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Śabarī in the *Rāmacaritamānasa* and other *Rāmāyaṇas*

Śabarī is an important character in the *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulasīdāsa: she represents a lowly woman who meets Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa after the abduction of Sītā and obtains salvation by the grace of Rāma. In the folklore of Northern India she is considered to have been a tribal woman who offered leftover plums to Rāma who ate them happily and granted her supreme status. In some folk songs she is mentioned as a Bhilanī¹. The Kols in Central India claim their origin from her². But none of the classical Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇas* such as the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, Kambana's Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa* in Telugu or the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kṛttivāsa depicts this story of her tribal birth or her act of feeding Rāma with already tasted (*uchīṣṭa*) plums. For the first time she is mentioned as a Bhīl woman (*Bhīlanī*) in the *Bhaktamāla* of Nābhādāsa dating back to the 17th century, where she is said to have offered Rāma plums (*bera*) which she had already tasted³. This is attested in Indian folklore. This *jūṭhā bera* episode is found in the *Sūrasāgara* of Sūradāsa (A.D. 1581–85) where she is mentioned in the *Rāmacaritāvalī*⁴. But again we cannot give a precise date

¹ In Bhojpurī and Avadhī speaking areas the present author has heard such songs many times. In one of them '*bhīlanī ke jūṭhavā beravā khailanī ho Rāmā*', which means that Rāma ate the left-over plums given to him by Śabarī, is repeated several times. In one of the Avadhī songs Rāma eats the sweet fruits offered by Śabarī, but Lakṣmaṇa casts them aside.

*Rāma pahūce Sabarī ke asarama re
ari ho miṭhī miṭhī phalā lai kai āi
tau Rāmā kay bhojana kare re
ari ho Lachimana bhojana nāhī kare
tau pichavā bahāvaya re*

(Rāma reached Śabarī's *āsrama*. She brought sweet fruits for him and Rāma ate them, but Lakṣmaṇa did not eat any and threw them behind). Cf. K. Marālī, *Lokaḡitō mē Rāmakathā*, Sāhitya Bhavan Pvt., Allahabad 1986, p. 161.

² C. Bulcke, *Rāmakathā*, Hindī Pariṣad Prakāśan, Allahabad 1962, p. 438. See also W.G. Griffiths, *The Kol Tribes of Central India*, Calcutta 1946, p. 207.

³ Śrī Nābhā Svāmī, *Bhaktamāla*, ed. Jānakīdāsa Vaiṣṇava, Ṭhakur Prasād eṇḍ Sans, Vārāṇasī V.S. 2022(1965), pp. 22–25.

*Śabarī asarama raghubara āye
ardhāsana dai prabhu baiṭhāye
khāṭe phala taji miṭhe lyāi*

for this version, which seems to be of late origin. Tulasī does not mention this episode at all. In *dohā* 36 Tulasī depicts her as *jātihīna*, without a caste, and of lowly birth. The Hindi commentator of the Gītā press, Gorakhpur edition, explains *jātihīna* as *nīca jāti* (mean caste)⁵, which does not seem to be appropriate. A proper translation of *jātihīna*, would be exactly ‘without a caste’. A tribal social system is free from the caste dogma, and this is what Śabarī seems to be. The whole *dohā* is as follows:

Jātihīna agha janma mahi mukta kīnhi asa nārī
mahā manda asa sukha cahati aise prabhuhi visārī (Aranya K., 36)

Following the Hindi commentary of the Gītā press, Hill translates in this way:

‘He (Rāma) granted liberation to a woman like that, of such low caste and altogether born in sin. O foolish, foolish soul! do you expect peace if you pay no heed to such a Lord?’⁶

Elsewhere, in the *Rāmacaritamānasa*, Śabarī calls herself *adhama jāti*⁷, which may mean of the lowest caste. In fact, Śabarī’s caste identity is not very

juṭhe bhaye so sahajsuhā
antaryāmī ati hita mānī
bhoana kīne svāda bakhānī
jāti na jānata kāhuki prabhu jānata
bhakti bhāva hai jugajuga mānata
kari dandavata bhāi balihārī

