

under the name Tulasī. (For the rest of the story of Tulasī see under Tulasī, Para 4).

Mālāvati was the wife of Kuśadhvaja. As Lakṣmī had promised to take birth as their daughter, both of them waited for the birth of the child uttering the Vedas. At this time a child was born from the mouth of Kuśadhvaja. This child was the incarnation of Lakṣmī. With the birth of the child Kuśadhvaja regained all the wealth and prosperity he had lost. The child was named Vedavati (Devavati). She grew up and became a young woman. Her desire was to get Mahāviṣṇu as her husband. Once an asura named Śambhu came to the hermitage of Kuśadhvaja. When he saw Vedavati he fell in love with her. He asked Kuśadhvaja for the hand of his daughter, but Kuśadhvaja did not give his consent. Śambhu got angry. He came back in the night and killed Kuśadhvaja with his sword. Hearing the sound Vedavati woke up and saw the dead body of her father lying in a pool of blood. She looked at Śambhu angrily. In that fiery look Śambhu was burnt to ashes.

Vedavati began to perform very severe penance to get Viṣṇu as her husband. It was at this time that Rāvaṇa had begun his campaign of conquest. He defeated all kings and was proceeding victoriously through the vicinity of the Himālayas, when he saw the beautiful damsel Vedavati sitting alone and performing penance. Seeing so beautiful a girl engaged in penance, he told her that he was the famous Rāvaṇa with ten heads and requested her to throw away the garment of bark of the tree and the matted hair and to accept him as her husband. She rejected his request. The angry Rāvaṇa caught hold of her hand. She resisted using her teeth and finger-nails. She cried out that she wanted no more to retain the body made impure by the touch of a wicked person. She made a fire and jumped into it. Thus in the sight of Rāvaṇa, she burnt herself to death. Before death she vowed that in the next birth Mahāviṣṇu would become her husband and would kill Rāvaṇa.

Rāvaṇa who himself was burning in the fire of amour, was extremely sorry at the death of the beautiful girl. He took the ashes of hers to Laṅkā and put them in a golden box and kept the box in a solitary place. He used to visit the place daily. Since the arrival of the ashes, bad omens began to occur in Laṅkā. One day Nārada came to Laṅkā. Rāvaṇa asked Nārada for the reason of constant occurrences of bad omens in Laṅkā. Nārada replied that the cause of bad omens was the golden box he was keeping and that if it was kept in Laṅkā any longer, it would cause destruction and that if it was destroyed, great disaster would follow. Nārada advised Rāvaṇa to remove the box without opening it to somewhere else outside Laṅkā. Accordingly Rāvaṇa caused the golden box to be dropped in the sea. By and by it came with the waves to the shore of Bhārata (India). Robbers took it and went to the north and hid it in a forest. They were not able to take it away again. Thus the box came to be deposited on the basin of a river in Mithilā.

It was this river-basin that King Janaka selected as the place for sacrifice. Being kept in this holy place, the ashes of the body of Devavati in the box mingled with her spirit and was taking shape into a child. When the place was ploughed for preparing the spot of sacrifice, for Janaka, this golden box was discovered. The child which was inside the box, was taken home and

brought up by the king who named her Sitā. It was the portion of this Sitā herself that took birth next as Pāncālī. (Devī Bhāgavata, Kamba Rāmāyaṇa)

*Other versions.*

(i) The King Padmākṣa performed penance before Mahāviṣṇu with a view to get Mahālakṣmī as daughter. Mahāviṣṇu gave the King a great Phallus to realize his wish. From that a beautiful girl was born. The King named her Padmā. When she attained marriageable age, the King made preparations for her Svayamvara (the bride herself choosing a husband). On the day fixed for the marriage Rākṣasas came and destroyed all the preparations and killed King Padmākṣa. Because of her sorrow at this disaster Padmā jumped into the fire. The giants searched for Padmā every where, but they could not find her. They returned in disappointment.

One day, during this period, Rāvaṇa was travelling in his Aerial chariot. When he reached this place, he saw Padmā who had come out of the fire. Rāvaṇa was fascinated by the beauty of Padmā. So he turned towards her. Seeing this, Padmā again jumped into the pile of fire for safety. Without any delay Rāvaṇa made a search in the pile of fire. At last he got the body of Padmā (Sitā) in the form of five jewels. The disappointed Rāvaṇa placed the five jewels in a box and took it to Laṅkā and gave it to his wife Mandodarī. One day Mandodarī opened that box and saw Padmā sitting in the form of a beautiful virgin. Thinking that it was not propitious to keep her who was the cause of destruction to Padmākṣa, his family and kingdom, Mandodarī exerted pressure on Rāvaṇa to cast the box out of Laṅkā. Rāvaṇa with his men took the box from Laṅkā and buried it in Mithilā. Before the box was closed Padmā cursed Rāvaṇa. "I will come to Laṅkā again to kill you and your clan."

One day when a brahmin of Mithilā was ploughing his field he got this box. Thinking that it belonged to the King, the brahmin took the box to King Janaka. The King took the child in the box and brought it up. He named the child Sitā. (Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa, 7-6).

(ii) In Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa we see another story which is somewhat different from that we see in Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa. It is given below :—

Rāvaṇa who had become the harasser of the entire world began to harass the hermits and sages also. He used to shoot arrows at the hermits who were sitting in meditation in the forests, and taking their blood in the arrow-head, he stored it in a big pot. In the same forest a hermit named Grtsamada was engaged in penance to get a daughter who would be equal to Lakṣmī in every way. He took milk with the head of Darbha grass and stored it daily in a pot. One day Rāvaṇa came to his hermitage and took the pot of milk stealthily. He poured the milk into the pot in which he had stored the blood and stirring it well gave it to his wife Mandodarī. Seeing the character of her husband becoming worse and worse every day, Mandodarī became miserable. One day she decided to commit suicide and drank the contents of the pot given by Rāvaṇa. The thing which was taken for suicide, made her pregnant. Mandodarī buried that foetus in Kurukṣetra. After a while a girl was born