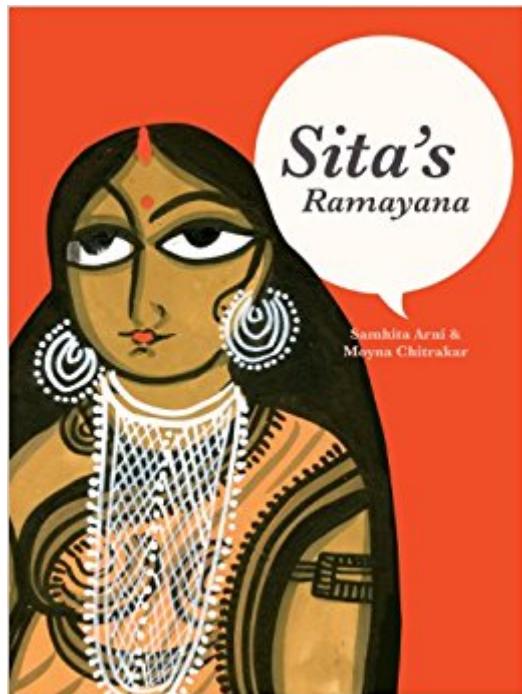


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# Sita's Ramayana



## Synopsis

The Ramayana is an epic poem by the Hindu sage Valmiki, written in ancient Sanskrit sometime after 300 BC. It is an allegorical story that contains important Hindu teachings, and it has had great influence on Indian life and culture over the centuries. Children are often encouraged to emulate the virtues of the two main characters – Rama and Sita. The Ramayana is frequently performed as theater or dance, and two Indian festivals – Dussehra and Divali – celebrate events in the story. This version of The Ramayana is told from the perspective of Sita, the queen. After she, her husband Rama and his brother are exiled from their kingdom, Sita is captured by the proud and arrogant king Ravana and imprisoned in a garden across the ocean. Ravana never stops trying to convince Sita to be his wife, but she steadfastly refuses his advances. Eventually Rama comes to her rescue with the help of the monkey Hanuman and his army. But Rama feels he cannot trust Sita again. He forces Sita to undergo an ordeal by fire to prove herself to be true and pure. She is shocked and in grief and anger does so. She emerges unscathed and they return home to their kingdom as king and queen. However, suspicion haunts their relationship, and Sita once more finds herself in the forest, but this time she is pregnant. She has twins and continues to live in the forest with them. The story is exciting and dramatic, with many turns of plot. Magic animals, snakes, divine gods, demons, sorcerers and a vast cast of characters all play a part in the fierce battles fought to win Sita back. And in the process the story explores ideas of right vs. wrong, compassion, loyalty, trust, honor and the terrible price of war.

## Book Information

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Novels

Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 4 and up

## Customer Reviews

A 2012 USBBY Outstanding International BookAn ALA Notable Children's Book, 2012A Texas Library Association 2012 Maverick Graphic Novel (Grades 9-12)A South Asia Book Award 2012 Honor Book"A must-purchase based on the strength of its dramatic story and arresting art, enhanced by superior design and high-quality production. Brilliant and fresh." &#151; School Library Journal, starred review"&#133;gorgeous, vibrant illustrations&#133;It is an accomplishment&#133;" &#151; Booklist, starred review"A vibrantly illustrated graphic-novel retelling of an ancient Indian legend&#133;A valuable piece of historical literature brought to the forefront for thoughtful new readers." &#151; Kirkus

Samhita Arni has been interested in Hindu mythology since she was a child. She has written *The Mahabharata: A Child's View*, a version of another great Indian epic, which has been translated into seven languages and was named Book of the Month by the German Academy for Youth Literature and Media, and one of the Best Published Books of 2004 by the Spanish Ministry of Culture. It also won the Elsa Morante Literary Award (Department of Culture, Campania, Italy). Samhita has also written scripts for film and television and is currently working on a thriller based on *The Ramayana*. She lives in Bangalore, India. Moyna Chitrakar is an artist and performer from the Patua scroll painting tradition. She is also the illustrator of the unique scroll book *Tsunami*, published by Tara Books.

This graphic novel is an interesting retelling of the Hindu epic *The Ramayana* from the point of view of Sita, the queen of Ayodhya. The words are written by Samhita Arni, who as a child wrote an absorbing retelling of another Hindu epic: *The Mahabharata: A Child's View*. The colorful, dramatic, appealing pictures are by Moyna Chitrakar, a folk artist who lives in West Bengal, India. Sita is not known for being particularly active or assertive. In fact, her obedience and devotion to her husband Rama are legendary. Yet by focusing on Sita's point of view, this retelling has something to say about a woman's perspective on war and justice. The story begins at the end, with the queen Sita entering the forest and begging the forest to shelter her. The forest wants to know why she was banished from Ayodhya, and she tells her story. This retelling emphasizes Sita's compassion for

