

Shri Vidhya – A Novel Perspective

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Abstract:

An exploration into the concept and philosophy of Shri Vidhya from a new perspective is presented. Three concepts are seen to firmly draw the foundation of the Shri Vidhya philosophy. First, The world we live in is beautiful and perfect. Second, By properly coordinating and managing our resources, we can enjoy Bhukthi in this world (Ka). Third, By continually focusing our thoughts on the Mother, we can cross the Ocean of Samsara and attain Mukthi (Hreem).

Introduction:

The first few Naamas of the ancient text of Lalitha Sahasranama are presented as a narration of how the Divine Mother Lalitha slays the evil Bhandasura, who is a metaphor for ignorance. It is seen that the only way out of ignorance is willingness to know; in other words, the awareness and consciousness required to know. This fundamental consciousness is seen as the Divine Mother Lalitha. Thus Bhandasura represents the empty void of the universe, in complete darkness and inconceivable inertia. The Divine Mother is the pure consciousness, the powerful information that quells the darkness of ignorance. It is this information that makes up the universe. The first few Namas denote the Five great actions performed by the Mother, simultaneously alluding to key paradigms in science and management.

With the newly rediscovered connection between science and spirituality through the Lalitha Sahasranamam, an exploration into the concept and philosophy of Shri Vidhya is now presented.

Shri Vidhya – A new perspective

We start with the following thought experiment:

Suppose you are a doll-maker. You have been given 51 necessary ingredients to make the doll. The 51 ingredients are thread, buttons, cotton, needle, cloth etc. You make a set of 32 dolls. Each of them unique, and using a unique combination of the ingredients. As a very passionate creator, you have made one of the dolls to look like yourself, and have similar properties. A customer arrives and looks at your artwork. He is extremely pleased with your perfection and has become an admirer of you. He wants to purchase a doll with which he can get the most intense feeling of closeness with you. Which doll will he choose? The last one, which you made in your own likeness, isn't it?

As humans we are gifted with a wonderful treasure – our own self, in body, mind and soul. We also understand that our body works in different layers – the skin, outer organs, inner organs etc. Also we ourselves have different layers – physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. Each layer connects to the others through certain organs which act as the gateways. For example, the cerebral cortex of the brain is the gateway between the physical and intellectual layers.

Similarly, our body has gateways which take us to higher levels, spiritually. Specifically there are seven such gateways starting from the bottom of our spine to the crown of our head. These are called Chakras, and the energy that flows through them is the Kundalini. The spiritual progress is achieved when one is able to arouse the Kundalini and makes it flow through the seven gateways and reach the ultimate destination – self-realisation. The ascent through each of the gateways brings about enormous changes in our constitution, personality,

perception, mindset, way of thought and so on. By climbing through the gateways, we get the required knowledge to reach the Absolute, step by step. We get certain perceptions of ourselves, the world around us, nature and the supernatural.

This is a typical example of the case where the journey is just as important as the destination itself. So, to achieve spiritual progress, we need to cross the seven gateways along with having the right coherent perception between each phase.

How do we achieve the right perception to reach self-realisation? We go back to the doll maker experiment. Here the doll maker represents the Absolute - The Primordial One. The 51 ingredients are the 51 concepts with which the universe is created. In their physical form, the 51 concepts are accessible to us as the 51 letters of the Sanskrit Alphabet. The 32 dolls represent the 32 fundamental forces of nature, which we understand better as the 32 most powerful Gods and Goddesses of Hindu Mythology. Again, these 32 Deities are accessible using the 32 lettered Gayathri Mantra, the most powerful Mantra. Of special mention among the 32 Deities is the 32nd, the Goddess MahaShodashi Shri Lalitha Maha Tripura Sundari. She is Shri Matha, the Divine Mother. Hence as the divine Mother, She is the closest representation of the Absolute, since by creating these 32 forces, the Absolute also becomes a Mother. This Deity, this force of nature, representing the Divine Mother is the central theme of Shri Vidhya. At all levels starting from the most gross – The form of the Devi Herself, to a more subtle form – The Shri Chakra, to the most subtle form – The Panchadashi and Shodashi Mantras, She is worshipped, adored and “lived” in the Shri Vidhya tradition.

The specialty of Shri Vidhya comes from the fact that, by worshipping the Mother directly, She elevates us to Her own position .

“bhavani tvam dase mayi virara drstim sakarunam iti stotum vancham kathayati bhavani tvam iti yah” -“no sooner one begins saying: "O Goddess, you..", You grant him that state of identity with you” - Saundaryalahari 22 by Adi Shankara.

Thus Shri Vidhya is the quickest way to reach our spiritual goals, and is often described as the most perfect for its efficacy and efficiency.

Shri Vidhya is one of the rare spiritual traditions that promises to yield both Bhukti and Mukti, i.e. enjoyment in this world and in the next. As such, Shri Vidhya assumes that the place we live is Heaven. It is perfect in its own right, and is blissful and beautiful. In fact beauty is the very name of the Goddess (‘Sundari’). The practitioner soon gets the perspective that everything around him from stone to gold is perfect, and is nothing but his own Mother in one of Her many manifestations. Thus by staying close to his Mother at all times, he feels blessed and enjoys the Bhukthi of this word. At the same time, he does not get attached to any of the things around him, with all his intent continually focused on the Mother. He attains one pointed spiritual growth, elevates the Kundalini to all levels and finally to the Destination, which is when he attains self realization, or Mukthi.

