

Lalita Tripurasundari, the Red Goddess

Dear One, Tripura is the ultimate, primordial Shakti, the light of manifestation. She, the pile of letters of the alphabet, gave birth to the three worlds. At dissolution, She is the abode of all tattvas, still remaining Herself - Vamakeshvaratantra

What is Shri Vidya and what relationship does it have to the goddess Lalita and to her yantra, the Shri Yantra? Vidya means knowledge, specifically female knowledge, or the goddess, and in this context relates to her aspect called Shri, Lalita or Tripurasundari whose magical diagram is called the Shri Yantra. She is a red flower, so her diagram is a flower too.

The tantrik tradition views its symbols as having a gross aspect, a subtle aspect, and a supreme aspect. In terms of Lalita, the gross form is the image of the goddess with her four arms and so forth, the subtle form is as yantra, and the supreme form is her mantra, all three being the goddess in different aspects. Behind the sometimes colourful symbolism is deep wisdom coupled with practical methods for realising oneself.



Lalita loves puja. This term is usually translated as worship. However, this is misleading, as it introduces a duality into a process intended to bring the practitioner (sadhaka or sadhika) to a non-dual position. There can be various pujas including daily rites, those performed at the four twilights, rites done for specific objects, optional rites done on festival days, or on otherwise auspicious days such as lunar eclipses or the entrance of the sun into a sidereal constellation, rites in assemblies or groups, and rites accomplished with a partner. [Subhagodaya](#), on this site, is a translation which gives the full puja of Tripurasundari or Lalita.

Lalita means *She Who Plays*. All creation, manifestation and dissolution is considered to be a play of Devi or the goddess. Mahatripurasundari is her name as transcendent beauty of the three cities, a description of

the goddess as conqueror of the three cities of the demons, or as the triple city (Tripura), but really a metaphor for a human being.

What then is a yantra? The word is usually translated as a machine, but in the special sense of the tantrik tradition refers to the Devi in her linear or geometrical form. Yantras, by the way, are always used flat. They may be two-dimensional or three-dimensional. Every aspect of Devi has her own mantra and yantra. The yantra of Devi Lalita is Shri Yantra. The divinity of the yantra always occupies the centre or apex.

The different parts or petals and lines of the yantra are usually arranged in concentric circles (mandalas) and contain rays or sub-limbs of devi. The Shri Yantra has nine of these mandals, each filled with various aspects of the Devi. In Shri Yantra there are 111 aspects. The Shri Yantra is said to be a geometric form of the human body, which implies that goddess as Macrocosm is one with human being as Microcosm.

Formation of the Shri Yantra

The creation of the Shri Yantra is described in the *Yogini Hridaya (Heart of the Yogini Tantra)*, which still does not exist in an English translation, as far as we are aware. This is said to be the second part of the *Vamakeshvara Tantra*.

"From the fivefold Shakti comes creation and from the fourfold Fire dissolution. The sexual union of five Shaktis and four Fires causes the chakra to evolve. O Sinless One! I speak to you of the origin of the chakra.

"When she, the ultimate Shakti, of her own will (svecchaya) assumed the form of the universe, then the creation of the chakra revealed itself as a pulsating essence. From the void-like vowels with the visarga (:) emerged the bindu, quivering and fully conscious. From this pulsating stream of supreme light emanated the ocean of the cosmos, the very self of the three mothers.

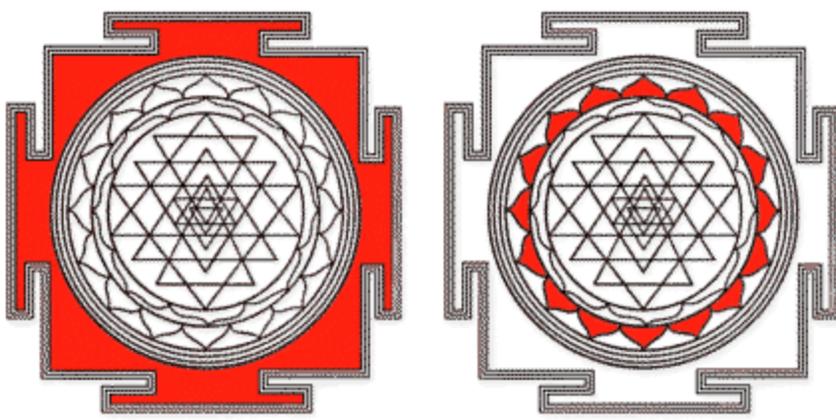
"The baidava of the chakra has a triple form, dharma, adharma and atma, and matri, meya and prama. The chakra of nine yonis is the great mass of consciousness bliss and is the ninefold chakra and the nine divisions of the mantra.

"The baidava is placed on a dense flowery mass and is the Chitkala. Similarly, the ambika form of eight lines is the circle of the vowels. The nine triangles quiver forth the effulgent form of 10 lines. The Shakti, together with her surrounding nine blossomed forth the 10 trikonas. The second quivering form of 10 lines has Krodhisha as first of the 10. These four chakras, of the nature of light, create the 14-fold form, the essence of perception." -- *Yogini Hridaya, 16-16*.

At the very heart of the bindu or centre of the Shri Yantra is that which caused it to emanate. This is Kamakala, consisting of the three bindus or potentials. One is red, one is white, and one is mixed. The red bindu is ova, the white bindu semen, and the mixed bindu the union of Shiva-Shakti, the individual as potential Shri Cakra.

