



MYTHOLOGICAL AND FICTIONAL ELEMENTS IN *MANDODARI: QUEEN OF LANKA* BY MANINI J ANANDANI

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Abstract : Mythic fiction is a genre that blends the elements of mythology and fiction. Indian mythic fiction is popular in twenty-first century. This popularity also creates a need to understand mythic fiction in its deeper sense. The differentiation between mythological and fictional elements is vital in not mistaking it as a complete work of mythology or fiction. By inspecting the work titled *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka* by Manini J Anandani, different elements from mythology and fiction are inspected as well as the incorporation of it in this work by the author is also examined. The discussion helps in inspiring the writers to write works of mythic fiction as well as scholars to analyze various literary works that belong to this genre.

IndexTerms – Mythic fiction, mythological elements, fictional elements, differentiation.

Mythic fiction has the elements of mythology as well as fiction. The identification and separate analysis of these elements are crucial in any work of mythic fiction. One of the mythological elements that can be used in the development of mythic fictional works is archetypal characters such as heroes, gods, mythical creatures and so on. The mythological characters in Manini J Anandani's *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka* is taken from the *Ramayana*. Even though the author uses the reference to *Sanghadasa's Ramayana*, it does not affect the characters as the characters are the same in both Valmaki's *Ramayana* and *Sanghadasa's Ramayana*.

The protagonist of the mentioned mythic fiction is Mandodari. The story is retold from the perspective of this character. The novel begins with Mandodari introducing herself, and her way of living and is later followed by the introduction of Dashaanan aka Ravana into her life. The line that shows that the protagonist is Mandodari is, "While my mother was a beautiful apsara and a celestial dance, my father was the ruler of Mayarashtra and a renowned architect." (*Mandodari Queen of Lanka* 1) Apart from the above-stated references, other shreds of evidence that show that the author didn't use the random name of Mandodari but has intentionally taken the mythological character is seen when Rishi Gritsamada address her as in the line, "Mandodari, the daughter of Mayasura and the queen of Lanka." (79)

The other important character taken from *Ramayana* by the author is Dashaanan aka Ravana. The reference to the character Dashaanan is seen in various versions of the *Ramayana* as in the *Ramayana* by C Rajagopalachari through the line, "And so Raavana learnt that Dasaratha's son, Rama, with his younger brother Lakshmana, was at Panchavati and that he, alone without even his brother's aid, had done it all and that no gods had come to their aid." (*Ramayana* 213) The author also used mythological characters such as Sita, Ram, Lakshmana, Vibhishana, Kumbakarna, Meghanath, Dhanyamalini and so on. This shows that in mythic fiction, characters are one such factor that is taken from a prominent mythological work.

The next important feature that can be seen in this novel is the plot. The plot in the novel is a linear narration of actions and sequences present in *Sanghadasa's Ramayana*. The base plot elements from mythology include the relationship between Ravana and Lanka, the marriage of Ravana and Mandodari, the birth and parentage of Sita, the identity of Rama and many more. The author used these plot situations in the novel as when Mandodari says about Sita in the lines, "She is the reason for this war- Sita is our daughter." (*Mandodari: Queen of Lanka* 231) The mythological plot where the birth of Sita as the daughter of Ravana and Mandodari is in *Sanghadasa's Ramayana*. This can be supported by the following line, "Sita, born of Mandodari and Ravana, was, on account of prediction, deserted; the foundling was brought up by Janaka..."

(*The Story of Rama in Jain Literature* 109) and the line that show that this concept of Sita's parentage is in *Sanghadasa's Ramayana* is, "...Sanghadasa's contribution to the development of the story of Rama lies in the description of Mandodari's marriage with Ravana and of the birth of Sita as Ravana's daughter." (*The Story of Rama in Jain Literature* 114)

The concept of gods and goddesses interacting with mortals is an enchanting recurrent element in Indian mythology. The author uses the significance of the interaction between Ravana and Lord Shiva in the novel. Ravana is intricately connected with Lord Shiva. After a sequence of conflict, Ravana became a great devotee of Lord Shiva and he wrote many hymns including the Shiva Tandava Stotram. The inclusion of this mythological element in the novel can be seen in the lines, "He was named 'Ravana' by Shiva...Ravana then composed the Shiva Tandava Stotram to praise the lord and ask for forgiveness." (*Mandodari: Queen of Lanka* 5)

