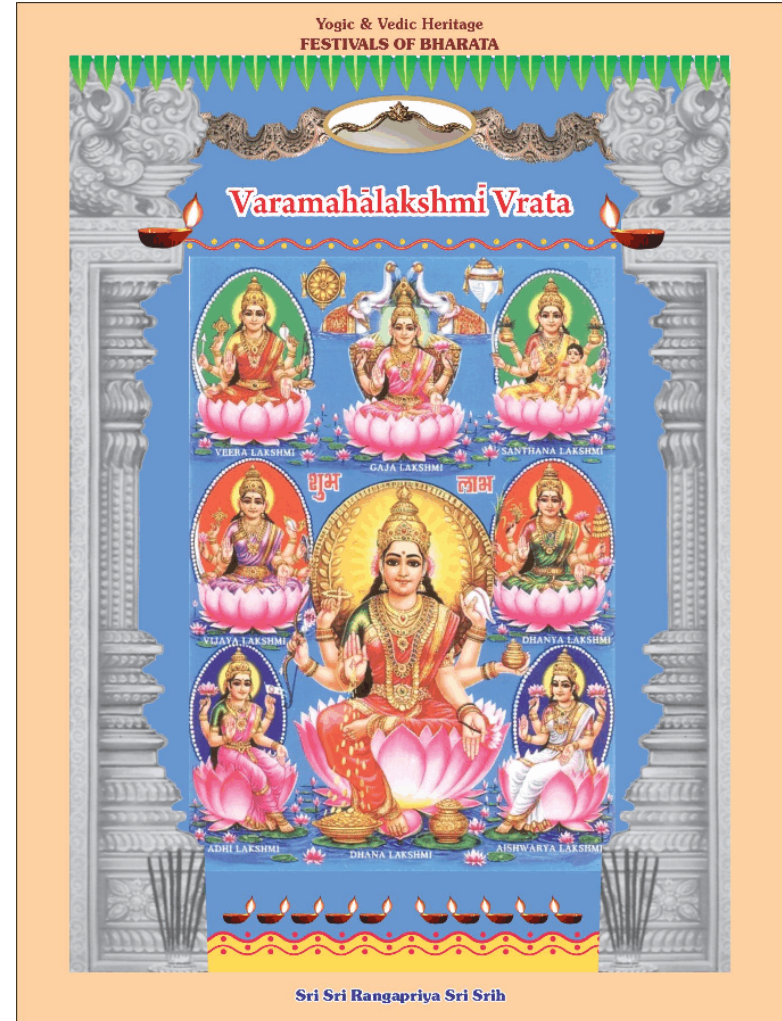




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We Dedicate this Sacred Treasure at the holy lotus feet of

Sriranga Mahaguru and SriMata

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अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ॡ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ	अं	अः
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	ḹ	e	ai	o	au	am	ah
क	ख	ख	ग	ङ											
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa											
च	छ	ज	झ	ञ											
ca	cha	ja	jha	ña											
ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण											
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa											
त	थ	द	ध	न											
ta	tha	da	dha	na											
प	फ	ब	भ	म											
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma											
य	र	ल	व	श	ष	स	ह								
ya	ra	la	va	śa	sha	sa	ha								

Example:

क	का	कि	की	कु	कू	कृ	कृ	क्लृ	के	कै	को	कौ	कं	कः
ka	kā	ki	kī	ku	kū	kṛ	kṛ	klṛ	ke	kai	ko	kau	kam	kah



Varamahālakshmīvrata

Varamahālakshmīvrata is considered as one of the most famous *vratas* observed in the month of *śrāvaṇa*. In case the month of *śrāvaṇa* occurs twice in the form of *nija* and *adhika* (regular and intercalary), this *Vrata* is observed only in the *nija śrāvaṇa*. Even though it is not enjoined among the regular *vratas* like *Ekādaśī*, *Śivarātri* etc which should be observed by all, this *vrata* is observed to please Goddess *Jaganmātā* with great devotion and religious fervour by a large number of devotees in our country.

There is a *vidhi* which stipulates that this *vrata* should be observed on a *Friday* which is nearest to the *Pūrṇimā* of the month of *śrāvaṇa*.

शुक्ले श्रावणिके मासे पूर्णिमोपान्त्यभार्गवे ।
वरलक्ष्म्या व्रतं कार्यं सर्वसिद्धिप्रदायकम् ॥

नभोमासे पूर्णिमायां अन्तिकस्थे भृगोर्दिने ।

मत्पूजा तत्र कर्तव्या सर्वसिद्धिप्रदायिनी ॥

व्रतरत्न page 110-116

Sāstras command that, *Varamahālakshmī* should be worshipped on the day of *śrāvaṇa Śukla Pūrṇima* when the planet *śukra* is shining in the eastern sky.

