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Introduction

Lidia Guzy

The relationship between religion and music can be approached in many ways. The transdisciplinary workshop at the Institute for Scientific Studies of Religions, Freie Universität Berlin, 5th - 7th May 2006, focused on the role of music as a vehicle for religious ideas.

A basic premise in the anthropology of religion and religious studies is to view religion in a socio-centric way, as a social fact and category (Durkheim/Mauss 1963 (1903): 82ff; 86ff; Durkheim 1967 (1898): 137; 1994 (1912): 36-41; 75). Religion thus is to be comprehended as a language of a specific society or culture. Music, in the optic of the workshop, is conceived as “humanly organised sound” (Blacking 1973: 3-31) and body movement. Music can thus be approached as culturally specific acoustic speech, as a “total cultural language” (Feld/Fox 1994: 25-53) which seeks to express something where words end. Music as non-verbal religious communication acts as a social form of cultural consolation, commemoration, recollection and the representation of ideas and values (Coppet/Zemp 1979: 117-119) as well as a marker of cultural and personal identity.

From the comparative perspective on cultures one can observe that music is used not only in religious adoration and worship but also in rituals of personal and collective crisis, as for instance in mourning, death and commemoration rituals. Music is also an expression of different religious identities in the form of religious chants and the sacred, ritual and liturgical music of diverse societies.
Why is it important to reflect upon the relationship between music, society and religion in order to analyse religion and society?

Music is abstract, intangible. But in its forms music is material and clearly structured. Its paradoxical character lies precisely in its intangible and physical elements. Music is on the one hand an epitome of the transcendent (in terms of *transcendere* (Lat.) = exceeding) and immaterial side of culture. On the other hand music can only be mediated through material objects: through musical instruments and the human singer and listener.

Music is culturally created and therefore touches “the cultural self.” Music is thus a vital medium of personal perception, especially significant for the transmission of religious ideas. Mediated through a person’s perception of a supra-personal power music clearly illustrates both the interface between society and the empirical individual as well as the continuity of society in view of the empirical finiteness of death. The social continuity is represented through values, ideas and models of behaviour. Not without reason do musical instruments and the sounds and voices of humans or birds (Feld 1982) play a crucial role in mourning and funeral rites (Guzy 2008: 21-28; 90-96). Music outlasts one’s empirical death. As a supra-personal category music accompanies the collective response to both individual and collective crisis. An analysis of this supra-individual continuity is the basis of a sociological analysis of religions. Could the paradoxical fact of the intangibility and physicality of sound – which moves listeners through the evoked emotions – imply that music is culturally predisposed to act as a medium for transcendent religious matters?

In its transdisciplinary and culturally comparative perspective the volume focuses on the following questions:
Introduction

- How are religious ideas in diverse religions and societies transmitted through music?
- How can we translate the cultural meaning of music in the rituals of diverse religions into an analysis of religions and rituals in general?

This collected volume represents the proceedings of the conference “Religion and Music” in 2006. As such, it aims to formulate impulses for the study of religions, rituals and the aesthetics of religions.

In order to facilitate the uniformity of the articles and layout the editor has deliberately refrained from diacritical characters.

References


1 The conference was organised together 1) with the *Association Européenne pour l’Étude Scientifique des Religions* (EuroAssoc) with Prof. Dr. Hartmut Zinser as its Executive Director and 2) with the *Religionswissenschaftliche Werkstatt Berlin-Brandenburg*, represented by Daniela Weber.

Welcoming Address “Religion and Music”

Hartmut Zinser

In almost all religions music plays a big, if little mentioned, role. In the field of Studies of Religions it was long overlooked or hardly noticed, for which there are certainly numerous reasons. One reason is that Studies of Religions have relied on texts as the basis of its scholarly investigations; for another, before the introduction of modern technical tools for recording and reproducing music in cults and rituals, music itself could not satisfactorily be made the object of research. I personally know of no scholar in our field who had Mozart’s gift of being able to jot down the notation of even a shorter musical piece he or she had heard just once. This explains why reports about cults or rituals are usually limited to merely mentioning that songs or instrumental music were performed or that a worship service was embellished by bells, drums or other percussion instruments etc. Of course it has long been known that songs and psalms were sung in the services of all the Christian confessions and also that biblical text readings were sung, so as to render religion an aesthetic experience. Similarly the role of a cantor in a synagogue is well-known. However, what is not so known is that for a long time the chief pastor of “Michel” [St. Michaelis Church in Hamburg] used to chant his sermon and even now it is still possible in this Protestant church to hear a sermon occasionally being sung.

And yet today to describe religion as an aesthetic experience, albeit not exclusively so, still seems somewhat strange or even offensive
to many Religious Studies scholars, just as some are disconcerted by the question of the entertainment value of religion. Certainly it would be wrong to reduce religion to entertainment or an amusing pastime; that would be putting it too drastically! Nevertheless religion has to be made experienceable somehow, otherwise it dies. Music is an excellent device for doing this. As Lidia Guzy points out, it is intangible and transcends material culture, thus being similar to religion, which likewise goes beyond the material world and material existence. Other theses about the relationship between religion and music can be quickly furnished. Presenting and analyzing these in detail will be the subject of the lectures and discussions of our conference.

The theme of “religion and music” takes up questions and problems that came up in an earlier conference on religious aesthetics organized by our institute. Like that gathering, the one today is also being carried out as a joint venture with the Association Européenne pour l’Étude Scientifique des Religions (EurAssoc). This association was founded in 1998 in Luxembourg with the aim to gather and to spread information about scientific research on religion, with special reference to the history of European religions. Later, the holding of conferences became a further task of this Society for the Scientific Study of Religions.

The conference on “Religious Aesthetics” was planned and organized by Privatdozentin Dr. Susanne Lanwerd (see Lanwerd 2003). Our institute’s cooperation with the Association Européenne pour l’Étude Scientifique des Religions actually began with the conference on “Dieux des Celtes, Götter der Kelten, Gods of the Celts” (see Zinser/Ternes 2002). The 3rd joint conference, organized by Dr. István Keul, was entitled: “Religion, Ethnicity, Nation and the Handling of Identities in East-Central and Southeastern Europe” (Keul 2005). The title of an
earlier conference, organized by Dr. Inken Prohl, who has just been appointed to a chair in Heidelberg, was: “Zen, Reiki, Karate: Japanese Religiosity in Europe” (Prohl/Zinser 2002). Thus practically every year since 1999, we have carried out an international conference on Religious Studies questions. Smaller events under the banner of the “Forum Religion und Gesellschaft” [Forum Religion and Society], held almost every semester, have supplemented this conference series, of which the following were published: “Psychologische Aspekte neuer Formen der Religiosität/ Psychological aspects of new forms of religiosity” (Zinser/Schwarz/Remus 1997); “Tradition im Wandel, Weibliche Religiosität im Hinduismus, Jainismus und Buddhismus/ Tradition in Change: Female religiosity in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism” (Poggendorf-Kakar/Guzy/Zinser 2000) and “Askese – Entsagung und Disziplinierung. Lokale Traditionen im Vergleich/ Askesis – Renouncement and Discipline. Local traditions in Comparison” (Guzy/Piegeler 2002).

All conferences are designed to present Scientific Studies of Religions to the general public.

