

Tripurasundari Ashtakam

Tripurasundari Ashtakam Octad to Goddess Tripurasundarii by Shankaraachaarya Translated by Siddharth. Introduction and commentary by Giri and Swami Vishvarupananda.

Before we begin, let us offer ourselves at the feet of the Divine Mother, Mahaatripurasundarii, who as Ishvara rules the world but is none other than the indwelling spirit (Atman) within us and which pervades us all that exists.

This introduction deals with the background on the name of Tripurasundarii. It is one of the best epithets to describe the Devi meaning that she is the belle of all the three worlds. The word tripura can be interpreted variously. The Kaalika Purana says that by the will of pradhana, the body of Lord Shiva became triple : the upper part became Brahma, the middle part became Vishnu and the lower part became Rudra. As these three pura-s (bodies) are in Lord Shiva, he is called Tripura (three bodied) and his wife is known as Tripuraa. In the Kaamakalaa Vilaasa (13,14), the honored sage, Abhiyukta, mentions that Devi created all the three forms and she is before all (purobhava), because she is in the form of all the three (trayimayi) and exists even after the dissolution of the three worlds and recreates them again. In the Brahmanda-Purana, it is mentioned that the Goddess Tripurasundarii rules over the entire universe and She is the supreme empress, and Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are mere functionaries in Her empire.

The Lalitaa Sahasranaama portrays Her as being attended by Lakshmi and Saraswati on either side. Shankaracharya, in his Saundaryalahiri, mentions that Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva started their cosmic processes when the Supreme Shakti knitted Her brow for a split second. The Devi mantra consists of three syllables, and her fifteen lettered mantra panchadashaakshari is composed of three kuuta-s (peaks). She resides in three naadi-s (nerve channels), namely sushumna, pingalaa, and idaa. She is the ruler of the three Shaktis - ichchaa (will), jnana (knowledge) and kriyaa (action). She pervades all the three worlds - heaven, earth and the nether world. She is the controller of all the three bodies - sthula (gross), suukshma (subtle), and kaarana (causal). She is the self which is present through the three states of existence - jaagrat (waking), svapna (dream), and sushupti (deep sleep). Though she is above all guna-s, She pervades the three modes of energy- sattva (purity), rajas (mobility) and tamas (inertia). Love and joy are the inherent qualities of beauty. Sundarii means belle and beauty. Shankaracharya, while explaining Chandogya Upanishad 7, 31:1, mentions that all longing and desire is a source of pain, and in what is finite there is no bliss. He mentions that the Infinite alone can produce bliss. When bliss takes on a form, it is sundarii: sarva.nga sundarii (lalitaa trishati, verse 130) and Shankara comments on this name of the Devi as the one who possesses all the marks of beauty and has all the qualities of perfection and is thus the source of Bliss. May the Divine Mother guide us in our every action and thought, and may She confer upon us the greatest gift of all, moksha (liberation) by removing the veil of maya which She weaves. At Her feet, I offer this flowery poem Shloka 1 kadambavanachaariNiiM munikadambakaadaminiM nitambajita bhudharaaM suranitambiniisevitaam.h . navaamburuhalochanaamabhinavaambudashyaamalaaM trilochanakuTumbiniM tripurasundariimaashraye ..

1.. "I take shelter in Tripurasundari, the wife of the three eyed one (Shiva), wandering in the forest of kadamba trees, refreshing like a multitude of clouds to the hosts of sages, whose hips excel the mountains, who is served by the celestial damsels, who has eyes like a newly bloomed lotus and who is dark in colour like a newly formed cloud." I take shelter in Tripurasundari: Where else can one take refuge ? One should always take refuge at the Lotus feet of Ishvara. Instead of looking for favors by entertaining mortals, we should sing the glories of God, and reside at Her feet. The rest will take care of itself. The wife of the three eyed one: Though in reality, there is no difference between Shiva and Shakti, Shakti is the phenomenon of the noumenon called Shiva. Wandering in the forest of kadamba trees: Kadamba also means multitude, so it represents universe. The allegory of Kadamba trees is used frequently by Shankara. Ravi informs me in thiruvilaiyaadaL puraNam, there is a nice reference to kadamba vanam. It details how Indra got rid of his brahmahatti dhoshham praying to the svayambu lingam of shrii sudareshhwarar, in another liila a businessman witnessing the puuja offered to Lord there and then he informing the paaNDya king, then Lord instructing the king build the Madurai city in that spot. Thus, kadamba vanam refers to Madurai with Minakshi. Refreshing like a multitude of clouds to the hosts of sages: Clouds form rain, which quenches the thirst. Thus, it is grace which is showered to quench the spiritual thirst. Whose hips excel the mountains: Technically, that word should be buttocks, but is euphemistically said 'hips.' Besides the figurative narration, it means She is more firm than the mountains but it excels the mountains since it is also supple. Despite being firm, She is easily moved by Love. Who is dark in colour like a newly formed cloud: This could also be translated as nimbus cloud. It is a cloud from which rain is following. This is a frequently used reference referring to the shower of grace. But nimbus clouds also have uniform grayness and extend over the entire range like the ever-present grace all over the universe. Further, nimbus also sometimes is used in the same sense as a halo.

