



Lakshmi Purana

(Manabasa Gurubar Katha)

Translated into English by Dr. Jagannath Prasad Das in prose form

Salutations to thee, mother Kamala, daughter of the ocean. Salutations to thee, Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort. Salutations to Kamala, the benevolent, who looks after all beings, inert and living. He who listens to your life story with attention or remembers you with devotion is delivered of his poverty.

Here I narrate your story.

One day, sages Narada and Parashara, in the course of their travel, entered a village. It was Thursday in the month of Margashira and the village folk were celebrating the holy occasion, worshipping Lakshmi.

Narada asked Parashara, "What is this ritual? What is this *vrat* that Brahmin and Chandala alike are celebrating? Who are they worshipping and what are the rituals?"

Parashara said, "This is the worship of Lakshmi on the Dhanamanika Thursday. Margashira is the supreme among the months of the year and Thursday in this month is Lakshmi's favourite day. Of the Thursdays, the first

Thursday is specially important. If that day happens to be the tenth day of the bright fortnight, *Sudasha vrat* is performed on that day.”

Narada said, “Do tell me who has gained by observing the *vrat* and who has suffered ignoring Lakshmi.”

Parashara then narrated this story: One day Lakshmi told Jagannath (Vishnu) with folded hands, “Lord, it is my *vrat* day today and if you permit, I would go round the city.” Jagannath having agreed, Lakshmi bedecked herself in fine clothes and ornaments and jewellery; took the form of an old Brahmin woman and went to the house of a trader. There she asked the lady of the house, “How is it that you have not decorated the house for Mahalakshmi *vrat*?” The woman said, “Do tell me how and for whom the *vrat* is to be performed.” Lakshmi told her : “Wash the floor with cowdung and decorate it with rice paste. On a low table, spread some newly harvested paddy grains of white colour. Fill a *mana* (grain measure) with such grains and place it on the table. Wash three betel nuts in turmeric water and place them on the mana. Decorate the place with vegetables, flowers and coloured cloth. Then invoke Mahalakshmi with lamp and incense and make three offerings of meals. Prepare special pancakes and sweets and eat that Prasad after prayer. Many things are taboo for women during this period : giving Mahalakshmi’s Prasad to outsiders - even to a married daughter, beating the children, not cleaning the cooking vessels till all the black is gone, spreading the bed crooked, disobeying the in-laws, sleeping naked, applying oil, and so on. If it happens to be the last day of the dark fortnight on Thursday, a woman should not wash the mouth after meals, face south or west while eating, tie and dress hair in the evening, eat in a dark room, apply oil on the body after bath, be angry with or disobey the husband. Lakshmi does not leave the house of the woman who treats her husband as god, is of clean habits and shares her husband’s happiness and sorrow. Lakshmi shuns the house of the woman who is adulterous, lazy, dirty, quarrel some and disrespectful to the husband. The married woman has no future without her husband. If she does vain *vrats* leaving aside service to her husband, she is destined to be reborn as a child widow”.

So saying, Lakshmi asked the trader's wife to prepare for the *vrat* and went on to visit other houses. In the course of her visits, she entered the street where low caste *chandalas* lived and entered the house of a *chandala* woman Shriya on the outskirts of the town. Shriya, a devotee of Vishnu, had woken up early in the morning and had made preparations for worship with lotus flowers and offerings. She was now praying to Lakshmi to accept her devotions.

Lakshmi could not resist the lotus flowers and stepped on them. Thus appearing before the *chandala* woman she asked her to seek a boon from her. The *chandala* woman said, "Give me a hundred thousand cows, wealth befitting Kuvera, a son in my lap, ornaments for my arms, and immortality." Lakshmi said, "All these will be gifted to you, except immortality".

At this time, Jagannath and his elder brother Balaram were hunting in the forest. Balaram called Jagannath and said, "Look at your wife's conduct. She is now in a *chandala's* house. She goes to the huts of low-caste *hadis* and *panas* and comes back to the temple without even taking a bath. This she does everyday. She is supposed to care for the poor and so the *chandala* woman worships her. Well, if you are so fond of your wife, go and build her a palace in the Chandala Street. Listen to me and drive her out. It ill behoves you to have such a wife."

Jagannath said, "If we throw her out, we cannot get a wife like Lakshmi again. What we can do is to get her back into caste by paying a fine of five lakh rupees to the inhabitants of heaven. If she repeats this, we will throw her out of the temple. We may excuse her this once." Balaram said, "If your Lakshmi stays, I do not stay. A wife is like a pair of sandals. If you have your brother, you can have ten million wives. If you still feel for your wife, go and build a palace in the *Chandala* Street; don't come back to my great temple." Jagannath could take no more of this and they came to the main gate of the temple.

In the meantime, Lakshmi gave Shriya all she desired, a mansion of sandalwood, plenty of gold, and five sons. After this she returned to the temple to find the brothers sitting on the doorway. When she wanted to enter, Jagannath said, "We have nothing to do with you who have been to the *Chandala* Street. If it were only me, I would have excused you your transgression, but brother has seen this and has reprimanded me enough. You are the worst of sinners. You move about like a mad woman. You can not live in my house."

Lakshmi said, "Throw me out after giving me a divorce." Jagannath said, "In our caste, there is no system of divorce." Lakshmi said, "You got me out of the churning of the ocean and you had promised my father Varuna that you would excuse ten transgressions of mine. I have only committed one and that you do not tolerate." Jagannath said angrily, "Your father is just so much salt and he is roaring all the time. We had to build a wall around the temple to escape the noise."

