

CHAPTER : I

INTRODUCTORY

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From the dawn of the creation human being has expressed his gratitude towards the highest being. This feeling, in the hearts of the human beings to express his sense of wonder and gratitude to the god, worked as the seed of an idea which gradually developed into the "words of praise". Thus, the stotra can be called the first outburst of the human being. Hence it can be said that the origin of the stotra is as old as the Rgveda.

The word stotra is derived from  $\sqrt{\text{stu}}^1$  (stuñ stutau) which means "to praise". The stotra is defined as "Stūyate anena iti stotram" i.e. the stotra is that by means of which the divinity is praised. It is also defined as "Guṇiniṣṭhaguṇābhidhānaṃ stotraṃ"<sup>2</sup> i.e. the statement of attributes of the god who is the receptacle of such attributes (qualities). They are called "songs of praise"<sup>3</sup> by some scholars. The name stotra itself denotes that it is the means to praise or to adore or to propitiate. Thus a short hymn, composed to praise a deity, is called stotra. They are either epithets descriptive of the power or greatness of a deity addressed or collection of names at times strung into verses.

The stotra is a variety of literature, generally included either in 'Laghukāvya' or 'Gītikāvya'<sup>4</sup> by the Indian as well as western scholars. But according to some scholars it is of a nature of religious poetry.

As far as its origin is concerned we can trace it back to the vedic time. M. Krishnamachariar is of a view that "The Religious Poetry in India is as old as Indian thought. Samhitās of the Vedas, particularly of Atharvāna contain eulogistic invocations of various deities and these eulogies abound in the literature of Upaniṣads, Epics and Purānas"<sup>5</sup>. Prof. Keith pointing out the continuous flow of the production of stotras says, "the production of hymns of praise to the gods naturally did not cease with the vedic poets, though gradual change of religion evoked an alteration the gods who received adoration"<sup>6</sup>. But S.K. De remarks that "the production of hymns in praise of deities obtained from the vedic times, but the ancients possessed the secrets of making their religion poetry and their poetry religion"<sup>7</sup>.

Thus the origin of stotras like other varieties of our literature is found in the vedic literature. In the Rgveda we find "indrasya nu vīryāni pravocaṃ yāmicakāra prathamāni vajri", "I will sing heroic deeds of Indra". Similarly we find previous form of stotras in Sūktas describing heroic deeds, valours etc. of the gods such as Varuna, Aśvinīkumars<sup>7</sup> and others<sup>8</sup>.

Another type of stotra, in which a person sings the greatness of god, is found in the 'Satarudrīya' of the Yajurveda as "namah somāya ca rudrāya ca namastāmrāya ca...." where we get 265 epithets in all, showing prowess and valour of Rudra<sup>9</sup>. This is also a peculiar variety of stotra literature. By the time, both the kinds, i.e. stotra describing qualities and deeds and possessing epithets developed into a regular literary form. Out of the second variety (i.e. Nāmāvalyātmake), the 'Aṣṭottara-satanāma' came into existence. Thus the stotras possessing

8 names or 10 names or 25 names or 100 names or 1000 names came into existence. In this way, the stotras in the form of Namavali of various deities like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Am̄bā, Gaṇeśa, Śakti etc. came into existence.

The 'Namāvali' stotras, sometimes, are found having the importance of the stotra established at the beginning by dialogue between two locutors, the middle portion containing the actual names of a deity addressed and at the end, followed by the benefits of the recitation of that stotra. Some of them are prefaced by the mention of "Viniyoga" which consists of the mention of R̄si Chandas and Devatā and its employment. Thus, the stotra containing 1000 names is called "Sahasranāma".

The epic shows the existence of such hymns (i.e. stotras), the Purānas and the Tantric afford many specimens of them. Thus the collection of a hundred or thousand names of a god or a goddess became numerous.

The development of stotras took place in three successive stages : (1) The vedic age (2) The Purānas and the Tantras and (3) The independent tradition of stotras.

It has been already discussed earlier that the origin of the concept of thousand names is found in the names of Rudras (in Y.V.) which show the powers and function of Rudra. Thereafter in the Vālmiki-Rāmāyana first of all we get the Sītā-sahasranāma in which we find thousand names describing powers of Sītā<sup>10</sup>. In Mahābhārata we find two well-known Sahasranāma stotras viz. Viṣṇu-sahasranāma<sup>11</sup> and Sītā-sahasranāma. Among which the Viṣṇu-sahasranāma is the most popular Sahasranāma. Here each name contains philosophical meaning.