Shloka 2 kadambavanavaasiniiM kanakavallakiidhaariNiiM mahaaha.rmaNihaariNIM mukhasamullasadvaaruNIm.h . dayaavibhavakaariNIM vishadalochanIM chaariNIM trilochanakuTumbiniIM tripurasundariimaashraye ..

2.. "I take shelter in Tripurasundari, the wife of the three eyed one (Shankara), who lives in the forest of kadamba trees, holding a golden vina, adorned with a necklace of precious gems, whose face is full of delight due to nectar, who bestows mercy and glory, the Devi with radiant eyes." Who lives in the forest of kadamba trees: Normally, it is assumed God is transcendental to the universe. But, God is also immanent in it. But for Her, there is nothing. So, Shankaracharya, in a veiled way (he is so good at pretending/concealing), is saying She is everywhere and lives in the world also. Holding a golden vina: Vina's inner meaning is the spine. It is a common analogy to meru danda. The base of the vina is thus the muladhara and the strings are nadis. Another common usage of vina is to say that the stem is shiva, strings are uma, shoulder is vishnu etc. Thus She is playing with all of them through Her Shakti. Further, vina is compared to the universe which the Devi plays for music. If you are enchanted by the music, and not by the performer, you will be lost. That's her lila. Large number of objects, varied in name and forms, appear before us. Not confused by it, we should look at the underlying unity of consciousness beneath that. Adorned with a necklace of precious gems: This is a direct reference to the Lalita-Trishati Bhashya. Shankara beautifully explains there that the ornaments are nothing but our Self. Whatever is adorned is only the Self. She is the Self in every deity and us. Whose face is full of delight due to nectar: This is because She is in mystic union with Shiva at the sahasrara. The blood-shot eyes and the red cheeks are due to the intoxication produced by samadhi. VaaruNii is usually translated by date-palm spirit, because date is the favorite fruit of Lord Varuna. The inner meaning of vaaruNi is different. When the nectar was churned, the liquor which flowed out is also called varuni. Who bestows mercy, wealth and glory: Wealth is a common usage. Shankara frequently says that Devi provides with wealth, both physical and spiritual. Shankara says of Tripurasundarii, Bhukti-mukti-pradaayinii. She will give Her devotees both bhukti and mukti. Not too much bhukti, but enough so that the person will never worry about wealth, health etc. The Devi with radiant eyes: Also: 'O clear-eyed, wandering one.' That is, She is wandering while being clear eyed, just like a jivan mukta. (because She is the moving spirit in all). She is unruffled by pain or pleasure since She is the Self. This should be not confused with She being Saguna Brahman also. As Saguna Brahman, She bestows pleasure and prosperity on the devotees. That is a philosophical meaning while the apparent meaning is 'Devi with radiant eyes.'

Shloka 3 kadambavanashaalayaa kuchabharollasanmaalayaa kuchopamitashailayaa gurukR^ipaaasadvelayaa . madaaruNakapolayaa madhuragiiitavaachaalayaa kayaa.api ghananiilayaa kavachitaa vayaM liilayaa ..

