5 Devi Atharvashirsha:

अथर्ववंशीय देवीभर्णोपि atharvavedīya devīatharvasīrṣa
This sukta from Atharvaveda is related to (in fact it borrows from) Rigveda, the mantras 1 to 8 of 125th sukta of 10th Adhyaya of the 10th Mandala. This sukta is a link between philosophy (दर्शन darsana) and techniques (तन्त्र tantra). Yogic techniques do not go very far without proper philosophy.

This sukta is considered to be very important in Atharvaveda. It is a tradition to recite this sukta before Durgasaptashati. It gives a rare insight into some of the deep concepts in Tantra and as such many teachers would not explain this sukta easily.

5.1 Text Translation and explanation:

ॐ सर्वे वै देव देवीमृतम्: काण्यि तं महादेवांति ॥ २ ॥ Oṁ sarve vai deva devīmṛtaṁ kāṇyi tavaṁ mahādevañi ॥ १ ॥
All the gods, going near the Goddess, asked ”who are you, O mighty Goddess?”

मानवीत्व अहं प्रभुमवरूपिणि ।
मतः प्रकृतिपुपपात्मकं जगत् ।
शृण्यं वाणृत्यं व ॥ २ ॥

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She said: I am an aspect of Brahma. From me this Universe, in form of Prakrti and Purush, is generated; which is both void and non-void.

The Universe is existing or not existing depending upon your viewpoint or plane of reference or level of reality. We have already explained Prakrti and Purush.

I am both bliss and non-bliss. I am knowledge and non-knowledge. I am brahma and non-brahma. The five primodial principles and non-principles is myself. I am the whole percieved Universe.

Doubt: Bliss and non-bliss, or knowledge/non-knowledge are understandable, but saying brahma/non-brahma does not make sense.

Reply: Remember that Devi is an inseparable part of the Attributeless Paramatma. She is beyond the Creation as indicated by Brahma or the non-manifest state called Abrahma.

I am Veda (knowledge about brahma) and non-knowledge. I am learning and ignorance. I am unborn and also born. I am up, down and crosswards. The purport of these mantras is that Devi is beyond the usual characterization.

I move about in form of Rudra and Vasu. I move about as Aditya and All-gods. I sustain Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Agni and both the Ashvinas.
अहं मीमं लक्ष्मीं पूज्यं भणं दयामि ।
अहं विष्णुमृक्षम ब्रह्मणमूल प्रजापतिः दयामि ॥ ६ ॥

ahaṁ somaṁ tvāṣṭāraṁ pāṣaṇāṁ bhagaṁ dadhāmi ।
ahaṁ viṣṇumurukramaṁ brahmaṅamuta prajāpatiṁ dadhāmi ॥ ६ ॥

I convey Soma, Tvasta, Pusha and Bhaga. I bring Vishnu with wide foot-steps, Brahma and Prajapati.

अहं दयामि द्रविणं हविपते मुग्धायं यजुर्मानाय मुनिवते ।
अहं गद्रा मण्मनी वमृना विकिल्पी प्रथमा यज्ञवानाम ॥
अहं पुत्रं पितप्रथम साज्ञम माौरिष्ण्वितं समूः ॥

ya eva वेद । य ऐ वै मम्मदामातिः ॥ ७ ॥

ahaṁ dadhāmi dравिणं हाविष्माते सुप्राव्ये याजमानंगला सुवन्ते ।
ahaṁ rāṣṭ्रं सायणंगलं वसण्डं चकितुः प्रथमां यज्ञवानं ॥
ahaṁ सुवे पितायं ज्ञमानं सुरद्धांभां योनिरप्वंताः समुखः ॥

ya evam veda । sa dāyiṁ नम्मदामाप्नोति ॥ ७ ॥

I bring Wealth with Havi for a yajaman who gives the best Havi to gods and effuses Soma. I am the Empress of this whole Universe. I give wealth to worshippers. I am the observer and the first amongst those worth worshipping. I create on myself (as basis of all) the primordial elements (like Akash etc.) My abode is in the Waters of Samudra (the consciousness of self awareness). One who knows this obtains divine wealth.

t देवा अनुनान नमो देवोऽ महादेवाय शिवाय पयतं नमः ।

नमः प्रकृत्यं भद्रायं नियताः स्म्य तामः ॥ ८ ॥

ta devā abruvan namo devāyai mahādevayai śivāyai satatāṁ namah ।
namah prakṛtyai bhadraiyai niyataḥ sma tām ॥ ८ ॥

Then the gods said : Namaskars to the goddess, the great goddess. Namaskars always to the goddess who is beneficial to all. Namaskars to the goddess who is the Nature and graceful. We, followers of rules, pay our respects to her.