other women, including those who are considered enemies by the men. She believes that Lakshmana's rash decision to cut off the demoness Surpanaka's nose is the cause of her (Sita's) abduction and the war in Lanka. "Violence breeds violence, and an unjust act only begets greater injustice," Sita says. When she is Ravana's prisoner in Lanka, Sita becomes close to one of her demoness guards: Trijatha, who, unlike the other guards, feels compassion for Sita. It is Trijatha who tells Sita the story of the war between Rama and Ravana. As much as Sita is overjoyed that Rama won the war, she still feels compassion for Mandodari, Ravana's widow, as well as for all the other "enemy" women. "They would be queens no more, and their people had met death on the battlefield-for what? For one man's unlawful desire. . . . It was such a high price to pay." The story also features a few other powerful females, including an apsara (divine female) who warns Hanuman about a sorcerer, and the goddess Chandi Devi. In the end, of course, even Sita's devotion to Rama cannot help her against the rumors that surround her because of her sojourn with Ravana. Sita finally makes a decision to leave Rama and return to her mother, the Earth. I have included this book on my online Gender Equality Bookstore.

This version of the Ramayana is perfection. It is beautifully written from Sita's point of view. The art is very earthy; bold strokes and strong colors evoke strong emotions from the reader. I thought Sanjay Patel's version of the Ramayana was the bee's knees (and it is) but Sita's Ramayana is the bee's knees and cat's pajamas!

I was looking for a storybook, not a comic book style take on epic. I still admire the effort though.

The illustrations are excellent and give a good introduction to Eastern culture. There could be added a little more explanation or a basic outline of this story (myth). Perhaps some follow ups; addition books on this subject matter. Canada has become a nation of polyglots and this arouses more curiosity about our new Canadians.

I got this book for my twelve-year-old daughter to read as part of her study of Ancient India, because I was intrigued with the idea of a warrior epic re-told from a woman's point of view. Along with Sita's Ramayana, my daughter and I read a good, brief summary or two of the Ramayana and several of the cantos (particularly those dealing with Sita) in R.C. Dutt's translation (available on the web). I've come to love this book -- but it wasn't love at first sight. At first, I was rather put off by the illustrations -- definitely not my style and I found them difficult to "read." I often had trouble telling

one character from another, or understanding the action. My daughter, who is quite accustomed to reading graphic novels and manga, read half the book and put it down in frustration, saying that it was hard to understand and then her favorite character was killed (I never found out who that was, but it must have been a bad guy!). However, as I read the book slowly and carefully (having first studied the portraits of the "cast of characters" at the beginning of the book), I got better at reading the illustrations and found that I could understand the story quite well -- and it was beautifully told. And my daughter picked up the book again, finished it, and said she thought she understood it well enough. Then I read the book again, aloud, to my daughter (and we worked together on understanding the illustrations) and this time the poignancy of Sita's story struck me even more strongly. The entire scene of Sita's reunion with Rama after he wins the war with Ravana (a scene which does not appear in the original Ramayana; it must have been created by the author and the illustrator of this book) -- this scene is heart-wrenching, but also uplifting because of Sita's strength, clear vision, and willingness to "speak truth to power." Sita's confrontation of Rama about the destructiveness of his actions, and her profound statements of the effects of war on women and children -- these are some of the most powerful and moving statements of truth I've ever read, in any work. To my surprise, my daughter was captivated by the cantos of Dutt's Ramayana that I read aloud to her: The Tale of the Hermit's Son, The Breaking of the Bow, Mandodari's Lament, Ordeal by Fire, Woman's Truth Vindicated, and Sita Lost. (When a couplet was difficult to understand, I would read it, explain it to her, then read it again.) She says she wants to read the entire Ramayana. I'm hoping to find Dutt's translation in book form, and the Chandrabati Ramayana (another retelling of the myth from a womanly point of view). This experience has been a reminder to me that we shouldn't underestimate children's capacity to understand and appreciate the great epics. Pre-teens and young teens seem to crave heroic tales, and the same kids who gobble up "fan fiction" series can be fascinated by literature like the Ramayana, if we give them the opportunity. But back to Arni and Chitrakar's beautiful Sita's Ramayana -- Moms, read this book to your daughters! And perhaps even more important -- read it to your sons...again and again as they grow, if necessary!

This book was in the graphic novel section of our local library which happens to be my 9 year old son's favorite area. I am a yoga teacher and pulled it off the shelf because it was telling "The Ramayana" story from, as the title makes clear, Sita's perspective. My son, who draws, found the artwork compelling, liked that it had Hanuman and "that guy with a lot of heads". We checked it out. My son was thoroughly engrossed in this book. I was truly surprised how fast he read it and how much he had to say about it. "Sita's Ramayana" is a big hit. I came on smile. today hoping to find

another book collaboration between Ms. Arni and Ms. Chitrakar -- alas, we'll have to go with something else. Perhaps, if the author and illustrator see this review they'll consider another project together.

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