There is also an opinion that this *Vrata* should be celebrated on the second Friday of *śrāvaṇa Śuklapaksha*. But, the practice of celebrating this *Vrata* on other Fridays of *śrāvaṇa Śuklapaksha* is also there.

The deity worshipped in this *Vrata* is *Varamahālakshmī*. As she grants boons, and as she is also a superior goddess, she is called *Varamahālakshmī*. (वरदा महालक्ष्मीः, वरा च लक्ष्मीश्च). We find this name recited in '*Devī aṣṭottaranāmastotra*' as वरलक्ष्मीं वसुप्रदाम्."

She is the mother of all living creatures and she blesses everyone with everything auspicious and the best, and therefore is referred to as '*lokamātā*' (mother of the universe) and '*maṅgaladevatā*' (auspicious goddess) etc. The words '*śrīh*' and '*Lakshmīh*' stand for all the best things which are being desired for by all. Therefore she is revered by one and all. Wisdom says that she is worthy of worship by all. Thoughtless persons indulge in deriding and insulting her and her holy names,

taking them only in a narrow sense. This is made clear by one or two examples. A leader once proclaimed in a public gathering thus:—

“I had been to *Badarikāśrama* a few days ago. I had the *darśan* of only Lord *Nārāyaṇa*. I did not have the *darśan* of *Lakshmīdevī* at all because I do not crave for *Lakshmī* or wealth. What I want is the well being and prosperity of people”.

Once, *Śrīraṅgamahāguru* blessed the house of a devotee by naming it ‘*Lakshmīvilāsam*’. A person who fancied himself to be a scholar, happened to look at the name board in front of the house of the devotee, and ridiculed with a remark—“The people who live in this house are only after money. They do not have love of knowledge. They are not interested in social service. That is why names like ‘*vidyāvilāsam*’ or ‘*sevāsadanam*’ did not occur to them. Their only aim is to make money and it is clearly suggested by the name given to the house.”

Even in ancient times some people have used derogatory words referring to HER without discerning the divine and the grand sense pervading the word ‘*Lakshmī*’. Poet *Bāṇa* in the chapter ‘*sukanāsopadesa*’ of *kādambarī* says “When this *Lakshmī* was born in the ocean of milk she obtained passion (red color and lust) from the tender leaves of *pārijāta* and crookedness from the digit of the moon

(darker half of moon), fickleness from *uccaiśśravas* (the divine horse), seductive power from *kālakūṭa* poison, haughtiness from *madirā* (intoxicating liquor) and extreme harshness from the *kaustubha* (divine gem.). She has acquired all these because of her association with them. There is no other *anāryā* (dishonourable person) like her”. (इयं लक्ष्मीःक्षीरसागरात् पारिजातपल्लवेभ्यो रागम्, इन्दुशकलादेकान्तवक्रताम्, उच्चैश्श्रवसः चञ्चलतां, कालकूटान्मोहनशक्तिं, मदिरायाः मदं, कौस्तुभमणेः अतिनैष्ठुर्यं, इत्येतानि सहवासपरिचयात् गृहीत्वैव उद्गता... अनार्या (कादम्बरी-शुकनासोपदेश)

The poet intends to state that money makes one haughty, it causes jealousy, love and hatred, crookedness of mind, seductiveness, haughtiness, and harshness. Though he wishes to drive home this point, it is foolishness on his part to decry the great Goddess, as that very Goddess *VidyāLakshmī* is the cause of all his prosperity and poetic talent.

Some people proclaim "I do not desire money. I need the help of people, I wish the wellness of the world, I desire for success in my endeavors and *mukti*."

All the things they desire viz., wealth of human resources, wealth of character, wealth of success in their endeavors, wealth of development of the world and *moksha* are all true forms of Lakshmi and are only a small part of the great glories of the great

Goddess *MahāLakshmi*, and unfortunately it is not noted by them.

The *āgama śāstras* say that *DhanaLakshmi* (wealth), *DhānyaLakshmi* (cereals), *SantānaLakshmi* (progeny), *VidyāLakshmi* (knowledge), *ShauryaLakshmi* (valour), *KīrtiLakshmi* (fame), *SaumyaLakshmi* (gentle character-benign) and *VijayaLakshmi* (victory) are all forms of goddesses *AshṭaLakshmi* (*Lakshmi* of eight forms) Also, the idols of these eight forms have been consecrated and established in a number of temples. We come across the words *SiddhaLakshmi* and *MokshaLakshmi* in vedic hymns. So, to talk disrespectfully of the *Jaganmāta* who grants all the desirable *Purushārthas* of people, is nothing but ignorance.

"Money brings along with it, arrogance, envy, jealousy, hatred and a host of other misfortunes. This wealth is also a form of *Lakshmi*. Therefore we condemn her," say some people. This is not correct. Because knowledge, age (youth), success, physical strength, support of people etc., cause arrogance in many people. For this reason all these do not deserve to be rejected. It is good judgment to accomplish the benefit of oneself and of the world from these. These are all glories of God and should be revered. This rule applies to money as well. It is also a *vibhūti* (a glory) of the mother of the universe.

