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MATRIMONY AS SACRIFICE IN
SHANI MOOTOO'S *VALMIKI'S DAUGHTER*
AND LAKSHMI PERSAUD'S *RAISE THE LANTERNS HIGH*



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Introduction

This paper considers notions of sacrificial womanhood as tied to gender norms such as the implied inevitability of marriage within the familial context of Indo-Trinidadian culture. It explores two texts authored by writers Shani Mootoo and Lakshmi Persaud, *Valmiki's Daughter* and *Raise the Lanterns High*, respectively. Whereas upon first glance the protagonists Viveka and Vasti appear to have little in common, one shared theme is the powerful desire to not inflict pain on parental figures through their choices. Despite varying degrees of education, opportunity and religious devotion, they have one thing in common – their eventual marriages at the story's end are the ultimate sacrifice made from of a sense of duty towards a beloved parent. Both characters, I argue, are bound together by a shared, symbolic system of sacrificial womanhood which places “suitable” marriages at the centre of female achievement. Yet, the words of Supriya M. Nair ring true here, that “the woman's network that admittedly provides a fostering environment may well become the web that ensnares her” (64).

Gender Ideologies

Various aspects surrounding the cultural community of the novels' protagonists (and authors) are worth highlighting. For the Indo-Trinidadian community, this includes the background of indentureship, which saw the influx of approximately 144,000 workers from the Indian subcontinent between 1845-1917, to replace the labour of the formerly enslaved. In order to grasp one of the core influences that informed some of the behaviours and beliefs of this group, one must understand the ideological cargo they bore with them to the Caribbean. This includes their ideas of Indian manhood and womanhood - ideas challenged during indentureship, reinforced at its cessation and which continue to change through exposure, as well as in response, to other influences. The indentured labourers were influenced by holy texts "derived from both a classical and contextual mode - the classical based on the original literary sources, and the contextual offering variations depending on the areas from which the migrants had come" (Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations* 139).

Just as the variety of languages brought by the labourers soon standardised to Trinidad Bhojpuri, so too did the variations of myth, symbol and ritual become standardised and adapted by those who conveyed and practised them (139). The main venues for transmission, Mohammed adds, were religious occasions, and the transmitters were those who were Brahmin (or claimed to be), and who were versed in the religious scriptures (142). Elizabeth Jackson notes that "Hindu women are enjoined in numerous myths and legends to serve their husbands like gods, and that their devotion to their husbands should also extend to in-laws" (57). She further quotes Suma Chitnis' description of the concept of *pativrata*, literally translated as "one who is vowed to her husband" (Chitnis, 90). This ideal describes a wife whose ultimate "religion and duty" is a life of "service and devotion to her husband, and his family" (Chitnis 90). This

highlights an important idea of Indian womanhood - that of a “good” woman being a *married* one.

The image of wifely servitude, Elizabeth Jackson notes, is best personified by the character Sita of the *Ramayana* epic (57). The *Ramayana* emerged prominently during indentureship as a source of inspiration, a balm for the indignities of the system and as a model of marital relationships. Historian Sherry-Ann Singh notes that while the *Ramayana* tradition “comprises several hundred varying written and oral traditions, the *Ramcharitmanas* was the version brought to Trinidad by indentured Indians” (25). Detailing its composition by the “poet-saint Tulsidas around 1574”, she points out its centrality “to the literary, cultural and religious heritage of India and almost every other country of the Indian diaspora”. While not original in “plot or theme”, Singh explains that the *Ramcharitmanas* is rather an “interpretation of the Valmiki myth of Rama, with influences and borrowings from other prominent texts of sixteenth-century India”. From the earliest arrival of Indians in Trinidad, Singh notes that “the *Ramcharitmanas* has occupied the unchallenged position of ‘*Dharmashastra* par excellence’ in all facets of Trinidad Hinduism, providing ‘the major framework of the theological edifice of Hindu migrants’”. The Tulsidas version of the *Ramayana* has been so widespread and beloved in the region that Tulsidas is often regarded as “the father of Caribbean Hinduism” (25- 26).

