

Sri Suktam

-an Exegesis



Swami Shantananda Puri

Sri Sukta--an Exegesis

A prayer to Goddess Lakshmi, this mantra of the Rg Veda can confer powers of fulfilling the devotee's desires from the mundane to the spiritual.

SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

The most popular among the various *Suktas* in the *Vedas* are *Purusha Sukta* and the *Sri Sukta*, which are chanted daily in many households, temples and *Asrams* (mostly in South India).

Sri Sukta belongs to the *Khila Rk* (supplemental hymns) coming after the fifth *mandala* of the *Rg Veda*. Though a *Khila Rk*, it is given the same importance as the *mantras* in the main *mandalas*.

Like all the *mantras* of the *Rg Veda*, the *Sri Sukta* is panegyric and also contains prayers for material welfare, prosperity, fortune, success and plenty of riches (which mostly consisted of cows, horses, grains and other basic materials for food besides money).

Addressed to Lakshmi

The hymns are all addressed to Goddess Lakshmi but the first two and the last three *Rks* are addressed

conjointly to the mystic fire god (Agni) as also Lakshmi. The former is the intermediary messenger who carries the oblations and the message of prayers to all gods and goddesses, including Lakshmi.

The period of the *Rg Veda* has been placed as 6000 B.C by Tilak. The *Sri Sukta* is mainly addressed to Sri or Lakshmi--the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Mythologically, Lakshmi or Mahalakshmi is considered the queen consort of Lord Narayana, proclaimed as the supreme *Purusha* (Purushottama).

Eight Aspects

Even though, in common parlance, Lakshmi is connected with wealth, she is worshipped in eight aspects, such as Vijaya Lakshmi (for success), Gaja Lakshmi (for strength, nobility), Dhana Lakshmi (for riches) and Moksha Lakshmi

(for liberation), etc. Thus, Lakshmi is vested with the powers of fulfilling the entire gamut of desires from the mundane to the spiritual, of a sincere devotee.

The name *Sri Sukta* contains in itself an indication of all the benefits, blessings and auspiciousness that will be bestowed on a devotee. The word *Sri*, according to root derivations, connotes the following (vide *Arhibudhnyā Samhita*):

1. The root *Sru* means, to annihilate or dispel: One who dispels all the impurities and defects of those who take refuge in her. This aspect is seen in verses (*Rk*s) 6 and 8 of the *Sukta*.

2. *Sru* to hear: The one who hears the cry of distress of the devotees. This is indicated indirectly in *Rk* 3.

3. The one who is sought as refuge by all--*Sriyate*. Indicated in *Rk* 5.

4. The one who bestows all the good and noble qualities on her devotees: *Srinati*. See *Rk* 7.

5. Lastly, the one who bestows *moksha* or takes one to the highest state of God realisation.

Relationship with Spirituality

Many advanced spiritual practitioners may feel repugnance or at least wonder as to how the

Vedas, the supreme guide to spirituality, could give us a legacy of such prayers which are full of distressing supplications for mundane riches and favours which are normally considered as the paramount obstacle to spiritual progress.

Surrender to Supreme

It is not possible for the majority of the people to ignore their deplorable financial condition, etc., and to proceed on the path of spirituality. It is not practicable, too. So when a person finds that all his endeavours to progress in the material life are rendered futile and get stumped, he begins to realise that there is an invisible supreme power which controls his destiny, which is not only all-powerful but is also compassionate and mother-like. He supplicates and surrenders himself to that power, thus subordinating his ego.

Thus, by slowly chanting *Suktas*, *Stotras*, *Japas*, etc., a love for God begins to dawn in his heart and a stage comes when he will yearn for God, disregarding the gifts he used to beg for. That is why Lord Krishna has categorised such seekers of riches also as his devotees in the same rank as a *jnani*, a man of knowledge. In the seventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* he has titled

Saint's Kingdom

An illustrious saint named Vidyaranya (12th pontiff of Sringeri Sharada Peetham) was a very poor *brahmachari* (celibate) in his pre-monk days and was worshipping Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, with great austerity. The divine mother appeared before him, but disappointed him by saying that in that birth he was not destined to become rich. But, in the next birth, she would certainly bless him.

Vidyaranya adopted a ruse to bypass the situation. He took *sannyasa* (monkhood), as it was considered a second birth. Lakshmi conferred on him immense wealth. But Vidyaranya became repentant as, being a monk, the rules did not permit him to touch any money or own it. Who can understand the divine mother's sport or *leela*?

It was in those days that Malikafur, a Muslim marauder, invaded southern India. Due to lack of money, there was no Hindu kingdom which was able to fight against the massacre, plunder and other atrocities of the invaders. Vidyaranya was able to inspire two brothers, Harihara and Bhukka, to lead an army against the marauder by placing all his immense wealth at their disposal. The brothers were able to succeed and established the Vijayanagara kingdom.

them as *Artharthis* (seekers of wealth and other objects).