Father and Mother are represented in Shri Vidya by two limbs or aspects of Lalita known as Varahi and Kurukulla. The semen of Varahi, the father-form, gives four alchemical dhatus to the child. The ova of Kurukulla, the mother-form, gives five dhatus to the child. Consciousness enters via orgasm. The three bindus, collectively known as Kamakala (digit of sexual desire), are the root potential of sun, moon and fire. It is like sun and moon coming together in an eclipse, or the seed from which the plant human being grows.

Varahi's four alchemical dhatus are known as the four fires. Kurukulla's alchemical dhatus are known as the five saktis. The combination of these five saktis (downward pointing triangles) and four fires (upward pointing triangles), forms the complex figure in the centre of Shri Cakra.



Varahi's four fires are the 12 (3 x 4) sun Kalas, 12 sidereal constellations. Kurukulla's five triangles are the 15 (5 x 3) Kalas of the moon, 15 lunar days. The complete individual grows within nine months to be born as a Shri Yantra or plant. The flowering of this plant is shown by the 24 petals of the yantra. The above all gives rise to the familiar shape of the Shri Yantra. The yantra is usually arranged in one

of two forms. In the Bhuprastara, it is two dimensional and laid flat, usually facing the east, but sometimes the north, depending on the practice. The Meruprastara has the yantra in a pyramidal form. Unless the yantra be decorated with the appropriate bija and other mantras, it is worthless. It is also dead unless it is installed with life and the individual doing the puja is initiated into one of the lines (parampara).

The Nine Mandalas of the Shri Yantra The Earth Square or Bhupura

This mandala represents the enclosing walls or fence of the zonule of a practitioner. The three lines of the bhupura of Shri Yantra each has a set of subsidiary aspects or sub-limbs of the goddess. On the **outer line** are the eight world protectors (lokapalas), the guardian spirits of the directions and intermediate directions.

On the **middle line** are eight Siddhi Saktis identified with the senses. On the **inner line** are eight Shaktis ruling Desire, Anger, Envy, Delusion, Greed, Jealousy, Virtue and Vice. They are the eight Matrikas. These saktis are collectively known as the Obvious Ones (Prakata Yoginis). A form of the triple Devi known as Tripura rules all these shaktis in this individual mandala of the yantra known as 'The Chakra Ruling the Three Worlds'. She has four arms, is the colour of crystal, is adorned with pearls and holds a book, a pot, and a beautiful lotus. her Vidya is Am Am Sauh.

Outer line: Indra (E) wears yellow, rides an elephant; Agni (SE) wears red, rides a ram; Yam (S) wears black, carries a staff; Nirriti (SW) wears dark green; Varuna (W) wears blue, and his vehicle is a makar; Vayu (NE) wears pale clothes; Soma (N) wears pure white; Ishana (NE) is a form of Mahadeva Shiva.

Middle Line: The Siddhi Shaktis are smeared with vermilion, wear red garlands, carry noose and goad, and are as bright and beautiful as red lotuses.

Inner Line: Brahmi wears yellow, has four arms, is beautiful. One hand dispels fear, one grants boons, the others hold a jewelled jar and makes the gesture of purification. Mahesvari wears white, has three eyes, holds trident, skull, axe, and vessel containing sour curds. Kaumari wears yellow, holds shakti-dart, Javelin, and makes the gestures of dispelling fear and granting boons. Varahi is dark in colour, holds conch, discus, dispels fear, grants boons. She wears many ornaments and gems. She has the head of a pig, holding plough, mace, sword and shield. Indrani is black, carrying a bright blue lotus. Camunda is black, holds trident and damaru (hourglass drum), holds axe, and milk in a bowl. Mahalaksmi wears yellow, holds serpent, shield, bell and milk in a skull shaped cup.

The nature of this outermost mandala is fire of fire. The gem is topaz. The time is 24 minutes (360 breaths). The Mudra is the All Agitating.

Sixteen Petals

The saktis in this circle are known as the Hidden Ones.

The whole mandala of 16 petals is called 'Fulfiller of Desire'. The presiding form of the Lalita is Tripureshi. Her vidya is Aim Klim Sauh. She is described as ornamented with all gems, carrying a book and a rosary. The 16 yoginis in this mandala are associated with the attainment of desires by the cultivation or strengthening of power over mind, ego, sound, touch, sight, taste, smell, intellect, steadiness, memory, name, growth, etheric body, revivification, and physical body. They are described as the Nitya Kalas. Each holds a noose, a goad, pot full of nectar, and makes the sign of giving. They are very red.



The gem of the mandala is sapphire. The dhatu

of physical alchemy is chyle, the first product of the disintegration of food by the biological fires. The time is three hours (2700 breaths). The Mudra is the Wetting Mudra. The nature of the mandala is sun of fire.

Eight Petals

The saktis in this mandala are called the Very Secret Yoginis. The whole circle of eight petals is called the 'All Exciting Cakra'. Presiding here is Tripura Sundari. Her vidya is Hrim Klim Sauh. She is described as swaying because of her love intoxicated state, with her eyes full of bliss.

She smiles with passion. She shows the mudras dispelling fears and granting boons.

The eight saktis in each of the eight petals of the mandala are described as saktis of Speech, Holding, Walking, Excreting, Pleasure, Abandoning, Concentration and Detachment. They are described as sapphire blue, holding noose, goad, dispelling fear, and holding blue lotus. Their names (Ananga Madana etc) all convey terms of loving sexuality.

The gem is cat's eye. The dhatu is Flesh. The time is day and night (21600 breaths). The mandala's nature is moon of fire.

Fourteen Triangles

This mandala is called 'The Cakra Bestowing All Good Fortune'. The Yoginis are called 'Concealed by Tradition'. The presiding form of the devi is Tripura Vasini. Her vidya is Haim Hklim Hsauh.

