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# The Vigil

Sarah Joseph



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Interpretations of Valmiki's poem about the epic battle between Raman and his nemesis, Ravanan, tend to focus on the glory and virtues of the hero. But in the Malayalam modern classic Oorukaaval – translated here as The Vigil – Sarah Joseph tells a turbulent tale: that of Angadan, who believes that Raman killed his father Vali against all principles of dharma.

Unlike the celebrated central characters who are blind to or choose to ignore that which is inconvenient, Angadan is acutely aware of the silent sufferings of the weak and disempowered. Over and over, the tormented

young vanara prince sees Raman act against justice and fair play, not the least of which is his consent to Sita's fire ordeal. Ultimately, though, it is the person most wronged by Raman – Sita – who provides him redemption from his searing quest for revenge.

In The Vigil, the familiar rhythm of the original poem is stirred up by Angadan's ascetic touch. Sarah Joseph provides a new spin to the grand old story, bringing in contemporary concerns such as the environment, peace

and women's empowerment, and provides a new path, a fresh way of understanding it.

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