Further, even if the wealth is sought by a person for himself, it may be of help to other needy persons, too. The anecdotes in the boxes will amply illustrate this point.

Eligibility for Chanting

Prapanchasara, an authoritative text on *Mantra Sastra*, has prescribed certain procedure to be followed and also certain qualifications for the devotee desirous of doing the daily recitation of *Sri Sukta*.

Before starting to recite *Sri Sukta*, the aspirant should first get initiated into the *Sri Mantra* by a competent *guru* who is an expert in the knowledge of the principles of *Mantra Sastra*.

Actually, there are many more Lakshmi *mantras*. As Kamala (Lakshmi) is also one of the deities of the ten *Mahavidyas*, she has a single syllabled *mantra kleem*. There is a peculiar *mantra* known as *Kuberā Dhanakarshana Lakshmi mantra*.

None of these *mantras* will give

ffect unless they are taken from u.

After taking the *Sri Mantra*, the stee should do the *japa* by ating the *mantra* hundreds of s, all the while imagining ally that the *guru*, Lakshmi and *mantra* are all identical and one. Some of the main qualifications ribed for a person desirous of grace of Goddess Lakshmi are l below:

He should be calm and cted, always with a smiling face, ng sweetly, being the first to and talk (instead of waiting for ther man to greet and talk first). hould be full of compassion rds the deserving, never remiss s worship/hospitality towards ru, deity, guest and the mystic (Agni). He should have good

conduct, accustomed to take bath daily, maintaining discipline, always habituated to take food facing the east and firmly adhering to the laws applicable to his caste and station in life. He should remain content with his own wife and moderate in food as well as speech.

He should complete the *japa* of the *Sri Mantra* 12 lakh times and along with it all the 15 *Rks* of *Sri Sukta* should also be recited like a *japa*, with *Rishi*, *chhandas* and *Devata* for each *Rk*. Each of the hymns in *Sri Sukta* has different *Rishi*, *chhandas* and *Devata*.

First *Rk*--*Ananda Rishi*, *Anushtup chhandas* and *Sri Devata*.

Second *Rk*--*Kardama Rishi*, *Anushtup chhandas* and *Agni Devata*

Third *Rk*--*Chiklita Rishi*, *Anushtup chhandas* and *Agni Devata*.

Gold from Gooseberry

The great Adi Sankara, while yet a *Brahmachari*, happened to go for *esha* to the house of a lady who was extremely poor. There was hing at all available in the house, and the lady was highly distressed as was reluctant to let go that lovable boy without alms. At last, she able to find out one half-rotten *amalaka* fruit (gooseberry) which gave to the *Brahmachari*. Sankara was moved by her plight and her manimity and sang a *stotra* called *Kanakadhara Stava*, invoking the e of Goddess Lakshmi on that poor woman. The mother relented showered a huge number of gold nuggets, each of the size of an *alaka*. Here again, the wealth sought for by Sankara redounded to welfare of a poor and needy family.

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There seems to be a lot of difference of opinion regarding the names of *rishis* and *devatas*. Somewhere it is mentioned that for the entire *Sri Sukta*, Hiranyagarbha is the *rishi* and Lakshmi is the *devi*. So one has to follow the tradition in his *guru's* lineage. It is specifically warned that one who does not instruct his disciple in the relevant *rishi*, *chhandas*, etc., becomes a sinner.

For those desirous of enjoyment in this world and liberation, the procedure as laid down in *Bodhayana Sutra* has been prescribed in the worship of Lakshmi through *japa*. Similar procedures have also been detailed in the *Vasishtha Smriti*, the *Padma Purana* and other similar texts, with certain variations. In all these cases one should follow his *guru's* tradition.

Revealed By Lord's Will

As *Sri Sukta* is part of the *Vedas* which were not composed by any man or author, each *mantra* had been revealed by Lord's will to a particular *rishi* who was able to visualise the goddess whose subtle form is the *mantra*.

The *rishis* were the seers. Before starting a *mantra* we pronounce the name of the *rishi* and touch the head in reverence. We touch our nose and mouth with the hand while

pronouncing the name of the metre (every *Vedic mantra* has a rhythm with a prescribed number of syllables and they are categorised as *Anushtup*, *Gayatri*, etc., metres). Every *mantra* has a presiding deity (*devata*).

According to all the *Smritis*, *Grihya Sutras*, *Puranas*, etc., it is not enough to chant or do *japa* of *Sri Sukta* but with each of the 15 *Rks*, oblations of milk (cooked as *Charu*), ghee, lotus and *vilva* and other fruits, etc., have to be given--10 to 28 times for each *Rk* in the sacrificial fire (*Aupasana Agni*) kept in the house. Thus, the *Sri Sukta* was originally meant for being used to perform a *Homa* (a small sacrifice where various substances are to be offered as oblations in fire in a special altar of bricks), besides the normal daily chanting as done for the entire *Samhita* of the particular *Veda*.

