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**Goddess Sita, Pachamama and Mother Earth  
- celebrating World Earth Day on 22<sup>nd</sup> April**

**By Siddhartha**

It was on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 22<sup>nd</sup> April as the "**International Mother Earth Day**". In so doing, Member States agreed that the Earth and its ecosystems are our common home, and that it was necessary to promote Harmony with Nature in order to arrive at a right balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations. Underlying the resolution was the conviction that the earth was indeed 'mother', sustaining and nurturing all the species, including humans, animals and plants. Furthermore, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (2012), entitled "The future we want" reiterated: *"We recognize that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that "Mother Earth" is a common expression in a number of countries and regions, and we note that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development."*

At Fireflies Ashram we celebrate World Earth Day during the whole of the month of April. For us, Mother Earth is symbolised by the goddess Sita. Many years ago, we got together a number of villagers to discuss World Earth Day at our ashram. The discussion went well, and we talked about the need to be careful with our water-use and the need to plant more trees. But we realised that the passion was lacking. Then it struck us that we would have to find a significant symbol or metaphor from the religious universe of the people to spark their imagination. Such a symbol was not difficult to find for the goddess Sita was often referred to as Prakriti (nature) in scriptural texts.

The 'Ramayana', the great Hindu epic, states that Sita was discovered in a furrow when King Janaka was ploughing. It is likely that ploughing was part of a royal ritual for King Janaka to ensure fertility of the land. Sita is considered to be a child of Mother Earth and a symbol of Earth's fertility, abundance and well-being.

In the Sita Upanishad, an ancient sacred text attached to the Atharva Veda, goddess Sita is referred to as Bhumi (Mother Earth). She is also the Ultimate Reality of the Universe, the ground of Being and material cause behind all that is manifested. Sita is also primordial Prakriti (nature) and appears in daily life as Will (ichha), Action (kriya) and Knowledge (jnana).

According to the Sita Upanishad, Sita emerged at the tip of the plough showing her link to Prakriti or nature, nourisher of all forms of life. She is immanent and all-pervading in the universe. She is the tree of plenty. Evolution and preservation are her strengths and qualities. All the worlds are lit up by her. She represents "The wheel of time and the wheel of the Universe".

There are similar goddesses in other parts of the world. One of them is Pachamama, the Andean Mother Earth. She provides harvests of potatoes and coca leaves. Today's environmental problems stem from a lack of respect for Pachamama. We take too much from her and pollute her, endangering the life of the planet as a whole. As South America embraced Christianity the goddess Pachamama merged into the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary also began to be looked upon as Mother Earth.

At Fireflies Ashram we have built a temple to honour Goddess Sita. The temple is unique, for in place of the *gopuram* (the equivalent of the church steeple) we have trees growing over the shrine, indicating that Sita sits in the womb of nature. We meet regularly at the temple to do *puja* and chant. We recite together that Goddess Sita is Mother Earth, that she represents water and trees, that she is the provider of food, and that she is particularly the refuge for women and children.

Through honouring Goddess Sita and Pachamama we are venerating the sacredness of the earth. All through human history we have held the earth as sacred. It is only in the modern era that we consider the earth as real estate, a commodity to be bought and sold in the market, as a mere resource or mineral, and so on. Even from an evolutionary perspective the earth is our first mother; all life emerged here first

as single celled organisms. We human beings co-evolved with the plants, trees and animals. It is only in nature that we are connected with our first mother. It is here that we discover our true selves.

Today we can no longer talk only of our universe. We know that there are many universes. We live in a multiverse composed of many universes, and billions of galaxies and planets. The multiverse is composed of both material and spiritual energy, not separate, but integrated as one reality. Goddess Sita and Pachamama represent not only the spiritual energy of the earth but also the spiritual energy of the multiverse. The evolving multiverse is a spiral, circling to higher spiritual depths, to use an analogy from the French philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Through the symbolism of Goddess Sita, Pachamama, and similar symbols, we become a part of this evolving spiritual spiral of the multiverse.