One should use it for the attainment of *Dharma* and for rightful material enjoyment. “धनाद्धर्मं ततस्सुखं”. **Here we remember great words of Śrīraṅgamahāguru who said "If wealth can be useful in any way to attain the supreme truth, I will not turn away from that (wealth)".**

This opinion is also endorsed by the following *Subhashita*—

वक्त्राब्जे भाग्यलक्ष्मीः करतलकमले सर्वदा धान्यलक्ष्मीः
दोर्दण्डे वीरलक्ष्मीः हृदयसरसिजे भूतकारुण्यलक्ष्मीः ।
खड्गाग्रे शौर्यलक्ष्मीः निखिलगुणगणाडम्बरे कीर्तिलक्ष्मीः
सर्वाङ्गे सौम्यलक्ष्मीः सपदि भवतु मे धर्ममोक्षार्थसिद्धेः ॥

(Let *BhāgyaLakshmi* be on my lotus (shaped) face, *DhānyaLakshmi* (cereals) in my lotus shaped hands. *VīraLakshmi* (valour) in my shoulders, *BhūtadayāLakshmi* (compassion for all living creatures) in my lotus heart, *ŚauryaLakshmi* (heroism) at the tip of my sword and *KīrtiLakshmi* (fame) when I grandly exhibit the multitude of noble characters (qualities) and *SaumyaLakshmi* (handsomeness or beauty) be present immediately in all the parts of my body. And let all these *Lakshmis* settle in those parts at all the times for the attainment of *dharma* and *moksha*.) Even an *ātmasādhaka* and a *sanyāsī*, who have given up the desire for women, wealth fame or profit, aspire for the wealth of *ātmaguṇas* such as *Bhūtadayā*

(universal benevolence) *kshamā* (forgiveness), *anasūyā* (absence of jealousy) and the wealth of *moksha*. As all these are forms of *Lakshmī*, She is worshipful to them also, as she grants them all.

That is why it is said in the *Śrutis*, *smṛtis*, *purāṇas*, *Āgamas* and *Itihāsas*, that even *Brahma* and other gods, all *purushārtha* seekers and *siddhas* have worshipped *MahāLakshmī*. The three great *Ācāryas* viz. *Śaṅkara*, *Rāmānuja* and *Ānandatīrtha* and other *mahātmās* have sung the sweet devotional *stotras* of Goddess *Laksmī*.

We can note that the word *Lakshmīh* means one who is always watching (observing) everything. “लक्षयति सर्वं सदा इति लक्ष्मीः”. The word also indicates that she, the mother of the universe herself, is the consort of Lord *Nārāyaṇa* who is an eternal witness to all, and, in eternal union with him she stands as an all-knowing (Goddess) and a witness to all. **We respectfully recall here the explanation given by Śrīraṅgamahāguru who said "She bears the symbols (*lakshma*) of the Lord. She is *parabrahmamayī* (filled with the supreme spirit) and *parabrahmagṛhiṇī* (divine consort of the supreme spirit)".**

The famous epitbet (word) ‘*Śrīh*’ also clearly proclaims her excellence She tears apart all evils and makes the whole world happy by her noble

qualities. She dwells in the supreme spirit; she is the refuge to all the living beings. She listens to her praise sung by the devotees.

शृणाति निखिलान् दोषान् श्रिणाति च गुणैर्जगत् ।

श्रियते चाखिलैर्नित्यं श्रयते च परं पदम् ।

श्रयन्तीं श्रयमाणां च शृण्वतीं शृणतीमपि ॥

The words which denote her such as ‘*ramā*’ ‘*mā*’ ‘*Maṅgaladevatā*’, ‘*Kshīrasāgarakanyaka*’, ‘*Indirā*’ etc., proclaim this supreme greatness (glory) of her.

"*Purushottama* (Lord *Vishṇu*) is your divine consort, the Lord of the serpents who is the form of the *prāṇic* force, is your couch and seat, *Garuḍa* the *vedātma* (the soul of vedas) and the king of birds, is your vehicle, The *māyā* (the deluding power) which enchants the world is a veil of your sport, *Brahma* and the other *devas* with their consorts are your slaves; your very name ‘*Śrī*’ is the best among names . Who is equal to you? Who is greater than you? How is it possible to praise you?" All the divine forces such as *Gāyatrī*, *Sāvitṛī*, *Sarasvatī* are nothing but your various forms or glories.

Great sayings of *Ācāryas* such as—"You are famous by names viz *gīrdevata*, *garuḍadhvaja*'s wife, *Śākambharī*, *Śaśisekhara*'s consort; you sport in the acts of creation, sustenance and destruction. You are *parāśakti* (supreme power), and *parāprakṛti* (supreme nature). Everything

symbolized by feminity in this world is your own form. Who is equal to you?," proclaim that she is the cause of everything, is supreme, works together with the supreme entity, imperishable, the embodiment of all forces, and proficient in protecting all. *Varamahālaksmī vrata* is thus a great festival of worshipping such a great Goddess.

