

Behind the famous injunctions to Hindu women, “Be like Sita!” or “Be a Second Sita!” lies the ideal of the perfect wife (*pativrata*), the ever-devoted and faithful Sita found in the many versions (*katha*) of the Ramayana. The paradigm of the *pativrata* most certainly includes the performance of one of the wife’s chief traditional duties: cooking for her husband as well as family, guests, and the gods. Yet in most of the classical Ramayanas that define the *pativrata*, the quintessential perfect wife never cooks. To literally be a second Sita, the most the ideal wife would have to do is gather nuts and fruit from the forest.

Why is this wife/goddess who is never in the kitchen commemorated throughout India by kitchen shrines (*Sita Rasois*)? They exist today in Ayodhya, where it is said that Sita cooked for Dasharatha and his family, and in many places that loosely correspond to where she might have cooked for Rama, Lakshmana, and her twin sons during her times of exile in the forest (*vanavas*). These shrines commemorating her putative culinary artistry do much more than quaintly concretize a gloss on the textual *Ramayanas*; they present and represent the banquet of meanings, symbols, and concepts linking the roles of women, wives, and goddesses to the production of ideal kingship, both at home and in exile. The *Sita Rasois* of the city and forest are signs of the movable feast associated with Sita: from her flows the bounty that is the foundation for the once and future utopian world of fruitful abundance that is *Ramarajya*.

Visiting *Sita Rasois*

In Ayodhya, an elaborate Sita’s Kitchen lies abandoned behind locked gates. Elsewhere in India, however, a number of Sita’s Kitchens still function as sites of pilgrimage and devotion. From the many *Sita*

Sita in the Kitchen: The *Pativrata* and *Ramarajya*

○ Phyllis K. Herman

Rasois attested to by ethnographers and listed in the modern compendium of pilgrimage sites known as the *Tirthank Kalyan* (Second edition, 1995), I chose to visit several along one possible route taken by the forest

exiles (*vanavasis*) Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana.

At least two of Sita’s kitchens have been documented in Ayodhya, but only one survived the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. I found



the intact Sita *Rasoi* within the fenced-off complex on the Ramkot, in the building bearing the painted-on phrase “Janmasthana Sita *Rasoi*” (Birthplace Sita’s Kitchen). The *Rasoi* shrine is in the basement and quite beautiful. It has on the floor three tiles patterned in green, white, and black a concrete-block sitting place; a concrete-and-tile rolling board; and a molded-concrete rolling pin. Near the back wall is an oven (*chulha*), and above it is a shrine to Sita. The *panda* described the *Janmasthana* as the place where Rama was nurtured and spent most of his childhood, and he said that the kitchen was where Sita cooked her first meal for Rama’s father, Dasharatha (see Herman, 1998).

From Ayodhya, I traveled west to the Bharadvaja Ashram in modern Allahabad (Prayag). Various sources had led me to believe that a Sita *Rasoi* was there, at the ashram where Valmiki recounts that Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana resided for a short time. I found what looked like fairly new temples to Shiva and to the goddess Santoshi Mata at the ashram, but the women who ran the temples stated firmly that the Sita *Rasoi* was in Chitrakut, not in Allahabad. Nonetheless, they and the *pandas* I talked to in and around Allahabad all said the same thing about Sita cooking: When Sita was at the Bharadvaja Ashram ‘of course she cooked.’

Continuing towards Chitrakut on the same possible route of the first forest exile, I visited the village of Lalapur, about an hour east of Allahabad. There, at the top of a hill—above a temple (*mandir*) to a local goddess and adjacent to a Valmiki Ashram, a site from Sita’s second forest exile—are the clearly marked remains of a Sita’s Kitchen. Written on an outcropping of rock directly below the ashram is the phrase “Sita *Rasoi*” with a white

arrow pointing towards the shrine. Following the arrow, I found a small cave, again labeled Sita’s *Rasoi* in orange paint where, according to the local *pandas*, Sita cooked for her sons, Kusha and Lava, while at Valmiki’s Ashram. Visible near the cave is an ancient, and now dry, path made by running water, a factor that would have made it a good kitchen place. The tin sign describing the spot as a Sita *Rasoi* was lying on the ground, and the shrine itself was neglected. One *panda* explained that robbers had taken the images (*murtis*) of Sita, Kusha, and Lava, and therefore the site had lost popularity. Four new *murtis* of Sita, Kusha, Lava, and Valmiki carved in marble lay nearby, awaiting installation. Once they were in place, the *panda* said, worship (*puja*) at the *Rasoi* and the Ashram would again be popular.

