

MANIFESTING THE TRANQUILITY AND CONSCIENCE OF ANAND NEELAKANTAN'S 'BHADRA' FROM THE NOVEL *ASURA*

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Abstract:

Silence, has its own value based on various aspects like context, person, era, place, gender, class, race, nationality and title. Silence is mostly considered as a symbol or characteristic of the downtrodden through the ages. This paper focuses on the silence portrayed by the character Bhadra, one of the fictional subaltern man depicted by the Indian writer Anand Neelakantan in his novel *Asura*. His quietness and conscience travels throughout the novel, but with intensity much more than that of the first protagonist Ravana. Bhadra can be considered as the second protagonist of the novel *Asura*. However, Bhadra is a voice less character to all the other major characters of the plot just as a subaltern in any other novels. This paper pens down the tranquility and intensity of the same through the character Bhadra. The author has tried to portray the voice less culture of the subaltern through the character Bhadra. He has also used double narrative technique for this novel with the characters Ravana and Bhadra. The importance conferred to both the narrators is equal in their potential and passion.

Key words: silence, intense, voice less, subaltern

Neelakantan's *Asura* is known to be one of classical counter narratives of the epic *Ramayana*. Apart from this, the novel depicts many other themes and ideas like feminism, subaltern voices, fantasy, etc. This paper is going to deal with one among them, socializing the submissive commoner. Neelakantan has used a double narrative for *Asura* - one is done by Ravana, the asura emperor and the other by Bhadra, the submissive commoner. The narration of the novel starts with Ravana, but it mostly travels with Bhadra and ends with his voice. Neelakantan has beautifully set the place and the rights of the commoner during Pre-Ravana era, Ravana's era, Post-Ravana era, Rama's era, and Post-Rama's era

through the character Bhadra. Neelakantan has made Bhadra to live out the experiences of having a commoner's life in all the above mentioned ages. Neelakantan has used Bhadra to deliver the situations and things where the common citizen has voiced out or voiced less. He has also revealed how the conscience of these commoners might feel in those situations. This paper stretches to explore the stillness and the inner guide of acquiescent Bhadra in the novel *Asura*.

Bhadra is one of the fictional characters designed by Neelakantan for the novel *Asura*. The character of Bhadra does not have any appearances in any of the narrations of the epic *Ramayana*. Bhadra is portrayed as an untouchable Asura subaltern, who lives as a downtrodden under the rule of Mahabali, Sumali, Kubera, Ravana and Rama. He is a mere citizen of any country, under anybody's rule. Most of his voices are unheard or barely heard. Whether it is a royal mighty warrior or a mere downtrodden, everyone has a limit for their patience. One cannot withhold their silence forever. Sometime or some way it will burst out one day or another. This research paper tries to convey the silence, the outburst and its consequences of the character Bhadra in the novel *Asura*.

Bhadra is introduced in the novel, just as a happy commoner, who was disinterested about who the king was. He was once a namesake soldier for Mahabali and Sumali. In his introductory speech Bhadra says that he is an ordinary man. He says, "I was neither a great fighter, nor a great organizer. Short, plump, with soft hands, I am just an ordinary man. Just like a vegetable vendor, the bullock cart man, peddler in the market, or even the washer man. I am a nobody." (Neelakantan 43). He is a lay man without any large ambitions and is happy with his pepper veins, coconut palms, and two cows. All that is what he need to be happy with his wife and three year old daughter. All this got scattered one dark night because of Deva's invasion. The deva soldiers spoiled the entire course of peaceful Bhadra. They smashed his daughter to the walls so hard that her skull shattered into pieces. They have also dragged his wife to darkness and gang raped her brutally. Bhadra was not in a position to fight against the strong Deva warriors, even though they made his life dark. He just escaped from there just for his survival. From that moment the purpose in his life was to seek revenge on the entire clan of Deva's.

Bhadra then joined hands with the upcoming Asura emperor Ravana believing that he would treat everyone without any bias. Still, the position of Bhadra had not changed. Ravana was very impressed with the ideas and devotions of Bhadra towards him. Bhadra badly wanted to make Ravana the Asura emperor, so that he could exact his revenge on Devas. His loyalty is seen his first ever talk with Ravana,

he says, "Trust me, your Highness, my King; I shall serve you better than anyone ever born. I shall lay down my life to you. Make me your servant. I know you are our saviour. You are our God-sent king, who has come to rescue the Asura tribe from the clutches of the Devas." (Neelakantan 65). All of this led to doubt Bhadra. Ravana also felt suspicious upon Bhadra's enthusiasm and devotion as he thought that the latter is the spy of his half-brother Kubera's spy. And so, Bhadra remained voiced less or less heard person with Ravana too. Bhadra was loyal towards Ravana in all means but he was imprisoned for his exotic idea to conquer Lanka. In Spite of that he escaped from Ravana and helped him to grab the throne of Trikota by poisoning the food of the Kubera's soldiers. All his sacrifices just made Ravana and his council to throw him away and asked to remain silent.

Bhadra immensely helped Ravana in all possible and impossible ways to attain the throne of Lanka. However, Bhadra was never given a reputation by Ravana and his council. Instead he was silenced again and again as they took advantage out of him. Bhadra's silence started way before that horrible night incident but nothing had changed even in the empire of Ravana. He was still meant as a mere low man. His silence was becoming intense day by day as he could not express himself. Bhadra sensed that Ravana is the only possible mighty Asura emperor to win over Devas. He wisely helped Ravana with the attack of Varuna's ships but later Ravana shakes hands of friendship with Varuna but not with Bhadra, as he is just an untouchable. During the imprisonment of Ravana by the king Karthiveerarjuna, the council of Ravana asked Bhadra to kill Ravana's baby girl (since the astrologer said she will be cause of Lanka's destruction) and Ravana's new lady love Vedavati (distraction for Ravana from his kingly affairs). Bhadra killed Vedavati, who cursed for the destruction of the entire Asura clan while dying. He was unable to kill the baby girl as he was reminded of his own daughter's death. All these acts just made each day of Bhadra to undergo struggles and troubles rather than having gifts and appreciation.