She is very red and very beautiful. Fourteen shaktis of the triangles are associated with the chief nadis or currents of bioenergy. They are described as being proud, wanton, young, colour of cochineal, ornamented with gems, holding noose, goad, mirror, winecup full of nectar. They are the Akarshanis or Attractors.

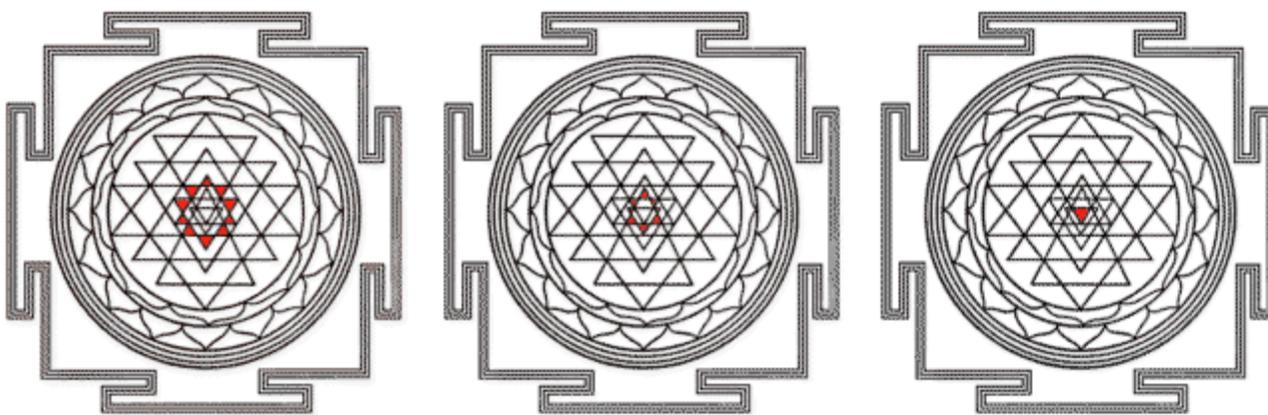
The gem is coral. The dhatu is blood. The time is weekday. The Mudra is called All Subjugating. The nature of the mandala is fire of sun.

Outer 10 Triangles

This mandala is called 'The Cakra Bestowing All Objects to the Sadhaka'. The saktis are called the Kula Kaulas. The presiding aspect of Red Devi is Tripura Shri.

Here, the goddess is as effulgent as 1000 rising Suns, adorned with celestial ornaments, with large rising breasts, holding book and rosary, dispelling fears and granting boons.

The 10 shaktis in the triangles are described as having thrilled faces, holding noose and goad and adorned with various crystal and heavenly gems.



These are the Yoginis of the 10 vital breath

hs. The gem is pearl. The dhatu is Ova/Semen. The time is Lunar Day (tithi).

The Mudra is called the All Intoxicating with Love. The nature is sun of sun.

Inner 10 Triangles

The mandala is called 'The Cakra Protecting All'. The Yoginis are called Without Origin. The presiding aspect of Lalita is Tripura Malini. Her vidya is Hrim Klim Blem.

She holds noose and goad, dispels fear, and holds a skull. She is of vermilion brightness.

Her shaktis are the colour of 1000 rising suns, adorned with pearls and gems, holding noose, chisel, and showing the gestures of knowledge, and giving boons. They are the saktis of the 10 Vital Fires. The gem is emerald. The dhatu is Marrow. The time is Lunar Fortnight. The Mudra is the Great Goad. The nature is moon of sun.

Eight Triangles

This mandala is called 'The Cakra Destroying all Disease'. The yoginis are known as the Secret or Rahasya yoginis. The presiding aspect of the Red Goddess is Tripura Siddha.

Her vidya mantra is Hrim Shrim Sauh. She is described as the Destroyer of Poison.

Her yoginis are the colour of pomegranate flowers, wearing red clothes, smeared with red scent, each carrying five arrows and a bow. These saktis are the rulers of Cold, Heat, Happiness, Sorrow, Desire, and the three gunas Sattvas, Rajas, Tamas. They are also called the eight Vasinis and rule the eight Sanskrit letter groups. The gem in this mandala is diamond (Vajra). The time is month. The Mudra is Khecari Mudra. The nature of the mandala is said to be fire of moon.

The Four Weapons

In between the mandalas of eight triangles and the central triangles are the four weapons of the Red Goddess -- flowery bow, flowery arrows, noose and goad.

Central Triangle

This mandala is called 'The Cakra Giving All Success'. The Yoginis are called Very Secret. Lalita dwells here as Tripura Amba, her Vidya being Hsraim Hsrklim Hrsrauh.

She is also known as Sampatprada Bhairavi, coppery effulgent, like 1000 suns, with three eyes, a face like the moon, adorned with white gems, with a beautiful figure, rising swelling breasts, intoxicated, wanton, young, proud, holding book, dispelling fear, holding a rosary and granting boons.



Her three saktis are called Lady of Lust (Kameshvari), Adamantine Lady (Vajreshi), and Flowery Vagina (Bhagamalini). Kameshvari is called the Rudra Shakti. She is white in colour, besmeared with camphor, adorned with pearls and crystal, and various other gems, holding book, rosary, bestowing boons and dispelling fear.

Vajreshi is the Vishnu Shakti. She is bright as red powder (kumkuma), adorned with flowers and gems, like the dawn sun. Her eyelids are smeared with sapphire dust, she holds sugarcane bow, flowery arrows, bestows boons, dispels fear.

Bhagamalini is the Brahma Shakti. She is effulgent as molten gold, adorned with priceless gems, holds noose, goad, and shows the gestures of knowledge and bestowing boons.

