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Terrifying beauty: interplay of the Sanskrit and vernacular rituals of Siddhilakṣmī

Sthaneshwar Timalsina

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1 **Abstract.** ■

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3 **1 Introduction**

4 This essay explores the interplay of Sanskrit and vernacular traditions prevalent
5 in the formation of a larger Hindu culture through a focus upon the Siddhilakṣmī¹
6 tradition of the Kathmandu Valley. This case study, with an emphasis upon the ritual
7 dimension, demonstrates the fluidity of Tantric culture vibrating within the socio-
8 political sphere, regenerating cultural components that bind distinct traditions within
9 the periphery of an all-embracing central power. The exchange occurring between
10 the vernacular and Sanskrit cultures, as demonstrated here, is not based on
11 dominance and subjugation but is an organic process of cultural vitality. In this
12 sense, “Sanskrit” here represents the unchanging cultural core which once was as
13 fluid as its vernacular rituals that are now found in the periphery in uncanonized
14 form. Furthermore, the dynamics of “center” and “periphery” are explored from a

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¹ Classical texts identify the deity as Siddhalakṣmī, as do the Kashmiri ritual texts. Priests in Nepal and the texts themselves call the deity Siddhilakṣmī. I prefer using “Siddhilakṣmī,” following Mark Dyczkowski’s preference to accept the vernacular usage. In addition to the texts cited in this paper, I have consulted the following works: *Dhyānamāla* (manuscript, author’s personal collection); *Jayadrathayāmala* (manuscript, Nepal Archives); *Kālasaṅkarsīṇimata* (manuscript, Nepal Archives); *Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya* (1966); *Śrīvidyārṇavatānta* (1986); Bhattacharyya (1994); Kreijger (1999); Pal (1997); Rana and Bhattarai (2000); Sanderson (1990); Sastri (1970); and Shastri (1950). I have also consulted the following individuals: Dhananjaya Rajopadhyaya, current chief priest of the temple; and the brothers Kṛsnabhadra Sarma and Gopal Sarma, whose grandfather was the chief priest.

15 sociological perspective: a center is that which possesses the power to replicate itself
 16 and which attains this replication through an ongoing, fluid negotiation with its own
 17 periphery. Finally, I demonstrate that the hierarchy of the *maṅḡala* deities is
 18 determined neither by ethical issues nor by the “dangerous” character of the central
 19 deity as portrayed by Robert Levy (1990),² but in accordance with respective
 20 degrees of compatibility that are determined by the rituals and visualizations of the
 21 central deity. This leads to the conclusion that “center” and “periphery” are
 22 co-existing and mutually defining each other, negotiating their ritual and image in
 23 constant dynamism.

24 The myth, image, and rituals of a deity regenerate in new structures that are
 25 negotiated within the cultural dynamic, as demonstrated in this study of the Lakṣmī
 26 tradition. Lakṣmī, the Hindu goddess of prosperity,³ first appears in myths as the
 27 consort of Nārāyaṇa.⁴ This particular identification of Lakṣmī soon transforms into a
 28 generic term, referring to a class of divinities possessing diverse myths, rituals, and
 29 visualizations.⁵ The first variation appears in ritual, with a Tantric modification. At
 30 this level, the goddess is not distinct from her core Vaiṣṇava familial identity.⁶ At the
 31 next level, the vernacular traditions impact the Sanskrit core and generate a
 32 negotiated image. The Lakṣmī found in Bengal riding an owl or in Nepal visualized
 33 riding a tortoise fall within this category (Slusser, 1982, p. 321). Explicitly, the folk
 34 traditions of visualization derive their core components from the central Purāṇic
 35 Lakṣmī; they nonetheless add multiple aspects meaningful to the folk culture. The
 36 popularity of the deity determines her next manifestation, that is, whether or not she
 37 can manifest in a different myth along with the deities of a different family. In
 38 another myth, Lakṣmī found within the *mahāvīdyā* family manifests as an aspect of
 39 Śaī, the consort of Śiva.⁷ The public domain of the goddess now introduces her new
 40 myth which articulates the centrality of another deity. This new manifestation fur-
 41 ther empowers the deity, allowing her to belong to different sects. This entry of the
 42 goddess into the periphery of another *maṅḡala* can result in this deity manifesting in
 43 that center, creating a myth that places her above other deities. The Mahālakṣmī

² I cite Levy for his structure of dangerous deities that protect the moral order (see Gellner, 2001, pp. 295–307; Parish (1994) highlights the view that the moral issue is what determines the power of the deity [Gellner, 2001, pp. 307–311]). In this paper I disagree with Levy (1990) when he categorizes the centrality of the deity as determined by their “dangerous nature”: “the central goddess Tripurasundarī is... the proper kind of dangerous goddess to be at the center of the *maṅḡala*” (p. 167); “Taleju is a central focus in the interrelated set of symbols and symbolic enactments associated with the dangerous deities of Bhaktapur” (p. 241); “Bhagavati... is a female form with many arms, clearly a dangerous goddess” (p. 241); and “the city’s major male dangerous divinity... Bhairava” (p. 241).

³ Lakṣmī, etymologically deriving from *lakṣman*, could refer to both auspicious and evil signs. However, from the time of Varāhamihira, Lakṣmī seems to denote only “auspicious” (see Coburn, 1985, p. 157).

⁴ Coburn identifies some instances in which Lakṣmī, prior to the rise of sectarian Hinduism, is consort to male deities other than Viṣṇu. Significant are Agni, Puruṣa, and Dharma (Coburn, 1985, p. 159).

⁵ Citations in *Devī Bhāgavata* 9.16, 9.40, and 10.12 each give a different genealogy of Lakṣmī. Linkage of Lakṣmī with Śiva occurs in the *Śiva Purāṇa*.

⁶ The Lakṣmī under this category is the Vaiṣṇavite Tantric Lakṣmī whose ritual and visualization can be found in the *Lakṣmī Tantra*.

⁷ In later Śākta Tantras, ten deities—Kālī, Tārā, Bhuvaneśvarī, Tripurasundarī, Bhairavī, Mātāṅgī, Dhūmāvati, Chinnamastā, Vagālāmukhī or Pītāmarā, and Kamalātmikā or Lakṣmī—are considered to be of unsurpassable wisdom. As the only exception, the *Kubjikopaniṣad* mentions Siddhikubjikā as a *mahāvīdyā* deity, a merging of Siddhilakṣmī and Kubjikā (see Dyczkowski, 2000, p. 19n44).

