

## LALITĀ-SAHASRA-NĀMA

We all know the legend of Kāma, the God of Love. Lord Shiva is deeply engaged in his *tapas*. Kama, the intrepid God of Love aims an arrow at him in order to disturb and draw him out of his trance. Shiva opens his third Eye and out issues a shaft of fire which reduces Kama to ashes. Chitrakarma, an attendant of Shiva, is moved by pity. He collects the ashes of Kama and makes a human figure out of it. Shiva glances at the strange figure before him; instantly the form leaps into life, beautiful and luminous. Chitrakarma advises the person so created to pray to Shiva and repeat the Shata Rudriya Mantra. He does likewise and Lord Shiva, pleased with the austerities, blesses him with the overlordship of the world for an unconscienable length of time. On hearing this, Brahma exclaims in

distress, 'Bhand, Bhand'. And that is how the new person comes to be known, Bhandāsura. The Gods are oppressed, and led by Indra, their king, they seek the help of the supreme Puissance, the Pāra Shakti. They perform a sacrifice and out of that sacred Fire there emerges the beautiful figure of the Goddess. She promises to put down the Titan. The Gods are relieved. But Brahma raises an objection that a single person could not assume sovereignty. She is entreated to choose a mate. The Devi agrees and throws up a garland which neatly falls on the neck of Lord Shiva who then takes the bewitching form of Kāmeshwara. The wedding duly takes place and the beautiful Goddess, Lalitā, becomes Kāmeshwarī. She proceeds to fulfil her mission and Bhandā is no more. The Deities of Speech laud the Queen Empress with her thou-

sand Names and we have this splendid litany of *Lalitā-sahasra-nāma*.

Indeed, Sri Lalita is not just a mythological figure. As the celebrated commentator, Bhaskara Raya Makhi, points out, the Fire, Agni is the flame of consciousness within which burns incessantly, without fuel, *antar-nirantara-nirindhana-medhamāne mohāndhakāra paripanthini samvid agnau*; this fire burns away all delusion and darkness. Lalita is the Power of this Consciousness. Bhandā, the Asura, who is killed signifies the loud and blatant Ego who meets his end at the hands of this divine apocalypse.

This Hymn of a thousand Names is not a mere devotional outpouring. It is an inspired homage which is at once poetry, philosophy, yoga, theology, occult knowledge. Each Name is the total of the particular, desig-

nated, Power embodied in this Divinity. To repeat a Name is to invoke that Power in oneself and in the atmosphere around. We have known how these various powers scintillate when the string of Names is recited with devotion and attention.

She is the Divine Mother of All. But she is not confined to this All. Her very name, Lalita, signifies she who sports in her transcendence, *lokān atītya lalate*. She extends herself as this wide universe, she takes on innumerable forms. But at the same time she is free from all form. The one central note that runs through all this multifaceted Poem is that she is boundless, infinite. All that is finite, formed, is her self-figuration. She is the queenly Swan that floats on the waters of the tranquil minds of the sages. She is the thunderbolt that rends the mountains of earthly ills. She loves flowers, she herself is a

Flower. She is the hurricane that sweeps away all misfortunes. There is a deliberate play of paradoxes in this hymn of adoration, as if to emphasise that the reconciliation of all contraries in our life is to be found in this great Harmoniser, *sāmarasya parāyanā*.

She is again the Kundalini who rises from her nether station of transcended sleep, strikes open the several closed lotuses studded along the spinal column, releasing their respective powers into action, and meets her Lord overhead bathing the fortunate worshipper in endless bliss. She lends herself to be realised in both ways, the Way of Knowledge as well as the Way of Joy.

Each of the thousand Names that constitute this profound Litany is an electric switch that lights up a distinct facet of the manifestation of the

Divine Mother. It is not enough to repeat them. One has to dwell upon each Name with love and tender feeling. Each is a body of the One whom, we adore. Respect it as such, utter each syllable with full awareness. You do not need to complete the whole list of thousand names in one stretch for your prayer. The ritual of *nāmāvali*, string of names, is not obligatory on all, at all times. As an outpouring of devotion, appeal of love, the heart's adoration, *stotra*, you do as much as you are moved to and can do with gathered consciousness.

And here we begin with the *dhyāna shloka*, a visualised meditation, on the Sovereign of our hearts and our worlds;