References


This article is divided into two parts. Part 1 introduces Hinduism as a highly sound-based culture and proposes a new method and theory for the study of Hinduism and its sacred literatures. Part 2 exemplifies the method and theory by discussing the outstanding value of music as a language of devotionalism (bhakti). The focus is on two famous goddess hymns (stotra), the *Mahishasuramardini-Stotra* and the *Saundaryalahari*, being exponents of two major styles of Indian vocal music in terms of performance and interpretation, sound and content, function and socio-cultural milieu. Besides a “sensography,” special attention will be paid to the hymns as complex communication systems and to their diverse musical interpretations expressing collective and individual modes to relate to the divine. The two hymns may be seen as paradigmatic examples of folk and elite culture expressed in Indian devotional music. Before going into a more detailed analysis, the broader framework of cultural performances and the great value at-
attached to physical sound – not only the sound of music – in the Sanskrit lore of Hindu India should be discussed.

**Sound and Sense**

Anyone speaking about communication and meaning – at least in today’s Western cultural area – will not necessarily think of sound as an independent medium of expression and communication, and anyone studying texts is mainly interested in the contents and thus hardly aware that texts always have a material quality, too – their sound – and can be perceived in a sensuous and emotional way. In Hindu India things are different. People are very sensitive to the communication aspects of the very sound of language. Since earliest times, both orality and sonality have enjoyed great cultural significance and have also had a distinct influence on how people approach texts. “Reading” out a religious text in Sanskrit means “reciting” it in a musically pleasing way and taking the utmost care to pronounce it correctly. In turn, simply listening to the sound of a religious text is already held to be auspicious and purifying. In the scholarly traditions, as well as in everyday life, we find a great focus on the sonic dimension. The importance of sound and its perception has led to rites, models of cosmic order and abstract formulas. Sound serves both to stimulate religious feelings and to give them a sensory form and embody them. It is noteworthy that this predominance of sensing the world through sounds is not confined to religious life only, but pervades even the most complex symbolic representations in the arts and sciences. Sound may function as an organizing principle in such abstract conceptualizations as are found in grammar, mathematics, and astronomy. At the core of Paninis ingenious grammar, for instance, lie cer-
tain sound codes which re-arrange the Sanskrit alphabet. The alphabet, being structured accordingly to the articulation in a strictly phonetic and highly rational order, inspired likewise the numeric code-systems used by astronomers. Instead of conspectuses and diagrams we find memorizing systems and poetic verses full of alliterations. The same predominance of sound is seen in metaphysics where sound becomes a means of interpreting and understanding the world. The sophisticated cosmologies of the tantra are based once more on the letters of the alphabet and mysterious sound codes serve as models to explain the coming about of the world and language. In various ways sound with its subtle yet very physical quality has been a powerful medium of communication chosen to invoke ordered relationships, to bring about ritual effectiveness and generate sources of power and value, and not least to construct “the sacred,” to embody assumptions about the place of human beings in a larger order of things and to produce emotional absorption.

There is some justification in calling Hinduism a highly sound-based culture. The audible and recited word is of major importance. In Northern India the cult of Ram, for example, is widespread, and thrives almost exclusively on sound rituals, recitatives and texts performed for the senses. From the uninterrupted repetition of the god’s name, “Ram Ram,” to Ram songs (bhajan) in simple rhythms, to the recitation and dramatic performances of the vernacular epic Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas. Above all, in the devotional traditions of bhakti (lit., “loving participation”) with its emphasis on emotional religiosity, music plays a central role. Here language tends to be eclipsed almost entirely by music. But we should not lose sight of the fact that music is only one special case, albeit the most conspicuous one, of the cosmos of sound pervading the whole of everyday religious activity in Hindu
India. The Sanskrit tradition, to which belong also the two goddess hymns discussed below, encompasses a very extensive spectrum of recited and sung sacred texts dating from earliest times. Not only are complete sound rites enacted, but also an exceptionally rich religious and secular literature uses language and sound poetically and reflects it philosophically.

Starting from the perception and interpretation of sound, we gain access to an important aspect of India’s cultural history and daily religious life which has been neglected by generations of scholars. The study of Hinduism and its manifold traditions has been, like the study of religion in general, too much oriented towards scriptural traditions and purely cognitive aspects, theologies, faith systems, philosophies – only at best including their social function and organisation. Until recently scholars of religion paid too little attention (and in fact practically no attention at all) to material culture and sensory data – to what can be perceived by the eyes, ears, nose, skin, to the sensory awareness and bodily knowledge of the participants, to living traditions and actual practices. This has been a special problem in the study of Hinduism, which is definitely not a “book religion.”4 In treating it like one, and focussing on the Veda as the “bible,” “holy scripture,” or “canon” of the Hindus, scholars have “textualized,” “semanticized,” “unified” Hindu traditions and “abstracted” them from the ways in which they are actually lived out. Field studies, debates about “Orientalism” and post-colonial criticism were needed to arrive at this tru-

4 In the past decade growing attention has been paid to the highly misleading nature of the term “Sacred Books” with respect to Indian sacred literature. See, for instance, Julius Lipner (Lipner 1994), who speaks of “voices” instead of “books” or “Sacred Scriptures,” and Axel Michaels (Michaels 1996: 111-141).
ism. For the Western history of religion it may be true that religious evolution was accompanied by the development of the mass media. In India, however, the spoken and audible word did not lose any of its importance during the introduction of writing, bookbinding and printing. “Texts” are primarily there to be heard, even when they are written down, and readings are performances.

Milton Singer coined the term “cultural performances” for recitations, ritual readings, rites, songs, ceremonies, festivities, plays, dances, concerts, public lectures, and determined that these are the most basic units connecting the “Little Tradition” (“popular,” “folk,” “vernacular” cultures) and the “Great Tradition” (“elite,” “Sanskritic,” “Brahmanical” cultures) of Hinduism (Singer 1972). One of the first who approached Hinduism not via cognitive systems, he rightly observed: “The very tissue of the culture is made from puranic themes. Practically every cultural performance includes one – in song, dance, play, recitation, and exposition” (ibid: 76). Meanwhile, there has been growing awareness that the model of “book religions” and Protestant religiosity is simply misleading. It is typical that the “orientalist” and “auto-orientalist” (reform Hindu) construction of Hinduism preferred

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5 See, for instance, Richard King’s fine analysis on Orientalism and Religion (King 1999).

6 The terms “Little Tradition” and “Great Tradition” introduced by Robert Redfield (Redfield 1960) have been criticized because of their pejorative connotations and the vastly complex interaction, fluidity and continuity that actually takes place. But they remain important heuristic terms, because they express differences which actually are there, even though the so-called Little Tradition has absorbed a great number of elements of the so-called Great Tradition and Sanskritic Hinduism (often in a genuinely transformed way), while the so-called Great Tradition has absorbed many popular and folk elements (sometimes without any major changes unless they offended the purity rules, sometimes giving them a new encoding, sometimes including them as subordinate features within the existing hierarchy).
Shankara’s commentary of the late-Vedic Upanishads, which are closest to “holy scriptures” in a Western sense, namely texts that are received for their semantic message. However, the Upanishads are also recited and the Veda as a whole is not a “scripture.” It has remained a ritual text to be recited and the very paradigm of sacred sound for four-thousand years, although it was surpassed in the Common Era by other sacred literatures or “canons” – most of all by the Puranas and the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana – in terms of popularity, pan-Indian distribution, social access and collective identity. Several scholars have pointed out the irrelevance of (semantic) meaning in the Veda and the unparalleled focus on orality in Vedic learning and traditional Sanskrit scholarship.\textsuperscript{7} Agama and tantra studies have sharpened our awareness for the cosmological role of sound and the dominant role played by tantra from around the fifth to the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{8} Guy Beck propounds sacred sound to be the “central mystery” of the Hindu experience of the divine and “a common thread connecting a number of outwardly different sectors within it” (Beck 1993: 3). A number of recent publications indicate a shift in the agenda of studying Hinduism: book-titles like \textit{Religions of India in}
Practice (Lopez 1995) or Tantra in Practice (White 2000) and a large number of regional studies in the “field” are typical for this shift. This new “post-colonial” agenda luckily corrects previous misrepresentations, but new dangers of counter-misrepresentations loom, too. Whereas the “orientalist” construction focused solely on Sanskrit texts, primarily the Veda and Upanishads, and their contents, the “anti-orientalist” focus on practice, ritual and non-elite culture often tends to deliberately neglect the textual tradition and Sanskrit culture that exerted an enormous influence in the past also within popular, regional and vernacular cultures (but only minimally within tribal cultures). The (Eurocentric) split of thinking and acting, text and practice, lingers on in the way Hinduism is represented, despite the far greater receptiveness nowadays to the emic perspective, i.e. the cultural actor’s self-representation.

