Sita meaning “furrow” is portrayed as the wife of Lord Rama, who is considered as the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu in the Hindu tradition. Sita is depicted as the female protagonist of the Ramayana, an itihasa ascribed to Sage Valmiki and is an integral part of Hindu literature (smriti). Ramayana, is the compound of two words, Rama and ayana meaning ‘Rama’s journey’. The Ramayana consists of 24,000 verses in seven books (kândas) and 500 cantos (sargas), and narrates the story of Rama whose wife Sita is abducted by Ravana, the King of Lanka. Thematically, the Ramayana explores human values and the concept of dharma. Sita is esteemed as a standard-setter for wifely and womanly virtues for all Hindu women. Understood theologically in Hinduism, Sita is an avatar of Sri or Lakshmi, the Divine spouse of Lord Vishnu. Sita has been a much revered figure amongst the Hindus. In the blurring boundary between religion and mythology, between history and fiction, she has been portrayed as an ideal daughter, an ideal wife, and an ideal mother. But this paper views Sita in the perspective of ecologists and feminists.

Sita's story has been portrayed in an exemplary manner. The actions, reactions and instincts manifested by Sita at every juncture of her long and arduous life are treated in an excellent way. The values that she enshrined and adhered to at every point in the course of a demanding life are the values of womanly virtue held sacred by countless generations of Indians. Valmiki himself calls his epic “Sitayah charitam mahat”, meaning the noble story of Sita, “a reverberant and talismanic phrase” (Sitayah, viii) extols K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in the ‘Introduction’ of his book, Sitayana, (1987) Sita’s story has been portrayed in an exemplary manner. The actions, reactions and instincts manifested by Sita at every juncture of her long and arduous life are treated in an excellent way. The values that she enshrined and adhered to at every point in the course of a demanding life are the values of womanly virtue held sacred by countless generations of Indians. Valmiki himself calls his epic “Sitayah charitam mahat”, meaning the noble story of Sita, “a reverberant and talismanic phrase” (Sitayah, viii) extols K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in the ‘Introduction’ of his book,
sub-titled as ‘the Epic of the Earth-born’. He further explains why he has chosen this title by presenting a very brief plot structure:

*Sitayana* is ‘Sita’s saga sublime’, the story of her birth, childhood and girlhood, her marriage to Rama, their life as exiles in Dandaka for 13 years, their yearlong separation and reunion, their Coronation at Ayodhya, her second sundering from Rama, her crown of motherhood, and the last scene of her self-transcendence and return to her Earth-Mother . . . .This is the quintessential story: the rest is the needed ballast and scaffolding. (xiii)

The significant change in *Sitayana* is from Rama to Sita, “from the rational-linear masculine to the psychic-integral feminine world-view”. It is in this tradition, come the *Ramayana* re-tellings of Chandrabati in Bengali and of Molla in Telugu that belong to the women folk tradition with its work and ritual songs, which are natural women-oriented fragmentary discourses. Nabaneeta Dev Sen in her highly scholarly article “Lady sings the Blues: When Women retell the Ramayana” that appeared in the journal *Manushi* (Issue 108) forwards a feministic observation that is worth quoting:

Women’s Sita myth where Sita is a woman, flourishes only on the periphery. The male Sita myth where she is a devi, continues in the mainstream. In the women’s retelling, Sita is no rebel; she is still the yielding, suffering wife, but she speaks of her sufferings, of injustice, of loneliness and sorrow. In the women’s folk tradition in India, never mind where you are, which century you belong to or what language you speak, you are all sisters in sorrow. . . . when they sing the story of Rama, they are astonishingly close to one another. In their feelings, their perceptions, their expressions, their choices of events and their responses, they echo each other. . . . These work songs and ritual songs have opened up a rich world of women’s *Ramayanas*. . . . These are connected with different moments of a woman’s life. . . . They call it the *Ramayana* but it is of Sita that they sing. It is natural in women’s retellings of the *Ramayana* for them to pick and choose their episodes; they are not interested in the heroic epic cycle, which has no relevance to their lives. If what they create is fragmentary, it is because their lives are fragmentary. For them, it is the whole story. It reflects a woman’s world in its entirety. (www.ninapaley.com/Sitayana/Manushi_LadySingstheBlues.html)

Samhita Arni and Moyna Chitrakar’s *Sita’s Ramayana* also shares this tradition. Rebecca Buchanan in her article “Sita’s Ramayana” for the journal *Sequential Tart* (Nov.21, 2011) observes: “By choosing to base *Sita’s Ramayana* on Chandrabati’s version, translator / adapter Samhita Arni and artist Moyna Chitrakar have created an adaptation which is markedly different from any other in print: it is a female-inspired,female-centric and a (eco)feminist tale”.(http://www.sequentialtart.com/article.php?id=2106)

A female deity of agricultural fertility by the name Sita was known before Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, but was overshadowed by more well-known goddesses associated with fertility. According to the *Ramayana*, Sita was discovered in a furrow when King Janaka was ploughing. Since Janaka was a king, it is likely that ploughing was part of a royal ritual to ensure fertility of the land. Sita is considered to be the child of the Mother Earth, produced by the union between the king and the land. Sita is a personification of the Earth’s fertility, abundance, and well-being. Srinivasa Iyengar writes about the rapturous astonishment of King Janaka:

> Since the vision had sprouted as it were from the opening furrow, the enraptured Janaka cried ‘Sita’! and bent down in gratitude. Imaging Pity as well as Power, the lone naked new-born babe seemed a visitant from Heaven, and smiled on fair Earth’s bounteous bosom. (*Sitayana*, 29)

Samhita Arni’s *Sita’s Ramayana* is a graphic novel, as the name suggests, is a version of the epic told from the point of view of the hapless princess. Author Samhita Arni begins her story with a heavily pregnant Sita walking into the forest with bruises on her feet and tears in her eyes. The inhabitants of the forest, the leaves, flowers, creepers, and animals wake up from their long sleep at the intrusion. They wonder what this beautiful maiden, dressed in silks and ornaments, is doing in their world and start questioning her. In response, Sita recounts her story and the horrified forest creatures pledge to protect her and make her stay as comfortable and secure as they can. With Moyna Chitrakar’s drawings, Arni constructs the story by adding dialogues to the visuals. This is a splendid attempt, at once linking the woman, the environment and art.
The pictures speak:


LET ME LIVE HERE. Sita begged.

THE WORLD OF MEN HAS BANISHED ME.

And then the forest spoke: Tell us, sister, how you came here.

Arni’s Sita’s Ramayana strongly supports Ecofeminist ideals that are avidly propagated by diligent activists, especially to uphold an ecofeminist ethics and culture. A vital proposition in this sphere is: A reintegration of human consciousness and nature must reshape the concept of God. Instead of modeling God after alienated male consciousness, outside of and ruling over nature, God in ecofeminist spirituality is the immanent source of life that sustains the whole planetary community. God is neither male nor anthropomorphic. God is the font, from which the variety of plants and animals well up in each new generation, the matrix that sustains their life-giving interdependency with each other (Ruether).

Vandana Shiva, an environmental activist claims that women have a special connection to the environment through their daily interactions with it that has been ignored. She says that women in subsistence economies who produce “wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature’s processes.” However she makes the point that “these alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs are not recognized by the capitalist reductionist paradigm, because it fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women’s lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth”. Arni emphasizes the point that the eco-products readily respond to a suffering woman:

The forest heard Sita’s story. Her tale was passed from tree to tree, leaf to leaf. The birds flew high into the sky, promising to spread her tale across the forest. The snakes, hearing of her loss, vowed to stay free of her feet, and the lions and tigers swore to leave her in peace.

The ecofeminists strongly feel that while men dominate women and humans dominate nature. Naturally, then, women and the environmentalists should be united in their struggle. Today, the ecofeminists believe that major changes need to be made in our modern society.

I HAVE BEEN HAPPY HERE IN THE FOREST, LIVING A SIMPLE, PEACEFUL LIFE. AND NOW MY PAST RETURNS – IN THE SHAPE OF MY HUSBAND, TO DEFEAT AND KILL MY SONS! I WISH HE HAD NEVER COME

Rama banishes Sita to the forest for having been accused of adultery by one of the stupid citizens of Ayodhya. She is forced to give birth to her twins all by herself and live in the forest as a single mother as a result of this. Years later, when Rama meets her again through coincidence, he still hesitates to take her back, as he still has lingering suspicions about her fidelity. His hesitation causes Sita to call up her mother Bhûmi to embrace her and be subsumed into the Earth.

O wonders of wonders, O miracle surpassing all miracles:

for even as Vaidehi in her trance of absolute surrender
raised her resonant voice to the Mother,
the ground opened at her feet, the Goddess Madhavi seized Maithili in her protective embrace,
and as the awed celestials rained flowers
in an unceasing shower,
Maithili shared Madhavi’s throne as it disappeared under Earth. (Sitayana, 647)

Rosemary Radford Ruether, a writer, is an active campaigner for women’s spirituality. Her book Gaia and God: an Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing brings a new way of thinking and reflecting towards the earth to which readers are intimately and inextricably connected in living and in consuming from it. Ruether offers the feminist view and her evaluation toward the heritage of Western Christian culture and of the American World, and takes readers from creation story to destruction reality and from domination to the possibility of a healing quest. The healing quest for the earth is rooted in deep ecology which examines the symbolic, psychological, and ethical patterns of destructive relationships of not only humans with nature, but also men and women, classes and nations. It leads to the issue of
eco-justice which involves both socially and earthly dominations. This ecological healing is a theological and psychic-spiritual process. Ruether could articulate more about the role of Gaia as mother and how this mother role fits into the theology of creation. She understands that there are three major characters, God, Gaia, and humans, who are intimately interrelated. The readers can be known more about the theory behind the term she uses in her book, Gaia, as a theologian. The readers/writers require a new consciousness if the biosphere is to survive much beyond 2030. These socially constructed oppressions are formed out of the power dynamics of patriarchal systems. In one of the first ecofeminist books, New Woman/New Earth, Ruether, states:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women’s movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society (204). (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecofeminism)

References