

The Story of Lakshmi from the *Puranas* (Sanskrit legends)

Shreedevi Disappears

"Wealth and power corrupted the demon-king. Now, pleasure and comfort has weakened the god-king. Neither holds on to dharma for long. Neither deserves my grace." So saying, the goddess dissolved herself in the ocean of milk.

Instantly a gloom descended upon the world: it no longer reverberated with song and dance. Weapons lost their power, gems their luster, men their vigor. Cows did not give milk, fields became barren, and trees bore neither flower nor fruit. The cosmos became a desolate place bereft of joy and laughter.

Churning the Ocean of Milk

The goddess's disappearance caused panic in the three worlds.

"We must bring her back," said the gods.

"But how?" wondered the demons.

"By churning the ocean of milk," said Vishnu. With Mandara, king of mountains, as the spindle and Akupara, king of turtles as the base, the *devas* and the *asuras* created the cosmic churn. Using Vasuki, the king of the serpents as the churning rope, they began churning the ocean of milk.

Lakshmi rises

The churn twisted and turned, the ocean frothed and fumed, waves roared and spewed foam in every direction. Eons passed. Nothing emerged. But the gods and demons were determined to bring the goddess back and continued to churn the great ocean.

Pleased by their efforts, the goddess finally emerged as a Lakshmi, the desirable one, in all her splendor. Seated on a dew drenched Lotus, dressed in red silk, bedecked in gold, she was the very embodiment of affluence, abundance and auspiciousness.

As she rose, *rasa*, life giving sap, began flowing in every direction. The earth palpated with life. Joy filled the air. The gods saluted her; the demons sang songs to her glory. Sacred elephants who hold up the sky came from the eight quarters of the universe, raised their trunks and consecrated her with life sustaining water.