Further again, in the most of <sup>the</sup> Purānas we come across many Sahasranāmas in praise of various deities. One such Purāna is the Brahmānda Purāna, where we find the present text viz. Lalitā-sahasranāma<sup>12</sup> (IS.).

From the colophon<sup>13</sup> of the IS. text we come to know that the work belongs to the Lalitopākhyāna, which is in the form of a dialogue between Śrī Hayagrīva<sup>14</sup> and the sage Agastya. And Lalitopākhyāna, as the colophon mentions<sup>15</sup>, itself is a section of the latter half of the Brahmānda Purāna. The IS. extols the greatness of the Goddess Lalitā, with a special reference to the slaying of Bhandāsura, the demon.

#### Analysis of the IS. :

Lalitā Sahasranāma", as the title clearly indicates, is a hymn wherein the thousand names of Śrī Lalitā<sup>16</sup> have been sung in a Śloka-form with a preamble in the beginning and phalāsṛuti at the end. There are 320 stanzas in all which are divided into three parts. The first part (Ch. I) containing fifty one verses, (i.e. 1 to 51 ślokas) is named as "Pūrvapīthikā" or "Pūrvabhāga". The next 182½ verses (i.e. from 52 to 233½), which actually contain the thousand names of the goddess Lalitā form the second part called 'Madhyabhāga' or 'Stotrabhāga'. The last portion containing 87½ stanzas (i.e. the stanzas onward 233½ to 320) is called "phalāsṛuti". Among these the first portion speaks of the circumstances under which this stotra was originated. The 'madhyabhāga' contains the thousand names euloging the splendour, valour, divine traits and superiority of the Goddess (Lalitā). The last division (i.e. Phalāsṛuti) narrates the benefits accruing

to the worshipper who recites the hymn (i.e. IS.). It also lays down various tantric prayogas and practical applications of the IS.

The Importance of the IS. as shown in the "Purabhāga" and "Phalasaruti".

The present work (IS.) is stated to be the thirty sixth chapter of "Lalitopākhyāna". The first part shows the greatness of Śrīlalitā's thousand names by emphasizing the divine power of the preceptor Hayagrīva and by tracing unusual competence of his disciple Agastya. Again by indicating the valour of the Goddess the importance of the IS. is shown.

In the very beginning of the work, Agastya, the sage of extra ordinary powers asks Hayagrīva that he has narrated to him the wonderful account of the manifestation and deeds of the Goddess Lalitā and how she sprang forth from the fire of consciousness. Also Her coronation celebrated by Gods and the slaying of Bhandāsura was described (1-2)<sup>17</sup>. Then Her sovereignty and the divine city called Śrīpura were described, The superiority of Her mantra (i.e. Pañcadaśakṣarī), the sixfold nyāsa (Soḍhānyāsa<sup>18</sup>) in the Nyāsakhanda are explained (3-4). In Pūjākhanda the internal external worship etc. are elaborated. While describing Purścarna the definition of Japa, the elements of Homa (sacrifice) in Homakhanda, are described in detail (5-6), While in the division devoted to secrecy, the mystic-unity<sup>19</sup> of Śrīyantra, Śrīvidyā, Śrīlalitā, the spiritual preacher (Desika) and disciple and their mutual relations are taught. In the section of stotras many euloging hymns of <sup>the</sup> goddess are presented. Also Sahasranāmas

of Goddess Mañtrinī and Dandinī are sung. But the Sahasranāmas of Lalitā are not presented. Hence sage Agastya asks Hayagrīva, the reason for not revealing the IS. to him (7-10).

Then Hayagrīva declares the reason for not divulging hymn of Lalitā to him (12). It is said that the IS. is the most secret, hence it was not declared though other things were described (11-12). Hayagrīva further says that as Agastya asked for the IS. with a great devotion, it is revealed that the IS. is not meant for public teaching. It should be taught by the preacher to a deserving and devoted disciple. While emphasizing secrecy of the IS. it is declared by Hayagrīva that the IS. should not be given to him who has no respect for teacher or who is wicked, sceptic and without devotion to the Goddess (13-15). It should be imparted to one who knows the mantra (i.e. Pañcadasī) of the Goddess and regularly worships Her (16). Again at the end of the phalaśruti, it is said that the IS. should be concealed from devotionless just as Śrīvidyā is preserved from them (315). Hayagrīva finally urges Agastya that it should be taught only to a Bhakta who has been initiated into Śrīvidyā. As this excellent hymn is not for those who are of a nature that of animals (316). This shows that the importance of the IS. also lies in its secrecy.

