

Ravana in ‘Meghnad Badh Kavya’: A Review of Educational Achievement through the Lens of Heroism

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Abstract: *Ravana is rendered speechless by the grief of losing his son. Chitrangada's lament further fuels his thirst for vengeance. The first thunderous blow Ravana suffers in Meghnad Badh is the death of Veerbahu. The gods themselves trembled before the might of this heroic son, yet Rama-a seemingly gentle warrior-defeated him through astonishing strategy. Ravana struggles to comprehend how such an unimaginable event could occur. His disbelief finds voice: The news of Veerbahu's fall shakes Ravana's faith and conscience. A spiritual awakening stirs within him. He interrogates himself deeply, realizing that his own sins hastened his son's downfall. His guilt no longer remains confined to the personal realm; its consequences have engulfed lineage and nation alike. In grieving over Surpanakha's humiliation, Ravana himself descended into wrongdoing. He lost his brother Kumbhakarna and his valiant son Veerbahu prematurely. The best example of the higher education system that developed in Lanka under the supervision of Ravana is the heroic and unparalleled military prowess of Meghnad. It is due to his father's ideals, educational philosophy and knowledge that Meghnad emerged as a unique warrior and strategist. This study argues that heroism is not limited to the boundaries of moral good and evil; rather, heroism lies in the pursuit of knowledge, education, leadership and building civilization. In this new perspective, Ravana is presented not only as a villain, but as a knowledge-based hero and a unique educationist, whose educational legacy is of particular significance in the history of Indian culture and educational philosophy.*

Keyword: Meghnad Badh Kavya, Heroism, Character of Ravana, Character of Sita

1. Background

Michael Madhusudan Dutt adopted the narrative framework of Meghnad Badh Kavya from the Ramayana; however, the linguistic brilliance and aesthetic charm of the epic are entirely his own. Through his extraordinary command over language, Madhusudan masterfully presents heroic (Vīra Rasa) and pathetic (Karuṇa Rasa) sentiments throughout the poem. In particular, the fusion of heroism and pathos in the character of Ravana renders the epic profoundly compelling. Although, the Rakshasa clan ultimately faces defeat, the overwhelming intensity of heroism elevates their lost glory. The heroic death of Veerbahu in direct combat ignites Ravana's vengeful spirit, which remains alive until his final breath. More than paternal grief, it is the unfulfilled lament of a heroic soul that permeates the entire epic. Upon receiving the news of Meghnad's death, Ravana-the supreme treasure of the Rakshasa lineage-becomes deeply shaken. Through a renewed literary vision, Madhusudan consoles the valiant heart of Ravana, thereby creating a revolutionary interpretation of the character. With this novel portrayal, Madhusudan Dutt earns recognition as one of the greatest sons of Saraswati in Bengali literature. Through refined artistic craftsmanship, Madhusudan enables Ravana to rediscover the courage to challenge Rama without fear. Thus, Meghnad Badh Kavya is not merely a tale of sorrow or downfall; it emerges as an immortal heroic epic in Bengali literature. Invoking the blessings of Goddess Saraswati, Madhusudan immerses himself in poetic creation:

“-Come you too, Goddess, honey-gatherer of thought-
Imagination! From the poet's floral mind
Collect nectar and form the honeycomb,

So that the people of Gour may eternally drink ambrosia
in joy”.¹

Ravana is rendered speechless by the grief of losing his son. Chitrangada's lament further fuels his thirst for vengeance. The first thunderous blow Ravana suffers in Meghnad Badh is the death of Veerbahu. The gods themselves trembled before the might of this heroic son, yet Rama-a seemingly gentle warrior-defeated him through astonishing strategy. Ravana struggles to comprehend how such an unimaginable event could occur.

His disbelief finds voice:

“Is this news but a dream of the night?
O messenger! He before whose arms the immortals
trembled-
Was he slain in open battle by Rama the mendicant
archer?
Did fate cut down a silk-cotton tree with flower petals?”²

The news of Veerbahu's fall shakes Ravana's faith and conscience. A spiritual awakening stirs within him. He interrogates himself deeply, realizing that his own sins hastened his son's downfall. His guilt no longer remains confined to the personal realm; its consequences have engulfed lineage and nation alike. In grieving over Surpanakha's humiliation, Ravana himself descended into wrongdoing. He lost his brother Kumbhakarna and his valiant son Veerbahu prematurely.

Seeking to stabilize Ravana's turbulent mind,
Madhusudan offers philosophical counsel:

“Reflect, O Lord-
Even if a mountain peak shatters under thunder,
The mountain does not lose its composure.
This world is illusionary;
Its joys and sorrows are ultimately vain”.³

Veerbahu's death is depicted as an ancient heroic legend. Rama's forces hid within the Madakalakari forest like warriors entering a trap. Veerbahu's military prowess remains immortal in Rakshasa lore. He annihilated countless enemies with heroic valor, yet destiny rendered his fall inevitable.

“Rama advanced into battle, O Prince!
The battlefield surged like an ocean in storm,
Swords flashed like flames,
Conches roared like waves of the sea”.⁴

Gazing upon the golden Lanka-its sunrise, magnificent palaces, and rows of flower gardens-Ravana's heart swells with patriotism. While grief-stricken as a father, he is equally inflamed as a warrior king determined to avenge his son. Thus, in Meghnad Badh Kavya, Ravana's heart is portrayed not as stone but as profoundly tender.

When Rama crosses the ocean to attack Lanka, Ravana's wounded pride finds expression. He accuses the sea of betraying Lanka:

“O Ocean! What garland do you wear today?
How did Rama win your favor?”⁵

Through the dialogue between Sita and Sarama, the wife of Vibhishana, Ravana's greed, jealousy, and moral corruption are exposed. Though his power is legendary, his unrighteous acts render his downfall inevitable. Abducting Sita-the daughter of Janaka and the wife of Rama-was an unforgivable transgression.