Indeed Gavin Flood recently drew attention to the problem that both cognitive and cultural anthropology are misleading in their approach to texts, claiming that “the act of reading is at the heart of literature and at the heart of religious life.” What he means is very similar to the propositions of this article, what he says is somewhat different, however – or at least misleading. A Westerner will understand “reading” as silent, mental reading. But this is not what Flood had in mind and what he presented in video form: the video showed the enactment of a text, a public performance of a possession trance in

10 Donald S. Lopez, Jr., who is also the editor of the whole series “Princeton Readings in Religions,” for which he claims in the cover texts “a fresh approach to sourcebooks on the religions of the world”: “Princeton Readings in Religions moves away from an emphasis on philosophy and the religious expressions of elite groups.” (Lopez 1995)

a South Indian village, i.e. a particularly intensive type of the presentation-genre which Milton Singer called “cultural performances.” Flood did not use the term “performance,” apparently intentionally. In fact, “reading” captures the emic self-representations more faithfully. Characteristically, the Sanskrit word *patha*, “reading,” implies that the text is received not purely mentally, as a contemporary Westerner would understand it, for it means a semi-musical recitation. Religious reading is an aesthetic event. It is not merely a cognitive, but also a bodily act, and as such received by the listeners aesthetically. The voice, the ritual, the liturgy, the sensory awareness and mental reception enable the text of the past to be brought to life in the present. This pertains to both elite and folk culture. In fact Flood’s illustration did not come from high Hindu Sanskritic tradition, but from the folk Hinduism of “Village India.” He used the term “reading” to refer to the verbal expressions of the actor’s being possessed by the Lord-God Vishnu\(^\text{12}\) – whereby the non-Brahman priest became in a very real sense mentally and corporally what he was reciting. Flood’s use of the term “reading” contrasts in an important aspect to Singer’s term “cultural performance.” While Singer’s focus is on social sense and social function, Flood’s focus is on internalization and religious subjectivity in the interface with the social and political world. Flood emphasizes collectively shared interiority, the text which is internalized, embodied and transformed in the recipients’ own lives, redefining their lives – those of the actors and reciters and those of the spectators and listeners. The strength of his argument lies in the integration of the existential and religious meaning with which the indigenous agents or speech community represent themselves, and in being sensi-

\(^{12}\) Possession-trance is quite common in the local traditions of Southern India.
tive to the actual embodiment of their texts: in the cultural performances the life of the participants becomes the life of the text and vice versa. Through intense situational enactments of this kind, repeatedly performed, texts are internalized. They are bodily, viscerally and emotionally experienced by the actors and the ritual participants so that the meaning attributed to them spills over into ordinary daily life, becoming externalized.

Fine cultural descriptions of texts in practice are not lacking, but still rare. Even more rare are systematic conclusions regarding the method of studying sacred literatures and regarding a theory about the communicative function of texts in practice. It has already become clear that the “communicative function” of such performances surpasses their immediate semantic content and even the various interpretations that individual performers might attribute to them. But it also surpasses the symbolic interpretations that semiotic ritual theories attribute to rituals, such as acting out a “social drama” – Victor Turner’s well-known postulate (Turner 1957; 1962; 1967; 1982). Texts in practice are often not “expressive” of any social issue at all; they may be, but not at all necessarily. Semiotic theories tend to over determine meaning by claiming a “deep structure” in social sense, known only to the researcher and hidden from the practitioners. This is one reason why formalist-structural ritual theories, such as Frits Staal’s, tend to underdetermine meaning and claim formal rules, orthopraxy, and the “meaninglessness” of rituals (Staal 1976: 2-22; 1989). This is definitely not either how the indigenous participants understand their texts and rites. Flood has made a good point regarding this. Also Stanley Tambiah’s performative ritual theory (Tambiah 1979: 113-169; 1998: 227-250) and the cognitive theory of Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley (Lawson/Mccauley 1990: 137-169) take the
emic perspective more seriously. Tambiah seeks a synthesis of cultural description and formal analysis and sees the meaning of ritual in the communication of cosmology. Lawson and McCauley, on the other hand, in addition to interpretation claim to offer a strictly scientific explanation, based on Chomsky’s generative grammar. Moreover, they postulate that the semantics of rituals must be approached by a “reflexive holism” that takes into account the whole of the culture in question. These are important insights. If we do not want to exclude in our scholarly arrogance the indigenous agents entirely, nor take over their own interpretations and semantic codings completely into our empathy, we have to find ways to synthesize the emic and the etic. With respect to Hinduism this means to approach texts as texts in practice (actual or virtual) and extend our methods for studying and analyzing sacred literatures. At the meta-level of theory we are challenged with questions about the unparalleled focus on orality and sonality, the “meaning” of text rituals, the cultural role of sound and its relationship to world-orientation. As the primary communicative function of the manifold ritualizations of sacred texts I suggest the illocutionary power of rites to create situational presences by stimulating bodily and sensory awareness, mental focusing and emotional identification. Language as expressive sound has its own independent validity of meaning, its own capacity to communicate, and its own aura. It unfolds its effects in the sphere not only of the terminological and logical, but also of the sensory and emotive. The communicated meaning of texts in practice therefore need not necessarily lie in expressing semantic messages, or social issues, or even cosmological beliefs. But certainly, text rituals are always embedded in such beliefs and in a wider sphere of cultural sense, collective belonging and identity.
The reader will find this approach to Hindu literatures and Hindu culture at large in greater detail in Sound and Communication (Wilke/Moebus forthcoming), on which this article is based. In the following I would like to extract some of the trajectories and propositions in terms of method and theory. Oliver Moebus and I have arrived at this:

a) We appeal to the senses in studying religious texts, and in studying Hindu literature in particular. A merely philological approach is insufficient, since the philologist’s ‘text’ – detached from its audible realization – does not exist as a text type in the Indian tradition. Therefore, we suggest an expanded method of interpreting texts to include the auditory dimension in the analytical study of textual data.  

b) In doing so, we exemplify a recently proclaimed paradigm in (German) Religious Studies (Religionswissenschaft): Religious Aesthetics (Religionsästhetik), the academic study of sensory perception and symbolic representation. There have been some programmatic publications on the theoretical level (Cancik/Mohr 1988: 121-156; Münster 2001; Lanwerd 2002; Münchner Theologische Zeitschrift 2004: Nummer 55; Mohn 2004: 300-309; Bräunlein 2004: 7-53). In contrast to these deductive theoretical drafts, we have elaborated Religious Aesthetics inductively as a hypothesis needed to explain the religious “habitus” found in Hinduistic India: a possible, purely aesthetic dimension of sacred texts must be presumed because otherwise one can account neither for the way that Hindus approach these texts in their religious life nor for the inherent value of sound apparent in this context. We consider it necessary to distinguish orality and