44 identified in the *Prādhānikarahasya*, who generates the triad of Kālī, Lakṣmī, and
 45 Sarasvatī, exemplifies this. The deity consequently manifests in a distinct form
 46 distanced from her original myth linking her with a specific family. The case of
 47 Siddhilakṣmī belonging to the Tantric Śaiva pantheon demonstrates this fluidity.
 48 These multiple modalities do not follow a sequence of time in order to manifest but
 49 rather can appear simultaneously. In other words, a meaningful cultural study can be
 50 done by placing these different components in different parts of the *maṅḡala*,
 51 emphasizing the circularity and interdependence of these cultural modalities.

52 Although a goddess of prosperity, Siddhilakṣmī is neither the smiling goddess
 53 sitting atop a lotus nor is she a *mahāvīdyā* deity, as her *mantra*, *maṅḡala*, and
 54 visualizations differ dramatically. Commonly visualized as riding a Bhairava who
 55 himself rides a corpse or a Vetāla and possessed of multiple faces and arms, bearing
 56 a skull-cup, freshly chopped head, and weapons that include the sword, skull, staff,
 57 and trident, she displays attributes of the Kāpālika tradition. Nonetheless, the
 58 Siddhilakṣmī tradition is not entirely divorced from the other, more familiar, Lakṣmī
 59 practices. Rather, it incorporates within itself a sophisticated structure to support a
 60 bewildering array of Lakṣmīs with rich traditions of practice.

61 The secretive nature of the Tantric tradition has kept the visualization, *mantra*,
 62 and *maṅḡala* of the deity out of the public domain. In the context of Siddhilakṣmī,
 63 she is publicly worshipped in a water-vase. The name of the deity is frequently
 64 changed, and the public name of the goddess can differ from her textual name. This
 65 posture of dissimulation creates the realm of myth, distancing the tradition from
 66 actual history. Iconographic evidence places the goddess in Kashmir, and the
 67 Kashmiri ritual manuals further strengthen this relationship. Ethnographic study
 68 has established that this same Siddhilakṣmī is one of the main deities of the Kath-
 69 mandu Valley (Sanderson, 1990). The patron deity of several Malla kings, Siddhil-
 70 akṣmī remains the clan deity⁸ of many Nevār families, playing a vital role in Nepali
 71 kinship structure. These instances relate the Kashmiri and Nepalese Tantric traditions.

72 The argument that the folk practice consciously conceals the Sanskritic tradition
 73 can be supported by the names of the Siddhilakṣmī shrines. Mark Dyczkowski (2000,
 74 p. 11) identifies five Siddhilakṣmī temples in Patan and Bhaktapur. However, the
 75 temples are publicly known with other names, for instance, Pūrṇacaṇṇī or Nyāta-
 76 pola. The Macalī temple in Teku, in addition to the shrines counted above, is also
 77 identified as a Siddhilakṣmī shrine,⁹ as is the Sikālī shrine in Khokana. Remarkably,
 78 what these vernacular names are hiding is her Sanskritic identity. In these examples,
 79 the vernacular designation appears as a decorative garment.

80 Scholars examining Hindu rituals have often argued for a dichotomy between
 81 so-called folk practices and the rituals and practices rooted in Sanskrit texts. In this
 82 study, I examine the ritualistic dimensions of Siddhilakṣmī found both in texts and
 83 performed by the high-caste Rājopādhyāya Brāhmaṇas, along with the folk tradi-
 84 tions, to reveal that a “ritual” in its complete form functions in a harmonious way
 85 that makes both the Sanskritic and vernacular elements resonate interdependently,
 86 like different cords making a single composition. The texts, which primarily

⁸ I have used the term “clan deity” for the term “*kula-devatā*” in Sanskrit or *digu-dya* in Nevari.

⁹ The Sanskrit variant of Macalī is Matsyeśvarī. There may be two reasons behind this name: (i) there were fish in the pond nearby, and this identified the goddess who has the company of fishes; and (ii) the deity is being linked with Matsyendranātha, who is worshipped by both the Hindu and the Buddhist communities.

87 systematize various practices with their numerous visualizations,¹⁰ identify and
 88 maintain distinct traditions. The rituals performed by the public, on the other hand,
 89 simplify the textual complexities. For the public sphere, the goddess of a shrine can
 90 be identified with all the variants of Siddhilakṣmī or even of other deities: she is all
 91 goddesses, all mothers, and nonetheless Siddhilakṣmī. The text-based rituals
 92 performed by the main priest systematize the various forms of rituals performed by
 93 the members of the community. In this process, the textual rituals do not subjugate
 94 those occurring in the public sphere, and the authority of the systematic ritual as
 95 performed by the main priest is not questioned by members of the community. The
 96 visualizations of the deity reveal that the goddess maintains her identity-in-differ-
 97 ence as a single goddess with multiple visualizations. This example highlights the
 98 core identity found in different, and sometimes fluid, structures of rituals. This
 99 diversity can also be observed in regional variations: the Bengali portrayal of Lakṣmī
 100 depicts her as riding an owl, rather than atop a lotus. The folk tradition of wor-
 101 shipping Lakṣmī during the night describes her as night-roaming owl rider, while the
 102 Sanskrit texts detail worship to the deity atop a lotus which blooms during the day.
 103 This variation does not reduce Siddhilakṣmī but, in contrast, amplifies her
 104 complexity with diverse rituals and visualizations.

105 Ultimately, it is the role of the main temple priest to weave together the various
 106 forms of rituals and visualizations that the community members perform, thereby
 107 building a metasystem uniting the community in a spiritual harmony. This under-
 108 standing can be synthesized through historical analysis, ethnographic research, and
 109 the use of textual resources. My argument is that any specific Tantric tradition, here
 110 that of Siddhilakṣmī, (a) reproduces its own vibrant cosmogony with multiple sets of
 111 private and public practices uniquely suited for various social strata; (b) manifests a
 112 complete *maṅḍala* with the possibility of infinite emanations; (c) establishes inter-
 113 relationships between the deities of various transmissions; and (d) relates the
 114 external, visual, or mundane to the divine through a complex process revealing the
 115 embodied world itself as the body of the maṅḍalic deity.

116 2 Siddhilakṣmī in oral tradition, inscriptions, and textual history

117 Siddhilakṣmī is considered as the primary deity of Matsyendra, who is traditionally
 118 identified as the founder of the Tantric Kaula system.¹¹ The Rājopādhyaya priests of
 119 Patan, one of the cities of the Kathmandu Valley, recount a legend in which Sidd-
 120 hilakṣmī is the mother of Manakāmanā,¹² whose temple is located in the hills of
 121 Gorkha. In the ritual based upon this myth, the priest from Manakāmanā travels
 122 once a year to pay homage to Siddhilakṣmī, conveying the message of good health
 123 and well being from Manakāmanā. This occurs when the *joṣīs* or “astrologers” find

¹⁰ For visualizations of Siddhilakṣmī and her iconic relationship with other goddesses, see Timalsina (2006).

