

# Sita

**Amish** is a 1974-born, IIM (Kolkata)-educated banker-turned-author. The success of his debut book, *The Immortals of Meluha* (Book 1 of the *Shiva Trilogy*), encouraged him to give up his career in financial services to focus on writing. Besides being an author, he is also an Indian-government diplomat, a host for a TV documentary series, and a film producer.

Amish is passionate about history, mythology and philosophy, finding beauty and meaning in all world religions. His books have sold more than 6 million copies and have been translated into over 20 languages. His *Shiva Trilogy* is the fastest selling and his *Ram Chandra Series* the second fastest selling book series in Indian publishing history. You can connect with Amish here:

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‘{Amish is} one of the most original thinkers of his generation.’

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‘{Amish’s writing is} a fine blend of history and myth... gripping and unputdownable.’

– **BBC**

# Sita

## Warrior of Mithila

Book 2  
of the  
Ram Chandra Series

**Amish**



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This book is produced from independently certified FSC® paper to ensure  
responsible forest management.

To Himanshu Roy  
My brother-in-law,  
A man who exemplifies the ancient Indian path of Balance,  
A proud Lord Ganesh devotee who also respects  
all other faiths,  
A sincere Indian patriot,  
A man with wisdom, courage, and honour.  
A hero.





Om Namah Shivāya  
*The universe bows to Lord Shiva.*  
*I bow to Lord Shiva.*



From the Adbhuta Rāmāyana  
(credited to Maharishi Valmiki)

*Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati svrata |  
Abhyutthānamadharmasya tadā prakṛtisambhavaḥ ||*

O keeper of righteous vows, remember this,  
Whenever dharma is in decline,  
Or there is an upsurge of adharma;  
The Sacred Feminine will incarnate.

She will defend dharma.  
She will protect us.





## List of Characters and Important Tribes (In Alphabetic Order)

**Arishtanemi:** Military chief of the Malayaputras; right-hand man of Vishwamitra

**Ashwapati:** King of the northwestern kingdom of Kekaya; father of Kaikeyi and a loyal ally of Dashrath

**Bharat:** Ram's half-brother; son of Dashrath and Kaikeyi

**Dashrath:** Chakravarti king of Kosala and emperor of the Sapt Sindhu; husband of Kaushalya, Kaikeyi, and Sumitra; father of Ram, Bharat, Lakshman and Shatrughan

**Hanuman:** Radhika's cousin; son of Vayu Kesari; a Naga and a member of the Vayuputra tribe

**Janak:** King of Mithila; father of Sita and Urmila

**Jatayu:** A captain of the Malayaputra tribe; Naga friend of Sita and Ram

**Kaikeyi:** Daughter of King Ashwapati of Kekaya; the second and favourite wife of Dashrath; mother of Bharat

**Kaushalya:** Daughter of King Bhanuman of South Kosala and his wife Maheshwari; the eldest queen of Dashrath; mother of Ram

**Kumbhakarna:** Raavan's brother; also a Naga

**Kushadhvaj:** King of Sankashya; younger brother of Janak

**Lakshman:** One of the twin sons of Dashrath; born to Sumitra; faithful to Ram; later married to Urmila

**Malayaputras:** The tribe left behind by Lord Parshu Ram, the sixth Vishnu

**Manthara:** The richest merchant of the Sapt Sindhu

**Mara:** An independent assassin for hire

**Naarad:** A trader from Lothal; Hanuman's friend

**Nagas:** Human beings born with deformities

**Raavan:** King of Lanka; brother of Vibhishan, Shurpanakha and Kumbhakarna

**Radhika:** Sita's friend; Hanuman's cousin

**Ram:** Son of Emperor Dashrath of Ayodhya (capital city of Kosala) and his eldest wife Kaushalya; eldest of four brothers, later married to Sita

**Samichi:** Police and protocol chief of Mithila

**Shatrughan:** Twin brother of Lakshman; son of Dashrath and Sumitra

**Shurpanakha:** Half-sister of Raavan

**Shvetaketu:** Sita's teacher

**Sita:** Adopted daughter of King Janak and Queen Sunaina of Mithila; also the prime minister of Mithila; later married to Ram