Lakshmi said, "You want to throw me out since I stayed a while in the house of an untouchable. You talk of caste and since you are gods, every thing is excused. What about your own caste? You lived in a cowherd's house. You ate in Nima's house; you ate left over fruits from Jara. Both you brothers are therefore low caste, no less. If the wife commits a mistake, the husband must bear it. For one transgression, the master does not remove his servant."

Jagannath said, "I cannot disobey my brother. I will give you a daily ration for the time being and may be bring you back later after persuading brother." Lakshmi said, "I do not want a daily ration. I will leave like a helpless orphan. I will go to my father's house. Take away your ornaments and do not accuse me later." So saying Lakshmi took off all her ornaments and gave them to her husband. He said, "When a man sends away his wife, he gives her clothes and foods for six months. Take these ornaments, sell them and buy yourself clothes and foods." Lakshmi said, "When you get another wife, give her these ornaments. I leave like a lowly orphan. But I put

a curse on you. As true as the movement of sun and moon, you will have nothing to eat. For twelve years, you will be destitute and will get no food, water or clothes. When I, a *chandala* woman, serve you food then only you will get to eat.”

Lakshmi then left the temple and calling Vishwakarma asked him to build her a small hut. Vishwakarma built a palace with walls of gold and columns of coral and this pleased Lakshmi. She then summoned the eight Vetalas and asked them to ransack the kitchen and pantry in the temple and bring everything to her. When the Vetalas said they were afraid of Jagannath catching them in the act, Lakshmi asked Nidradevi to make the two brothers sleep till the next day. The Vetalas now brought everything to Lakshmi who found that they had not brought back the golden bejeweled beds on which the brothers slept. The Vetalas went back and brought these after throwing the two brothers on ordinary string beds, as also the costly garments of the brothers. Lakshmi then called Saraswati and asked her to go to every house and ask the householders not to give food and water to Jagannath.

When the brothers woke up, they found the place deserted and everything gone. Jagannath said, “This is what happens when Lakshmi leaves.” Balaram said, “Don’t say such things about a mere wife. If a wife is lost, does it mean that the husband has to go hungry?” They then went to the kitchen and the pantry, but there was nothing inside. They went to the Indradyumna tank, but there was not a drop of water in it.

Having spent the day without food and water, they decided to go out begging. Wearing torn clothes, sacred thread on the shoulder and broken umbrella in hand, the brothers now looking like Brahmin beggars, went round asking for water to drink. Wherever they went, they were taken to be thieves and driven out. At one place when a Brahmin woman wanted to serve them rice, the utensil containing rice simply vanished. At another place, they were served some parched rice, but Lakshmi who knows everything, asked the wind-god to blow it away. The brothers then thought of entering the pond and

eating lotus roots, but as soon as they entered the pond the water became mud.

The brothers then went to the sea shore, the abode of Lakshmi's father. There at the portals of the place they recited the Vedas and when the maid servants came out, they asked for food. The maids reported this to Lakshmi, who asked them to go to the Brahmins and tell them that they could not possibly eat food prepared by a chandala woman. When told this, Balarama said, "Give us utensils and provisions; we will do our own cooking." Lakshmi sent them utensils and rice and vegetables but also urged Agni not to provide any heat to the fire wood when the brothers cooked.

Thus frustrated, the brothers agreed to eat in Lakshmi's house even if it meant losing caste. Lakshmi then cooked a great meal for them and the maids served it to the brothers who ate to their hearts' content after prolonged starvation.

When the brothers were resting outside the palace after the hearty meals, Lakshmi sent the maids to ask them if they were married. Jagannath said, "I sent away a wife like Lakshmi; hence our misfortune." The maids said, "How can a man become poor if he forsakes his wife?" Jagannath said, "There are wives who bring wealth; there are also wives who bring death in the family."

Balaram now asked Jagannath to go and hold Lakshmi's hand and tell her that it was all his, Balaram's, fault. Lakshmi could live wherever she wanted and he would never again try to forbid her. Jagannath went inside and as soon as Lakshmi saw him, she was all smiles. She then washed his feet and from the water thus sanctified she sipped a little and a little she sprinkled on her head. She worshipped his lotus feet with flowers. Then she said to him, "You drove me out as a *chandala* woman, but are in the very same woman's house. Both of you have thus lost caste. Shame on your greatness; shame on your vows. Shame on your brother and your promise. Now what do you want?"

Jagannath said, “We have suffered a lot because of you. The world now knows us as beggars. Everyone knows that it is you who fed us. Whoever listens to this Purana on Thursday will be absolved of sins. The woman who recites this on Lakshmi puja day will go to heaven.”

Lakshmi said, “You must promise this to me. *Chandalas* and Brahmins will have no food taboos henceforth; they should eat from each other’s hand. Only then will I go back to the temple.” Jagannath agreed and took Lakshmi by her hand and with Balaram returned to the great temple. Balaram said, “A home is beautiful only when the lady of the house is there. Now I know how great Lakshmi is.”

Narada listened to the story. It is only through the grace of Lakshmi that the wretched chandala woman was blessed with wealth. Success comes to those who read this Purana. All sins vanish as with sunrise. Those who recite or listen to this Purana earn the benefits of a trillion cow-gifts. This Purana is the way to salvation.

Thus ends the Lakshmi Purana written by Balaram Das.

(Abridged)

Courtesy: Dr. Jagannath Prasad Das

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