¹¹ Khagendra, Kūrma, Meṣa, and Matsyendra are regarded as the four masters that manifest Tantra in the four ages: Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali. Other than Matsyendra, these seem to be of purely mythological origin. The *bhujā* offering in Patan attributed to Matsyendranātha also relates him with Siddhilakṣmī.

¹² The correct Sanskrit term would be Manokāmanā (she who grants the wishes); however, this is not the conventional pronunciation.



124 an auspicious moment (*sāyit*) in one of the summer months¹³ for the priest to travel
 125 to Patan. The priest, then, serves as the messenger (*dūta*) of the deity. Since the
 126 priests of Manakāmanā are traditionally of the Magar caste¹⁴ while the priests of
 127 Siddhilakṣmī are Brāhmaṇas of Rājopādhyāya family, this ritual of message-giving
 128 intertwines key representatives of distinct social classes whose ritual exchanges act
 129 to cohesively bind the society together. The priests return to Gorkha with the gifts
 130 sent by the mother to her daughter, Manakāmanā. No Purāṇic or Tantric textual
 131 source supports this mythology, so it appears to be of local origin.¹⁵ An additional
 132 myth identifies Maitidevī, the goddess in Kathmandu worshipped by both Hindus
 133 and Buddhists, as the sister of Manakāmanā. These local myths found in Kathmandu
 134 are not known to the public in Gorkha, and the people of Gorkha visit the shrine of
 135 the mother of Manakāmanā located a few miles' distance from her temple. This
 136 relationship of the deities of the valley is not necessarily reciprocal with rural deity.
 137 These myths arguably do not predate the Śāha dynasty which politically connected
 138 Gorkha with the Kathmandu Valley. Local myths relate Manakāmanā with the śāha
 139 dynasty, as they do in the case of Siddhilakṣmī with the Malla dynasty. The
 140 annexation of the valley and Gorkha initiated the relationship between these two
 141 deities of two locales. Myth, in this case, serves as an identifying factor.

142 These vernacular myths are not found within the Sanskritic tradition. The Tantric
 143 tradition of Nepal found in Sanskrit literature relies upon the *āmnāya* system. The
 144 *āmnāya*, generally translated as "transmission," is the directional source of the
 145 deities who manifest from the five different faces of Lord Śiva. When incorporating
 146 the lower face, this system is described as having six transmissions, and when the
 147 ordinal directions are included, its expanded form is called "ten transmissions"
 148 (Rana & Bhattarai, 2000, pp. 140–146). Following the Nepalese Tantric tradition, a
 149 practitioner is initiated with the *mantra* of various deities of all the transmissions in
 150 order to achieve authority in practicing and initiating in all transmissions. This
 151 process is called *kramadīkṣā*, initiation within a sequence. Following this, Siddhil-
 152 akṣmī falls under the northern transmission (*Puraścaryārṇava*, 1968–1974, 1, p. 16).¹⁶

¹³ Sāun, Bhadau, and Asoj in the Nepali calendar.

¹⁴ Magars are not found in classical *jāti* system. However, in Nepal, the conventional stratification places them at the lower range of Kṣatriyas.

¹⁵ The marital status of the goddess relates her to the legend of Pārvatī, the mountain-daughter married to Śiva. This is found also in the Nevār Buddhist tradition of Vajrajoginī (Sanskrit: Vajrayoginī). The most explicit and detailed rituals for bringing the goddess to her maternal house and to her marital house can be observed in the Tripurasundarī tradition of Dhading, Salyan. In this tradition, the goddess journeys from Salyānkoṭ to Salyāntār, from her mountainous birthplace to her marital house. This type of maternal and marital houses of the goddess is also found in Dacchinkālī (Sanskrit: Dakṣiṇakālī) in the southwest of Kathmandu. Besides this, there are also sisterly relationships of the goddesses. Example can be found on Maitidevī of Kathmandu and Manakāmanā. The sisterly relation of nine Bhavānis in the Karnālī zone (far-west region of Nepal) envelops the entire Khas region guarded by the sister-goddesses. The aspect of the goddess with her marital house and maternal house and the pilgrimage to these places as a ritual is studied by Sax (1991, pp. 36–126), focusing on the tradition of the goddess Nandā in Gadhwāl.

¹⁶ Puraścaryārṇava identifies Siddhilakṣmī, Guhyakālī, Mahābhīmasarasvatī, Dhūmrā, Kāmakālākālī, Mahākālī, Kapālīnī, Mahāśmaśānakālī, Kālasaṅkarṣiṇī, Pratyāṅgirā, Kālārātrī, Yogeśī, and Siddhibhairavī. Puraścaryārṇava quotes *Muṅṅamālātāntra* to further provide the detail of the deities of the northern transmission in which the goddesses Dakṣiṇā, Chinnamastā, Rājarājeśvarī, and Svarṇakoṣeśvarī are included along with the aforementioned deities. A ritual text, published as an appendix of *Yatidāṅṅaiśvaryaividhāna* (verse 593), explains that Mahākālī of ten faces is the united form of two Siddhilakṣmīs of the eastern and northern transmissions each having five faces.

153 There is yet another subdivision of the goddesses, according to which the goddess
 154 Siddhilakṣmī falls within the Siddhavidyā category (*Puraścaryārṇava*, 1968–1974, 1,
 155 p. 20).¹⁷ Nevertheless, both the Sanskrit and vernacular traditions share the fact that
 156 the goddess lives with her family and has her mother and sister. Both Sanskrit and
 157 vernacular traditions remain silent about her paternal links.

158 The tradition of Siddhilakṣmī contains certain elements that predate the rise of
 159 the sectarian Hindu pantheon. Whether Siddhilakṣmī properly falls within the Śai-
 160 vite or Vaiṣṇavite tradition highlights the rich paradoxes of this deity. She contains
 161 within herself the Purāṇic Lakṣmī—a gentle, loving figure linked with the beneficent
 162 Nārāyaṇa—while also embodying a Tantric nature that demands the consumption of
 163 wine, blood offerings, and other left-handed elements clearly linking her with Śaiva
 164 Tantra and specifically the Kāpālika tradition. Some of the iconic forms of Sidd-
 165 hilakṣmī practice, particularly that of Viśvalakṣmī and Pratyāṅgirā, represent the
 166 most horrific forms of the deities visualized. Placement of Siddhilakṣmī within the
 167 deities of the northern transmission further suggests that Siddhilakṣmī, like other
 168 deities in the Śaiva family, emanates from Lord Siva and specifically falls within the
 169 family of Kālī. The difference between the Purāṇic and Tantric texts that deal with
 170 deities of the same name lies in the way the respective ritual visualizations are
 171 executed. Thus, the names of the deities are subordinate to the practice-based
 172 contextualization of each deity.

