



**Feminist Reading of Manini J. Anandani's *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka***

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**ABSTRACT:**

Women have been always treated as unoriginal and have not given equal rights and opportunities in the society. Feminist movement arose out of injustice taught by men against women. In Feminist literature, female characters occupy a prominent place. Mandodari is one of the unimportant characters in Ramayana who is the most beautiful apsaras married to the legendary and mighty king Ravana. To queen Mandodari's shock, he marries more women and takes on many concubines. This work also throws light on the birth secret of Sita. This paper tries to explore the feminist elements in the life of Mandodari as portrayed by Manini J. Anandani in *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka*.

Key Words: mythology, revisionism, feminism, subjugation

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Feminism is a social movement that has the purpose of bringing equal opportunities and rights among the women in Indian society. Feminism plays a major role in literature in contemporary society and the female perspective. The author uses multiple methods to portray the subjugated life of the female character. She recreates the story in a way that attempts to break down the treatment of women as lifeless soul and telling the story with a feminist narrator who was unnoticed in the original text. Since 1980s, it is Lisa Tuttle who has been adopted by a majority of feminist critics. Feminist Literary Criticism examined old texts within literary canon through a new lens. The major goals of feminist criticism are the development and discovery of female tradition of writing and rediscovering of old texts.



While it also interprets the symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be hiding or ignored by the male perspectives. It has the intent to analyse women writers and their writings from a female perspective and increase the awareness of sexual politics of language and style. This theory is concerned with women's authorship and the representation of women's condition within literature, in particular, the portrait of fictional female characters.

Manini. J. Anandani (1986) is a passionate mythological feminist who is currently pursuing her post graduate diploma in comparative mythology in the University of Mumbai. She has previously worked in the hospitality, marketing, communication, banking and sales sectors and as a corporate trainer. She currently lives in Mumbai with her husband and daughter. Her first book *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka* (2018) has given voice to Mandodari, one of the least known women characters in the Hindu epic who is one of the most beautiful apsaras married to the legendary and mighty king Ravana.

An apsara named Madhura is fascinated by the god Shiva and tries to get love from him. It inflames his wife, Parvati and she transforms the apsara into a frog destined to live in a well. Shiva consoled and gave a boon to the apsara that she would reincarnate as a beauty and will marry a valorous king who is a devotee of Shiva. Later an asura king named Mayasura and his apsara wife Hema rescued a beautiful girl child from a well that is the rebirth of apsara Madhura. The couple brought up her as Mandodari. Dashaana, a benevolent king with ten heads and lot of extra ordinary powers, but lustful and egotistic marries her. To queen Mandodari's shock, he marries more women and takes on many concubines. Mandodari in her loving way tries to give advice and guide him towards the righteous path.

Dashaanan is a great scholar and Shiva's devotee born to the sage Vishrava and the Daitya princess of Kaikesi. He is not only mastered in all the four Vedas but also possessed great knowledge in Ayurveda and Astrology. He is also expert in music, arts, political science and occult science and became a renowned scholar of six shastras. It was Lord Shiva who named him as 'Ravana'. Taking the advantage of his growing demonic powers, he takes over his half-brother Kubera's throne in Lanka. Mandodari's father was the ruler of Mayarastra where Dashaanan and Mandodari had their first sight and attracted with each other.



Dashaanan sends the proposal to marry Mandodari. Mandodari is made the queen to Lanka. Soon, her happiness turned into ashes. Dashaanan started to take many wives for the sake of political advancement. It enrages Mandodari but she could not able to react because she is supposed to be respond like a queen.

‘And for the sake of his political advancement he may decide to take as many wives as he wishes!’ I was suddenly enraged at the explanation provided by Nanashri. I still didn’t know if I was supposed to respond like a queen--- calm and collected--- or if I could scream like an angry wife who had been betrayed.