**Sumitra:** Daughter of the king of Kashi; the third wife of Dashrath; mother of the twins Lakshman and Shatrughan

**Sunaina:** Queen of Mithila; mother of Sita and Urmila

**Vali:** The king of Kishkindha

**Varun Ratnakar:** Radhika's father; chief of the Valmiki

**Vashishtha:** Raj guru, the royal priest of Ayodhya; teacher of the four Ayodhya princes

**Vayu Kesari:** Hanuman's father; Radhika's uncle

**Vayuputras:** The tribe left behind by Lord Rudra, the previous Mahadev

**Vibhishan:** Half-brother of Raavan

**Vishwamitra:** Chief of the Malayaputras, the tribe left behind by Lord Parshu Ram, the sixth Vishnu; also temporary guru of Ram and Lakshman

**Urmila:** Younger sister of Sita; blood-daughter of Janak and Sunaina; later married to Lakshman







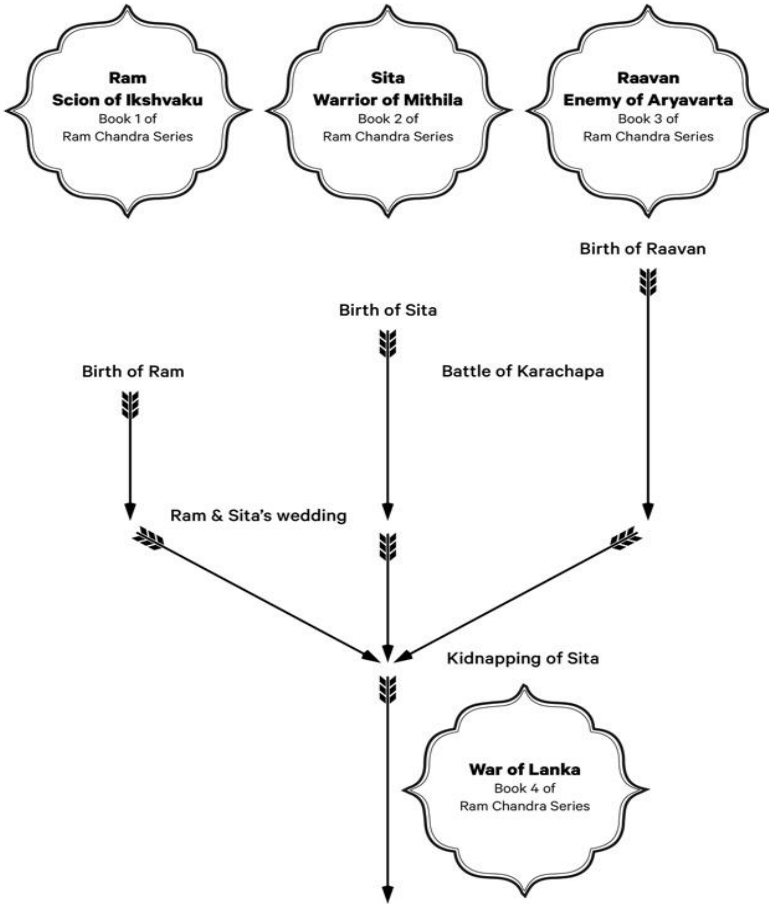
## **Note on the Narrative Structure**

Thank you for picking up this book and giving me the most important thing you can share: your time.

I know this book has taken long to release, and for that I offer my apologies. But when I tell you the narrative structure of the Ram Chandra Series, perhaps you will understand why it took so long.

I have been inspired by a storytelling technique called hyperlink, which some call the multilinear narrative. In such a narrative, there are many characters; and a connection brings them all together. The three main characters in the Ram Chandra Series are Ram, Sita, and Raavan. Each character has life experiences which mould who they are and their stories converge with the kidnapping of Sita. And each has their own adventure and riveting back-story.

So, while the first book explored the tale of Ram, the second and third will offer a glimpse into the adventures of Sita and then Raavan respectively, before all three stories merge from the fourth book onwards into a single story.



I knew it would be a complicated and time consuming affair, but I must confess, it was thoroughly exciting. I hope this will be as rewarding and thrilling an experience for you as it was for me. Understanding Sita and Raavan as characters helped me inhabit their worlds and explore the maze of plots and stories that make this epic come alive. I feel truly blessed for this.