173 The manual of Siddhilakṣmī worship (*Siddhilakṣmīpūjāvidhi*) further identifies
 174 the goddess with Kālī in gesture and aspect. She is invoked as Mahācaṇṇayogeśvarī,
 175 visualized with an enflaming tongue, and prayed to as the one who devours time and
 176 dwells in the cremation ground. She is envisioned as the one consuming blood, fat,
 177 and flesh. Her 24-syllable *mantra* invokes her as Kālikā and Saṅkarṣiṇī, further
 178 affiliating her with Kālī.¹⁸ She is envisioned as both formless and in form. As the
 179 *liṅgam* is commonly worshipped in both abstract and figurative forms, so also is
 180 Siddhilakṣmī worshipped in stones without form and in images. The manuals of
 181 Siddhilakṣmī preserve certain elements of the Krama tradition. For instance, the
 182 deities are grouped into the sections of Vyomavāmeśvarī, Khecarī, Gocarī, Dikcarī,
 183 and Bhūcarī. The texts also ritualize complex structures of visualization, adding
 184 further categories to those found in the Krama tradition.¹⁹

185 In the Hindu tradition a single deity is invoked with multiple names and forms,
 186 and Siddhilakṣmī is no exception. Her Sanskrit names primarily identify her
 187 attributes and connect the deity with her myths. She is, however, known to the public
 188 in Patan by the name Puṇṇacānī.²⁰ Her original name, Siddhilakṣmī, at this point
 189 becomes “secret,” and the public is aware only of her new name. However, what is
 190 hidden here is the Sanskrit name that reveals the family or transmission of the deity.

¹⁷ There are nine different orders in which a disciple is initiated in this *kramadīkṣā*. The Vidyākrama includes Siddhilakṣmī as a necessary step in order to accomplish the order. This order includes Siddhilakṣmī, Mahāsiddhikarālīkā, and Kāmakalākālī as the deities in the sequence to be initiated in the northern transmission (for details, see Rana & Bhattarai, 2000, pp. 338–345).

¹⁸ Her *mantra* runs as: “*om siddhilakṣmī [sic] vidmahe kālīkāyai dhīmahī tan no saṅkarṣiṇī pracodayāt.*”

¹⁹ The *nyāsa* practice in *śoṇāśānta* (at the end of the 16th digit) is an extension of the practice common to the Krama texts that prescribe *dvādaśānta* (the end of the 12 digit).

²⁰ The oral history suggests that Puṇṇānanda Brāhmaṇa brought the Siddhilakṣmī tradition to Patan. The terrifying deity (Cannī) worshipped by Puṇṇānanda, therefore, is called Puṇṇacānī. This is according to Dhananjaya Rajopadhyaya, Kṛsnabhadra Sarma, and Gopal Sarma.

191 Although her public name is still in Sanskrit,²¹ this name reveals only an external
 192 detail, that her shrine was founded by a priest named Pūrṇa. The case with most
 193 other Tantric deities in Kathmandu is that their Sanskrit names are completely
 194 unknown to the public. With vernacular rituals, myths, and identities concealing the
 195 core Sanskritic tradition known only to initiates, the public correlates with the
 196 function of the body in relation to the heart.

197 Siddhilakṣmī is worshipped in a stone by the members of the clan. When the
 198 members disperse, they bring with them their own sacred stone as the clan deity. The
 199 temple ritual represents the worship of their own clan deity worshipped in a stone,
 200 and for those families who do not have their clan-stone, the goddess in the temple
 201 functions as the clan deity (Dyczkowski, 2000, pp. 10–15). Here the goddess wor-
 202 shipped in aniconic stone represents the vernacular, while the canonic texts give
 203 numerous visualizations. What is hidden from the public, once again, is the image of
 204 the goddess that is found in Sanskrit. The difference in this case is that the public
 205 image of the goddess is “no-image,” with formless stone worshipped as the goddess.

206 The Sanskrit tradition of Siddhilakṣmī preserves the most esoteric aspects of the
 207 goddess cult, as the nuances found in her ritual and visualization connect her with
 208 the Tantric Mata and Krama systems. This is to argue that her origin can be found in
 209 both the western and northern transmissions, linking her with Kubjikā and Kālī.
 210 Siddhikubjikā, worshipped by the Rājopādhyāyas, the priests of both the Siddhil-
 211 akṣmī and Taleju temples, incorporates both these transmissions in a single deity.²²
 212 This tallies with the assumption that the image of a deity is in negotiation with
 213 images of other deities in the surrounding areas. As families establish new rela-
 214 tionships, so does the tradition of the goddess, constituting new myths that harness
 215 different deities within a single familial circle. The vitality of this regeneration
 216 depends upon the fluid negotiation between the canonical and vernacular, Sanskritic
 217 and non-Sanskritic, iconic and aniconic aspects of the divinity.

218 The above analysis depicts the interplay of center and periphery in non-violent
 219 ways. This, however, is not to argue that violence does not occur in a dynamic
 220 power-reconfiguration. Nonetheless, the violence cannot be singled out as origi-
 221 nating either from the center or the periphery. The geographic center, the valley, is
 222 dominated by the periphery, with the Śāhas from the periphery actually ruling the
 223 country. This periphery has also applied violent means, as can be exemplified from
 224 the capture of the land that sustained the temple rituals by Rāṇabahādura Śāha²³
 225 and by the eradication of the system of temple land with privatization by Birendra
 226 Shah. These violent means bring the central deity to the periphery, drawing the
 227 periphery to the center.

228 As the stone worshipped by a clan ties all the clan-members together, so does
 229 the single letter or seed *mantra* of the goddess, which is otherwise visualized in

²¹ Her name as Pūrṇacaṇṇī is identified by the bell-inscription in Patan Siddhilakṣmī temple: “*tām sarveṣṭavidhāyinīm bhagavatīm śrīpurnacaṇṇīm namaḥ.*” The name Pūrṇacaṇṇīprasāda occurs in a list of those who contributed to the renovation of the temple.