Rāma came to Śabarī’s dwelling place. She gave him a seat with utmost respect and made him sit. She brought sweet fruits leaving behind the sour ones. The fruits which were already tasted were tasty. The Lord who dwells in everyone’s heart relished them and praised their sweet taste, manifesting his affection. Prabhu does not pay attention to anybody’s caste; he accepts the emotions of *bhakti* all the time in every age. She prostrated to salute him. She was completely dedicated to him. Finally she left her body and went to heaven. Sūradāsa says: “Lord Rāma was very kind and performed her last rites with his own hands”, Sūradāsa, *Sūra Sāgara*, ed. Nanda Dulāre Bājpeyī Vārāṇasī V.S. 2029 (1972), p. 208 (1st edn. 1948–50).

Sūradāsa (d. VS.1638–42) is a Kṛṣṇaite poet who describes the loves of Kṛṣṇa. In the above-mentioned edition Kṛṣṇa’s heroic actions have been included following the *Bhāgavata Puraṇa*, which also tells Rāma’s story. It seems that the manuscripts that follow the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are late, and that the poems are most probably later innovations. Thus we are not able to ascertain the genuineness of Śabarī’s episode or, for that matter, of the whole Rāma story or other Kṛṣṇaite long narrations such as the *Putanāvadhā* etc. The Venkateśvar press, Bombay, and the Kāśī Nāgarī Pracariṇī Sabhā editions are collections that have grown around the name of Sūradāsa when he became famous. An the end of the poem, Sūraja Dāsa appears as the name signature in the place of Sūradāsa, and this also casts some doubts about the authenticity of the episode. We are not sure that Sūradāsa and Sūraja Dāsa are one and the same person.

⁵ Tulasīdāsa, *Rāmacarita mānasa*, modern Hindi commentary by Hanumāna Dāsa Poddāra, Gītā Press, Gorakhpur, VS. 2052 (1995), 1st edn. 1939. See the commentary that follows *dohā* 36 of the *Aranya kāṇḍa*.

⁶ W.D. P. Hill, *The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1971, p. 319 (1st edn. 1952).

⁷ *Rāmacaritamānasa*, *op. cit.*: *adhama jāti mā jāra mati bhārī* (*Aranya kāṇḍa* 34.1).

clear. She seems to be a tribal, as attested in the *Bhaktamāla* and in the folk songs of Northern India. Therefore, there was no other way for a classical poet to call her but *jātihīna* or *adhama jāti*. Here we must bear in mind that the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* calls Śabarī *hīna jāti samudbhavā*, 'born in a low caste'⁸. Tulasī makes her *jātihīna*, which means without caste. For the Hindu caste system Śabarī is an outcaste, and it was therefore an obvious choice for the poets to call her a *hīnajāti*, *jātihīna* or *adhama jāti*. Elsewhere the words *caṇḍāla* or *malekṣa* would have been used, but they were not appropriate in a *bhakti* context, where, whether belonging to a caste or having no caste or creed, either man or woman, rich or poor, all can achieve salvation if they are devoted to God.

In the *Rāmācaritamānasa*, Śabarī appears first in her *āśrama* (that of sage Mataṅga)⁹ when Rāma presents himself after the demon Kabandha has been defeated. Before his death Mataṅga had assured that Lord Rāma would come and give her salvation. In the Tulasī's *Rāmāyaṇa* Śabarī remembers this and becomes pleased when Rāma and Lakṣmana appear.

*Śabarī dekhi Rāma grhā āe
muni ke bacana samujhi jiyā bhāye* (Araṇya K., 33/3)

'When Śabarī found that Rāma had arrived at her place (lit. *grha*, house) she was pleased to remember the words of the sage (Mataṅga)'. The whole episode of Śabarī is very brief here:

1. Śabarī touches the feet of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa as soon as they arrive. Overcome with love she bows her head to them again and again. Their eyes are large and resemble lotus flowers. They wear matted hair (*jaṭā*) and garlands around their necks. Rāma is dark and Lakṣmaṇa is fair. Beholding them she becomes speechless, overcome by love. She washes their feet and then gives them a beautiful *āsana* upon which to sit.