The gem of the mandala is Gomaya. The dhatu is Fat. The time is season (two months). The Mudra is the Bija Mudra. The nature of the mandala is sun of moon.

Bindu

This mandala is called 'Purely Blissful'. The Yogini in this mandala is the Queen of Queens, Rajarajeshvari, the Very Red One, her Transcendent Majesty Lalita Maheshvari Mahatripurasundari.

Her vidya (Kamaraja vidya) is ka e i la hrim ha sa ka ha la hrim sa ka la hrim, plus a secret 16th syllable. Her description is that given in *Vamakeshvara Tantra*.

Surrounding her are the [Fifteen Nityas](#). The gem is ruby. The dhatu is hair. The time is year. The mudra is Yoni Mudra. The nature of this central mandala is moon of moon.

Yantra Mantra Tantra of Lalita

Lalita, as primordial devi, rays out her attendants and shaktis as modifications of moon, sun and fire. In this Shiva has no place, no qualities, is without the ability to act. Only when united with devi may 'he' act.

This is based on the subtle and practical idea of Shiva as pure consciousness, witness of the triple manifestation of his Shakti. This Shakti, the very essence of the three gunas of Sattvas, Rajas, and Tamas, is the cause of all manifestation in the universe and as a human being. The three shaktis, by blending and reblending, create all things.

Shakti is triple as sun, moon and fire -- that is to say of all the sidereal constellations and planets, and therefore of Time itself. She is triple as Will (Iccha), Knowledge (Jnana) and Action (Kriya). She is threefold as intellect, feelings, physical sensation.

Shakti is triple as wake-dream-deep sleep. What is called the Fourth is the witness, Shiva, who is said to pervade the whole cosmos just as heat pervades a red hot iron.

The physical body, according to the precepts of Ayurveda, is triple as the 'humours' Vata, Pitta and Sleshma. The varying combinations of these three shaktis make up the physical body.

Shakti is also fivefold as aether, air, fire, water and earth. The combination of the five elements and three gunas produce Lalita's Eternities (Nityas) -- 15 in number, each identified with a lunar day of the bright fortnight. The moon, symbolising Shakti, is the mirror or reflection holding together all creation.

A close examination of the details relating to the nine mandalas of Shri Yantra reveals that the shaktis of the whole circle represent the human being, who, in potential, is Shakti-Shiva united. The aim is for a person to realise that all powers, energies and manifestation are shaktis of consciousness, pure awareness.

The yantra may be examined in two ways, either as manifestation or dissolution. Maintenance is an intermediate state between the two polarities. When she is worshipped as creatrix the order is from centre to perimeter. As dissolver, the puja is from perimeter to centre.

In Sivananda Yogi's *Subhagodaya* is given the daily ritual or puja of Lalita's Shri Yantra -- based on the *Vamakeshvara Tantra*. This rite is based on non-dualism, in a spiritual sense the realisation of the intrinsic oneness of macrocosm and microcosm.

As the puja is intended to banish all thoughts of difference, the devi is first felt or visualised in the heart, and then drawn out via the breath and installed in the yantra. She is then worshipped as actually residing there. But a clear link has been made between subject and object. The true home of devi is as cosmo-creatix in the heart of the body which is the devi in human form.

The Various Mandalas of Shri Yantra

The Triple Goddess, from her own will to manifest, extends herself in a ninefold way, as modifications of moon, sun and fire. The attributions of the various mandalas shows the type of energy represented. The meditation in Bhavana Upanshad is a figurative way of describing this celestial city or mountain which is a human being.

The island of jewels is the gross human body with its 9 alchemical bases or dhatus. Each is figuratively described as a gem -- diamond, emerald, sapphire, ruby &c. The sea of nectar (semen/ova) is the base for the arising of the human body. The diagram suns up the meditation. We can see that this island of gems is a very pleasant place to be, full of gardens, with a beautiful, begemmed palace, wafted with a gentle breeze upon which is carried great fragrance, cool, alluring.

This indicates the Kaula view that one gains liberation by a very pleasant way, enjoying as one goes. This paradise island is very, very close. Each of the elements in the island meditation has a subtle meaning associated with the esoteric physiology of Shri Vidya.

She, Lalita, united with Shiva, is subtlety of subtlety, hidden behind the curtain hanging from the canopy. Her forms may appear to become progressively less subtle, but she still remains herself.

Bala-Sundari-Bhairavi

Although Tripurasundari, as mother of the universe (jagadamba) is the aspect most often met with in works of Shri Vidya, she is also worshipped as Bala (a young girl), and as Bhairavi (a crone).

As Bala, she is 16 years old, a virgin, very playful and dear. Bala has her own yantra and mantra. her vidya is Aim Klim Sauh.

Bhairavi is also an aspect of Lalita, but represents Shakti in whom menstruation has ceased, and has some affiliations with Kali.

Applications of Shri Vidya

There are many prayogas (ritual uses) related to Shri Yantra. Some rites depend on auspicious times, such as Full moon days or nights in specific solar months

Devi also manifests as the five elements of aether, fire, air, water and earth. The saktis are purple (air), white (water), red (fire), yellow (earth), blue (aether).

Chapter II of *Vamakeshvara* gives a large number of rites, which one is not entitled to perform unless the daily rite is also accomplished. These rites are called the shatkarma, six acts: protection, peace, victory, wealth, punishment, destruction. The categories vary occasionally. When punishing an enemy it is necessary to both protect yourself and to know the right time for performance, according to the rules, and also the vulnerable points, which vary with the phase of the moon and with astrological aspects.

It is important to remember that Shri Vidya was primarily oral, and vital information was often left out of the written versions, so it is necessary to know a host of things before a rite can be started.

