



Silence: Silencing the Silenced in Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* – The Story of Ravana and His People

S. Kaleeswari^{1*}, Dr. R. Geetha²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar (Part-Time), PG & Research Department of English, Thiruvalluvar Government Arts College, Rasipuram – 637 401, India.

²Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor, PG & Research Department of English, Thiruvalluvar Government Arts College, Rasipuram – 637 401, India.

*Email: kaleeswarieng@gmail.com¹, rgwins4@gmail.com².

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.13.4.176](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.13.4.176)



Article info

Article Received: 04/10/2025
Article Accepted: 08/11/2025
Published online: 13/11/2025

Abstract

Retold versions of the epic are the choices of many writers of twentieth as well as twenty first centuries in India, as the writers' aim to bring to lime light not only the morals and ethics of the age-old tradition to the present generation but also, they activate the readers mind to think in a new perspective. The wishes of the writers are fulfilled when the readers trace the hidden emotions of the antagonists and the minor characters which remain in the dark unnoticed. Anand Neelakantan's *Asura Tale of the Vanquished The Story of Ravana and His People* shock the readers as it describes the unarticulated pain and suffering of Ravana who has been seen only as the abductor of Rama's wife Sita.

Uttar Ramayan provides the basis for the novel *Asura Tale of the Vanquished The Story of Ravana and His People*. The story unveils Sita as the daughter of Ravana. Ravana cannot endure the exile of his beloved daughter Sita and he seizes her to save her from the peril. But his agitation and psychological stress are least understood and his perils amplified when Sita turns deaf to the requests of her father Ravana. Ravana who has created a nation for his Asura community fails to build a hope in the heart of his own daughter Sita. His hesitation in announcing the truth to the world because of his embarrassment has left Ravana with no option than remaining silent. Silent is the best option to avoid misunderstandings and wars of the world but in the case of Ravana his silence is the sole reason for his vanquished state. This article entitled "Silence: Silencing the Silenced in Anand Neelakantan's *Asura Tale of the Vanquished The Story of Ravana and His People*" aims to discuss the strained relationship between Ravana and Sita, the stress endured by Ravana, his silence and his downfall for being silent.

Key Words: retold versions, tragic protagonist, paternal silence.

Introduction

Generations transmit the great Indian Epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* orally from generation to generation. Valmiki and Veda Vyasa inscribed it in Sanskrit. Valmiki's *The Ramayana* and Vyasa's *The Mahabharata* are the Itihasa or Mahakavya of Indian literature. The Indian regional languages have the translated forms of these great works. Valmiki's *Ramayana* in Sanskrit and Kambar's *Ramayana* in Tamil glorify Rama as the incarnation of God Vishnu and Sita as Goddess Lakshmi. Valmiki's *Ramayana* spotlight Rama's birth, childhood, marriage, exile, Sita's abduction, Ravana's defeat, Rama's return to Ayodhya and his coronation as its emperor.

The World Wars and the development of science and technology and its consequences have instilled fear and lack of confidence in the mind of the people. They have lost their faith in existence. To eradicate fear and revive faith the post-colonial writers have started narrating episodes from the great Indian epics from a different perspective. Thus a new era of revelation for the retold versions of the epics arose. The retold stories formulate a new consciousness among the readers. These stories edify them how to overcome their fear and face reality. These stories do not belong to one age. They deal with a common theme which is appropriate to the current scenario. Anand Neelakantan's *Asura Tale of the Vanquished The Story of Ravana and His People*, *Vanara the Legend of Baali*, *Sugreeva and Tara* are other version of *The Ramayana* and *The Roll of Dice Duryodhana's Mahabharata The Story of the Kaurava Clan* and *The Rise of Kali Duryodhana's Mahabharata The Story of the Kaurava Clan* are the adaptations from *The Mahabharata*.

