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IF THE LION TELLS THE STORY: ANAND NEELAKANTAN'S *ASURA: TALE OF THE VANQUISHED* AS A SITE OF DIALOGISM AND COUNTER-NARRATIVE

Arijita Pradhan
Affiliation: Assam University, Designation: Assistant Professor
Email: arijita.ash@gmail.com

Abstract*: This paper employs Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to explore the nuanced portrayal of Ravana in Anand Neelakantan's Asura: Tale of the Vanquished in contrast to the depiction of the character in Valmiki's Ramayana. By presenting Ravana's perspective, the novel invites dialogic engagement with the myth, amplifying the voices suppressed in the dominant Deva-centric narrative. By utilizing Asura as a case study, this paper seeks to posit an important question pertaining to the dialogic narrative strategies: In what ways does Anand Neelakantan's Asura embody Bakhtin's concept of dialogism by presenting multiple, independent voices that resist unification under a single ideological perspective? In its attempt to respond to these questions, the paper seeks to accomplish two objectives: to foreground the interpretative texts written for the Asuras, and to situate Ravana as a product of his choice and circumstances rather than a quintessential villain. By humanizing Ravana and situating his actions within a matrix of social and personal struggles, Neelakantan reframes the myth, presenting him as a tragic figure shaped by his circumstances rather than pure malice. The novel, thus, interrogates the moral absolutism of mythological archetypes and replaces it with a morally ambiguous, dialogic understanding of Ravana's life.*

Keywords: Epic, Dialogism, Counter-narratives, Polyphony, Ramayana, Asura

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The well-known African proverb, "Until the lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter," encapsulates the essence of Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* (Hereafter *Asura*). This retelling of the Ramayana shifts attention from the celebrated narrative of Rama's divinity to the silenced perspectives of Ravana and the Asuras. Traditionally

represented as a ruthless demon and an embodiment of evil, Ravana in the *Ramayana* performs the role of villain in the grand narrative of good versus evil. In *Asura*, however, Neelakantan reconstructs Ravana's story, challenging the hegemonic cultural constructs that have long relegated him to the realm of irredeemable antagonism.

However, Neelakantan's novel is not merely a retelling; it is a deconstruction of the Ramayana's monologic constructs. Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and polyphony provide a theoretical lens to analyse how the novel amplifies marginalized voices and destabilizes established binaries of heroism and villainy. By engaging with Ravana's narrative, it opens a space for dialogic interaction between conflicting worldviews, urging readers to confront the complexities of morality, power, and identity within the larger framework of an epic. The following research questions guide this analysis: In what ways does Anand Neelakantan's *Asura* embody Bakhtin's concept of polyphony by presenting multiple, independent voices that resist unification under a single ideological perspective? How does the retelling of Ravana's tale in *Asura* serve as a dialogic counter-narrative to the monologic authority of the traditional Ramayana? In its attempt to respond to these questions, this paper utilizes polyphony as a means to analyse the retelling of epic.

Polyphony, as defined by Bakhtin, is coexistence of multiple, autonomous voices within a text, and they articulate their distinct worldviews trying to justify their positions. Whereas monologic narratives advocate a singular perspective — how much ever diverse the means of representation may be — polyphonic texts, conversely, facilitate diverse ideologies, and validate each voice. In a polyphonic narrative, characters engage in dialogue with one another, instead of being subsumed under the authorial perspective. Citing the characters of Dostoevsky novels, Bakhtin mentions, such characters "by the very nature of his creative design, not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6). In contrast, characters of a monologic narrative, as explicated by Bakhtin, are merely extensions of the author's ideology: "subordinated to the verbal and semantic dictatorship of a monologic, unified style and a unified tone" (*Problems* 204). Neelakantan's *Asur*a exemplifies polyphony by juxtaposing the perspectives of two narrators — Ravana and Bhadra — with different experiences and worldviews. Whereas Ravana's voice reflects the ambition and dilemmas of a flawed yet determined leader, Bhadra's account presents the hardships and disillusionment of the common

