

Gradual Shift in Treatment of the Character of “Ravan” of the *Ramayana*

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Abstract

This dissertation gets the opportunity to focus on the gradual shift in treatment of the character of “Ravan” of the *Ramayana* since its creation till now. Here, the term “postmodern” works as the driving force behind the attempt of putting the character of “Ravan” within a postmodern framework where the boundary, between the hero and the villain, struggles to find its existence. Some crucial aspects have been brought into focus for the better understanding of the title. These aspects have been arranged with utmost carefulness. Two important texts (The *Ramayana* of Valmiki and Madhusudan’s *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*) and a film (Mani Ratnam’s *Raavan*) have been scrutinized with sheer seriousness in order to prove the title as authentic.

Keywords: Binary Opposite, Collective Unconscious, Archetype, The *Ramayana*, Ravan, *Paradise Lost*, Satan, *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*, Indrajit.

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The character of “Ravan” would be analyzed, through this writing, within a chronological framework where the demarcation between hero and villain, good and evil, peace and chaos, and light and dark gets gradually blurred.

To find out the gradual shift in treatment of the character of “Ravan”, it is necessary to go through critical approaches. At first, this work has gone through the primary sources and taken help of the secondary sources to reach a convincing goal. This writing selects Michael Madhusudan Dutta’s *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*, Valmiki’s the *Ramayana*, and Mani Ratnam’s *Raavan* (Hindi version) as the primary sources for being South Asian literary products. On the other hand, as a representative of the west’s literary products, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Book I and II) and other important books and essays are going to be the secondary and supporting sources for this work.

Valmiki’s the *Ramayana* gets the primary focus in this work as the epic is an ancient piece of creation. The work by Valmiki gets into the genre called “epic”. This theological piece of writing took its place in the sphere of literature for its epic characteristics. All the main characters are there with their individual grandeurs. The story of the *Ramayana* is narrated from the perspective of Sri Ramachandra, the son of king Dasharatha. He was sent to exile for fourteen years along with his brother, Lakshmana and his wife, Sita. Sita was abducted by Ravan and the great fight between two armies took place. From the theological point of view, Rama has been shown as such a character that goes through so many difficulties and wins over all the obstacles. His last obstacle becomes Ravan. Ravan has been depicted as an out and out villain. His character has been designed with such evil characteristics that Rama gets the opportunity to glorify himself through his win over Ravan. Valmiki’s the *Ramayana* is written from the theological perspective where Rama gets the major focus. The character of Ravan has been heightened in order to glorify Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu. Ravan has been made a villain from Rama’s perspective. Ravan does not get the opportunity to flourish himself as he falls short to Rama as a heroic figure. An epic should have a central figure and Rama takes the place. His win over Ravan is presented to win the religious belief of the Hindu people. The common notion of good and evil gets priority through the depiction of Rama and Ravan. In this epic, Rama is the “*sur* or harmony” and Ravan appears as the “*asur* or chaos”. A “binary opposition” (Binary Opposition N. pag.) is a pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning. Binary opposition is the system by which, in language and thought, two theoretical opposites are strictly defined and set off against one another. It is the contrast between two mutually exclusive terms, such as

on and off, up and down, left and right. So, it is visible that the binary opposition takes its place strongly in this epic.

