

Sri Lalitaa Saharanaama: *An Overview*

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Introduction:

The worship of Universal Mother (referred as Devi or Shakti or Ishwari), as the Supreme Being is well known in Vedic tradition. In Tantric philosophy, the Supreme Being is seen as Shakti and Shiva, who are inseparable. In fact the great poet Kalidasa says,

Vaagarthaaviva Sampriktou Vaagarthah Pratipattaye
Jagatah Pitarou Vande Paarvati Parameshwaraou

Which means, "I prostrate to the parents of this universe, Parvati (Shakti) and Parameshwara (Shiva), who are ever united as speech and meaning for their blessing unity in my speech and meaning".

In this beautiful verse, speech representing conscious activity refers to Shakti and meaning representing knowledge refers to Shiva. Thus a meaningful speech as on one entity refers to the inseparable nature of Shakti and Shiva. This principle when applied to the infinite activities found everywhere in all things of the universe, then they are manifestations of Shakti as Universal Mother. The reference for all these infinite activities as Pure Consciousness represents the Universal Father Shiva.

As a mother in a family carrying out several activities takes care of all the children in her family, similarly in the Universal Family, the Devi as the Universal Mother takes care of Her Infinite dependents that includes all beings such as humans, animals, birds, insects, etc. It is well known that as children in a family feel close to their mother, so also infinite beings in the universe feel close to their Universal Mother. Hence the loving worship of the Universal Mother is natural and helps in the spiritual development. Now several questions arise. What are the qualities of this Universal Mother? How do we describe this Universal Mother? What are Her activities? The answers to such questions are found in Sri Lalita Sahasranama, which symbolically represents to one thousand names or descriptions of the Universal Mother referred as Sri Lalitaa.

Sri Lalitaa Sahasranaama

The word Lalitaa etymologically refers to “The One who nurtures the beings in the Universe(s) from an abode transcending the Universe(s)”. Sri Shankaraacharya says in Veda Paadastava about the name Lalitaa as,

Laliteti Sudhaapooraa Maadhuree Choramambike
Tava Naamaasti Yattena Jihvaava Me Madhumattamaa

Which means, “Oh! Mother, Your name Lalitaa which even steals the sweetness of nectar is on my tongue, has made my tongue sweeter”.

This Lalitaa Sahasranaama occurs in poetic form as an answer given by Lord Hayagreeva to the question by Sage Agastya. It has three parts namely introduction, thousand names and then Phalashruti (fruits for the recitation of thousand names). In the introductory part Sage Agastya asks Lord Hayagreeva, as “You have narrated to me the most wonderful history of Mother Lalitaa Devi with all the details such as Her manifestation, Her coronation and Her slaying of the demon Bhandasura. You have also described Her abode Shripura in all its glory and also the greatness of Panchadashi Mantra.... But you have not told me the Thousand Names of Lalitaa Devi. Have you forgotten to do so or have you deliberately refrained? Or am I unworthy of hearing the Names?” To this question by the Sage Agastya, Lord Hayagreeva replied, “ I did not tell you, because I thought it was secret. Now that you have asked me with devotion, I will impart it to you”. And then He narrated the Thousand Names, saying that these names have been composed by Goddesses of Speech at the express command of Sri Lalitaa Parameshwari herself. The third part contains the Phalashruti, which includes materialistic blessings as well as spiritual blessings including realization of Brahman.

Various Concepts in Sri Lalitaa Sahasranaama

The poetically beautiful Sri Lalitaa Sahasranaama provides concepts at various levels. In one approach, it is classified in thirteen categories. A brief description of these categories with some representative names is presented.

(1) Sri Maturavatara (Incarnation of the Universal Mother)

This description of Mother Lalitaa is in 54 names (1–54). The first name itself represents Universal Motherhood. She is the source for

everything animate and inanimate. Every being reaches to the Mother first. The incomparable beauty of the Mother Lalitaa is described vividly in these names. The 15th name describes that her forehead is bright as the moon on eighth day. The 48th name describes her as the treasure house of beauty. The 54th name says that she has won over her Lord Parameshwara.

