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Behind THE SITAYANA • Sita's Slumber Party

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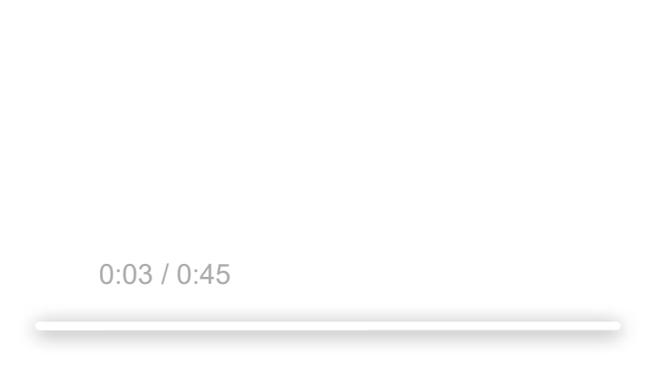
A 30-Year-Long Slumber Party!

Being alone and stuck in our bedroom is a feeling that many of us have become all too familiar with. So why not make it into something enjoyable, like a slumber party!?

Enter Sita, a young girl of 16. She's got a crush, she's got a phone to talk to friends, she's got stuffed animals, she's got her parents telling her what to do. She's got all those little things that we've stored in our memory and filed under "Teens."

Played by Nikita Chaudhry, Sita journeys from 16 to 26, her wide-eyed naivete replaced by loneliness and then knowledge, experience, and agency. All while stuck in her bedroom.

Chaudhry said the most exciting part for her was playing with the passage of time and how her embodiment of Sita changed. There was a feeling of coming of age, watching the bedroom and the individual transform. Not only that, there was an excitement of simply telling stories and using different voices like so many people do.

"The process of rehearsing in my bedroom was trippy and inspiring, and it was interesting to play in this space I've spent so much time in," Chaudhry said.

"It also becomes this confined space where Sita takes her journey. The way she tells the story also started to make me reflect on how

we perceive voices and decide to portray them in the way we tell stories. I was very inspired by my time alone."

Transitioning from her bedroom to the actual set was a feat. Not only is there an enormous amount of text to memorize in this one-woman show, but the first time the show was filmed was also the first time the actors got to be in the space. Chaudhry said it felt magical, like a one-night-only performance.

"The very first thing I did the day that I got there was walk around the space and touch everything and try to live in that space and personalize it in my head as much as I could," Chaudhry said. "It did feel very theatre-esque."

> *"That was very fulfilling for me as an actor, because it only exists for this one time, one space, one take."*

To start, Chaudhry portrays Sita as a vivacious young girl filled with excitement for what's to come, bubbling with hope and expectations.

"It was very fun to revisit parts of Sita and find out she that does have a lot of who I was as a kid," Chaudhry said. "She has that excitement of adventure, not necessarily knowing the sacrifice, pain and things that come with getting older."

Since many of us have been using this time to process our lives, it is only fitting that Sita processes her life in this patriarchal lockdown as well. While the story

may have South Asian roots, it is universal in its theme of healing and growing, recovering from heartbreak and betrayal, and finding a sense of self.

With the three versions, we fight the danger of a single story. Chaudhry said there is no single version of an ancient text, and South Asian womanhood isn't one thing. She believes that Lavina's way of contemporizing the classical text will help people outside the South Asian community also relate to the story.

> *"I hope people leave knowing they have a sense of agency in their own life, whatever that might look like in the context of how they perceive the story,"* Chaudhry said. *"It's the ability to make choices, to literally leave or stay in a space, how you decide to leave and enter, and how you tell your own story."*

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