On the other hand, the story of *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*'s source is from Valmiki's the *Ramayana* but the characters and the incidental ingredients are not so vividly used in this epic. In a letter to Rajnarayan Bashu, Madhusudan wrote about this epic: "In this present poem, I mean to give scope to my innovatory powers (such as they are) and to borrow as little as I can from Valmiki" (Dutta 40). The characters of this epic are from the *Ramayana* but they are influenced by western characteristics. Meghnad is the favourite Indrajit of Madhusudan. Madhusudan has rewritten the character of a wild, stubborn and heroic general into a beautiful, normal and well model of life in his epic *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*. In this epic, he is the apple of eyes of his mother, the strength of his father, the necklace of Pramila and the nightmare of the enemies. All these characteristics, undoubtedly, have turned him into a favourite to the readers but his traits are not enough to establish him as the hero of *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*. The characteristics of an epic hero are absent in his character. The effective struggle, the energy and strength to be rescued and the sufferings are absent in his character which have become the bars to the way of becoming the hero of *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*. But, on the other hand, those characteristics are successfully depicted through Ravan's character and have established him as the epic hero of this epic. On one hand, he is the wrong-doer and on the other hand, he is the sufferer of his wrong doings. Ravan was believed to be an illegitimate son of the evil lord, Ravana from the famous Indian epic, the *Ramayana*- hence the name, Ravan came. This one did not have ten heads, but two. *Meghnadbodh Kabbo* is a masterpiece in Bengali literature where Madhusudan has depicted Ravan, collecting from mythological stories, in his own way. The Ravan of mythology is the "rakshasa or rakkhos or demon" with ten heads and twenty hands whose bestial nature is the symbol of hatred but the Ravan of *Meghnadbodh Kabbo* is the hero who goes through the sufferings of his own wrong doings. He is the character, whom the readers see, losing his son Birbahu and his mourning for his son touches readers' hearts. When Chitrangada accuses him, the readers see him thinking about the subjects of Lanka rather than Birbahu. The nature of his strength attracts attention. The Ravan of mythology is the bestial character but the Ravan of *Meghnadbodh Kabbo* is the character who is the embodiment of humanistic attitudes. He has love for his son but his heart is more worried for the subjects of his country. The theological approach has been absent from this particular work. It is clear that Madhusudan has depicted the character of Ravan from another perspective where Rama does not get the sympathy of the readers rather Ravan gets the sympathy of the readers. The change of notion is evident here. Ramesh Chandra Dutta has said about *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*, "The reader who can feel and appreciate the sublime, will rise from a study of this great work with mixed sensations veneration and awe, with which few poets can inspire him, and will candidly pronounce that bold author to be indeed a genius of a very high order, second only to the highest and greatest that have ever lived like Vyas, Valmiki or Kalidas, Dante or Shakespeare" (Dutta 26).

In *Raavan*, Dev falls in love with Ragini, a spunky classical dancer who is as unconventional as him. They get married and he takes up his new post in Lal Maati, a small town in northern India, a town where the world of law is not the police but Beera, a tribal who has, over the years, shifted the power equation of the place from the ruling to the have-nots of the area. In *Raavan*, the evil character gets twisted as he gets the focus from the director. Sita of the *Ramayana* gets sympathetic to the Ravan here. Regarding acting, Ravan outdid Rama in the movie and thus Ravan got the status and sympathy of a hero. Critics have been critical about the loose adaptation of Valmiki's the *Ramayana* as the film is categorized in the criterion of "analogy" (one of the three types of adaptation) where the whole scenario is transplanted and little of the original is identifiable. Among the movie previews, some experts talk about the nature of the changes brought by Mani Ratnam. A film expert of Film Journal International, says about

Raavan: “Dark, psychologically trenchant modern retelling of the ancient epic the *Ramayana*, with a police inspector’s wife held captive in a jungle by a near-mythic tribal leader” (Lovece N. pag.). He again says:

In Tamil filmmaker Mani Ratnam’s brutal modern-day retelling (filmed in both this Hindi version and a separate Tamil version), those ideals of good and evil go to shades of gray, but without any blasphemy against the original text—specifically the third book, ‘Aranya Kanda,’ in which the demon-king Ravana kidnaps Sita and Rama must rescue her. That’s a highly simplistic description of what, in Ratnam’s interpretation, is a cracklingly stylish, suspenseful psychological drama that even with its classical structure never goes where you’d expect (Lovece N. pag.).

Another film critic comments on *Raavan*:

Never one to paint his characters black or white, Ratnam gives both Dev and Beera ambiguous character traits that make it hard to pigeonhole them as entirely good or bad. So *Raavan*-figure Beera has a conscience that stops him from having his way with Ragini although he desires her, and Ram-inspired Dev is so hell-bent on achieving his goal that he will resort to deceit and betrayal in order to get there. But what might have truly turned this film into a brave, daring effort is a less ‘darpok’ handling of Ragini’s change-of-heart towards Beera. While she does soften considerably when she understands his provocation for revenge, Ratnam never quite turns it into a Stockholm-syndrome situation that might have made for a far stronger central conflict” (Masand N. pag.).