subject, a deprecated "other". To connect this deliberation to the wider spectrum of Bakhtinian proposition, one can analyze how polyphonic voices intercept the narrative from reaching a singular, conclusive interpretation. For example, Ravana's reflection, "History is always written by the victors" (10) testifies to the novel's effort to interrogate dominant discourses. On a different occasion, he states, "I am not the villain they make me out to be; I am the voice of the oppressed" (124). Through these moments of ideological tension, the novel undermines the authoritative narrative of the Ramayana and presents a platform for diverse voices to enter a space to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Dialogism, another core concept introduced by Bakhtin, refers to the interaction of multiple, often conflicting, perspectives within a text. In narratives characterized by dialogism, epistemic uncertainty is embraced, and a multiplicity of ideological perspectives are juxtaposed. This contrasts with traditional narratives, which frequently present a singular, authoritative viewpoint. In the case of *Asura*, the conventional Deva-centric narrative of the Ramayana is challenged by the alternative perspective of the Asuras. Neelakantan's novel engages in a dialogue with the ancient epic, and questions its portrayal of Ravana as a villain and Rama as an unquestionable hero. By presenting the Ramayana through the lens of the vanquished, *Asura* encourages readers to rethink the rigid moral distinctions between good and evil, hero and antagonist — categories that have long shaped interpretations of epic.

Epic poetry, as a literary genre, embodies a historical consciousness, even if the events are not always historically verified. Rooted in specific temporal and spatial contexts, epics function as cultural narratives, reflecting the values and beliefs of their respective eras. Their authority derives from perceived antiquity and sacredness. Beyond mere storytelling, epics shape and reinterpret religious beliefs, moral values, social norms, and cultural practices, thereby reinforcing cultural unity. They serve as ideological tools, reflecting and reinforcing the dominant values of a society, often those of the ruling classes. The process of recording and translating these oral traditions, whether through colonial or national languages, inevitably shapes their final form and interpretation.

The epic also serves as a meta-narrative that represents the value system of high culture. It deals with grand themes like universal ethics and the battle between good and evil, while

addressing subsidiary ethical values related to human relationships. The epic bridges classic traditions with local cultures, incorporating new social needs into its narrative. As Bakhtin points out:

> [Epic's] constitutive feature is the transferal of the world it describes to an absolute past of national beginning and peak times. The absolute past is a specifically evaluating (hierarchical) category. In the epic- world view, "beginning", "first", "founder", "ancestors", that which occurred earlier and so forth are not merely temporal categories but valorized temporal categories, and valorized to an extreme degree. (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 15)

Thus, the epic participates in the formation of dominant cultural ideology that influences society (Craig). As a high literary genre, the epic records a closed and absolute past, characterized by conclusive and valorized features. It is temporally isolated from contemporary life and is impervious to change. The epic's worldview focuses on the distant past, often idealizing it. In this tradition, historical events are viewed not just temporally, but as valorized categories, marking the beginning of everything good. Thus, the epic plays a key role in constructing cultural hegemony; and its deconstruction or reconfiguration becomes important in the modern period for reshaping identity.

Regarded as one of India's greatest epics, Ramayana has had a lasting impact on Indian culture. Written originally as a Sanskrit poem, the Valmiki *Ramayana* is considered as the most authoritative version of Rama's story, and serves as the foundation for numerous subsequent versions. Composed around the second century BCE, it consists of 24,000 verses divided into seven *kandas*: Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundara Kanda, Yuddha Kanda, and Uttara Kanda. In the most common version, King Dasharatha of the Kosala kingdom has three wives; and his son, Rama, is exiled for fourteen years due to the demands of his stepmother, Kaikeyi. Rama's brother, Bharatha, rules in his place. In the forest, Rama's brother Lakshmana humiliates Surpanakha, who is infatuated with Rama. Ravana, the Asura king of Lanka, kidnaps Sita, Rama's wife, leading to a war in which Rama eventually rescues her but refuses to take her back due to rumours of her chastity. Later, in the Uttarakanda, Sita, pregnant

with Rama's children, is abandoned and finds refuge with sage Valmiki, where she gives birth to twin sons, Lava and Kusha.