13 The discussion of the two goddess-hymns below will illustrate this approach, but Sound and Communication introduces a much broader range.
sonality. This is why we speak, for instance, of audible texts and not of oral literature. The differentiation of orality and sonality is pertinent for two reasons: first, because the audible word remained predominant even after the introduction of writing and because no scriptural tradition was able to destroy or dominate the living communication systems, and second, because physical sound ranks high as a primary icon of absolute reality in a number of conceptual and ritual systems. The Nada-Brahman (“Sound Brahman”), which was popularized by the jazz historian Joachim Berendt in Western culture (Berendt 1987)\textsuperscript{14}, too, is but one – if relatively late – example\textsuperscript{15} of the approach to symbolize and hypostatize sound.

c) The diversity of sacred texts in the Sanskrit Hindu traditions do call for a historical and synoptic procedure that includes largely secular systems such as grammar, theater, poetry, science. And precisely in the not explicitly religious area it becomes clear just how decisively important sound as a means of communication and expression is in its effects on India’s cultural hierarchy of values. Presenting Hinduism as a culture of sound encompasses a broad range of cultural performances, oral transmission channels and sonic representation systems and codes (e.g., Vedic and tantric mantras, “Mantra Science,” the Goddess Vac (“Speech”), the Shabda-Brahman (“Word Brahman”),

\textsuperscript{14} Joachim Berendt did so in a New Age manner in his famous radio presentations and in his book The World is Sound: Nada Brahma. Music and the Landscape of Consciousness (1987; German original 1983).

\textsuperscript{15} The Nada-Brahman doctrine that the entire universe and the great gods are sound (nada), was presumably introduced by the Indian musicologist Matanga (8th cent.), and found wide distribution in religious circles. The term “Nada-Brahman,” apparently a later nominalization, was a great symbol in which several traditions merged: yogic, tantric, Vedantic, bhakta, and the ancient Vedic Vac mysticism, i.e. Vedic conceptions of the “Goddess Speech.”
the Nada-Brahman, the sound codes of the grammarians, astronomers, mathematicians, and the sound play in poetics). It is an approach to cultures as perceptual systems, corresponding to David Howes’ anthropology of the senses and his “call to return to the senses” (Howes 1990: 55-73). This approach is sensitive to different hierarchies of perception within different cultures and inquires how sensory models inform the discourse and practices of everyday life. It breaks with the textual paradigm of academic scholarship that is even common among cultural anthropologists: just consider Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture as “text” which can be “read” and decoded (Geertz 1993). Not only the philologists have had their blind spots, but even semiotic approaches display an Occidental/Eurocentric bias that runs counter to their program of thick descriptions. The textual paradigm may fail to acknowledge significant features about the self-awareness of agents belonging to other cultures, or even misrepresent them. The incorporation of non-visual channels of sense-perception into academic study calls attention to blind spots and opens new avenues. It may disclose cultural patterns and world orientations that have not been “seen” at all or only inadequately by the usual textual paradigm.

d) The dominance of hearing and sound sensation (oral-aural) has so far been associated only with weakly differentiated “non-literal,” “oral” societies, so-called “cultures of the ear” in contrast to Western societies and the “typographic man” who replaces the ear with the eye.16 While such typologies spot light to important cultural differ-

16 For this typology see Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan 1962); for ethnographies on the auditory codings of oral societies see Edward Carpenter (Carpenter 1973), Steven Feld (Feld 1982) and David Howes (Howes 1990).
ences, at the same time one should keep in mind the danger of essentializing cultures and treating them as monolithic, closed systems. Furthermore, the focus on non-literate societies has tended to hide the fact that even highly literate cultures may be predominantly sound-based. Introducing Hinduism as a culture of sound brings in new arguments and differentiations. Sanskrit Hinduism being a highly complex and vastly plural culture, it is less easy to speak of only one cultural pattern or one world orientation; eye and ear are not seen as contrasts, but often appear synaesthetically related. If we call it nevertheless a “culture of sound,” this is due to the sheer quantity of material. At the same time the material reveals that there is no one way to deal with sound, for we find multiple voices and a great variety of indigenous rationalities, discourses and negotiations on the correlation of language, thought and reality. The book *Sound and Communication* is properly speaking not just about sound, but also about the power of language and the relationship of language and world-orientations. It includes some of those (few) traditions for which sound did not play a decisive role at all, such as Shankara’s Advaita-Vedanta. Remarkably, Shankara and the post-Shankara schools attribute the major role in communicating and realizing the highest reality, which they conceive as essentially non-verbal, pure non-dual consciousness, not to sound, but to oral teaching and gnostic knowledge, or more precisely to a certain teaching method that explores the suggestive power of language and is received purely cognitively. In contrast, other Advaitic traditions, i.e. yogic and tantric ones, conceptual-

\[17 \text{It is typical, for instance, that the Veda is called “Shruti” (“Hearing”), but associated with the Rishis (“Seers”). In the post-Vedic puja images and mantras assert the presence of the divinities, and yogic and tantric traditions describe the double image of light and sound as the central mystery of the divine.}\]
ize the highest reality as the most subtle sound-waves or as “unstruck” sounds, which they correlate with light. They conceive the whole universe to be based on sound or on the phonematic structure of the alphabet. Here non-dual reality is not reached cognitively, but rather by mantra repetition and sound contemplation.

e) Language is effective in both its terminological, logical aspect and its sensory, emotive aspect. The main function of language is creation of sense and this takes place at a very great number of levels, semantic and non-semantic, by making propositions and using symbolic forms. In fact, in many Indian religious traditions non-semantic sounds are a medium of utmost importance for communication, too. Exploring sound and sense involves the question of the relationship and interface of mythos and logos, two quite distinct forms of thought and rationality. Here, we continue the lines of Ernst Cassirer, Suzanne Langer, Kurt Hübner and Stanley Tambiah’s Lévy-Bruhl reception, exploring the pre-terminological, pre-logical and sensory, and show that these dimensions have their own ways of making sense.

f) Since the Indian experience of the world and the divine includes an exceptionally great focus on sonality and since even natural scientists have made use of sonic code systems – both being quite different from our Occidental perceptions –, the question of possibly different world orientations becomes pertinent. It is a difficult question, loaded with dangers of “othering” discourses and essentialisms. To deal responsibly with it, one must seek a theory that is able to cover the internal plurality within one and the same culture and the fluidity of cultural borders, a theory that includes both differences in cultural identities and cross-cultural continuities, and a theory that accounts for struc-
tural similarities and real-world mutual interactions\textsuperscript{18}. In *Sound and Communication* we suggest a systematic framework of participatory and emancipatory world-orientations (which are themselves again diversified and pluralist) to serve as a complex culture theory capable of accommodating all these functions. By means of this framework, which was inspired by Tambiah’s systematic draft on multiple orderings of reality (see Tambiah 1990: 84-100)\textsuperscript{19} we structure our Indian material and show by comparisons that its applicability appears to be universal. It is a very generalist culture theory, which is based on two basic approaches to world and language, namely a participatory mode (the indicator of which is involvement and a “mythically,” metonymically and holistically experienced reality) and an emancipatory mode (the indicator of which is detachment, independent power of interpretation, ability of self-reflection, comprehensive conceptions and an “atomist” view of the world and oneself). These two reality orientations also express themselves in differing views on language and linguistic forms, but the orientations are not mutually exclusive. Despite the diametrically opposed axioms of both orientations – here only the whole, there only the individual – in reality both of them flow constantly into each other. No interpretations of the world are totally liberated from the realm of mythos.\textsuperscript{20} And there was probably never a time, a culture (including the Western age of enlightenment, modernity and post-modernity) nor a person who did not know both orien-

\textsuperscript{18} Such interactions have been there in the past all along, but have grown in colonial and post-colonial times where we find an expansion of multicultural contact zones and the effects of mass media and globalization worldwide.

