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A Discourse Analysis of the *Argala Stotram* in the *Durga Saptashati*

Saumya Sharma[1]

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Abstract

Across cultures, religious discourse serves as a model for behaviour of individuals, through the chanting of hymns, stories and ritual practices. Although studies exist on the discourse analysis of such texts in the Western context, not much is available on Hindu religious writings. Hence, drawing on specific tools of discourse analysis such as vocabulary, speech acts and intertextuality, this paper engages in a discursive reading of the Argala Stotram from the Durga Saptashati highlighting some of its features. Firstly, the *stotram* contains various names of the goddess that require an intertextual understanding of how she is conceived, described and invoked across several texts. Secondly, the names can lexically be seen as synonyms and the relation of the deity with others can be viewed in terms of hierarchy and complementarity. Thirdly, multiple speech acts are employed by the speaker-devotee when uttering the hymn and the appropriateness of the speech acts can be better understood through the conviction of *sahrdaya*, linking discourse with Indian aesthetic theory and showing how a textual reading provides insights about language, the participants involved and their complex dynamics of interaction that is simultaneously verbal, emotional and cognitive.

Keywords: Religious Discourse, Discourse Analysis, Argala Stotram, Durga Saptashati, Devi Mahatmya, Speech Acts

1.0. Introduction: Religious Discourse Studies

Religious Studies is an interdisciplinary area that can be linked to various academic disciplines, be it philosophy, sociology, anthropology, gender, psychology and comparative studies. Sociologists have been interested in exploring the contrast between religion and reason,

[1] Associate Professor, EFL University, Regional Campus, Lucknow-226012. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5227-8616, Email:saumyasharma@efluniversity.ac.in

the nature of theology, how it sustains culture, the role of religion as a civilizational legacy and its interplay with society (see Durkheim 1995, Hume1990 and Weber 1993). A focus on religion can also be seen in the works of anthropologists who have investigated the customs and rituals of traditional societies, including totems and magic, and how these served as fundamental belief systems, determining the worldviews of individuals (see Douglas 1966, Levi-Strauss 1966 and Turner 1969). With the rise in feminist studies, the issue of gender has also been explored wherein scholars have examined male bias in religious texts and the inclusion of feminine symbols and women's experiences within the religious canon (see Slee 1990 and Jantzen 1995). In contemporary times, there seems to be a shift towards de-traditionalisation of religion with scholars arguing that instead of focusing on western concepts, emphasis should be placed on analysing micro-narratives and evolving new methods of analysis: "new languages of description and interpretation are called for; new theories are required" (Heelas 2004: 252). This means understanding religious texts and practices in all their complexity, using an interdisciplinary lens along with knowing how one's beliefs and religious position shape and are shaped by religious studies. It is within the above-mentioned academic perspective that the present paper is positioned as it seeks to discursively examine an Indian religious text.

1.1 Religion and Language

Broadly, religion influences human behaviour and one's judgments about self and others, orienting us to the social world. It provides directional strength about one's beliefs, allowing us to see "in the facts of the world signs of the appropriateness of the orientation we adopt for ourselves" (Armour 2013: 401), thus serving as a guide on how to live, especially through the practice and reading of hymns, chants, sermons, stories, rituals and sacred texts. Interchangeably known as liturgical or divine discourse, religious discourse is unique in adapting esoteric doctrines and ideas through symbolic patterns and rituals, via oral and written modes. It is situated within the sphere of communication and focusses on a shared understanding between the text/reader or the speaker/listener (Kapranov et al. 2024). Across cultures, religious texts and their authors are revered as they connect the reader to an unseen reality that is often invoked by an individual as part of devotional practice and/or in times of distress to provide protection and solace. Therefore, the text forms a link between the words, the individuals and their everyday functioning, highlighting its power (Pihlaja 2021). A pre-requisite for studies on religious texts is an examination of their language and narrative style for any serious textual interpretation (Jamison & Witzel 1992) since the meanings in a text can be viewed both literally and allegorically for richer insights. Religion provides not just "symbols' meanings (the semantics) but also the ways of combining such symbols (the syntax)" (Vestrucci 2022: 3), the context for symbolic language (pragmatics) and the origin of it (semiotics), thereby the language of religious texts is a relevant topic for analysis due to the nature of its composition and the validity given to it. Although a rich Vedic and Shakta tradition exists in Hinduism, and the Devi Mahatmya has been analysed from theological, mythological and gender-based perspectives (as discussed below), yet hardly any study exists on a language analysis of the Mahatmya, particularly its linguistic/discursive dimensions. Bridging this research gap, the present study aims to focus on a discourse analysis of select extracts from the Argala Stotram from the Devi Mahatmya using specific linguistic tools namely, vocabulary, speech acts and intertextuality.

