



**REVISITATIONS : THE POLITICS
OF REWRITING OLD TEXTS**

**PROCEEDINGS
OF
U.G.C. NATIONAL SEMINAR**

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POST GRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE , IRINJALAKUDA, KERALA
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'Raavan falls for Sita'-the story retold in Mani Ratnam's film *Ravanan*

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In the present scenario rewriting classical and other literary texts have become a fashionable practice. Not only in Literature but in other forms of art also there could be seen the rewritings of texts. Edward Bond's *Lear*, Tom Stoppard's *Rozencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Kathali versions of *Ramayana* or *Mahabhartha*, film versions of texts like *Dracula* etc are some of the examples.

The present paper entitled '*Raavan falls for Sita*'-the story retold in Mani Ratnam's film *Ravan* is a humble attempt to look at the variation of depiction of the classical antagonist in the epic *Ramayana*. Valmiki's *Ramayana* depicts the story of Rama, the king of Ayodya go in exile to the forest with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana. In the *vanavasa* Sita happens to be abducted by Ravana, the king of Lanka to Ashoka Vatika. The abduction was simply for the sake of sport of a ferocious king. It leads to a great warfare between Rama the ten headed Ravana.

Raavana, a film by Mani Ratnam, casts the story of Beera who is labeled Ravan. It phantasmagorically retells the episode of abduction of Raghini to the forests. Dev, Raghini's husband a police officer battles for his wife with Beera. The movie recasts the breath-taking episode of *Ramayana*, 'Ashoka Vatika'. The movie is the modern dramatization of the scene where Sita is abducted by Ravana and kept in the Ashoka Vatika. The story is set in Lal Maati, a rural town in North India. This place has no regards for the police and court law, but in the hands of Beera. Being a man with his own principles and handling the issues down his way the modern Ravana is different from the Ravana in the Epic with his character, social role and the environment in which he lives. The present paper discusses the character of Ravana in the film *Ravan* when compared and contrasted with the same in the Epic *Ramayana*. It also refers to *Ramayan* a highly successful Indian television series created, written, and directed by Ramanand Sagar. It is a television adaptation of the ancient Indian religious epic of the same name.

'Raavan falls for Sita'-the story retold in Mani Ratnam's film *Ravan*

The politics of rewriting the Old texts marks the "afterlife" of the original as Susie Tharu and Anitha Devasia use the term in accordance with the translation of a text. The retold text represents the voice of the shadowed. This particular idea is very much evident in the postcolonial context. A



text represents the history, thought, culture, politics and social structure of the times in which it takes its birth. As Romila Thapar puts it in her essay *Forests and Settlement, Ramayana and Mahabharata* depicts the socio-political and cultural scenario of the subcontinent in the ancient times. The great epics of Indian Literature live through the ages marking their influence over other works of all times. Mahabharata written by Veda Vyasa and Ramayana by Valmiki with their immense possibility of interpretations have influenced the writings of India. The texts are reworked on to represent the present. The magnum opus has become the mythical representations. They relive in different cultures and political facets.

The epic *Ramayana* extends its life in different cultures and geographies. It is accommodated by different peoples according to their respective cultural pattern. Different peoples of places ranging from the East Germanic to the Far East and to the Subcontinent have been ethnocentric in the reception of the text. In each cultural context the text relives a novel representation. It represents the indigenous voice of the specific cultural group. In its extant form, Valmiki's Ramayana is an epic poem of some 50,000 lines. The text survives in several thousand partial and complete manuscripts, the oldest of which appears to date from the 11th century A.D. The text has several regional renderings. Robert P. Goldman differentiates two major regional renderings: the northern and the southern. The poem is traditionally divided into several major *kandas* or books, that deal chronologically with the major events in the life of Rama—*Bala kanda*, *Ayodhya Kanda*, *Aranya Kanda*, *Kishkinda Kanda*, *Sundara Kanda*, *Yuddha Kanda*, and *Uttara Kanda*:

Aranya Kanda, describes the forest life of Rama and the kidnapping of Sita by Ravana, the king Lanka. *Kishkinda Kanda* describes the meeting of Hanuman with Rama. *Sundara Kanda* narrates the heroism of Hanuman, his flight to Lanka and meeting with Sita. *Yuddha Kanda* describes the battle between Rama and Ravana. Several times the story of *Ramayana* has been adapted into different art forms including performance forms of art like Kathakali. The present paper discusses the retold story of *Ramayana* (*Aranya Kanda*, *Kishkinda Kanda*, *Sundara Kanda* and *Yuddha Kanda*) in the form of a film by Mani Ratnam in Hindi. It focuses on the presentation of main story of the epic and the characterization of Ravana in the movie. Ravana is the king of Lanka and the primary antagonist in the Ramayana. In the classic text, Ravana kidnaps Rama's wife Sita, to claim vengeance on Rama and his brother Lakshmana for having cut off the nose of his sister Surpanakha. This depiction is, however, open to other interpretations. Ravana is described as a devout follower of Shiva, a great scholar, a capable ruler and a maestro of the Veena. There are staunch devotees within the Hindu traditions. They believe that his description as a *ten-headed person* is a reference to him possessing a very thorough knowledge over the 4 Vedas and 6 Upanishads, which made him as powerful as 10 scholars. An alternative interpretation is that he does not have control over the five senses and five bodily instruments of action. His counterpart, Rama, on the contrary, is always in full control of these



ten. There are different versions of Ravana as adventurous and as demonic king of the three worlds- of humans, of gods and of demons. There are people who worship Ravana for Rama. Ravana is identified as the god of the oppressed and the 'demonized'. Hence it leads a discussion of the text as the subaltern writing back.