\textsuperscript{19} Tambiah replaces Lévy-Bruhls problematic terms “mystical” and “rational” with the categories “participatory” and “causal.”

\textsuperscript{20} We differentiate „myth“ (traditional narratives) from „mythos“ (a thought form).
tations and happily live with them. Common means to accommodate both are, for instance, code-switching or enjoying the ambivalence or not even being aware of it. But there seem to be times and cultures – or cultural and social segments – who apparently organise their whole cosmologies, religious systems and social identities primarily in one way or the other. Tracing and analyzing such organizational patterns reveal a dominant cultural habitus. In India, we find code-switching, ambivalence, models which subordinate magical and mythical elements to abstract and philosophical thought, but most of all we find various mixtures of peaceful co-existence of participatory and emancipatory orientations and a substantial number of pronounced participatory views of language. Most remarkably, there are multiple forms of deliberate mythical synthesis in which rational explanation of language is ultimately subordinated to an all-encompassing “language mythos,” or in other words, we find several cases of a rationalized participatory world orientation and a pronounced reflected holism regarding world-language-consciousness and human-divine relations, i.e. cosmology and metaphysics. The most outstanding examples are the linguistic theories of the grammarian Bhartrhari (5th cent. C.E.) and of the Kashmir Shaiva philosopher, left-handed tantrist and poet Abhinavagupta (11th cent. C.E.), or the Nada-Brahman of the musicologists (7th-13th cent. C.E.), who claim the world is sound. In all of these holistic systems – and by the way in Shankara’s Advaita-Vedanta, too, which spends little time on sound, but focuses only on semantics – ultimately the same program always becomes clear: the search for a mythos that encompasses the whole world. But still the manner, in which this is attempted, shows that India is not at all more strongly participation-oriented than Western societies. Quantifying statements of this type are unworkable in a differentiated culture and
complex society. The Sanskrit culture in which Bhartrhari, Shankara and Abhinavagupta grew up was supported by a highly rationalized and highly technical society with a considerable share in world trade, a society that also tried to calculate the gravitational constant, invented the first automated machine in the form of the waterwheel, and started to tackle differential equations. But despite these strongly emancipatory elements in Sanskrit culture, the mythos was never de-valued, in contrast to Greek society, which set mythos and logos against each other. What characterizes Indian culture appears to be the steadfast refusal to subordinate its participatory world orientation simply to an absolute, atomistic rationality whose purpose is to emancipate the individual.

Mythos and logos, participatory and emancipatory thought and action, as two completely different ways of understanding and interpreting the world, must ultimately be recognized as systems of equal value, since they cannot replace each other. They uncover quite different truths, operate differently, and do different things. In Western cultures people have sought to organize plurality of orientations where it appeared necessary for survival, generally via “code-switching.” Indians, as a rule, have preferred integration. Any areas for an emancipatory orientation that were discovered did not eliminate the mythos, but instead were added to it and embedded in it. And sacred language reflects this process. The written logos stripped of its sound and meaning had no chance of supplanting the sensory and presentational communication systems. The audible texts, with their high degree of sensory input, always remained real symbols of the numinous, however hyper-radically transcendental the theologians wanted to be. Totalitarian solutions are foreign to Sanskrit Hinduism, with its additive, inclusive pragmatic approach. And for precisely this reason sound, as
the most participatory medium of all and as the most effective means of transporting mythical involvement, has retained its special position in both religion and philosophy even today.

What we are speaking of are dominant traits and patterns, which, if generalized to the whole of culture, become ideal types in the sense of Max Weber. Other scholars used the terms “inclusivism” (Hacker 1982: 11-28) or “identificatory habitus” (Michaels 1998: 19-27; 365-377) where we would speak of “participatory world-orientation.” But they stressed cognitive and social elements rather than sound and sensation and focused other elements in their cultural descriptions.

The focus on sound has some advantages regarding influential cultural theories and current debates. It inherently corrects and differentiates orientalist constructions, but also anti-orientalist, post-colonial criticism. It forces to reconsider Jack Goody’s influential theory of orality and literacy, and his postulate of the power of the written tradition. In traditional India, we definitely find an interface of rational science and oral cultures, 21 or of abstraction and participation which Goody strictly denies. In India, the power of the living audible word, memorization systems, oral transmission, cultural performances etc. fulfill in many aspects the role that Goody reserves for the written tradition. And his thesis is unable to accommodate (or even conceive) the independent value of sonality and the focus on sound codes and sound systems. This focus should be also of interest for ritual studies. Further on, one can re-formulate Max Weber’s cultural theory of a singular rationality in the occidental culture which he based – among other things – on a sociology of music. Turning his argument, it may be claimed that there is a singular rationality in Indian

21 This point was already made by Frits Staal (Staal 1986) and Harry Falk (Falk 1990: 103-119) whose emphasis is the Veda and its oral transmission.
culture whose most expressive cultural symbol is the strong sound orientation and subsequent approaches to music, for instance, the Tampura having such a central place or the very loud South Indian temple music which is literally corporally felt. Weber equated Indian religiosity to renouncer and intellectual religions, and to magic and mysticism. In fact, Hindu religious culture is often very pragmatic and sensuous and much less soteriological than Weber conceived it. But he had a good point, which can be reformulated as a cultural value of participation, a habitus of identification, and a particularly strong sound orientation. In Sanskrit Hindu India, there is a tendency to merge and identify, to merge things, humans and gods, the physical and the spiritual, and sound has been an excellent means for it; on the ideological or cognitive level as powerful representation system of cosmic unity and on the practical level as identificatory strategy and – most importantly – as sensuous assessment of non-duality. Sound has a uniquely strong capacity to link the interior and exterior world and to relate to pre-logical spheres. Such properties and the effectiveness to represent a collective pattern which Axel Michaels called an identificatory habitus, is probably why sound has been historically so powerful in the religious field. Music has its own sphere and function within this larger context. It gives way to acoustic perception of imperceptible moods. It is a very powerful language of feelings – just think of Bollywood movies where the most intimate emotions are expressed not in everyday language, but in music, songs and dance. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, music is the perfect means to induce laya, mental “absorption”, states of ecstasy and being possessed.
Folk and elite culture expressed in Indian devotional music

I am going to present just a tiny speck of the vast religious landscape, but the two goddess-hymns selected represent those two areas which have not only been most influential in the living tradition but also cut across different segments of cultural actors: tantra and bhakti. Tantra and bhakti are usually treated as very distinct systems, and there are good reasons to do so. However, in many ways they have merged. This is particularly true for the strotra literature, that is hymnology, to which my samples belong, and for the cultural milieu for which they have been composed, namely South Indian temple culture and puja-rites of Shaiva-Shakta groups.

