

SHRI LALITASAHRANAMA -LESSON TWO

VERSES 22-33

Verses 22 & 23 tells us as to where Sri Lalita resides. From 24 to 30 we are given a gist of the main shaktis that assist the devi in the battle. Verses 31 to 33 primarily lists the missile exchange between the Devi and Bhanda.

At this juncture we are entering the area of tantra. More details will come in later verses. Tantra simply means a way or method. In religion it refers to any prescribed method used in worship. The method when repeated will facilitate the active restless mind and body to focus on the divinity concerned. The step by step procedure facilitates this. There is no religion in the world that is free from tantra.

Yantra, mantra and tantra are the three basic components of external worship. Looking from a global and historical perspective, from the belief systems of the adivasis (= ancient dwellers such as indigenous tribes) all the way to the sophisticated theology and sampradaya of world religions, one can see the role of yantra, mantra and tantra. This is the Trinity of- physical designation, repeated sacred sounds or words and a particular methodology that is employed for the single purpose of invoking and stabilising the divine in us.

sumeru shringahmadhyasthaa

One who is seated on the midpart of Sumeru.

In the Puranas, Sumeru, is a symbolical mountain located in the middle of Bharatavarsha (Greater India). Meru itself means a heap, a mountain or even an elevation. It also implies a focus from which radiation or growth spreads. The center of the svastika design is called meru. The bead to turn around in the japa mala is also called a meru. Sacred geometric designs generally containing intersecting triangles within circles, used in the worship of specific deities are called chakras, mandalas or padmas. When these are constructed in a three dimensional manner, they are referred to as meru chakras.

Here the devi is said to dwell on top of the beautiful meru. This refers both to her location in the physical yantra the meru chakra used for worship and her position in our personal lives. In the former she is connected to the entire framework of the meru from her position up on top. In the latter, where emotions, thoughts, energies and forces interact she is to be found connected to all yet above all.

sheemannagara -naayikaa

One who rules the city of Shree

Stationed on the meru she rules the fortress city of Srinagara or Sripura. This is the city of Prosperity, Plenty and of Auspiciousness. This nagara has several divisions according to the Brahmanda purana. It is guarded by Mahakala and Mahakali. As their names indicate they watch over time and its divisions. These divisions cover nimisha (the smallest unit of time), to tithis (lunar days), to pakshas (lunar cycles)and yogas (time frames within a day). Here too we find seasons such as Vasanta (spring) and Grishma (the hot season) described as deities who serve Lalitadevi.

chintaamani-grihaantasthaa

One who lives in the abode of Chintamani.

Within this fortress-city she resides in the house called Chintamani, (the jewel of Chitta). In the Brahmanda purana we read that a continuous fire offering goes on, inside this mansion. The offerer(hotaa) is Sri Kamesvara and the hotree is the devi Lalita or Kamesvari. Together the two maintain the universe. The griha is fortified by vedas and purusharthas in the form of chariots and horses.

In the precinct are the chariots of other shaktis such as Manthrini, Dandanaatha, Gaayathri, Agnidevathaa, Brahma, Hari, Siva, Sarasvathi, Baalaa and Mahaaganapathi and many others. Here too are the ashta siddhis and the fifteen nitya devatas.

The **ashta siddhis** are eight powers by which one has mastery over oneself as well as the material content of the earth we live on. These are considered as superhuman powers. These occur naturally during spiritual evolution. The rishis warn us that these can often distract and even halt spiritual progress. The best method is to move on to higher rungs of the ladder of sadhana and not be waylaid by them.

The nitya devis govern the phases of the moon.

pancha-brhmaasana-sthithaa-22

One who is on the panchabrahma -seat.

In this Chintamani mansion the devi resides in a chamber called Sopaana mandira. Here in the center is the Bindupeetta. This peeta is also called Vidya peeta, Mahaapeeta or Sreepeeta. The cot like seat she sits on has four legs that are indeed Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesvara and Isvara according to the Brahmanda purana. On top of the plank lies Sadaasiva. These are the panchabrahmas. The panchabrahmas are the 5 ishvara-tattvas or cosmic principles. They are- srishti, sthithi, samhaara, tirodhaana and anugraha. These are creation, maintenance, dissolution, veiling and blessing.

A set of steps, sopaana, leads to this seat. These steps are the five tanmatras (building blocks of creation) and their corresponding human sense organ systems, as well as ahankara, buddhi and manas. Here too are purusha and prakriti and the remaining of the thirty six tattwas of Shuddha vidya. On top of the plank seated next to each other is the couple, Kamesvara and Kamesvari. They are young, sixteen years of age, decorated in all finery and filled with the sentiment of sringara (beauty and love).

The sumeru is the symbolic ascension of our chitta towards the divine. From this peak vibrations spread into all areas of our living world through which we reap our experiences. The spread of the chitta is wide, it is a personal city to each one of us. We are advised how we can fortify it and what resources are there for our use. The central or innermost chamber is the connecting area between the pindanda (individual universe) and the brahmanda (the cosmos). The precious gem of the best of the chitta ie. or chintamani is obtained only after thorough exploring and refining and cutting our thoughts as we plough through various experiences in life. Chintamani then can represent a mind that is skillfully cut and polished by sadhana.