About an hour from Lalapur lies the holy town of Chitrakut. The *Chitrakut Mahatmya* begins by praising the area: “When in Chitrakut you are on the right path. . . Looking at what can be found there, no worldly desires will detract you from your aims.” The *Mahatmya* goes on to give routes for modern pilgrimages in and around Chitrakut. On the first day, the pilgrim (*pujari*) should circum-ambulate Kamadgiri Hill. On the second day, the *pujari* must climb another hill, east of the Kamadgiri, on which is situated the Hanuman Dhara Mandir. This Mandir is about halfway up the steep hill and, after *puja* there, he should continue to the top, to the Sita *Rasoi*. Along the way, the pilgrim should stop at the hill’s many sites commemorating scenes from the *Ramayanakatha*, including several sets of Rama’s footprints imbedded in the stones.

At the very top of the hill, commanding an incredible view of the Mandakini River and the land below, is the Sita *Rasoi* complex. At its entry is a life-size statue of

Tulsidas and more footprints left by Rama. The signs instruct the pilgrim to have *darshan* of Rama’s footprints and then proceed to the cottage that is the Sita *Rasoi*. This small structure, which is built of stone and painted white, commemorates Sita’s cooking for Rama and Lakshmana, at Chitrakut, during the first *vanavas*. At the shrine’s entrance are what looks like a grinding stone and a board for rolling dough. Within the shrine is a rolling pin and, built into the back wall, a *chulha*. On the wall above this flower-laden *chulha* is graffiti referring to the “mother of children” and “fruits of [or in] this kitchen (*chaukasthan*)” — that is, although this Sita *Rasoi* marks a spot from the first *vanavas*, the graffiti references motherhood as well as cooking. Across from the *Rasoi* is another structure, a shrine dedicated to Sita and Rama, in which the emphasis is again on Sita. Her *murti* is gloriously arrayed, and women’s bangle bracelets hang from the walls to form a sort of a frame above and around this image.

Departing from the route of the first forest exile, I went north from Chitrakut to Brahmavarta, near Bithur, Uttar Pradesh, where I knew there to be a Sita’s Kitchen yet again located in a Valmiki Ashram, where Sita gave birth and raised Kusha and Lava during her second *vanavas*. I had seen pictures of this Sita’s Kitchen that had been taken in the 1980s, but when I arrived in 2000, I found that the complex had been renovated. The landmarks of the *Ramayanakatha* remained the same, of course: “There,” the visitor will be told, “Is where Sita gave birth; over there is the garden where the twins kept the horse they stole from Rama’s *Ashvamedha*; that is where Sita entered the underworld—and here, at the center of this Valmiki Ashram, is where Sita cooked for Kusha and Lava.”

The kitchen shrine is a small free-standing structure, newly painted white and designated with a plaque, rather than the painted-on label of the 1980s. The front aperture, where offerings are placed, frames a large bell that hangs from the center of the shrine's ceiling. While the bell was not in the photographs from the 1980s, and a third shelf had been added within the shrine's niche, apparently to accommodate utensils along with the *murti* of Sita and the *chulha*, the building itself seems unchanged.

On the top shelf in the niche Sita presides in the same place as in the 1980s, although her *murti* now appears much fresher and newer. The *chulha* on the bottom shelf is likewise the same, except that it had received a coat of white paint. Many of the utensils that a good cook needs are placed around Sita and on the shelves below: along with the *chulha*, I could identify a long-handled wooden instrument possibly used for stoking the fire, a grinding stone, leaves, a rolling pin, and a rolling board. This *Sita Rasoi* has more kitchen utensils than the others I visited, and, surprisingly, they are modern and functional. Also in this Sita's Kitchen are implements found in traditional temple settings: a flywhisk of peacock feathers, folded cloths, a fan, a shell, a coconut, and some dishes. A few bangle offerings—like those at Chitrakut—decorate the wall around the niche. Intrinsic to the *Sita Rasoi* in Brahmavarta seems to be a particularly strong sense of the conflation of sacred space and domestic (kitchen) space. Indeed, the panda mentioned that on occasions such as Ramnavami and Shivaratri, *pandas* 'cooked' in it, that is, they stood in the *Sita Rasoi* and handed out *prashad* to pilgrims.

