

convinced that she was chaste and pure. (See under *Ṭiṭṭibhasaras* to know the greatness of this divine lake). 9) *Cursed Sītā*. Sītā was spending miserable days in the hermitage of Vālmiki. Her matrimonial life was a hell. Is there any special reason for misery? Yes. It is the curse of a bird. Once Śeṣa told this story, of the cursing of Sītā by a bird, to the hermit Vātsyāyana. That story is given below:

The event took place when Sītā was a young girl in the palace of Janaka. One day while Sītā was playing in the garden she saw two parrots, cock and hen, which talked well. The spouses were delightfully engaged in love-making. As soon as the couple saw Sītā they flew up to a tree and sang thus: "A handsome king will take birth on the earth. His name will be Śrī Rāma. His wife's name will be Sītā. Their wedded life will be happy.

Hearing the song, Sītā thought that they were some divine persons, and asked her maids to catch them and give them food. The maids caught the parrots and brought them before Sītā. She asked the birds. "Don't fear. Who are you? Where do you come from? Who is that Rāma? Who is Sītā? How did you come to know of them? Tell me all. I will not hurt you!

The birds replied. "In the forest there is a hermit named Vālmiki. We live in his beautiful hermitage. That hermit has composed the story Rāmāyaṇa, which is yet to happen, and has taught it to his disciples. We have heard those songs. Having heard them over and over we also have learned them by heart. We will tell you who Rāma is and who Jānakī is and what would happen to her who lives happily with him. Hear it! Saying thus the parrots passed on to the story of Rāma. Due to the sacrifice of the hermit Rṣyaśrṅga, Mahāviṣṇu incarnated as four persons, of whom Rāma the eldest, with his younger brother and Viśvāmitra, would come to Mithilā. He would draw the bow and marry Sītā....

Sītā was extremely pleased with the sweet song of the birds and asked them so many questions repeatedly with curiosity. Seeing the excitement of the questioner the parrots understood that she was Sītā herself. They asked her. "Beautiful girl! who are you? Why are you so much interested in knowing about Rāma? What is your name?" Sītā disclosed everything about her to the birds, and said "I am the same Sītā, the daughter of Janaka you have sung about. I will let you go only on the day when that handsome prince Rāma comes and marries me. Your conversation has made me so curious. You can live comfortably in my house, eating sweet-meats." The birds were in great fear when they heard this. They looked at each other and replied to Sītā. "Good child! we birds fly about in the sky and perch on trees and bush. Houses are not comfortable to us. Moreover I am pregnant. After my delivery in our own place I will come here. You need not have any doubt." The female parrot said thus. But Sītā did not let them go. Then the male parrot prayed humbly with anxiety. "Sītā, allow her to go. Why do you detain my beautiful wife? Allow us to have our own way in the forest. My wife is pregnant. After the confinement both of us will come back." Sītā said "Let her live with me. You may go as you please."

The parrots were in great sorrow. If they had not made any noise on that tree this detention would not have occurred. These pitiable supplications had no effect on

Sītā. The male bird cried to Sītā to let him take his mate along with him, and beat his head on the ground. Sītā was adamant. The female bird, filled with misery and anger cursed Sītā thus. "You have separated me from my husband. I am pregnant. May you too be separated from your husband when you become pregnant". When she had finished saying, she fell on the ground and wriggled and died. An aerial chariot came down to the earth from heaven for the soul of that bird which had died exalting and glorifying Śrī Rāma. The soul of the bird got into the chariot and went up to heaven. The male bird, being unable to bear the death of his beloved wife, dipped himself in the Gaṅgā. Before his death he cried out in anger. "I must be born in the city of Rāma. By my words, this Sītā should be separated from her husband and fall into misery." He died in the Ganges in Krodha (anger) and fear. So he took rebirth with the name Krodhana as a washerman by caste and profession. It was this washerman who spoke words of calumny about Sītā. Due to the calumny of this washerman, Śrī Rāma abandoned Sītā and she had to take shelter in the hermitage of Vālmiki. (Padma Purāṇa, Pātāla Khaṇḍa, Chapter 57).

10) *The end of Sītā*. (See under Rāma, Para 33).

SĪTĀ II. A river. Mention is made in Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapter 188, Verse 102, that once the hermit Mārkaṇḍeya saw this river also in the stomach of child Mukunda (Śrī Kṛṣṇa). This is one of the seven branches of the river Ganges. (See under Sindhu).

ŚĪTAPŪTANĀ. A ferocious she-devil. (Mahābhārata, Vana Parva, Chapter 230, Verse 28). This terrible monster causes abortion in women.

ŚĪTĀŚĪ. A river flowing through Śākadvīpa and famous in the Purāṇas. (Mahābhārata, Bhīṣma Parva, Chapter 11, Verse 32).

ŚĪTIKANṬHA. A nāga which was in the company of the nāgas that came to lead the soul of Balabhadrarāma to Pātāla. (Mausala Parva, Chapter 4, Verse 16).

ŚĪTIKEŚA. A warrior of Subrahmaṇya. (Śalya Parva, Chapter 45, Verse 61).

ŚIVA (RUDRA). One of the Trinity.

1) *Birth*. The seers or spiritual giants of India imagined three forms to God, dividing all the activities into three departments, i.e. creation, sustenance and destruction or annihilation. Brahmā, for creation, Viṣṇu, for sustenance and Śiva, for annihilation - they are the Trinity. Viṣṇu was born first, Brahmā next and Śiva last. The essence of Indian spiritualistic thought is that these three visible forms of God will, at the close of the Kalpa cease to be and become one with the cosmic power, and that the trinity will be born again at the commencement of the Kalpa and will take up their respective functions.

The dominant quality or attribute of Śiva is Tamas (darkness). Many stories, with slight variations, are told in the various Purāṇas about the birth of Śiva. Some of the more important stories are summarised below.

(i) At the beginning of the Kalpa, while Brahmā was meditating upon the birth of a son like himself, a child deep blue in colour, appeared on his lap, and the child began running about crying aloud. Brahmā asked the child why it was crying; then the child asked Brahmā to give him a name. Though Brahmā told him that his name was Rudra and asked him not to cry, he cried seven times more. Then Brahmā gave him another