The next but most important condition is that *Sri Sukta* cannot be chanted like the *Sahasranama stotras*, the *Gita* or the *Ramayana*, as it is a part of the main *Vedas*. In the *Vedas*, in certain syllables accentuation has to be given upwards, in some downwards and in others in an equal way, which have been termed as *udatta*, *anudatta* and *svarita (sama)*, respectively.

Svara of Phonetics

Accordingly, in the printed texts too, different diacritical notations have been given (a vertical line on the letter for *udatta*, a small underline for *anudatta*, and a small line on top for *svarita*). One of the six limbs (*śhadāṅga*) for study of the *Vedas*, called *Siksha*, deals with the correct methods of *svara*, enunciation and pronunciation—the science of phonetics.

In the *Mantra Sastra*, each syllable in the alphabet called *Matruka* (there are 51 syllables) is a power capsule, each with a different sensitive type of energy (with different capability) which releases tremendous vibrations having subtle consciousness when they are pronounced or chanted.

A slight defect in pronunciation, a slight elongation of the sound, the omission or unclear pronunciation of a letter or syllable could cause

havoc. Not only will the desire or purpose of the devotee not be achieved, but on the contrary it could cause bad results, such as ill-health, loss of riches or property and accidents.

Certain other conditions prescribed for chanting of *Vedic* hymns, such as *Sri Sukta* in *Siksha*, are:

1. One should not sing the *mantra* in a musical tune.
2. One should not recite it fast.
3. While chanting, the head should not move up and down (with *udatta* and *anudatta*). In the olden days while studying *Vedas* and practising, one used to keep a lemon on his head as it would fall down with the least shake of the head.
4. One should not read it from a book or notebook where the hymns are written. One should get them by heart solely by listening to the teacher and repeating them.

Demon Son for Sage

In the *Paniniya Siksha*, an example has been quoted citing a *Vedic* anecdote of *Vritrasura* (*Taittiriya Samhita*). The anecdote is as follows:

When *Tvashta* became angry against *Indra* for having killed his son, he performed a sacrifice wherefrom a mighty *Asura* (*Vritra*) was to be born who would take revenge by killing *Indra*. The *mantra* to be chanted was *Indra Shatruṣṭvārdhasva* with an upward accent on *Shatru*. Instead, by mistake, the priests (*Ritviks*) pronounced with an *udatta* on *Indra* (*Adyodatto*). The result was that *Tvashta* got a son (*Vritrasura*) who was killed by *Indra*, in a battle.

5. One should know the meaning of the *mantras* chanted. Even though the radiating vibrations have their own effect, a knowledge of the meaning renders the *mantra* more effective.

6. One should chant them in a full-throated voice (unlike the *mantras* of *Mantra Sastra*, the *Vedic mantras* should not be recited mentally).

In addition, one of the other conditions is that while chanting one should not pronounce the letters as if beating them on a rock or with an excessive emphasis on each letter as if breaking a pot. While the pronunciation should be clear, it should be softly handled as a tigress carries her cub delicately between the teeth with no harm or discomfort to the cub.

Other Injunctions

Incidentally, there are also other injunctions. While chanting, no other musical accompaniments, such as violin or harmonium, should be played. The idea is that any admixture or adulteration with other sound waves will affect the virgin purity and effect of the *Vedic* sound waves and may invoke harmful results. From all these things it is also clear that even recitation of *Vedas* through cassettes/transistors/

T.V./radio, etc., may not be effective as the quality of the waves will undergo a change when transmitted through such medium.

All such care and attention to the accompanying rituals (and not the pronunciation aspect) gain more importance when the *Suktas* are recited with a materialistic motive. When they are recited with a desireless attitude, either for the benefit of the public, in general, or only for invoking the grace of the divine mother for liberation purposes, the mother herself will guide the reciter.

Procedure for Worship

A person who wants the grace of Lakshmi for amassing immense riches through *Sri Sukta* is expected first to do *puja* to *Lakshmi yantra* (a graphic device on a metallic plate) or to an idol installed at home. This worship is done by invocation (*Avahana*), offering seat (*Asana*), water for feet (*Padyam*), water in the hand (*Arghya*), sipping water (*Achamana*), giving a bath (*Snana*), offering clothes (*Vastra*), ornaments (*Abharana*), sandal paste (*Gandha*), flowers (*Pushpa*), incense stick (*Dhoopa*), light (*Deepa*) and consecration of offerings, such as *Payasa* (*Naivedya*) and prostration (*pradakshina namaskara*).