Another critic comments on the character of Vikram in *Raavan*: “Vikram (who represents Rama of the *Ramayana*) cuts a strong figure as the police officer, though in his dark glasses, he often resembles a sinister hard man from a film about a South American dictator” (Bennett N. pag.). Another film expert comments about *Raavan*: “The epics return again to contemporary cinema. After a re-telling of the Mahabharata against a political backdrop in Prakash Jha’s *Raajneeti*, cineastes can now feast their eyes on a modern-day rewrite of the *Ramayana*, against a cops-and-robbers canvas” (Kazmi N. pag.). Again she says:

The second half of the film does get a semblance of story, with adequate twists and turns which reflect the Surpanakha legend (again revised), the Hanuman-Sita encounter, the Agni-pariksha demand (re-interpreted again as a polygraph test) and the film moves from sheer visual to visceral too. There are enough punches in the second half to keep the momentum going, but by and large, the film scores mostly on art and aesthete. Everything seems to be geared to make *Raavan* an object d’art, including the music (A.R. Rahman and Gulzar create a few foot-tapping numbers), the stunts, the cinematography and the no-make-up and heavily-made-up look of Aishwarya and Abhishek respectively (Kazmi N. pag.). Another critic reviews *Raavan*:

This time, Ratnam’s latest takes a big chunk of larger-than-life Indian mythology, sloppily swaps antagonist with protagonist, and ends up giving an earnest Bachchan far too much scenery to chew in far too much spotlight” (Sen N. pag.). He again says: “It’s one thing to mask familiar characters with grimy grey, evoking empathy for the villain and giving the hero some flawed ambiguity, but here Ratnam falls prey to sensationalism and turns *Raavan* into a schizophrenic Robin Hood, and Ram into a bloodthirsty, consistently amoral cop (Sen N. pag.).

These critics’ comments prove that in *Raavan*, Ravan and Rama have been depicted differently from the earlier depictions.

The character of “Ravan” is the main concern here as the two texts and the film deal with the character of “Ravan” from different perspectives.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book I and II) will be helpful for this work as a representative of the west's postmodern attitude. Milton's “Satan” matches with Valmiki's “Ravan” and for this reason Satan's character should get the focus. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book I and II), Satan has all the heroic qualities. Besides nobility and dignity, he has valour and determination which goes to make a great hero. He is a great figure of epic dimension. Milton does it very technically in order to increase the intensity of the epic. Satan is much more glamorous than Adam. Milton portrays the negative character with sheer mastery and he seems to take the side of Satan. Satan gets a new touch by Milton where Milton does his best to elevate the character of Satan. About Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Robert Burns says: “Give me a spirit like my favourite hero, Milton's Satan” (Sen 59). Another critic, Addison says about Satan, “He is the most heroic subject ever chosen for a poem and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty” (Sen 47).

In our nurturing, there is “collective unconscious” (Collective Unconscious N. pag.), which is sometimes misstated as collective subconscious, is a term of analytical psychology, coined by Carl Jung. It is a part of the unconscious mind, expressed in humanity and all life forms with nervous system, and describes how the structure of the psyche autonomously organizes experience. Jung distinguishes the ‘Collective Unconscious’ from the ‘Personal Unconscious’, in that the ‘Personal Unconscious’ is a personal reservoir of experience unique to each individual, while the ‘Collective Unconscious’ collects and organizes those personal experiences in a similar way with each member of a particular species. The ‘Collective Unconscious’ contains archetypes, universal mental predispositions not grounded in experience. The heroes of the *Ramayana*, *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*, *Raavan* and *Paradise Lost* were established in our mind in collective unconsciousness according to the *Bible* and the *Ramayana*. An “archetype” (Archetype N. pag.) is a universally understood symbol or pattern of behaviour, a prototype upon which others are copied, patterned, or emulated. Archetypes are often used in myths and storytelling across different cultures. In psychology, an archetype is a model of a person, personality, or behavior. In philosophy, archetypes since Plato at least, refer to ideal forms of the perceived or sensible things or types. In the analysis of personality, the term archetype is often broadly used to refer to a stereotype- personality type observed multiple times, especially an oversimplification of such a type, or to an epitome- personality type exemplified, especially the “greatest” such example, or to a literary term to express details. Archetype refers to a generic version of a personality. In this sense “mother figure” may be considered an archetype and may be identified in various characters with otherwise distinct (non-generic) personalities. Archetypes are likewise supposed to have been present in folklore and literature for thousands of years, including pre-historic artwork. In the *Ramayana*, Rama gets the place of an archetypal hero and Ravan gets the place of an archetypal villain. But, in postmodern point of view, which denies all about archetypes, blur the barrier between good and evil and between hero and villain.