Since this was the plan, I had left clues in the first book (***Ram – Scion of Ikshvaku***) which will tie up with the stories in the second and third books. Needless to say, there are surprises and twists in store for you in books 2 and 3 as well!

In fact, there was a very big clue in the last paragraph of ***Ram – Scion of Ikshvaku***. Some had caught on to it. And for those who didn't, a big revelation awaits you in the first chapter of the second book, ***Sita – Warrior of Mithila***.

I hope you like reading ***Sita – Warrior of Mithila***. Do tell me what you think of it, by sending me messages on my Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter accounts given below.

Love,  
Amish

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\*\*\*

When one writes, one pours one's soul out on paper. They say it takes courage to do that. They also say that courage comes only when one knows that many stand with him. I'd like to acknowledge those who stand with me: Who give me courage: Who make me realise that I am not alone.

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And last, but certainly not the least, you, the reader. It is only due to your support that I have been given the privilege of living the kind of life I do; where I can do what I love and actually earn my living from it. I can never thank you enough!



## Chapter 1

*3400 BCE, somewhere near the Godavari River, India*

Sita cut quickly and efficiently, slicing through the thick leaf stems with her sharp knife. The dwarf banana trees were as tall as she was. She did not need to stretch. She stopped and looked at her handiwork. Then she cast a look at Makrant, the Malayaputra soldier, a short distance away. He had cut down perhaps half the number of leaves that Sita had.

The weather was calm. Just a little while ago, the wind had been howling through this part of the forest. Unseasonal rain had lashed the area. Sita and Makrant had stood under a thick canopy of trees to save themselves from the rain. The winds had been so loud that it had been almost impossible for them to talk to each other. And just as suddenly, calm had descended. The rain and winds had vanished. They'd quickly headed to a patch of the woods with an abundance of dwarf banana trees. For the entire purpose of the excursion was to find these leaves.

‘That’s enough, Makrant,’ said Sita.

Makrant turned around. The wetness had made it hard to cut the leaf stems. Under the circumstances, he had thought that he had done a good job. Now, he looked at the stack of

leaves by Sita's side. And then down at his own much smaller pile. He smiled sheepishly.

Sita smiled broadly in return. 'That's more than enough. Let's go back to the camp. Ram and Lakshman should be returning from their hunt soon. Hopefully, they would have found something.'

Sita, along with her husband Prince Ram of Ayodhya and her brother-in-law Lakshman, had been racing through the *Dandakaranya*, or forest of Dandak, to escape the expected vengeance of the demon-king of Lanka, Raavan. Captain Jatayu, leading a small company of the Malayaputra tribe, had sworn to protect the three Ayodhya royals. He had strongly advised that flight was the only available course of action. Raavan would certainly send troops to avenge his sister, Princess Shurpanakha, who had been injured by Lakshman.

Secrecy was essential. So, they were cooking their food in pits dug deep into the ground. For fire, they used a specific type of coal — anthracite. It let out smokeless flames. For abundant caution, the sunk cooking pot was covered with a thick layer of banana leaves. It ensured that no smoke escaped even by accident. For that could give their position away. It was for this reason that Sita and Makrant had been cutting down banana leaves. It was Sita's turn to cook.

Makrant insisted on carrying the larger pile, and she let him. It made the Malayaputra soldier feel like he was balancing his contribution. But it was this act that would eventually prove fatal for poor Makrant.

Sita heard it first. A sound that would have been inaudible a little while ago, with the howling winds. It was unmistakable now: the menacing creak of a bow being stretched. A common bow. Many of the more accomplished soldiers and senior



officers used the more expensive composite bows. But the frontline soldiers used the common variety, made entirely of wood. These bows were usually more rigid. And, they made a distinct sound when stretched.

‘Makrant, duck!’ screamed Sita, dropping the leaves as she leapt to the ground.

Makrant responded quickly enough, but the heavier load made him trip. An arrow shot in quickly, slamming into his right shoulder as he fell forward. Before he could react, a second arrow struck his throat. A lucky shot.

Sita rolled as she fell to the ground and quickly steadied herself behind a tree. She stayed low, her back against the tree, protected for now. She looked to her right. The unfortunate Makrant lay on the ground, drowning rapidly in his own blood. The arrow point had exited through the back of his neck. He would soon be dead.