Devotees adore her as a supreme goddess, divine consort of *Nārāyaṇa* the *Paramapurusha*, *Akhilajaganmāta* (holy mother of all the words), *Anādisiddha* (accomplished without a beginning), *Ānandamayī* (filled with divine bliss), *Anantakalyāṇaḡaparipūrṇā* (who is perfect with and complete with infinite noble, benedictive qualities), the form of all power (*sarvaśaktisvarūpiṇī*), one who grants all the rightful desires of beings and the divine proprietress of everything (*sarveśvari*).

नमस्ते चिदचिद्गर्गसंरक्षणविचक्षणे ।

जगद्विधानशिल्पिन्यै विष्णुपत्न्यै नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

Also, devotees praise her and salute her thus - "Salutations to you, the one who is capable and proficient in protecting both the classes of *cit* (*jīva*-living beings) and *acit* (*jaḍa*-non-living things), the sustaining architect (*shilpiṇī*) of the universe, and the divine consort of Lord *Nārāyaṇa*". And in the scriptures which describe her greatness as

nityasiddha (eternally accomplished), *nityaśuddha* (eternally pure), *nityabuddha* (eternally wise), *nityamukta* (eternally free), and *maṅgaladevatā* (goddess of auspiciousness), and we see that she is depicted as the one who was born in the ocean of milk, the sister of the king of seven seas, the sister of the moon, the one who took birth in the sacred fire [sacrificial pit (*yajnakundā*)], and manifested in a lotus. etc. We see many such depictions in our *śāstras* and *purāṇas*. When rationalists come across such descriptions, naturally they raise a number of questions.

They may ask: "If *ŚrīLakshmī* is an eternally established principle where is the question of her being born? All those who take birth must die. We worship goddesses to escape from the states (changes) such as birth, growth and death. How can that very Goddess have such transformations?

"If she is the younger sister of the moon, he must be senior to her and if it is so, can't we worship him instead, who stays in the position of her *guru* as the supreme principle? Also, there is no unanimity regarding the theory of her birth. To say at one time that she is born in the ocean, and at another time to describe that she is born in the fire of sacrificial *yajna* and yet again to state that she is born in a lotus, only go to state that all these are stories fabricated at different times, or only poetic fancies.

On the other hand, if all these statements are true, she will be just like any other ordinary mortal, taking many births at different times.”

The incident of *devas* and *asuras* churning the ocean of milk for obtaining *amṛta* and this *maṅgalamūrti* (auspicious form) *Lakshmi* manifesting from the ocean, wedding Lord *Nārāyaṇa* and residing in his bosom, is renowned in the stories of the churning of the ocean quoted by the *purāṇas*. If this is true, the question that would arise is whether she was not the consort of Lord *Nārāyaṇa* before this incident. And thus many may think that all these statements could be fragments of imagination. There is no end to such speculations and arguments. So, the real meaning has to be gathered only from the enlightened people who possess divine knowledge and yogic experience. One can arrive at the conclusion only from the knowledge obtained by the blessings of the supreme Goddess. **Śrīraṅgamahāguru gave the (satisfactory) explanation which leaves no scope for delusion, doubt or deceit in this regard. We quote here the explanation bestowed by him.**

“The *samudramathana* (churning of the ocean) described in our *purāṇas* and *Itihāsas* is a beautiful and a divine metaphor. It is a didactic poetry that teaches the true meanings in an effective, faultless dignified, simple and a beautiful way. The

pondering of the *sādhakas* to obtain the divine nectar of supreme bliss (*paramanandamṛta*) by meditation is nothing but the churning of the ocean (*Dhyāna mathana*). “अन्तस्समुद्रे कवयो वयन्ति” “*manakkadalil vāḷavalla māyamanāḷa nambī*”. The *āranyokopanishat* refers to this as an upward churning (*ūrdvamukhamathana*). For such a churning, both the *daiva* and *āsura* forces should cooperate. “The backbone which is called ‘*merudanda*’ in the *Yogaśāstras* is the churning staff. The *kundalinī* or the pranic power (force) is the serpent *śesha* that cooperates as a churning rope for this marvellous churning of the ocean. While churning thus, the poison, which is great delusion and misery personified, is nothing but a great obstacle to *Yoga*, appears first. Valiant *mahādeva* swallows this this great obstacle in the form of great delusion and agony playfully and blesses the devotees. Next, the great obstacle of instability that is encountered by the *sādhakas* is removed by Lord *Nārāyaṇa* in the tortoise form, who (the tortoise) has subdued passions, and brings everything under control. This churning of (meditation) continues by the grace and power of God. Then, in the internal world (of *sādhakas*) many *siddhis* (alluring occult powers) show up. The divine cow ‘*Kāmadhenu*’, the divine tree ‘*kalpavṛksha*’, the divine elephant ‘*airāvata*’, and the divine damsels of