The Ideal of Matrimony

Sherry-Ann Singh explains that while the *Ramayana* emphasises Sita’s commendable qualities, other verses “served to cement the notion of women as morally, intellectually, spiritually, physically and socially inferior to men” (34-35). For many Indian men, these warnings in lore would transfer to “common sense notions” about womanhood and the need to safeguard women’s sexuality. Furthermore, the “dangerous” dimension of female sexuality would

have been displayed in full force within the Trinidad plantation system, where a shortage of Indian women remained an issue throughout indenture (Mangru 211). As a result, women enjoyed significantly more independence, choice and importance than they did in India. This social inversion led to “considerable tension and provided the key to an understanding of the problems Indian immigrants faced in establishing a stable family life” (Mangru 213). Many women had multiple partners, often opting to leave a significant other when discontented. Mangru notes that “the paucity of women made polyandry almost an acknowledged system” (227). This had tragic and destructive consequences.

Echoing Elizabeth Jackson, Singh further notes that “The essentially patriarchal family system that developed during the early post-indentureship period held Sita - chaste, submissive, faithful and loyal to her husband - as the highest ideal of womanhood” (34). Sita’s dutiful example was also referenced as a deterrent to the “snares” of modernisation and creolization for Indian women. Supriya M. Nair notes that “With the rise of the middle classes and the subsequent distance from the early period of indenture, the reinstatement of the traditional Indian family structure only emphasized the desirability of marriage” (60). There, within their core roles as wife and mother, Indian women’s “dangerous” sexuality could be properly controlled and guarded. Furthermore, she in turn would be expected to use her example, influence and power over her children (one of the few sources of power willingly allowed to her) to guard the actions and choices of her daughter/s. Thus, if the sexuality of Indian girls is restrained in the developmental process, the only place in which it can be appropriately expressed is within marriage. This paper examines the ways in which “choice”, particularly choices involving whether or not to marry, as well as when and whom to marry, is coded within a powerful discourse of sacrificial femininity. Sometimes erroneously marked as “traditional” and as a past, permanent

fixture representing the standards of Indian behaviour, ideals such as these draw power from various Hindu myths and religious scriptures, interpreted and reinforced by patriarchal authority. They include notions of female submission and obedience to male authority (father, husband), the implied inevitability of marriage and as quoted above, devotion to their husbands.

In the texts discussed in this section, these ideals have been interrogated and their effects creatively rendered to highlight their impact on female selfhood. This includes ideas that strongly influence the behaviour of the protagonists, the choices they make regarding whether and whom to marry and finally, whether the notion of choice is truly a viable one for them. Thus, the novels present scenarios which seemingly allow options to women, but these same scenarios also implicitly interrogate ideological frameworks which hold self-sacrifice as their highest ideal and example. It should be noted that both novels span different time periods within Trinidad and Tobago's history, with *Lanterns* set in the 1960s and *Valmiki* in the late 1990s, early 2000s. Both authors write from outside the region, and while Persaud's writing clearly relates to the past, Mootoo's more contemporary setting appears to underestimate the changing attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community, particularly among educated members of society. These nuances, while very much present in reality, are somewhat downplayed in the novel, whether due to the author's own physical distance from the community she is writing about, or more simply, as a result of the creative choices made by Mootoo for greater impact. Despite this, both novels are useful explorations of the ways in which the veneration and expectation of female sacrifice ultimately shape the decisions of the protagonists, presenting personal autonomy as a seemingly elusive concept. In Persaud's *Raise the Lanterns High* and Mootoo's *Valmiki's Daughter*, the authors boldly equate marriage with the ultimate sacrifice of the daughter-protagonist's own desires and aspirations in order to please her family. With respect to the

former, Persaud likens her protagonist's union - marked by the sacred fire - with the suttee's immolation on her husband's funeral pyre.

Raise the Lanterns High

Perhaps Persaud's most imaginative work, *Raise the Lanterns High* straddles between the 18th century in a fictional Indian city, Jyotika, and 1960s Trinidad. The third person narration reveals a similar dilemma for the modern-day protagonist, Vasti Nadir, that is shared with three queens of Jyotika; it is the pull of "tradition" and communal expectations, versus the desire for personal freedom and autonomy. The third-person narrator focalizes on the various central female characters in turn, faithfully capturing the inner turmoil caused by their respective conflicts through lengthy internal monologues. Direct speech is further used to enhance characterization, with the two central characters, Vasti and Queen Renu, positioned as intellectually capable women, proficient in well-reasoned debate. At the novel's end, the narrator ties the opening scene with the closing one, a strategy that instead of achieving closure, as one would anticipate, only serves to poignantly highlight how little has changed for women and their "choices" in the span of two centuries.