Sita cursed in anger. And then realised it was a waste of energy. She began to breathe deeply. Calming her heart down. Paying attention. She looked around carefully. Nobody ahead of her. The arrows had come from the other direction, obscured by the tree that protected her. She knew there had to be at least two enemies. There was no way a single archer could have shot two arrows in such rapid succession.

She looked at Makrant again. He had stopped moving. His soul had moved on. The jungle was eerily quiet. It was almost impossible to believe that just a few short moments ago, brutal violence had been unleashed.

*Farewell, brave Makrant. May your soul find purpose once again.*

She caught snatches of commands whispered in the distance. ‘Go to... Lord Kumbhakarna... Tell... she’s... here...’

She heard the hurried footsteps of someone rushing away.

There was probably just one enemy now. She looked down at the earth and whispered, 'Help me, mother. Help me.'

She drew her knife from the scabbard tied horizontally to the small of her back. She closed her eyes. She couldn't afford to look around the tree and expose herself. She would probably be shot instantly. Her eyes were useless. She had to rely on her ears. There were great archers who could shoot arrows by relying on sound. But very few could throw knives at the source of a sound. Sita was one of those very few.

She heard a loud yet surprisingly gentle voice. 'Come out, Princess Sita. We don't want to hurt you. It's better if ...'

The voice stopped mid-sentence. It would not be heard ever again. For there was a knife buried in the throat that had been the source of that voice. Sita had, without bringing herself into view, turned quickly and flung the knife with unerring and deadly accuracy. The Lankan soldier was momentarily surprised as the knife thumped into his throat. He died in no time. Just like Makrant had, drowning in his own blood.

Sita waited. She had to be sure there was no one else. She had no other weapon. But her enemies didn't know that. She listened intently. Hearing no sound, she threw herself to the ground, rolling rapidly behind low shrubs. Still no sign of anyone.

*Move! Move! There's nobody else!*

Sita quickly rose to her feet and sprinted to the slain Lankan, surprised that his bow was not nocked with an arrow. She tried to pull her knife out, but it was lodged too deep in the dead Lankan's vertebra. It refused to budge.

*The camp is in trouble! Move!*

Sita picked up the Lankan's quiver. It contained a few arrows. She quickly tied it around her back and shoulder. She

lifted the bow. And ran. Ran hard! Towards the temporary camp. She had to kill the other Lankan soldier before he reached his team and warned them.



The temporary camp showed signs of a massive struggle. Most of the Malayaputra soldiers, except Jatayu and two others, were already dead. Lying in pools of blood. They had been ruthlessly massacred. Jatayu was also badly injured. Blood seeped out from numerous wounds that covered his body. Some made by blades, some by fists. His arms were tied tightly behind his back. Two Lankan soldiers held him up in a tight grip. A giant of a man loomed in front, questioning the great Naga.

Naga was the name given to people of the Sapt Sindhu born with deformities. Jatayu's malformation gave his face the appearance of a vulture.

The other two Malayaputras knelt on the ground, also bloodied. Their hands were similarly tied at the back. Three Lankan soldiers surrounded each one, while two more held them down. The Lankan swords were dripping with blood.

Raavan and his younger brother, Kumbhakarna, stood at a distance. Looking intently at the interrogation. Focused. Their hands clean of any blood.

'Answer me, Captain,' barked the Lankan. 'Where are they?'  
Jatayu shook his head vehemently. His lips were sealed.

The Lankan leaned within an inch of the Naga's ear and whispered, 'You were one of us, Jatayu. You were loyal to Lord Raavan once.'

Jatayu cast a malevolent look at the Lankan. His smouldering eyes gave the reply.

The Lankan continued. 'We can forget the past. Tell us what we want to know. And come back to Lanka with honour. This is the word of a Lankan. This is the word of Captain Khara.'

Jatayu looked away and stared into the distance. Anger fading. A blank expression on his face. As if his mind was somewhere else.

The Lankan interrogator signalled one of his soldiers.

'As you command, Captain Khara,' said the soldier, wiping his sword clean on his forearm band and slipping it back into his scabbard. He walked up to an injured Malayaputra, and drew out his serrated knife. He positioned himself behind the youth, yanked his head back and placed the knife against his throat. Then he looked at Khara, awaiting the order.