Initiation

Devi Lalita may be installed in a disciple, a yantra, or an image. All the methods essentially follow a similar form, but the right time must be selected. A disciple must have the necessary qualifications and potential.

After initiation, she or he is to perform an operation to endue the vidya with energy or life. This involves the recitation of the root vidya a specified large number of times, although other valid methods exist for preparation.

The Vidya (Mantra)

There are said to be 15 lines of mantra, each perceived by a different Rishi (Seer). The most widespread seems to be that called Kadi (beginning with 'Ka'), which itself has three sections. The other main division is Hadi, although it is said that the Kularnava Tantra incorporates both in a division called Kahadi. Devotees of the Kadi line worship the Shri Yantra from the perimeter to the centre, while Hadi devotees worship it from the centre to the perimeter. Some of the lines of the vidya are said to be broken, and do not run in a continuous stream.

The 64 Kaula Tantras

These tantras are enumerated in *Vamakeshvara* and *Kulachudamani Tantras*, and in other places. At some time in history a school of Shri Vidya was formed on an orthodox Vedic basis. A proponent of this school, Lakshmidhara, wrote a commentary on the famous Shri Vidya hymn called *Saudaryalahari*.

Unfortunately, most of the 64 tantras are lost. But their contents may be gauged from Lakshmidhara's commentary. We have to remember that the descriptions are based on an orthodox Vedic interpretation.

1) Mahamaya Sambhara. Deluding of intellect and senses. 2) Yogini Jala Sambhara. Involving the agency of Yoginis. 3) Tattva Sambhara. Causing elements to appear and transform. 4-11) Eight Bhairava Tantras. The commentator says that these are objectionable as they belong to the Kapalikas or skull wearers such as Naths, Aghoris, and so forth. 12-19) The Bahurupa Astaka. Importance attached to the eight shaktis or Matrikas.

20-27) The Eight Yamalas. Of these, only Rudra Yamala seems to have survived, although it is doubtful that the text which exists is the same as the original. Other of the yamalas do exist in part as quotations in later tantras. The commentator says these relate to Siddhi. 28) Candra Jnana. Expounds the 16 Nityas, but condemned as 'it smacks of Kapalika tenets'. 29) Malini Vidya. Enabling one to cross great oceans. This could be the Malini Vijaya Tantra, a work of the Kashmir Saivites which includes magical operations based on the 36 tattvas.

30) Maha Sammohana. Hypnosis. 31-33) Vamajusta, Mahadeva and Vatula. These are condemned as they deal with Vamachara. 34-35) Vatula Uttara and Kamika. The latter is still extant, and belongs to the Kashmir group of Agamas. The chief guru of this school is the famous Abhinavagupta. 36) Hridbheda Tantra. Condemned through Vamachara. 37-38) Tantrabheda and Guhyatantra. Condemned because of retaliatory magic. 39) Kalavada. Digits of the moon, induction of chandrakalas, which are the 108 parts of the moon found in a horoscope.

40) Kalasara. The rules of colour. There is no reason given for its exclusion. 41) Kundika Mata. Attainment of siddhi through elixirs and drugs. 42) Mata Uttara. Deals with 'quicksilver'. See the Matrikabheda Tantra. 43) Vinakhya. Power over Yakshinis. 44) Trotala. Magical practices of medicine and clairvoyance. 45) Trotala Uttara. Bringing the 64 crores of yoginis face to face. 46) Pancamrita. Nectar from the body. The five nectars are mentioned in the Kaula Jnana Nirnaya. 47) Rupabheda. 48) Bhuta Uddamara. 49) Kulasara. 50) Kullaoddisha. 51) Kulacudamani. 48,50 and 51 are still available. The commentator says these tantras are not sanctioned by Veda.

52-56) Sarvajna Tantra, Mahakali Mata, Arunesi, Modinisa, Vikunthesvara. They are all declared reprehensible as they belong to the digambaras (naked sadhus). 57-64) East, West, South, North, Uttara Kaulas, Vimala, Vimalotta, Devi Mata. One of these lines still exists.

The Nine Nathas

Each of the nine Nathas or lords is identified with an aperture of the human body, and with one of the nine mandalas of the whole Shri Yantra. One's own guide is Shiva as pervading these nine chakras, and is identified with the current of bioenergy called Susunna. They are all meditated on as white, with two eyes and two arms, showing the gestures banishing fear and giving boons. They may be visualised as being in sexual intercourse with the presiding aspects of the Devi in the nine mandalas.

The Four Oceans

The four duties of a human being are described as oceans because of their limitless extent. The sadhaka in the zone is at the junction point or field of action of these four oceans, on the island of gems.

The Nine Bodily Dhatus

Each of the nine matters (dhatu) in the body is presided over by an aspect of Lalita. The Universe, in Shri Vidya, is said to be time, space, and a combination of the two. The first is Shakti, the second Shiva, and the third Shiva and Shakti in union. These are also the three eyes on Lalita's face, and sun, moon, fire.

The Island of Nine Gems

On this island, which is all and everything, seed and sprout, the six seasons all manifest simultaneously. The Aeon Trees (Kalpadruma) are identified with resolution as any act undertaken with resolution is fruitful. The six seasons are identified with the six tastes of a human being.

Horses are the five senses as they lead one forward into action, figuratively taken as war. It is Lalita who slayed the demon Bhandu with all his fearful hordes. All her saktis assisted her in this. Then the celestial city, the Nagar was built. Elephants are the objects of senses, or the impressions.

Shri Vidya implies unity between knower, means of knowledge and knowledge itself. These are the three cities. This means that the knower, by means of the five instruments of knowledge, offers to knowledge itself, Devi in the yantra. (See *Bhavanopanishad*).