A Journey into the Past

Raise the Lanterns High opens in the year 1955 when Vasti Nadir was a form 2, secondary school pupil (roughly 12 years old). She witnesses the rape of a schoolgirl as she leisurely gazes through her binoculars while walking through sugarcane fields after school. While the faces cannot be clearly seen, the rapist wears a ring, engraved with "an eagle, its wings spanned as if in flight" bearing a winged scroll on its back (8). Vasti's immediate thoughts reveal much of the ideological setting of the novel, as she feels relief that she has not seen the victim's face. Vasti chooses silence and discretion as a means of "saving" the girl from an unbearable existence in which her rape is made known. This choice

betrays the thinking of a young girl who has been conditioned to view rape as conferring shame on the victim, not the perpetrator. Years later, Vasti discovers the owner of the ring in the person of Karan Walli - the man chosen by her family to be her husband. Overwhelmed by the predicament before her - particularly the deeply distressing thought of calling off the wedding and shaming her conservative, widowed mother - Vasti falls into a state of temporary unconsciousness. There, a "magical" mirror in her bedroom transports her mind into the eighteenth century - where the city of Jyotika, located in Northern India, is preparing for the funeral of its king. Two of his three widowed wives are now expected to offer themselves as suttees in accordance with respect, tradition and their noble rank. The third, Queen Renu, being from another kingdom in the south of India, is not expected to comply with these practices, but she seeks to convince the other queens to choose another path.

Renu serves as a character foil for Vasti, as both utilize techniques such as debate, dialogue and logic to radically combat traditions and choices they consider demeaning to women. Renu eventually chooses to flee rather than live the degraded life of a widow, and ironically seeks freedom by indenturing herself to Trinidad. The other two queens later choose to leave surreptitiously as well. Despite her consciousness having borne witness to their courage, Vasti is unable to successfully carry her own convictions to their logical conclusion and call off the wedding. The novel ostensibly reveals why this is so, as despite her strong intellect and repugnance of Karan Walli, Vasti differs from Renu in one crucial area. The former is still in her mother's care and wary of bringing shame upon her loving, close-knit family and community. This is a common theme in Persaud's fiction, whereby the novel's main source of conflict is internal, in the form of deep-rooted tension between personal desire and communal/familial expectations. These expectations can be understood in light

of notions of “tradition”, through which women are regarded in light of an idealized, Indian past. In this narrative, mentions of “the old ways” paint a picture of a time of uniformed propriety, during which women were falsely imagined to conform to a fixed pattern of female submission, “purity” and devotion – a past which necessitates further interrogation.

De-romanticizing the Past

Through the character of Queen Renu, Persaud interrogates the stereotypical portrayals and assumptions of Indian women as “carriers of tradition” as opposed to “symbols of change” (Yuval-Davis 61). The novel further questions the interpretations of scriptures which have long influenced behaviour, along with the motives of the Hindu priests who disseminate this knowledge. Yet perhaps the most important contribution of *Lanterns* is how the narrative contests romantic notions of an idealised and static Hindu way of life. Persaud does not repudiate the Hindu faith but places it within the context of compassion, non-violence and alternative textual reinterpretations. In Renu’s plea to her sister-queens against their acquiescence to entering the pyre, she reveals in the past:

...the suttee act was purely a symbolic one, denoting the coming to an end of the connection with one life and the beginning of another. In those times the pundit would bless the living and the dead - the widow and the body of her husband - lying on the pyre... Well before it was lit, however, the widow was wisely raised from the pyre from a male relative of her husband, to affirm it was the family’s wish (*Lanterns* 130-131).

Queen Renu’s thoughts go on to sum up the novel’s main source of conflict: “Oh, how tyranny has woven itself within the very weave of custom, concealing itself within custom’s thread” (140). Persaud goes to some length to establish how the priests’ personal ambitions, along with a narrow, patriarchal

interpretation of the Vedic texts collude to bring about various customs that are detrimental to women but not based in Hinduism. In having Renu challenge and reinterpret the texts under question, new possibilities are imagined for the sister queens. Through these characters, Persaud subtly suggests that the faith system in itself is not faulty but rather, the ways in which religious leaders, through the instruments of custom/tradition, have created and perpetuated ideals detrimental to female subjectivities.

Problematizing the Text

Supriya M. Nair questions Persaud's outlook, commenting that,

Lanterns is unable, it seems, to avoid the pitfalls of religious consciousness, particularly in its troubled relationship with the nationalist narratives of mother(land), wives and womanhood. It is no coincidence that the Roop Kanwar sati atrocity occurred at a time of rising Hindu fundamentalism in India, or that official British opposition sometimes brought on a spate of sati deaths, or even that sati was tied to the honour killing of women in the period of Mughal invasion. The figure of the woman is conveniently used as the insignia of national, religious and cultural integrity, often to her detriment (Nair, 56).