तमाग्निवर्णं तपस्या ज्वलनं वैरोधनं कर्मफलेतुपुस्तां ॥

durga devā यशं प्रवद्धामहे युग्माताशिष्ये ते नमः ॥ ९ ॥

tamagnivarnāṁ tapasā jvalantīṁ vairocanīṁ karmaphaleṣu jusūṁ ।
durgāṁ devīṁ śaraṇaṁ prapadyāmahe surāmāsajītryai te namah ॥ ९ ॥

She, with colour of Agni, shining with knowledge, bright, being worshipped
to obtain fruits of actions, we are in her refuge. O Devi, destroyer of Asura, namaskars to you.

The gods (of the form of Prana) created the shining Vak, which is spoken by animals of all types. She, like a Kamadhenu, pleasure-giving, giving food and strength, Vak be satisfied by our prayers and come near us.

All the living creatures have their brains working with help of the Vak. Vak gives food — all kinds of perceptions, pleasure — bliss and strength — intelligence.

To the Night in form of Time, the power of Vishnu, prayed by Vedas, mother of Skanda (Parvati, Shivashakti), Sarasvati (Brahmashakti), mother of gods Aditi, and daughter of Daksha (Sati), destroyer of sins, beneficial Bhagvati, we convey our namaskars.

We know the Mahalaxmi and meditate on her, the all-powerful one. May that goddess direct us in [cordect] direction.

O daksha, your daughter Aditi gave birth to immortal gods, worth praying.
kāmo yonih kamalā vajrapāṇīrghuḥ hasā mātariśvābhramindraḥ
punarguhā sakalā māyāyā ca puruṣāsīrā viṣvanātāditiṇīyāṃ
dharmindraḥ

kām kṛ, pīnī r, kumār l, vārāṇa jī, l, gūḍha ā, r, h, m, mahārāja k, āmṛta h, idū l, ā, r, m, k l, mahā ā, r, these are the root knowledge about the Mother of the whole universe and an aspect of brahma.

The mantra gives the following matras for meditation:
ka-citāhṛīṃ, hasakahalahrīṃ, sakalahrīṃ.

This is a very important mantra for Tantra. It is said to have six types of meanings:

bhavatī, vācyatī sampradāyatī, kaulikatī, rāhasyatī, tattvatī.

Some commentators show even more meanings to the level of meaning of individual letter.

नमस्ते: अप्नू भगवति मातरमात्र पाहिं पर्वत: || १४ ||

namaste astu bhagavati mātaramān pāhī sarva mā || 16 ||

O Bhagavati, these namaskars to you. O mother, protect us in all ways.

24
saisā viśvedevāḥ somapā asomapāḥ ca | saisā yātudhānā asurā rakṣāṃsi
piśācā yakṣāḥ siddhāḥ |
saisā satvarayatamasaṃsi |
saisā brahmāviṣṇurudrarūpiniḥ | saisā prajāpatindramanavāḥ
saisā grahanakṣatrapyotih |
saisā kalakāśhādikālarūpiniḥ | tāmahāṃ pranomi nityam |
pāpaḥārinīṃ devīṃ bhaktimuktipradāyinīṃ |
anantāṃ vijayāṃ sūdhāṃ śarasayāṃ śivadāṃ śivām || 17 ||

She is these eight vasus. She is the eleven Rudras. She is the twelve Adityas. She is the All-gods — drinking Soma or non-drinking. She is Yatudhan, Rakshahas, Asuras, Pishachas, Yakshas and Siddhas. She is Satva, Rajas and Tamas. She is Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. She is Prajapati, Indra and Manu. She is the planets, stars and constellations. She is various measures of Time. She is destroyer of sins, giver of both enjoyment and Moksha, without end, giving victory [over distractions of Samsar], pure, worth taking refuge, giver of peace, peace personified, we pray to her.

In Vedic texts two types of gods are shown — those who drink Soma, शोभन्त्र somapā and those who drink ghee, ग्नीर gṛtapā. The first type of gods represent various regions and activities of our brain while in deep meditation, while the second type of gods denote regions and activities of brain while one is doing some mental activity.

Yatudhan are a kind of demons.

वियोद्धकारपूर्यं वैतिहात्त्रयमनितम् ।
अर्धन्दुलिमितं देह्येऽवीजं सर्वरथ्यायकम् || २८ ||

viyādikārasamuktaṃ vittihotrasamanvitam |
ardhendulasitaṃ devyā bījaṃ sarvarthasādhakam || 18 ||

एक्षमकार्यं ब्रह्म यतयमः ।
प्रायत्नं परम्यायं ज्ञातं सर्वभवायः: || २९ ||

evamekāksaram brahma yatayah sūdhacetasah |
dhyāyanti paramāndamayā jñānāmburāsayaḥ || 19 ||

Akash means ā, with ा-syllable, Agni य is the Bijamantra (ज्ञा) for the goddess. It is able to satisfy all desires. Those Yogis whose mind is pure, meditate on this one syllable Brahma, they are having extreme happiness and like an ocean of knowledge.