1.2 Literature Review

A brief literature review is given below to highlight the kind of studies in the Vedic tradition especially on the Devi Mahatmya and the representation of the goddess, along with studies on religious discourse.

1.2.1 Studies on the Puranas and Devi Mahatmya

In the Indian context, there exists a rich and ancient tradition of religious texts, primary amongst them being the Vedas that contain invocations to gods (*devas*), the Brahmanas that provide commentaries on Vedic rituals, the Aranyakas that act as a bridge between the above, detailing the importance of sacrifices and how to live the life of a retired householder in the forest and the Upanishads that provide philosophical commentaries on the nature of truth, *dharma* and salvation (Klostermaier 2007). The later scriptures include the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata that describe the lives and actions of Vishnu's avatars Rama and Krishna and the different Puranas that encompass a fivefold description of the creation/dissolution of the universe, cosmic cycles, the genealogies of gods, kings, sages and the narratives on different rulers and their dynasties (Coburn 1980). The Puranas include detailed accounts of the actions of various gods and goddesses, their battle with the *asuras* (demons) and indirectly provide precepts on righteous action and living (Dalal 2018). Although the Vedas embody spiritual authority, yet the Puranic literature seems to be the foundation of Hinduism through which everyday living is sustained as they have been anonymously passed down and expanded over the ages, employing gods, kings and sages as exemplars of righteous action and the consequences of one's undertakings (Taylor 2008). Thus, Puranas can also be known as Puranaveda as they disseminate the knowledge of the Vedas in narrative form (Leach 2014). Out of the eighteen Mahapuranas, the texts that relate to Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti have generally been responsible for the spread and practice of normative deity worship in the form of Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism (Taylor 2008).

Studies on the Vedas include a detailed analysis of its creativity and imagination in presenting universal truths (Maharaj 2015) and an examination of Vedic chants, the allegory, imagery and similes in their language and also the varied or ambiguous interpretations that are possible (Gonda 1975). In a similar vein, the Puranas have also been examined in terms of their narrative structure, thematic treatment and the characteristics of their genre, especially how they embody cultural and religious ethos (Bailey 2003). For instance, the proverbs or aphorisms adapted in Garhwali from the Skanda Purana have been analysed for their linguistic, literary and sociocultural significance (Nautiyal & Bagwari 2025). Of specific interest is the Markandeya Purana that has been investigated for the richness of its tales on Raja Harishchandra and the goddess Durga (Chaturvedi 2004). Since this paper focusses on a linguistic reading of a select *stotram* from the Durga Saptashati or the Devi Mahatmya, it is interesting to note some of the scholarship available on the text that particularly pertains to the image of the goddess.

Coburn's (1984) work on the Mahatmya is a comprehensive research, presenting the narratives of the goddess, the rich Sanskrit tradition it belongs to, the importance of the various names of the goddess and translations of various chants dedicated to her. Coburn (ibid.) also underscores that though the goddess tradition is of paramount importance to Hinduism representing the feminine principle, yet most studies have focussed on ritual worship and the

amalgamation of Shakti as part of Vedic culture from the historical, social and religious points of view, hence more research is needed on Shakta texts. Bhatt (2021) translates the Mahatmya in English focussing on the origin of the goddess through three episodes of the battles against the demons, stating the significance of the episodes, textually and allegorically. Brown (1990) compares the conception of the goddess in the Mahatmya and the Devi Bhagvatam noting that in the former although the goddess is born from the rage of the devas to destroy the demons yet there are moments of calmness in the way the gods worship and propitiate her. In contrast, the image of the goddess in the Bhagvatam is gentler, focussing more on the maternal aspect of the goddess as the womb of all creation and the progenitor of enlightened knowledge. Kingsley (1978) notes the multiplicity of names for the goddess that signify her personality such as Shiva's consort, Vishnu's consort Lakshmi, the warrior goddess Durga, the fierce protector Kali and the Matrikas referring to a group of goddesses working for supreme Shakti. The goddess is viewed as a form of Vishnu, whose main function is to guard the cosmos against evil and in doing so she adopts various forms, names, roles and qualities, sometimes appearing as compassionate and gentle like Parvati and at other moments as the fear-inspiring Kali.

Thus, the divine feminine can be construed through varied names, enhancing the complexity of the narrative and the tradition of worship. Another study (Balkaran 2019) highlights the textured understanding of the Mahatmya arguing against the binary logic of viewing the goddess as either gentle or ferocious. The goddess's shielding extends not just over the devas, her children/devotees but also her dignity as the demons attempt to possess her and in doing so commit a major blunder – of apprehending the cosmic feminine principle in the limited form of a woman/object. Analysing the role of the cosmic sound and silence in the journey of the goddess and the battles fought by her, Balkaran (2019) explains that the goddess is more than a conglomeration of binaries, a compassionate being whose desire for welfare includes annihilation of those who disrupt peace.