3.. "She whose house is the forest of kadamba trees, whose garland is radiant on Her heavy bosom, whose breasts are high and hard (firm) like mountains, who shines in the grove by the grace of Paramaguru Lord Shankara, whose cheeks are reddened due to inebriation, who is the abode of sweet song and sweet talk, by such an intensely blue woman we are playfully protected." She whose house is the forest of kadamba trees: The universe, as explained above. Here it also refers to Her house, which is the heart/Self, of the forest of the mind and universe. Whose garland is radiant on Her heavy bosom: Garland denotes auspiciousness. Whose breasts are high and hard (firm) like mountains: I explained one of the meanings before (with respect to hip). The additional meaning here is that She gives milk and food to everyone. Her huge breasts represent Her eagerness to be the Mother of all. Thirujnanasambhandar gained jnana just by tasting milk from Her. Who shines in the grove by the grace of Paramaguru Lord Shankara: She is the world Mother who graces everyone. She is mother of all children and teaches them everything from devotion to shastras. But She knows much more. She is, after all, nijaaGYAruupanigama, as said in the Lalita Sahasranama, which means She expounded the Vedas. Shankara says that Vedas were breathed out by Brahman. Who is Brahman? Tripurasundarii. Whose cheeks are reddened due to inebriation: This was explained before too. This is the nectar flowing from union at sahasrara. Who is the abode of sweet song and sweet talk: A mother loves her children and She sings to the child and talks to him, knowing fully well the children may not be able to understand Her. But the child is pleased by seeing the mother talk, and the mother is pleased by talking and singing to the child. Even ferocious lioness help their children, while the male lion wanders away. Such is the love of an ordinary physical mother. What to say of the Mother of all, the Divine Mother? Can this child ever describe Her glory? By such an intensely blue woman: She is blue like the clouds, and the ocean. She is all pervading, everywhere. Blue also refers to the blue light which emanates in the ajna chakra during meditation, which is nothing but a manifestation of the Kundalini Shakti. we are playfully protected: This can also be translated as protected from Her lila, so as to be unaffected by Her lila. It is Her lila which makes Brahman bestowed with names and forms. Once understood, one marvels at the wondrous beauty and variations in life with an underlying unity to all.

Shloka 4 kadambavanamadhyagaaM kanakamaNDalopasthitaaM shhaDamburuhavaasiniiM satatasiddhasaudaaminiim.h . viDambitajapaaruchiM vikachachaMdrachuuDaamaNiM trilochanakuTumbinIM tripurasundariimaashraye ..

4.. "I take shelter in Tripurasundari, the wife of the three eyed one, who dwells in midst of the forest of kadamba trees, who always stays near the golden mandala, who lives in the six lotuses and is ever in readiness (for siddhas) like

a flash of lightning, who has imitated the color of the hibiscus whose crest jewel is the brilliant moon." Who always stays near the golden mandala: This indirectly refers to the sun. The most powerful of all elements. When the moon shines in the sahasrara and fire shines in the muladhara, the heart is enveloped by the sun. Who lives in the six lotuses: Shakti residing in the six chakras. and is ever in readiness (for siddhas) like a flash of lightning: She is the lightning for siddhas. The true siddha does not have want powers, he only knows the Self. What is the use of siddhis ? If we have some power, we would be proud over persons who have less and jealous with people who have more powers. Instead, the siddha (jnani) is ever-satisfied with the Self. She is the Self. The hidden meaning is that the lightning is in the ajna chakra. It is a big blast of light. Who has imitated the colour of the hibiscus: Scarlet hibiscus. Signifying the red color. It is the dynamic activity of the universe. Whose crest jewel is the brilliant moon: The inner meaning is, in the sahasrara one can see this moon. This produces soma, which enriches our body without food/water.

Shloka 5 kuchaaJNchitavipaJNchikaaM kuTilakuntalaalaMkR^itaaM kusheshayanivaasinIM
kuTilachittavidveshiNIm.h . madaaruNavilochanaaM manasijaarisaMmohinIM mataN^gamunikanyakaaM
madhurabhaashhiNImaashraye ..

5.. "Between whose two breasts there is a beautiful (or adorable) vina, who is adorned with curly hair, who resides on the lotus, who is the foe of those of cunning intellect, whose eyes are reddened by intoxication. who has enamoured even the foe of cupid, who is the daughter of sage Matanga, in this sweet talking Tripurasundari I take shelter." Between whose two breasts there is a beautiful (or adorable) vina: Vina is the spinal cord, and also the universe which is activated by Her. It also stands for pranava in the anahata, since it says between the breasts. Who is adorned with curly hair, She never gets old. She never ages and loses hair. Who resides on the lotus: Residing in the chakras. Who is the foe of those of cunning intellect: She destroys demons without hating them. The cunningness is only a reflection of the duality of the mind. When a mother beats the child because (s)he is stupid, and wants to run off, it does not mean She does not love the child. Whose eyes are reddened by intoxication: Eyes are reddened by the nectar flowing from the sahasrara. Who has enamoured even the foe of cupid: The foe of cupid is Lord Shiva. She enamoured even Him. Who is the daughter of sage Matanga: She was born to sage Matanga to fulfil his wish. That's why She is sometimes called Matangi. In this sweet talking Tripurasundari: She talks sweetly. Any yogi will talk sweet, what to say of the divine Mother. I take shelter: There are no other places available for shelter.