Ramayana gained the status of scriptural authority during the medieval period due to the growing popularity of the Rama cult in Hindu culture. Its significance as a "Kavya" (poetic work) in Sanskrit literature and its evolution from a literary work to a sacred scripture in Hindu culture highlight a complex interplay between cultural narratives and religious beliefs. The numerous religious adaptations and linguistic translations demonstrates its universal appeal and cultural impact. Early adaptations include the *Romopakhyan* in Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and *Paumachariya* (also known *Padma Charitra*) in Prakrit by Jain monk Acharya Vimalsuri. The Jain version emphasizes the Jain values of ahimsa and ethical conduct, differing from the action-oriented narrative of Valmiki's text. Written in Pali language, *Dasaratha Jataka* explores Buddhist principles of righteous governance and compassion. While Kamban's *Ramavataram* (12th century) presents a Tamil retelling, *Ranganatha Ramayanamu* (13th century) by the poet Ranganatha is a Telugu rendition of the epic. Other regional adaptations include Krithvas' *Krittivasi Ramayan*, also known as *Sriram Panchali* (15th century) in Bengali, Balaram Das' *Dandi Ramayana* in Odia, and Madhava Kandali's *Saptakanda Ramayana* (15th century) in Assamese language. The 16th century witnessed Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas* in Awadhi, *Toraveya Ramayana* by Narahari in Kannada, *Adhyathma Ramayanam* in Malayalam by Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, and Sant Eknath's *Bhavarth Ramayan* in Marathi. Later, in 17th century, Guru Govind Singh's *Ramayan* composed in Braj Bhasa, and various other adaptations in 18th and 19th century further strengthened the epic's legacy (Ramanujan 133-134, 141-148, 155-158).

It is not hard to agree with Paula Richman that Ramayana, instead of being a definitive and static text, has been a "multivoiced entity, encompassing tellings of the Rama story that vary according to historical period, regional literary tradition, religious affiliation, genre, and political context" (16). The various retellings of the story of Ramayana in different languages like Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Bengali, and Assamese far exceeds the primary purpose of translation. In addition to reaching a wider audience, they offer creative interpretations that reflect the cultural, social, and historical circumstances in which they were created. Ramayana*'s* popularity and adaptability is evident in its continued presence in various art forms, including theatrical performance (*Ramlila* in Northern India; *Yakshagana* in Southern India) and dance (Thai Khon), making it a significant

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cultural narrative. The central purpose of these narratives was to praise Rama's virtues and to make the epic accessible to a larger, regional audiences. Additionally, these adaptations demonstrate how socio-political conditions and historical realities have shaped Ramayana.

These retellings, while diverse, are always based on the core story that celebrates Rama as the divine figure. G. N. Devy emphasises this aspect of Ramayana, and notes that it chronicles "the entire genealogy of Rama, giving this character an immense historical proportion; on the other hand the vanquished Ravana is given a relatively compressed historical representation" (13-14). Sheldon Pollock further notes that Rama's divinity is central to the narrative's logic, and the Ramayana is a text of "othering," defining evil by demonizing the other (282), particularly through the character of Ravana, an oft-maligned antagonist.

Interestingly, in the last few decades, there has been a tradition of contemporizing epics to humanize divine figures and reveal hidden voices beneath the heroism. For instance, writers have explored the lesser-known aspects of the great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, with works like Shivaji Sawant's *Mrityunjaya*, *The Death Conqueror: The Story of Karna* (1989); Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* (1995); Mahasweta Devi's *After Kurukshetra: Three Stories* (2005); Chitra Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *The Forest of Enchantments (2019)*; Iravati Karve's *Yuganta* (2008); Aditi Kotwal's *Draupadi in High Heels* (2013); Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* (2014), *Lanka's Princess* (2017), and *Ahalya's Awakening* (2019); Manini J. Anandani's *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka* (2018); Amit Majmudar's *Sitayana* (2019), and many such. These translations and reimaginations have contributed to the formation of Ramayana as a dialogue in progress over time. The changing time and contexts through which Ramayana "has lived its socially charged life" (Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" 293) are reflected in its heteroglossia. White revisiting Bakhtin's account of heteroglossia, Julia Kristeva comments, "in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (36). Ramayana's capacity to embrace plurality has created such space of diverse utterances and their intersections.

Even in the contemporary era, Ramayana continues to be a source of literary inspiration, some of which even challenge the traditional narrative, and presents alternative perspectives and divergent ideological interpretations as in *Meghnadbadh Kavya* by Michael Madhusudan Dutta.