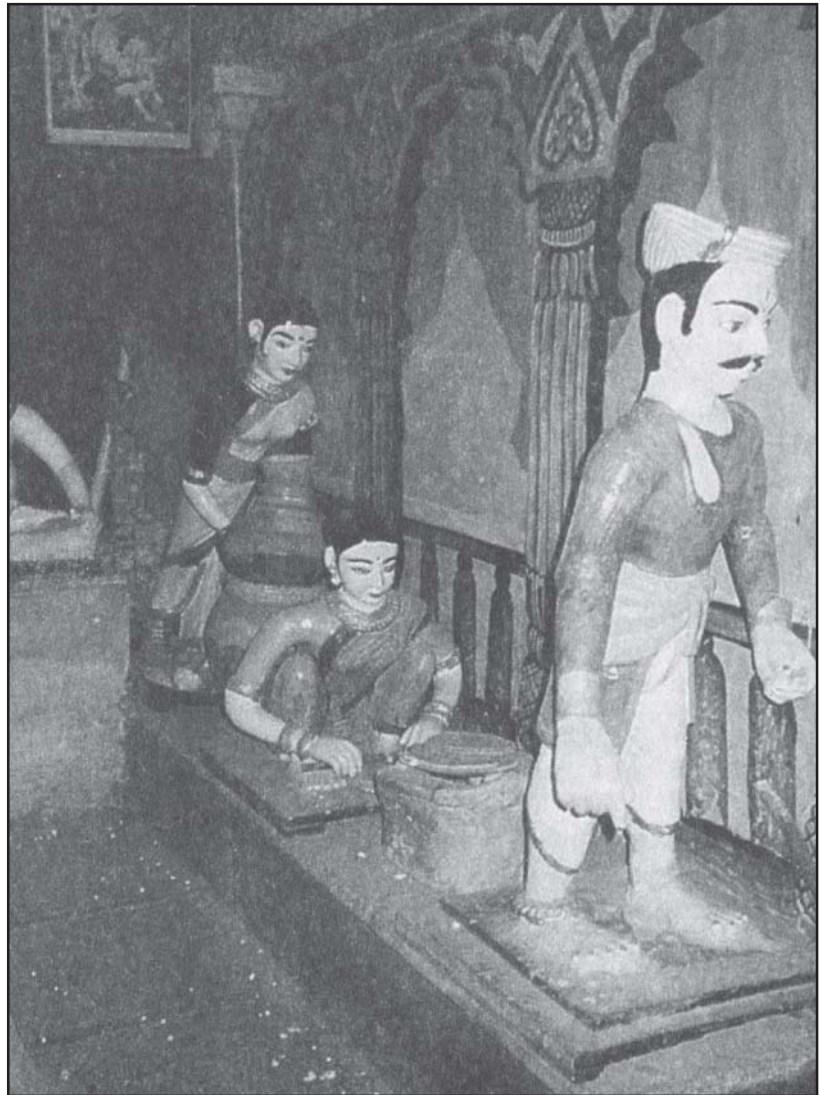
Discovering Sita's Sansar

Far to the south of this Valmiki

Ashram in Uttar Pradesh, lies another geography filled with locales from the *Ramayanakatha*: the city of Nasik, in Maharashtra. The *Tirthank Kalyan* has Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana living in the forests of Panchavati and Tapovan, and it is from this general area that Ravana kidnapped Sita. I went to Nasik following reports of a Sita's Kitchen within a cave in Panchavati. Beneath the shade of five banyan trees is indeed a cave dedicated to Sita (the sign reads "*Sita Gumpha*" [sic]), but in the tripartite cave where the kitchen shrine was

supposed to be, I found only two square stones, empty wall niches whose red stains marked a history of worship, and a Shivalingam. This cave, according to the staff on hand, was where Rama and Lakshmana hid Sita while they went on their forest adventures; in their absence, she occupied her time, they said, by meditating on Shiva.