There are many versions of *Ramayana* in India following Valmiki's *Ramayana*. A different tale discloses the hidden part in the life of the epic characters. The repetition of glorifying the hero as the incarnation of the God makes the epic tales monotonous. They show only one side

of a coin and hide the other vision from the listeners. But the writers of the present era narrate and retell the epic stories in a different perspective. They try to mingle the current problems and issues in their works and thereby make it vibrant. Anand Neelakantan in *Asura Tale of the Vanquished The Story of Ravana and His People* depicts Ravana as the protagonist. This article titled "Silence: Silencing the Silenced in Anand Neelakantan's *Asura Tale of the Vanquished The Story of Ravana and His People*" speaks about the reason behind the silence of Ravana and the reason for being silenced for several ages.

Anand Neelakantan's *Asura Tale of the Vanquished The Story of Ravana and His People* begins with the death of Ravana. He, as the protagonist, narrates the story and also expresses his wish to renew his life. He is not ready to change his nature even if another chance is given. He is unyielding. He broods over the situation that raised him to such greatness. His father, a famous Maharishi Kaikasi entrusted all his wealth to Kubera, Ravana's half-brother. So born with three siblings Ravana has to face poverty and hunger. To eradicate their hunger and poverty his mother take them to Kubera's palace. But Kubera is not ready to spend time with them; he throws a few pieces of gold and leaves the place. Here Ravana learns to be silent. His forbearance to this insult motivates him to speak through action. There Ravana says,

I gained my biggest asset from that arrogantly opulent palace of avarice and greed – my burning ambition. The fire of hunger would never quench the flames of ambition the palace ignited in me. I knew then that the world he owned and much beyond, would be mine and mine alone. Today might very well be the last day I will be with my mother. Tomorrow, if our small hut survives this torrential rain, we will start our journey. I believe there is a world out there to conquer. A better world awaiting us.
(16)

Ravana has spent much of his time in creating an identity and a splendid kingdom for the Asura community. There is a famous declaration of Freud about the ideal relation between unconsciousness and consciousness which means that the 'id,' the unconscious, will be replaced by the 'I,' by consciousness and self-identity. Freud's aim was to strengthen the ego, the 'I' self which is the conscious rational identity. In this way, this identity would be ultimately more powerful than the unconscious and, in consequence, will be able to control the unconscious (Freud 80). Ravana's "I" or the conscious self creates an identity for him. He is much conscious of his race and wishes to resurrect the Asura race which has been crushed and annihilated. During this process he proclaims his victory as the Asura emperor but endures his agony for his lost daughter in silence. The reason for his silence is explicated in this article entitled "Silence: Silencing The Silenced in Anand Neelakantan's *Asura Tale Of The Vanquished The Story of Ravana and His People*"

Ravana, the Asura king's marriage with Mandodari is an arranged marriage planned by his mother. "There was no love, no romantic courtship, no whispers under moon, no stolen kisses; in fact it was clinical. Not even my fertile imagination could conjure up a romantic relationship with Mandodari" (173) Ravana feels dejected yet he is not ready to rebuke anyone for it. He silently accepts it. The roaring lion of the Asura dynasty is a tamed one for his mother and his siblings. To his revelation everything changes when Mandodari gives birth to a girl child. His admiration for the child knows no bounds. The tiny creature entralls his heart and strengthens their marriage bond.

An astrologer's declaration, "in front of everyone, that she would bring destruction to the Asuras" (205) spoils their bliss. This disturbs Ravana's psyche because he senses a change in the attitude of his family members, ministers and the palace servants towards his daughter. "They showed great

reverence and love when my daughter was in my arms or with Mandodari. But I could feel the hatred and fear they felt for her" (205). So, in order to save the child from all the impending dangers, he decides to take the child with him wherever he goes and be a protective shield for her. Thus he takes her to the warfront. But there he falls a victim and is taken as a captive by Karthiveerarjuna, the ruler of Mahishmathi. In the mean time the Asura council disposes the little princess and informs him that the forest fever which has swept the entire town has taken the lives of many Asuras including the Asura Princess.

Ravana's intuition informs him that his daughter is alive. He is not ready to believe their tale. So, he takes Bhadra afar, threatens him and makes him reveal the truth. Bhadra informs him everything and Ravana is convinced that his daughter is safe and has been transformed as a Deva princess. But he is not ready to leave her to lead a Deva life. He is made to believe that she will get recognition and reputation as a Princess which she could not get in Lanka. This separation gives him enormous pain yet he endures it silently for the sake of her wellbeing. Anand Neelakandan narrates how Ravana the king of a great empire is made to retain his secret and is made to bear it silently till his death.