2. Later she brings delicious fruits, roots and bulbs and offers them to both. Rāma eats them and praises them.

3. She stands before them with joined hands. Her love for Rāma increases more and more. Then she says: 'I am a woman of a very low caste (*adhama jāti*). I do not know how I can perform worship and praise'. She appears to be very hesitant.

⁸ *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, text and Hindi commentary by Muni Lāl, Gītā Press, Gorakhpur, V.S. 2051 (1994). 1st edn. V.S. 1989 (1932).

⁹ Śabarī's teacher Mataṅga was born to a barber (*nāpita*) father and a *brāhmaṇa* mother. There is a story in the *Mahābhārata* that once he went to fetch sacrificial objects for his father on a chariot driven by a donkey. He beat the donkey mercilessly and the donkey's mother reproached him to be so cruel because his father was a *caṇḍāla*. He came to know the story of his low birth from his father. Later he exercised austerities to obtain Brāhmaṇahood. Indra in his self-defence told him that it was vain for a man of low caste to try to obtain Brāhmaṇahood and turned him into a lovely bird. He was called Chandodeva. Later Mataṅga obtained heaven. Mataṅga was a great *ṛṣi* and the fine trees in his hermitage had grown from the sweat of his pupils.

4. Then Rāma speaks to her and tells her that the only relationship that he accepts is *bhakti*. Caste, lineage, family, religion, glory and wealth, qualities and cleverness, one may possess all these things, but he who has no *bhakti* is like a cloud without water.

5. Later Rāma preaches and explains to her nine types of *bhakti* which are also found in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (Tulasī's main source of inspiration). In the *Bhāgavata Purāna* nine types of *bhakti* are also preached, but in a different form (see below).

6. Rāma assures Śabarī that she is dear to him because she has firm *bhakti* in him. He says: 'Supreme status which is obtained by *yogīs* through profound austerity, will be achieved by you. If *jīva* has my *darśana*, has seen me, he will attain to his original nature (divinity). In the end Rāma, who is performing the divine play (*līlā* or *carita*) like an ordinary human being, asks her if she has any news of Sītā. She tells him to proceed towards the Pampā lake where he will make friendship with Sugrīva who will tell him how Sītā can be found. She tells Rāma all the story which the sage Mataṅga had related her. In other *Rāmāyaṇas* this has been described in detail, but Tulasī finishes the whole thing in one verse:

*bāra bāra prabhu pada siru nāi
prema sahita saba kathā sunai. (Aranya K., 35/13)*

'She bowed before Rāma again and again, then told him the whole story with love'.

The readers or listeners of Tulasī's time perhaps knew the whole story, so that it was not relevant for Tulasī to give the full details. This, actually, is a standard technique used by the poet.

7. Finally Śabarī burns herself to death into a fire created by Yogic power (*joga pāvaka*). She attains the supreme status from where a living being does not return to this life again. In the end Tulasī says 'O man! abandon the various actions which make you sorrowful. Have faith and love Rāma's feet.' (*Aranya K.*, 35, 3-4)

It has to be remembered here, that before the beginning of Śabarī's episode, Rāma preaches to Kabandha¹⁰ and tells him that one should worship *brāhmaṇas* since Brahmā, Śiva and all the other gods including himself become the servant of he who serves *brāhmaṇas*:

¹⁰ Name of the *rākṣasa* Danu (son of Śrī), punished by Indra for insolently challenging him to combat; his head and thighs were forced into his body by a blow from the god's thunderbolt, leaving him with long arms and a huge mouth in his belly; it was predicted that he would not recover his original shape until his arms were cut off by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. See M. Monier Willams, *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Oxford 1899. A detailed story of Kabandha is given in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* in *Aranya kāṇḍa* 69, 24-51; 70, 1-70; 71, 1-35; 72, 1-27; 73, 1-73. Before meeting Śabarī, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa meet Kabandha. Cf. the *Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmiki*, tr. Hari Prasad Shastri, Shantī Sadan, London 1985, pp. 149-53 (1st edn. 1957).