Khara took hold of Jatayu's head such that his eyes stared directly at his fellow Malayaputra. The knife at his throat.

'You may not care for your own life, Captain Jatayu,' said Khara, 'but don't you want to save at least two of your soldiers?'

The Malayaputra looked at Jatayu and shouted, 'I am ready to die, my Captain! Don't say anything!'

The Lankan hit the young soldier's head with the knife hilt. His body slouched and then straightened again with courage. The blade swiftly returned to his throat.

Khara spoke with silky politeness, 'Come on, Captain. Save your soldier's life. Tell us where they are.'

'You will never catch them!' growled Jatayu. 'The three of them are long gone!'

Khara laughed. 'The two princes of Ayodhya can keep going, for all I care. We are only interested in the Vishnu.'

Jatayu was shocked. *How do they know?*

'Where is the Vishnu?' asked Khara. 'Where is she?'

Jatayu's lips began to move, but only in prayer. He was praying for the soul of his brave soldier.

Khara gave a curt nod.

Jatayu suddenly straightened and loudly rent the air with the Malayaputra cry. *Jai Parshu Ram!*

*Jai Parshu Ram!* shouted both the Malayaputras. The fear of death could not touch them.

The Lankan pressed the blade into the throat of the Malayaputra. Slowly. He slid the serrated knife to the side, inflicting maximum pain. Blood spurted out in a shower. As the youth collapsed to the ground, life slowly ebbing out of him, Jatayu whispered within the confines of his mind.

*Farewell, my brave brother ...*



Sita slowed as she approached the camp. She had already killed the other Lankan soldier. He lay some distance away. An arrow pierced in his heart. She had grabbed his arrows and added them to her quiver. She hid behind a tree and surveyed the camp. Lankan soldiers were everywhere. Probably more than a hundred.

All the Malayaputra soldiers were dead. All except Jatayu. Two lay close to him, their heads arched at odd angles. Surrounded by large pools of blood. Jatayu was on his knees, held by two Lankans. His hands were tied behind his back. Brutalised, injured and bleeding. But not broken. He was defiantly staring into the distance. Khara stood near him, his knife placed on Jatayu's upper arm. He ran his knife gently along the triceps, cutting into the flesh, drawing blood.

Sita looked at Khara and frowned. *I know him. Where have I seen him before?*

Khara smiled as he ran the knife back along the bloodied line he had just drawn, slicing deep into some sinew.

‘Answer me,’ said Khara, as he slid the knife along Jatayu’s cheek this time, drawing some more blood. ‘Where is she?’

Jatayu spat at him. ‘Kill me quickly. Or kill me slowly. You will not get anything from me.’

Khara raised his knife in anger, about to strike and finish the job. It was not to be. An arrow whizzed in and struck his hand. The knife fell to the ground as he screamed aloud.

Raavan and his brother Kumbhakarna whirled around, startled. Many Lankan soldiers rushed in and formed a protective cordon around the two royals. Kumbhakarna grabbed Raavan’s arm to restrain his impulsive elder brother.

Other soldiers raised their bows and pointed their arrows in the direction of Sita. A loud ‘Don’t shoot!’ was heard from Kumbhakarna. The bows were swiftly lowered.

Khara broke the shaft, leaving the arrowhead buried in his hand. It would stem the blood for a while. He looked into the impenetrable line of trees the arrow had emerged from, and scoffed in disdain. ‘Who shot that? The long-suffering prince? His oversized brother? Or the Vishnu herself?’

A stunned Sita stood rooted to the spot. *Vishnu?! How do the Lankans know? Who betrayed me?!*

She marshalled her mind into the present moment. This was not the time for distractions.

She moved quickly, without a sound, to another location.

*They must not know that I’m alone.*

‘Come out and fight like real warriors!’ challenged Khara.

Sita was satisfied with her new position. It was some distance away from where she had shot her first arrow. She slowly pulled another arrow out of her quiver, nocked it on the bowstring and took aim. In the Lankan army, if the commander fell, the rest of the force was known to quickly retreat. But

Raavan was well protected by his soldiers, their shields raised high. She could not find an adequate line of sight.