the heavens etc., are those *siddhis*. In this series, *Candra devatā* (The Moon) who is the form of the mind principle, appears. Afterwards *Varamahālakshmī* the mother of the universe, the supreme bliss and the supreme divine knowledge personified, appears. These are true yogic visions. Not imaginations. These are not the events of the physical world that occurred somewhere or during some period in the past. These are true *yogic* experiences (visions) that can be obtained by all the *sādhakas* during genuine *sādhana*, under the guidance of *Brahmajñānis*. They can be obtained even now and also in the future. Such yogis, by Her grace can also have the auspicious experience of *MahāLakshmī* merging in the heart of Lord *Nārāyaṇa*. Because she appears in the '*yoga bhūmi*' (inner world) after the appearance of *candra devatā*, she is called the younger sister of *candra*. Here there is no question (*Candra* or *Lakshmī* being) elder or younger at all.

As *ŚrīLakshmī* is seen (visualized) in the inner ocean of consciousness, and in the inner world of yogis, it is stated metaphorically that she was born as the daughter of the king of oceans. She has no physical changes such as birth, growth etc. As she is visualized as a result of spiritual *yajna*, it is said that she was born in the *yajnakundā*. As she

appears in all the lotuses such as *mūlādhāra* she is called as '*Padmasambhava*' (born of lotus).

Lakshmī, the eternal auspiciousness incarnate, is also called the *svayamvarapatnī* of *Nārāyaṇa* (i.e. the one who married *Nārāyaṇa* out of her pure will) by the *jñāni*'s, because, after bestowing *darśana* to the *sādhakas* first, she again bestows *darśana* from the lotus seat of *Nārāyaṇa*'s heart.

आविर्भावः कलशजलधावध्वरे वापि यस्याः

स्थानं यस्याः सरसिजवनं विष्णुवक्षःस्थलं वा ।

भूमा यस्या भुवनमखिलं देवि दिव्यं पदं वा

स्तोकप्रज्ञैरनवधिगुणा स्तूयसे सा कथं त्वं ॥ (श्रीवेदान्तदेशिकः- श्रीस्तुतिः)

(O goddess, you were born in the ocean of divine nectar. You (manifested) in the sacrificial fire of *yajna* too. Your residence is the lotus-lake. And also the bosom of lord *Nārāyaṇa*. Your extent is the whole universe and also the divine world. How can you, the one with limitless virtues, be praised by people of small intellect?)

The names *Padmā* and *kamalā* suit her very well. She appears in the lotuses of the inner heart. She holds lotuses in her hands. She resembles the lotus very much in her feet, the hands, the face and other parts of her divine auspicious body, and also in the divine fragrance of the body. She is *Padmāvatī* who is lotus all over.

पद्मप्रियां पद्महस्तां पद्माक्षीं पद्मसम्भवाम् ।

पद्मनाभप्रियां देवीं पद्मिनीं पद्मगन्धिनीम् ॥

पद्मप्रिये पद्मिनि पद्महस्ते पद्मालये पद्मदलायताक्षि।

विश्वप्रिये विष्णुमनोऽनुकूले त्वत्पादपद्मं मयि सन्निधत्स्व ॥

वाग्भूगौर्यादिभेदैर्विदुरिह मुनयो यां यदीयैश्च पुंसाम् ॥

(श्रीशङ्करः, विष्णुपादादिकेशान्तस्तुति)

She is *Gāyatrī*, *Sāvitrī*, *Sarasvatī*, and *Durgī*. *Śraddhā*, *Medhā*, *Kīrti* and many such other powers are her glories. Everything in the world that is feminine is hers and all that is masculine is of Lord *Nārāyaṇa*, the ultimate *puruṣa*. She is the true form of the supreme light (*Parañjyotisvarūpa*) without any gender discrimination.

देवे यन्मानुषेषु पुंनामा भगवान् हरिः ।

स्त्रीनाम्नी श्रीश्च विज्ञेया नानयोर्विद्यते परम् ॥ (विष्णुपारण 1-8)

She co-operates with *ŚrīmanNārāyaṇa* in the sport of the cosmos, displaying her *avatāra līlas* (sports of incarnation). She is adorned by other names viz *Bhārgavi* (born in the *Bhṛgu* family) *Jānakī* (daughter of king *Janaka*), *Vaidarbhī* (daughter of king of *vidarbha* and also known as *Rukmiṇī*).