A father is an ardent lover of his daughter who accepts and admires her activities. Ravana who has not met his daughter for decades feels euphoric at her 'Swayamvara'. He regrets for being silent. "Why had I forsaken her? Why had I forgotten her? I had lost her entire childhood. Why had I not attacked Mithila and taken her back?" (310) He is unable to go near her and show his emotions outwardly by caressing her. So, he admires her as, "She stood there so radiant and lovely that I almost wept. Sita. She resembled her mother, but her skin was dark, the colour of honey. She had long, black tresses. She was my daughter, an Asura princess" (295). As a father, Ravana is unable to bear the sight when she is asked to stand amidst hundred men whose lusty eyes

greedily assessed her appearance. Seeing his daughter being a feast for the lusty eyes enrages his anger. He hates this kind of Deva custom and culture. Yet he silently watches the show because "I had no rights over my daughter, but I prayed for her happiness" (299).

Rama breaks the bow and Sita immediately garlands him. This announces them as husband and wife. Though Sita's hasty selection disturbs his heart, he is helpless and he has to remain silent because he understands his limitations. So, he watches everything silently and says, "What right did I have to destroy the happiness she felt? Daughter, I have failed you.' I hoped she would be happy with the man she loved so much"(299).He feels some unknown danger awaiting her. So, he decides to keep a protective watch over her. He says to himself that if Rama proves to be a wrong choice, he will then take her to Lanka and will protect her from all harm.

The spies inform Ravana about Rama's voluntary exile and his stay in the forest along with Sita and his brother Lakshmana. At once Ravana sends his soldiers to safeguard Sita, Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana believes that forest is not a safe place for Sita. As the great Emperor of Lanka, he cannot allow his daughter to lead a life of a beggar in the forest. He is unable to cherish the idea that his daughter is made to lead a nomadic life in the jungle. So, in order to safeguard Sita from the unknown dangers waiting for her in the forest, Ravana decides to kidnap her to Lanka. As per his plan he carries Sita on his shoulders and runs towards his hidden Pushpaka. At first Sita is much shocked by his deed; later "she scratched my face and back with her nails. I could feel blood trickling down. I felt a strange elation in thinking that I deserved it all for having abandoned her, for believing in some unscientific prediction and being afraid of my own daughter, and for the things I had not given her as a father" (310).

Ravana bears everything and takes her to Lanka with the hope of seeing, "the wide-eyed surprise in Sita's face when the first sight of Lanka caught her attention. For a moment she forgot her grief. My heart swelled with pride. I wanted to show her what glories I had in store for her. 'Sita, my daughter, behold your Lanka!'" (312). Though she is mesmerized by the gorgeousness of the fortress and its settings, she is not ready to be its inhabitant. So, she decides to shelter under the Ashoka tree till her husband comes to rescue her. Like her father who bears her separation in silence, she decides to bear her separation from her husband in silence. The divide between the father and daughter silences even the readers of Anand Neelakantan who are introduced to a new tale.

Sita's presence in Lanka does not give happiness to Mandodari. She feels that her come back has not brought happiness to Lanka. It is for her sake Ravana has sacrificed his beloved uncle Maricha. Though it is a great loss to him he bears it silently for the sake of his beloved daughter. Next, to rescue her, Hanuman enters Lanka and destroys half of Lanka. He sets fire and in it Ravana's younger son Akshaya Kumara, a boy of eight years old is burnt alive. Ravana is not able to bear the sight of the burnt child. He gets dejected and says, "To save one child, I had sacrificed another. I had brought disaster on the people I was supposed to protect" (331). Yet he is not ready to forsake her. He assures, "I just sacrificed your little brother for you. I may lose everything but still I will stand up for you. Once I forsook you, but never again" (331).