वायस्य ब्रह्मायुः पर्यत्रमनितम् ।
vāṁmāyā brahmaśastasātmā saśtham vaktrasamanvitam
sūryo'vāmasrotrabindusamjuktaśattītyakah
nīrōjanena saṃmiśro vāyuścādharyuk totaḥ
vicce navārṇako'ṛṇah syānmahādānandātyakah

Vak व, Maya म, Brahmas or Kama क, the sixth consonant व with Vaktra व, Surya स, the right ear श, and Bindu ब, the third from त, i.e. ब, with Narayana न, Vayu व, with lips व, and विचे – this Navarṇa mantra gives pleasure (bliss), and nearness to Brahma to the meditator.

The meaning of this mantra is O Sarasvati, O Laxmi, O Kali, all of us pray to you to obtain the realization of Brahma. O Chandika, here are namaskars to you. Please remove the tight knot of this bond in form of Ignorance and release me from Samsar.

I worship the goddess staying in the middle of my Self (or mind), bright as the morning Sun, holding tongs and Ankusha, with beautiful looks, with the hand in Varad (benefactory) and Abhaya (protecting) mudra, with three eyes, with red cloths and who satisfies the desires of her worshippers.

Trinetra – one having three eyes; eyes denote the source of information or knowledge; because it is Vak which makes me know the world, while I am awake, asleep or dreaming, Vak has three eyes, one for each state of mine. Or, some interprete the states referred as awake, asleep and meditating, the Third eye corresponding to the meditative state.

with red cloths – cloths are the outer covering; the outer layer of Vak is the activity that goes on during the waking state and it is denoted by the red colour, which is a standard colour code in Rigveda for Agni, the activity at Cerebral Cortex.

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नमामि त्वा महादिवी महाभयविनाशिनीम्
I offer namaskar to the goddess destroying fearsome troubles, eliminating mighty obstacles, personified compassion.

Even Brahma etc. do not know her real form, so she is called Ajneya. We do not find its limit, so she is called Ananta. We can not find the meaning, so she is called Alakshyā. Her birth is not known, so she is called Aja. She is found one alone evrywhere, so she is called Naika. Because of this she is called these various names.

Amongst the mantras she is the original sounds, in the words she is the essence of knowledge. Amongst the knowledge she is beyond what is comprehensible by analysis and in the Shunya, i.e., during deep meditation, she is the witness to that state. She is well known as Durga, there is
nothing better than her.

तां दुर्गां दुर्गमां देवीं दुराचारविपर्यातिनोऽ

नमामि भवभीतोऽहम पंचागर्णवतारिनोऽ|| २४ ||

tāṁ dūrghāṁ dūrgamāṁ deveṁ durācāravighātinīṁ |

namāmi bhavabhīto'haṁ sansārārṇavatārīnīṁ || 25 ||

I, afraid of the Samsara, offer namaskars to Durga, difficult to know, destroyer of sins and pilot while crossing this sea of Samsara.

ढंढमध्यवर्णोंप योंकीते स पृष्ठायांवर्णांपञ्जफूलमार्गिति |

ढंढमध्यवर्णमध्यात्ता योंत्वा स्थापयति शतलक्ष्म प्रज्ञावापी सोवार्मिन्यं न विन्दति |

शतमद्वीतरं वास्त्र पृष्ठायांविधि: स्मृत: |

damāṇavāṇа पठेवण्यं मादं पापे: प्रमुख्यते |

महादुर्गाणि तरसऽ महादेव्या: प्रसादतः: || २६ ||

idamatharvasīrṣam yo’dhite sa paṁcātharvaśīrṣajapaphalamāpnoti |

idamatharvasīrṣajāmāṅītvā yo’rcāṁ sthāpayati sātalaksāṁ prajaptvāpi |

so’rcaśiddhim na vindati |

satamaśottaraṁ cāsya puraścaryāvidhiḥ smṛtaḥ |

dasavāraṁ pāṭhedgyastu sadyah pāpaiḥ pramucyate |

mahādurgāṇi tarati mahādevyāḥ prashañdate | 26 |

One who studies this Atharvashirsha gets credit for reciting it five times. One who establishes and worships an image without knowing this Atharvashirsha will not get any benefit, even if does 100,000 recitations.

Repeat this 108 times — that is the method of Purascharana. Even repeating ten times makes him free of sins due to the grace of MahaDevi.