It was difficult to see evidence of a kitchen shrine in the cave, but the staff informed me that the *Sita Rasoi* was across the street. The building across from the cave carries a sign



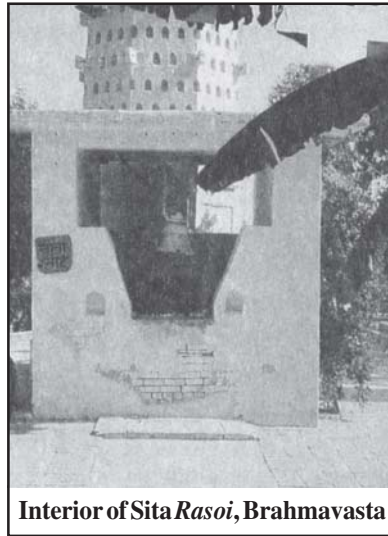
Sita Sansar at Panchavati

advertising it as “Sita’s World [Sita *Sansara*] . . . the place where Maricha was killed and where the abduction of Sita took place.” Inside, waist-high partitions create a central aisle with a room to either side. The room to the left (with your back to the entrance) features a life-size plaster Rama shooting Maricha, the golden deer. Above these statues hang plaster ornaments representing watermelons, bananas, pome granates, and other fruit. Dense greenery and birds are painted on the wall behind Rama and Maricha, simulating the forest.

The room to the right of the entrance was not the sort of Sita *Rasoi* shrine I had come to expect for it contained a depiction of a ‘Sita’s World’ that consisted almost entirely of her cooking! Four life-size statues of Sita are displayed along the sides of the room. In different saris and ornaments, Sita uses a grinding rod, fetches water, kneads dough, and rolls dough with a rolling pin while *chapatis* bake on a *chulha*. In the center of the room, a fifth life-size Sita stands holding a dish full of food within Lakshmana’s protective magic circle.

Across from her is a gigantic statue of Ravana in the guise of a holy man (*muni*); he has a huge bowl in his hand, which is stretched toward Sita. This is the instant before Sita crosses the line. This diorama of Sita and her food preparations includes an alcove in the back wall. Hanging from the ceiling above the alcove is more plaster fruit, and the alcove itself is flanked by nearly life-size figures of Valmiki and Tulsidas. Between these figures are a picture of Rama with Hanuman and Lakshmana and a small statue of a cow and its nursing calf.

Ensnared within the alcove is a textual conundrum—the twin sons of Rama and Sita, comfortably posed on a bed, watch with great enjoyment the two crucial (and simultaneous)



Interior of Sita *Rasoi*, Brahmvasta

scenes from their parents’ past unfold before them—Sita with Ravana, and, beyond that tableau, Rama chasing Maricha deep in the forest.

While not a kitchen shrine (although there is evidence of *pūja* there), Sita’s World is another articulation of the theology that put Sita in the kitchen. It explicitly portrays the activities imagined in the Sita *Rasoi*s in Ayodhya, Lalapur, Chitrakut, Bithur, and elsewhere. Moreover, in its emphasis on the *pativrata* as perfect hostess to Ravana and as mother of the future heirs of *Ramarajya*, it focuses our attention on the forest exiles and specifically on Sita cooking in the forest. In the popular imagination, it is a Sita who cooks, who offers Ravana food during the first *vanavas*, and nurtures her sons into adolescence during the second.

The Sita *Rasoi*s and Sita’s World commemorate Sita, whose textual forest adventures may appear to be recountings merely of passive victimhood, as a powerful agent who even in the forest—the space antithetical to the ploughed furrow, the cooked offering and civilized living—can almost alchemically process the fruits of the land (and her

womb) into the abundance and fertility that so characterizes the ideal of *Ramarajya*.

Cooking in the Forest

In the Valmiki *Ramayana*, according to Thomas Parkhill (1997: 199), “The forest ‘processes’ him [Rama] from heroic ‘raw material’ into a warrior of mythic stature already beginning to realize his *dharma* as the sacralized king of the whole world.” Of what does this processing consist?

While *Ramarajya* is finally centered in the bustling city-state Ayodhya, from which it radiates outward to the world at large, its foundation is constructed in exile in the forest. As Nancy Falk (1973: 1) points out, “It appears that the king had to have some kind of transaction with the wilderness . . . to acquire or hold his kingship.”

For *Ramarajya*, the model that survives to this day as the ultimate Hindu paradigm for perfect rule, the transactions between Rama and the forest are vital. The relationship between the future ideal king, Rama, and the wilderness has very obvious aspects. As a youth learning martial skills and later, in his first years of exile, he acts as a protector of ascetics by conquering the very symbols of the wild, the threatening and powerful *Rakshasas*. But Rama, Lakshmana, and especially Sita spend the majority of their textual epic time in the forest, and it is in the vast (now almost gone) wilderness that popular commemorations of their itinerary abound.