The next mythological elements are symbols and objects. The author discusses Ravana and his possession of Pushpaka Vimana. It has mythological significance as it is highlighted in *Ramayana* as Ravana travels in it and also it played a crucial role in the abduction of Sita. The line in the novel that shows this is, "She said that Dashaanan would join the king for lunch and depart for his kingdom in his Pushpaka Vimana-a flying chariot that he had taken over from Kubera." (8) The other mythological object used by Manini J Anandani in this novel is Shiva's bow. Shiva's bow is crucial in the *Ramayana* as the stringing of this bow was the contest held in Sita's swayamwar. The writer introduces Shiva's bow in the novel in the following lines, "And my lord, the bow belongs to none other than the supreme lord, Mahadeva Shiva! Dashaanan was stunned to hear about Shiva's bow." (145) Therefore, the above discussions point out that plot, character, symbols, objects, etc. are basic mythological elements that can be incorporated into the creation of mythic fiction as done by Manini J Anandani for *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka*.

Fictional elements are complementary to mythological elements in a mythic fiction. There are various fictional elements used in the novel. The immediate notable element is the change of perspective of narration. The novel is written in first person narrative unlike the conventional style of third person narrative in the mythology, *Sanghadasa's Ramayana*. It is seen in the line, "I was getting dressed early that morning to join my brothers for hunting." (1) Another fictional element is the author's exploration of uncharted facets of lesser-known characters' personalities, motivations, and relationships. The dialogue between Bajrajala and Mandodari in the novel is a fictional one but is significant to understand the pain of Bajrajala. It is as follows, "It is better than having a husband like mine, who is asleep most of the time." (38)

The author uses *Sanghadasa's Ramayana* but she fictionalizes the abandonment of Sita. In the novel, it is shown that it was Mandodari who was responsible for abandoning Sita. In mythology, it was Ravana who was responsible for abandoning Sita due to a prediction that the first child of Mandodari would prove the cause of the annihilation of her family. This is also acknowledged in the write-up titled All about Devi as in the lines, "...the astrologers predicted that the first child of Vidyadhara maya (Ravana's wife) will destroy his lineage thus Ravana abandons her and orders the infant to be buried in a distant land where she is later discovered and adopted by King Janaka. (Kaushik)

The above discussion shows that the novel deviates from the events that are narrated in *Sanghadasa's Ramayana*. The author used her imagination to rephrase the action of events that led to the abandonment of Sita. This makes it one of the prominent fictional elements used by the author in the creation of this mythic fiction.

Dramatization is another fictional element. Manini uses dramatization in the novel to intensify the death of the character, Ravana. The author shows that on the thirteenth day of the Ram and Ravana's battle, Vibhishana who is one of the brothers of Ravana joined with Ram and Lakshmana against Ravana. This situation creates an emotional intensity in the reading experience as it was Ravana's brother standing against him.

The author states the mythological work that is taken into consideration is *Sanghadasa's Ramayana* but she reimagines the death of Ravana which does not adhere to the narration stated in the mythological work. In *Sanghadasa's Ramayana*, it is Lakshmana who kills Ravana with a chakra, not Ram. This incident of Lakshmana killing Ravana in Jain *Ramayana* is acknowledged by the mythologist, Devdutt Pattanaik in the line, "It is Lakshman who kills Ravan using a magic wheel, while Ram maintains the Jain ideal of non-violence." (Pattanaik) The author mentions that the death of Ravana is caused by an astra that can be pulled into a bow which deviates from the concept mentioned in *Sanghadasa's Ramayana*. The mythology narrates that it is by a chakra Ravana was killed as his head was cut off. But the author takes the liberty of fiction and changes the concept to the death of Ravana by piercing his naval as indicated by Vibhishana in the line,

"Vibhishana gestured towards his lower abdomen and pointed at Lankeshwar." (*Mandodari: Queen of Lanka* 255)