The objective of this work is to explore the shifts in treatment, of the character of Ravan, which has been taking place through ancient, modern and postmodern ages. And for this reason, Valmiki's the *Ramayana*, Madhusudan's *Meghnadbodh Kabbo* and Ratnam's *Raavan* get the main focuses and Milton's *Paradise Lost* get the secondary focus as he dealt with ‘Satan’ who matches with ‘Ravan’.

As a piece of the classical age, the theological epic, the *Ramayana*, completely focuses on the character of Rama. Rama was glorified and he was made a hero. But for this reason, Ravan was depicted as a demon. So, Valmiki makes Ravan a mere tool for the making of a Lord who is Rama. Valmiki had to create a binary of good and bad in order to teach people through this piece of writing. Rama is depicted as a very good character from the very beginning and Ravan

the opposite. Ravan's good characteristics were not focused as it was very much intentional and Rama's negative characteristics were ignored in order to prove Ravan as an out and out villain. This writing questions this partial attitude of the author where the story has been told from the perspective of Rama.

Meghnadbodh Kabbo (Ballad of Meghnad's demise) is a tragic epic. It consists of nine cantos and is quite exceptional in Bengali literature both in terms of style and content. It was written in 1861. In *Meghnadbodh Kabbo*, Madhusudan focuses on the 'Yuddha Kanda' of the *Ramayana*. Meghnad is the favourite Indrajit of Madhusudan. Meghnad is the son of Ravan and he gets the status of the anti hero of the *Ramayana*. The valour, courage and devotion of a grand warrior is projected through the character of Meghnad or Indrajit. The name of the epic shows Madhusudan's attempt to make Indrajit, the hero of the epic. But, it is true that the story does not end by the death of Meghnad rather three cantos have been proceeded after that incident. The epic ends with the portrayal of Ravan's reaction and sufferings with mourning for the death of Meghnad. In the end of the story, readers experience a wrong-doer suffering for his misdeeds. The depiction of Indrajit and Ravan has been made grand like Rama and Lakshmana by Madhusudan. Ravan's portrayal as a father, husband and king gets highlighted in the positive light.

Madhusudan does not depict him as a demon rather he portrays Ravan as a human with humanly characteristics. His son, Meghnad, gets the status of a heroic figure but Indrajit cannot be called a hero as he lacks the characteristics of an epic hero.

Raavan is a 2010 Hindi film directed, written and produced by Mani Ratnam. The film was released on 18 June 2010. The film opens with shots showing Beera Munda (Abhishek Bachchan) a bandit jumping off a cliff into the water. His gang is busy distracting the police. Police vehicles are set ablaze. Ragini Sharma (Aishwarya Rai), on a boating trip, is kidnapped by Beera. Dev Pratap Sharma (Vikram), her husband and a superintendent of police, is informed. A brief montage of sorts showcases the story of Beera. He is seen as a local hero, a sort of Robin Hood-who runs a parallel government, with his brothers – Mangal (Ravi Kishan) and Hari (Ajay Gehi). Though considered a terrorist by the local police, Beera is respected by the villagers. He kidnaps Ragini hoping to avenge the death of his sister Jamuni (Priyamani). Dev and his team enter the forests with the aid of Sanjeevani Kumar (Govinda), 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; Dev had led an encounter against Beera during Jamuni's wedding. Dev's shot grazed Beera in the neck. Beera escaped, but the police captured and serially raped Jamuni, when she refused to reveal Beera's whereabouts. Beera returns home to find Jamuni distraught and traumatized. The next day, she commits suicide by drowning in a nearby well. Unhappy that his brother is preparing for war, Hari convinces Beera to allow Hari to offer a truce 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. Furious, Ragini leaves Dev to meet Beera through Mangal. When she does, she asks him what Beera had told Dev. Beera replies that he had said, 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 comes to surface when she tries to save Beera with all her might. Content that Ragini too has feelings for him, Beera falls off the cliff to his death with a smile. This adaptation, of the *Ramayana*, is called a loose one. This paper is not concerned with the quality of the adaptation