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Likewise, authors such as Anand Neelakantan and Kavita Kane presents unconventional perspectives by narrating the story from the viewpoints of characters like Ravana or Surpanakha. These retellings of Ramayana often impart prominence to the traditionally side-lined characters, and thus, offer a nuanced exploration of the epic's themes of poverty, class, power, justice, and morality. In a departure from traditional narratives, some versions highlight Ravana's heroic qualities, and in certain cases, depict him as a Jain monk. Anand Neelakantan's *Asura*, for example, subverts Ravana's typical villainous image, and present him as a complex individual, who lives life on his own terms, unapologetic and unrepentant for his actions:

> Ravana was a man who lived life on his own terms, doing what he thought was right and caring nothing for what was written by holy men; a man who lived life fully and died a warrior's death [. . .] and it is only the small detail of who won, that decided the hero and the villain, in their epic life stories (494).

His story, much like Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, reflects a hero who values personal freedom over divine commandments, with the only distinction between hero and villain being the outcome of the epic's battle.

Such fictional retellings of epics encourage readers to critically engage with the inherent ideological and political dimensions embedded within the original texts. The diversity of voices present in these narratives aligns with the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly his concept of polyphony (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6), where each voice possesses its own validity. Bakhtin argues that characters in a polyphonic narrative are autonomous — capable of both challenging and agreeing with the author's perspective and the established socio-political framework. As Bakhtin explains, polyphony represents "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6). In such narratives, characters often demonstrate certain self-awareness that transcends the author's control.

Neelakantan's appropriation of Ravan as a hero reveals the previously ignored images of its protagonist of the epic. He had made the traditional villains — the demon Ravana and his family — the tale's narrative focus. Even though the novel follows the plot structure and the main characters of the original text, it tells the story from an entirely different perspective. The author

himself proclaims this aspect as the primary purpose of this retelling: "It is fascinating to see how the same story changes when the view point changes." (S, Devika 5). In other words, rather than simply reversing the roles of protagonist and antagonist, Neelakantan reconstructs the narrative from Ravana's perspective, and positions him not as the villain of the tale, but as the sovereign of the Asuras. Ravana's voice — that recounts key events — challenges the traditional portrayals and provides an alternative lens for understanding his character. Known as the quintessential anti-hero in Indian culture, Neelakantan's Ravana himself justifies the necessity of such dialogic encounter:

> For thousands of years, I have been vilified and my death is celebrated year after year in every corner of India. Why? Was it because I challenged the Gods for the sake of my daughter? Was it because I freed a race from the yoke of caste-based Deva rule? You have heard the victor's tale, the Ramayana. Now hear the Ravanayana, for I am Ravana, the Asura, and my story is the tale of the vanquished. I am a non-entity, invisible, powerless and negligible. No epics will ever be written about me. (Blurb, *Asura*)

Asura, thus, emerges as a counter-narrative to the traditional Ramayana, and becomes a tale of the rise and fall of the Asura Empire under Ravana's reign. In this becoming, the novel challenges the conventional dichotomy of good versus evil, presenting these binary opposites as fluid and flexible, complicating our understanding of morality and heroism.

Another key difference in terms of plot is that, instead of beginning with Rama's exile, the novel begins with Ravana's speech. As he lies on the blood-soaked battlefield, surrounded by the bodies of both kin and enemies, slowly succumbing to death while scavengers feast on his flesh, the Asura emperor recounts the trajectory of his life — a narrative that, in turn, becomes the story of his vanquished people. Structured in sixty-five chapters, the novel unfolds intriguingly with the title "The End" — symbolizing his inevitable downfall — and concludes with "The Beginning". Ravana's story in *Asura* begins with his defeat in battle: "Tomorrow is my funeral…I am not afraid of death. I have been thinking of it for some time now…A lonely star is simmering in the depths of the universe…My beloved Lanka is being destroyed." (1)

