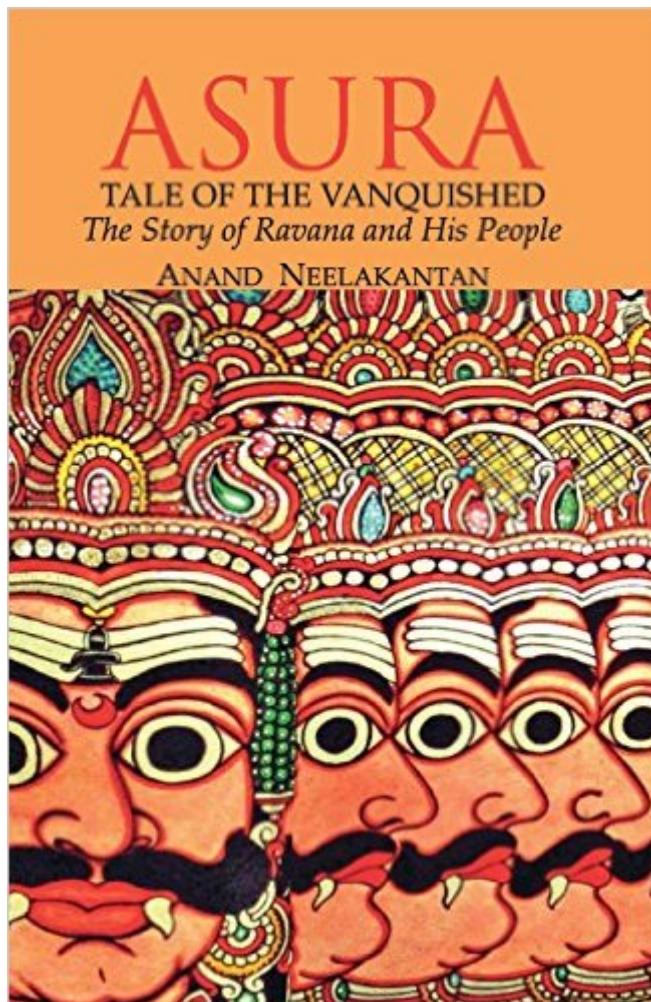


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ASURA : Tale Of The Vanquished



Synopsis

The epic tale of victory and defeat— The story of the Ramayana had been told innumerable times. The enthralling story of Rama, the incarnation of God, who slew Ravana, the evil demon of darkness, is known to every Indian. And in the pages of history, as always, it is the version told by the victors, that lives on. The voice of the vanquished remains lost in silence. But what if Ravana and his people had a different story to tell? The story of the Ravanayana had never been told. Asura is the epic tale of the vanquished Asura people, a story that has been cherished by the oppressed outcastes of India for 3000 years. Until now, no Asura has dared to tell the tale. But perhaps the time has come for the dead and the defeated to speak. — For thousands of years, I have been vilified and my death is celebrated year after year in every corner of India. Why? Was it because I challenged the Gods for the sake of my daughter? Was it because I freed a race from the yoke of caste-based Deva rule? You have heard the victor's tale, the Ramayana. Now hear the Ravanayana, for I am Ravana, the Asura, and my story is the tale of the vanquished. — I am a non-entity ? invisible, powerless and negligible. No epics will ever be written about me. I have suffered both Ravana and Rama ? the hero and the villain or the villain and the hero. When the stories of great men are told, my voice maybe too feeble to be heard. Yet, spare me a moment and hear my story, for I am Bhadra, the Asura, and my life is the tale of the loser. — The ancient Asura empire lay shattered into many warring petty kingdoms reeling under the heel of the Devas. In desperation, the Asuras look up to a young saviour ? Ravana. Believing that a better world awaits them under Ravana, common men like Bhadra decide to follow the young leader. With a will of iron and a fiery ambition to succeed, Ravana leads his people from victory to victory and carves out a vast empire from the Devas. But even when Ravana succeeds spectacularly, the poor Asuras find that nothing much has changed for them. It is when that Ravana, by one action, changes the history of the world.

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Customer Reviews

I was born in a quaint little village called Thripoonithura, on the outskirts of Cochin, Kerala. Located east of mainland Ernakulam, across Vembanad Lake, this village had the distinction of being the seat of the Cochin royal family. However, it was more famous for its hundred odd temples; the various classical artists it produced and its music school. I remember many an evening listening to the faint rhythm of Chendas from the temples and the notes of the flute escaping over the rugged walls of the school of music. Gulf money and the rapidly expanding city of Cochin have, however, wiped away all remaining vestiges of that old world charm. The village has evolved into the usual, unremarkable, suburban hell hole, clones of which dot India. Growing up in a village with more temples than was necessary, it was no wonder that the Ramayana fascinated me. Ironically, I was drawn to the anti-hero of the epic Ravana, and to his people, the Asuras. I wondered about their magical world. But my fascination remained dormant for many years, emerging only briefly to taunt and irritate my pious aunts during family gatherings. Life went on... I became an engineer; joined the Indian Oil Corporation; moved to Bangalore; married Aparna and welcomed my daughter Ananya, and my son, Abhinav. But the Asura emperor would not leave me alone. For six years he haunted my dreams, walked with me, and urged me to write his version of the story. He was not the only one who wanted his version of the story to be told. One by one, irrelevant and minor characters of the Ramayana kept coming up with their own versions. Bhadra, who was one of the many common Asuras who were inspired, led and betrayed by Ravana, also had a remarkable story to tell, different from that of his king. And both their stories are different from the Ramayana that has been told in a thousand different ways across Asia over the last three millennia. This is then Asurayana, the story of the Asuras, the story of the vanquished.