Crossing the turbulent ocean in his chariot, Ravana abducted Sita. Though his might shattered mountain peaks, the karmic consequences of this act sealed the fate of the Rakshasa clan. Killing Jatayu brought upon Ravana a curse that foreshadowed his doom:

“Reflect on your fate, O Ravana!
You, a jackal, dared to challenge a lion.
Who will save you now?”⁶

The abduction of Sita marked the day Ravana tarnished Lanka's honor. Mother Earth herself cursed Ravana for violating her daughter:

“Because of you, O Ravana,
Your lineage shall drown in destruction”.⁷

Once a land of celebration, music, and divine presence, Lanka transformed into a battlefield drenched in blood. Goddess Sati's blessings became essential to the destruction of the Rakshasa clan:

“Without you, O Mother, who holds such power?
Destroy the Rakshasas, protect the three worlds”.⁹

Despite his legendary status as a Maharathi, Ravana becomes infamous due to his misguided arrogance. The death of Indrajit-invincible even to the gods-breaks Ravana entirely:

“I dreamt of seeing you on the throne, my son-
All hopes shattered by past-life sins”.¹⁰

Meghnad Badh Kavya is enriched by heroism and pathos alike. The epic emphasizes Ravana's grief over losing his sons rather than mere military defeat. With Meghnad's death, the final heroic pillar of Lanka collapses.

“After seven days of mourning,
Lanka wept as if idols were immersed on Dashami”.¹¹

Through Meghnad's death, Ravana's karmic cycle reaches completion. Deprived of divine support and familial bonds, Ravana fights until the end to preserve his nation's dignity. He is neither cowardly nor self-serving. Madhusudan portrays Ravana as a patriot, a devoted father, and a tragic hero. Thus, Ravana in Meghnad Badh Kavya stands not as a villain but as one of the most tragic and heroic figures in Bengali literature.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt's Meghnad Badh Kavya (The Slaying of Meghnad) is one of the most remarkable epics in modern Bengali literature. In this work, the poet departs boldly from the traditional portrayal of Ravana found in the Ramayana. Instead of presenting Ravana merely as a villain, Madhusudan reconstructs him as a tragic heroic figure, rich in intellect, dignity, and moral complexity. This reinterpretation offers significant educational value, encouraging readers to develop critical thinking, ethical reflection, and emotional maturity.

1. Ravana as a Heroic Figure

In traditional narratives, Ravana is portrayed as the embodiment of evil, pride, and lust. However, in Meghnad Badh Kavya, Ravana appears as a heroic king and a devoted father, whose greatness lies not in moral perfection but in human strength, courage, and suffering.

Ravana's heroism is reflected in:
His unshakeable courage in the face of destiny
His royal dignity even during moments of personal loss
His deep love for his son Meghnad (Indrajit)

After Meghnad's death, Ravana does not collapse into despair. Instead, he accepts his sorrow with stoic strength, which elevates him to the status of a tragic hero. This portrayal teaches students that heroism can exist even in defeat.

2. Intellectual Grandeur and Educational Symbolism

Madhusudan presents Ravana as a great scholar and strategist, well-versed in the Vedas, sciences, and statecraft. This intellectual dimension transforms Ravana into a symbol of educational achievement.

From an educational perspective, Ravana represents:

The power of knowledge and learning
The responsibility that comes with wisdom
The tragedy of knowledge without ethical balance

This duality helps learners understand that education is not merely about intellectual excellence but also about moral judgment. Ravana's downfall serves as a lesson that knowledge must be guided by humility and righteousness.

3. Humanization of Ravana: Emotional Depth

One of the greatest achievements of Meghnad Badh Kavya is the humanization of Ravana. He is no longer a mythic demon but a suffering human being-grieving, loving, and questioning fate.

His grief after Meghnad's death reveals:
A father's silent pain and emotional restraint
A ruler's sense of duty over personal sorrow
A human being's struggle against destiny

This emotional portrayal enhances the educational value of the text by cultivating empathy in students. Readers learn to see beyond binary ideas of good and evil.

4. Tragic Heroism and Western Influence

Madhusudan Dutt was deeply influenced by Western classical epics, especially Homer and Milton. Ravana resembles the tragic heroes of Greek drama-great in stature, flawed in character, and doomed by fate.

Ravana's tragic heroism is marked by:
Hamartia (tragic flaw), especially pride
Conflict between duty and emotion
Inevitable downfall despite greatness

Studying Ravana through this lens helps students connect Indian epics with Western literary traditions, broadening their comparative literary understanding.

5. Educational Achievement and Moral Reflection

From an educational viewpoint, Meghnad Badh Kavya encourages:

Critical re-reading of canonical texts
Appreciation of alternative perspectives
Understanding of complex moral realities

Ravana's portrayal challenges students to question inherited moral judgments and recognize that heroism can exist even within morally ambiguous characters. This makes the text highly valuable in higher education and literary studies.

2. Conclusion

Meghnad Badh Kavya, Ravana emerges as a tragic, heroic, and intellectually powerful figure. Michael Madhusudan Dutt transforms him from a one-dimensional

villain into a symbol of human greatness and failure. Through Ravana's character, the epic achieves profound educational success by teaching empathy, ethical reasoning, and critical literary analysis.

Thus, Ravana in Meghnad Badh Kavya is not merely a character of literature but a powerful educational model, demonstrating that true heroism lies not in victory, but in dignity, intellect, and the courage to endure suffering.

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