Ravana vividly narrates his own physical suffering as well as the devastation of Lanka. As the war reaches its climax, the narrative shifts into an extended flashback that traces his rise from

casteless obscurity to power, his ideological struggles, and his ultimate fall: the pain of love, abandonment, conflict, and war. He recollects his journey from an impoverished, casteless child in a fragile hut on a hilltop, contrasted to the grandeur of Trikuta's palace. Despite being the son of great sage Vishrva and Daitya princess Kaikesi, Ravana spent his childhood in poverty, and his journey from rags to riches is fraught with challenges, including his struggle to claim his place in the world. Abandoned in a ditch by his father, the Maharishi, and his half-brother, Kubera, Ravana and his siblings — Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana, and Soorpanakha — were denied basic education. In the flashback to his boyhood, Ravana mentions, "My brothers and I never had an education to speak of. No Brahmin was ready to take us for free even if we worked for them." (16). Later, they received their education and training under the guidance of a paternal figure, Mahabali. He reflects on his mixed Brahmin and Asura heritage, acknowledging that his father neglected him in favour of his stepbrother, Kuvera, and had given all his wealth to Kuvera, leaving nothing for Ravana.

Despite meticulous planning, Ravana's initial attempt to conquer Lanka failed. Even then, he refused to seek privileges based on familial ties to Kubera, despite the obvious advantages it could bring: "I was sure any junior manager of his numerous units would have welcomed us to their gold-brocaded offices, had we identified ourselves as Kubera's siblings. But that was the last thing I wanted to do." (19). This refusal to live under the shadow of a half-brother, who once dismissed them with indifference, suggests a deep sense of dignity, pride, and unwillingness to accept charity, even in difficult circumstances. Eventually, he succeeded when Kubera vacated the Royal Palace for him. Despite his intelligence and achievements, Ravana is often isolated, both by his own actions and by the societal structure that deems him unworthy due to his caste. He was regarded as an untouchable ruler by his subjects, and initially mistook their avoidance in the marketplace as a sign of respect, only to later realize, it was due to his lowly caste as a shudra, which was seen as contaminating their esteemed city.

His reminiscences not only detail his formative years — his rise from soldier to sovereign, and ultimately, his ascension to the throne of Lanka — but also narrates his relationship with Vedavati and Sita, which culminates in the Rama-Ravana war, its consequences, and his eventual demise. Through his voice, *Asura* subverts the traditional Ramayana's portrayal of Ravana as a symbol of unmitigated evil, instead presenting him as a tragic hero grappling with his flaws and aspirations. It further offers a deeper, more nuanced view of his motivations, struggles, and the

complex forces at play in the epic. It positions Ravana as a tragic hero, caught in the tensions between power, love, caste, and fate, highlighting the fluidity of good and evil in this reimagined retelling of the Ramayana.

Through this reflective storytelling, Ravana offers a deeply personal account of his triumphs and tragedies, combined with grandeur and vulnerability. He recognizes that his life was shaped by external forces, destined to fulfill someone else's mission, and resents being used as a tool to elevate the gods. He reflects, "I had been born to fulfil someone else's destiny. To allow someone else to become God" (15). To that end, the course of his life has predominantly been shaped by the victors of the epic — the Devas.

Ravana, the ten-headed king of Lanka, is a complex and tragic figure. The complexity of his character is further revealed through his interactions — marked predominantly by desertion — with his family and his subjects: the paternal rejection, his struggles with his caste identity, and estrangement from the Brahmin community. The reminiscences of his childhood bears a sense of alienation: "Growing up was difficult, a continuous numbing ache, the kind which throbs and slowly spreads its black finger over one's soul." (16). His deep sense of alienation is further intensified by his troubled relationships. His relationship with Mandodari is complicated by his infidelity, and the subsequent birth of Athikaya, who is raised alongside Ravana's legitimate sons, Meghanada and Akshaya Kumara. Moreover, the birth of Ravana and Mandodari's daughter, Sita, is considered as a cursed event, which will cause the downfall of his kingdom and his death.

In view of this curse, Ravana ordered his soldiers to kill the infant girl in the forest. However, Bhadra informed him that the girl had survived. Later, he learned that his daughter was alive and had been adopted by a benevolent king, a divine ruler, and was being raised as a deva princess. Although relieved that his daughter was still alive, Ravana was troubled to find out she had become the princess of his adversaries — she was Sita, the wife of Rama and the adopted daughter of Janaka, King of Mithila. His deep sense of possessiveness over his daughter Sita, whom he had abandoned as a child, grows when he learns that she has become the wife of Rama. This discovery deeply unsettles Ravana, who feels an intense, possessive need to control her fate, seeing her marriage as an affront to his own pride.