(2) Sri Nagara Varnana (Description of the Universal Mother's Abode)

In 9 names (55–63), the abode of Mother Lalitaa namely Sri Nagara is described beautifully. The 55th name tells that she is dwelling on the middle peak of Mount Sumeru. In 61rd name, she is said to reside in the center of ocean of nectar (of immortality). The 63rd name describes her as Mother, who bestows the desires of her devotees.

(3) Bhandasura Vadha (Slaying of the demon Bhandasura)

In the next 20 names (64–83), a beautiful description of her slaying of the demon Bhandasura is given. The 64th name describes that her power is praised by all the assemblies of multitudes of devas and rishis. This is because she represents Supreme Atman who energizes all faculties. The 65th name says that Mother Lalitaa is endowed with an army of all shaktis to slay Bhandasura and his army. This battle is described in Lalitopaakhyaana. Bhandasura refers to arrogant shamelessness. In 83rd name it is described that Brahmaa, Vishnu, Mahendra and others praise her Supreme Power.

(4) Mantra Roopaha (the manifestation of Mantras)

In the next 4 names (84–87), her form in mantras is described. The 84th name says that she was the life-giving medicine to Manmatha (Cupid) who was burnt up by the fire from the eye of Lord Shiva. The next three names refers to the three parts (kootas) of Panchdashi mantra namely Vaagbhava (face), Madhya (throat to waist) and Shakti (waist to feet)

(5) Kundalini Roopaha (the manifestation of Kundalini)

In the next 24 names (88 –111), the manifestation of Lalitaa as spiritual energy form is described. The 88th name describes her as the root of the Panchadashi Mantra, which is the source to bless the four-fold objective namely Dharma, Artha, Kaama and Moksha. The names from 99 to 104 describe the Chakras Moolaadhaara, Manipoora and Ajnaa chakra along with the three Granthis (knots) namely Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. These are the yogic centers in the Sushumnaa

Channel in the spinal cord. The 105th name describes that the Mother Lalitaa blesses Sahsraara (at crown of the head).

(6) Bhakta Anugraha (the blessings upon Her devotees)

In the next 14 names (112–125), the blessings of Lalitaa on her devotees are described. The 118th name describes that she takes delight in pure devotion of devotees. The 119th name describes that she is amenable to sincere devotion. The 121st name says that she removes the fear of her devotees. The 125th name says that she blesses happiness to her devotees.

(7) Nirguna Upaasana (Worship of Mother beyond attributes)

In the next 67 names (126–192), the nirguna (beyond attributes) nature of Lalitaa is described. The 154th name says that she is without limitations or constraints. The names 172 and 173 nicely describe that not only she is beyond doubts but she will also destroy the doubts of her devotees by blessing knowledge. The names 191 and 192 describe that not only she removes the misery of her devotees but also blesses happiness to them.

(8) Saguna Upaasana (Worship of Mother with Her attributes)

In the next 56 names (193–248), a description of Lalitaa through her attributes is given. The 193rd name describes that Devi Lalitaa is not attainable by sinners. The 217th name describes Lalitaa as the great energy. The 237th name says that Lalitaa is served by great sixty-crore of groups of yoginis. The 244th name says that she is the Ruler of animate and inanimate things of the world. The 248th name says that she shines like ruby.

(9) Pancha Brahma Roopaha (Manifestation of Five Brahmas)

In the next 92 names (249–340), a description is given of Lalitaa through the forms of five Brahmans who manifest as Brahmaa, Vishnu, Rudra, Ishwara and Sadaashiva. The 256th name says that Universe is her Form. She also carries out the five actions namely creation, protection, dissolution, blessing and destruction. The 281st name says that series of universes appear and disappear with the opening and shutting of her eyes.

