

ŚABARA. A mleccha—low caste. The Mahābhārata has the following about Śabarās.

(i) Śabarās were born from the dung and urine of Nandinī, the cow of Vasiṣṭha. (Ādi Parva, Chapter 174, Verse 16).

(ii) When Sātyaki annihilated the Kauravas the dead bodies of thousands of Śabarās were heaped on the battle-field. (Droṇa Parva, Chapter 119, Verse 46).

(iii) In early days the Śabarās lived in the kingdom of Māndhātā, their profession being murder and looting. (Śānti Parva, Chapter 65, Verse 13).

(iv) Śiva had once taken the form of forest-dwellers and Śabarās. (Anuśāsana Parva, Chapter 65, Verse 17).

(v) Many Kṣatriyas lived for many years hidden in caves for fear of Paraśurāma, and as they had no association with kṣatriyas during the period, they became Śabarās. (Aśvamedhika Parva, Chapter 29, Verse 15).

ŚABARĪ. A woman of the tribe of forest-dwellers. Śrī Rāma, during his life in the forest, gave her salvation.

1) *Former life.* Śabarī, in her former life, was the only daughter Mālinī of the Gandharva King, Citrakavaca. An erudite scholar, Vitihoṭra, married her. As he was ever immersed in contemplation of Brahman his wife Mālinī, (later Śabarī) kept one hunter, Kalmāṣa, as her paramour, and her husband cursed her thus: "As you have become a lover of the hunter, you turn out to be a hunter-woman."

2) *At the Suburbs of Mataṅga's hermitage.*

Mālinī in tears sought redemption from the curse from her husband, and he told her that she would get absolution from her infamy and the curse from Śrī Rāma. Immediately she was transformed into a hunter-woman and she came to the suburbs of Mataṅgāśrama. She took a special liking for the place, the reason being that the flowers in the āśrama possessed a special fragrance. Once while the disciples were carrying a load of flowers for the muni (Mataṅga) a few drops of sweat from their bodies fell on the ground, and the muni blessed that the trees and creepers, which grew up from the sweat and their flowers would never fade. This is described as follows in Canto 73, Araṇyakāṇḍa of Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa.

"Oh! Rāma! nobody plucks and wears those flowers. They neither fade nor fall down. While the disciples of Mataṅga were carrying a load of flowers for him, they sweated on account of exhaustion and some drops of sweat fell on earth which developed themselves into flowers due to the prowess of the guru's tapas. Even today may be seen there Śabarī, who has taken to sannyāsa and who tends the flowers. She will attain heaven only after seeing you."

Śabarī lived for long there serving Mataṅga's disciples, performing tapas and learning knowledge about Brahman. At the time of the munis giving up their physical bodies they blessed Śabarī that without further delay she would meet Rāma and get redemption from the curse. They also blessed that she would possess divine eyes to see hidden things and also the past and the future. After that she was spending her days awaiting the arrival of Rāma.

It was the period of the life in the forest of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. After visiting various āśramas Rāma at last came to Mataṅgāśrama. Hearing about Rāma's

visit Śabarī had gathered a lot of fruits. Now, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa came and Śabarī received them most respectfully. After herself biting each fruit to test its taste she gave the fruits for them to eat. The left-overs of Śabarī appeared as nectar to Rāma. Then Śabarī told Rāma thus: "When you go a short distance southwards there is the beautiful stream called Pampā. You cross Pampā and advance a little further and you will reach mount Ṛṣyamūka. On the top of that mountain lives Sugrīva, son of Sun, and if you enter into alliance with him you will succeed in finding out and getting back Sitā after annihilating the enemies. Oh! Lord! my salutations."

After speaking thus, Śabarī the great anchorite and chaste woman closed her eyes. Immediately she was transformed into Mālinī, the Gandharva damsel, and all at once a handsome Gandharva prince appeared there in a divine plane. It was Vitihoṭra, the husband of Mālinī. After saluting Śrī Rāma he took away his wife in a chariot to the Gandharva city. (Kamba Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇyakāṇḍa).

ŚABARĪMALA (ŚABARĪ MOUNTAIN). A sacred place in South India in the eastern region of Kerala on a mountain called Śabarimala. It is not quite certain whether the name of this mountain is in any way related to Śabarī, to whom Śrī Rāma had given salvation. At any rate a very ancient temple with Śāstā as the presiding deity therein is found at Śabarimala today. It is proof positive of the great sanctity attached to the ancient temple that every year lakhs of devotees from all parts of India visit it braving dense forests, mountains and wild beasts on their way. Historical evidence about the origin of the temple or its philosophical importance is sparse, but there is a legend, more illuminating than facts of history, about Śāstā (Ayyappan) the deity installed in the temple. The legend is as follows—

In olden days the royal family of the Pāṇḍyas divided itself into two branches, one of them settling down at Velliyūr and the other at Madura. When the king of Madura one day went a hunting in the forest he met a handsome and very powerful and courageous Malayāli youth. The king immediately took a liking for him and appointed him as an officer in his army. The youth gradually rose up in military service to become the Commander-in-Chief. The other officers, who were jealous due to the rise of the youth—Ayyappan—began conspiring to drive him out. The queen became a weapon in the hands of the conspirators, and at their instance she pretended herself to be very ill and lay in a fainting fit. All the physicians acknowledged defeat in curing her. Then a physician, an agent of the conspirators, came forward and assured the king that he would cure the queen of her illness within one and a half hours if a leopard's milk was made available. The king told Ayyappan about it.

Ayyappan went into the forest and returned to the palace with many she-leopards. He rode a tiger leading the leopards. People in the royal court were frightened by the sight of the leopards. The King realised that Ayyappan was not an ordinary person. Being questioned about him by the King, Ayyappan replied that God was his father and the whole world his home. As he did not like to live any further with tale-bearers and conspirators he returned to Kerala.