The Fifteen Nitya Shaktis

These are modifications of Lalita as red goddess with her three gunas and her five elements of aether, air, fire, water and earth. They are identified with the 15 days of the lunar fortnight. As the moon remains itself, though appearing differently according to phase, so too Lalita. Each Nitya has her own vidya, yantra and group of energies (saktis). Lalita or Tripurasundari is the 16th day or Full moon, with her 15 digits. Each of the 15 Nityas has a certain number of arms, the totality of arms (= rays) of the whole circle being 108. Because any unit of time is taken as a microcosm or parallel of any other valid unit, each of the 15 Nityas has 1440 breaths.

One lunar fortnight is 21600 breaths -- which is the number of a whole cycle or process. The breaths of a human being during one day and night are 21600 -10800 of which are solar, the other 10800 being lunar. By this device, the unity of the 15 Nityas, time, space and a human being is shown. As time is breath in Shri Vidya, we find that the periods of the four famous yugas are also based on breath. Each breath is influenced during the day by the planets in their waxing and waning of power.

These cause poisons to accumulate in the physical body. Nectar is released when the sun mandal 'melts' the moon mandal, and one attains to Hamsa. This is the nectar of compassion.

Lalita as the Whole Universe

Tantrik rites often include 'nyasas', the placing of some principles in a certain sequence on one's own body. The idea is that this process purifies and divinises.

Lalita's Sodha (sixfold) Nyasa is a highly complex rite in which a practitioner places on the body the 51 letters of the alphabet, the planets, the 27 nakshatras or lunar mansions, the 12 sidereal constellations, and the 51 sacred sites (pithas) of all India.

Placing these different things on the body the practitioner comes to realise oneness with the whole cosmos. This ritual also illustrates some important concepts. The *Tantraraja* states that there is no difference between the circle of the letters of the alphabet and the sidereal Zodiac. Lalita as devi is Shakti as all language, mantra, sound, music and vibration. She is also Shakti of Time as all planets and constellations. She is the very essence of sun and moon. Each of these realms requires inner comment.

51 Ganesas and 51 Letters

The image of Ganesa illustrates the three realms. elephant, his body human, and his vehicle a mouse. These are three realms in one being. He is lord of obstacles in three ways. As elephant, his great strength can break barriers. As human, he can use his intelligence. As mouse, he can penetrate the smallest places. Every aspect of Shri Vidya may be understood in three ways -- gross, subtle, and supreme -- and so the meaning of things often remains uncertain unless you already know someone who has the key, or belong to the in group.

As letters of the alphabet, Lalita is Matrika Shakti, who deludes by her Maya through words, speech, mantra.

Planets

The tantriks knew the seven traditional planets of western astrology, and also had a greater number of shadowy planets, of which Rahu and Ketu -- the nodes of the moon -- are the best known. The planets are important to an understanding of Shri Vidya, but the details are so extensive that they must be reserved for a later time.

27 Nakshatras

These constellations were thought of as beyond the 12 sidereal constellations, so remote they were almost beyond time itself. These 27 are employed in Shri Vidya to determine suitability of partners, constructing Vajra Yantras, and so forth. Each of the 27 has its own animal. A yoni or lingam is classified as being harmonious or the reverse according to the position of the natal moon in these constellations. They are also associated with sacred herbs and trees, and much used in specific or optional rites.

Yoginis

The Yoginis of the bodily centres (dhatus) reveal very much of interest as they are associated with the well known but much misunderstood cakras. These Yoginis are really images of the ayurvedic or alchemic bases in the body.

They can only be understood in relation to such an alchemy. Kundalini is the body shakti, the great deluder, the trickster, the cause of sleep. To raise her means to become conscious of her manifestation. Shakti in the body has her various forms as Prana (Breath) Shakti, fire Shakti and so forth. When Prana Shakti becomes agitated, she zigzags up the body. At this time one starts to experience dissolution. Various things may be seen and felt.

Dakini, Rakini &c. preside over the alchemical physical bases of skin, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow. The last of these yoginis presides over the highest dhatu, highest as it forms the physical basis for new life -- ova/seed. In this form she is truly limitless, as she manifests as the Aeon Tree (Kalpadruma). The Dakinis and Rakinis &c. are pictured as terrifying as they consume the food one ingests.

Twelve Rashis (Constellations)

These are viewed as 12 great suns or sun Kalas, mighty Adityas presiding over great affairs, feeding on human beings and their essence.

51 Pithas

These are places in India particularly sacred to devi, as they mark the spots where the parts of her body fell after it was sliced into pieces by the discus of Visnu. The yoni fell at Kamarupa, hence the special spiritual regard in which this place is held by Kaulas.

The Nadis

Nadi means river, and is extended to include other currents and courses, such as those of the bioenergy and the pulse. Ayurvedic physicians have written works distinguishing various types of pulse indicating dysfunction of the three powers. Nadi is also 150th part of the ascendant in a birth chart based on the sidereal zodiac. Such a birth chart is called Rashi Kundali. It is impossible to cast accurate charts without knowing which nadi rules a person or time. Each nadi has an aspect of the devi ruling it, and a solar and lunar part -- hence there are 3600 in the zodiac.

There are said to be 72000 nadis in the human organism. This number indicates a large but not infinite number of channels of bioenergy. They are the pathways of Prana Shakti.

The chief pathways are Susumna, extending from a point between the anus and genitals to the top of the head; ida and pingala, which are the solar and lunar pathways coiled around the central channel. This Susumna is Shiva and Shakti in sexual union. The human body is conceived of as a tree -- the root is at the top of the head, and it ramifies downwards. These channels are the pathways or body vehicles for Vata, one

of the three dosas or humours in Ayurveda of the human body, and constitute the central nervous system with three main concentrations.