(10) Kshetra Kshetrjna roopaha (manifestation of field and knower of field)

In the next 32 names (341–372), a description of her as the field as well as the knower of the field is given. The 343rd name says that she as the Supreme Being is the protector of the field and of the knower of the field. The names 366th, 368th, 370th and 371st describe the four stages (from the subtlest to gross) of the production of the sound field namely Paraa, Pashyantee, Madhyamaa and Vaikharee. This can be applied to all manifestations.

(11)Peethaani–Anga Devataashcha (The Her locations and counterparts)

In the next 102 names (373–474), the various abodes of mother Lalitaa and her counterpart devataas are described. The 373rd name says that she is the vital current of her Lord Kameshwara. The 417th name says that she is of the form of consciousness in beings. The names 425, 426 and 427 together become Tat–Tvam–Ayi and represent her all–pervading nature. The names 471, 472 and 473 refer to her as the Queen of siddhas, the eternal knowledge (siddhis) and the Mother of all siddhas.

(12)Yogini Nyaasaha (The dwellings of Yoginis)

In the next 58 names (475–532), a description of the various yoginis and their dwellings are given. The names 475, 485, 495, 504, 514, 521 and 528 describe various Chakras namely Vishuddhi (Daakini), Anaahata (Raakini), Manipooara (Laakini), Svadhishtaana (Kaakini), Moolaadhaara (Shaakini), Ajnaa (Haakini) and Sahasraara (Yaakini). These names describe the details of the various yoginis. The 532nd name says that she is facing all sides, which means she sees all things and knows all things.

(13)Vibhuti Vistaara–Marga bheda Saamarasya (Expansion of Her faculties and harmony of various Paths)

In this last group of 468 names (533–1000), elaborate descriptions of mother in all her various manifestations are given. The 539th and 540th names describe that she manifests as scriptures. The 543rd name says that she is attainable by the devotees who are righteous. The 573rd name says that she is the goal of all knowledge. The 583rd and 584th names describe that she is the spiritual knowledge, which is the most exalted knowledge. The 585th name says that she is Sri Vidya, which refers to Panchadashi mantra and associated knowledge. The 595th name says that she resides in the heart of all and hence she has to be meditated upon in one’s heart. The 604th name says that she is inexhaustible storehouse of all great qualities. The 618th name says

that she is the Supreme. The 644th name says that she is knowledge herself, which means her form (body) is knowledge. The 656th name says that she is the bliss achieved by yoga. The 667th name says that she is One without second. The 727th name says that she is the One who bestows the knowledge of Shiva for devotees. The 757th name says that she is manifested in things that are perishable and also imperishable. The 791st name says that she is Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. The 806th name says that she is the Supreme Light. The 822nd name says that she is the Ultimate Brahman. The 889th name says that she is the One who causes the universe to revolve. The 894th name says that she has no origin and is Eternal. The 911th name says that she is the Consort of Sadaashiva. The 926th name says that she is the One who blesses the abode of priceless liberation (from all bondages). The 993rd name says that she is the lamp that dispels the darkness of ignorance. The 999th name says that she represents the union of Shiva and Shakti as the inseparable one. The 1000th name describes her as Mother Lalitaa, the Supreme Being.

Concluding Remarks

The sincere recitation and devoted efforts in understanding meaning of Sri Lalitaa Sahasranaama will greatly help spiritual aspirants to advance in their spiritual journey. I offer this humble effort to my Gurus Sriranga and Srimaataa Vijayaambika.

Sri Maatarancha Srirangam Vande Vaagartha Roopinou
Vaagarthah Pratipattiyartham Jnaananda Prasiddhaye

I prostrate to my Gurus Sriranga and Srimaataa Vijayaambika, who are inseparable as speech and its meaning. I pray to them for the unity in my speech and meaning to bestow the Knowledge and Bliss.