

from it. That child was Sitā, the daughter of King Janaka.

(iii) There is a story in Devī Bhāgavata stating how Sitā was born as the daughter of Rāvaṇa. It is as follows :

Rāvaṇa wished to marry Mandodarī, the daughter of Maya. Then Maya said to Rāvaṇa thus :—“According to the horoscope of Mandodarī, the first child born to her will be the destroyer of its clan. So it would be better to kill that child.” Not acting upon the advice of Maya, Rāvaṇa put the first child in a box and buried it in the city of King Janaka. This child was Sitā, the wife of Śrī Rāma.

2) *Marriage.* Sitā grew up in the palace of King Janaka. Kuśadhvaṇa the younger brother of Janaka had three daughters. They were named Māṇḍavī, Ūrmilā and Śrutakīrti. Sitā grew up along with these three sisters. The four of them grew up as sisters and friends. Sitā grew up to be a young woman. Several young men wished to marry her. Janaka refused everyone of them. One day the princesses were playing with their maids in the garden of the harem. Sitā sat on the dais in the centre of the garden to make a flower garland. All their attempts to gather the jasmine flowers from the twigs of a large mango tree in the garden ended in failure. Sitā instantly ran to the weapon-house and taking a bow and arrow, shot down the flowers. The flowers fell down on the cloth placed on the ground without being damaged. Janaka saw the shooting of Sitā, from the palace. He was amazed at the expertness of Sitā. The bow which Sitā took was Śaivacāpa (the bow of Śiva). Śiva had used this bow, in days of old, to destroy the sacrifice of Dakṣa. Śiva, who was pacified by the destruction of the sacrifice of Dakṣa and the victory over his enemies, gave this bow to his devotee, the King of Videha. That King kept the bow in his weapon-house and used to worship it. Sitā had taken that bow and shot with it.

The King who had been thinking about the marriage of Sitā thought that what he saw was a good omen. So the King made a proclamation that only he who could take the bow of Śiva, draw it, and shoot with it would become eligible to marry Sitā. Hearing this many adventurers came to the palace and tried to handle the Śaivacāpa and retreated admitting defeat. It was at this time that Viśvāmitra brought Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to the forest for the protection of sacrifice. Hearing about the Svayamvara of Sitā, Viśvāmitra took the princes to the palace of Janaka. The King was greatly pleased when he learned that the princes were the sons of Daśaratha, of the solar Dynasty. Next morning, at the instruction of his elders and priests and teachers, Śrī Rāma stood on the dais in the middle of the hall, where the Śaivacāpa was placed, ready to handle it. He lifted up the bow with his left hand, drew it easily and fastened the string tightly and the bow was broken. When the Kings who were present, heard the roaring sound of the breaking of the bow, they shivered with fear as serpents at the sound of thunder. Sitā jumped with joy like a peacock. A letter was sent to Daśaratha then and there. Friends and relatives arrived. Under the guidance of the presiding priest Śātānanda, the marriage ceremony was conducted. Rāma married Sitā, Bharata married Māṇḍavī, Lakṣmaṇa married Ūrmilā, and Śatrughna married Śrutakīrti. The brides

and bridegrooms went to Ayodhyā with their parents and relatives. (Kamba Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa).

3) *Anasūyā's gift of clothes and ornaments.* Daśaratha who had become old, wished to hand over the realm to Śrī Rāma. Since Kaikeyī stood as a hindrance, the kingdom fell into the hands of Bharata. Moreover Sitā had to live in the forest with Śrī Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa for fourteen years. In the early period of their forest-life they visited the hermitage of Atri. Seeing the devotion of Sitā towards her husband, Anasūyā the wife of hermit Atri, blessed her and gave her a fine garland, clothes and ornaments and cosmetics. Anasūyā blessed Sitā again and said that she would shine as Lakṣmī if she besmeared her body with the divine cosmetics. (Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa, Sargas 118-120).

4) *Test by Pārvatī and Parameśvara.* In the last year of forest-life Pārvatī and Parameśvara tested the firmness of the love of Sitā and Rāma. (See under Rāma, Para 14).

5) *Phantom Sitā.* A few days before the abduction of Sitā by Rāvaṇa, Fire god took the guise of a Brahmin and approached Śrī Rāma and said : “O, Śrī Rāma ! The Devas have sent me to tell you certain things which will take place shortly. Your incarnation has the aim of killing Rāvaṇa. Sitā is meant to be a cause for the same. The death of Rāvaṇa is imminent. He will come and carry Sitā away. So entrust Sitā with me. I will keep her carefully. Make a phantom (Māyā) Sitā and keep her here, instead of the real Sitādevī. After the killing of Rāvaṇa, when Sitā enters fire as a proof of her purity, I will return Devī Sitā.” Śrī Rāma agreed to it. Fire god by his power of contemplation, created a phantom Sitā, exactly like the real Sitā in shape and figure and nature and placing her beside Rāma, he disappeared with the real Sitā. Even Lakṣmaṇa was not aware of this fact. The real Sitā Devī was under the care of Fire god till the moment of the test of chastity of Sitā by fire, after the killing of Rāvaṇa. During the time of entering the fire the illusory Sitā vanished in the fire and the real Sitā came out. (Devī Bhāgavata, Skandha 9).

6) *Sitā killed Sahasramukha.* See under Sahasramukha Rāvaṇa.

7) *Abandonment of Sitā.* See under Rāma, Para 31.

8) *Sitā in the hermitage of Vālmiki.* Abandoned Sitā, who was pregnant, wandered about in the forest and at last reached the hermitage of Vālmiki, who gave her protection and shelter. The story of an occurrence at this time is given in Kathāsaritsāgara, Alaṅkāravatīlambaka, Taraṅga 1.

The other hermits did not like Vālmiki's action of giving shelter to Sitā. They said “Sitā is impure. Otherwise her husband would not have abandoned her. By her association we also would become sinners. As the hermit Vālmiki is kind, he will not cast her away especially when she is pregnant. So the best thing for all of us, is to go to another hermitage.” This murmuring of the hermits reached the ears of Vālmiki. He said “She is pure and chaste. I know it with my inward eyes.” But they did not believe it. Then Sitā said “Lord ! you can test my chastity in whatever way you like, and if I am found to be impure you may cut off my head.”

The hermits tested Sitā in the Ṭiṭṭibhasaras (a divine lake near the hermitage of Vālmiki) and were