Yuval-Davis echoes these sentiments, noting the important role women play in nationalist projects, particularly those aimed at combatting rising modernity which appears to threaten "the cultural essence" - or at least what is constructed as such. She notes that "even practices such as sati in India can become foci of fundamentalist movements which see in women's following of these traditions the safeguard of the national cultural essence, operating as a mirror image to the colonial gaze which focused on these practices to construct 'otherness'" (Yuval-Davis 61).

What Persaud fails to comment upon is how Sita's strength is consistently situated in relation to the gratification of her husband - whether by proving her purity, devotion or loyalty. For the suttee ritual, where deification is said to be attained upon death, an interesting predicament occurs in which a highly reverential attitude is held towards a recipient who is no longer present to experience it. The ideal woman is the one who has given her life (literally or symbolically) for her husband - thus female strength is only acknowledged when the female self is erased. This contradiction is somewhat reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's essay, "Stabat Mater", where she posits that the Christian image of the Virgin Mary has created a biologically impossible ideal against which Western culture would measure women - a figure who is both a virgin and a mother (Kristeva 133). In a similar vein, the figure of Sita is at its most basic a portrait of sacrificial womanhood, whereby the woman gains stature and selfhood through a daily "death" to her own personhood.

Compliance with Community

It is important to note from the novel that even in their radical choice to save their own lives, the queens cannot remain in the kingdom. Despite their personal enlightenment, there is no indication of a wider, cultural one. They are frankly told by Pundit Krishna, "should you decide not to join your King on his pyre... you will be shunned by all. Living in a state of neglect you cannot possibly imagine" (152). This puts Vasti's seemingly unwise decision to marry Karan into context, since fleeing is not an option, and she must live to face her community, her family and her much-loved and loving mother. If anything, the imaginative glimpse into the past allows the reader to understand how deeply-rooted the ideals of sacrificial femininity run, and how powerfully they have been guarded and upheld, even into diasporic contexts. For even the truth regarding those who have lived differently is suppressed - women recalled by Renu include "woman warrior... Queen Masaga", "Queen Nayanika, ruler and

military commander of the Satavahana Empire” and “Padmini”, who rescued her husband from enemy forces by advancing a surprise attack against the Moguls (138-139). However, idealizing the past necessitates a silencing of questioning/alternative voices and appropriately, in *Raise the Lanterns High*, silence is equated with defeat. The unnamed schoolgirl’s ultimate defeat lies in her fear of speaking out against Karan Walli. It is to the young Vasti’s later detriment that she does not “go to her” (8) and instead becomes complicit in this silence.

While the adult protagonist does have a clear voice, with her opinions expressed vigorously in the earlier portion of the story, she remains silent about Karan’s crimes and continues with the wedding. By doing so, another “rape” is hinted at in the similar imagery of moving stalks/stems. At the novel’s opening, mention is made of “swaying sugar-cane stems” which Vasti views through her binoculars, with the wind carrying the promise, “I will marry you” to the young victim (7-8). At the novel’s ending, marriage has indeed taken place and Vasti is momentarily reminded of “a forest of sucrose stems; a young girl’s cry fills her ears” (348). Plant imagery is further used to present the consummation of the marriage in a manner suggesting the bride’s passivity and indifference: “Vasti has become as pliant as the water rushes with their naked stems bending to their flowing shadows” (350). Thus, while not a violent rape like that described at the beginning, it is nevertheless a union that is not fully consensual, but one in which the family, the community and religious ideals come together to impact female “choice”.

Valmiki’s Daughter

With respect to the historical reality, Mehta comments on how the notion of female self-sacrifice was present in the reconfiguration of community life post-indentureship, where “Indian women, consciously or unconsciously, collaborated in the perpetuation of myths that were detrimental to the

realization of their own full potential" (Mehta 196). However, insights allowed into characters such as Vasti allow for a glimpse into the emotional tensions that grip these fictional creations and which produce constraining consequences, even within contexts where choice is seemingly more available. Mootoo examines this topic in her characteristically sensitive manner in her 2008 novel, *Valmiki's Daughter*. In this text, Mootoo implicitly questions whether it is even possible for an individual to fully withstand the familial and cultural forces which regulate and constrain behaviour. To place selfhood above one's formative values is presented in the novel as contradicting one's very being - so engrained are certain standards imposed by ethnicity, gender, class and culture. As discussed earlier, within the context of Indo-Trinidadian society, these standards are imparted through myths, symbols and of course, by members of the community (ethnic, religious and professional). For those whose desires transgress "acceptable" behaviour, a no-win scenario is presented: to shame one's family is to also become victim to their pain, whereas to conform suggests a death akin to the suttee's.