The other fictional elements that can be incurred in mythic fiction are through the use of language. The way characters express themselves through dialogue contributions to their personalities is the nature of dialogue styles used in a language by an author. This shows that the dialogue style is a powerful tool for distinguishing characters as it reflects the essence of each character. The other opportunity that is opened to the author by the use of dialogue style is its contribution to the immersive word-building process that can describe a minute scene in more words and emotions. The next feature of language in the fictional part of any mythic fiction is the author's choice of setting the tone for the literary work even though the base is a mythological work. It also helps the author to determine the narrative pacing. All these contribute to the philosophical exploration of the chosen mythology.

The importance of tone of language in any work that uses fiction can be stated in Robert Scholes' *Elements of Fiction* from the following lines,

Of all dimensions of language that can be considered, two are especially important for reader of fiction. Both of these dimensions can be seen as ways in which wit- or artistic intelligence-operates through language. One has to do with tone, or the way unstated attitudes are conveyed through language. (*Elements of Fiction* 27)

The feministic tone is one such element of language used by writers while involving fiction. It is used to strive for inclusivity in language by avoiding the reinforcement of gender binaries. This tone becomes a platform for characters especially women characters to articulate their agency by breaking away from restrictive roles assigned by societal expectations. It is a means to highlight the strength of women characters which the traditional tone of narration fails to present.

The author's usage of liberty in determining the tone due to the adaptation of fiction can be seen in Manini J Anandani's *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka*. The author has used a feministic tone to retell *Sanghadasa's Ramayana* and present the internal thoughts of the character, Mandodari. This tone helps Manini to present the feelings of Mandodari and paves the way for readers to understand the reason for certain decisions taken by the character. One of the most criticized and socially disregarded decisions taken by Mandodari is accepting the marriage between her and Vibhishana (Ravana's brother) after the death of Ravana. This may raise questions regarding her chastity and her love towards Ravana. Through the usage of a feministic tone, the author was able to present the circumstances that led Mandodari to make such a decision. The first maybe her promise to Dashaanan as in the line, "You are Lanka's Queen; it needs you. Promise me you will do whatever it takes..." (*Mandodari: Queen of Lanka* 256) and the other maybe to make the throne stable as stated by Rama in the line, "We reached the conclusion that only with you as their queen will Vibhishana be popularly accepted... your marriage to Vibhishana will favor him as king." (261)

This shows that the use of a feminist tone by the author helped to present the side of Mandodari and the first-person narration done by the same character made the direct conversation between the character and the readers possible. This makes the character confess her intention of marrying Vibhishana in the last chapter of the novel as, "My marriage with Vibhishana was a political necessity... For the first time, I was queen before I was a wife." (265)

The other element is the pace of narration. The pace of narration refers to the speed at which events unfold and information is revealed. It is a delicate balance throughout the narration. Effective pacing engages readers, keeping them invested in the unfolding events. This shows that the artful control of pace is key to a captivating narrative. The pace of narration varies in the introduction, rising action, climax and falling action.

The author's pace of narration varies in *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka*. This was possible because of the addition of fiction as mythologies follow a standard pace of narration throughout the work. In the primary text, the pace of narration is moderate in certain parts and slow in the parts where Mandodari's emotion has a significant role in the plot. The last part of the novel or the falling action is done in fast-paced narration. This is seen as the author conveys the incidents of Sita and Rama's departure to Ayodhya, people questioning Sita's chastity, the test to prove her chastity and the coronation of Rama within two paragraphs as in the lines,

He gave them the Pushpaka Vimana to fly across the ocean in order reach Ayodhya faster, Later, my dasi told me that Sita had been asked to walk through fire in a ritual. It seemed more of an assessment of her chastity to me... A few days later, the invitation for Rama's coronation arrived. (267)

All the above discussion gives an idea about the mythological and fictional elements in Manini J Anandani's novel, *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka*. Hence, the work is a mythic fiction. A similar kind of analysis can be done with any other work of mythic scope. This elaborates the scope of study in this stream. It can be observed that the analysis presented above is important to classify a work of literature as mythic fiction.

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