Visarjana (returning the deity to her place) by the 15 *Rks* of *Sri Sukta* (one for each *Upachara*) is to be performed as indicated. Then, after doing *Agni Pratishtha* (establishing sacrificial fire), oblations of lotus, *amrit* (small sticks) of *vilva*, milk and honey are to be given with recitation of *Sri Sukta* 28 times. Thus, if one is able to do this *Sadhana* for six months, he will be the recipient of Lakshmi's grace.

Plain Japa Will Do

As, in the modern days, there are several constraints for a person busy with earning his livelihood and social obligations if he could recite *Sri Sukta* once daily without any *Homa*, it will be infallible in its effect. The mother is mainly concerned with a devotee's sincerity, faith (*shraddha*) and an exclusive love for her, and not so much with the arithmetic of his *japa*.

The recitation of *Sri Sukta*, if done repeatedly and regularly, even though motivated by personal and materialistic desires, would result in purification of the mind (*chitta suddhi*)--a *sine qua non* for God realisation or liberation.

Many have expressed a doubt that while Lakshmi's origin is attributed to the milky ocean, she has also been described elsewhere in some texts as the daughter of

sage Bhrigu. Actually, the *Vishnu Purana* says, Lakshmi is the eternal consciousness and the eternal consort of Lord Vishnu and her coming out of the milky ocean etc., were her sporting (*leela*).

Lakshmi, in the ultimate aspect, is identical with *Para Sakti* and *Para Brahman*--the Supreme Consciousness. To quote Prof. S. K. Ramachandra Rao, one of the foremost scholars in *Vedic* wisdom, Lakshmi or Sri is the mother goddess, identical with the sun and the moon and the mystic fire, and adored by all the gods (including Vishnu and Siva). She is Narayani as well as Tryambaka. That is why her appeal is universal.

As she is omnipotent, she is capable of fulfilling all materialistic desires for enjoyment in this world as also liberation. It is also reiterated in other texts that she is very quick in bestowing her grace as she is easily pleased. Not only does she grant all desires, but she also enables the *Jiva* to cross the ocean of *Samsara*. Lakshmi is the repository of all auspicious qualities.

There are many commentaries on *Sri Sukta* and a few are parochial and sectarian in some of the interpretations. The most popular commentaries are those of Sayana

(known later as Vidyaranya) and Prithvidharacharya.

Specialities of the 15 Mantras

Out of the 15 *Rk*s, the first two and the last three are invocations addressed to Jataveda, that is, the mystic sacrificial fire god (Agni). Commentators like Ranganatha Muni hold the view that Jataveda refers to Vishnu. The *Rg Veda* starts with an invocation to the fire god and ends similarly. *Sri Sukta* has been ordained for daily use in a *boma* (sacrifice with lighted fire) and, according to the scriptures, Agni has been described as the messenger of gods and as the one who invites all the gods.

Yaga, Homa, Yajna...

Incidentally, many common words such as *yaga*, *yajna*, *boma* and *sattra*, are all used for sacrifices. The term *yaga* is used where it is done in a standing posture and *boma* where it is done in a sitting posture. *Yajna* includes both *yaga* and *boma* as also mental sacrifices. While *yaga*, *yajna*, etc., are all meant for the benefit of one *yajamana* (who initiated the performance), in *sattra* all the participants can offer oblations and become the beneficiaries.

The first *Rk* is loaded with high importance. It has eight syllables in each quarter (*pada*), being in *Anushtubh* metre. The first starting word

Hiranya Varnam and *Hiranmayim* in the second line suggest Lord Narayana who is considered to be of golden effulgence.

So, the first eight syllables are suggestive of the *Ashtakshari* (eight syllables) *Mahamantra* of Lord Narayana. The word *Hari* in *Harinim* also strengthens that suggestion.

The 16 syllables of the first and second *pada* together are indicative of the 16 hymns of *Purusha Sukta*. The 24 syllables of the first three *padas* are indicative of the *Gayatri Mantra* with 24 syllables. *Hiranya Varnam* has also been interpreted as meaning the one who has made the words of the *Vedas* effulgent and *Gayatri* is known as the mother of the *Vedas* (*Gayatri Chhandasam Mata*). All the 32 syllables of the *Rk* are indicative of *Narasimha Mantra* known as *Mantra Raja* (king of *mantras*) with 32 syllables.

In sloka 48 of Chapter 9 in the seventh *skanda* of *Srimad Bhagavata*, Prahlada praises Lord Narasimha as Agni who is termed as Jataveda in the last *pada* of the *Rk*.

Four-fold Benefits

Thus, it is indicated that the recitation of the first *Rk* itself is capable of giving all the benefits of 1) *Ashtakshari Mantra* forming part

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of the three great secrets (*Rahasyatraya*) of Vaishnavas; 2) *Purusha Sukta*; 3) *Gayatri Mantra*, and 4) *Narasimha Mantra* with 32 syllables (*Mantra Raja*).

