

LAKSHMI TANTRA: Lakshmi does not enjoy a solid place in Tantra as opposed to the Mahavidya Goddesses. Lakshmi is often approached as a form of Kamala, one of the Dasa Mahavidyas and the most important Goddess Forms in Shakta Tantrism. By Shakta Tantrism, we mean the veneration of the ten great Devathas and practicing the rituals associated with them.

KAMALA: As with all of the Mahavidyas, Kamala is an independent form of the Goddess: It is She, and not Her consort, who merits attention and worship, Vishnu is barely ever mentioned in relation to Kamala. She is the youngest of the Mahavidyas, but hang on a minute....by youngest, one means the first formed of the primal Mahavidya.

Kamala shares Lakshmi's attributes. She is the most beautiful Mahavidya. She has a beautiful golden complexion. She is being bathed by four large elephants who pour jars of nectar over her. In her four hands she holds two lotuses and makes the signs of granting boons and giving assurance. She wears a resplendent crown and a silken dress. I pay obeisance to Her who is seated on a lotus in a lotus posture."

Her beej mantra is sometimes called the Yoni beej. Yoni is in the form of a female's sex organ and is in form of a lotus. It is the most basic female principle. Kamala as lotus goddess also represents development of the person by maintaining the dharma of keeping the seven chakras open. She upholds sadhana. Lotus represents chakra. So, Lotus Goddess is advancement Goddess. This is why she, as Shree or Lakshmi, is called Shakti of Shiva.

PANCHARATRA: In the Trinity pantheon, the consorts play a lesser role to the spiritually oriented male-husbands. They shine with the coming of Shaktam of Mother Goddess worship. Shaivism swiftly adopted Shaktam principles and recognized Feminine energy to be a partner to that of the male. Purusha and Prakriti found its absolute place in Shaivism with or without the Ardhanari concept. Indeed Shaivism thrived and shined with the cliché, 'without Shakti, Shiva is Shava' and did not just pay lip service. The southern Shaiva Siddhantis and Siddhar perumans had the Shiva-Shakti as essence of Shaivite principles. Shakti found her way into the 36 Shiva Tattvas as opposed to Vaishnavite feminine principles.

In Vaishnavism, it is the Pancharatra school that highlights Lakshmi as supreme and independent deity. This is a kind of Tantric sub-sect of Vaishnavism which does not enjoy much recognition among the various Vaishnavite fields of thought. Notwithstanding, Pancharatra did muscle strength to propound a decidedly Shakta approach to Lakshmi. It elevates Lakshmi to the status of Supreme Divinity.

In Pancharatra, Mahavishnu remains almost entirely inactive, relegating the creative process to Lakshmi. She alone acts, and the impression throughout the cosmogony is that She acts independently of Vishnu. This is a clear adoption of the Shaivite Purusha-Prakriti principles. Practically, here, Lakshmi dominates the entire Pancharatra to achieve the position of the Supreme Divine Principle. She is deemed to be the underlying reality upon which all rests, that which pervades all creation with vitality, will and consciousness.

LAKSHMI TANTRA: Among numerous Pancarata Agamas, Lakshmi Tantra is wholly dedicated to Lakshmi. It is the exclusive treatment of the Shakti of Vishnu as the Vaishnavite Mother Goddess. It contains rules for Lakshmi tantric sadhana and in particular the left-handed Tantras that requires a female partner. Highlighting the role of Lakshmi as the Mother Goddess, the text notes that Lakshmi both created and embodies the entire Universe (seen and unseen) out of a mere one-billionth fraction of Herself: 143.

So, Lakshmi seems to perform what Parvati performs in Shaivism. She performs all of the acts that traditional Hinduism attributes to the great male gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. In Tantra 50.65.67, She herself powerfully proclaims "Inherent in the Principle of Existence, whether manifested or unmanifested, I am at all times the inciter, the potential in all things. I manifest Myself as the Creation, I occupy myself with activity when Creation begins functioning, and I ultimately dissolve Myself at the time of destruction. I alone send the Creation forth and again destroy it. I absolve the sins of the good. As Mother Earth to all beings, I pardon them all their sins. I am the Giver of Everything. I am the thinking process itself and I am contained in Everything."