Establishing the importance of the IS. and declaring superiority of it over the other Sahasranāmas, it is said that there are so many stotras (i.e. Sahasranāmas) in Tantra, euloging the Goddess and are also giving immediate result. Among all these hymns IS. is the most preferable one for the devotee of the Goddess. Just as the Śrīvidyā is the best among the Vidyās and

there too the Kādividyā. Just as the Śripura is the best among the other cities. Just as the Goddess Lalitā is the best among the Goddesses. Just as the Śiva is the best among Gods, who follow the Śrīvidyā (17-18). Similarly IS. is the best among all the other Sahasranāmas, as Lalitā is pleased more by the recitation of the IS. than by reciting any other Sahasranāma. Hence one should recite the IS. down to the end of life, for the pleasure of the Goddess (19-20).

In the third part again stressing the importance of the IS., it is said that just as there is no mantra as good as Mantrarāja (i.e. Pañcadasī), just as there is no deity like Lalitā, similarly there is not a single hymn like the IS. Even those who are not regular devotees, who have not received mantra, Sahasranāma etc. from Guru, write out the IS. in a book and worship Lalitā, then the Goddess will be pleased (281-282). Further it is said that one who adores Śrīcakra, while reciting the IS. with lotus or Tulasī flowers (i.e. bunch of Tulasī) or Kalhāra or Kadambaka, Champaka, Mallikā, Karavīrakas, Utpala or Bilva leaves or with Kundakesara or pālākas and such other fragrant flowers especially like Ketakī etc., then the result of this is indescribable even by Mahesvara. The Goddess only can realise the greatness of such worship (285-287).

It is also said that all the persons of different āsramas should repeat these thousand names to rectify any kind of defect in the performance of their duty. Especially in the Kali age, which is noted for the prevalence of sin and delinquency on the part of the people to do their duty, there is no protective

except the recitation of the IS. (300-301). Again to a thousand names of Viṣṇu, a single name of Śiva is superior, that to the thousand names of Śiva single name of the Devī is preferred. There are crores of the thousand names of the Devī. Out of these ten<sup>20</sup> Sahasranāmas are on the top. Among these ten the IS. is the best one (302-304).

The circumstances under which the IS. was composed and its divine origin :

In 'Pūrvabhāga' it is urged that the IS. should be recited regularly like the 'nityakrama' (25). The worship of Śrīcakra, japa of Pañcadaśī mantra and recitation of the IS. should be strictly followed in daily worship (26). The reason, therefore, is that the Goddess is extremely pleased by its recitation. Because the IS. was composed by the Vāgdevatās (Vasīnī etc.) by the permission of <sup>the</sup> Goddess (32). It is narrated that once upon a time when the Goddess Lalitā was seated on Her throne then there was a great opportunity for all who had assembled to worship and propitiate Her. There were crores of gods with their consorts, Brahmā and Sarasvatī, Nārāyaṇa and Lakṣmī, Rudra and Gaurī, various Śaktis headed by Mantrinī and Dandinī, myriad of celestials, holysages like Viśvamītra and others, Siddhas like Nārada, Śaṅkara and others (33-37). When they took their respective seats after giving due respect to the Goddess Lalitā the Vāgdevīs Vasīnī and others started praying to Her with the IS. (38-39). The Goddess was greatly pleased with them and all the assembly members gathered together were amazed and filled with joy as it was a perfect hymn of secret literature as well as pregnant with mystic power and philosophy (40). Hence

it is called "rahasyanāma". At that time the Goddess declared that <sup>the</sup> IS. was sung by Vāgdevī at Her behest and for Her pleasure. So one should repeat the IS. to please the Goddess more and more (41-42). Even the Goddess Herself gives the promise, that "a devotee who recites these thousand names after worshipping me on the concentrated Śrīcakra' and repeating my Pañcadasī mantra, will be very dear to me and I will fulfill all his desires" Hence, it is said that one should not exclude the recitation of the IS at any time (43-45).