*mana krama bacana kapaṭa taji jo kari bhuūsuri seva
mohi sameta biranci siva basa tākē saba deva* (Aranya K., 33)

‘He who in thought and word and deed does sincere service to the gods on earth (*brāhmaṇas*) may command myself as well as Brahmā and Śiva and all the other deities’¹¹.

Tulasī has often been criticised for his extolling the superiority of the *brāhmaṇas*. Here Rāma speaks to Kābandha while he is dying, struck by Rāma’s arrows.

‘A *brāhmaṇa* is adorable even if he curses, beats, scolds and speaks harsh words. A *sūdra* is not venerable even if he is full of qualities, learned and expert in knowledge (*gyāna pravīṇa*). A *brāhmaṇa*, should be revered even if he is devoid of qualities and character. Rāma says: “He does not like a man who is against the *brāhmaṇas* (*brāhmaṇa drohī*)”¹². It is immediately after this statement that Tulasī introduces the Śabarī episode in which Rāma shows great favour to Śabarī.

Vālmīki describes Mataṅga’s forest and Śabarī’s *āśrama* in some detail, with blossoming flowers, birds and beasts, altars of the ascetics where they use to chant the *gāyatrī mantra*. Tulsīdāsa ignores many details that Vālmīki incorporates. In his *Rāmacaritamānasa*, Śabarī is a great devotee of Rāma has no caste or is of mean caste (*jāti hīna* or *adhama jāti*) and obtains the salvation (*mukti*).

Vālmīki does not report things in this way. Śabarī is instead a great ascetic (*tapasvīnī*) living with hermits in the beautiful *aśrama* of the sage Mataṅga. She is called a *siddha* – endowed with spiritual powers – and a *śramaṇī* – who is a hard, working woman performing acts of bodily mortification, religious exercises and austerity. In the *Tulasī Rāmāyaṇa* Rāma calls her a great devotee and explains to her nine methods of *bhakti* akin to the descriptions of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. In the end she throws herself into the fire and goes to heaven. However, the fire in the *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulasīdāsa is ignited by her Yogic power (*yogāgni*), whereas in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* it is not. Vālmīki describes her in some detail, as wearing matted hair, a special garment and a black deer skin, garlands of flower, beautiful ornaments etc. before entering the *hutāsana* (sacred fire). Finally she goes to heaven¹³.

The Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kambana describes Śabarī as a great ascetic who lives meditating upon Rāma. When she meets him, her eyes become filled with tears in devotion. She says to Rāma: ‘My austerity has borne fruits now that I have seen you. Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and other gods had informed me that Rāma himself would come here. I lived here only to see you. I am blessed today. Rāma gives that great ascetic, Śabarī, his blessings.’ As in Vālmīki’s and Tulasī’s

¹¹ Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

¹² *sāpata tāṛata parusa kahantā, bipra puṇya asa gāvahā santā
puṇya bipra s:īla guna hīnā sūdra na guna gana gyāna pravīṇā* (Aranya K., 33).

¹³ Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, Aranya K., 74/34.

Rāmāyaṇas Śabarī explains Rāma how to reach Sugrīva, who will later help him to find Sītā. In the end she abandons her body by her Yogic power, but is not told to have burnt herself into the fire:

‘After that, she gave up her body, / in the culmination of her Yogic powers / gained through her efforts and, by herself, / with joy she reached the heavenly world. / Seeing her, the heroes felt measureless admiration and set out, / with their anklets of gold resounding / on the great route that she had described’¹⁴.

Descriptions of the nature of the beautiful *aśrama* and of her welcoming Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa by washing their feet and bowing her head are absent in Kambana. Rāma calls Śabarī mother, which is extremely cordial and humble. Śabarī’s caste background and the eulogizing *brāhmaṇas* as opposed to *śūdras*, is not found in the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*. Nor is it in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. The offering of already tasted plums to Rāma, a significant element in folk songs, is not found in any of these classical texts.

The Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* of Gonabuddha, also known as *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, gives a comprehensive description of Rāma’s qualities in this context. Upon his arrival in her hermitage, Śabarī touches his feet with great devotion and then adores him, remembering his victory over Tāṛakā and his protecting the sacrifice of Viśvamitra (Kauśika). Rāma had walked on the path along the Gaṅgā, had given salvation to Ahilyā, had broken Śiva’s bow and killed many demons, among which Khara Dūṣaṇa and Mārīca, and had performed many other heroic acts: all this is recalled in her *stuti* (praise) of Rāma¹⁵.

Śabarī is reported to have lived in the hermitage of Mataṅga who, before his death, proclaimed that Rāma would come to that place and Śabarī would have an occasion to welcome him. Śabarī narrates this story to Rāma, to whom she offers beets, roots, bulbs etc. to eat, a detail which is found in *Tulasī Rāmāyaṇa* as well. The Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* does not refer to this. In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* Śabarī mentions that she had collected fruits from the forest, which indirectly suggests that Rāma ate them. She requests Rāma to meet the son of Sūrya (Sugriva), who will help him in finding Sītā on the Rṣyamūka mountain. Śabarī also repeats the story of how Sugrīva’s wife and kingdom have been abducted by Vālī and how he is suffering.

This well-known story is not reported in the other *Rāmāyaṇas*. Kambana just mentions that Śabarī sent two brothers to Sugrīva. In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* only Kabandha requests Rāma to go to Sugrīva in the Rṣyamūka mountain, who will help him in the search of Sītā.

The Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* repeats that Śabarī ignited the fire and holding Rāmā’s image in her heart burned herself to death. Indra and the other gods came

¹⁴ G.L. Hart and H. Heifetz. *The Forest Book of the Rāmāyaṇa of Kampan*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1988, p. 300.

¹⁵ Gonabuddha, *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, transl. into Hindi by A.C. Kāmākṣī Rāv, Bihār Rāṣṭra Bhāṣā Paṛiṣada, Patna 1961, p. 167.

to see her, and Śabarī went to heaven¹⁶. Her asceticism is not as conspicuous as her *bhakti* in the Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa*. As in the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*, she is more of a firm devotee than a *tapasvanī*. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa bhakti* is not emphasized. Śabarī is more of a profound *tapasvīnī* than anything else: she performs austerities and penances, and helps and serves the sages of the *āśrama*.

In the Bengali *Kṛttivāsa Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa behold the forest where Śabarī lived. Countless birds of bright plumage and deer sporting happily in pairs could be seen. Milk-white swans glided on the waters, gay butterflies lazily floated in the balmy air. Rāma's heart ached anew¹⁷. The world was beautiful, but without Sītā he was suffering. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa came to the hermitage of Śabarī who was an aged woman to whom the sage Mataṅga had recommended before his death to stay until Viṣṇu would appear in the guise of Rāma. She had been waiting for him for a long time. In the *Kṛttivāsa Rāmāyaṇa* she is not described as great an ascetic as in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* but her *bhakti* emerges very well. In her youth she had erected an auspicious gateway of banana trees overhung with fresh green *devadāra* leaves to receive him and straining her eyes she had gazed across the far horizon for the coming of the Blessed One. In her middle age, she had kept tall pitchers of water full to the brim in auspicious welcome, with the offering of flowers. In her declining years daily she had plucked ripe fruits for her holy guest, and he whom she worshipped so devotedly in her heart had appeared at last!¹⁸

Śabarī gives Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa her hospitality, shows them round the hermitage and finally bids them farewell. Kṛttivāsa does not describe her being burned in the fire to reach heaven. Her devotion to Rāma is as profound as in the other texts. Some of her acts such as making a gateway from banana trees and *devadāra* leaves in her youth and collecting water to welcome Rāma in her middle age are Kṛttivāsa's additions. In the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* Śabarī is shown to perform more actions in her devotion.