‘Rani Mandodari, I understand how you might be feeling. But this is a marriage made for political advancement and strengthens the rule of the emperor. It is a negotiation done for diplomatic reasons. Nanashri tried convincing me. (29)

Ravan’s other marriages disgusted Mandodari. It was Dhanyamalini, a tribal princess who was warm and smart in her conversation and his third marriage is with Bharatvarsh princess Nayanadini who looks poised. For popularity and wealth, he captured many lands and women. He filled his Antapura with many women and he started to spend there most of his nights. While Mandodari yearned for her husband, she felt envious to the insane noises coming from the Antapura, it made her feel more lonesome.

Lanka gained a lot of popularity in the next one year. Dashaanan had conquered various lands and captured their wealth and women. He brought women of various races from various kingdoms. He filled the antapura with seductive women of the Naga tribe of Bharatvarsh, gandharvis from the north, deva women, dark rakshasi and asura women. Some were the daughters and wives of kings whose kingdoms he had conquered. There were women of Kinnara tribes from the east of Bharatvarsh. (72, 73)



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Rishi Gritsamada visits Lanka to stay for few weeks in the palace for his tapasya. While Ravana dislikes his visit and he cut off Rishi's head for disobeying his words. And he also doubts the virtue of Mandodari that made her to take poison. While in her treatment she came to know about her pregnancy and she hide it from her husband and family. To hide her pregnancy she went on a pilgrimage to all the holy tirthas of Bharatvarsha. She visited various places and it was in Ayodhya where she gave birth to a baby girl to her shock the baby was dead. With the great grief she placed the baby in a pot and buried in the soil. After few years she gave birth to two baby boys named Meghanath and Akshayakumar.

Dashaana kidnaps Sita to seek revenge against Ram and his brother Lakshmanan's injustice towards his sister Meenakshi. Sita looked like a bird trapped inside a cage. While in conversation with Sita, Mandodari come to know about the birth secret of Sita, to her shock Sita is none other than her own daughter whom she buried in Ayodhya land. Dashaana kidnapped her without knowing that he was abducting her own daughter.

'My adoptive parents, King Janaka and Mata Sunaina, had no children before me. Our kingdom was on the verge of a famine. The rains had abandoned the region for three consecutive years. My father performed a yagna, believing that it would bestow nature's blessings on the region. As part of the yagna, the king was required to plough the field. While doing so, the furrow was trapped against a rock. Still trying to push the plough, my father heard a child cry. He exhumed the soil near the furrow and found me. He asked everyone around if they knew me or my parents. He enquired for days but no one came forward to claim me as their own. And then they knew that I was probably abandoned by my parents. My father proudly said that he furrowed me from the barren land, and hence named me Sita.' (194)

Mandodari lost her two sons and her husband in the war which was done by Ram and Lakshmanan for Sita's abduction. It was Vibhishana, brother of Dashaanan who helped the Ayodhya princes to defeat Dashaana. After the death of Dashaanan, Mandodari was forced to marry Vibhishana for political necessity. She devoted herself to bring up Meghanath's son for



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the future Lanka. Anandani portrays Mandodari as a perfect wife standing firmly by her imperfect conceited husband and his downfall, mainly due to his irresponsibility and the action of tricksters.

My marriage with Vibhishana was a political necessity. Thinking about Dashaanan's many wives that I had envied and he had claimed to be 'political necessities' made me laugh now. For the first time, I was a queen before I was a wife. I had braced myself for the women to look at me differently after my marriage to Vibhishana, but nothing changed. If anything, they respected me. Bajrajala, Meenakshi, Dhanyamalini and Nayanadini and I were bound by the same grief. We had all lost our husbands and our sons. We had all survived to live a life of sacrifice. (265)

This paper tries to explore the feminist elements in Mainini J. Anandani's *Mandodari: Queen of Lanka*. Here, the novelist brings the story about the life of Mandodari as a tool to portray subjugation and exploitation of women from age old times. The major events of Ramayana from female aspect make the novel not only different but an important feminist text.

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