Marmas

Marmas are 108 in number, well documented points of the human organism which, if pierced, usually cause death. Many are recognised by western medicine. On the Shri Yantra, marmas are represented by the confluence of three or more lines.

Sandhis

These are joints in the human frame, knee joint, elbow joint &c. The body is the temple of the devi. On the Shri Yantra sandhis are represented by the junction of two lines.

Meaning of Kula

A 'kula' is a Shakti. The foregoing shows that each Shakti in the yantra is some energy of the human organism in its gross, subtle, or causal aspects. 'Akula' (lit. 'not Kula') is Shiva.

"Having abandoned her family of young Kula women, she becomes Shiva, with no qualities, no characteristics, devoid of the form of time." -- *Vamakesvara Tantra*

"All things the body. The body is the sacrificial ladle. Knowledge is the food." -- *Shiva Sutras II, 9-10.*

The Weapons of Lalita

Lalita holds five flowery arrows, noose, goad and bow. The noose is attachment (moon). The goad is repulsion (sun). The sugarcane bow is the mind. The flowery arrows are the five sense impressions. When consciousness perceives these, the outward directed arrows stop being dry sticks.

These five flowery arrows together with the bow are personified as six Krishnas or Kamadevas. V84 of ch xxiv of *Tantrarajatantra* states that Lalita assumed a male form as Krishna, and 'by enveloping all women enchanted the whole world'. Each of the six forms is like dawn, with six arms, holding flute, noose, goad, sugarcane bow, flowers, sour milk.

Eroticism in Shri Vidya

The physiology of Shri Vidya postulates macrocosm and microcosm as one. From this follows the realisation that the sexual union of man and woman mirrors the cosmic creation. It is natural that loving sexuality should be seen to have a cosmic status.

Kaulas have been criticised as their works emphasise love and death, but they were always realists. Many tantras establish that the terrifying Kali and the benign Lalita are two sides of the same coin. This coin or currency is called life. Lalita, with her waxing moon, represents creation, and Kalika with her waning moon dissolution. Each is a complete symbol, of high sublimity and loaded with spiritual significance.

The 15 Syllable Mantra

A chart, in Sanskrit, in the Adyar Library edition of *Varivasya Rahasya*, which deals with the 15 lettered Vidya of Lalita is so useful to an understanding of Shri Vidya and the yantra that we have summarised its contents below.

The Kadi Vidya runs ka e i la hrim: ha sa ka ha la hrim: sa ka la hrim. There is also a secret 16th syllable said to be the quintessence of Lalita.

There vidya, yantra, guru, disciple, goddess are all conceived of as being one. The Shri Yantra is within the wheel of time (Kalacakra), and represents the human body (microcosm), and the universe (macrocosm). These 15 letters are conceived to exist within the meru or spine of a human being, from the base to the top of the head.

The seven (or nine) 'cakras' are strung along this thread of light, as are the different mandals or circles of Shri Yantra. Note that the Lalita Vidya is itself divided into three parts, each represents fire, sun and moon.

Different letters of the alphabet all exist in a subtle form within the spinal cord. Each chakra is presided over by a Yogini whose function is connected with the transmutation of food, which is alchemy of the food factory.

There are 50 petals associated with these six cakras as there are 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. $21600/50 = 432$. The cakra of the absolute or semen/ova itself has 1000 letters or petals. Semen is conceived of as residing here because of its alchemical nature as an elixir produced by the synthesis of the forms of food.

These three which are oneness are knower, means of knowledge, object of knowledge. Their union is called samarasa.

The three corners of the central triangle of the Shri Chakra are presided over by three symbolic Nathas. The Fourth Natha, Shiva Himself, is united with Shakti in the centre of the Bindu.

This Bindu, united Shiva Shakti, creates the cosmos. If we observe nature we see that the Shri Cakra (child) comes from the sexual union or samarasa (perfect assimilation) of man (Shiva) and woman (Shakti).

Their samarasa is known as the Fourth, because it appears when all three are present, and also produces or has the three as its powers or saktis.

This Fourth is awareness, the witness, the enjoyer, the measurer, the measuring stick, and the measured, Adinatha, the merulingam, beyond time and space, and therefore outside the Shri Yantra or the cosmos as modification or play of sun, moon and fire. These last three form the body of Lalita.

The three saktis of the Fourth are known as Kamesvari, Vajresi and Bhagamalini, in the symbolism of Shri Vidya.

They are also the saktis Iccha, Jnana and Kriya (Knowledge, Will, Action), and in their aspects as Creator, Maintainer and Destroyer are known as Vama, who vomits forth the universe, Jyesta who maintains, and Raudri who dissolves.

The body of a human being is made up of these three in combination and blending. They are active, passive and reconciling.

The three are also symbolised as three holy mountains known as Kamagiri, Purnagiri, and Jalandhari. The apex of these foothills is the very secret Oddiyana, at the centre of Shri Yantra. The three also represent three symbolic lingas within the human frame.

Conceived of as the human body, and as the Meru or subtle spine, these three places are points of convergence or pilgrimage of the channels of bioenergy connected with the sun and moon. There is a correspondence between these channels in the body, and the luminaries in the heaven.

As the Shri Yantra is Time and Space, all constellations, planets, lunar mansions, are conceived of as being the body of Lalita, Maha Tripura Sundari. It was these three cities that were destroyed by Lord Shiva, and described in the Shiva Mahimna Stotra.

At the confluence of the three rivers of bioenergy are three lingams of Supreme Shiva, resorted to by the wise. One united with the Fourth is liberated. Others are deluded by the Maya or play of the goddess, who, with her three aspects in all is known as Mahamaya Adya, the womb of all.