*Wish Ram was here. He would have gotten an arrow through somehow.*

Sita decided to launch a rapid-fire attack on the soldiers to create an opening. She fired five arrows in quick succession. Five Lankans went down. But the others did not budge. The cordon around Raavan remained resolute. Ready to fall for their king.

Raavan remained protected.

Some soldiers began to run in her direction. She quickly moved to a new location.

As she took position, she checked the quiver. Three arrows left.

*Damn!*

Sita deliberately stepped on a twig. Some of the soldiers rushed towards the sound. She quickly moved again, hoping to find a breach in the protective circle of men around Raavan. But Khara was a lot smarter than she had suspected.

The Lankan stepped back and, using his uninjured left hand, pulled out a knife from the sole of his shoe. He moved behind Jatayu and held the knife to the Naga's throat.

With a maniacal smile playing on his lips, Khara taunted, 'You could have escaped. But you didn't. So I'm betting you are among those hiding behind the trees, *great* Vishnu.' Khara laid sarcastic emphasis on the word 'great'. 'And, you want to protect those who worship you. So inspiring... so touching...'

Khara pretended to wipe away a tear.

Sita stared at the Lankan with unblinking eyes.

Khara continued, 'So I have an offer. Step forward. Tell your husband and that giant brother-in-law of yours to also

step forward. And we will let this captain live. We will even let the two sorry Ayodhya princes leave unharmed. All we want is your surrender.'

Sita remained stationary. Silent.

Khara grazed the knife slowly along Jatayu's neck, leaving behind a thin red line. He spoke in a sing-song manner, 'I don't have all day ...'

Suddenly, Jatayu struck backwards with his head, hitting Khara in his groin. As the Lankan doubled up in pain, Jatayu screamed, 'Run! Run away, My Lady! I am not worth your life!'

Three Lankan soldiers moved in and pushed Jatayu to the ground. Khara cursed loudly as he got back on his feet, still bent over to ease the pain. After a few moments, he inched towards the Naga and kicked him hard. He surveyed the treeline, turning in every direction that the arrows had been fired from. All the while, he kept kicking Jatayu again and again. He bent and roughly pulled Jatayu to his feet. Sita could see the captive now. Clearly.

This time Khara held Jatayu's head firmly with his injured right hand, to prevent any headbutting. The sneer was back on his face. He held the knife with his other hand. He placed it at the Naga's throat. 'I can cut the jugular here and your precious captain will be dead in just a few moments, great Vishnu.' He moved the knife to the Malayaputra's abdomen. 'Or, he can bleed to death slowly. All of you have some time to think about it.'

Sita was still. She had just three arrows left. It would be foolhardy to try anything. But she could not let Jatayu die. He had been like a brother to her.

'All we want is the Vishnu,' yelled Khara. 'Let her surrender and the rest of you can leave. You have my word. You have the word of a Lankan!'



‘Let him go!’ screamed Sita, still hidden behind the trees.

‘Step forward and surrender,’ said Khara, holding the knife to Jatayu’s abdomen. ‘And we will let him go.’

Sita looked down and closed her eyes. Her shoulders slumped with helpless rage. And then, without giving herself any time for second thoughts, she stepped out. But not before her instincts made her nock an arrow on the bow, ready to fire.

‘Great Vishnu,’ sniggered Khara, letting go of Jatayu for a moment, and running his hand along an ancient scar at the back of his head. Stirring a not-so-forgotten memory. ‘So kind of you to join us. Where is your husband and his giant brother?’

Sita didn’t answer. Some Lankan soldiers began moving slowly towards her. She noticed that their swords were sheathed. They were carrying *lathis*, long bamboo sticks, which were good enough to injure but not to kill. She stepped forward and lowered the bow. ‘I am surrendering. Let Captain Jatayu go.’

Khara laughed softly as he pushed the knife deep into Jatayu’s abdomen. Gently. Slowly. He cut through the liver, a kidney, never stopping ...

‘Nooo!’ screamed Sita. She raised her bow and shot an arrow deep into Khara’s eye. It punctured the socket and lodged itself in his brain, killing him instantly.

‘I want her alive!’ screamed Kumbhakarna from behind the protective Lankan cordon.