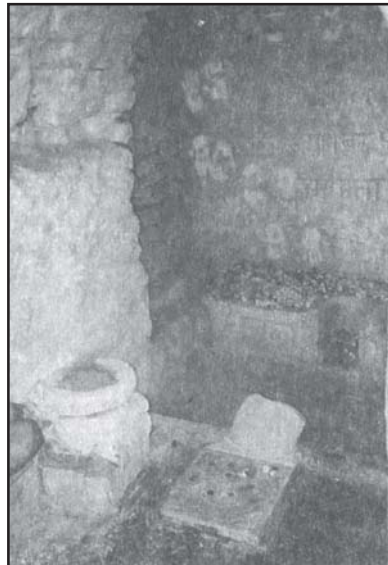
The forest/wilderness as opposed to village/ploughed field is an ancient juxtaposition in India, and the implications of the dichotomy between the two spaces continued to suffuse matters of great importance such as sacrifice, renunciation, and salvation. Charles Malamoud (1996:

75) characterizes this persistent dichotomy of *aranya/vana* and *grama/kshetra* as a description of the entirety of the inhabitable world—either forest or village, or both, evoked every possible setting in which human activity could, or would, occur in this world. In all periods of Indian religious history, the forest is described as the quintessential place of solitude and salvation, on the one hand, and as the space of exile, great danger, and chaos, on the other. The forest holds the horrible *Rakshasas* and unimaginable peril. It also abounds with *ashrams*, the hermitages where one can lead a life of *dharmaranya*, of perfect solitude and perfect austerity. Moreover, even for the citizens of the village, the forest can be a source for “the renewal of life, of unmitigated, direct access to the divine, less hampered by rituals and by social divisions” (G. D. Sontheimer, in Tripathi & Kulke 1994: 127). In Maharashtra, for example, inhabitants used to leave the village limits for a period of days and “would return with assurance of greater crops, less illness and, in general greater well-being” (*ibid.*). The forest can be, in other words, a source as fertile as the ploughed field.

For the future king of Ayodhya, the forest is the space for wondrous (re)birth and renewal: Sita’s Kitchens function as modern aniconic and iconic expression of the source, gestation, ripening, and maturation of Ramarajya. Sita, the embodiment of “ploughed land,” is depicted in the *Sita Rasois* and *Sita’s World* as domesticating the forest by the ritual of cooking in her kitchens. It is she who transforms the forest into a fertile source for kingship. It is she, wife and mistress of the kitchen, who must offer food to Ravana, thereby causing the major events of the *Ramayana* to take place. The connections between cooking and

female fertility—the perfect wife as increaser—is made concrete in the numerous *Rasois* shrines dedicated to her. In Ayodhya, she begins her career in the urban kitchen of the *Janmasthan*. In the forest kitchens, she fulfills her promise as a truly great chef feeding and increasing the Raghava line.

There is a clear delineation in the *Ramayana* between life in Ayodhya and life as it will be lived in the forest. In his attempt to dissuade Sita from accompanying him, Rama says to her, “The forest is never a place of



Sita Rasoi at Chitrakut

pleasure—I know—It only is pain” (VR 2.25.5 [trans. Pollock, Princeton University Press, 1986]). He goes on to list all the miseries and dangers—sleeping on the ground, uncertain weather, the troublesome creatures ranging from worms to lions, and intractable vegetation: thorn trees, grass, tangles of branches. But at the beginning of the first exile, the wise woman Anasuya instructs Sita that the distinction between the two spaces should not alter her behavior: “A woman who holds her husband dear—whether he is in the city or in the forest, whether he is good or

evil—gains worlds that bring great blessings” (VR 2.109.23). If we see the forest exiles of Rama and Sita as the very foundation of ideal kingship, then the kitchens of Sita and their contents and connotations begin to have a wider context.

