



Saraswati Nagpal

# Sita

*Daughter of the Earth*

Illustrated by Manikandan

Thousands of years ago, in the time cycle called *Treta Yuga*, gods and demons walked the earth alongside mortals.

It was an age of magical powers and potent prayers used by forces of good and evil. It was a time when wonderful miracles or terrible misfortune could change a man's life in the blink of an eye.

In that age, the land of Bhaarat was a cluster of many kingdoms, each ruled by a strong warrior king. One such kingdom was Videha, to which I belonged.



There was great mystery surrounding my birth. The people of Videha always wondered where I had come from.

I was destined to be a princess, and this is my story...

My parents, Janaka and Sunaina, were King and Queen of Videha, and ruled the land from the lovely capital city of Mithila.

My father was a just and wise king, and my mother was famous for her compassion and generosity.

Mantri ji, ensure that a canal is dug to bring water to his land. I will inspect it in two weeks.

My fields are dry, Your Majesty. The crop has failed without water. How will I feed my children?



Yes, Your Majesty.

My father always kept his word.

These robes are for your children.

My fields are flourishing! Long live King Janaka!



My parents' lives were perfect, except--

My parents summoned the *raj-guru*, and told him about their grief. The *raj-guru* thought for a while before he spoke.

As guided by their guru, my parents fasted, meditated, and worshipped at the altar of the great Goddess Bhudevi. They gave away gold, grains, and garments in charity, and took the blessings of *rishis*.

My heart aches for a child to love and care for. We have been married for years now. Will I ever, ever be a mother?

Fear not, my son! There is one who can grant you your heart's desire. Bhudevi, the Earth Goddess, is known to be merciful and leaves no wish unfulfilled. Seven days from today, perform the sacred soil-tilling ceremony in her honour. She will answer your prayers.

Do not grieve, my queen. I shall do everything in my power to see you happy.

The seventh day dawned bright and clear. The soil-tilling ceremony began at an auspicious moment. While *rishis* and Brahmins chanted hymns to the Earth Goddess, my father touched his forehead to the earth in reverence and then picked up the golden plough.

With single-minded devotion, they repeated their one prayer – that the merciful goddess grant them a child.

Bless us, Bhudevi!



Suddenly, the plough hit a piece of metal. Everyone watched in astonishment as my father dug a casket out of the earth.



Bhudevi has showered her grace on us! Here is a beautiful baby girl for you, my queen.  
At last! My own child! Praise the goddess!



In honour of Bhudevi, we shall name our little princess Sita, for she truly is the daughter of the earth.

Long live Princess Sita!



And thus began my life as the Princess of Videha. Happiness filled the palace and my parents' lives were finally complete.

A few years later, to everyone's delight, my mother gave birth to a baby girl – my sister and dearest companion, Urmila.

As a child, I would sit for hours listening to stories about my ancestors and the gods.



...and then the gods gifted the great bow to your grandfather, to honour his skill and also for its safekeeping.