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The narrative reaches a turning point during Sita's swayamvara, when Ravana is shocked to see Shiva's bow being used as the contest's prize. His fear of Sita's treatment as a prize grows, and when Rama turns victorious in the contest, Ravana feared for Sita's well-being and questioned whether Rama would treat her well. Upon learning that Rama had been exiled to the forest with his brother Lakshman and wife Sita, Ravana grew increasingly concerned for Sita's safety and resolved to bring her to Lanka for protection. Using deceit, he succeeded in abducting Sita and bringing her to Lanka. However, Sita's presence in Lanka seemed to confirm the curse that had been prophesied. As Rama is exiled to the forest, Ravana kidnaps Sita, believing he is protecting her from harm, but also fulfilling the curse foretelling his downfall.

As the decisive clash between Rama and Ravana intensifies, Ravana's internal conflict reaches its peak: the conflict between his paternal duty to Sita and his responsibilities to his kingdom. Despite this agonizing dilemma, he chooses not to disclose their blood relation, viewing the fight against the oppressive caste system and Brahminical hierarchy a greater struggle than the personal conflict. However, his idealist vision crumbles with the defeat of his army and the consequent fall of his kingdom. His refusal to compromise his pride or the family values results in his defeat by Rama.

Another notable departure from traditional versions of the Ramayana is complementing the narrative voice of Ravana, a king, with that of Bhadra, a common man among kings and villains. In an interview with Devika S, Neelakantan justifies the inclusion of Bhadra's character: "I created Bhadra as an image of the common man. Bhadra's voice is the voice of the muted majority [...] His character gives it a third perspective."(5) His perspective highlights the necessity of taking class into consideration. Anand Neelakantan mentioned Bhadra's voice on the blurb of the book:

> I am a non-entity – invisible, powerless and negligible. No epics will ever be written about me. I have suffered both Ravana and Rama – the hero and the villain or the villain and the hero. When the stories of great men are told, my voice may be too feeble to be heard. Yet, spare me a moment and hear my story, for I am Bhadra, the Asura, and my life is the tale of the loser. (Blurb)

While Ravana's story centers on his ideal of an Asura society liberated from caste oppression, Bhadra's story underscores the limitations and inherent contradictions of this dream. His account illustrates the hardships faced by common Asuras who endured the consequences of Asura-Deva conflict. Marked by disillusionment and resentment, his voice critiques Ravana's leadership and Asura society's structure. The interplay between Ravana's kingly stance and Bhadra's critical analysis as a common farmer fosters an unresolved dialogue, which resists the finality and closure — typically associated with monologic texts. The accounts of these two Asura figures offer a concise historical overview of what has been termed by the author as "*Asurayana*, the story of the Asuras, the story of the vanquished" ("Preface"). By fostering a dialogic engagement with the epic tradition, *Asura* underscores the importance of revisiting cultural narratives to uncover the multiplicity of truths embedded within any grand narrative.

The divergence of Ravana's and Bhadra's perspectives transforms the text into a vibrant exploration of power, morality, and identity, thereby transcending conventional hero–villain dichotomies. Together, their voices challenge the singular, valorized interpretation of the Ramayana, and offer a nuanced portrayal of the Asura-Deva conflict. The narrative characterizes, what Caryl Emerson explains as, "a decentered authorial stance that grants validity to all voices" (Emerson). By foregrounding the voices of Ravana and Bhadra, *Asura*, thus, challenges the epic's monologic structure and introduces a polyphonic perspective. This allows for the expression of dissent, which introduces divergent perspectives and creates alternative realities. In contemporary contexts where dissenting opinions are often suppressed, such act of reinterpretation becomes a political exercise. Revisiting and reimagining epics through a modern lens becomes a crucial intellectual exercise, which resonates with Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and heteroglossia.

This paper further serves as a preliminary investigation into the multifaceted complexity that defines Ravana's character within Asura. By delving into his motivations, personal relationships, and internal journey, the study has attempted to unravel the moral ambiguities surrounding his actions and to highlight the themes of redemption, authority, and self-identity that permeate Neelakantan's work. Ultimately, this critical analysis has endeavoured to challenge established notions of villainy and invites readers to reconsider their understanding of this iconic figure in Indian mythology.

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