Impossible Identities

In *Raise the Lanterns High*, the ideological setting is established early in the novel by Vasti's fear of shaming the rape victim by her revealed presence. In a similar vein, through the prologue of *Valmiki* the reader is made immediately aware of the novel's core themes. It opens with the unnamed father (whom the reader understands to be Valmiki from the book's title) looking at his daughter sitting amongst a "sea" of presents (3). Only later in the novel, when this scene is revisited, are these revealed to be wedding gifts, and despite this hidden knowledge, it is enough in the present time to know that it is a searingly poignant moment for Valmiki. The desire he expresses towards his daughter to "switch off the light in the room, throw a net over her, wrap her tightly in his grip, and flee with her" suggests that he wishes to save her from a seemingly

morbid fate - which later proves to be her marriage (3). By including himself in this escape, the reader becomes aware that he too has a longing to flee something, thus setting the tone for a tale of regret and personal loss. The prologue ends, however, on a note that suggests the unlikelihood of another path, that although “He should have let his daughter do all that she wanted, be all that she was... in a place like San Fernando, that was impossible” (4). Through the choices and the consequences of characters like Valmiki Krishnu, his daughter Viveka and wife Devika, the novel attests as to just how unattainable and uninhabitable some identities are within particular contexts.

With respect to the narrative structure of *Valmiki's Daughter*, context or “place” presents uniquely in the novel, which features scenes of Trinidadian life vividly detailed through descriptions of local foods, scents and landmarks. A now-famous portion of the novel contains a 15-page description of San Fernando (7-21), replete with a plethora of images which lend rich tribute to Mootoo’s hometown in visual, olfactory and gustatory detail. Furthermore, every few pages of the book contain descriptions of sumptuous local foods, suggesting a writing that in more ways than one, hungers for home. The lens through which this exploration is presented is at times deeply nostalgic, with clear hints of love and longing from a writer who herself has migrated from this specific Trinidadian municipality. The novel is fraught with hints of a life lived in pain, lacking authenticity and mired with strong regret. The fact that Valmiki’s predicament threatens to be repeated in his daughter’s life makes the novel’s title extremely fitting.

A Life of Regret

While the source of Valmiki’s tension and remorse is his hidden same-sex desires, Mootoo does not explicitly state whether her characters are bisexual, lesbian, gay, etc., but rather portrays them as negotiating these realities and identities. Valmiki is presented, however, as having a strong preference for men

over women and as being haunted by the love and desire he continues to feel for his first love, Tony Almiraz. Tony was Valmiki's fellow student twenty years prior, during their medical studies in Scotland. When he and Tony plan to inform their respective families of their love, Valmiki cannot go through with it (68). The ending of the Prologue is echoed here as the narrator reveals "in a place as small as Trinidad, he was much less ready to risk any of it" (68). Thus, he ends the relationship with Tony and secretly departs for Trinidad, learning later that Tony had attempted suicide as a result. Over twenty years later, the novel reveals that whenever Valmiki feels "disoriented", it is Tony - living far away in Goa - whom he reaches for emotionally (26-27). Despite this longing and the truth of their former, shared love, he conforms to the heteronormativity of his community. Within the confines of familial and national public spaces, he is aware that anything outside of heterosexual desire is impossible.

Jackie Hogan explains that "Groups which are politically and economically marginalized on the basis of such characteristics as race, ethnicity, gender, class, or sexuality, tend also to be marginalized within the national imaginary". This leads to the silencing or disparaging of their "contributions, their histories and sometimes their very existence" (1). This "discursive marginalization", Hogan adds, "in turn helps reproduce long-standing inequalities by reinforcing the Otherness of such groups, and thereby sustaining material and symbolic barriers to their full and equal participation in the life of the nation" (1). Every instance of authentic expression of Valmiki's true self takes place either in the wild, natural world of Trinidad (as seen in his relationship with his hunting companion, Saul) or beyond its national boundaries (demonstrated in his relationship with Tony while in Scotland). However, in the familiarity and safety of this external identity he is able to censor his sexual preferences and position himself alongside the pre-existing image of an affluent, Brahmin, Hindu, Indo-Trinidadian man. It is an image diligently prepared for him by his

loving, hardworking, middle-class parents and one into which he enters dutifully. Through the figure of this regretful, burdened man, Mootoo portrays that it is not only female subjectivities which are constrained by the predominant ideological discourses of gender, culture, religion and nation. The unspeaking but very-present figure of Tony - who is described as now being married to a woman - further lends strength to this predicament. In this regard, marriage is presented as a form of bondage, a necessary rite of passage and a masking of one's true self.