The Sanskrit *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, which is a major source for Tulasī, is a philosophical text dealing with *bhakti*. In fact, the nine methods of *bhakti* described by Tulasī are already found in it. It is interesting to see how *bhakti* is preached by Rāma in a sectarian Rāmaite text going probably back to the 14th or 15th century¹⁹. The Śabarī episode begins here when Kabandha is killed and Rāma reaches Śabarī's hermitage with Lakṣmaṇa. Beholding them Śabarī's eyes are filled with tears of joy. She falls on Rāma's feet and later she worships them and offers them the fruits which she has collected, a feature common to all the *Rāmāyaṇas*. She narrates them the story that the sage Mataṅga had told her before his death that Rāma would come in her *āśrama* one day and that he had

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 168.

¹⁷ Kṛttivāsa, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Shudhā Mazumdār, Orient Longman's, Calcutta 1977, p. 109.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 110.

¹⁹ See S.M Pandey, *Abduction of Sītā in the Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdāsa*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica 8, Leuven 1977, p. 266.

incarnated himself as Rāma to kill the demons. Here Śabarī tells Rāma that she was born in a low caste (*hīna jāti samudbhavā*), a circumstance which is also found, as we have seen above, also in Tulasī's *Rāmāyaṇa*: but whereas the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* uses the word *hīnajāti*, Tulasī has *jātihīna*, which may mean 'without caste'. In the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* Rāma says to Śabarī: 'The state of being a man or a woman or belonging to a class of *āśrama* or to a particular state of life or else bearing any special name is not a qualification for adoring me. Devotion is the only qualification. If a man has no devotion for me, neither sacrifice nor charities, neither *tapasyā* nor the study of the *Vedas* and the performance of rituals can help one to see me. By *bhakti* alone am I attained'²⁰.

Tulasī is brief, but he makes very clear that one may have high caste, good family, group, religion, glory, prosperity, power, relatives, cleverness and other qualities but that without *bhakti* one is like a cloud without water. Though borrowing many elements from the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* he makes new additions or changes to make his message of *Rāmakathā* clearer to the minds of the people.

I have already compared elsewhere two versions of the nine methods of *bhakti* in two *Rāmāyaṇas*, the *Adhyātma* and the *Rāmacaritamānasa*.²¹ Here a brief comparison is given. The *Adhyātma* describes the following nine types of *bhakti*:

(1) *satāmsaṅgati (satsaṅga)*, the communion of saints. (2) *kathalāpaḥ*, the recitation of my deeds. (3) *guṇeram*, the singing of qualities. (4) *vyākhyā (śāstra)* the exposition of sayings or scriptures. (5) *acāryopāsanaṁ*, to serve the spiritual teachers with devotion to me. (6) *yama, niyama śīla*, purity of heart and keeping to the rules of good conduct and firm faith in meditating upon me. (7) *mantropāsaktva*, repeating and using *mantras*. (8) *madbhakteṣvadhikā pūjā sarvabhūteṣu manmatih*, to love my devotees more than myself and to see me in everybody, detached from worldly things. (9) *sarala chala hīna*, simplicity in one's behaviour and honest dealings with all.

In the *Rāmacaritamānasa* (*Aranya K.*, 34/4 to 35/3) Rāma preaches Śabarī almost the same thing:

(1) *santa saṅga*, fellowship of saints. (2) *kathāprasaṅga mē rati*, devotion to the stories concerning Rāma. (3) *guru pad paṅkaja sevā, amāna bhagati*, selfless devotion to the *guru*'s lotus feet without pride. (4) *gunagāna*, singing the praise of Rāma. (5) *mantra jāpa, bhajana*, repetition of the names of Rāma and devotional songs. (6) *damaśīla virati*, self control and detachment from this world. (7) *sama mohi maya jaga dekhā, motem santa adhika kara lekhā* beholding the world instinct with Rāma and to regard the saints as greater than Rāma. (8) *yathā lābha santoṣa, par doṣa na dekhaī*, to be content with what one has got, not finding fault with others. (9) *sarala chala hīna, bharosā*, simplicity in one's dealings with all, complete trust in me.