Twelve out of the 15 *Rks* contain words ending in *Eem*. Further, according to the popular versions in Tamil Nadu, the word *Padmineem* occurs in the fifth *Rk* where *Eem* means the one who is in the form of syllable *Eem*. The significance of *Eem* has been extolled in *Sri Vidya* tradition.

In fact, the word *Harinim* in the first *Rk* contains the letters *Ha*, *Ra* and *Eem* which are indicative of the *Maya Bija Hreem* which is again known as *Sakti Pranava* (equal to *Aum*)--which helps in removing the enticing attraction of *Maya*.

Granter and Dispeller

The first word of the *Sukta*, *Hiranya Varnam* is redolent of *Hiranyagarbha* or *Brahma* who is indicated by the letter *Ka*. The word *Hari* (in *Harinim*) denotes, *inter alia*, *Indra* who is represented by the syllable *La*. The word *Harinim* also contains *Eem*. Thus, the first two words are indicative of the *Bijakshara Kleem* which is known as *Kemaraja Bija*, capable of granting all the desires initially, and finally dispelling all the desires including

passion and lust from the mind. Among the *Dasamahavidya* goddesses, *Kamala* represents *Lakshmi* and her monosyllabled *Mantra* is *Kleem*.

In the entire *Sri Sukta*, the most oft-repeated word is *Padma*, meaning lotus. It occurs in many combinations in five out of the 15 *Rks* (*pushkarini* also means lotus). In fact, the supplementary verses which are also included for recitation, besides the 15 *Rks*, contain verses where the word *padma* occurs abundantly.

The lotus is a favourite of *Lakshmi* who is pleased to be associated with it. *Brahma* himself came out of the lotus from the navel of *Lord Vishnu* and thus the lotus was his predecessor. While all of creation is the handiwork of *Brahma*, based on *Karmic* balance (*Vasana Srishti*), the lotus was first created by the Supreme Lord himself out of his *chit* (consciousness).

Thus, the Lotus represents pure *chit*, as also purity bereft of any *Karmic* influence. Further, as the lotus has also come out of the same origin, that is, the milky ocean as *Lakshmi* herself, both have been associated as brother and sister.

Fire of Knowledge

The first two *Rks* esoterically represent a call to the fire of knowledge (*Jnanagni*) or the *Kundalini* power to help in the descent of the supreme consciousness in the devotee's heart. When the *Kundalini* awakes and consciousness rises and courses through the *sushumna nadi*, she is described as being effulgent like a streak of lightning and also of the golden yellow colour in the midst of the flame of the fire (*Vaisvanara*).

In fact, when the *Vedic* chanting is done with *stara* in the upward and downward accentuation of syllables, it has the same effect as control of breath (*Pranayama*) with the result a number of *nadis* (subtle nerves) get activated (*nadi chalanam*) which help in the arousal of the *Kundalini Sakti*, the conscious infinite power which lies slumbering underneath the spine (*muladhara*). The vital air (*prana-elan vitala*) also gets rechannelled resulting in maintenance of good health.

Grace of Maha Maya

The words *Hiranya Prakaram* in the fourth *Rk* and *Suryam Hirannmayim Lakshmi* in the 13th *Rk*, are suggestive of the contents of one of the *mantras* of *Mundakopanishad* where the *rishi* prays to the Sun representing the supreme consciousness to remove

Maya's alluring golden covering (here termed as *Prakaram*). Lakshmi or wealth is the main elusive but alluring temptation which forms the principal stumbling block to spiritual evolution. It is possible to overcome it only by the grace of *Maha Maya* (Lakshmi) herself.

The main nature of the Supreme Being (*Para Brahman*) has been described in the scriptures as consciousness and bliss (*chit* and *ananda*). *Para Sakti* is described as having arisen from the fire of consciousness. Lakshmi is the same as *Para Sakti* as she is described in *Sri Sukt* as *Esvarim sarva bhutanam*--the all powerful controller of all beings.

As already mentioned, the first two *Rks* which are indirectly addressed to Lakshmi, through the mediation of Agni, represent an invocation to the highest consciousness. In *Rk* 4, the beginning word *Kaam* represents absolute bliss (*ananda*). It is further reinforced by the words *Truptam* (one who is in constant bliss and thus contented) and *Tarpayantim* (one who gladdens and makes all happy). The word *chandram* in *Rk* 1, 5 and 14 also means the one who gives delight to people, just like the moon. Thus, it is clearly indicated that Lakshmi is not different from the

supreme being (*Brahman*) of the nature of consciousness and bliss.

Identical with *Atman*

The fact that *Lakshmi* is not only the *Parabrahman* but identical with *Atman* or the Self is indicated in *Rk* 3. The word *Rathamadhyam* (one who is in the midst of chariots--one of the constituents of an army) also denotes the one who is seated in the body as *Atman* or Self.

