

Thulasi –the holy plant

Retold By

P.R.Ramachander

Thulasi (ocimum sanctum) is possibly the holiest plant for the Hindus. There is a story in Devi Bhagavatam about her.

Long long ago Lord Vishnu had three wives viz Lakshmi, Saraswathi and Ganga.(I have verified this in several sources) One day Ganga looked at Lord Vishnu with lot of passion, when the other two were present. A big quarrel erupted between them. When Saraswathi attacked Ganga, Lakshmi tried to separate them. Saraswathi got infuriated and cursed Lakshmi that she should be born as a plant in earth. Ganga cursed Saraswathi, that she should become a river and Saraswathi in turn cursed Ganga that she should become an ever flowing river. Lakshmi, who was loved a lot by Lord Vishnu, told her, “Please do not worry. You would be first born as a daughter of a very pious soul called Dharma Dwaja and later marry an Asura called Shanka Chooda, who would be one of my incarnations. Later you would come and join me in Vaikunta, after becoming the holy plant Thulasi.”

There was a great king called Rudra Savarni, in his clan was born a great king called Vrusha dwaja. Vrusha Dwaja was a very great devotee of Lord Shiva. Because of this he banned worship of all other Gods except Lord Shiva in his kingdom. Due to non worship of Goddess Lakshmi during the Kanya (October-November) month, there was a great famine in his country. Apart from that Lord Surya, who was also not worshipped, cursed the king that he would become a wretch. This infuriated Lord Shiva. He sent his Trident against Lord Surya. Lord Surya, afraid of Shiva’s trident ran to his father Kashyapa Prajapathi for help. Since he was not in a position to help, both of them approached Lord Brahma. He also expressed his helplessness to protect Lord Surya and all of them together went to meet Lord Vishnu. Lord Shiva also came there. Then Lord Vishnu pointed out that since the time of Deva’s was very much different, thousands of years have passed in the earth and Vrusha Dwaja was no more. He requested Lord Shiva to take back his trident. Then Lord Vishnu told them that in the clan of Vrusha Dwaja, two kings viz Dharma Dwaja and, Kusa Dwaja were remaining and both of them were doing extreme penance to Goddess Lakshmi, so that she would bless their kingdom .Goddess Lakshmi appeared before them and blessed them saying that she would be born as daughter to them and with this their country would become fertile and rich.

Kusa dwaja married a lady called Malawathi and a daughter Veda Vathi was born to them. When Veda Vathi was doing Thapas (penance), Ravana tried to rape her. She cursed Ravana that, if he touches any lady without their consent his head will beak in to thousand pieces. She then jumped in to the sacrificial fire and died. Ravana took the ashes of the fire, put them in a box and threw it in the sea. This box was swept ashore in the kingdom of Mithila and was found by Janaka. Vedavathi was in side the box in the form of a girl child .She was called Sita, who later became the wife of Lord Rama.

Dharma dwaja married a lady called Madhawi and Goddess Lakshmi was born to them as a girl child. Since she was an incomparable beauty, they called her Thula Si (Incomparable one). Thulasi grew up in to lass as soon as she was born and left her kingdom and started doing Thapas in Bhadrinath with a wish to marry Lord Vishnu .She did Thapas in the middle of fire all round her in summer and under water in winter. She did Thapas for twenty four thousand years eating only fruits. Another thirty six thousand years eating only leaves, another forty four thousand years eating only air and the last ten thousand years without eating any thing. Lord Brahma, appeared before her and asked her what she wanted. She told him that she wanted to become the wife of Lord Vishnu. Lord Brahma told her, “Hey Thulasi, Lord Sudhama who was a part of Lord Krishna is now born as an Asura called Shanka Chooda.He is a part incarnation of Lord Vishnu. You would first become his wife. Later you would become the wife of Lord Narayana. While going back , a part of you would remain in this world as a holy plant called Thulasi. Any worship which does not include worship with the leaves of Thulasi, would be incomplete and would not be accepted by Gods.”

Shanka Chooda at that time had pleased Lord Brahma by his Thapas and was given a Vishnu kavacha(armour) and a boon that unless the armour is removed from his body and till his wife loses her virtue(Pathivruthya) , no body can kill him, Shanka Chooda requested Thulasi to marry him and both were married. They lead an extremely happy life. This time Shanka Chooda started giving trouble to the Devas. Devas accompanied by Lord Shiva approached Lord Vishnu for a solution. Lord Vishnu gave his spear to Lord Shiva so that he can break the Vishnu Kavacha , which Shanka Chooda was wearing, When Lord Shiva and Shanka Chooda were engaged in a fierce battle, and Lord Vishnu assumed the form of Shanka Chooda and went to Shanka Chooda’s palace. When they entered the bed room Thulasi started suspecting Lord Vishnu. Then Lord Vishnu took his real form and told her, “Lakshmi, you have been doing great penance to marry me. By Now Shanka Chooda would have been killed by Lord Shiva and it is time for you to leave this body and come as Lakshmi to Vaikunta and be with me. Your body which you leave here will become a great river called Gandaki and your hair would transform itself in to a holy plant Thulasi. This plant would become the holiest among plants.”

Lord Vishnu and goddess Lakshmi returned to Vaikunta.