More soldiers joined those already moving toward Sita, their bamboo *lathis* held high.

‘Raaaam!’ shouted Sita, as she pulled another arrow from her quiver, quickly nocked and shot it, bringing another Lankan down instantly.

It did not slow the pace of the others. They kept rushing forward.

Sita shot another arrow. Her last. One more Lankan sank to the ground. The others pressed on.

‘Raaaam!’

The Lankans were almost upon her, their bamboo *lathi* raised.

‘Raaam!’ screamed Sita.

As a Lankan closed in, she lassoed her bow, entangling his *lathi* with the bowstring, snatching it from him. Sita hit back with the bamboo *lathi*, straight at the Lankan’s head, knocking him off his feet. She swirled the *lathi* over her head, its menacing sound halting the suddenly wary soldiers. She stopped moving, holding her weapon steady. Conserving her energy. Ready and alert. One hand held the stick in the middle, the end of it tucked under her armpit. The other arm was stretched forward. Her feet spread wide, in balance. She was surrounded by at least fifty Lankan soldiers. But they kept their distance.

‘Raaaam!’ bellowed Sita, praying that her voice would somehow carry across the forest to her husband.

‘We don’t want to hurt you, Lady Vishnu,’ said a Lankan, surprisingly polite. ‘Please surrender. You will not be harmed.’

Sita cast a quick glance at Jatayu. *Is he still breathing?*

‘We have the equipment in our *Pushpak Vimaan* to save him,’ said the Lankan. ‘Don’t force us to hurt you. Please.’

Sita filled her lungs with air and screamed yet again, ‘Raaaam!’

She thought she heard a faint voice from a long distance. ‘Sitaaa ...’

A soldier moved suddenly from her left, swinging his *lathi* low. Aiming for her calves. Sita jumped high, tucking her feet in to avoid the blow. While in the air, she quickly released the

right-hand grip on the *latbi* and swung it viciously with her left hand. The *latbi* hit the Lankan on the side of his head. Knocking him unconscious.

As she landed, she shouted again, ‘Raaaam!’

She heard the same voice. The voice of her husband. Soft, from the distance. ‘Leave ... her ... alone ...’

As if electrified by the sound of his voice, ten Lankans charged in together. She swung her *latbi* ferociously on all sides, rapidly incapacitating many.

‘Raaaam!’

She heard the voice again. Not so distant this time. ‘Sitaaaa ...’

*He’s close. He’s close.*

The Lankan onslaught was steady and unrelenting now. Sita kept swinging rhythmically. Viciously. Alas, there were one too many enemies. A Lankan swung his *latbi* from behind. Into her back.

‘Raaa ...’

Sita’s knees buckled under her as she collapsed to the ground. Before she could recover, the soldiers ran in and held her tight.

She struggled fiercely as a Lankan came forward, holding a neem leaf in his hand. It was smeared with a blue-coloured paste. He held the leaf tight against her nose.

As darkness began to envelop her, she sensed some ropes against her hands and feet.

*Ram ... Help me ...*

And the darkness took over.



## Chapter 2

*38 years earlier, North of Trikut Hills, Deoghar, India*

‘Wait a minute,’ whispered Sunaina, as she pulled the reins on her horse.

Janak, the king of Mithila, and his wife, Sunaina, had travelled a long way to the Trikut Hills, nearly a hundred kilometres south of the Ganga River. They sought to meet the legendary *Kanyakumari*, the *Virgin Goddess*. A divine child. It was believed across the *Sapt Sindhu*, *land of the seven rivers*, that the blessings of the Living Goddess helped all who came to her with a clean heart. And the royal family of Mithila certainly needed Her blessings.

Mithila, founded by the great king Mithi, on the banks of the mighty Gandaki River, was once a thriving river-port town. Its wealth was built on agriculture, owing to its exceptionally fertile soil, as well as river trade with the rest of the Sapt Sindhu. Unfortunately, fifteen years ago, an earthquake and subsequent flood had changed the course of the Gandaki. It also changed the fortunes of Mithila. The river now flowed farther to the west, by the city of Sankashya. Ruled by Janak’s younger brother Kushadhvaj, Sankashya was a nominally subsidiary kingdom of Mithila. To add to the woes of Mithila,