Ravana bears this loss too in silence. But to his surprise Mandodari lends her support. She promises to be with him in all his endeavours. She also advises him not to send her back to her husband because they do not know how he will be treating her. Ravana has never thought of sending Sita back to her husband but when Mandodari reminds him of that he thinks why he should protect her and thereby bring disaster to his people. He

questions, "Who am I to bring destruction to my own people for the selfish reason of saving my daughter?" (339)

Mandodari seems to have read his mind and rejects his thought. She is aware of the danger waiting for her in the Deva Kingdom. She reminds him of the Deva culture which will question their daughter's chastity. As Sita is living with them, they will question her purity and will not accept her and that will bring chaos to her life. So, she requests him not to send her back. Ravana gets back his wisdom and faces the challenge bravely. His brother Vibhishana becomes a traitor but his son Meghananda, a replica of young Ravana, comes to his support. Ravana, with all his regenerated might, stands against Rama and the Vanara force. The Vanara force brings chaos to Lanka.

Rama defeats Ravana to release his wife Sita with the assistance of Vanaras. The Vanaras bring commotion and destruction to the Asura kingdom. "Every moment, someone, something, was being killed somewhere – perhaps by the enemy on a battlefield or a killer who had broken into a house in search of victims hungry tiger; by an accident on the road; or as a sacrifice to quench the bloodlust of the Gods. Violence alone ruled the world" (357). They, under the leadership of Angada, enter Ravana's palace; as they cannot find him, they carried the Asura Queen Mandodari away to the thick jungle of Subela and brutally harasses her. Ravana is not able to witness the pathetic condition of his wife yet he tolerates it with silence. Ravana is not ready to part with her. "But he chose the tough way, to live with snickering subordinates who would make lewd comments about his wife the moment his back was turned"(393), because she is lawfully wedded to him and it is his duty to be with her and support her in all circumstances. Here as Bhadra says, "I understood why Ravana would never be defied. He was too humane to be a God"(393). Bhadra is in all praise for Ravana's greatness for accepting his wife after the calamity. Because later he has witnessed how

Rama, the Deva King treated his chosen wife, Sita, for being a captive in the Asura campaign.

Ravana feels dejected as he procrastinates declaring the truth. This not only leads to his downfall but also becomes the reason for the destruction of the Asura community which he has resurrected. He regrets, "Had I listened to my head, perhaps fate would have decreed differently. But then, I was always a creature of passion. I had lived as Ravana and I would die as Ravana. I did not intend to become Rama, the perfect man and God. There was no dearth of gods in my country. It only lacked men" (354). He does not wish to lose his identity. Though he knows that his silence about Sita's birth will bring disaster to his family and to his people, he remains silent and does not disclose it to anyone.

Rama succeeds in his attempt at redeeming Sita by killing Ravana. But the readers of Anand Neelakantan understand that his silence has put an end to his life. Rama successfully releases Sita from the Asura king whereas Ravana's silence fails him fatally. Though Sita is saved by Ravana from all the dangers of the jungle, he is seen as a kidnapper. Ravana hides behind his silence and his silence stands as an unbroken wall between him and the world. His silence has pulled him down and he is recognized only as an antagonist. Anand Neelakantan's retold version introduces Ravana as a silent as well as silenced protagonist which is a paradigm shift.

Conclusion

It is the unarticulated love of the daughter to the father in Shakespeare's *King Lear* that ultimately digs the grave for the greatest King and the Princess. Similarly, the truth silenced ultimately has paved the way for an inglorious end to the otherwise the unvanquished emperor. It is, his unproclaimed love for his precious Princess which could not be exemplified at any point of life during his lifetime that prompted Ravana the father to be quite passionate and haste. This perhaps is the

fatal flaw and he reads the consequences accordingly. The essentiality of communication at the right place with the right people would have averted the tragedy. The divine musician who is able to hold enthralled even the divine beings fail miserably owing to his self-imposed silence.

Work Cited

- Freud, S. (1964). *The dissection of the psychical personality*. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 22). London: Hogarth Press.
- Neelakantan, A. (2018). *Asura: Tale of the vanquished – The story of Ravana and his people*. Platinum Press.