She deludes by her every process, and has the form of Matrika devi, or goddess of speech and words. The 15 syllables of the vidya are usually disguised in symbolic design or code. The three Hrim are called the three maya granthis or knots of delusion. This Hrim breaks down into Ha for Shiva, Ha for Shakti, and Im for samarasa.

The Fourth (Turiya) also pervades consciousness in its states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. This is also expressed in the *Shiva Sutra*.

Meaning of Shri Vidya

The Yogini Hridaya, the second part of the Vamakeshvara Tantra, states that the mantra has several meanings. Some are literal, others traditional, inner, Kaulika, occult and real.

Literal Meaning

The syllables represent Shiva and Shakti. The first part, Ka E I La Hrim, is called Vagbhava, and is Vama Shakti, Brahma, Jnana Shakti, and Eastern Face. The second part, Ha Sa Ka Ha La hrim, is Kamaraja, Jyesta Shakti, Visnu, Iceha Shakti, and Southern Face. The third part, Sa Ka La hrim, is called Shakti, is Raudri Shakti, Rudra, Kriya Shakti and Western Face. The fourth part, the hidden or secret syllable, is mother goddess, Shambhu Natha, the totality of the three shaktis of Knowledge, Will and Action, and the Northern Face or amnaya.

Traditional Meaning

Ka = air, Ha = fire, Sa = water, La = earth, Ha = aether. The vowels are above aether. The 15 syllables are 1 of aether, 2 of air, three of fire, four of water, and five of earth. The three forms of La represent the three Worlds. The five forms of the letter Ha represent sound.

Inner Meaning

The vidya shows oneness of Shiva, Guru, devi and disciple; as it is Shiva in sound form (Shakti) which preserves the line.

Kaula Meaning

The Mother goddess is known as Ganeshi (Lady of Hosts), because of her great number of rays. These are the Ganesas of the sixfold Nyasa. Devi has three eyes which are sun, moon, fire. She has three saktis which are Will, Knowledge, Action. She has three gunas which are active, passive, reconciling. These are the nine planets. The 27 nakshatras are 10 Knowledge and Action modes, 10 objects of senses, Devi, Deva, three gunas as one, and the four inner causes. The six yoginis have their names beginning Da, Ra, La, Ka, Sa, Ha -- and end in 'akini'. They preside over the physical bases (dhatus) of the body. The 12 sidereal constellations are the 10 vital breaths, the embodied being (jiva), and the Supreme Creator. The 51 pithas correspond to the letters of the alphabet, and are points of confluence one should visit within the body.

Each of the three sections of the vidyas represents speech -- in potential, in formation, in manifestation. The Devi is Matrika Shakti.

Breath is Time

This is a fundamental postulate of Shri Vidya and much of the symbolism is based on it. The letters of Sanskrit said to represent the embodiment of Lalita as mantra are 52 in number: 16 vowels and 36 consonants. These, multiplied together, total 576. This number, divided by nine yields 64. The Shri Yantra is said to have 64,000,000 yoginis in the nine sub-mandalas.

Each mandala has a unit of Time associated with it. The basic unit is a breath. One nadika is equal to 24 minutes or 1440 seconds, and each breath is one 360th of this, or four seconds. A human being breathes 21600 times each 24 hours.

A Kali Yuga is 432,000 years of 360 days. A Dvapara Yuga is 864,000 years. A Treta Yuga is 1,296,000 years. A Satya Yuga is 1,728,000 years. The circle of the sidereal zodiac has 12 constellations, each of which has nine parts (navamshas). These 108 (12 x 9) are called Candrakalas.

Each Candrakala is, itself, a micro-constellation. The number of degrees in the sidereal cakra is 360. The number of minutes is 21600. A conjunction is 21600', a square 5400', an opposition 10800'. Each eternity (Nitya) of the root mantra has 1440 breaths. (See the prayoga of Bhavana Upanishad). This implies that Lalita is 21600, as she is the collectivity of the 15 Nityas.

Lalita's cakra is the grand synthesis of Time, Space, and humankind. Her 36 tattvas are the whole cosmos.

Ritual Accessories (Upachara)

These can be multiplied indefinitely. The chief are scent (earth), incense (air), flame (fire), water, and flowers (aether). They should all be red, or tinged with red. They represent, in their basic form, the five impressions. See *Gandharva Tantra*.

Devatas of the Leftovers

At the end of the rite Vatuka Natha is in the NE, and takes flame leftovers; Yoginis in the SE take mantra leftovers; Kshetrapala in the SW takes scent and incense leftovers; Ganesa, in the NW, takes mudra leftovers. The aspect of Lalita called Sosika consumes everything that is left. She is worshipped in the NE in a circular pit.

Gayatri

This is the name of a specific kind of mantra used at the four twilights of dawn, midday, dusk and midnight. There are Vedic and Tantric gayatris. Lalita has her own which is *tripurasundaryai vidmahe kameshvaryai dhimahi tanno klinne prachodayat*.

Esoteric Meaning of the Vidya

This leads the sadhaka to identify the vidya with moon, sun and fire, as sections of the central or Susunna Nadi, relating to Intellect, Emotions, and Physical Sensations. These have to be brought together for the Fourth to appear. There are 10 fire kalas, 12 sun kalas, and 15 moon kalas. The 16th includes them all.

Sound

The letters of the vidya are Nada, or sound, and the absolute, and end as uttered sound. When charged with the consciousness of the Fourth these mere letters become mantra. Otherwise, words continually delude.

The 16th syllable of the vidya also represents the Fourth. This Fourth is Kamakala. Beyond it is the Ultimate Absolute (Atiturya - beyond