1.2.2 Representations of the Goddess

Overlapping with studies on the Devi Mahatmya are two specific analyses of the representation of the goddess. Lyons (1992) examines the Devi Mahatmya as extolled in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, in an artistic form, not only detailing the value of indigenous aesthetics but also how the art forms of the text attempt to capture the power and charm of the goddess, matching the art to the written word. The artist portrays the goddess in her various roles, as the forgiving mother and the deity of forests, protecting animals and flora-fauna alike. The Shimla version not just shifts focus from the original text but it enhances it through appealing visuals that show influence of Tantric traditions. Even the Nepali version of the Mahatmya highlights how the text incorporates Nepalese iconography, styles and symbols interlinking the religious text and sentiment with the larger socio-political scenario and leadership in Nepal (Smith 2014). The hybrid styles in the Nepalese text explain its multidimensional interpretations. Lastly, the comic strip version in Amar Chitra Katha (McLain 2008) delineates how the comic preserved the scriptural authority of the Vedas and Puranas in portraying the goddess as a super-heroine, possessing divine power and strength yet reconstructing the tales according to postcolonial middle-class sensibilities. In this manner, Anant Pai and his team have presented a modern yet accurate and authentic representation of the goddess as embodied in the religious treatises while creating a balance between the verbal and visual elements of the story.

1.2.3 Studies on Religious Discourse

Discourse is broadly classified as connected speech and writing and has become an established cross-discipline in the past three decades dealing with the intersections of language, context, power relations and society (Dijk 1985). Wijsen (2013) argues that the shift towards the discourse analysis of religion has been gradual with researchers increasingly becoming discontent with objective and positivist approaches. Scholars in this area are caught within the paradox of adopting scientific approaches to an area that goes beyond science. Plus, several scholars claim to engage in a discursive study without using proper models and tools of discourse found in critical discourse analysis, critical linguistics, ethnography, cognitive linguistics, etc. Moberg (2013) suggests that the need to use discourse implies a thorough understanding of the methodology used, the research perspective of social constructionism and the need for an informed stance. He classifies three ways in which discourse has been used in religious studies. The first kind of research involves meta-theoretical uses of the term discourse, focussing on retaining a critical stance towards the data and also a sense of self-reflexivity. The second kind of scholarship employs the terms discourse, genre and narrative, contextualising their analysis within specific subfields of religion for instance looking at secularisation of religion or the opposing paradigms of individualism versus collectivism in religion. The third type of studies actually engages in a discourse analysis in a specific context, using tools and concepts from the area like Lynch's study (2005) of discourse of religion in popular culture. Taira (2013) explains the actual ways of carrying out a discourse study in a religious context, stressing that each study needs to be individually designed and the focus can be on language and non-verbal aspects taking into consideration the social context. It involves the focus on one or more than one discourses in the text, and textual analysis can include specific tools like vocabulary, presupposition, speech acts, transitivity, rhetorical tropes and narrative techniques and how all of these assist in portraying the characters/individuals in the text/context (Fairclough 1992). Some specific studies are discussed below.

Using critical discourse analysis, Wijsen (2010) analyses the meanings and struggles in interreligious worship in Friesland demonstrating how participants view it. Some scholars view it as a form of religious tolerance, unity, harmony and communion with God while others perceive it as domination of one religion over others, indicating that religion itself is complex and conversations about it involve individual, institutional and social dimensions of worship along with multiculturalism. Dada and Adagbonyin (2022) engaged in a transitivity analysis of the Holy Communion employing Halliday's systemic functional linguistics model (see Halliday 1973 &1978). This model focusses on examining sentence structure, verbs and nouns in discourse. Dada and Adagbonyin (2022) found that various verbal processes were used in the text such as material verbs to denote action, verbal ones to denote what was said, mental processes signifying thoughts and beliefs while behavioural processes showed physiological responses. Material verbs were in preponderance in the study and overall transitivity analysis indicated how liturgical discourse expressed experiences, beliefs and emotions about the world. Another study (Cipriani 2002) demonstrates the power of language used in church sermons drawing on Biblical authority, showing how the priests employed a mix of appeals, fear and motivation to encourage worship and a spiritual life. This highlights how the power of religion largely resides in and through language, affecting the social and personal lives of people (Cipriani 2002).

Using philosophical discourse analysis, Borowitz (2006) explores the language of The Talmud (the holy text of the Jews), highlighting the presence of logic, literariness, novelty and authenticity of voice through the discourses and stories in the Talmud that represent the most authentic formulations on Jewish religion and duty. In another work, Albinus (1997) presents the language of religion in ancient Greece as a shift in communication styles and a change from mythos (narration) to logos (reasoned argument) that transformed the ways in which Greek scholars like Plato, Homer and Orpheus spoke about the cosmos, religion and reality allowing for language to talk about the world while preserving myths, rituals and supernatural beliefs. In other words, what the Greeks spoke and did through language (their discourses) explains how they viewed the social and the religious.