"Asura: Tale of the Vanquished" is probably the best work of fiction by an Indian author that I had the pleasure of reading in a long time. It is very entertaining as well as informative. The narration style is highly imaginative and introspective, consistent with the first-person mode of storytelling. The author does a brilliant job of explaining the wider social/political/economic context of the period in which the story takes place, from the perspective of Ravana and also another character who is a common man living in erstwhile Lanka. I read some comments about the language being too

long-winded but honestly, I didn't feel that way. When you write a story in first person, the narration has to be more explicit anyway. In fact, I enjoyed getting into the main characters' minds and the pleasure was enhanced as Mr. Neelakantan has an excellent command of the language and a good sense of humor and irony. One flaw in my opinion is that some of the main characters such as Rama and Meghnada were not fully developed. Another thing is that due to the book being written from the perspective of just two characters, the author could not include a lot of direct dialog/conversations to illustrate situations where other characters are involved but not these two. Such situations are described indirectly from Ravana's or Bhadra's viewpoint only. However, despite these observations, I still enjoyed the book a lot. Guess I am going to read his next book as well!

Neelakantan's Ajaya was a great read, cliff hanging chapter endings, ethical qualms, profound questions of Dharma, addressed again and again... Asura is sooo disappointing... its saving grace is, it unfolds a version of the Ramayana where Sita is Ravana's daughter... The first pages, which define Neelakantan's Ravana are well done as is the last 10% of the book where Neelakantan's long laboured critique of caste, finally comes to fruition... Mataji Vanamali's telling of the legends is so much more worthwhile in, *The Complete Life of Rama: Based on Valmiki's Ramayana and the Earliest Oral Traditions* and *Hanuman: The Devotion and Power of the Monkey God*... much more depth, beauty, excitement and profound spiritual insight....

Asura: Tale of the Vanquished by Anand Neelakantan is the story of Ravan, the primary antagonist in the Hindu Mythological Epic Ramayana. Instead of portraying Ravan as a devil and Ram as a God incarnate, Anand has attempted to depict the human nature of the characters, which is more grey than either black or white. Anand has taken well-known mythological facts and weaved a very imaginative and ingenious story around it. Ravan is one of the most fascinating characters in Indian Mythology. His character is much more nuanced than has been traditionally depicted. When I heard about this book on Ravan, telling his version of the story, I was truly excited and eager to read it. However, this book did not match up to my expectations and this is in-spite of a very engaging and interesting story. This one's undoing is its lax editing and poor characterization. The book is longer than it should have been and certain portions are extremely dull and boring, especially the first half. Further, the way Ravan's character is developed is highly inconsistent. At times he is brave and knowledgeable, at times he is arrogant and acts like a fool, at times he is full of love and affection for his family, at times he insults and throws them out. There is nothing in the plot which can explain these inconsistencies, and this makes it really difficult to relate to the main character. Bhadra - the

second main character and one of the narrators, also suffer from similar inconsistencies. A good read if you are interested in Indian mythology, but definitely not something which will blow your mind.

Compelling story.. You definitely sit up and take notice of the protagonist.. Raavana like never seen before.. But.. The lack of attention to detail.. looks like author lost track of the small details that he sets up even as recent a few scenes ago within the same chapter. Also the typos and grammatical errors make it a sub-par reading experience.

Anand Neelakantan has given a whole new perspective by taking the side of Ravana and making the reader empathise with the character. Ravana, full of vices and virtues seems more realistic and human and therefore enthralling than his counterpart, Rama, the embodiment of perfection. The writer though a debutant writes beautifully and vividly. There is a parallel version given by Bhadra, a common man under Ravana who gives a neutral perspective regardless of the ruler and makes you reflect on both Rama and Ravana. Loved the book. A must read. 4/5

Well finally I managed to complete the book... which I must admit was quite a long read. The book takes the perspective of Ravana to bring into context rules, customs which were followed earlier and continue to be followed even today. The book questions some of the rules laid down by the society and makes you think would our lives be different if these rules were not there?

Such a page turner book with lots of relevant viewpoints are relevant to our modern world. A must read for those who love Ramayana epic story.

It's always great to read a well known tale written with a different perspective. History and mythology are often defined by who writes it. Who can tell what really happened? The present has so many faces, yet only one will make it to the pages. Enjoyed the book thoroughly.

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