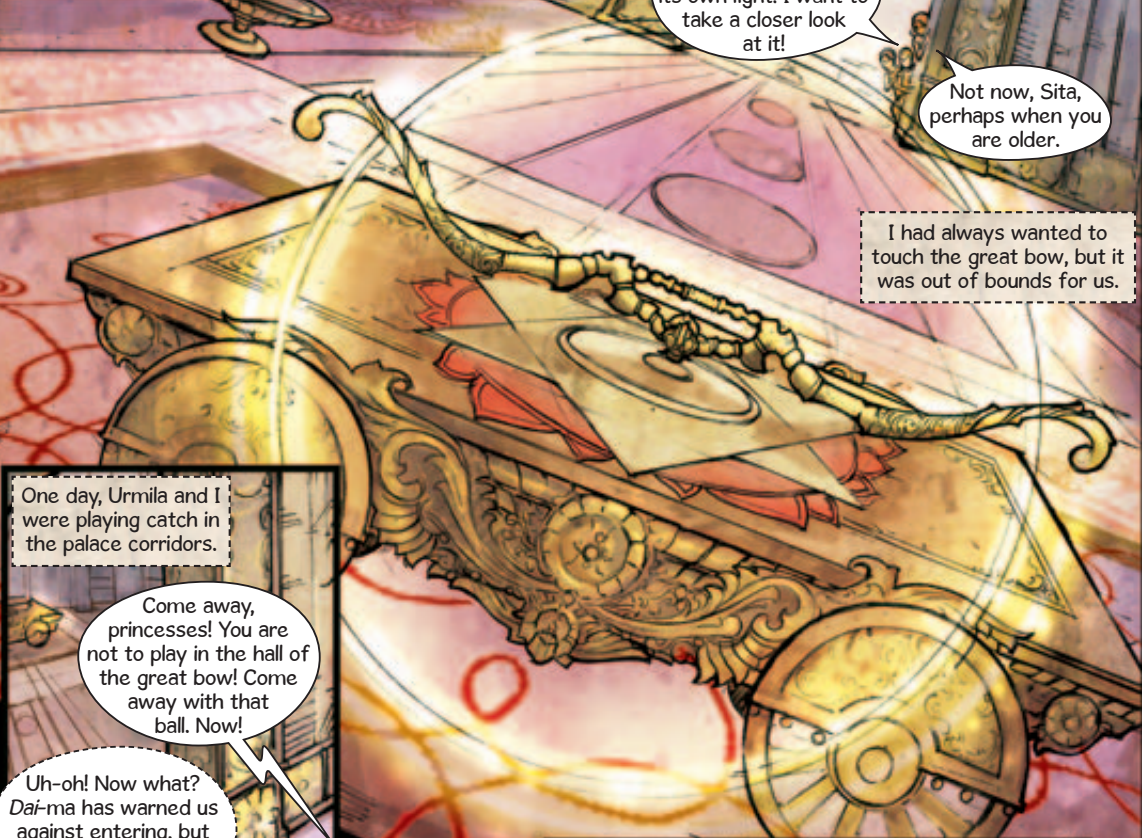
This bow is made of magic so strong that no mortal man has ever been able to lift it...

...not even the mightiest warriors! So it has stayed in exactly this position for centuries.

Look, *Dai-ma*! The bow shines with its own light! I want to take a closer look at it!

Not now, *Sita*, perhaps when you are older.

I had always wanted to touch the great bow, but it was out of bounds for us.



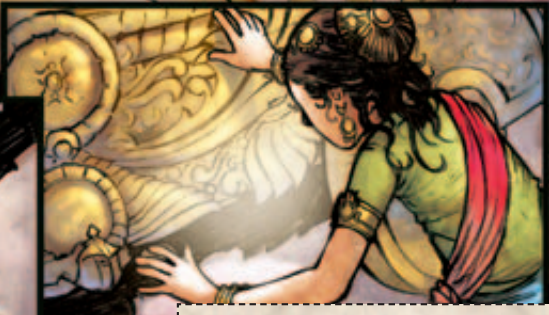
One day, *Urmila* and I were playing catch in the palace corridors.

Come away, princesses! You are not to play in the hall of the great bow! Come away with that ball. Now!

Uh-oh! Now what? *Dai-ma* has warned us against entering, but we need to get the ball.



Wait here, *Urmila*.



I searched for our ball and found it lodged under the table that held the great bow. Eager to retrieve it, I pushed the table...

# Sita

Daughter of the Earth



In an ancient age, when gods and goddesses walked with mortals...

...Sita is the kind-hearted and intelligent princess of Videha. Married to Rama, Prince of Ayodhya, her journey in life takes her from exhilaration to anguish...

Along the way, she has to leave behind the luxury of royal comforts and live the simple, harsh life of a forest-dweller, facing danger at every turn.

Ensnared in the evil plans of the wicked demon-king Ravana, Sita is abducted and hidden away in Lanka. Will Rama muster up a strong army to rescue Sita from the demon's clutches? Will Sita return to Ayodhya to become queen of the land... or is she destined to be mistrusted and live alone for the rest of her life?

Adapted from the ancient Indian epic, the *Ramayana*, this is a touching tale of love, honour, and sacrifice that reveals one woman's shining strength in an unforgiving world.

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