Research by Richardson et al. (2021) also reveals the intersections between religious language and cognition through the use of cognitive metaphor theory to indicate how figurative language particularly metaphors and metonymy embed human thought, action and living. Many aspects are examined through metaphor analysis such as how the divine is conceptualized, the relationship between the human and the divine, between human and supernatural, the use of verbal and non-verbal elements in rituals and how people view faith in conversations on shared or differing faiths. Other scholars (Jabloński et al. 1998) too expand on this point, arguing how metaphors help to understand not just the meanings in religious texts but how people respond to religious experiences and major life events, hinting at the psychological aspect of the language of religion. In the Indian context, not much attention has been given to discourse analysis of religious texts. Notable is the discourse study of classical Sanskrit texts by Kulkarni and Das (2012) who argue for the same, based upon the rich historical and cultural tradition of scholarship in Sanskrit, both in oral and written forms. The researchers employ a computational linguistic analysis at the paragraph, sentential, topical and sub-topical levels to understand the kinds of discourses in Sanskrit texts and the variation in meanings that arise from the same text, underscoring the richness of language.

On the basis of the studies on religious discourse and the Devi Mahatmya, it is clear that hardly any studies exist that explore the discursive dimension of Hindu religious texts, using linguistic tools. Therefore, the present study aims to do exactly that, bridging the research gap.

1.3 Theoretical Framework: Discourse Analysis

Deriving from the Latin word ‘discurrere’ meaning moving to and fro, discourse analysis is a way of engaging in textual analysis (both spoken and written) across genres and texts be it advertisements, cartoons, magazines, films, songs, literary texts, conversations, newspaper reports, etc. (Renkema 2004). Discourse often examines language within and beyond a sentence (Stubbs 1983) based on the fundamental notion of how communication constitutes action (Renkema 2004), that is, what is being conveyed through the words in a text and how it is being done. For this, the contextual factors of the text become relevant: the situation in which the text arose, the link between text and society, the participants involved and what they are doing through the text or how the textual language is used to describe them (Cook 1989). This often entails examining the words across sentences and their pragmatic meanings.

1.3.1 Language and Context

Dijk's approach to discourse and context is especially useful here as it allows a rigorous analysis of the text through language and context. Context models (Dijk 2008) primarily occur in communicative situations (verbal and textual) specifying the contextualisation of language (how and why are words used the way they are) and the co-text (words across sentences). Context models focus on how discourse is planned, produced and interpreted, the textual levels of language organisation (its grammar, vocabulary, intertextuality, speech acts, etc.), the inter-subjective dimension of how communication occurs between text and reader and/or between interlocutors and how the text/talk is understood both as a personal experience and as a social practice by individuals in local, cultural contexts (Dijk 2008). The emphasis is on relating micro-level analysis to understand larger thematic structures within a text and relating it to broader sociocultural patterns. I will be broadly drawing on Dijk's approach (2008) to understand context and discourse, borrowing the tools of vocabulary, speech acts and intertextuality for the present analysis. The present study's research methodology is thus qualitative, textual discourse analysis. Due to space constraints, this research focusses on representative extracts from the Argala Stotram to highlight a movement from words to a wider network of meanings and contexts to process the discourse of *stotrams*.

1.3.2 Linguistic Tools

1.3.2.1 Vocabulary

It includes an exploration of the word schemes in a text such as the list of synonyms, antonyms, repetition of words, all of which can function as lexically cohesive devices, providing underlying meaning to a text. Vocabulary also includes connectives that add grammaticality to a text through adverbials and conjunctions. Moreover, the kinds of words used in a text inform us about the ways in which the text describes the characters/interlocutors involved (Salkie 1995). For instance, the words used in Vedic chants provide clues about how Vedic gods and goddesses were perceived by the Vedic sages (Gonda 1975). Another aspect is that if words are substituted by other words, it becomes significant for analysis (Salkie 1995). For example, the use of synonyms for the word 'happy' can have specific meanings according to text and context. Dijk (2008) suggests that lexis in a text can perform various functions. It can tell the reader about the social situation, the position and evaluations of the participants, the emotions embedded in the text and its ideologies.

1.3.2.2 Speech acts

Primarily discussed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), speech acts denote how language is actional in nature. In other words, how humans perform certain actions using language such as thanking someone, requesting for something, ordering, suggesting promising etc. Austin (1962) explains that speech involves sounds known as locution and the force of the utterances creates the illocution or speech act. Every speech act has a perlocution or effect. For example, if 'A' requests 'B' to lend his book for a day, 'B' might get angry and refuse to do so or he might do so willingly. Speech acts show the relations between participants, their position, power and the appropriacy of conditions that give rise to their interaction (Dijk 2008).