The core- chamber has the seat supported by the four divine cosmic processes of creation, maintenance, dissolution and veiling. The fifth and last process is the plank of anugraha or blessing. On this are seated the permanently- bonded -couple, the Isvari - Isvara of the world.

How do we go about refining ourselves so that we can go into our own inner chamber ? It is not by mere denial of all that we experience. It is not by refusing and misusing the universe we live in. It is by recognising that, through the medium of this universe alone can we go inwards. This universe is Purusha and Prakriti, the Awareness Principle and the Material Principle. It is through knowledge gathered with the help of the sensory systems as well as ahankara, buddhi and manas with which we experience this universe. This in turn helps our entrance into the inner chamber. As we climb the sopanaa we are going upwards as well as inwards.

Cosmically the world resulted from Divine Will. It is the Divine Will that continues to support it as the great Yagna. We are the hotaa/hotree only of our individual fire offering or yagna. We must recognise our place in this Universe with a sense of humility. One must learn how best to conduct oneself in this yagna such that the inner yagna coincides with the cosmic Yagna in perfect harmony.

mahaapadmaatavi-samstthaa, kadambavana-vaasinee

Oh one who is within the grove of Mahapadma, in the grove of kadamba trees.

Her fortress -city is in a mass of lotuses called Mahapadma that is within a grove of kadamba trees. The grove is said to be filled with many exotic plants, beautiful streams and lakes. The gem studded lotuses that grow here are the matrukaa shaktis. Matruka shaktis are the "little mothers" that preside over each and every alphabet of our language. In Kerala tradition there is a marvellous ritual to Lipi-sarasvati or Matrikaa sarasvati where the entire chain of Sanskrit alphabets are invoked into a large chakra.

It is interesting to note that in Kerala, mandalas and chakras are referred to as " padmams".

Padmas =chakras = mandalas have the nature of flowers in that they can bloom or closeup. These may refer to the psychic centers in us. Chakra also indicates movement around an axis.

The kadamba tree features in the romantic literature of ancient India as a symbol of an ideal meeting place for man and the divine.

sudhaasaagara-madhyastthaa kaamaakshi kaama-daayinee-23

One who with desirous eyes, seated in the midst of the nectar-ocean, fulfiller of desires.

In the Brahmanda purana this ocean is described as having all kinds of vessels plying on it. Innumerable creatures live in it and many a breeze wafts across it. The devi is said to have eyes that look at you with love and is the one who facilitates that which you desire.

The ocean is vast and limitless to our eyes. Such a vast and limitless ocean is the Unmanifest aspect of creation. This ocean is not a turbulent fearful one but rather one full of sweet nectar of aesthetic delight or rasa. From here arise the land of materialisation on which grow the sacred syllables. These constitute the building blocks of our languages. Here too are beautiful trees and streams of expression and feelings that nourish life itself.

devarshi-ganasangaatha-sthooyamaanaathma-vaibhavaa

One brought into being by the praises of the devas and the rishis.

Her coming is in response to the prayers of the devas and the rishis.

Devas are illuminating principles that guard the world. Rishis are guardians of eternal wisdom.

Bhandaasura-vadhodyuktha shakthisenaa-samanvithaa-24

One who is with a shakti army, rounded up for the killing of Bhandasura.

She has an army created for this battle led by manifestations of the feminine divine principle.

sampathkaree-samaarooda sindooravraja-seyvithaa

One who is served by Sampatkari who rides on an elephant and is also surrounded by elephants.

Sampatkari is a general in the devi's army. She is born from the goad of Srilalita. Her complexion is red.

She leads a retinue of elephants, horses and chariots. She herself rides on the elephant named Ranakolaahala. She wields a sword, bow and arrows. She destroys Durmadaasura.

The word kari means elephant. The one who rides on an elephant is the one to kill the asura who is intoxicated (mada) with wickedness (dur.). Again the devi represents the sum total of gains (sambat). This has a weight that can crush maddening wickedness.

A person who has not accumulated spiritual wealth cannot crush evil. Evil can be crushed only by tremendous goodness.

ashvaaroodaadhishthithaashva kotikotibhiraavrithaa-25

One who is surrounded by crores and crores of horses headed by Ashvaruddha, one who rides a horse.

The devi Ashvaruddha, a general in the army, rides on the horse Aparajita. She is in charge of an army of a wonderful variety of well bred horses. She is born from the noose of Srilalita. She wields the noose, goad, a staff of sugar cane and the bridle. She destroys the asura Kurunda. Kurunda is represented as a headless person. He symbolises stubbornness and lack of reasoning. This type of an asuric behaviour needs a swift slash from the powerful sword of discrimination and action.

