

This introduction deals with the background on lalitAsahasranAma (the purANa etc) and the importance of Shri Chakra, the diagrammatical form for meditation. (Only a brief description is provided here since it has been extensively described by Adi Shankara in the text of SaundaryalaharI. A detailed description of Lalita yantra (Shri Chakra) is given in the Hindu Tantrik page <http://www.shivashakti.com/>)

Among the 18 purANas, brahmANDa-purANa is well known for the extolment of Lalita. It explains in detail the appearance of the Goddess Lalita to save the world from the clutches of the demon bhaNDAsura. There are three important sub-texts in this purANa.

The first of these texts is LalitopAkhyAna, consisting of 45 chapters and is found in the last chapter of the purANa. The last five chapters are especially well known. They extol the greatness of the Divine mother, the significance of the mantra of the goddess (shoDashAkShari-vidyA), the various mudras and postures to be practiced, meditations, initiations etc., and the mystical placement of the deities involved in Shri Chakra.

The next text is the lalitA trishati in which 300 names of the goddess is featured. There is a well known commentary on this work by Adi ShankarAchArya.

The third text is the celebrated LalitA sahasranAma, which consists of 320 verses in three chapters. The first chapter is 51 verses, and relates that the 1000 names of LalitA were recited by various devatas as commanded by the goddess herself. This chapter also explains that the verses are in anuShTup ChaNDaH (metre known as anuShTup) and that the deity Lalita is invoked in three kUTas (vAgbhava, kAmarAja, and shakti). The second chapter of the text contains the thousand names of the goddess in 182 1/2 verses (which is transliterated below). The third and final chapter is 86 1/2 verses long and enumerates the benefits accrued by reciting these one thousand names of the Goddess. This is mainly to encourage people to recite the names with concentration to achieve, if not anything else, a peace of mind.

Lalita trishati and lalitA sahasranAma are dialogues between the sage Agastya and the god Hayagriva (Pronounced as hayagrIva). Hayagriva is the incarnation of ViShNu who assumed the form of a horse to kill a demon by the same name. Agastya was a sage of great renown, who is immortalized as a star in the celestial heavens (one of the seven Rishi-s, saptarShi or Ursa Major). He is the patron saint of Tamilnadu being a founder of a system of medicine called Siddha, and also having drunk the whole ocean in his kamaNDalum. According to yaska's

Nirukta, Agastya is the half-brother of the great sage,
Vasishtha.

The story of the meeting of Agastya and Hayagriva is given in the lalitopAkhyAna and is quite interesting. Agastya was visiting several places of pilgrimage and was sad to see many people steeped in ignorance and involved in only sensual pleasures. He came to kA~nchi and worshipped kAmAkShI and sought a solution for the masses. Pleased with the devotion and his caring for the society, Lord ViShNu appeared before Agastya and provided the sage Agastya with the solution of 'curing' the worldly folk from ignorance. He explained that He is the primordial principle, and the source and the end of everything. Though He is above forms and guNAs, He involves himself in them. He goes on to explain that a person should recognize that He is the pradhAna (primordial) transformed into the universe, and that He is also the puruSha (conscious spirit) who is transcendental and beyond all qualities(guNa-s) and forms. However to recognize this, one has to perform severe penance, self-discipline etc. If (since) this is difficult, Lord ViShNu advises that the worship of the goddess will achieve the purpose of life, given as liberation from bondage, very easily. He points out that even other Gods like Shiva and Brahma have worshiped the goddess TripurA. ViShNu concludes his discourse saying that this was revealed to Agastya so that he (Agastya) can spread the message to god, sages, and humans. ViShNu requests Agastya to approach his incarnation, Hayagriva and disappears from Agastya's sight.

Agastya approaches Hayagriva with devotion and reverence. Hayagriva reveals to Agastya that the great Goddess, lalitA, is without beginning or end and is the foundation of the entire universe. The great goddess abides in everyone and can be realized only in meditation. The worship of goddess is done with the lalitA sahasranamA (1000 names) or with trishati (300 names) or with aShTottaranAma (108 names) or with Shri Chakra (diagrammatical form for meditation).

In tantra shAstra, each devi/deva is worshipped as a mantra, and yantra. Shri Chakra is used to represent the divine mother diagrammatically. It denotes how the power of a small point in the centre of the Shri Chakra transforms itself into a series of triangles, circles, and lines. One can meditate on the Shri Chakra itself knowing the significance of the triangles and circles. These forms represent the various transformations of the Reality. One can realize that the universe has evolved through the undifferentiated consciousness and has eventually become the universe as we know it. The recitation of sahasranAma and trishati are used in the worship of Shri Chakra. The correspondence between Shri Chakra as a yantra and the fifteen letter mantra of the goddess (pa~nchadashIvidyA, pronounced panchadashIvidyA)

is achieved by carefully studying the Shri Chakra which is constructed using the symbolism of the three kUTa-s and the significance of the fifteen letters of the shrIvidyA. It is said that if meditation on Shri Chakra is not possible, recitation of the sahasrAma with utmost devotion would confer the same benefits, perhaps in longer time-frame.

The sahasrAma also mentions how to meditate on the various centres of consciousness (chakras) in one's body. Kundalini, meaning coiled up, ordinarily resides in the muladhAra chakra, at the base of spine, and when it rises to the sahasrAra chakra at the top of the head, one becomes aware of the ultimate reality.

Before reciting the sahasrAma, it is advised that the divine mother be meditated upon according to the dhyAna shloka-s, given in the beginning of the text.

May the Divine Mother guide us in our every action and thought, and may She confer upon us the greatest gift of all, mokSha, the liberation.

OM tat sat.

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