rather this paper would analyze the recent and changed attitudes of the new artist through depicting Ravan and other characters differently. In this film, Ravan gets the major focus and the story is narrated from his perspective. Ravan (Beera) gets the heroic stature as he gets the sympathy of the heroine and of the audience as well and Rama (Vikram) makes himself a villain to the audience as he kills Ravan (Beera).

Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* in 1667. Throughout the first two or three books of *Paradise Lost*, Satan seems as if he's the hero of the poem. This is partly because the focus of the poem is all on him, but it is also because the first books establish his struggle—he finds himself defeated and banished from Heaven, and sets about establishing a new course for himself and those he leads. Milton presents Satan primarily as a military hero, and the council of devils as a council of war. In doing so, he makes *Paradise Lost* resonate with earlier epics, which all center around military heroes and their exploits. At the same time, Milton presents an implicit critique of a literary culture that glorifies war and warriors. Satan displays all of the virtues of a great warrior such as Achilles or Odysseus. Milton, as an author, gets the full freedom to portray his characters according to his wish. Satan has been glorified by Milton and it shows Milton's inclination towards Satan. Milton seems to question the structured unit of the society through making Satan, a heroic figure.

Valmiki has tried his best to make Rama, a sympathetic character to the readers. He made Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*. Ravan, on the other hand, gets the opposite treatment. Valmiki thought it necessary to create a binary opposition in order to show the difference between good and evil. And, he did it from the religious perspective. He thought it necessary to produce such opposite characters for his purpose to preach people as a sage. These two characters are very much mythological. They belong to the Hindu mythology. It is necessary to focus on the politics of myth where the myth makes all the things static and stereotyped. Among the structured unit of the society, myth has been most structured. The politics of myth can be understood clearly after focusing on some ignored issues. Ravan was the king of Lanka. Lanka was a prosperous land at that time. It was a developed island where prosperity prevailed. Ayodhya was a peaceful land as well. But, Valmiki talked about Ayodhya only as he wished to make Rama the hero of the epic. Rama as an incarnation of God Vishnu got the focus of Valmiki. He showed Rama's sufferings during the exile but Ravan's suffering after his son's death was not portrayed. Rather, Ravan's rage was exposed to the people by Valmiki. All the negative characteristics of Ravan had been brought before the readers. And, all the negative sides of Rama's character had been ignored. The conspiracy of Rama's stepmother turned into a blessing for Valmiki as the conspiracy helped Valmiki to project Rama's sufferings during the exile of fourteen years. Valmiki, as a devotee of the Hindu religion, did the right thing through ignoring all the negative aspects regarding Rama and his near and dear ones. The characters like Rama and Lakshmana, apart from their religious significance, should be taken into consideration as epic characters only in order to have a proper analysis. Lakshmana cut the nose of Suparnakha as she proposed Lakshmana after proposing Rama. Suparnakha wanted to marry Rama but she changed her wish as she came to know about the marital status of Rama. She had been called a 'witch' as she made Sita scared after being denied by both brothers. As a result, to avenge his sister's humiliation, Ravan kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita. The kidnapper got criticized but not Lakshmana for cutting someone's nose. This became the motif of the 'Yuddha Kanda' of the *Ramayana*. This epic can be categorized as a literary product of 'classicism'. Almost all the products of that era had certain purposes. This epic is not an exception. This epic is structured as an epic with the ideal characteristics of an epic where a hero overcomes a villain. As a result, someone had to be the hero and Rama got the upper hand. He had to win someone like Ravan who had equal powers like Rama but without heavenly advantages. Thus, the binary opposition was established. After focusing on the 'Uttara Kanda' of the *Ramayana*, some more important issues emerge. After kidnapping Sita, Ravan