Thus the core philosophy of Shri Vidhya is “Poornam Idam” – “Heaven is right here”. It is through this philosophy that Shri Vidhya achieves Advaita or non-distinction between the Worshipper, Worship and the Worshipped.

The greatness of our Divine Mother is far too much to describe in words. A glimpse of Her Greatness can be obtained by visualizing Her gross Sthula Sharira.

In this form she is shown seated in the middle of the Gold and gem-studded palace, Chintamani (itself a metaphor for a wish-fulfilling place). Among the three Goddesses, She manifests Herself as the Sattva Guna Goddess Parameshwari. To Her right and Left, we see Goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswathi serving Her. She sits on a throne, whose seat is none other than the God Sadashiva. The four legs of the throne are the Gods Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Ishwara. The Five Gods of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Ishvara and Sadashiva are known as the “Pancha Brahma”, and represent the actions of creation, preservation, destruction, hiding and Grace respectively, and the Mother above them signifies She is above these cycles. That is, She is beyond space, time and concept. Also, in Saundarya Lahari, verse 4:

“Other arms than Yours can confer protection or boon; You alone do not act overtly, by gesture, the promises of refuge or boon. What is more, Your feet, O sole refuge of the world of beings, Are alone expert indeed in yielding boons more than asked for. This describes the "prime potent power"”

The Panchadashi Mantra is the most subtle representation of the Divine Mother. The doll maker used 15 ingredients to make the last doll in his own likeness. These 15 ingredients are the 15 letters of the Panchadashi Mantra, using which we can invoke the Divine Mother.

Most of the deities in the collection of 32, can be invoked with a single Akshara. This gives rise to the term BijaAkshara or Bija Mantra – the seed mantra. For example, Lord Ganapathy, the First in the 32 Forces can be invoked with the letter “Gam” – Om Gam Ganapathaye Namah.

Then, why is it that for the Divine Mother we use not one or two, but 15 letters, the longest for any deity in that set of 32? It is so because, we want to invoke the Divine Mother, the closest to the Divine Absolute. Thus, we want to invoke qualities such as Motherly love, Beauty, Perfection, Efficiency, Success and of course Eternity.

Our Mother is called “Tripura Sundari”, and there are infinite reasons for that – to represent the three Gunas, to represent the three states of wakefulness, to represent the three states of heaven, earth and hell, and so on. But one important reason for calling Her the “Beauty of Three”, is because we view our Mother as three Goddesses.

1. Lalitha Maha Tripura Sundari - The playful and loving Mother Herself, who is the Supreme Queen of the Universe.
2. Raja Matangi - The dark complexioned counselor to our Mother, Her sole Minister directing devotees to our Mother’s court.
3. Varahi Dandini – The boar-faced law enforcer, maintaining law and justice in the Mother’s Court.

These three Goddesses represent the three Motherly qualities of love, success and perfection.

Accordingly, the Panchadashi, the 15 lettered mantra of our Mother is also split into 3 sections, each honoring one of the three forms. Analysing this mantra, letter by letter, may help to clarify things.

Vaakbhava Koota –

1. Ka – signifies coordination and management.
2. E – signifies solitude and solidarity of the Mother, highlighting Her infinite love for us.
3. I – signifies Perfection and balance.
4. La – Signifies beauty and playfulness.
5. Hreem – Signifies the completion and balance achieved through the eternal cycle of creation and destruction.

Thus this set of five letters invokes Lalitha Maha Tripura Sundari – our beautiful, playful, caring Mother who achieves the perfect balance in Her court – the universe.

Kaamaraaja Koota –

6. Ha – Eternity.
7. Sa – Success.
8. Ka – Coordination.
9. Ha – Eternity

10. La – Beauty.

11. Hreem - Signifies the completion and balance achieved through the eternal cycle of creation and destruction.

This set of 6 letters signifies the Rajamatangi Devi, the Counsellor in our Mother's court. She displays qualities of eternal success and guidance to the follower.

Shakthi Koota -

12. Sa – Success.

13. Ka – Coordination.

14. La – Beauty

15. Hreem - Signifies the completion and balance achieved through the eternal cycle of creation and destruction.

The last set of four letters invokes Dandini Matha, the Law Enforcer, with innate qualities of management, coordination and success.

Sometimes, a sixteenth letter such as “Shreem”, “Hreem” or “Aim” is added to make the Panchadashi mantra, a “Shodashi” Mantra. This extra letter is a token. That is, what the letter is doesn't matter. The 16th letter is only used to show that excluding the 15, any letter can be used to access the Divine Mother in its own right.

But what is more important is the fact that three of the letters are used in all the three Kootas. They are the beauty letter “La”, the coordination letter “Ka”, and the eternal mantra “Hreem”.

Conclusion

These three concepts firmly draw the foundation of the Shri Vidhya philosophy:

1. The world we live in is beautiful and perfect (La).
2. By properly coordinating and managing our resources, we can enjoy Bhukthi in this world (Ka).
3. By continually focusing our thoughts on the Mother, we can cross the Ocean of Samsara and attain Mukthi (Hreem).