राघवत्वेऽभवत्सीता रुक्मिणी कृष्णजन्मनि ।

अन्येषु चावतारेषु विष्णोरेषानपायिनी ॥ (विष्णुपुराण 1-9)

यद्भावेषु पृथग्विधेष्वनुगुणान् भावान् स्वयं बिभ्रती

यद्धर्मैरिह धर्मिणी विहरते नानाकृतिर्नायिका ॥

(वेदान्तदेशिकः-दशावतारस्तोत्र 1)

(This *Jagannāyikā* (leader of the universe) *MahāLakshmi* sports in different *bhāvas*, playing the role of *Sahadharminī* (lawful wife) of the Lord by shouldering his *dharma*s and assuming various modes during the manifold dispositions of Lord *Nārāyaṇa*.)

It is stated figuratively only that God descends (takes incarnations), when he manifests himself for the good of the world, even though he is a *nityasvarūpa* (of eternal true form) and does not undergo changes such as birth or growth.

उत्पन्नः प्रोच्यते विद्वन् नित्य एवोपचारतः (विष्णुपुराण 1-3-4)

This principle applies to Goddess *MahāLakshmi* as well.

Our salutations in great reverence to the *yogapurusha* and his consort *yoga Lakshmi*, who unravelled the knot of our doubts by explaining the true meaning (of *MahāLakshmi*)

Utsava and pūjāvidhi:

So far we discussed in detail the divine form of *Varamahālakshmi*. Now we shall discuss the modalities of observing this festival.

Some staunch devotees observe fast till the evening on the day of the festival and worship *Jaganmāta Lakshmi*, invoking her in *Kalāśas*, and some other devotees, without those observances simply worship her and observe the festival. As we

have already noted, this *vrata* is suitably observed on a *Friday* which is nearest to the full moon day of *śrāvaṇa*.

शुक्ले श्रावणिके मासे पूर्णिमोपान्त्यभार्गवे ।

वरलक्ष्या व्रतं कार्यं सर्वमाङ्गल्यसिद्धये ॥

In case the month of *śrāvaṇa* happens to be an *adhikamāsa* the festival should not be celebrated. The *Vrata* should be celebrated in the regular *śrāvaṇa* only.

***PūjāVidhi* (Precepts of worship)**

Those who have fealty to the *vrata* should invoke the *Devi* in a holy *kalaśa* or in an idol with proper *saṅkalpa* and worship her. According to the procedures set by *bhavishyottara purāṇa*, devotees along with their family members should do *saṅkalpa* praying for long life, good health, progeny, wealth, safety, steadfastness, success, and all other auspicious things, and offer *shoḍaśopacāras* like *Dhyāna* etc. to *Śrīmāta*. In this *Mahāpūja* after the *Kalaśa pūja* and *pīṭha pūja*, a *tantupuñja* (heap of threads) made of brand new golden coloured threads numbering twelve and having twelve knots should be installed and the goddess is to be invoked in the heap and worshipped. Goddess can also be invoked in the idol of *Śrīdevi*, and/or in a *pūrṇakumbha*, bedecked with sandal paste, flowers and tender leaves, or in a pot which is filled with unbroken rice

or wheat grains. There is also a custom of invoking the Goddess in one or two of the above three arrangements. Then the *āṅgapūja* (worship to the parts of the idol), *pushpa pūjā* (worship with flowers), and the worship with leaves should be offered to her with the recitation of the names of *Ramā*, *MahāLakshmī* etc. ending with *Namah*, or, *aṣṭottara pūja* should offered with the recitation of the names *Prakriti* etc. ending in *Namah* And *pūja* should be offered to the Goddess invoked in the *tantupuñja* with the twelve recitations beginning with name *Ramā* and ending in the salutary word *Namah*. Devotees who can afford, may prepare a sweet dish called *Sajjappa* and offer it to the Goddess as a special *naivedya*.

In this *Vrata*, the *tantupūja* forms a very important part. *Jaganmāta* who herself is present in the form of the holy thread, accepts the worship. At the end of the *pūja*, after praying her with earnest devotion to grant all the desires, and after obtaining her permission, the thread should be saluted and tied to the right wrist. And again with her permission, the old thread should be discarded. The prayer hymn pertaining to these are—

दारिद्र्यसागरे मग्ना भीताहं भवभीतिः।

दोरं गृह्णामि कमले ममाभीष्टप्रदा भव ॥

(I am drowned in the ocean of poverty. The ocean of life is frightening me. O *Kamalādevi*! I am

taking this worshipped thread. Kindly grant me my desires)

कमले दोररूपेण स्थिते सर्वाघहारिणि ।
नमस्त्रैलोक्यजननि दारिद्र्य मे निवारय ॥

(*Kamalādevi!*, you are present in this *dora* (sacred thread)! You are the destroyer of all sins! O *trilokajanani!* (mother of the three worlds)! I salute you. Remove my poverty)

द्वादशग्रन्थिसंयुक्तं कृतं द्वादशतन्तुभिः ।
धारयामि महादेवि सूत्रं ते सर्वमङ्गले ॥

(O *Sarvamāṅgaladevatā*, I now wear your *dora* which is made of twelve knots and twelve threads)

दामोदरि नमस्तेस्तु नमस्ते लोकनायकि ।
नमस्तेऽस्तु महालक्ष्मि त्राहि मां परमेश्वरि ॥

(O consort of Lord *Dāmodara!* I salute you. O Proprietress of the world!, I salute you. O *MahāLakshmī! Parameśvarī*, I bow to you. Protect me).