offered Sita to marry him. As a demon, he was not supposed to respect such heavenly bondage like marriage. But, he did. As a demon, he could violate Sita as he had ample time to do such heinous act. But, he did not. On the other hand, after killing Ravan, Rama suspected Sita and she had to face ‘*agnipariksha* or the test of fire’. Rama acted like a mere human being of the earth as there was no sign of godly attitude. Sita passed the test but Rama was forced by the people to banish Sita as people suspected her chastity. Rama did not go against people as he seemed to be a ‘King’ first and then came all the other factors. The ‘Uttara Kanda’ disclosed the sufferings of Sita at Valmiki’s hermitage.

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* should get secondary focus as he did not deal with ‘Ravan’ directly but he dealt with ‘Satan’ who is a ‘*ravanic* or Ravan-like’ character. Chronologically, *Paradise Lost* comes at the second place as a representative of west’s literary products. The two great influences that worked upon the poetic career of Milton were the spirit of the Renaissance and the spirit of the Reformation. Milton lived in such a period when bitter controversies were around him. As a result, his works were influenced by the controversies. He treated ‘Satan’ differently through *Paradise Lost*. Milton seemed to be in favour of Satan in Book I and II. Satan came before the readers with heroic qualities. Milton depicted Satan with such grandeur that all other characters seemed minor to him. Milton seemed to criticize even the God as harsh and rude for being cruel to Satan. Adam’s fall is the main focus of the epic where Adam is punished through the banishment from the Garden of Eden as he ate the forbidden fruit. And, on the other hand, Satan rebelled against the God and thus was defeated. In Book I and II, he and other fallen angels, are seen to gather together for the second battle against the God. Milton depicted him with such spirit that he matched with an epic hero. After reading the first two books of the epic, readers find Satan as an undaunted military hero of a defeated army. Milton, unlike Valmiki, portrays Satan apart from any religious doctrines. Rather, he did it as a poet for his literary fulfillment. The gradual change in treatment of an evil character is quite evident here as Milton is no Valmiki.

Sympathy towards Ramachandra and antipathy towards the demons have been the purpose of the writer of the *Ramayana*. But, the poet of *Meghnadbodh Kabbo* has avoided the older idealism and showed his sympathy towards the demons. The description of the demons by the poet makes the readers cry. The readers get overwhelmed by the love of the demons for the fellowmen. Their fellowship is praiseworthy. The readers get hurt by the disasters the demons face. Madhusudan did not make the demons demonic. Rather, he treated them as human beings. His demons are superior than humans in courage, pride, wealth and progression. The wives of the demons worship Shiva, a Hindu god, for the welfare of their families. The demons worship the gods and goddesses as well. Through this poem, Ravan and Meghnad are glorified along with Rama and Lakshmana. Ravan’s family sacrificed everything in order to save Lanka. In order to save the independence of Lanka, the undaunted spirit and determination of Ravan get exposed with mastery. Indrajit has been depicted as a patriot who does not hesitate to sacrifice his life for the sake of Lanka. Indrajit is a loyal and obedient son as well. Ravan, as the king of Lanka, tries his best to save the country and he is seen to get anxious about his subjects. A real king’s characteristics are properly focused through the character of Ravan. As a modern piece of writing, this epic gets the opportunity to question the religion and religious standards. Modernism comes with questioning the absolute truth of anything. Madhusudan does it in his own ways. He should not be called a “blasphemous” and he is not. His work was highly appreciated in the field of literature because religion does not come in the way of literary masterpieces where individual mastery surpasses all other aspects. He depicted the demons according to his wish as he did not take the responsibility of a preacher rather he got the opportunity to take the freedom of writer provided by modernism. The established notion has been deconstructed through this epic. The stereotyped characters have been released from the narrowness. The characters got the opportunity to breathe the new air supplied by

Madhusudan. He says, "I despise Ram and his rabble" (Dutta 25). The influences of Renaissance and modernism are quite evident on Madhusudan as he glorifies Ravan and gets sympathetic towards this particular character. Valmiki could do the same as Madhusudan did if Valmiki were a part of Madhusudan's time.