In the *Kathopanishad*, the body has been symbolised as a chariot and the Self (*Atman*) as sitting in that chariot. Thus, the undercurrent purport of *Sri Sukta* is to propitiate the *Brahman*, the Supreme Self in the form of *Lakshmi* and to attain the highest desirable riches that is, *Moksha Lakshmi* (liberation). The word *Asva Purvam* also denotes that while the *Atman* is immutable, the body is *Asva* (will not remain tomorrow).

Auspicious Qualities

The various *Res* also are narrative of the various auspicious qualities of *Lakshmi* as detailed below.

1. The words like *Hiranyavarṇam*, *Jvalantim*, *Prabhasam*, *Adityavarṇe*, *Suryam* signify the unparalleled effulgence and brilliance of the divine mother, which constitute the inherent beauty of the mother. The *Atman* has been

described as the quintessence of all beauty, in the scriptures (*Satyam*, *Sivam*, *Sundaram*).

2. The word *Harinim* has got, *inter alia*, the meaning--one who is capable of dispelling all our sins (*Papanasini*).

3. As told earlier, *Chandram* means the one who delights all hearts like the moon (*Abladini*).

4. The word *Lakshminim* shows that the goddess is endowed with all excellent features as prescribed in *Samudrika Sastra*.

5. *Rk* 3 shows *Lakshmi* is the Self of all beings (*Rathamadyam*--*Atma bhuta*).

6. The words *Ardram* and *Hastinada prabhodinim* connote the impatiently gushing compassion (*Dayarupini*) of the mother.

Though it looks somewhat farfetched, Ranganatha Muni has given a lovable interpretation for *Hastinada Prabodhinim*. According to *Pothanna Bhagavatam* in Telugu, Lord Hari heard the distress call of the elephant (whose leg was caught in the jaws of a crocodile). In hastening to the side of the elephant, he left without taking any of his weapons, such as the mace or the *Sudarshana Chakra*. Ranganatha Muni says that *Lakshmi* gets alerted (awakened) by such calls in distress as that of

Gajendra. The one who hastens much quicker than Lord Vishnu for protecting the devotees in distress is Goddess Lakshmi.

7. *Padme Sthitam* in Rk 4 denotes that Lakshmi is not far to seek but very much seated in the lotus of our hearts (*Hridaya-nivasini*).

8. *Udaram* in Rk 5 denotes that she is generous.

9. Rk 7 indicates that Lakshmi is capable of bestowing fame (on account of learning and riches) and prosperity.

10. Rk 8 denotes that Lakshmi is capable of weeding out all the negative factors (*Alakshmi*) which obstruct the way to prosperity.

11. The words *gandhadvaram* and *nityapushtam* in Rk 9 remind one of the *Mrityunjaya mantra*, *Triyambakam Yajamabe...*

12. Rk 10 connotes that Lakshmi can give the powers of materialising whatever is expressed by speech (*vak-siddhi*) and granting all enjoyments (*Bhoga-prada*).

No list of the mother's excellent qualities can ever be complete as they are infinite.

13. The easiest way for liberation or God-realisation is absolute surrender (*saranagati*). The mother is the only refuge where the beings can confidently surrender themselves

(*saranya*). Hence Rk 5 speaks of surrender to the mother.

Conclusion

The *Sri Sukta* is of benefit to the chanter and the listener alike, as it will ensure purification of mind. Many people are worried about their short temper or immense anger which overwhelms them on occasions. It is said that the one who chants *Sri Sukta* daily will be easily able to get rid of anger, envy, greed and any bad thoughts which may arise.

Lakshmi is the doorway for all fragrance to enter and she always nourishes all things with her presence. Hence, this *mantra* is capable of bestowing long life, bereft of diseases.

It has been my personal experience that even ugly looking old men who were given to daily recitation were found to develop a divine glow and beauty in their face. Lakshmi is capable of endowing one with beauty, charm, nobility of character and a charismatic personality.

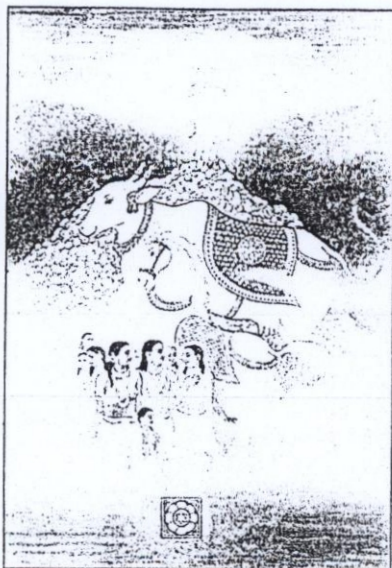
The various material benefits that accrue through recitation of *Sri Sukta* have been summed up in a supplemental verse as "riches, prosperity, divine effulgence, good health, food grains, money, cows, horses, plenty of sons and a long life of hundred years." □



1. O God Agni, bring forth for me Goddess Lakshmi also known as Chandra and Hiranmayee, washing away our sins and adorned by jewels of gold and silver!