The number of flour cakes to be offered to *devī* are twelve. After offering the worship with flowers in cupped hands united to the goddess, twelve cakes should be offered to a devout Brahmin who is well versed in the *vedas* and who has *bhakti* in *Śrīdevi*. “It is the mother of the universe herself who receives this gift (*dāna*), and again it is only SHE who gifts them (to others). She alone makes (helps) both (the giver and the receiver) to cross (the ocean

of life)" — With this devotion, this auspicious ritual should be accomplished with deep absorption in the worship.

इन्दिरा प्रतिगृह्णातु इन्दिरा वै ददाति च ।

इन्दिरा तारिकोभाभ्यां इन्दिरायै नमो नमः ॥

Among the vedic hymns chanted in this *pūja*, *Śrīsūkta* is the most important vedic hymn. The hymns of this *sūkta* are chanted in all of the important *upacāras*. A special *pūja* for the Goddess is offered in the evening.

An analysis of the *pūjāvidhi* (precepts of worship)

When we look at the modalities of the *Varamahālakshmī pūja*, we find that some of the aspects of the *pūja* need explanation.

Why should *Varamahālakshmī vrata* be celebrated only on the Friday which is nearest to *śrāvaṇa Pūrṇima*? This is the first question. The great sages have stipulated certain specific days for various festivals, which are conducive both externally and internally to the natural opening up of special spiritual centers related to the deity being worshipped, and when the grace of that deity specially flows in the *sādhaka*. This is the common principle which should be remembered here also.

It is famous both in scriptures and tradition that the month of *śrāvaṇa* and Saturday are very auspicious for the worship of *Mahāviṣṇu*, and the

month of *Kārtika* and Mondays are auspicious days for the worship of Lord *Śiva*. And thus it is natural (and also appropriate) to worship *Jaganmāta Śrīdevī*, the consort of Lord *Nārāyaṇa*, specially in the month of *śrāvaṇa* itself, as this month is dear to him.

नमस्ते चिदचिद्दर्शसंरक्षणविचक्षणे ।

जगद्विधानशिल्पिन्यै विष्णुपत्न्यै नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

विश्वप्रिये विष्णुमनोनूकूले त्वत्पादपद्मं मयि सन्निधत्स्व

Of the two fortnights, the *Śukla paksha* is dear to *devas*. The dark half is dear to the manes. And it is very appropriate to worship *Śrīramādevī* who is *devadevī* (goddess of gods) and *maṅgaladevatā*, in the *Śuklapaksha* itself.

Why should the special pooja be done on Friday only? We have to remember the *tattva* that *Bhārgava (sukra) nadi* is related to *Śrīgranthi* which is between the eyebrows. *MahāLakshmī*, along with *Dhātā* and *Vidhātā*, incarnated as the daughter of the couple viz. sage *Bhṛgu* and his wife *Khyāti*. She takes the incarnation as the eternal divine consort of the immutable Lord *Nārāyaṇa* who pervades everything. She does so for the welfare of her devotees, both in the internal and the external spheres. One of her many incarnations is the incarnation of '*Bhārgavī*'. For this reason also *Bhārgavavāsara* (Friday) is dear to her. This sacred legend may be reflected upon here.

देवौ धातृविधातारौ भृगोः ख्यातिरसूयत ।

श्रियं च देवदेवस्य पत्नी नारायणस्य या ।

नित्यैवैषा जगन्माता विष्णोः श्रीरनपायिनी ।

यथा सर्वगतो विष्णुः तथैवेयं द्विजोत्तम ॥

(विष्णुपुराण 1-8-15)

Not only the Fridays in the month of *śrāvaṇa* but Fridays of all the months are dear to *Śrīdevī*. The conjunction time of the day and the evening (i.e. the evening twilight) is naturally auspicious for the union of *prāṇa* and *apāna*, and more so for meditating upon her. *Sandhyā*, *Sāvitṛī*, *Gāyatrī*, *Sarasvatī* - all these are indeed her own forms. *Pūrṇima* is the day when the moon appears gloriously with all the digits, and the Friday that is near to it is still more an auspicious time for her *Pūja*. That is the time when *Lakshmī* enters our houses. The doors of the houses should be kept open at that time. Houses should be decorated with the imprints of *Lakshmī*'s lotus feet.

Why should she be worshipped in a twelve threaded *dora* only?