Mani Ratnam's *Raavan* is a 2010 film. This recent film should get focus as it twists almost the whole thing. In this era of postmodernism, mass people have been a major focus of the filmmakers where variations have been welcomed. Postmodernism questions everything and each of the literary pieces is self-reflexive. *Raavan*, as a representative of the postmodern era, does the right thing through celebrating the chaos. People have got bored with the goody-goody characters. People look for changes all the time and Mani Ratnam comes with some twists through *Raavan*. He makes the things interesting through making Beera (representing Ravan) a heroic character with heroic qualities. On the other hand, Vikram (representing Rama) gets the opposite treatment. People did not take it as an act of "blasphemy". They took it very normally and lightly. People are not so bothered about religious taboos and standards these days. They love to celebrate everything and *Raavan* celebrated both goodness and badness. Vikram (representing Rama) is seen to take the polygraph test of Ragini (representing Sita) like the "test of fire" in the *Ramayana*. Vikram suspected Ragini as Rama suspected Sita. The modern Rama is no better than the ancient Rama but the modern Ravan (Beera) is far more changed than the earlier versions. As a result, Beera (representing Ravan) gets the sympathy of Ragini (representing Sita) in this modern re-telling of the *Ramayana*. The demarcation between hero and villain, good and evil, peace and chaos, and light and dark is surely getting gradually blurred.

Some very recent approaches of people around the world would make the shift in treatment of Ravan more clear. In an online article, it is said, "The Tamil Nadu countryside is exposed to folk forms that celebrate Ravana as a hero and Rama as the villain who treated women unfairly. Many Tamils who know the *Ramayana* know it through its Tamil version, the Kamba *Ramayanam*. In it, Ravana is highly venerated as a Vedic scholar, a connoisseur of music, a warrior—and as an epitome of everything moral. In short, Ravana is a tragic hero, not a villain" (Samudram N. pag.).

The SAPAN Institute (The South Asian Performing Arts Network and Institute) announced the production of "The Eleventh Face: Ravana's Untold Story" on 30 April, 2011. An online commentary says about this play, "Based on the ancient Hindu epic, known as The *Ramayana*, "The Eleventh Face: Ravana's Untold Story" presents an alternate interpretation of The *Ramayana*. Through original words, dance and song, The SAPAN Institute tells the story of The *Ramayana* through the eyes of its infamous antagonist Ravana, the ten-headed demon king of Lanka" (Shah N. pag.).

This paper has focused strongly on the character of 'Ravan' where this particular character has been changing throughout the ages. This topic has been a very different one with new approaches towards the character of 'Ravan'. The gradual change in treatment of the character of 'Ravan' has been shown chronologically through taking the very recent changes in approach into consideration. Valmiki's Ravan is of evil and bestial nature, Milton's Satan is more determined than Adam, Madhusudan's Ravan is more humane and more heroic than Rama and Mani Ratnam's Ravan is focused as a hero. A hero is someone who persists against all odds, someone who is willing to plunge into the depths of his or her inner being, as frightening and as dangerous as that process might be. He recognizes the risks of his decisions, and he acts anyway. Aristotle's concept of 'Hamartia' helps the readers to acknowledge that a true hero is not one who is wholly good. Instead, a true hero is an individual who is willing and able to acknowledge his or her complexities and continues facing the challenges of life regardless of the obstacles placed in one's path. Rama has been made such a hero in the *Ramayana* and Ravan has taken the place of Rama in *Meghnadbodh Kabbo* and in *Raavan*. Milton's Satan has been a pioneer in

the way of transformation of notion of an evil character and *Meghnadbodh Kabbo* and *Raavan* have been the followers. The demarcation between hero and villain, good and evil, peace and chaos, and light and dark is surely questioned and threatened by the recent treatments of the character of ‘Ravan’.

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