²² Nepalese manuals identify Siddhilakṣmī with Kālī and Kubjikā: “*yathā kālī thatā kubjā siddhilakṣmī thatā priye | pratyāṅgirā abhedena pūjayet kulabhairavi ||*” (*Hāhārvatantra*, Folio 49, Microfilm no. A204/4).

²³ Traditionally, Siddhilakṣmī rituals were maintained by the *guthī* land. This land was captured by Rāṇabahādura Śāha (1774–1799), in the episode remembered in the history of Nepal as the “sixty-two loots” (*bāsaṭṭhī haran*). Subsequently, a chieftain of the Rājopādhyāya clan from Gavahal, Patan pleased the ruler, and the property of the temple was returned at the request of this chieftain.

230 various forms and practiced with different *mantras*. This can also be seen in textual
 231 practice. A seed *mantra* of a specific transmission (*āmnāya*) does not identify a
 232 particular deity and is shared by the deities of that particular transmission in
 233 general.²⁴ As long as the sound-form remains intact, the deity remains substantially
 234 unchanged when an alteration of appearance occurs. Each visualization of Siddh-
 235 hilakṣmī demonstrates that the gestures and weapons she bears identify her modes
 236 of action. Ritual manuals allow the practitioner flexibility in visualization of
 237 Siddhilakṣmī, so that the deity may grant whatever effect the supplicant desires,
 238 confirming the notion that the manifestation of the deity in any particular form is
 239 arbitrary, depending on the act the deity is supposed to perform.

240 The worship of Siddhilakṣmī in the temple contains complex features. The
 241 priests of the temple are high-caste Nevār Brāhmaṇas. Nevertheless, the ritual
 242 worship is performed with the offering of wine and meat. Here, the rituals of the
 243 temple are not controlled by the rules commonly accepted by the Brāhmaṇas but
 244 are instead negotiated with the public. In another example, the priest sanctifies the
 245 harvest with the offerings, mainly of the *bhujā* or rice-cake, and controls the public
 246 sphere with his authority on the *mantras*, while the public reciprocally sustains the
 247 tradition with offerings and financial support. Different components of the ritual
 248 resonate with different social strata; the social functions are rituals in their abstract
 249 form.

250 In Nepalese kingship, Siddhilakṣmī plays an analogous role in the former royal
 251 capitals of Bhaktapur and Patan. The Siddhilakṣmī temple in Bhaktapur, located
 252 within the periphery of the royal palace, indicates the close relationship of this
 253 deity to the Malla kings. Bhūpatindra Malla ordered the construction of the
 254 Nyātapola temple in 1702 CE. The temple is a five-story construction in the
 255 Pagoda style, with the temple banner bearing a painting of the goddess Siddh-
 256 hilakṣmī astride Bhairava and Vetāla (see Becker-Ritterspach, 1998, p. 70). On one
 257 *torāṇa*, the image of the deity with 16 arms, depicted slaying a buffalo, can be seen,
 258 while the rest of the *torāṇas* display the buffalo-slaying Durgā with 18 arms. Since
 259 the central image is very old and decayed, it is probable that two hands have been
 260 lost from the original 18-handed image of Durgā. According to the Nepalese royal
 261 chronicles known as the *vaṃśāvalis*, the reason behind the construction of this
 262 five-story temple was to domesticate Bhairava, already residing in his adjacent
 263 three-story temple.

264 The Malla kings of Nepal worshipped Taleju as their main clan-divinity. The
 265 tradition of Taleju and Siddhilakṣmī share much in common. Strikingly, in the
 266 Bhaktapur Taleju temple, the *torāṇa* image exactly follows the description of
 267 Siddhilakṣmī, with five faces and ten arms (*Puraścaryārṇava*, 1968–1974, 3, p. 53). A
 268 slight variant is that, in this particular image, the deity appears riding a lion,
 269 resembling the buffalo-slaying Durgā image. The principal image of the Taleju deity
 270 does not remain in the central shrine for the entire year but rather only for the ninth
 271 day of the Durgā festival. On this day, the image is placed in a different room, on a
 272 different floor of the same temple. The iconic form of the deity, with a single face
 273 and ten arms, is then visible through a screen in the main shrine: on all other days,

²⁴ The early Tantric texts of the Kālī tradition such as *Jayadrathayāmala* and the later texts such as *Mahākālasaṃhitā* or *Hāhārāvatantra* both preserve the core elements of the Kālī tradition that is visible in the Guhyakālī tradition in Nepal. The *mantra* and visualization of Siddhilakṣmī contains the characters of the Kubjikā tradition as well as that of the Kālī tradition.

274 only a small wall painting is on view. The room is dark, obscuring a view of the
275 deity's weapons, but most of these correspond to Siddhilakṣmī's attributes, sug-
276 gesting further links between Siddhilakṣmī and Taleju.

277 As the vernacular name Taleju conceals the goddesses' real identity from the
278 public, certain deities, despite their independent identity, also appear generic and
279 can refer to different divinities. Besides Lakṣmī addressed above, Durgā appears as
280 another goddess whose apparent identity conceals several other Tantric divinities.²⁵
281 Furthermore, a single shrine functions time and again as the temple of distinct
282 goddesses. These strategies, nevertheless, do not distance the public from the deity,
283 but rather the public's reverence transcends distinctive names and forms. That the
284 public worships formless stones while the priests worship iconic form supports the
285 same argument that for a priest, the "deity beyond name and form" is a doctrine,
286 while for the public, it is their experience.

287 I have argued that the centrality of a deity resides in her compatibility with other
288 deities. This is apparent in the context of Siddhilakṣmī, who is clearly a combined
289 form of the deities of Siddhi (Siddhayogeśvarī) and Lakṣmī. During the Durgā ritual,
290 the visualization of Siddhilakṣmī incorporates aspects of all three divinities wor-
291 shipped. Her white body represents the aspect of Sarasvatī, her red garment and
292 other weapons suggest that she is Mahālakṣmī, and her weapons, such as a freshly
293 chopped head and skull-staff, represent aspects of Kālī. This resemblance solidifies
294 the goddess as the central deity of the popular Śākta tradition. Furthermore, the
295 deity, with her five faces, represents the five transmissions (*āmnāya*), making possi-
296 ble the visualization of all different deities within the body of a single goddess. This
297 "economy of visualization," in which multiple goddesses are imbedded within a
298 singular image, is one of the core components that defines the centrality of the
299 goddess.

