mahiṣāsura Mardini Stotram* is the stotra kāvya embodiment of Mahākālī's nature. Its twenty-one verses in rapid compound metre enact in sound what Sri Aurobindo describes in prose: "the immediately effective process, the rapid and direct stroke, the frontal assault that carries everything before it" (*Mother* 19). The second verse:

सुरवरवर्षिणि दुर्धरधर्षिणि दुर्मुखमर्षिणि हर्षरते त्रिभुवनपोषिणि शङ्करतोषिणि किल्बिषमोषिणि घोषरते ।
दनुजनिरोषिणि दितिसुतरोषिणि दुर्मदशोषिणि सिन्धुसुते जय जय हे महिषासुरमर्दिनि रम्यकपर्दिनि शैलसुते ॥

[She who showers boons upon the foremost of gods; who assails those hard to overpower; who endures the evil-faced; who delights in the roar of battle. She who nourishes the three worlds; who pleases Śaṅkara; who steals away all sin. She who burns with wrath at the demon-born; who dries up the pride of the wicked; daughter of the ocean. Victory, victory to you, O Slayer of Mahiṣāsura, of beautiful braided hair, O daughter of the mountain.]

The verse holds fierce epithets and tender address simultaneously. *Durdhara-dharṣiṇi* (she who assails those hard to overpower) and *tribhuvana-poṣiṇi* (she who nourishes the three worlds) stand in the same line. The refrain *śailasute*, daughter of the mountain, is a term of familial intimacy. The warrior and the mother are not two aspects held in tension but one reality seen from two positions. Sri Aurobindo describes the same unity in

Mahākālī: "she is loved and worshipped by the great, the strong and the noble; for they feel that her blows beat what is rebellious in their material into strength and perfect truth, hammer straight what is wry and perverse and expel what is impure or defective" (*Mother* 20). The rapid metre of the stotram itself running without pause through compound after compound, is the formal enactment of Mahākālī's mode: the stroke that does not hesitate.

c. Vedānta Deśika's Śrīstuti and Mahālakṣmī

Vedānta Deśika (1268-1369 CE) composed his *Śrīstuti* in twenty-five verses of Mandākrāntā metre as a sustained devotional and philosophical statement about the nature of Śrī within the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta *sampradāya*. Two features of the text bear directly on Sri Aurobindo's characterisation of Mahālakṣmī.

The first concerns the question of Śrī's sovereign power as her own intrinsic nature. Vedānta Deśika names her *īśānā* of the universe. The word *īśānā* is formed from the root *īś* (to rule, to be master of) with the *cānash* suffix, which in Sanskrit grammar designates a quality that is permanent and constitutive of the subject's nature, distinct from qualities that are contingently acquired or held by association with another. Her *īśanatva* (lordship) is *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*, a defining characteristic of her own nature, not *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa*, a quality held by relation to another. Sri Aurobindo states the same of Mahālakṣmī in his own terms: she is a full Aspect of the divine Mahāśakti, a power in her own right who acts as principal and not as derivative (*Mother* 17).

The second is verse 14 of the *Śrīstuti*:

यस्यां यस्यां दिशि विहरते देवि दृष्टिस्त्वदीया तस्यां तस्यामहमहमिकां तन्वते सम्पदोघाः ।

[In whichever direction your gaze wanders, O Devī, there, rushing to outdo one another, competing among themselves, floods of abundance pour forth.]

Sri Aurobindo writes of Mahālakṣmī: "the compelling magic of an irresistible universal charm and attraction that draws and holds things and forces and beings together and obliges them to meet and unite that a hidden Ananda may play from behind the veil and make of them its rhythms and its figures" (*Mother* 20). Deśika's verse reveals the same quality: things do not merely receive Śrī's grace; they race toward it, competing with each other in their eagerness. This is the power Sri Aurobindo names in Mahālakṣmī, not the force that drives (Mahākālī) nor the wisdom that comprehends (Maheśvarī) but the beauty and harmony that attract, that make beings desire to move toward each other and toward the divine. The compound *aham-aham-ikāṃ*, "I, I first," captures in three syllables the competitive rush of abundance toward her gaze.

Structural Argument and Directions for Further Inquiry

Across the three strata examined in this paper, the four qualities that Sri Aurobindo names in *The Mother* appear and recur, each stratum attending to them in the language available to its own age and purpose.

In the *Ṛgveda*, the qualities are distributed across several deity-figures: Aditi and Varuṇa for the omniscient, encompassing governance of Maheśvarī; Indra for the concentrated force and maternal care of Mahākālī; the Vedic Sarasvatī for the formed, inspired intelligence and perfect execution of Mahāsarasvatī; Uṣas and Śrī for the beauty and warmth of Mahālakṣmī. The Ṛgveda attends to each quality with precision in the language of mantra but does not gather them into an explicit fourfold schema under distinct names.

The *Devī Māhātmyam* consolidates three of these qualities into named forms: Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī. It points toward the fourth, the all-governing wisdom, through its *nirguṇa* Mahālakṣmī, but cannot name this distinctly without creating the structural ambiguity identified in Section 4.1. The triadic schema, shaped by the Sāṃkhya *guṇa* framework, cannot absorb the fourth principle without confusion.

The stotra kāvya tradition attends to each quality in philosophical poetry: the *Saundaryalaharī* for the ground sovereignty of Maheśvarī; the *Mahiṣāsura Mardini Stotram* for the paradox of Mahākālī's force and tenderness; the *Śrīsūkta* and *Śrīstuti* for the warmth and sovereign grace of Mahālakṣmī.

Sri Aurobindo's contribution in *The Mother* is a direct philosophical account of all four as real, distinct, conscious powers of the one Mahāśakti. He names Maheśvarī explicitly as a fourth Aspect, resolves the structural ambiguity of the *Devī Māhātmyam*, and grounds the fourfold vision in the *parā* Śakti above the *guṇa* level rather than in the Sāṃkhya framework. Both moves are continuous with what the tradition itself already attends to. As Kapali Sastry observes of the Vedic gods, that they "reveal themselves as substantial Realities, Powers, Personalities of the Supreme One" (*Further Lights* 72), so the four Aspects of the Mahāśakti are substantial Realities, present and at work across the full breadth of the Sanskrit tradition, awaiting the precise philosophical naming that Sri Aurobindo gives them in *The Mother*.

Several areas remain open for further inquiry. Whether the fourfold quality-pattern can be found within the Āgamic literature of the Śaiva Siddhānta, whether the *Tripurā Rahasya* or the *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* develop the implied fourth category of the *Devī Māhātmyam* more explicitly, and whether Kapali Sastry's Sanskrit commentary *Siddhānjana* provides more granular philological engagement with the Vedic correspondences identified here: each of these is a productive direction for further work within the tradition.

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