The detail method of worshipping the Goddess and adoring Her on the Śrīcakra :

Even the holy procedure of worshipping the Goddess is described in the IS. First of all after having regular bath one should perform the Sandhyā ceremony in the morning. Then he should enter the Pūjāgrha of the Goddess and should adore Śrīyantra, the king of cakras by offering Bilva leaves, Tulsi or lotus. Then the Goddess is to be worshipped on the Śrīyantra. Thus, after having adored 'Cakrarāja' and worshipped Śrī Devī, a devotee should utter the Vidya. (i.e. Pañcadasī mantra) either thousand times or three hundred times or atleast hundred times. Thereafter he should recite the IS. with complete faith (239-240).

Again it is said that one who is unable to adore the Śrīyantra and to repeat 'Pañcadasī', even if he may recite the IS. He would get the fruit of Japa and Pūjā by mere recitation of the IS. (23-24).

Achievement of different merits by the recitation of the IS. :

Further the IS. enumerates various merits which one gets by worshipping the Goddess or by reciting the IS. according to the above described procedure. One who recites the IS., even once in a life, he is benefited with greater merits than what one would get by taking bath in the river Ganges for crores of births, consecrating Sivaliṅga (i.e. Sivaliṅga pratisthā) in Benares, performing the Asvamedha sacrifice on the bank of the Ganges, donating to holy and erudite Brahmins a mass of gold in Kurukshetra at the time of Sun eclipse and Moon eclipse, digging uncountable wells in the dry deserts. All these being done with faith regularly for a thousand years, the reward of repeating the thousand names sup<sup>2</sup>passes thousand times the above rewards (241-245). The accumulated sins of him who repeats at least a single name of the IS. are perished. Again the sins which result from failure to do one's regular duties or from the performance of forbidden acts, all that will be wiped away by the recital of a single name of the IS. (246-248). Establishing most powerful effect of the IS., it is said that creatures living in all the fourteen worlds cannot commit that amount of sin which a single name of the Lalitā cannot remove. It is also said that one who recites the IS. daily receives all those good results he seeks from the Goddess Lalitā (249-251).

Again the Phalasaruti enumerates general advantages, and the magical effect of the IS. has power to cure all kinds of illness and to prolong the life by warding off all the types of untimely deaths (i.e. by wild beasts, due to poison, by accidents etc.) (236-237). The IS. by its power removes all the obstacles and

confers more and more prosperity over the reciter of it. Moreover the enemies of him who recites the Sahasranāmas of Lalitā with a great devotion are destroyed. All the 'abhicāra' prayogas on the devotee practised by the enemy, kill himself (enemy) being rebounded to him by the deity Pratyāngirā (268). Again one who looks at the repeater of the IS., with the malicious eye, the Mārtandabhairava (one of the gaṇas of the Goddess) makes him blind (269). The thief who steals the prosperity of the devotee, wherever he hides himself Kṣetrapāla kills him (270). The scholar who tries to overpower the repeater of the IS. in debate, Nakulesvarī at once makes him dumb (271). Even a king who becomes enimical to the devotee of Lalitā, the Dandini herself destroys his army (272). Again narrating favourable results and also the attainment of supreme power by the recitation of the IS., it is mentioned that if one recites the IS. with complete devotion continuously for six months, then Laksmī resides in his home for ever (273). The Goddess of speech (viz. Bhāratī) dwells everytime on the tip of his tongue who repeats the IS. either thrice in a day or once a day or at least once in a month (274). Even mere glance of a reciter of the IS. cleans the sins of others (270).

#### Various prayogas described in the IS.

The importance of the IS. also lies in stating different prayogas and direct application of the IS. in it. The prayogas laid down in the IS. are as follows :

(1) Āyuskaraprayoga : This prayoga is used to prolong the life. The IS. denotes that to practise this prayoga one

should meditate Lalitāmbikā in the orb of the moon on the full moon day and propitiate her with five types of offerings (i.e. Pañcōpacāra viz. Gandha, Puspa, Dhūpa, Dīpa and Naivedya) with the recitation of the thousand names of the Goddess Lalitā(255-256).

(2) Sarvajvarārtisāmana prayoga :

This is the prayoga for removing all types of fevers. In this prayoga the IS. should be recited, while putting hand on the patient (jvarārta) suffering from fever. It is stated that in the IS. that by this practice one suffering from fever and the headache caused by the fever, gets relief instantly (257).

(3) Sarvavyādhihara :

For removing all ailments one should touch the ashes while repeating the IS. and thereafter applying it to the body. Thus all the diseases disappear in a moment (258).