300 3 The vase-ritual of Siddhilakṣmī

301 In all Tantric rituals, a condensed form of ritual is performed before worshipping the
302 goddess with all offerings. In general, this condensed ritual occurs either as mental
303 worship or as a simple offering in the shrine. When worshipping the goddesses of the
304 Kathmandu Valley, this subtle ritual is offered to a small water vase (*kalaśa*). The
305 main goddess is invoked within this *kalaśa* along with all other deities that reside
306 in the area surrounding the central goddess. This is the case in the worship of

²⁵A story in the tenth chapter of *Devīmāhātmya* suggests that all the goddesses are the manifestation of Ambikā, generally identified as Durgā in common practice. In this story, Śumbha, a demon, charges that Ambikā is fighting in alliance with other goddesses, and she replies that she is the only one in the world, that there exists nothing other than herself (*ekaivāhaṃ jagaty atra dvitīyā kā mamāparā; Devīmāhātmya* 10.4). With this, she merges all the goddesses into her breast. This foundational Śākta text with its monistic currents is recited daily in several temples and especially practiced during the Durgā rituals. Since Nepalese Śākta tradition primarily relies on *Devīmāhātmya*, Durgā is considered as the heart of all the Śākta goddesses. *Devīmāhātmya* addresses Lakṣmī in two different instances: (i) the second section (*Devīmāhātmya* chapters 2–4) is considered to be the glory of Mahālakṣmī, and (ii) the *Aṅga* (a small text considered to be a limb of *Devīmāhātmya*) *Prādhānikarahasya* elevates Mahālakṣmī to the highest position, with two strata of Lakṣmī, one the Lakṣmī who is the source of all divinities and the other, the Lakṣmī who is the consort of Nārāyaṇa. *Prādhānikarahasya* 2–6 describes the primordial Mahālakṣmī, and the 19 verse explains the genesis of the second-level Lakṣmī.



307 Siddhilakṣmī, Guhyakālī, Taleju, the nine Durgās, as well as several other Śākta
 308 deities. In general, a water vase is installed in all Hindu rituals; however, the central
 309 deity is not worshipped within it. A vase is placed in other Tantric rituals for
 310 offerings; however, this again does not represent the central divinity. When the vase
 311 represents the central divinity, it is placed at the center of the altar.

312 All variants of Siddhilakṣmī necessarily require a vase to constitute the deity as an
 313 icon. The main Siddhilakṣmī ritual is performed by placing a vase on top of a
 314 *maṅḡala* drawn both in front of the temple and inside by the main priest in the
 315 monthly “root ritual” (*mūla pūjā*). In Nepal, the members of a particular *guthī* (a
 316 Nevār synonym for *kula*) can participate in this, with the most secret aspect being
 317 this worship of the vase (*kalaśa pūjā*). Worshipping the goddess in the vase simplifies
 318 an otherwise a complex ritual. The vase itself represents all other divinities, pri-
 319 marily Kubjikā, Guhyakālī, and Durgā. On one hand, these divinities are visualized
 320 within the vase, while, on the other hand, the vase itself contains some substance in
 321 fluid form, whether water, one of five pure substances,²⁶ or wine. In this way, the
 322 divinity within the vase is “fluid” in nature. Nonetheless, no matter the substance
 323 within the vase, a purificatory rite is conducted that turns the substance into
 324 “ambrosia” and indicates the presence of a divinity in the different types of fluids
 325 that are offered. What separates this ritual from mainstream Hindu rituals is the
 326 wine-offering, commonly considered to be impure. This wine-offering is explicit in
 327 the Guhyakālī temple where a ritual-vase is placed atop a pond filled with wine
 328 offered by devotees. The popularity of the wine offering suggests the strong influ-
 329 ence of Kaula tradition in Nevār Tantricism.²⁷

330 4 The outer sphere of the offering

331 The rituals performed outside of the temple envelop all the members of the com-
 332 munity within the sacred sphere of the *maṅḡala*. The inside and outside domains of
 333 ritual also constitute a hierarchy in which the society envisions power in its esoteric
 334 form. This ritual structure characterizes the structure of “power” that manifest in
 335 public and in person. The power of the deity that is recognized through “inner”
 336 rituals privately performed by the priest and the power that is realized in the
 337 external domain through public worship is considered to be simultaneously mani-
 338 festing, when the rituals parallel inside and outside. The interplay of the “inside”
 339 and “outside” worlds manifests in festivals (*jātrā*), musical performance, temple
 340 circumambulation, public offering, external ritual *maṅḡala*, *kalaśa* rituals, worship
 341 inside the temple, and visualizations. Through this interplay, the outer sphere, the

²⁶ Cow milk, curd, purified butter, honey, and raw sugar are considered to be the five pure substances. These five *amṛtas* (nectar) substitute for the five *makaras* (substances that start with “m” letter in Sanskrit word, such as *madya* or wine, *māmsa* or meat, *matsya* or fish, *mudrā* or cereals, and *maithuna* or sexual intercourse) of the left-hand practice.

²⁷ Nevār Śākta tradition focuses primarily on the Kaula system of Tantric practice. The texts such as *Kulārṇavatāntra*, *Śaktisaṅgamatantra*, *Sarvollāsatāntra*, and *Guptasāadhanatantra* reveal this propensity. Varieties of Kaula rituals depend upon the form of substances offered. Texts of the Kālī tradition, such as *Jayadrathayāmala*, elaborate Kaula practice. *Mahākālasaṅghitā* gives a systematic picture of the Kaula practice, common to the Nepalese Tantric practitioner. While several Kaula texts explicitly mention of the offering of *kuṅṅagolaka* or sexual fluids, practitioners have replaced these substances with the nectar of *hayāri* and *karavīra* flowers. Two substances generally offered representing the male and female principles are red and white sandalwood.



342 first extension of the circle comprised of the associate deities to whom the offering
 343 from the Siddhilakṣmī temple is made, is empowered through ritual-offering. The
 344 priest, while worshipping the main deity within the temple, maintains the *maṅḡala*
 345 constituted in the geographic plane alongside the associating deities.

346 The dynamics of purity and power constitute the core of this visibly structured
 347 ritual. As purity and power are constructed categories, so is secrecy. A Tantric
 348 practitioner endeavors to attain a state which is rooted in but transcends “purity.”
 349 Tantric ritual is the tool to achieve a power that allows the practitioner to transcend
 350 the domain of duality, thereby leaving the domain of purity and impurity far behind.
 351 Secrecy, as can be seen in Tantric rituals and practices, adopts a similar model in
 352 which the categories of purity and power are constituted. In this way, the public
 353 realm of the divinity functions through rituals that utilize and sustain these three
 354 categories of purity, power, and secrecy.

