

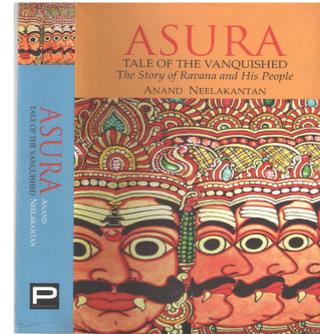
BOOK REVIEW

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'ASURA' a novel written by Anand Neelakanthan

'Asura' a 503-page-book written by Anand Neelakanthan is a novel written in touch of Hindu mythological epic, namely '*The Ramayana*.' The story here, of course, does not follow fully that of Valmiki's or any other mythological books subsequently written on Ramayana 'but a large part of it is Neelakanthan's own fiction or his own creation. The mythological stories normally advocating some specific religious doctrines bear, as such, some religious messages with lot exaggerations and illusions which lack in reality. Yet with the mythological epics and other such writings the literatures of almost all the languages began in human civilization, and those have some social bearings. Though the writer is trying to give a modern treatment to the story and to give the book the shape of a modern thriller, the book still remains an illusory fiction except the chapters dealing erstwhile social economy and social culture and customs of both the *Deva* and the *Asura* civilization of that time.

The story of Ramayana relates to the age of '*Tetra*' when Rama took birth as *Avtar* of Lord *Bishnu*, the world on the earth was limited to the '*Jambu*' island, and conception like the sun which was a god but moved round the earth and the earth was a mere flat disc floating on vast ocean water, gods were with immortality and divine power lived in the heaven (*Swarga*) and there was a third world below the earth meant for the *nagas*, ruled. Neelakantan has however imagined the gods, Asuras, Nagas and Vanars (ape-men) to live on the same globe; and that is a unique conception and treatment. The story of the novel has been told by basically two characters-----Ravana and Bhadra. Ravana, the king of Lanka, a powerful but tyrant *asura* king has been killed by *deva* prince Rama for abducting Sita, the wife of Rama. Ravana, a ten headed (the additional nine heads might be infra-visible) demon, had wisdom, knowledge and power of ten usual men but he did not use all heads but a single to abduct Sita. That was tragedy with Ravana and his Asur dynasty which caused them to face disaster. The writer has narrated the asura civilization of advanced social structure, art & culture, trade & commerce and mainly technology & architecture almost in a modern light. The asuras, at that time, had a casteless society but a seriously classed society which created have and have-nots and wealth to center around the king and his nobles only. The asuras, in general, had a grinding poverty having not enough to eat and stay well. On the other hand, the writer has seriously questioned the divinity of *Bishnu Avtar* Rama in his thoughts and actions. The deva society had castes and was dominated by the Brahmins. Here the actions and decisions of avtarry and wise king Rama have been largely plagued by the Brahmin interventions. Rama has been found to fail in giving justice to his subjects like Shmbuka, a little boy, hacked to death by Rama himself for mere chanting of a few *Veda Chlakas*, executing his beloved brother Laksmana for some minor security

lapse, and even showed total injustice to his beloved wife, Sita who did not have any vice practically other than her misfortune.

Portrayal of Bhadra as a low class destitute is really unique. Bhadra who was once a warrior and a loyal worker under Ravana was forced to become a destitute and seriously a have-not at his old age. He did not get any support and reorganization from the king. He also did not get any justice at the *Ram-Rajya* while he migrated to that place after death of Ravana. On his way back to Lanka again with empty his hands, he could also taste a Brahmin kingdom which gave no prestige to any low caste but tortures and humiliations. In this way, Bhadra could have never peace but never ending poverty all the time in his life. His tragedy was a common tragedy to his class and caste of that time.

The novel portrays Ravana as a common man rising from grinding poverty to power. What ruined Ravana was misapplication of his knowledge and power and strategy. With his death, the asura civilization virtually ended, and Brahmanism entered in Lanka with all the curse of caste system, with worship of Lord Vishnu and elimination of Lord Shiva as deity.

The Vanara (semi-human/ape-man) civilization is another aspect the book has described. This part has been well taken care of by the writer.

In fine, Neelakantan has been found to not to view the mythology of *The Ramayana* in the light of mythology itself but imbibed some modern thoughts and concepts while preparing and furnishing the novel. It is praiseworthy but a writer should also be concerned, at the same time, about what the readers and the critics want out of his writing. To our assessment, the book could have been much compact and concise avoiding some unnecessary illusions but with a bit of more touch of mythology to add to its poetic beauty.

By

Sri L. K. Borah, B.E. (Mech),

Ex-Chief Engineer,

Assam State Transport Corporation

Phone: 099542-58769 & 098640-28415

E-mail: lavanoo@gmail.com & info@voiceofassam.com

www.voiceofassam.com