Cooking in the Shrine

Although the kitchen shrines that dot the landscape of India seem to be of relatively modern origin, they evoke the very long and complex history of religion and food preparation in Hinduism. In an article on Sita’s Kitchen in Ayodhya, I have outlined the long history of Sita and her Vedic/Brahmanic associations (Herman 1998). Sita as cook and her *Rasois* in Ayodhya and in the forest are linked to the long and often esoteric history of Sita as furrow/goddess. While the Vedic, Upanishadic, and even textual epic congruencies between Sita and Brahmanic goddesses such as Viraj, Shri, and Lakshmi may not be a significant part of popular knowledge, hers is certainly a genealogy of goddesses whose function was the release of fertility in association with a royal male consort. The Rama and Sita of the Valmiki *Ramayana* evoke many ancient intersecting ideas about food, wives, goddesses, ideal kingship, and its necessary conjunction with feminine power. Clear as these ancient correspondences are textually, it is very unlikely that they are the sole impulse behind the advent of Sita Rasois and Sita’s World in modern India. Although the Valmiki *Ramayana* is tied to the ancient texts and their patterns of meanings, it is also inseparable from contemporary ideas of popular religiosity.

The *Sita Rasois* in Ayodhya and in the forest are unquestionably manifestations of the locative aspect of popular devotionalism, a

distinguishing feature of the shift in emphasis from Brahmanic ritual to *bhakti*. They also re-present the long alliance between food and religion in India. As R. S. Khare (1992: 16, 27) has observed, “Food does not merely symbolize. . . . It just is one of the self-evident truths on which the Hindu world rests. . . . India provides us with virtually an inexhaustible repository of instances where food loads itself with mundane and profound meanings.” The *bhakti* movement adopted and sanctified the sacred functions of food, changing Hindu gastronomy by locating the divine in this age and in this world. Devotees began to house and care for the divine in their homes as well as in temple shrines.

Kitchen as Shrine

The functions of the home and hearth/kitchen have long intersected with ideas of sacrifice and devotional offerings to gods and goddesses. The kitchen area (*rasoi*) of the modern Hindu home has nearly the same status as the worshipping place; the two spaces are governed by similar rules of ritual purity and are situated close to one another. The cooking area is where the generation and application of fire and heat from the *chulha* effects radical changes in substances, externally and internally. It is where the raw becomes the cooked, the indigestible is made digestible, the profane transforms into the sacred. In some instances, as A. K. Ramanujan (in R. S. Khare 1992: 234) explains, “the customary difference between home foods and temple foods is collapsed: home food is referred to in terms appropriate to the temple.”

Likewise, the commonplace utensils found in *rasois* are charged with religious meaning. Michael W. Meister (1995: 16) notes that “Objects of use are objects of thought. . . . The pot that cooks the rice can

contain the deity. . . . The image that gives human form to a god is no less of an implement than the spoon.” “Implements of household activity,” he continues, “may be used for ritual cooking and presentation as much as for home use” (ibid., 18). Grinding stone, rolling pin, rolling board, strainer, mortar and pestle, spoon, ladle, and water container—any of these can signify the act of cooking, both for humans and for the gods. Unsurprisingly, some kitchen/ritual utensils have powerful connections to human and divine sexuality and prosperity. The mortar and pestle and the grinding stone, for example, may figure as ritual elements in marriage ceremonies.

Hindu women are in charge of food, the areas of its preparation, and the related utensils in the domestic space; in the temples, Brahmins take on this role. “Whereas the priest presides in the temple, the women preside in the home, where they perform most religious and social rituals without the mediation of a priest. . . . The household rituals that women perform derive their authority from their marital status and fertility” (Ghosh, in Meister 1995: 21). Pika Ghosh goes on to describe the conflation of wife with Brahmin, noting similarities in purificatory rituals and mantra recitation, and Lina Fruzzetti (1982: 69) observes that “women and the Brahmin priests are ritualists in different contexts, but they are the ones who deal with the most highly charged substances and elements in Indian theology, food and fire.”

An important aspect of the ritual resemblance between women/wives and Brahmins is their use of fire (*agni*), and especially their manipulation of heat (*tapas*) as both process and product. In the history of ritual, the Vedic tradition presents over and over the multivalent power of Agni, and there are several

accounts of the world coming into being through *tapas*: the world was “cooked” until it was done (*Aitareya Brahmana* 5.32). For the ascetic (*tapasvin*), *tapas* can transform body, spirit, and the state of the world; the *Mahabharata*, for example, tells of *tapas*-laden ascetics who are able to generate rain and fertility (Kaelber 1989: 18–19). The term *tapas* can also be used for the natural heat associated with the reproductive process: after sexual heat has produced an embryo, the heat of the mother’s body “incubates” the baby to term. Because both Brahmins and women have access to this complex of esoteric meanings for *tapas*, each can be seen as a reservoir of fertility (see *Atharva Veda* 11.5.12).