355 The main ritual performed outside the Pūrṇacaṅḡī shrine of the Patan temple
 356 involves the offering of rice-cakes. Since this ritual ties different families together
 357 through the preparation of ritual objects and the performance of the ritual itself, it is
 358 necessary to deconstruct and understand this ritual within the context of Tantric
 359 society. The positioning of the 12 rice-cakes, to be explained shortly, can be visu-
 360 alized as a *maṅḡala*, and the ritual offering of these rice-cakes demonstrates how a
 361 cosmology functions. This *maṅḡala* represents the deities in the surrounding area,
 362 including the central goddess, Siddhilakṣmī. These surrounding deities differ from
 363 the deities invoked in the ritual worship described in manuals. The distinctive rice-
 364 offering in Patan invokes the symbolic presence of all deities in the maṅḡalic form.
 365 The ritual *maṅḡala* remains independent of the textual *maṅḡala*, since the *maṅḡala*
 366 of the ritual includes the specific deities of the surrounding geographic area, whereas
 367 the textual *maṅḡala* remains the pure, metaphysical emanation of a particular deity.
 368 The ritual of offering rice-cakes occurs in the final day of Indra Jātrā, the primary
 369 day for worship of Siddhilakṣmī.²⁸

370 After the worship of Siddhilakṣmī inside the temple, the main priest, a
 371 Rājopādhyāya, summons the deity into the vase and brings her outside to participate
 372 in the ritual of offering the rice-cakes. There, the Siddhilakṣmī *maṅḡala* is drawn
 373 with red powder, and the vase is placed upon the *maṅḡala*. At this time, the *bhujā* is
 374 brought and presented in a very specific order. Deities of the surrounding locality are
 375 invoked along with Siddhilakṣmī. Thereafter, the rituals transforming the rice into
 376 divine food continue. In order to perform this, the priest correlates the rice circle to
 377 the surrounding deities invoked in the form of a *maṅḡala*. Children of the locality
 378 have a significant role in the ritual phase when *bhujā* is moved from its position in
 379 front of the shrine of Siddhilakṣmī, with a portion going to the deity being
 380 worshipped. This offering is considered to be the main offering (*mahāprasāda*).
 381 From the portion that the children collect, some devotees construct a magical box
 382 (*jantar*) to hang on the devotee’s chest or arms, as a shield against witchcraft and for
 383 healing influenza.

384 The *bhujā* offerings total 12 in number, and these are divided into rows. The
 385 ordering of rows rotates every year, with the first row one year moving to the third
 386 row in the next year and the second row moving to the first row. Maintaining the
 387 sequential ordering of each row determines which deity will first receive their

²⁸ This day generally falls during the August and September months. The last day of the ritual occurs on Anantacaturdaśī, the 14th day of the bright half of the lunar calendar.

388 portion of rice each year. As the deities in the surrounding area are of equal status,
389 the sequential change of row-order indicates respect for this equality. The first row
390 was called *valānihma kavala* in 2001; the second, *maññichen kavala*; and the third,
391 *vakanihma kavala*. Next year, *maññichen* will be the first *kavala* and *valānihma* will
392 return to the last in sequence. However, these three rows are identical with the three
393 Rājopādhyāya clans, and the hierarchical offering that rotates every year maintains
394 equality in family status.

395 Siddhilakṣmī, being the central deity, is worshipped with the first *kavala*; Bhairava
396 with the second *kavala*; and Mahādeva with the third *kavala*. This basic structure
397 recognizes Mahādeva and Bhairava as separate deities, while suggesting the intimacy
398 of Bhairava with the deity, and also their relationship to the Śaiva elements in the
399 entire ceremony of worship. The order in which the deities are worshipped requires
400 further examination. This structure demonstrates how the hierarchy of power, both
401 in the family of deities and in the family of worshippers, is maintained as a constantly
402 evolving process.

403 The ritual of Siddhilakṣmī in Patan exemplifies how a vernacular tradition con-
404 stitutes its own *maññala* separate from the canonical practice. Her vernacular ritual
405 embraces the deities in the actual locale and not those prescribed in the text. The
406 precision of the offering, supervised by the Rājopādhyāya priests, creates yet
407 another dimension of ritual, where the vernacular ritual is in the process of for-
408 malization. The vernacular *maññala* represents the families of the priests living
409 within this periphery. The following sequence of the offering of rice-cake (*bhujā*), 12
410 in total, demonstrates this process of formalization:

411 a b c d *valānihma kaval*
412 e f g h *maññichen kaval*
413 i j k l *vakanihma kaval*²⁹

414 The offering starts from the last *kavala* of the row having i-j-k-l numbers. The deities
415 to whom these are distributed are:

416 d. *ṭhaḡu agniśālā* Gaṇeśa
417 c. Macchendranātha of Devaṅgā
418 b. *mūla bhujā* for Siddhilakṣmī
419 a. *jenavā* Gaṇeśa
420 h. *mahāpa* of Maṅgalbajār
421 g. *nāsadyo nṛtyeśvara* of *nāsala devatā*
422 f. *mūla bhujā* for Bhairava. The following year, this will go to the central deity.
423 e. *kalaṅkadeva* close to the pond in the east side of the temple.
424 l. *vahālukhā bhairavi*, in the pond
425 k. *ikhālukhu bhairava*
426 j. *mūla bhujā* that goes to Mahādeva. Another year, this will shift to Bhairava.
427 i. for Kaumārī close to Agniṃaṭha

428 Apparently, these 12 local deities that constitute the *maññala* of Siddhilakṣmī differ
429 from those in the ritual *maññala* that the Rājopādhyāya priest constitutes and to
430 which he performs offering inside the temple. This offering does not rely upon
431 Sanskritic texts; however, it does not contradict them either. While maintaining the

²⁹ According to a *vaṃśāvalī*, the Rājopādhyāyas of Patan are also the priests of the Tulajā shrine established by Siddhinarasiṃha Malla (see *Himavatkhāṇḍa*, Appendix, p. 150).

432 Sanskritic rituals based on texts, the priest also performs external rites that sustain
 433 the public ritual. In this interplay of the vernacular with the textual, both constitute
 434 and sustain each other: the textual rituals empower and maintain its esoteric aspect,
 435 while the autochthonous divinities allow the central divinity to function in the
 436 physical realm. What is noteworthy is that the first group centers on Matsyendra and
 437 Siddhilakṣmī, the second on Nṛtyeśvara,³⁰ and the third on Bhairava.