1.3.2.3 Intertextuality

This refers to the cross-linkages between texts and how a particular text contains echoes of other texts. In one sense all conversation is intertextual because it refers to something spoken or written before (Bakhtin 1994) and intertextuality broadly draws on this fundamental idea. For instance, intertextuality is often seen in literature and media where stories and memes refer to their predecessors. From a discursive point of view, intertextuality is part of the theory of context, giving information about the participants, the appropriateness of the communicative event and what was spoken or written on the same topic, earlier or later. Thus, it explains "both the meaningfulness and the appropriateness of discourse" (Dijk 2008:19), helping readers to make sense of the broader narratives in a text. Using these tools, I will now engage in a discourse analysis of the Argala Stotram, a popular hymn of the goddess.

1.4 Analysis

The Argala Stotram is one of the primary hymns that occurs early in the Durga Saptashati (henceforth, DS) before the goddess' battle with the demons. The term 'argala' refers to a bolt or pin that is used for fastening, a kind of a hinge thus metaphorically the hymn refers to praising the goddess to provide protection so that one's life is 'held together' without impediments. Due to space constraints I shall be analysing some selections from the hymn beginning with the first two verses. A striking feature of the hymn is the multiple epithets or names that are used to invoke the goddess wherein each name carries its own discourse highlighting how single words can be powerfully loaded with meaning. A complete understanding of each word entails scriptural or puranic knowledge about where and how it was used. Although the references for each name are spread across the Puranas, I will endeavour to explain their meanings with reference to texts related to the goddess namely, Srimad Devi Bhagvatam (SDB, Vijnanananda 2018), The Markandeya Purana (MP, Shastri 2004) and Kalika Purana (KP, Shastri 2008). Henceforth, the reference to verses, chapters and books from both these two Puranas and the Bhagvatam refers to the above-mentioned editions. For the sake of convenience, I have transliterated the verses from Argala Stotram in English.

1.4.1 Lexis and Intertextuality

Two of the most predominant aspects of the analysis are vocabulary and the related concept of intertextuality in the verses discussed below.

oṃ jayanti mangala kali bhadrakali kapalini.
durga kṣama shiva dhatri svaha svadha namostute
jaya tvaṃ devi chamunde jaya bhutartiharini
jaya sarvagate devi kalaratri namostute (Durga Saptashati 2015: 30-31)

The name Kali acts as a proper noun signifying darkness and also the feminine form of kaal' or time indicating how she consumes everything. Her imagery is terrifying, decorated with human skulls, wearing a tiger skin, holding a staff and a skull handle with "sunken reddish eyes, gaping mouth, lolling tongue" (Kinsley 1972: 329), laughing and howling while devouring the blood of demons and decapitating their heads. This imagery is also seen in verses 31-61 (book 5,

chapter 26, SDB). In verses 22-28, (book 5, chapter 29, SDB) when Devi Ambika requests Kali to drink the blood of the demon Raktabeej, also calling her Chamunda and, verses 22-28 (book 5, chapter 29, SDB) that alternately refer to her as Kali or Kalika who is the mother of the universe and the great illusion – Mahamaya – responsible for the creation and dissolution of the cosmos. In chapter 45, (KP) a particular story explains how Kali performs intense penance to become fair (Gauri) after she is teased by her spouse Shiva. Her destructive force is used for subduing evil, being a harbinger of welfare for all hence she is known as 'mangala kali'. In verses 5-9 (chapter 80, MP) the name Bhadrakali is used for the goddess while slaying the demon Mahisasura along with Devi Ambika. Chapter 60 (KP) explains how the worship of Bhadrakali/Durga occurs in the month of Uttarashada which is a time period of the Hindu lunar calendar and is a rough equivalent of the months of August-September. A rough translation of the name means the dark goddess who brings auspiciousness (Coburn 1984). In the tantric and puranic tradition, Kali is often associated with Shiva as his consort (Kinsley 1972) particularly in the cremation ground where Shiva holds a skull, known as a 'kapal' therefore the feminine form for her wearing skulls is 'kapalini.'

