

APPENDIX I

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**Translation as Negotiation: A Brief  
Comparative Reading of Clinton B. Seely's  
*The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from  
Colonial Bengal* and William Radice's  
*The Poem of the Killing of Meghnad***

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*The task of translators becomes rather intriguing with poetry translations, as poetry generically deploys defamiliarization more than prose does. When a translator embarks upon translating a grand-scale poem like the epic, the task becomes even more arduous as its 'grand style', which is far removed from the stylistic features of the lyric or the ballad, entails greater problems of what Roman Jakobson calls 'inter-lingual transposition' in translation (1966:238). In 2004 Seely completed his 25 years' project of translating Michael Madhusudan Dutt's magnum opus, Meghnadbadh Kabya, and it was published by OUP under the title, "The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal." By then Radice, too, had completed the first draft of his translation of the same epic, but delayed its publication until 2010, under the title – "The Poem of the Killing of Meghnad". These translations have not yet been taken up by anyone for a comparative study in the light of translation theories. Hence a juxtapositional reading of them, which is the object of this proposed paper, may not be either trite or superfluous.*

**Keywords:** Translation Studies, TLT, SLT, equipollence, blank verse, metre, phrasing

One of the tasks of Translation Studies is to examine how far, and with what effects, the Target Language Text (henceforward abbreviated to TLT) adheres to and deviates from the Source Language Text (henceforward abbreviated to SLT). The case becomes rather intriguing with poetry translations, as poetry generically deploys defamiliarization more than prose does. When a translator embarks upon translating a grand-scale poem like the epic, the task becomes even more arduous as its 'grand style', which is far removed from the stylistic features of the lyric or the ballad, entails greater problems of what Roman Jakobson calls 'inter-lingual transposition' in

translation (1966:238). So, to translate Milton's *Paradise Lost* into a target language is much more demanding than to translate his sonnets or elegies. Things become even more interesting for a researcher in the domain of Translation Studies when an SLT is translated into the same target language by different hands. The point becomes patent once we remember that Tagore's "Karna-Kunti Samvad" was translated into English not only by Tagore himself but by at least five others, too, including Sturge Moore, Humayun Kabir and Ketaki Kushari Dyson. Multiple translations of the same SLT invite two basic questions: first, as Laha (2017:71) indicates, how does each of the translations stand as translation *per se*, and secondly, how do the translations differ from each other and with what effects?

Clinton B. Seely, as we know, has translated *inter alia* Jibanananda Das's poetry, and William Radice is a well known Tagore translator. Seely's translation of Jibanananda's poetry and Radice's of Tagore's have already been taken up for study by researchers. [E.g. Dr. S.C. Dasgupta of Raiganj University worked on Radice as a Tagore translator, and Ms. S. Das is at present working under him on Seely as a translator of Jibanananda's poetry, to name two near at hand.] In 2004 Seely completed his 25 years' project of translating Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *magnum opus*, *Meghnadbadh Kabya*, and it was published by OUP under the title, "The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal." By then Radice, too, had completed the first draft of his translation of the same epic, but delayed its publication until 2010, under the title – "The Poem of the Killing of Meghnad". These translations have not yet been taken up by anyone for a comparative study in the light of translation theories. Hence a juxtapositional reading of them, which is the object of this proposed thesis, may not be either trite or superfluous.

There are basically two diametrically opposite views on poetry translation: one proclaims that translation is not possible, translators are traitors because a poem gets killed in translation; the other vindicates possibilities of successful translations – sometimes not excluding even what came to be known in the mid – 20<sup>th</sup> century as 'machine translation'. The present study will not take into account the former, and while focusing on the latter it will exclude the matter of machine translation which can translate 'Out of sight, out of mind' as 'invisible lunatic'!