Bhadra was meant to remain silent even when his beloved lady love and wife in Lanka, Mala, was raped by Ravana. He remained silent when Mala bore the son of Ravana named Athikaya. Bhadra raised him as his own son but Athikaya hated him since he did not allow Athikaya to go to the palace whenever he was needed. Bhadra felt very bad about his son's position at the palace when he got to know how Athikaya is fond of the crown prince Meghanada. Bhadra felt that Athikaya and Meghanada are just replacing images of Bhadra and Ravana respectively. He does not want his son to lead a life of a deliberate slave. Athikaya does not have ears for all these words of Bhadra.

Bhadra remained silent for all the troubles he had received from everyone thinking that he is of a low caste and all he can do is just to accept his way of survival under the upper class people. Bhadra's patience was tested when Athikaya was badly injured during his duel with Aganda, the Vanara prince instead of Meghanada. Bhadra had his outburst when Meghanada and Maricha visited his hut the same night to offer a few silver coins as a token of goodwill from Ravana for Athikaya's action. This irritated Bhadra to the core and he threw away the coins and shouted for everything that he was undergoing, "Get out! Get out, you bastards!

You think you are doing me a great favour by visiting my hut? You nearly killed me and my son. Who wants your coins? Keep them for yourselves. The King is compassionate, you say, Does he know what it is like to be treated as though one had a contagious disease? Does he know the pain of hunger? The sting of failure? The throbbing ache of hopelessness? The agony of being homeless? He does not want poor, black Asuras to be treated as untouchables, he wants us to live in the cities" (Neelakantan 284).

His anger and frustration was seen when he points out the discrimination imposed on them by the Brahmins. He explodes:

I know the reason for that too. You noble, rich, pseudo-Brahmins rave against us being unclean, our black skin, our smell...but you need us more than we need you. Who would carry your rubbish if we were banished? Who would sweep your streets, draw your carts, and die for you in your petty wars? (Neelakantan 284).

These words give a deep insight of a commonly uncommon subaltern man and his way of living for the sake of the rich. Even in the above dialogue he was stopped in between by Meghanada, who throbbed his sword near the throat of Bhadra.

Bhadra's thoughts about the lifesaver Ravana just became topsy-turvy with the abduction of Sita, Rama's wife. Bhadra helped Ravana and his entire clan whenever needed. He did not fail as a soldier nor as a common citizen in times of danger. At times he was muted to express his opinions through words or actions but he also willingly remained speechless most of the times. Bhadra was actually mightier in thoughts and action rather than Ravana or Rama, since he has out lived both. He was remaining silent. He thought he was not worthy to fight or voice up against the mighty warriors. All he did or was able to do was to witness and help his superiors in action whenever needed and return to remain silent. Though he was silenced by Devas, Ravana, and Rama throughout his life he was living a completely fully fledged life of a commoner.

Bhadra had undergone many occasions where he was intended to remain silent. He was not ready for an outrage anymore after his encounter with Maricha and Meghanada. He had many terrible encounters in pre-war, during the war and post-war between Ravana and Rama for Sita. His whole lifestyle in Lanka was collapsed and destroyed in Lanka's Brahmin clash. He lost his son Athikaya along with Meghanada in the war for Sita. Bhadra just had an inner conscience when he tried to get the corpse of Athikaya from Ravana, who was ready to perform the last rituals in a royal way for both his sons (Athikaya and Meghanada), "My

King, not even a dog cares for the death of young men like my son, who died for you. The round medals you give away, the petty jobs you offer to the kin of those who die for you, the paltry compensations which you throw from your brimming coffers, are nothing but baits, to entice more dogs to die for you. Let me take my little dog from you. He has served his purpose. You showed young men how glorious it was to die for such abstract causes such as the motherland and racial pride....., now let me take him to his mother" (Neelakantan 422).

These words of Bhadra seem to be the voice of all the unvoiced folks under any rule. His conscience had given a broader image of the life of a commoner under the mighty ones. He had destroyed his whole hut to burn the soulless body of Athikaya. Later, during his living in Ayodhya after the defeat of Ravana he witnessed the slaughtering of his foster grandson, Sambuka by Rama, silently because he could not express his loss too as he was just a member of the dhobi community then. He lost his foster son, Shiva and his wife, Arasi for the grief they suffered in losing their son. At last, he also witnessed the death of his lovable wife Mala, due to sudden fever. By now he was trained to suppress his outburst. He became a man of less emotion to relationships.

All great men come and go to have a place in history but commoners are the one who stay back to watch all these men. In fact, histories are meant to make the commoners aware of the great people. Common people live for survival; they merely have an ambition other than to live whereas the majestic heroes are not so. They have huge ambitions, revenge, dreams, status which puts an end to their life instantly. According to Bhadra, the commoners who are tormented and silenced are the ones who exist long just for survival. However, the character of Bhadra is also an added chapter to the way of living of a commoner under the rich and royals of the society, which still prevails. They will experience only silence as a response and are also allowed to respond only in silence by the so-called upper hands of the society.

In Spite of all this, if they wanted to voice out (which can be barely done) it does not make much change in the existing scenario. Even history has praised only the mighty kings and warriors, if not an outstanding citizen. It had always failed to narrate the story of the way of living of any commoner under these royals and mighty warriors. It has mostly remained silent and still remains silenced.

Works Cited

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