This matter is also in accordance to her *Vaishṇavībhāva*. Twelve is a powerful mystic number dear to Lord *Vāsudeva*. He is the reigning deity of the twelve months who inspires the twelve suns with twelve divine names *Keśava* etc.

एवं सर्वत्र निच्छिद्रं नामद्वादशपञ्जरम् ।

प्रविष्टोऽहं न मे किञ्चिद्भयमस्ति कदाचन ॥

– Says the *Nāmadvādaśapañjarikāstuti* in his praise.

His devotees put on *Dvādasordhvapundras*. The ‘*Vāsudevamahāmantra*’ furnished with twelve letters is one of the extensive great *mantras* prefixed with *praṇava*. Thus it is natural that *ŚrīVaramahālakshmī* who is *Dvādaśātmikā* and who is the *Parāśakti* of the Lord who is *Dvādaśātmaka* and who is in eternal union with *ŚrīmanNārāyaṇa*, receives *Dvādasanāmāvalipūjā* in twelve *tantu granthis*. As she is golden coloured, the rule that she should be invoked in a golden coloured twelve threaded *dora* is also equally natural.

हिरण्यवर्णा हरिणीं सुवर्णरजतस्रजाम् ।

Now about the special *naivedya* which is offered to her.

Sajjeyappa (a sweet dish made of wheat, sugar and ghee) and *modaka* (another sweet dish) are both endowed with distinct sweetness and complement the *Sātvikabhāva* (virtuous nature) in people. “सत्त्विका मधुरप्रियाः”. Goddess *Varamahālakshmī* is also “*suddhasattvamayī*” (full of pure noble nature). These eatables are filled with a *rasa* which is specially supportive of *ātmasukha*.” When we receive these as *prasāda* of *Śrīdevi*, their potential to induce the pleasure of material enjoyment and

bliss of emancipation (*bhogamokshaprada*) increases. “मुमुक्षोर्माधुर्यम्” We have to remember here that they also support the blooming of the *Śrīgranthi*.

Why should she be invoked in a holy water filled *kumbha*? Why should one invoke her in a *kumbha* filled with *akhaṇḍa* (unbroken) *tanḍula* (rice grain) and *Godhūma* (wheat)?

The part of our body from the neck to the top of the head is called ‘*kumbha*.’ ‘कण्ठादुपरिमूर्धान्त’. This part of the divine bodies of *Jnānis* in which the spiritual forces flow upwards is a divine pot itself, (*ūrdhvakumbha*). It is full of pleasant spiritual energy. So, the invoking of *Mahāyogeśvari*, the holy mother in the upright *pūrṇakumbha*, filled with holy water representative of the above, is naturally in accordance with the practice of *Yoga*. The pot filled with unbroken pure grain, stands for the principle that she is *DhānyaLakshmī*. And she is indeed the form of *paramānnahavishya* (pure sacrificial cooked rice) fit to be served for the enjoyment of the *devas*. These two *kumbhas* are symbolic of the vow ‘क्षुत्पिपासामलां ज्येष्ठामलक्ष्मीर्नाशयाम्यहम्’. (I shall destroy the *aLakshmī* (evil fortune, bad luck) called ‘*jyeshṭhā*’ associated with the impurity of hunger and thirst.) The tender leaves of banyan, mango, and other sacrificial trees used here to decorate the holy pots, stand for the ever fresh

brilliance, the double prosperity of the material world and spiritual welfare (*abhyudaya* and *niśśreyas*). Their very sight is also auspicious.

The *Śrīsūkta* which is chanted during her *pūja* is indeed a divine hymn which conveys the wealth of her all pervading total auspiciousness (*sarvamāṅgalyadevībhāva*). Just as the *Purushasūkta* is chanted in the worship of *ŚrīmanNārāyaṇa* with every service (like *Dhūpa*, *Dīpa*, *arcana* etc.), it is quite appropriate that *Śrīsūkta* is chanted during the worship of *MahāLakshmī* with every service. All the *purusharūpas* (male forms) belong to that *Paramapurusha* and all the *strīrūpas* (female forms) belong to the *parabrahmagṛhiṇī*

देवतिर्यङ्मनुष्येषु पुन्नामा भगवान्हरिः ।

स्त्रीनाम्नी श्रीश्च विज्ञेया नानयोर्विद्यते परम् ॥ (विष्णुपुराण 1-8-35)

Let us conclude this chapter on *Varamahālakshmī vrata* by devoutfully remembering the divine auspicious couple, who are celebrated by the sayings “माङ्गल्यं मङ्गलं विष्णुं वरेण्यमनघं शुचिम्” “पवित्राणां पवित्रं यो मङ्गलानां च मङ्गलम्” “रमा मङ्गलदेवता” etc.,

लक्ष्मीनारायणौ वन्दे जगतामादिदम्पती ।

सर्वकल्याणसिद्ध्यर्थं हृदयैक्यं सदाश्रितौ ॥