By such claims in the Lakshmi Tantra, Mahavishnu is pushed second place. He is not even an equal partner as opposed to the Ardhanariswa catch 22 lock in Shaivism. Here it is Lakshmi, and not Vishnu, who is Creator, Preserver and

Destroyer. Lakshmi Tantra 50.131.132: She is the sole object of devotion and meditation; She is the dispenser of grace; She is the bestower of liberation.

LAJJA GAURI: Lakshmi, traditionally is the Provider Goddess, with or without her tantric claims and basis. So, in needing a tantric parallel, Lakshmi seems to retain Her fundamental association with fertility, abundance and well-being, not in Her own rights but in the likes of Lajja Gauri, the 'sap of life' that vitalizes all Creation, the consciousness that underlies the entire manifest world. Here again Tantric Lakshmi is dependent externally on the other Maha Vidya Mothers or others and does not claim the 'sap of consciousness' as hers. (Lajja Gauri was posted earlier)

Supreme Mother Goddess Devi in Her various Aditi manifestations is also known as Maha Shakti, Para Shakti, Adya Shakti, Lajja Gauri, Matangi, Renuka, so on so forth. She depicts feminine energy in the most complex way in the Hindu pantheon. Those given to Shaktam, accommodate the principles in harmony without recourse to comparative analysis.

The preserving role of Lakshmi is played by Lajja Gauri. She is the mysterious, lotus-headed Goddess, who is always portrayed with legs opened to expose her vulva. Her legs are raised in a manner suggesting either birthing posture or sexual receptivity. For all the crying out loud, for her claims to be the Creator Goddess, Lakshmi seems to be relying on Lajja Gauri vulva symbolism, more than the Yoni beej of Kamala.

The prevalence of left hand practices within Lakshmi Tantra is only proof of left hand practices in Shaktam. There is no clear proof that, other than standard Shakta agama, Vaishnavism came up with their own Tantric left. Commentators of Shaktam such as Bhaskararaya, the commentator of Lalithahasranamam, Nagesa Bhatta, commentator of Durgasaptasati and Appaya Diksita, commentator of Candrakalastuti mention Shakta agama being incorporated in Lakshmi Tantra.

But the Trinity supremacy competition crosses over to the consorts. Vaishnavite Pancaratra and Lakshmi Tantra would claim that Shaivite Shakti and Her assertions, Durga, Bhadrakali and Yogamaya are merely names for Mahalakshmi, who is Vishnu's dynamic power. It does not stop there; for it is from Mahalakshmi that Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva apparently emanate. These claims are left for individual consumption and judgment.

There is very little mention of rituals in the Lakshmi Tantra except for iconography in the form of dhyana for Vyuhas, Lakshmi's retinue. The later commentators would have it that Lakshmi Tantra concerns itself with the individual adept, who desires to be released from the miseries of worldly existence. This is achieved by practicing yogic sadhana, worship of God and meditation visualizing Him as the personification of a mantra accompanied by the repetition of that mantra which enables divine grace.

Lakshmi Tantra adopts the usual four divisions of Jnana, Kriya, Yoga and Carya. The Kriya section is said to be omitted altogether. Kriya here mentions the rites for installing private image and worship. Carya has been reduced to a minimum and the Jnana preoccupies almost the entire treatise. Yoga pada gives a brief description of aradhana, the ritual worship of God.

In all, Lakshmi Tantra sets out to establish the supremacy of Lakshmi and her ranking. It does not follow any particular philosophical system and gives an impression of a combination of borrowed ideas, mainly Shaktam, in a hurry. It borrows substantially from the Bhagavad Gita, even direct quotes and from the Devi Mahatmya of the Markandeya Purana. In trying this marriage of ideas, Lakshmi Tantra reveals traits of Tantric Tara and Mahayana Buddhism only to prove that it is parasitic on various external sources rather than being a Vaishnavite Tantra recipe for practitioners.

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(draft Goddess Lakshmi)