In this day and age of overanalysis we find that many an evil or negative behaviour is being handled with psychological- pampering sticks. This serves only to add more problems not solve any. To be able to use the sword of "horse sense" one must have a clear mind not one cluttered with everchanging theories.

chakraraajaratthaarooda sarvaayudha-parishkrithaa

One who is equipped with all weapons rides on the King of Chakras.

This refers to the fact that unlike the other devis in the story, Srilalita has many more weapons and rides on the best or Kingchakra.

In the Brahmanda purana, chakras seem to refer to fancy battle formations. There is more to it. In the ritualistic worship of Srilalita, yantras called sriyantras are used. This yantra has divisions that correspond exactly to the divisions described in the battle formation. Generally all chakras for worship have specific intersecting triangles surrounded by circles of petals. The formal worship of yantras includes mudras, stotras and various ingredients of a puja.

The purpose of this detailed ritual is :

1. To allow a step by step exercise for the thoughts, going from the outer and more numerous thoughts to fewer inner subtler thoughts.
2. To arrive finally at the center, the basis or the core of thoughts itself.. This is where Srilalita is.
3. By participating in this properly one takes steps towards purification and blessing.

Each major deity has his or her own chakra i.e. yantra. eg Baalaa yantra, Syaamaa yantra and Vaaraahi yantra.

geyachakraratthaarooda mantrinee-pariseyvithaa-26

One who is served by Mantrini who rides on the Geya chakra.

Mantrini, another general has attendants called Yantrini and Tantrini. From her parrot came Dhanurveda, the archer. Her lion mount is Vajraghosha. This devi represents the yoga of music, mantras and esoteric wisdom. The suffix NI in her name suggests 'one that leads you to or one that serves as a vehicle'. We are reminded that Art too is a powerful force.

Let the body be an instrument and play the melody of mantra on it. Let the mind be a parrot that repeats mantras again and again. Let the fingers practise gestures that go along with the right mantric channel allowing the inner akasa(mind) and the outer akasa be connected with right energy waves. This practice allows sadaamada or constant unbroken enthusiasm or excitement for life..

kirichakra-ratthaarooda dandanaatthaa-puraskrithaa

One who has placed in front Dandanatha, who rides the Kiri chakra.

The word kiri means boar. Dandanatha, another general is often called Vaaraahee. She is described as having the face of the boar. She carries the danda or cane suggesting authority.. She also carries a plough and a club. The boar stands for sacrifice and uprooting of negative vasanas from their very base.

May we handle negative tendencies with an unequivocal stick. May we remember that time is the only media through which all efforts produce results. May we not fear confrontations within. May we remember that we do have a large army of scriptural truths and methods available for our battle.

jvaalaa-maalnikaakshiptha vahnipraakaara-madhyagaa-27

One who is hidden in the middle of a fiery fortress caused by Jvalamalinika.

Jvalamalini is one of the nitya devis. Hers is the 14th phase in the lunar cycle.

Every time we use our mind to defeat the armies of negative tendencies or anti daivic tendencies in us, then the devas rejoice. This battle keeps recurring just like the waxing and waning of the moon. The fourteenth day of the lunar cycle is significant as it precedes two very important tithis, full moon and new moon days.

bhandasainya-vadhodyuktha shakthi-vikrama-harshitha

One who rejoices in the defeat of the armies of Bhandaa, brought about by her victorious Shakti army.

nityaaparaakramatopa nireekshana samuthsukaa-28

One who is excited at the chivalries executed by the nitya devis

Shrilalita is excited on seeing the annihilation brought to Bhandaa's army by the Nitya devis.

The nitya devis preside over the tithis. They are fifteen in number and they annihilate fifteen generals in Bhandaa's army. The devis are Kaamesi, Bhagamaalaa, Nithyaklinnaa, Bherundaa, Vahnivasinee, Mahaavajresvaree, Doothee, Tvarithaa, Kulasundaree, Nithya, Neelapataaka, Vijayaa, Sarvamangalaa, Jvaalaamalini and Chithraa.

There is a tradition of invoking Shri lalita in her various aspects as nitya devis by worshipping the moon.

bhanda-puthra-vadodyuktha baalaavikrama-nandithaa

One who rejoices in the victory of Baalaa in connection with the defeat of Bhandaa's sons.

Baalaa is the nine year old daughter of Srilalita. She resembles her mother in all respects except in age. She killed the thirty sons of Bhandaa.

Being young she is often resorted to first by devotees, before they take to the upasana of Srilalita.

mantrinyambaavirachitha vishanga-vadhathoshithaa-29

One who rejoices in the killing of Vishanga that Mantrinee planned.

Vishanga was born from the right shoulder of Bhandaa. The prefix "vish" here may be taken to mean toxic.

Toxic- limbed- one would be Vishanga.

The best way of removing toxins that affect our mind-body complex is to use the yogas of music, mantras and ritualistic worship.

vishukra-praana-harana vaaraahee-veeryanandithaa

One who rejoices in the valour of Varahi, who removes the prana of Vishukra.