Another oft-quoted name for the goddess is Durga that is used interchangeably with Ambika, Kali and Chandika. In verses 55-60 (book 5, chapter 25, SDB) Shumbh refers to her as Durga while sending Chanda-Munda to kill her if she refuses to come with them. The name also famously surfaces in the killing of Mahisasura and with reference to establishing the link between Krishna and Durga. In one of the stories, Durga by worshipping the cosmic creator has emerged from the left side of Krishna, appearing as his Yogamaya to serve him and she also functions as Mula Prakriti – the basis of creation – in her service to Krishna (verses 1-110, book 9, chapter 8, SDB), thus in a way marking her subservience to him. In the same verses she is also known as the consort of Shiva and the destroyer of all difficulties. A similar reference is also seen in verse 11 (chapter 81, MP) when the gods sing praises of the goddess. In a later hymn in the Durga Saptashati addressed to the goddess wherein her thirty-two names are described, there is constant repetition of the name Durga in varied forms as one who allows her devotees to cross the ocean of life and who is an impregnable fortress, guarding people from terrors (Coburn 1984). She is also known as a form of forgiveness 'kshama' and is aligned with her consort Shiva. In fact, the names Shiva and Shivaduti are often used for her denoting how she embodies Shiva's power, strength and status, crystallizing the "tejas of the different gods" (Coburn 1984: 140). Since they denote the masculine and feminine principles, the name Shiva is used interchangeably for her. Similarly, chapter 61 (KP) discusses the name Sivaduti in verses 104-108, in describing the glories of mother goddess Mahamaya and her worship.

Other names for the goddess are Dhatri referring to how she is the basis or mother of cosmic creation, similar to the word 'Jagatdhatri' as seen in verses 13-31 (book 5, chapter 34, SDB) when describing the worship of divine mother; this can be corroborated by the tantric tradition where the goddess is invoked as the mother figure "the creator and sustainer of life" (Koller 2016: 225). She is also known as Svaha-Swadha connoting a form of benediction and also being related to Agni dev (Coburn 1984) and Kalaratri being a fierce manifestation of the goddess, akin to Kali and so called by the gods after the slaying the demons (verses 23-29, book 5, chapter 9, SDB). The last name Chamunde is a conjunction formed by killing the demons Chanda-Munda, the detailed episodes for which can be read in DB and MP. Thus, through this brief discussion it becomes clear that often the hymns of the goddess make use of various names wherein each honorific carries particular connotations with stories/actions attached to it, functioning as a discourse in itself. Here,

not only is discourse being created through connected speech (Renkema 2004) but it is crafted through each word, thus highlighting contextual and narrative understanding. Moreover, the actions of the goddess depict her immense power over other beings, human and non-human alike, be it for destruction of evil or bodily penance.

Furthermore, the various names and actions of the goddess indicate intertextuality and intratextuality as an in-depth understanding of the text requires a fuller appreciation of the major gods and the inter-wovenness of their tales, be it Shiva, Krishna or Devi. Intertextuality shifts focus from the author of the text to the text itself, from the individual to the social (Porter 1986) and here it means focussing attention on the power of the divine in the *stotram* and within the wider network of Vedic hymns and puranas that are cross-linked, demonstrating the richness of Hindu religious texts. In addition, some of the names like Durga also show intratextuality when referring to the goddess in the Saptashati text and *stotrams* itself.

After a few couplets, the following lines in the Argala Stotram highlight another discursive aspect.

krishnena saṃstute devi shashvadbhaktya sadambike
rupaṃ dehi jayaṃ dehi yasho dehi dvisho jahi.
himacalasutanathasamstute parameshvari.
*rupaṃ dehi jayaṃ dehi yasho dehi dvisho jahi (*Durga Saptashati 2015:34)

It is interesting to note that in the same *stotram* the goddess who serves Krishna as Yogmaya is now worshipped by him and Shiva. Krishna is referred to as 'shashwat' imperishable and undecaying and is seen as a devotee of Devi Ambika, another epithet of the goddess seen in the war with Raktabeej, Chanda-Munda and other demons (see verses 1-47, book 5, chapter 29, DB). Similarly, 'himachal sutanatha' signifies the lord/husband (*nath*) of the daughter (*suta*) of the mountains Himalayas, meaning Shiva who is married to Parvati but who worships the goddess as *parameshwari* – the highest cosmic *ishwar* form. On the surface of it, the *stotram* might look paradoxical but the above-mentioned lines indicate the hierarchical and complementary nature of godhead due to their multiple manifestations. In the Bhagvatam, the goddess takes the form of Yogamaya to serve Krishna and also becomes the consort of Shiva as Parvati but both Krishna and Shiva are dependent on the goddess's energy in its most fundamental and primordial form known as Shakti or *parameshwari*. Thus, a hierarchy is seen when the feminine principle becomes secondary and in service to the masculine principle but simultaneously the masculine principle cannot exist without its feminine counterpart (Parvati or Lakshmi) and the primordial feminine *shakti* who is considered highest in the divine pantheon, hence her worship by the male gods. After all, Shiva is a *shava* or corpse without the "divine energy" of his *shakti* (Koller 2016: 222), highlighting the power of the divine feminine in Hindu religious texts. Therefore, in their various forms, deities support and serve each other, exhibiting complementarity and hierarchy. Moreover, it is telling that in each of the main puranas about Shiva, Vishnu and Devi, each of these gods is praised as the main cosmic form, indicating that the manifestations change according to the narration.