²⁰ *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, *Aranya K.*, 10/20–21.

²¹ Pandey, *op. cit.*, pp. 286–87

It is needless to say that Tulasī follows the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (*Araṇya K.*, 10/22–28) closely. Rāma teaches Śabarī the nine methods of *bhakti* in both the *Rāmāyaṇas* in a similar way. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (7/5.23) also teaches nine methods of *bhakti* but slightly differently²². Prahāda teaches his father, Hiranyaśipu, who is hostile to Viṣṇu, the nine methods: ‘There are nine forms of devotion to Lord Viṣṇu. (1) *śravaṇam*, to hear the names, episodes etc. of Viṣṇu. (2) *kīrtanam*, to sing of his name and glories. (3) *smaraṇam*, to remember him (his name). (4) *pādasevanam*, to render service unto him. (5) *arcanam*, to worship him. (6) *vandanam*, to pay obeisance to him. (7) *dāsyam*, to dedicate one’s own actions to him. (8) *sakhyam*, to confide in him as a friend. (9) *ātmanivedanam*, to offer one’s body and belonging to his service and care. Offering oneself completely to the Lord and performing one’s ninefold devotions to him is regarded by me as the highest type of learning’, thus says Prahāda.

If we analyse the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and that the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, we find that the listening to the story of the Divine (*kathālāpaḥ*) in the *Adhyātma* is the *śravaṇam* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the singing of the qualities (*guṇeranam*) is the *kīrtanam* of the latter: the remembering of his qualities recalls the *smaraṇam* and the *pujanam* of the Divinity. The company of saints, worshipping a *guru*, and repeating sectarian *mantras* are not mentioned in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in this context, but it is said elsewhere that sinking in the dust at the feet of the great ones is necessary to reach the feet of Viṣṇu (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 7/5.32). *Bhakti* is the means to salvation. The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* emphasizes that all the nine forms of *bhakti* generate *prema lakṣaṇā bhakti*, which is love and devotion to God. In the *Adhyātma* and in the Tulasī *Rāmāyaṇa*, Śabarī attains *mukti* through this. It is obvious that the importance of the *Satsaṅga* has not been referred to in the context of the nine forms of *bhakti* in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, but elsewhere it is stated that *bhakti* comes through in the company of great souls (*satsaṅga labdhya mayī* (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 11/ 11.24). Purity and detachment from the worldly things are necessary to reach Viṣṇu. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Adhyātma* and the Tulasī *Rāmāyaṇa* all agree on this point. Prahāda has complete trust in Viṣṇu and protects him when his father Hiranyaśipu wants to kill him. This complete surrender to God is the characteristic of a devotee which has been emphasized in all the classical texts.

In conclusion, we can say that in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* Śabarī appears as an ascetic (*tapasvanī*) who practices penance and is wont to serve the sages in the hermitage of the *ṛṣi* Mataṅga. In later *Rāmāyaṇas* she becomes a devotee of Rāma. In the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* she is described as being of *hīna jāti* (low caste). Later Tulasīdāsa calls her *jātihīna* or belonging to *adhamajāti* (mean caste). The *Bhaktamāla* remembers her as a *Bhīlanī* woman. In the Tulasīdāsa *Rāmāyaṇa* she demonstrates her profound *bhakti* and hospitality to Rāma who is in search of Sītā. After meeting Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa she tells them the path to

²² Ibid.

the Pampā *sara* (lake) where they will meet Sugrīva. She holds Rāma in her heart and throws herself into *yogāgni* ignited by yogic power and obtains salvation.

In the words of Tulasī she is immersed into *haripada* from where there is no returning to this life. In the *Bhaktamāla* she offers Rāma plums which she has already tasted (*jūṭhā bera*), which Rāma eats. In North Indian folklore this act is celebrated because Rāma ate them happily and gave the low caste devotee a supreme state which is rare even for great sages.