But the connections between women and ritual in the Vedic material are not limited or defined by the concordances between their uses of heat. One of the major requirements to be a Brahmanic sacrificer (*yajamana*) is that the man has a wife. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* and the *Taittiriya Brahmana* make this necessity perfectly clear: “a ritual without a wife is not a ritual” (TB 2.2.2.6; see also ShB 1.3.1.12). After examining several “thematic roles” for the wife in the Vedic rituals, Stephanie W. Jamison (1996: 53) concludes, “One of the wife’s most important roles is that of injecting sexuality into the perfect, ordered world of the ritual. . . . One of the abiding concerns of all Vedic rituals, no matter what else they are directed toward, is fertility, the increase of prosperity through the generation of offspring and cattle, and the assurance of good pasturage and crops through abundant rain.”

Likewise, in the domestic sphere fertility and food are of abiding concern, never more so than in the presence of a (male) guest. Jamison puts into historical perspective the wife’s (still) indispensable role in

negotiating the difficulties of hospitality and exchange in the home; she illustrates the “anxieties of hospitality” using examples from epic narratives ranging from Ahalya to Oghavati. The perfect wife must conduct herself in accordance with the rules of hospitality, even when she herself becomes the object of the guest’s demand. The texts make so many overlapping connections between wives, food, sex (fertility), and hospitality that their implications are difficult to summarize. Essentially, the wife is depicted as the giver of food and as the ultimate exchange token; because the body of the perfect hostess is (theoretically) available to the guest, she herself is the very embodiment of food. This is why the diorama in *Sita’s World* is so evocative: Sita offers Ravana food but Ravana, recognizing the metaphorical parity between food and hostess, takes the hostess. He removes her both from her kitchen and from the forest in an attempt to accrue her fertility to his realm. Only after she returns first to Rama and later, during the second exile, to the forest is her full productive capacity and the foundational role of both the forest and the kitchen realized. After Sita and Rama have together inaugurated *Ramarajya*, Sita is abandoned in the forest where she births twin boys. She nurtures them until they are old enough to be presented as the heirs to *Ramarajya*, and thus the hope for its continuance and renewal into the next generation.

Conclusion

That Sita has a kitchen/kitchens is interesting in itself. Sita as a cook is not a role conferred on her by Valmiki, Tulsidas, or any of the regional *Ramayanas*—or by most of the other texts that have come down to us. Nevertheless, and despite the lacuna in the written record, according to R. S. Khare (1976: 52),



Sita World at Panchavati

Sita has long held a place as an adept in culinary practice. Nabaneeta Dev Sen (1998: 23) recounts, for instance, a modern Telegu song wherein Sita, just rescued from Lanka, is on her way back to Rama. Pointing to a stone, she says to Hanuman: “What a lovely grinding stone that will make. I would love to take it back to Ayodhya.” Usha Nilsson (unpublished paper, Sita Symposium, Columbia University, May 1998) describes a *Sita Lila* wherein Sita not only shops for food but also finds a way to magically cook an impossible meal for Lakshmana. In the popular imagination, it would seem that a *pativrata* as excellent as Sita must have cooked it.

As seen through the prism of modern feminism, it appears that Sita simply jumps from the kitchen into the test of fire and back again, that she only fulfills a very narrow definition of the perfect traditional Hindu wife. But the relatively recent *Sita Rasois* of the (now almost vanished) forest demonstrate that the Sita of the *Ramayanakatha* has a more cosmic dimension. They suggest that the power of Sita can be expressed in, but not confined to, the kitchen and her fertility is not fully defined by her name and its connotations of agricultural abundance. Her kitchen

is also a shrine, the *pativrata* is also a goddess, the cook is also one of the co-founders of *Ramarajya*, the female agent who together with Rama produced the unending feast that was *Ramarajya*. □

The author would like to thank the Dharam Hinduja Research Center at Columbia University and its then director, Dr. Mary McGee, for the invitation to present a paper on Sita’s Kitchen in Ayodhya at the Sita Symposium, May 1998. She is also grateful to Abha Jha in Delhi and Michelle Bonnice in Los Angeles for their help in researching and preparing this article.

The author is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at California State University, Northridge, USA.

Contributions Invited

We invite our readers to send us material on Sita from the folk songs of their region or Sita’s portrayal in different versions of Ramayana for possible inclusion in our forthcoming book on Sita jointly edited by Mary McGee and Madhu Kishwar.