The devotee appeals to the mystic fire, Agni (Jataveda), to invite unto him Goddess Lakshmi. (symbolising good fortune), resplendent like gold, wearing garlands of gold and silver, soothingly delightful, with the soft radiance of the moon and the complexion of gold-hued doe.





2. *O ye mystic fire, transport unto me that goddess of good fortune, who will never abandon me and whose presence obtains for me gold, cows, horses and men.*

The *sadhaka* describes goddess Sri as one who bestows wealth—herds of cows (for nutrition), horses (for transportation) and teams of men (for fellowship). Furthering his prayer he appeals to Agni to bring unto him Goddess Lakshmi who will never leave her devotee.

3. *Horses ahead and chariots in the centre, the procession of the mother-goddess draws near. Her arrival is proclaimed by the trumpet of elephants. May I seek the proximity of this shining goddess, may the goddess come close to me.*

The verse conjures up the vision of the goddess, in answer to the devotee's prayer, arriving in splendour. The horses symbolise the sense-functions of the devotee. The 'chariot' suggests the body. Lakshmi resides in the heart of all beings, and thus she is *ratha-madhyā*. The 'elephant' is the symbol of ego. Its calling is the appeal for divine help.



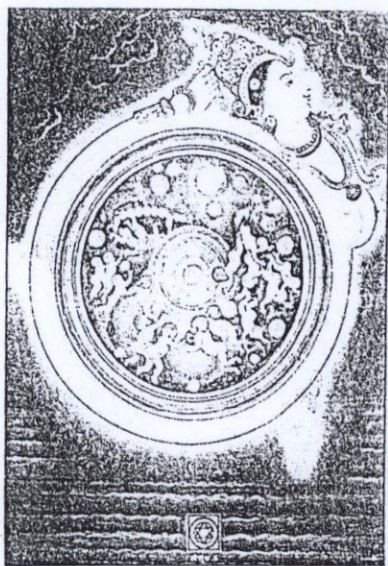


4. *I invoke here the presence of that goddess of wealth who is the absolute, who smiles benevolently, who is of the form of gold, cool but beaming brightly, content but fulfilling the desires of devotees, seated on the lotus (universe), and having the complexion of lotus.*

This verse describes the goddess as the highest absolute divinity, verily the *Brahman*, who may be realised in one's own heart. The lotus refers to the heart where she resides. She has no desires to be fulfilled, but is quick to satisfy the desires of her devotees. A golden aura surrounds her.

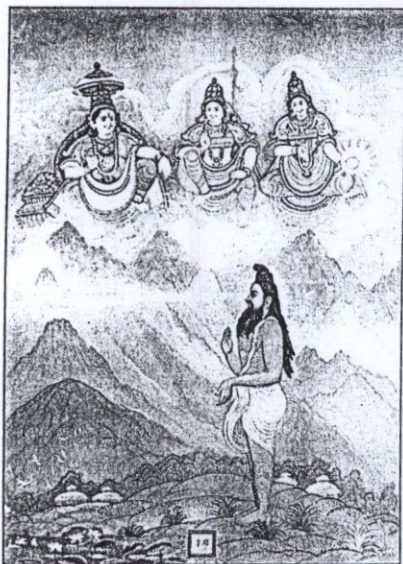
5. *I seek refuge in this goddess, who enlightens us (like the moon), effulgent, brilliantly renowned, verily the prosperity of the world, possessed of the gods, generous, and surrounded by lotuses. I have sought ye so that my misfortune may appear.*

Devi refers to one who is like a sun and is of the form of the red letter *eem*, capable of initially granting all desires and finally fulfilling them all, including lust and passion. The devotee appeals to Sri, shining like the moon, to rid him of his misfortunes.



6. *Sun-splendoured one, out of your penance (or will) sprang forth the bilva tree that is dear unto you. It was then that its fruits, by your grace, attained celebrity/fame. May they dispel the veil of ignorance and a host of impediments, and push out internal and external misfortunes.*

Born of the penance of Goddess Lakshmi, the fruit of the *bilva* tree (wood-apple tree) cleanses the body and mind alike. The devotee prays to the Goddess of *Bilva* (Lakshmi) to cleanse his ignorance and other impurities with her sun-like brilliance.



7. *May the friend of god Kubera, and fame (Keerti), along with the jewel Manimalini, approach me. Born am I into this kingdom, and may he (the friend of God) grant me celebrity and prosperity.*

This verse seeks Lakshmi her grace, prosperity, celebrity and happiness. Prosperity is personified as Kubera, celebrity as *Keerti*, and happiness as *Manimalini*. The devotee seeks the grace of these three divinities through Lakshmi to bring prosperity, fame and plenty to his motherland.