Tantrism has been the prevailing religious movement in India from around the fifth to the thirteenth century. Bhakti, i.e. devotional movements, became very strong from about the seventh century C.E. onwards, starting in the South (Tamilnadu) and vernacular culture (Tamil), where we find strongly ecstatic traits and a tendency to embrace yogic-tantric concepts.\(^{22}\) In tantra, the hypostasization of language and sound reached its peak. New mantras emerged which were put explicitly at the heart of worship. There occurred a particular symbiotic dovetailing of religion and art that is supremely typical of Hinduism even today. Via all the media channels available religion tries to reach the faithful and raise them out of their everyday world. The auditive means include mantras, litanies, songs and instrumental music, bells and conch shells; for the eyes there are splendid religious images, decorations, flowers, and sacred diagrams; for the sense of smell there is a rich cosmos of odors; and for the sense of touch there are numerous ritual implements, including heterodox sexual prac-

\(^{22}\) Bhakti in North-India, in contrast, has rather been an anti-type to tantra.
tices. These sensory stimuli are intended to heighten the perception of the sacred and bring about a new religious quality. Tantric elements and sonic rites strongly informed the South Indian temple cult, and so did devotional music, instrumental and vocal, as well. In bhakti, we find a definite preference for music. The normal form of a bhakti text is a song. There is a tendency for language to disappear into music, for it is not so much the words that count but the underlying emotions. Music as a language of its own, expressing and stimulating moods and feelings, is not least a very effective inducer of complete absorption of the mind, and states of rapture, and the bhaktas made rich use of it, their common aim being emotional merger with the deity. Song – as an ideal type – leads to absorption, trancelike states and being possessed, which in the religious context becomes spiritual lysis within the deity. Sound is the most participatory medium and music the best means of bringing about emotional participation.

Vocal music marks the moment in the temple worship when the ritual devotee becomes truly absorbed by the deity and when the focus of the offering ceremony shifts completely to the “lay” community. Although the singing of hymns is an essential part of the temple ritual and prescribed by ritual manuals, its nature is quite different than that of rites such as bathing the goddess in milk and honey, or pouring rice pudding over her head. While it is the priests who perform these ceremonial baths, as a rule it is the individual visitors to the temple – often sponsors of a ritual act, both women and men – who enthusiastically intone a devotional song at the end of the service. It is not the rice pudding that brings the rite to a close, but the music. And it is not uncommon for temple visitors to start singing a hymn even when a regular service is not in progress. This central role of the religious song is by no means restricted to temples in Southern
India. Throughout the country people meet after work to sing *bhajans* in praise of their favorite deity. While grinding corn, women in the countryside sing songs to Lakshmi, and people on a Ganga ferry spontaneously start singing praises to the all-purifying river goddess Ganga. Such singers are not trained in the classical sense and the songs are generally composed in the vernacular or hybrid Sanskrit.

Sanskrit Hinduism would not be Sanskrit Hinduism if it had not attempted to incorporate this phenomenon of feelings-set-to-song-and-music. In fact the *tantra* epoch is especially important in this respect. It marks the period during which the elitist element that was always associated with Brahmanic Sanskrit is abandoned completely. Sanskrit texts are written, including the *stotras* (“hymns”), which take up the religiosity of emotions and in some cases are composed explicitly to be sung. Some of these texts are still very popular even today. They are often learnt by heart and sung from memory by people who do not know a single word of Sanskrit. Most of the *stotras* are not intended to impart a complicated message. And neither are the recipients interested in understanding anything theological from them. They are striving for an affective experience of the deity in their inner world, and through the *stotras* become “tuned-in” to the deity.

This is also the major function of the two famous *stotras* I want to discuss, the *Mahishasuramardini-Stotra* and the *Saundaryalahari* although they are more complex than the common simple *bhajan* type in terms of their artful design. Both combine *tantra* and devotion, illustrating the outstanding value of music as a language of devotionalism in Hindu India.23 But they do so differently, by propagating popular and elite

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23 There are many tapes, cassettes and CDs with interpretations by different singers available. I hope the following presentation will be sufficient to make the readers “hear” the songs by their mere description. In the book *Sound and Communi-
goddess images, communal and individualistic devotion, and two major styles of Indian vocal music: fixed pattern and free improvisation. The *Mahishasuramardini-Stotra* may be called an exponent of folk culture and enjoys great popularity in South Indian popular culture and Sri Lankan temple festivals, whereas the *Saundaryalahari* belongs undoubtedly to the elitist high Hindu *tantra* and is rather intended for contemplation and private worship, whether at the end of the temple *puja* (“worship”), or within circles of Shri-Vidya Shaiva-Shakta initiates. While expressing collective and individual musical modes to relate to the divine, both are cultural performances apt to bring about rapturous states of mind – each of them a particular kind of engrossment, however. Max Weber’s distinction of two forms of ecstasy proves helpful here. On the one hand, he speaks of a “magic and orgiastic ecstasy” which he considered a mass phenomenon, related to folk and popular culture. On the other hand, he points to “apathetic ecstasy” as typifying the life style of Brahmins and their aristocratic distance towards intoxication, frenzy and ecstasy (Weber 1988: 323; 371).

The Atmosphere of the buffalo-demon-slayer: 
**The Mahishasuramardini-Stotra**

This stotra is a fairly radical and therefore especially interesting example of a musicalized stotra: with its spellbinding drum-like rhythm, onomatopoeic sound-chains, and aggressively dissonant harmonies – merely by virtue of the sound material – the hymn creates the “atmosphere” of the goddess Durga, known as Mahishasuramardini,

* citation readers can find a CD which includes some strophes of the songs or they may turn to www.music-india-online and other websites. All translations presented below are our own.
“crusher of the buffalo-demon.” Here the “Great Goddess” appears in her function as a demon-slayer, a narrative closely based on the Durga myth, in which the beautiful but heavily armed goddess slaughters several demons (see: illustration 1).

The story of the mythical battle is followed by a hymnic appreciation of the goddess’s indescribable beauty and attraction, full of praise for her victory over the forces of evil.

Illustration 1: Popular Indian illustration of Goddess Durga, anonymous artist.24

24 We could not verify the artist of this anonymous ‘dharmic’ picture.
The date of the anonymous hymn is uncertain, perhaps rather late. Interestingly, it does not appear in any of the classical stotra collections, yet is exceedingly popular in Southern India, being even a “must” at festivities in some temples. On the whole the stotra is rather “folksy.” The language used is Sanskrit but, as with many tantric texts, it is a kind of hybrid colloquial Sanskrit containing minor grammatical errors despite the linguistically demanding form.

In the Mahishasuramardini-Stotra, the melody is found together with the text, which probably indicates that the two were created together. Just a few seconds are enough to identify the stotra. In fact the melody is so well known that it sometimes turns up in modern religious “hit songs” as a musical quotation.\(^{25}\) The stotra is characterized by an unvarying, mechanical rhythm. It is often sung in a metallic, almost machinelike voice – probably mainly because the melody generally lacks the rich ornamentation typical of Indian classical singing. The harsh, aggressive nature of the sound is reinforced by having four tones in a dissonant harmony, of which two are merely ornamental. The special way in which the stotra is sung (in a monotonous rhythm accentuated on the basic beat) is more reminiscent of a war-dance than the cloyingly sweet style that is otherwise commonly found in modern bhakti songs. Yet despite the monotony of the line, the rhythmic music and the onomatopoeia of the Sanskrit words render the stotra almost hypnotic after a while\(^{26}:\)

\(^{25}\) As in “Ayiram Kannudaiyal,” which the famous Tamil bhajan singer S. P. Balasubramanian sings on his album Arul Shakti.

\(^{26}\) The argument of this chapter becomes only clear if the verses of the stotra are actually read. So even the non-Sanskritist reader is requested not to skip the lines in order to get some idea of the sound-effects. The Sanskrit reader may excuse the omitted diacritics which in case of this stotra is very unfortunate.

