

Frustration As The Dominant Theme In *Asura* And *Duryodhana*

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Abstract

Myth retellings are getting increasing popularity in India. The myth retelling fictions in Indian English literature dominate the literary market in India. What makes the modern retelling different from the traditional versions of myths? One of the major aspects is the humanisation of mythical characters which makes it easier for the readers to identify with them. The great mythological characters are portrayed as having common human emotions like love, lust, fear, anger, frustration and jealousy. The two novels *Asura* by Anand Neelakantan and *Duryodhana* by V Raghunathan are excellent works that throw light on the inner recesses of the traditional villains' psyche. These novels explore the frustrations of the protagonists.

Key Words: Myth, decanonization, psychological striptease.

“Good times have a habit of not lasting.”(Duryodhana, 43)

In the novel *Duryodhana*, Duryodhana is the sole narrator. The novel reminds us of the dramatic monologues by Browning. As the narrative progresses, we get a clear picture of Duryodhana's psychological landscape. Duryodhana is frustrated to the core. His first lamentation is that he is not even remembered by his real name which was 'Suyodhana'. On the other hand, he is known by a name which means exactly the opposite of the real.

Duryodhana's frustration begins when Kunti and her five sons enter the Hastinapura palace. Kunti raised a claim to the throne declaring her son Yudhishtira to be the eldest of the cousins. Duryodhana cannot accept this unexpected threat to his position as the crown prince. He says: “... life was no longer as pleasant as it had been before the unwelcome arrival of the Pandavas... I was suffering in my own palace”(57)

Bhima, from the beginning itself, poses a threat to the superiority complex of Duryodhana. Bhima with his huge physique and strength outshines him in his favourite art-the duel. Even the Guru is partial towards the Pandavas. Arjuna was his favourite. The Kaurava clan become restless as the Pandavas get the love of both the guru and Bhishma. Duryodhana reflects: “Had I received from my Guru even a fraction of encouragement that I consider my due, I would perhaps have appeared a little less bitter and arrogant and a little

more gracious to posterity, in whose annals I have been projected as some kind of a grand failure.”(68)

Unlike the conventional picture of Duryodhana as an arrogant, greedy, treacherous fellow, here he is a loving, caring and affectionate human being- a good friend, a loving husband and an affectionate brother. But his good qualities are over shadowed by his uncontrollable passion, frustration and anger. His terrible condition is portrayed in these words: “Night after night, I would go to bed only to lie awake, eyes wide open”(110)

Another incident that shatters Duryodhana’s pride is the failure to get Panchali’s hand at the swayamvara. Her beautiful “image became a constant distraction”(199) for him and he wished “ the world would be shrouded in a vast, black blanket into which i could curl up and go to sleep and never wake up”(206). Duryodhana who is confident in his friend Karna’s strength asks him to participate in the competition and win Panchali. But Panchali rejected him calling him a ‘sutaputra’. Her words echoed in Duryodhana’s ears and he intentionally started hating her. He rightly says “what you cannot or do not attain, you learn to hate”(209).

Duryodhana is loyal to his wife and they share a warm relationship. He trusts his friend Karna and they are the embodiment of true friendship in the whole of Mahabharata. When the Pandavas demand a share in the kingdom, Duryodhana forces his father to make him the crown prince. He accuses Kunti of wrongly plotting against him while her sons are not biologically the sons of Pandu. He calls himself the legitimate heir to Hastinapura kingdom. He mockingly says that neither Dritharashtra nor Pandu were born out of wedlock. He thinks that the relationships in his family are too complicated.

The novel portrays the extent to which a person can go to get his desires fulfilled. It shows how frustration can make people lose control over their intellect and how frustration leads to envy, anger and ultimately to the downfall.

The novel *Asura* is also a novel on emotions. In this work, Ravana is portrayed as a human being with all the common human emotions. He declares that he is not a God or Deva. He is just a human being and is vulnerable to the emotions of lust, jealousy and anger. Mahabali advises Ravana to shun the nine base emotions of anger, pride, jealousy, happiness, sadness, fear, selfishness, passion and ambition; and intellect alone is to be revered. But Ravana is completely against it. In his words: “anger is the basic emotion of life”(37), “jealousy is the driving force of progress, envy is the motivating force of life”(38), and he says, “ I do not fear’ fear’ so much as to deny its very existence.”(39) Ravana is too adamant and declares that he will live exactly as his emotions tell him to. The ten faces of Ravana represent ten emotions and hence he is called ‘dasamugha’.

Ravana’s personality is revealed through the words of his servant Bhadra too. Bhadra is a witness to all the ups and downs of Ravana’s life. Ravana is portrayed as a loving husband and father. Though he loved his wife Mandodari, he was head over heels for the beautiful Brahmin woman called Vedavathi so that he forgot all his marital commitments for a while. The episode with Vedavathi, shows the vulnerable side of the mighty Ravana. He was rejected and cursed by Vedavathi and he returns to the steady love of Mandodari and finds peace in it. While his passion for Vedavathi was like a storm his love for Mandodari was like a gentle breeze. Ravana shows the different facets of love a man can have at the same time.

When the vanaras humiliated Mandodari, he stands with her and ignores the offensive and vulgar comments of others. He is not ready to forsake his wife to save his honour in front

of the society. Bhadra recalls this incident when he hears that Rama forsakes Sita listening to some gossip mongers. Bhadra says, Ravana “was too humane to be a God” (393)

A deviation in the storyline of this novel from the traditional Ramayana by Valmiki is that in this novel, Sita is portrayed as the daughter of Ravana whom he lost as a small child. The novel depicts Ravana as an extremely loving and sacrificing father who abducts his daughter from her husband just to give her ‘a better life’. What is ironical is that he never reveals the fact to Sita. Everybody including Mandidari advises Ravana to give Sita back to Rama because she is deeply in love with her husband and no wealth of Lanka can give her more happiness. But Ravana is too obstinate and even considers it as a shame to stoop before Rama. This arrogance and obstinacy in his character make him pay a big toll. He loses his sons, his kingdom, his wealth and eventually his life.

“Bhadra laid me back on the wet earth, wet from my blood, the blood

Of my people, the blood of my dreams and the blood of my life. It was

Over. A sense of sadness and emptiness descended on me.”(Asura, 13)

Ravana is portrayed as a great tragic hero. He was a rebel right from his childhood. The harsh realities of life made him a rebel. He and his siblings were outcasts though born to a Brahmin father because their mother was an asura woman. As children they endured poverty, hunger and shame. Ravana rose to be a mighty king out of poverty but he was always a victim to his emotions.

The novels, *Duryodhana* by Raghunathan and *Asura: the tale of the vanquished* by Anand Neelakantan, portray the central characters as ordinary men with common human emotions. The novels are packed with anguish, agony and other intense emotional scenes. It is exactly because of this emotional appeal that these novels turned to be best sellers.

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