

RAMAYANA AS RAVANAYANA IN C. N. SREEKANTAN NAIR'S *LANKALAKSHMI*

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**ABSTRACT:**

The entire story of Ramayana is centered on Rama. It seems that it is for this hero that the epic has been created. Living in a society where the Ramas are the role models and Ravana is the 'Other' and the uncivilized could it be possible to re-tell the story of Ramayana as Ravanayana—a deviation from the narrative point of view? The strength and vigour of the race rakshasa and the character of Ravana is so interesting that it gives immense scope for the readers of Ramayana to interpret the story from a novel perspective. A profound thought of Ramayana unfolds the notion that the story of the text is being centered on Rama rather than Ravana—the anti-hero of the epic. Nevertheless, Ravana can be visualized in a more humanistic vision as a counter-hero rather than an anti-hero. C. N. Sreekantan Nair's *Lankalakshmi* is one such endeavor to redefine the epic character Ravana to a mythopoeic altitude even in his doom.

**INTRODUCTION:**

The retelling of the Ramayana as the Ravanayana challenges readers to reconsider their notions of heroism and villainy. By humanizing Ravana and portraying his story with empathy and complexity, this narrative gives a fresh perspective on a well-known tale. The retelling not only adds depth to the characters but also elevates the moral and cultural dialogue surrounding the epic.

The Ravanayana transforms the traditional narrative of the Ramayana, highlighting the complexities and nuances of Ravana's character. This reinterpretation opens up new avenues for exploration and discussion, enriching our understanding of one of India's most revered epics, the Ramayana.

C. N. Sreekantan Nair, the wizard of the changes in Malayalam theatrical innovations ignited the minds of the connoisseurs with the use of myth, legend, history and folk tales. The maestro of the experimental theatre C. N. is the founder of the theatre group kalikeralam and gave unprecedented impetus to the improvisations on and off the stage. His innovations involved a fusion of the classical theatre and the folk theatre and it impacted the revival of the theatre of the roots and influenced nativistic tradition of the folk drama. Nair's trilogy on Ramayana—*Saketam*, *Lankalakshmi* and *Kanchanasita*—is a daring experiment on both on the theme and treatment. The trilogy retells the untold story of the mythical characters. They expose the strife of the objective and subjective spheres of the individual life.

*Lankalakshmi*, the second play of the trilogy is the saga of Ravana, a character who aspires for power and glory but has to yield to the inevitable catastrophe. The play unfolds the inner conflicts and turmoil of the great rakshasa king Ravana who wants to make Sita, the pride and prestige of Lanka. The very question who is the hero of Ramayana seems absurd that the title itself says that it is the journey of Rama, the so-called Sooryavamsa king and the son of Dasaratha. When analyzing the two characters of the story it reverberates that Rama and Ravana are seemingly contradictory characters with extraordinary insight in human psyche. A mere comparison of these two gigantic characters tells that it is almost unfair to judge Ravana where the codes of the society are constructed by the Rama.

Ravana says that jewel is suited only to Lanka. Anything which is rare in the three worlds should belong to Lanka. I stole the divine plane pushpaka from my elder brother Vaisravana, so that it will belong to Lanka. Brahma's armor should come to the ruler of Lanka. Siva's sword chandrahasta should decorate the weapon store of Lanka Lanka has everything else: all beauties, fortune and wealth. Sita also should belong to Lanka. I am not a womanizer; I am a lover of all rare and beautiful objects. All things of beauty this Ravana will win. They will adorn Lanka and will be a lasting fortune for the clan of Rakshasas. (*Lankalakshmi*, 223).

It seems that the movement and change from the important theme and text of the play in this Ravanayana (the journey of Ravana) each incident, not just Sita's abduction or the destruction of Lanka, is dramatic. Ravana gradually rises to a celebrity cult of the generation. At the very outset of the play Hanuman is being warned by *Lankalakshmi* that, "be careful Ravana is the savior of his clan and the victor of this universe. He has received a boon from Brahma the creator that he cannot be killed by anyone born as a bird, serpent, Yaksha or rakshasa". (*Lankalakshmi*, 228)

The character Rama has everything in his way of life. Being born in Ayodhya as the son of Dasaratha he has always with him the power and glory of the Sooryavamsa. Rama the prince of Ayodhya walks through

red carpets and he never had any bad fortunes in his formative periods of life. The two gurus-- Vasishtha and Viswamithra are his teachers and they joined together to teach Rama forgetting the fact that they are lifelong rivals. Nurtured by three mothers and assisted by three brothers Rama walked towards perfection. On the contrary Ravana is the other, the primitive, uncultured that represents the black exotic rakshasa vamsa. Born as the son of Kaikasi and Vaisravana, Ravana in his childhood has nothing as his own. Ravana says to Kumbhakarna.