(4) The prayoga for removing malific effect of the stars :

In this prayoga as the IS. mentions, water in a pot should be sanctified by the repetition of the IS. and should be sprinkled over the affected person. By doing so the malific effect of the planets can be warded off. This can be named as "Grahahādhānāsanaprayoga".

The person afflicted with Pisāca or harrassed by the planets in bad houses in the horoscope also gets relief by practising above prayoga(259).

(5) The prayoga to remove the effect of poison in the body :

Here it is revealed that one affected by poison should recite the IS. meditating upon Lalitā being seated in the midst of

the ocean of nectar. By doing so he becomes free from the effect of poison (260).

(6) Putraprada prayoga :

For begetting a son or a child a barren woman is to be given butter sanctified by the recitation of the IS. Then she gets a son (261).

(7) Vanitākarsanaprayoga :

The IS. lays down that if one recites the Sahasranāmas for the whole night meditating upon the Goddess Lalitā, Visualises Lalitā binding desired woman by the noose and dragging her by the elephant-hook, then the desired woman comes to him in reality (262).

(8) Rājākarsanaprayoga :

To attract the king one desirous to captivate or win over the king should sit facing the direction in which the king resides and repeat the IS. for complete three nights concentrating on the Devī, then that king, being subjugated, comes to him, riding on a horse or an elephant and prostrates like a servant. And thus being controlled, the king offers him, his kingdom and his treasure as well (263-265).

Moreover it is said, "one who repeats the IS. daily will hypnotise all who would look at him (266)".

One of the merits of reciting the IS. is that one who recites the IS. once with a great devotion his enemies will be destroyed by Śarbheśvara (267).

Again it is declared that the repeater of the IS. need not himself have to practise Śaṭkarmas. But the ganas of the Goddess viz. Śarabhesvara, Pratyāṅgirā, Mārtandabhairava, Kṣetrapāla, Nakulesvarī, Dandini, themselves do their functions of Śaṭkarmas (268-272).

At the end particular tithis, days and muhurts are also enumerated. When the IS. is recited becomes more fruitful. IS. should be recited on the holy day like Saṁkrānti (entering of the Sun in a zodiac, on the solstic equinox) on dikṣā day and final dikṣā day and final dikṣā day, Navamī, Caturdeśī, on Friday and especially on full moon day. It is also said that one who worships the Goddess on the Śrīcakra on the Purnimā every month, identifies himself with Goddess Lalitā. Again if one worships the Goddess on the Śrīcakra on the Mahānavamī with recitation of the IS, his salvation will be at hand (289-291). Moreover, one's desires in this world are fulfilled and he enjoys prosperity with sons and grand sons. If one worships Her in Śrīcakra on Fridays, at last attains the Sāyujyamukti with Lalitādevī (292-294). One who entertains thousand Brahmins with Pāyasa, Apūpa and other sweets while repeating the IS., is showered upon by Lalitā with Sāmarājya Mukti (295). If the IS. is repeated without any desire then he gains Brahmajñāna by which he will be freed from all misery (297). It is declared in the IS. that those who are desirous of wealth, grain, fame, knowledge, too, will obtain these through the mysterious power of the IS. (297-298). It is also said that by repeating the names of other deities in crores of birth, that faith to repeat the IS. is generated, whose

birth is final, they recite the IS. because in <sup>the</sup> last birth of all, his births, person devotes himself to Śrīvidyā (307-308). Only a few persons know Śrīvidyā, Śrīcakra and repetition of the IS. and also they are not attainable by minor austerities (309-310).

Thus it is concluded that an aspirant should repeat the IS. with great devotion and should keep it the most secret (317). Then and then only the Goddess grants desired objects (319).

Above introduction shows the importance and popularity of the IS. in the circle of Śakti worshippers.

REFERENCES

1. The etymological explanation of the word stotra is given in the Śabda-kalpadruma under the word stotra.
2. Vide, 'Śrī Mātrkā Puṣpamālāstutih', 'Śaṅkarācārya, Trans. and notes by Dr.S.S.Janaki, Voice of Śaṅkara, Vol.V, No.4, Feb.1981, p.365, Stotra is also defined as :  
"Namaskārastathāśiṣca siddhāntoktiḥ parākramah /  
Vibhūtiḥ prārthanā ceti saḍvidhaṁ stotra lakṣaṇam"//
3. Winternitz, HIL, 1977., p.533.  
He translates the word stotra as 'Songs of Praise'.
4. Vachaspati, Gairola, Saṁskṛta Sāhitya kā Saṁkṣipta Itihāsa, 1978, p.611.  
He is of the opinion that stotra is the second variety of Gītikāvya.
5. M.Krishnamachariar, HCSL, III ed. p.313.
6. Keith, HSL, London, 1920, p.210.
7. S.K.De, HSL, p.166.
8. G.C.Jhala, Nirājanā, CGV, Surat, p.204.
9. Vide, Ṇajurvediṃya rudrī, Chapter V, VV. 17-46.
10. Cf. Saṁsārayoniḥ sakalā sarvasaktisamudbhava/Saṁsārasārā durvārā durnirikṣyā durāsadā//Vālmiki Rāmāyana, Sita.Sahasra-nāma, 29.