438 The priests take great care to ensure that when the rice-cakes are presented, each
 439 specific *bhuja* does not go to any deity other than the one invoked in the *maṅḡala*
 440 worship. The priests who officiate in this temple recall an occasion on which such
 441 confusion occurred. The story concerning the Kaumārī *bhuja*, for example, as
 442 reported by one of the priests, is that when the grandfather of Gopal Sarma (still
 443 living) made the mistake of offering the Kaumārī *bhuja* to another deity, those who
 444 had come to offer started vomiting blood. These mistakes in offering caused the loss
 445 of the position of the main priesthood. After this incident, the main priesthood
 446 shifted from one family of Rājopādhyāya to another family. What is noteworthy here
 447 is that the main priest, the center in the sphere of ritualistic authority, maintains his
 448 centrality with the “system,” and it is the “system” that sustains his centrality. If the
 449 “system” is broken, the centrality crumbles. However, this does not lead to
 450 dismantling the *maṅḡala*, as the *maṅḡala* recreates itself, with peripheral power
 451 shifting to the center.

452 The offerings made to the 12 deities in total represent the complete form of the
 453 Siddhilakṣmī universe, the cosmos delineated by a specific area within the town of
 454 Patan. This is the locality of the Rājopādhyāya families. The universe that is con-
 455 stituted through the ritual envelops the families of this clan, with the goddess
 456 established as the heart. The deities that receive offerings of rice-cake are located in
 457 the surrounding area. This *maṅḡala* is not the ritual *maṅḡala* of the Siddhilakṣmī
 458 found in texts, since that would merely be the association of goddesses; but it is more
 459 the *maṅḡala* of the deities that surround a particular Siddhilakṣmī temple. However,
 460 this local *maṅḡala* cannot be universalized, unlike the *maṅḡala* described in manuals.
 461 Local *maṅḡalas* are always determined by factors that surround the specific locale.
 462 Therefore, the deities worshipped in the public sphere can differ in every temple,
 463 while the ritual text may remain the same.

464 The “ritual” of the goddess is the fusion of the priestly and the public rituals. As a
 465 priest performs rituals in a shrine or *maṅḡala*, so does the public participate, but in
 466 different ways. For instance, public offering, circumambulation, or witnessing the
 467 rituals performed by others merge in such a way that all these, in a higher level,
 468 construct a single ritual performed collectively. The deity and the *maṅḡala* do not
 469 differ from the temple of the goddess in which she resides. The priestly ritual of
 470 worshipping the deity who is the core of the shrine and the public ritual of circu-
 471 mambulation around the temple which is the visible or the external form of the deity
 472 incorporate a ritual that envelops both aspects. The maṅḡalic structure of the floor
 473 plan that underlies the Nyātapola temple supports its five upper floors and depicts
 474 the five faces of the deity. During the ritual, the *maṅḡala* is visualized with five
 475 enclosures, a symbolic representation of the goddess with her five faces. The temple,

³⁰ Nṛtyeśvara plays a significant role in the Nevār community of Kathmandu Valley. Generally identified with the Nāsadyo, an autochthonous divinity, Nṛtyeśvara is the deity of both dance and harvest. Images of the deities of the northern transmission, for example, Guhyakālī or Kāmakalākālī are found in dancing pose, indicating an interrelationship with Nṛtyeśvara.

476 in this case, is yet another physical manifestation of Siddhilakṣmī herself, and the
 477 goddess and the temple are identical. In this way, the goddess not only dwells within
 478 the temple but also is herself the temple. The public, even though not allowed to
 479 enter into the shrine of the goddess, is already within the shrine of the goddess, the
 480 goddess manifests in the form of the temple.³¹

481 The discussion of rituals performed in different forms reveals that the divinity
 482 manifests in different structures: the temple in which the public offering occurs; the
 483 image of the goddess, which is worshipped, and in most cases only visualized; and
 484 the water-vase in which the goddess dwells in her unmanifest form. Some of the
 485 vase-forms worshipped in Guhyeśvarī shrines³² are not hollow inside but rather solid
 486 rock or crystal. This unmanifest form of the goddess resonates of the clan stones
 487 worshipped as Siddhilakṣmī.

488 5 Conclusion

489 The myths of the goddess link Siddhilakṣmī with kingship and power, while Sidd-
 490 hilakṣmī further functions as the clan-deity of the Rājopādhyāya families. Therefore,
 491 the rituals and visualizations need to be viewed within these contexts. Siddhilakṣmī,
 492 with her five faces and ten arms in various gestures, represents multiple deities, and
 493 this is what positions her at the center. In this way, the center is the essential core of
 494 the periphery, and the existence of the center underlies the existence of the diversity
 495 that constitutes the periphery. An example can be given of Siddhikubjikā, where two
 496 deities, Siddhilakṣmī and Kubjikā, merge and make an identity of a singular divinity.

497 The rituals of the goddess reveal how a constantly pure space, that is, the abode of
 498 the goddess, extends through external rituals and envelops the locale in which the
 499 families reside. The shared responsibility among different families that constitutes a
 500 single ritual weaves together all the strata of the society through ritualization.
 501 Shifting the lines in the rice-cake offering also explains that the intimacy of the
 502 goddess is orderly, with all families being at equal distance from the goddess. The
 503 condensed and external rituals, and the worship in the central shrine or in the
 504 temple, explain the same reality: that what is sacred, subtle, and apparently attain-
 505 able by the few, possesses visible, physical form, empowering and sustaining all. The
 506 centrality of the deity, Siddhilakṣmī in this case, does not depend upon her “dan-
 507 gerous” nature, as Levy suggests. Ferocious to those harmful to her devotees, she is
 508 portrayed in popular imagination as the motherly and gentle Lakṣmī.

509 Vernacular and Sanskrit practices embrace each other inseparably, constructing
 510 a unified tradition. This interplay constitutes a hybrid culture that melds different
 511 aspects of practices within the single stream of the goddess’ power. This fluidity both
 512 sustains and regenerates the ritual practices fused within the sociopolitical dimension

³¹ These notions can be found in elaborated form in Kaula Tantra texts. For instance, the Śrī Cakra, generally worshipped as the *yantra* in which the goddess Tripurasundarī resides, is also equated with the goddess herself. On one hand, this *yantra* is the locale where the goddess resides; on the other hand, this is the body of the goddess, the center being her heart and the external layers being her external forms and also her emanations. The notions that the self is both transcendent to the world and immanent are separately analyzed by Kṣemarāja ascribing to the Kula and Tantra thoughts (see *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, 1991, p. 8).

³² For detail about vase-worship and the tradition of Guhyeśvarī, see Michaels (1996, pp. 328–333).



513 of the community. The shared social power can be compared with the śakti of the
514 goddess, vibrant in the continuous rearticulation of Her maṅḡala.

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