1.4.2 Speech Acts in Devotional Discourse

The *stotram* can also be analysed in terms of speech acts, the pragmatics of which, I suggest, can be understood and linked to *rasa* theory. As discussed earlier, speech acts are illocutions that perform actions. Austin (1962) explains that a performative utterance is a piece of language that actually performs an action while being uttered. For example, when a priest states that 'I name you Nandini' it acts as a performative because by doing so the speaker performs the action of naming. Or when a judge in a court of law gives the verdict for life imprisonment to a prisoner stating 'I sentence you to life imprisonment' they are then issuing a performative. However, all utterances may not use performatives but they might still be speech acts like commanding, promising, thanking, requesting, etc. According to the Vedas, the primordial sound in the cosmos is Om and the Vedic chants and mantras are considered *shruti*, that is, cosmic sound heard and imbibed from God (Klostermaier 2007). In this sense, whatever the *rishis* composed or uttered involved the use of the speech act of asserting the presence of God and describing it. In a similar vein in Christianity, God's first use of language is considered performative, especially in the creation of Adam (Noppen 2015). Examining the speech acts in a *stotram* thus involves looking at the various ways in which the relation between the divine and devotee is created through personal contact (Noppen 2015) and how the use of hymns can shape and regulate religious life in general. In the lines from the *stotram* that have been discussed above, the naming of the goddess and her worship by Krishna and Shiva employs the speech acts of asserting and invoking because essentially the *stotram* is an invocation or prayer. Similar is the case with the lines given below.

chandike satatam ye tvamarchayanti bhaktitaḥ
rupam dehi jayam dehi yasho dehi dvisho jahi.
dehi saubhagyamarogyaṃ dehi me paramam sukham
*rupam dehi jayam dehi yasho dehi dvisho jahi (*Durga Saptashati 2015:32*)*

Here the goddess is referred to as Chandika and the words 'satatam', 'archayanti' and 'bhaktitah' denote the regular and dedicated worship of the goddess by her devotees. Next, there is a direct illocution of begging or requesting the goddess to give beauty/appearance, victory and fame to the devotee as seen through the words 'rupam', 'jayam' and 'yasho' and this line is repeated throughout the text as the second part of each couplet. Here, there exists parallelism in linguistic structure through the balancing of specific groups of words (Gonda 1975) with the repetition of the word 'dehi' meaning give. In addition, there is ambiguity in "dealing with the esoteric knowledge poets may speak of" who describe not just external circumstances but also inner reality (Gonda 1975: 240) showing how the words of the *stotram* can be apprehended at two levels. Thus, at one level the act of requesting for a youthful appearance, fame, victory and power can denote success in the material world while at another it can denote inner victories over body, mind and soul, making the essence of the *stotram* more inward and spiritual. Similarly, asking/requesting the goddess (speech acts) for *saubhagya* (good fortune), *arogyam* (good health) and *sukham* (happiness) can refer to outward happiness, status and wealth but it can also connote a healthy body-mind functioning towards holistic well-being.

Thus, the devotee is simultaneously making use of several speech acts: invoking the goddess, asserting and acknowledging her divine presence, praising her glories of killing the demons, requesting for health and wealth. However, the discourse of a *stotram* cannot be complete

without the context of its utterance. That is, the full meaning of the hymn is incomplete without knowledge of how it is uttered or sung. Now it is obvious that there are as many ways of uttering the *stotram* as there are speakers indicating variation, yet I would like to point to the appropriateness of the context and the speakers in defining the speech act, that is, the persons uttering the speech and the circumstance should be in accordance with the speech act issued (Austin 1962). For instance, if one greets someone, it should be in the beginning of a conversation, not in the middle of it and the position of the speaker should denote appropriacy. For example, it is generally considered that an older person can reprimand/criticise a younger person from their family for their mistakes, and usually not the other way round as the latter action would be a mark of disrespect.

Moreover, the speaker's thoughts and feelings should match the utterance. Austin (1962: 39) states that "a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts, feelings, or intentions and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves" for the completion of the speech act. For example, if one congratulates someone but does not feel happy for the other person the speech act becomes insincere. Similarly, if one advises someone but thinks that the advice should not be given, then the speech act is insincere. Thus, the speaker, their context, feelings and thoughts should fit in and denote sincerity for the speech act to be viewed as appropriate.