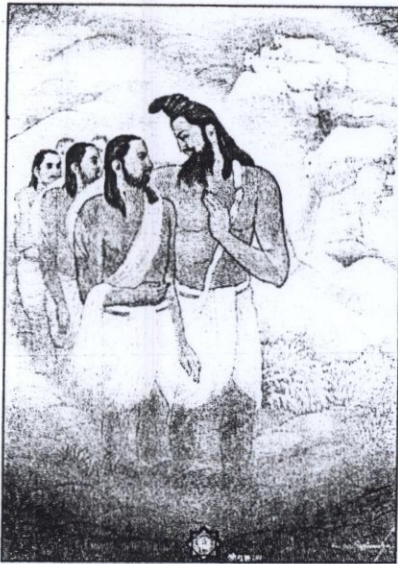
8. *May I drive away misfortune in the shape of hunger and thirst! O ye goddess, banish from my home ill-luck and want!*

This verse is addressed to Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, seeking her help in banishing ill-luck and poverty personified by the elder sister Jyeshta. The devotee prays: "Let the impurities like hunger, thirst, misfortune and failure that mark the presence of *Jyeshta* be driven out of my house by the grace and presence of Goddess Lakshmi".



9. *I invoke the presence here of Sri, the goddess of prosperity, who is verily the earth, hard to injure, ever nourished, endowed with the abundance of cattle, and the ruler of all creatures.*

This verse is addressed to mother-earth (Bhudevi) as the visible representation of Lakshmi. The devotee is praying to the goddess who is the very embodiment of earth. She is the ruler of all creatures, enduring and with infinite forbearance she nourishes and sustains all the living beings.



10. *May I obtain (by your grace) the resolves of mind, wishes, and truth in utterance; and may wealth of cattle, abundant food, wealth, and good name settle in me (who is your devotee).*

Now that there is an abundance of wealth of cattle and food grains because of the grace of the goddess, the devotee is praying to her further that his resolve to live uprightly by means of truth, honesty and good-will towards his fellow men be materialised.

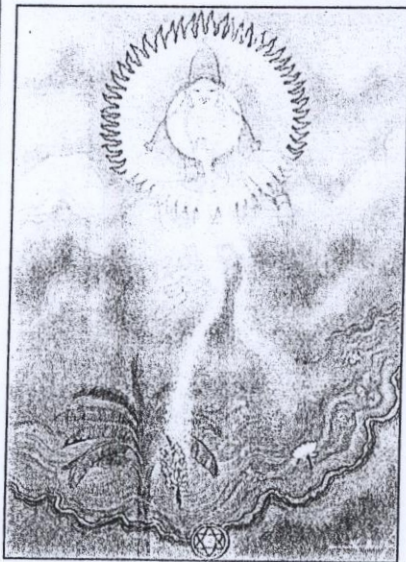
11. *The goddess had you for a son, and hence O Kardama, reside in me and establish in my abode thy mother, the goddess of prosperity, who wears a garland of lotuses.*

The devotee is inviting *Prajapati* Kardama who is the *manasaputra* of Goddess Lakshmi to reside with him. Seeking her son the goddess would follow Kardama and establish herself with the devotee.



12. *May the waters produce amiable effects: O Chikleeta, come and dwell in my abode! And make thy mother, the goddess of prosperity, abide in my household.*

The devotee is praying to the *rishi* Chikleeta, the *manasaputra* of the goddess, to stay beside him so that his mother, the goddess of prosperity (who in the form of life- sustaining waters) may come and stay beside him. Love, care, respect and understanding blossom out of these waters that brings about happiness in these relationships.



13. *O ye mystic fire, transport unto me Lakshmi, who radiates compassion, who is bright like the sun, wearing garlands of gold, attended by elephants and nourishing the whole world.*

The devotee prays to mystic fire, Agni, to bring forth Goddess Sri who resides in the sun and nurtures the world.



14. *O ye mystic fire, transport unto me Lakshmi on golden hue, dwelling in the lunar orb, holding the mace in her hand and wearing the garland of lotus flowers.*

In this verse Goddess Sri is invoked in the lunar orb (*Chandramandala*), glowing brilliant and lustrous like the moon. This verse addresses Agni, appealing to him to bring unto the devotee the goddess who brings prosperity.

15. *O mystic fire, transport unto me Lakshmi, who leaves me not and from whom (viz., by whose grace, or on whose arrival) I may obtain abundant wealth, cattle, horses, maids and menfolk (fellow beings).*

This verse is addressed to Agni, appealing to him to facilitate the arrival of Lakshmi who is the goddess of plenty and who grants the wealth of gold, cattle, horses and men. The devotee prays to the goddess to grace him with her inswerving attention on him. □



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