

## 1. Introduction

This work is based on a four month field research which took place in Vārāṇasī, the holy city on the riverbanks of the river Ganga in India. India is full of thousands and thousands of various gods and goddesses and temples consecrated to them. Every deity has its worshippers. One of these deities is Durgā. Her devotees are called *Śaktas*, derived from the term *śakti*, which expresses the female power or energy. My interest in Durgā came up during a visit to Vārāṇasī some time ago. I passed the large, deep red temple-compound every day while cycling to my Hindi classes. Sometimes I went into the temple with my landlady, fascinated that it is a goddess who is worshipped there. As I did not know so much about Hinduism and its peculiarities at that time, the idea came into being to do a research about this goddess, her temple, her devotees and their form of worshipping her.

Important ideas of Hindu philosophy are reflected through its deities and vice versa. They express notions about the beginning and end of the universe, about the existence of all beings, about social order and all kinds of human relationships. This universal truth is illustrated in myths, iconography and ritual behaviour. The latest mediums, such as cinema, television, comics and kitschy prints, contribute enormously in spreading the colourful kaleidoscope of religious ideas.

Hindu goddesses assume both benign and terrible forms. In their friendly manifestations they grant wisdom, liberation and success. They embody creation and female beauty as well as personifying the source of food and nourishment. In their terrible forms they manifest as fierce, dreadful,



Figure 2: Creation Of Durgā (Contemporary Comic)

bloodthirsty and destructive (Kinsley, 1987:139ff.). The goddess Durgā is a warrior goddess