1.4.3 Pragmatics of Devotional Speech

In the context of chanting a *stotram* one can speak of a non-tangible divine power and the human devotee wherein the latter can assert and praise the virtues of divinity and they can also beg/request divinity for help or protection. This assumes that the speaker-devotee truly believes in the power of that deity, they are genuinely expressing their feelings through the *stotram* and they sincerely need help from the deity. In other words, their feelings and thoughts should align with the words of the *stotram* when they are uttering it. Moreover, their own context can be of relative powerlessness, humility and/or affection towards the deity which becomes the reason for their chanting. In a spiritual sense, the chanting demands that the devotee have a responsive heart which in Indian aesthetic theory is synonymous with the notion of *sahrdaya*. Literally, meaning one who is attuned to the heart, the concept of *sahrdaya* was explained by Anandvardhana and Abhinav Gupta, renowned Kashmiri scholars of Indian aesthetics from 9th and 10th centuries respectively. Anandavardhana in his work *Dhavanyaloka* (1990) explains *sahrdaya* as a kind of sympathy arising in the reader when viewing dramatic scenes that arouse emotions. It refers to a sensitive reader/listener/audience who appreciates and understands the poetic text, in tune with what the artist has created (Murthy 2016). It also means an empathetic appreciation where one identifies with the art work; the "sahrdaya recreates from these very words the poet's world once again" (Sundarajan & Raina 2016:8) as the text is enlivened through the imagination of the listener/reader. Thus, a state of non-duality is achieved wherein the reader loses themselves in the words of the poet and expands their consciousness (Sundarajan & Raina 2016). This translates as dissolving oneself in and through the text, feeling every word, scene, action as is written or described.

When the speaker of the *stotram* utters it, asserting, praising and requesting the goddess (speech acts), they not only appreciate the text but their feelings and thoughts merge with the following beliefs: the magnificence of the deity's description, the power of the written word and

the power of the deity to grant them what they are requesting for. Their employment of various speech acts therefore becomes appropriate and feasible through their sincerity and devotion to the deity as their feelings and thoughts align with what the deity is and what they can do, creating spiritual fervour. The speaker-devotee therefore becomes a *sahrdaya*, merged in *bhakti* and transcending the boundaries between the creator and the created. This principle of sensitive appreciation provides insights about the state of the devotee and the appropriacy of their speech, shedding light on the complexity of how speech is not just verbal and contextual but also emotional and cognitive. The pragmatics of their speech is thus intertwined with the discourse of the text where each informs the other. Consequently, a discourse analysis of a *stotram* shows multi-layeredness, encompassing lexical analysis, cross-linkages between texts, the speaker's utterances and their state of mind.

This brief analysis highlights the performative and religious nature of language which is linked to several aspects. First, it shows the pragmatic function of speech acts and its association with religious experience–how the devotee asserts and declares the virtues of the goddess, requesting for protection, creating a spiritual bond between themselves and the divine. Religious hymns and *stotrams* thus become a site for reflecting the power and significance of the divine in the everyday lives of people and the power of religious devotion. Second, the study of discourse portrays the underlying intertextuality between Hindu deities and the multiple names of the goddess as her contexts and function change across scriptural texts, signifying the uniqueness of religious experience and the importance of language in depicting it. Third, such a study underscores devotional language as a form of ritual communication (Keane 1997) that constructs a dialogue between the tangible and intangible, where the agency and authority of the all-powerful yet compassionate goddess is opposed to the relatively powerless devotee. The *stotram* recitation can be interpreted within highly localised contexts whereby the religious experience is transmitted, enacted and experienced (Keane 1997).

1.5 Conclusion

Across cultures, religious discourse anchors individuals, guiding their actions and behaviour through hymns, stories, chants and ritual practices. Drawing on specific tools of discourse analysis such as vocabulary, speech acts and intertextuality, this paper engages in a discursive reading of the Argala Stotram, a hymn in praise of the goddess, highlighting some of its features. The findings reveal that the various names of the goddess require an in-depth intertextual reading for greater comprehension of the magnitude and actions of the goddess across texts/contexts, and the relation of the goddess/gods in terms of hierarchy and complementarity. Moreover, the multiple speech acts employed by the speaker-devotee (and their appropriateness) when uttering the hymn can be understood better through the notion of *sahrdaya* (spiritual responsiveness of the devotee), linking discourse analysis with Indian aesthetic theory. It thereby highlights how a linguistic reading provides insights about Hindu religious texts, the participants involved and their complex dynamics of interaction that is simultaneously verbal, emotional and cognitive. Moreover, this qualitative textual analysis bridges the gap between religious studies and discourse analysis with reference to Hinduism, offering a glimpse into religious discourse as a complex and layered form of ritual communication that enacts and embodies a unique religious experience between the devotee and the divine. Due to space constraints, the study has been carried

out on one single *stotram* but future research can engage in comparative analysis of several hymns in terms of discursive and semiotic perspectives.

Declaration on AI Use

I declare that the article titled 'A Discourse Analysis of the Argala Stotram in the Durga Saptashati' is an original piece of research done by me. I have not taken any type of AI assistance to prepare the manuscript.

Saumya Sharma

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