The film *Ravan* demonstrates the contestation of the marginality, stereotypical quality and fetishized nature of Ravana and his people. It remarks the counter-position of a positive demonized imagery. This addresses the shifting paradigms of representation. The story of Mani Ratnam's *Ravan* is a thematic presentation of *Aranya Kanda*, *Kishkinda Kanda*, *Sundara Kanda* and *Yuddha Kanda* of *Ramayana*. The film casts the story of Beera Munda, the Ravan. Beera is represented as a Robin Hood figure for the Lalmathi, a rural town in North India. Lalmathi is a place which has no regards for the police and court law, but in the hands of Beera. Being a man with his own principles and handling the issues down his way. It is also referred to as partially based on Maoist groups. Beera has a family consisting of two brothers Mangal and Hari and a sister. He has no problems until Dev Pratap Sharma enters his way. On a mission to put an end to Beera's realms, Dev tears the things down as it leads to unexpected twists in the life of Beera and his people. Beera's sister Jamuni gets brutally raped by the police men at station on her wedding day. The next day, she commits suicide by drowning in a nearby well. This wounds Beera and vows to avenge. Beera kills many policemen and kidnaps Ragini Dev Pratap Sharma's wife.

Beera kidnaps Raghini only to find the justice in his own way. Here the story takes turn to the meeting of Sanjeevani Kumar who does the role of Hanuman. Dev and his team enter the forests with the aid of Sanjeevani Kumar, a forest guard. Despite searching deep in the forests, Dev is unable to hunt down Beera.

Beera eventually tells Ragini the story of his sister's death. Unhappy that his brother is preparing for war, Hari convinces Beera to allow Hari to offer a treaty to Dev. Dev initially seems to agree, but when Hari comes out in the open, Dev shoots him to death. Beera and Mangal are enraged and attack Dev's camp and wipe it out. A final confrontation between Beera and Dev takes place on a rickety bridge, where Beera prevents Dev from falling to his death. Dev later finds Ragini bound and tied, with Beera leaving her.

However, while riding a train back to their hometown, Dev accuses Ragini of infidelity and informs her that it was Beera who told him so. This element in the story coincides with a similar one in the epic. Furious, Ragini leaves Dev to meet Beera through Mangal. Here the story takes a total shift when we find her showing her feelings for Beera. She asks him what Beera had told Dev. Beera replies that he had said that he protected Ragini for all the fourteen days and not anything else. They quickly realize Dev lied, hoping Ragini would lead him to his hideout. Dev appears with a police team and confront the duo. Ragini tries to save Beera, but he pushes her out of the line of fire. He is



shot multiple times. Ragini's true feelings come to surface when she tries to save Beera with all her might. Content that Raagini too has feelings for him, Beera falls off the cliff to his death with a smile.

The film gives a sketch of Ravana's character as subaltern suffering at the hands of the ruling or the dominant. It glorifies the innate goodness of Beera, the Ravan of the film, when he does not cast any lustful gaze at Ragini, Sita and keeps her chaste. Again when he leaves Dev, Rama, alive for his union with his wife Beera turns out to be the ultimate hero. A contrast is set between the educated, sophisticated and civilized Dev and illiterate, wild but virtuous Beera.

Thus Beera, the Ravan becomes the hero of the visual text. The hero of the postcolonial or rather post modern times is the remake of the antagonist of the ancient times history. The title of the paper refers to the innate goodness of Beera where he succumbs to his virtuousness towards Ragini. The life of Beera and his people presented as wild and primitive emphasizes the life of hunted, the socially deprived and marginalized. Dev and his people represent the so-called civilized cosmopolitan. It emphasizes the dichotomy between the cosmopolitan and the rural. In environmental perspective it is the aggression of the 'grama' over 'aranya' as Romila Thapar puts it. It is also noteworthy to refer to Shashi Tharoor's novel, *The Great Indian Novel* here as it also a remake of the *Mahabharata* dramatizing the political scenario of the 20th century India. In the text Ekalavya stoutly refuses to cut off his thumb and offer it as fee for eavesdropping on Drona Charya's lessons. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is yet another novel of the kind. Finally, *Ramayan* a highly successful Indian television series created, written, and directed by Ramanand Sagar needs to be pointed out as another remake of the Epic. It is a television adaptation primarily based on Valmiki's *Ramayan* and Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas*. It is also partly derived from portions of Kamban's *Kambaramayanam* and other works. It is only a faithful rendering of the original.

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