40
With regard to the words and their meaning, in parts the stotra is so hard to understand that some verses seem almost impossible to translate. The choice of words hardly follows the dictates of semantics, but is instead primarily determined by certain sound-ideas in the poet’s mind. The stylistic aspect, the art of choosing the words, becomes so secondary that the poetry is subsumed by certain onomatopoeic motifs. Usually, a chanter will sing the verse and the group will repeat the last line, which appears as a refrain throughout the stotra:

\[ \text{jaya jaya he Mahishasuramardini ramyakapardini shailasute.} \]

The meter selected derives more or less naturally from the name “Mahishasuramardini,” whose prosody is adopted as the rhythm for the whole stotra without following a classical Sanskrit meter. The name of the goddess (as a rhythmic germ cell of the poetry composition) is preceded by the call “\text{jaya jaya he ...}” (“victory victory O ...”), which is in turn the germ cell of the melodic material. The “he” (“O”) is forced out passionately on the expressive “passionata” interval of the Todi third and therefore also determines the \text{Raga} (musical mode) of the whole stotra, i.e. the \text{Raga} Todi used for wildly passionate and tragic scenes. If, like a Western music scholar, one were to ask about the fundamental idea of the composition, the answer would be: it develops by itself from the calling out of the name, rather than from any theological or allegorical concept in the text.

Even the word material of the first line of the first verse is formed completely from this audibly rhythmic fundamental idea:

\[ \text{ayi girinandini nanditamedini vishwavinodini nandanute ...} \]
We see here an extreme form of the semanticization of sound sequences. The first item which comes to mind is the beating of a drum, which sounds something like “di-ni-damm, di-ni-damm ....” The words mean: “Ayi! Daughter of the mountain, benefactress of the Earth, whose playing maintains the universe, the envoy of joy.” There is no immediate strict connection between the meaning and the “drum motif”. However, in the Indian context the concepts “drum,” “dance,” “joy” and “ecstasy” are closely associated. In Village India, the sound of drums coupled with dancing often induces possession trance. During the Navaratri festival, the possession of the goddess occurs after her ritually imitated victory over the demon. The rites may include ritual violence like buffalo sacrifices and self-mortifications. Now, I am not claiming that the *stotra* has to be sung during such rituals, rather that it evokes and imitates with its sound patterns the whole range of ideas and commemorative communal rites connected with this goddess. In real life, the demons crushed may be many: fears and illness, real enemies or inner ones like pride and ignorance. Notwithstanding these multifunctional interpretations, there is an intersubjective link: the collective knowledge of a powerful divine protectress. This shared pattern of communal identity and belonging is reproduced in the musical style. The singers always produce a pre-fabricated melody and a fixed pattern, leaving little space for individual improvisation. The rhythm, the music and the atmospheric mood underlying the *stotra*, are apt to induce a collective trancelike state.

A central feature, from the very first quarter of the verse onwards, is the atmospheric mood evoked by the phonetic dance motif in combination with the aggressive dissonant harmonies. This specific, highly energetic mood, very characteristic of the goddess Durga, remains throughout the whole *stotra*, no matter whether it is the events
of the battle that are being described, or later on the beauty of the goddess. The Durga atmosphere is present by virtue of the sound alone. For the bhaktas it is not simply brutal power, but a struggle for Good against the Demonic, and participation in the healing, protective and soteriological function of the goddess. Her worship performs the magic to ward off evil, and in the song this is heard semantically, as well as acoustically.

The aggressive musical style primarily reflects the gruesome acts of war that semantically determine the first part of the stotra. The phonetic motifs include, for example, Chanda (“the cruel”) and Munda (“the shaven-headed”), the names of two demons. These two names are frequently used to give a (folk) etymology of the name of the goddess Chamunda – meaning “the victor over Chanda and Munda”. Probably owing to this implicit pointer to the name of the victorious goddess, they are used in the stotra – unlike the demon’s name Mahisha (“the buffalo”) – as a leitmotiv in several verses. Like a germ, the names are hinted at right in the first verse by the numerous formations with “-nda”, “-mba”, etc. In verse 4 they are particularly explicit, with special attention being paid to the cerebral (retroflex) sound-formation “nda.” Here, the author is following not least a recommendation of the poeticians, who recommend the hollow-sounding, retroflex sounds (t, d, n) for horror, dread and disgust, which are also semantically expressed:

\[
\text{ayi shatakhandavikhanditarundavitunditashundagajadhipate} \\
\text{ripugajagandavidaranachandaparaknumshundamrgadhipate} \\
\text{njabhujadandanipatitakhandavipattamundabhatadhipate} \\
\text{jaya jaya .... //4//}
\]

“Ayi! She divides the bodies of the elephants [of the demon army] into a thousand pieces and chops off their trunks. Her lion shreds the temples of
the enemy elephants\footnote{According to the Indian view, the wildness and the power of an elephant reside in its temples, because this is where the attractant is exuded during the mating season.} and thus weakens the courage of the [demon] Chanda. Her strong arm pulls down the [demon] warrior Munda and chops him into pieces.” \textit{<Refrain>}

The palatal sibilant “sh” and the cerebral sibilant “sh”\footnote{In this case it is particularly unfortunate that the editor requested to omit all diacritical marks, since the two sibilants are represented in Sanskrit by different characters.} in the strophe below have a similar aggressive function, being, just like the retroflex sounds mentioned above, the bearers of negative moods. The author focuses on these sounds in verse 7, because they pick up phonetically the demons’ names Shumbha (with palatal “sh”) and Nishumbha (with cerebral “sh”):

\begin{verbatim}
ayi nijahumkrtimatranirakrtadhunravilochnadhumrashate
samaravishoshitashonitabijasamudbhavashonitabijalate/
Shiva Shiva Shumbha-Nishumbha-mahahavatarpitabhutapishacharate
jaya jaya .... //7//
\end{verbatim}

“Ayi! She finishes off the [demon] Dhumralochana (“smoke-eye”) just by shouting a threat, and makes thousands of clouds of smoke. From the seed of the blood dried in the battle the pomegranate tree grows, on which she is a creeper. O Shiva! O Shiva! The great massacre of [the demons] Shumbha and Nishumbha has given all her beloved ghosts and ghouls [from Shiva’s army] their fill.” \textit{<Refrain>}

Like the fight the victory, too, is audible. The sounds in the description of the victory become “lighter.” For instance, the words “victory, triumph” (\textit{jaya}) and “dance” (\textit{natya}) appear to be distributed over verse 10 (see below) either because of their phonetic material or their roots. Both semantically and acoustically, expression is given to the joy over the good ending of the battle. In the onomatopoetic sound-
chain *jhana jhana jhinjhim* one hears the tinkling ankle-bells of the goddess. In tantric literature there is an associative link between tinkling sounds, the airy ghostly Yoginis (fierce goddesses), and the bliss of ecstasy. This image is reproduced in the stotra:

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jayajayajapyajaye jayashabdadaparastutitapatparavishvanute
jhanajhanajhinjhimijhinkrtanupurasinjitanohitabhtapatet
naititanatardhanatitanatamayakanatitanatyasuganarate
jaya jaya .... //10//
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“Victory! Victory! On the occasion of this famous victory the universe sings constant hymns of praise full of cries of victory. [Your] ankle bells tinkle “ting-a-ling-a-ling” and charm the prince of spirits [Shiva]. You delight in the song, while Shiva, the chief dancer among all dancers, is animated to dance, and acts out a play.” <Refrain>

I would like to point out that a translation of the often dark and incomprehensible original stotra text is nearly impossible. Naturally this means that today’s Indian listener with a normal education including a bit of highschool Sanskrit understands at best only a fraction of the contents. But still the hymn is one of the most popular Durga stotras, available on many music tapes and extremely well-known. What makes the stotra so popular is the perfect realization, in its sound, of the central element of Durga’s personality, the unbridled power that is actually the source of her ability to destroy the demons. The suggestive-language music of the internal rhymes, the hammering machine-like meter and the unresolved dissonances have such an energizing, exciting effect that the listeners could not escape them even if they wanted to.
Individual musical forms of the “Flood of Beauty” (Saundaryalahari)

While the Durga hymn can be viewed as an example of a folk stotra style, the Saundaryalahari (literally “flood of beauty”) is probably the most famous goddess-hymn, written in an artistic style operating on many levels and using many metaphors. The hymn has a hundred verses and sings not of the warrior-goddess, but of the outstandingly beautiful and gentle goddess, the Para-Shakti or “Supreme Power” (see: illustration 2). It does so, not as an attempt to ward off evil, but within a soteriological framework in the sense of the Shri-Vidya philosophy, as a “flood of sentience and bliss.”