I am a person who has walked away from the fertile valleys to the top of the hill. I was making a pathway for myself by cutting the hills and breaking the stones. When I stepped up, climbed and reached each stage of achievement, I saw there were more heights to climb. Holding on to the stars, stepping on to the planets, I went higher and higher. During this climb I restored and pulled up a clan that was drowning in despair. I resurrected that clan. I recaptured Lanka. I accomplished all the adomments that Lanka deserved. The world which had forgotten the clan of Rakshasas are worshipping them today. (Lankalakshmi, 226)

During the time of Ravana's birth, the entire rakshasa vamsa was in a plight of exile. The rakshasas, having been defeated by the Devas dispersed and almost on the verge of loss of identity. It was during that time Ravana, with all his vigor and strength taught the world that it is your attitude not your aptitude that makes your altitude. He, with the boon of brahma made Lanka the abode of prosperity and security. It is Ravana who travelled the path that was replete with 'sound and fury' of destiny.

Rama in Valmiki's narrative is the maryadha purshothama--the embodiment of all good qualities or one could be forced to say that Rama is the gem of a person or gem among the male community who was fortunate enough to get Sita as his wife and Hanuman as his servant. The fame and name of Rama is so diverse that even the gods admired him. His adversary Ravana is otherwise called as dasumukha (ten-headed person). It seems to the readers that Ravana did the job of twenty people with ten heads. His ten heads are symbolic of ten perceptions or vision-Ravana is a vaidyan (doctor), musician, composer, philosopher, administrator, visionary, enchanter and technocrat. He knows the art of playing instruments and is a good husband, father and brother to his siblings. Ravana is a multidimensional personality whereas Rama is a single dimensional character. When questioned by Vibhishana in relation with the purity of mind of the leader Ravana retorts:

Your older brother, Ravan, leader of the Rakshasas, has only gained. Those achievements are now Legends. Poets sing in Praise when the planet moves aside from the path of Lanka's Puspaka Plane. The ugly looking black child was born from the womb of a Rakshasa woman, humble even Vishnu.... even my beloved wife Mandodari was one after breaking and entering Mayasura's circle of Chariots I won the sward Chandrahasam by uplifting sivas mountain (Kailasa) with my own hands I won the leadership of three worlds by killing and winning. (Lankalakshmi, 231)

Ravana who possesses the courage and strength to uplift kailasa, the abode of Lord Siva is more a vimochaka (one who saves from troubles) to his kulam and sibilings than Rama. Clad in the mask of womanizer, criminal, black and primitive this man has been marginalized for the projection of Rama by the creator of the story. Ravana has the vital qualities more that of a hero not of a villain. But he is represented in the narrative (The epic Ramayana) more as a villain/anti-hero than the real man in his heart. It could be more applicable to consider Ravana as a counter-hero if not possible to count him as a hero.

C. N. Sreekantan Nair in *Lankalakshmi* constructs Ravana as an icon of his vamsa. The transformation is from the state of a villain to then that of the qualities of a hero more to that if the structure of a tragic hero who faces his doom. The image of adversary Ravana is otherwise called as dasamukha (ten-headed person). It seems to the readers that Ravana did the job of twenty people with ten heads. His ten heads are symbolic of ten perceptions or vision-Ravana is a vaidyan (doctor), musician, composer, philosopher, administrator, visionary, enchanter and technocrat. He knows the art of playing instruments and is a good husband, father and brother to his siblings. Ravana is a multidimensional personality whereas Rama is a single dimensional character. When questioned by Vibhishana in relation with the purity of mind of the leader Ravana retorts:

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Ravana emerges in the play shadows even the legendary cult Rama and assumes the place of a hero who by the will of his character replaces himself with Rama. It seems to the reader that Rama and Ravana are not binary rivals but the complementary dualities of a single psyche that without Ravana Rama is imperfect.

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