Notions of Respectability and the Motif of "Place"

Viveka embodies the crack in the Krishnu edifice of respectability as the person who, in the words of Valmiki in the prologue, "reared up and threatened to undo them all" (3). Yet the cost of preventing this undoing, he knows, would come as a psychic death to his daughter. For all of Viveka's independent thinking, she also defines herself relationally, and with particular and unavoidable connection to the mother from whom she is different and to the father who shares her struggle, yet who has long exchanged authenticity for "respectability". Furthermore, despite Valmiki's own battles with these constraining images and ideals, resentment, not empathy, is his prevailing mood when Viveka seeks to live differently and engages romantically with the married Frenchwoman, Anick. Yet in his fear, he underestimates just how much Viveka is indeed "Valmiki's daughter" and how much familial and societal constraints have become embedded into her being. Valmiki made his choice out of fear and believes that his daughter's courage will lead her to an alternative path. He fails to understand, however, that this same courage is what leads her to the ultimate self-sacrifice (4).

The novel presents a motif of "place", which highlights how certain realities are only made possible in particular contexts. It is significant that both Viveka and her father find their first (and only) love in contexts and/or affiliations outside

their immediate Indo-Trinidadian community in San Fernando. In the case of Viveka, Anick is a French national, and it is noteworthy that their first sexual encounter takes place in a home built on a former French plantation - a place once owned by colonial masters who employed slave and indentured labour for profit. It now produces cocoa for Anick's Indian husband, and is a place rife with history and which seems to lie suspended in time, between past and present. In this setting, far away from San Fernando and with a person far removed from Indo-Trinidadian societal constraints, Viveka can briefly imagine another life which engages her fully and promises more happiness than anything she has known thus far. Yet, as with her father's trip home from Scotland, a change of place begets a change in the belief of what is possible. On joyfully returning to San Fernando, Viveka is forced to consider "the dreadful reality of losing her family", who "despite everything, was her life" (326). She knows she cannot hurt/shame them, thus an internal struggle ensues.

Negotiations and Negations

Viveka's struggle is more than a desire to please her parents but also represents a questioning of the values and associations that have been passed down to her. In this light, it is no wonder that Viveka understands by the novel's end that certain choices, like leaving Trinidad with Anick, are not viable in light of "the particulars of her situation... of Viveka's own family, of their position in Trinidad society" (357). She knows that "there was nowhere on her small island far away and safe enough" to live with Anick in the manner they intend, since "it was not only her security, but that of her family, her mother and father and Vashti, that would be affected" (360). Unlike Anick, Viveka is irretrievably bound together with her specific Indo-Trinidadian community, with its system of dominant values that articulate what behaviours are acceptable and which ones will not be condoned. While Viveka's eventual external conformity through marriage might suggest a weakening of resolve, the novel makes it

clear that “she knew who she was. She would not be diminished because of it.” (360) Thus, by ending the relationship with Anick, she acts in accordance with her own ideals of fairness and integrity - apologizing to Anick’s husband in her mind for the hurt she may have caused (360). Viveka, now aware that there is more at stake and no longer able to ignore her lover’s marriage, takes the more difficult path of an honest compromise by marrying her friend Trevor, whom she does not love.

Both *Raise the Lanterns High* and *Valmiki’s Daughter* end with the suggestion of marriage as death to selfhood; the ultimate sacrifice of self in order to fulfill duty to family and community. While the passionate lovemaking between Viveka and Anick is described in vivid detail and is an occasion of delight for both parties, with Trevor, it is awkward and uncomfortable (390). This is further reminiscent of Vasti’s wedding night, where she is passive and disinterested. The choices these characters make are carefully coded in situations which may at times be best described as “no-win” but also highlight the underlying ideals which require such personal negotiations. These ideals are held up to scrutiny through narratives which relay detailed accounts of the personal agony of protagonists who must live up to the attendant expectations for the sake of family pride and loyalty. Their sacrifices and surrender of personal desires in order to marry men they do not love, while heroic, are nevertheless deeply problematic. It signposts the need for greater empathy, compassion and freedom for those who long to live outside the folds of created and easily contested “traditions”.

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