Shloka 6 smaraprathamapushhpiNIM rudhirabinduniilaambaraam gR^ihiitamadhupaatrikaam
madavighuNa.rnetraaJNchalaam . ghanastanabharonnataam galitachUlikAM shyaamalaam
trilochanakuTuMbiniim tripurasundariimaashraye ..

6.. "She who bears the first flower of smara, who is wearing a blue garment with blood drops, who holds a bowl of honey, whose eyes are confused and who is staggering on account of intoxication, meditate on Tripurasundari Devi. Whose heart is elevated by firm breasts, the black one with her hair disheveled, in this Tripurasundari, the wife of the three eyed one, I take shelter." She who bears the first flower of smara: The first flower of Manmatha is lotus. The lotus is the sahasrara. and other chakras. smara is an appellation of kaama, god of desire and love. It also means memory, recollection. And that is the cause of all troubles. We think an object produced pleasure, recollect that experience and try to have it again, but how can joy depend on the object ? A toy which gave us pleasure when we were a child is discarded now. Shankara gives a rather drastic example: the body of the spouse is enjoyed with desire, but the moment the life leaves that body, the same body is burned! So long as the memory recollects experiences of the senses as pleasurable, the cycle of samsara goes on. Who is wearing a blue garment with blood drops: The blue garment Devi wears signifies the all-pervasiveness while the red drops in it signify creation. Who holds a bowl of honey: The honey obviously refers the nectar which She gives Her children who ask for it. The other interpretation is madhu is liquor, which She uses to keep people in the maya. Shankara uses this word as a double meaning. It is the liquor which produces maya or the honey which relieves one from maya. Whose eyes are confused and who is staggering on account of intoxication: eyes are inebriated .. due to intoxication of the divine ecstasy. During divine ecstasy one staggers. Whose heart is elevated by firm breasts: Here, it is said Her heart supports the mountains (and world). The black one with her hair disheveled: She does not need to braid Her hair. Who is of blue colour: The blue color refers to the all-pervasiveness of the Devi.

Shloka 7 sakuN^kumavilepanaamalakachuMbikastuurikaaM samandahasitekshaNAM
sasharachaapapaashaaN^kushaam.h . asheshhajanamohinImaruNamaalya bhuushhaambaraam
japaakusumabhaasuraaM japavidhau smaraamyambikaam.h ..

7.. "She who is anointed with kumkum, whose curly hair is anointed with musk, who wears a soft smile, who holds the bow, pasha, ankusha, etc., who enamours all people, whose garment is decorated with a red flower garland, who shines with a garland of hibiscus, on this Mother I meditate at the beginning of the japa vidhi." She who is anointed with kumkum: It is red signifying creation. Whose curly hair is anointed with musk, Her curly hair reminds one of the maya weave. She is always youthful. Who wears a soft smile: She has a soft smile, signifying Her smile is not harsh but sweet. Who holds the bow, pasha, ankusha: Pasha is the noose which binds people to maya. ankusha is the goad which She uses to implore people, and remove obstacles. After shaktipat, sometimes the devotee slackens and is

enamoured by maya, instead of mata. Therefore, She uses the ankusha to push the devotee in the right direction. Who enamours all people: She enamours people by Her maya and gives liberation to those who are enamoured with Her instead of Her maya. Whose garment is decorated with a red flower garland, who shines with a garland of hibiscus: Both of these signify creation again.

Shloka 8 pura.ndarapura.ndhrikaaM chikurabandhasairaMdhrikaaM pitaamahapativrataaM paTapaTiirachachaa.r
{rataam.h . mukundaramaNImaNIlasadalaMkriyaakaariNIM bhajaami bhuvanaaMbikaaM
suravadhuuTikaacheTikaam.h ..

8.. "I worship the Mother of the entire world, who is the wife of Lord Shankara, whose hairs are done by her chamber maid, who is the pativrata wife of Shankara, who is engaged in various talks, who is adorned with jewels by Lakshmi, whose servants are the heavenly damsels." Whose hairs are done by her chamber maid: Actually her hair is done by Lakshmi and Saraswati (see LS 123). Who is the pativrata wife of Shankara: She obtained Her husband through austerities. Whose servants are the heavenly damsels: The idea in this verse is to portray the cosmic energy as formless, and as the supreme empresses while having the manifested energies as maids. However, one should be clear in understanding that the manifestations are not inferior but amount to the same shakti. .. iti shriimad.h
sha.nkaraachaaryavirachitaM tripurasundarii ashhTakaM samaaptaM .. This concludes the tripurasundarii ashtakam composed by shrii shankara.

[HOME](#)