Tantra and bhakti appear here totally fused. The literary composition unites philosophical and theological density of thought with an elegant Sanskrit style and an abundance of lyrical images, quite in keeping with the ideal of artistic poetry with philosophical contents, a genre that conquered the literary stage from about the tenth century onwards. The poem is attributed to Shankara, since it is obviously a Southern-Indian post-Puranic product, albeit clearly older than the Mahishasuramardini hymn, and in such cases Indian tradition tends to accept the great philosopher as the author.

Unlike the Durga song, commonly sung in temple services and by groups, sophisticated texts with a deeper philosophical or esoteric meaning in the style of the Saundaryalahari are intended as recitation texts more for private contemplation. They may be sung at the end of the temple service (puja) by individuals (in the case of the Saundaryalahari usually by a female singer) with musical training and generally a good knowledge of Sanskrit. There is no refrain suitable for group singing, but rather a fluent complex text. Each of the verses, particularly the first group of 41, is full of esoteric meaning to be pondered.
and meditated upon. This often results in a more individual musical form. For example, a singer chooses a certain *Raga* for certain groups of verses or even for each individual verse. By so doing, the singer brings out his or her own interpretation in singing the text. In contrast to the Western way of singing songs, the musical composer and the performer are one and the same person. In Indian music there is a strict distinction between the singing of a pre-fabricated melody (like in the case of the *Durga* song) and free improvisation (like in the case

29 We could not verify the artist of this anonymous ‘dharmic’ picture.
of the \textit{Saundaryalahari}). Only the latter is regarded as high art. The \textit{Saundaryalahari} is clearly intended for such classical singing, even if in practice nowadays certain simple standard melodies are used to which all the verses can be sung. But actually every verse is composed in such a way that it takes up its own theme and imparts a certain mood – which is very much in keeping with the principle that every verse should be sung to its own Raga.

To show what such an interpretation might look like, I would like to present as an example the Carnatic singer Smt. R. Vedavalli. Hers is quite a personal interpretation. Other singers perform the text completely differently, in their own personal way. In Southern India the \textit{Saundaryalahari} is one of the stotras most frequently “set to music” and sold on cassette. So many musical recordings are available, but all singers have their own individual way of interpreting the hymn, with different Ragas.

For the first verse Smt R. Vedavalli selected the “female” Raga Ananda-Bhairavi as suitable for the beginning. Owing to its name, this Raga, on the one hand, can be associated with the name of the first part of the hymn, i.e., \textit{Ananda-Lahari} (“flood of bliss”), while, on the other hand, Ananda-Bhairavi is also the name of a goddess (with Kaula-tantric, i.e. heterodox left-hand tantric, connotations), the wife of Shiva-Bhairava. At the same time, in a quite specific manner, this Raga well suits the goddess as she is portrayed in the \textit{Saundaryalahari}. Ananda-Bhairavi is soft and flowing, but also elevated in style. The Raga is regarded as gentle, with the promise of good fortune. Already the instrumental prelude on the Veena and flute, which anticipates the Raga’s motif, announces the presence of the beautiful goddess. Then in quite a restrained fashion the singer starts singing the first verse – one of the most famous and most quoted mnemonic verses in the Shakra
tradition. It praises the goddess as the superior “power” (shakti). The following translation\(^{30}\) has already been adjusted to Vedavalli’s musical phrasing and therefore does not flow quite so smoothly:

“If the Lord is united with the power, he is capable of creation. If it is not so, the god is not even capable of the smallest movement. So You are worthy of worship, even by [the gods, who] build, sustain and destroy [the cosmos]. Bowing down before You, or singing Your praises – can one achieve this without merit?”

The singer realizes this particular verse in an interesting way:

We may find the treatment of the religious terms by the singer surprising. The word “god” (devo...) is sung very cautiously, almost

\(^{30}\) Like the English translation, the original German one in the musical notation is ours (Wilke and Moebus). The detailed musical description that follows was composed by Oliver Moebus who received training in Western and Indian music.
shyly. The other names of gods (the cosmic triad) are quite simply “over-sung.”

In the first quarter of the verse, the only accent briefly appearing lies on the gently emphasized final syllable of prabhavitum, “become more”, meaning here, “become powerful [as creator].” The singer lets the tone swell a little on the syllable “...tum” and then turn into a particular motif that returns again and again in the course of the song. This melody sinks from the main note G, via the soft E flat, downwards as far as D, and finishes there, without ever going back to the basic note. Instead, the melody develops into a gentle tremolo, which ebbs away in the harmonic suspense of the tones D and F. This infinity-suggesting “motif of longing” is the central motif of Ananda-Bhairavi.

In the second quarter of the verse the singer marks three words: the already mentioned devo (“the god”) is characterized by de-emphasis and by the awe-filled reticence with which it is intoned. This word occurs also where the melody returns to the basic note – something that did not happen in the first quarter of the verse. The word kushalah (here “able,” “capable,” but also “well-being”), which is characterized by a small trill, is likewise sung on the basic note. The secondary meaning of “well-being” indicates that the word is a mangala word with a corresponding musical form. The third marked word is api (“even”, here meaning “not capable of even the smallest movement”). The singer sings the word devo (“the god” = Shiva) pianissimo, as if she were facing a great secret, and api is sung in the same manner – with very quiet restraint. It is not given the coloratura that is usual at the end of every quarter of the verse. This soft and relaxed passage comes over as a brief moment of peace and fulfillment in the underlying feeling of longing. It almost seems as if the singer wants to
express the absolutely ineffable transcendence of Shiva. However, after a moment the musical expression gently glides back to the mood of longing that pervades the whole Raga.

In the second half of the verse Smt. Vedavalli marks the words “bow down” (pranantum) and “sing praises” (stotum) in a special way. The bhakti element is obviously especially important to this particular singer. While the theological tantric verses of the hymn are sung in a rather neutral tone, words evoking a devotional mood are always given a musical extra. For example, the words “You” and “worthy of worship” in the third quarter of the verse are lengthened, but on a single note without any melodic movement. At the end of the line the scale opens upwards into a long coloratura around the bright note A+, sung on the lengthened word api, “even (for these great gods).” The words “bow down” and “sing praises” in the fourth quarter of the verse are separated by pauses and the singer puts all her emotion into these words, ornamenting her singing with a sighing of delight. This musicalized devotion is conveyed especially vividly in the long, drawn-out and phonetically extended stotum va[yaya] (“... or sing praises”), which again takes up the “motif of longing,” G-F-E flat-D. At the end of the verse, the word prabhavati (“who can achieve this”) has a coloratura to echo the initial prabhavitum before leading into the second verse.

The whole recording of the Saundaryalahari sung by Smt. Vedavalli is, as with other singers of such texts, not an interpretation in the Western sense. The singer does not attempt to put across any textual content or to extract ideas from it, but rather, she reacts like a seismograph to individual words. Her song is actually a recitation during which she immerses herself completely in the text. The complex musical structures (in comparison to normal recitation) are an improvised