11. Vide, Mbh., Anusāsana-parva, 254.

12. One <sup>probably other than the popular one,</sup> LS is ascribed to the name of Agastya Pandit who was a poet of the court of the king Pratāparudradeva of Warangal (1294-1325 A.D.). For detail, see Krishnamachariar, HCSL, 1974, p.214.

13. Cf. The colophon.

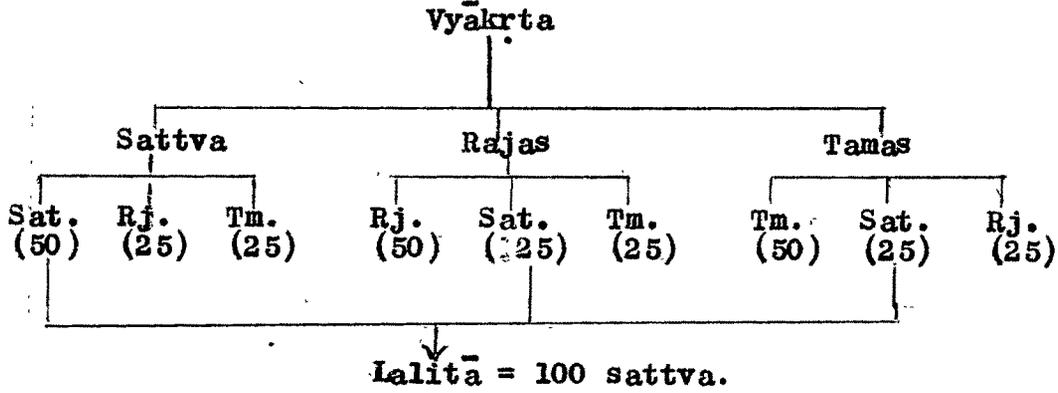
"Iti Śrībrahmāṇḍapurāṇe lalitopākhyāṇe hayagrīvāgastyaśaivāde lalitāsahasranāmastotraṁ nāma śattriṁśodhyāyaḥ".

14. Hayagrīva is one of the incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu. The story is found in the Devī-Bhāgavata (1-5). The story runs like this : Once Lord Viṣṇu, being very much tired, fell a sleep, resting his head on his bow, the gods wishing to awaken him for some reason employed the white ants to eat up the bow-string. At last, the bow being released took off the head of Viṣṇu. The Gods searched for the head but they could not get it. Finally the Goddess Tripurasundarī being pleased directed them to join the head (grīvā) of a horse (Haya or Asva). That Hayagrīva letter on slayed, the demon of that name.

15. See foot-note No.13.

16. The word Lalitā is explained by Bh. after the Padma-purāṇa In which, it is stated, "She, who having transcended the worlds, plays" of. "Lokanātīya Lalate lalitā ten cocyate".

The Lalitā-form is the pure and concentrated sattva form of the Parāśakti identical with Parabrahman.



The name Lalitā also suggests that the Goddess is fond of elegant things.

17. Figures in the bracket denote the verse number of the text given in the Appendix-I.
18. Soḍhānyāsa refers to six-fold nyāsas described in the Yoginī-hṛdaya (III.14.46). They are Gaṇeśanyāsa, Graḥanyāsa, Nakṣatran-yāsa, Yoginīnyāsa, Rāsinīyāsa and Pīthnyāsa.
19. This mystic-identity of the five, viz. Śrīyantra, Śrīvidyā, Śrīlalitā, the preacher and one's ownself is described by Bh. in the Varivasyā-rahasya, vide II.82.
20. These ten Sahasranāmas are :  
 Gaṅgā bhavānī gāyatrī kālī lakṣmī sarasvatī /  
 Rājarājesvarī bālā syāmalā lalitā daśah //