It may be useful for the purpose of the present study to refer to some notable practising translators, engaged in translating poetry from Bengali into English. *Tagore and Modernity* edited by Krishna Sen and Tapaty Gupta and published in 2006 has a panel discussion, excerpts from which are reproduced below:

MARTIN KAMPCHEN: How do I do my poetry translation? There is a poem in the beginning, and there is a poem at the end of a long tedious process [...]. I [have to] absorb the various layers – linguistic, emotional, cultural, religious – of that poem [...] I try to reconstruct the poem [by combining] philological correctness and literary value. (228)

KRISHNA DUTTA: [...] what I find the most difficult thing is that whenever I try to translate, the beauty and grace of Rabindranath's Bengali hums in my ear, and however much I try to put it across into English, I find it is inadequate [...] Translations, however clever, can only transfigure dancing into acrobatic tricks, in most cases playing treason against the majesty of the original [...] but I am also optimistic that it can be done. (229-32)

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI: There is a sentence which I wrote a few years ago in a preface [...] "The semiotics of poetry exceeds its semantics" – which is an unnecessarily complicated way of saying the full meaning of a poem is not conveyed simply through its words, but through its overall formal impact [...]. Any word is impossible to translate, fully, out of one language into another [...]. But for the practising translator, the bigger problem usually [...] is to think of how to devise a sort of formal structure for the entire translation [...] I feel that the translation of a poem should make some attempt to indicate the total formal structure – The stanza form, the rhyme scheme – of the original. [...] I don't say reflect entirely. Of course it is not possible to reflect entirely, but in fact, sometimes it may be possible to reflect it more than you may think at first sight. [...] to preserve the seriousness of the original, and the other non-prosodic aspects of the original, you have to tone down the effect, especially if you are trying to render a language like Bengali where rhymes and alliteration and repetition come much more easily in verse as compared to a language like English. We have to tone it down [...]. This might mean compromising the details of the form, leaving out some things, putting a few extra things, trying, as it were, for a kind of general principle of equipollence, of equal weight, not precise correspondence. (234-36)

KETAKI KUSHARI DYSON: I feel that if I didn't write some poetry in English, I wouldn't have the courage to translate from Bengali into English [...] you really have to know the craft skills [...]. Poets like Buddhadeb Bose [...] had this capacity as poets to make new poems on the models of the given source texts [...]. I think the whole point of translation is to bring out the flavour of something which is different. If it was the same, I wouldn't be translating it. It's the difference that makes the art of translation so exciting and so challenging. (239-42, 247) (emphases added)

To make a gist of the extracts above, we can say that (i) Kampchen wants to reconstruct the SLT; (ii) Krishna Dutta would struggle to capture the majesty of the original; (iii) Chaudhuri is in favour of devising a formal structure for the entire translation, a structure that will answer to a general principle of equipollence; and



(iv) Dyson implies that in order to be a good translator one needs to be a poet because a poet knows the craft of writing poems – the craft of transcreation. Notwithstanding the various positions (often supplementary or complementary to each other) of the practising translators, the fact probably remains that “[a]ny translator is faced with the competing demands of the desire, on the one hand, to be as faithful as possible to the original and, on the other, to produce a version which communicates well and is a pleasure to read” (France, 23).

Reduced to its bare essentials, the art (or ‘Science’?) of translation, therefore, has to depend on both ‘reflection’ and ‘refraction’, and engineered by the translator’s poetic sensibilities which can create a poem out of a source-poem, with traces of similarities and differences.

Needless to say, the difference between the two translations starts right from the titles themselves. While the subtitle to Seely’s work takes on an interpretive mode with the words “A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal”, ‘slaying’ in Radice’s becomes ‘Killing’, and ‘Meghnada’ becomes ‘Meghnad’ with the addition of ‘The Poem’ which probably is due to Radice’s desire to retain the word ‘Kabya’ of the SLT. It can be guessed from the two titles that deviations in translation are likely to tell us a lot about the ‘poetic engineering’ (Radice’s phrase, used in his *Poetry and Community* published in 2003) of the translator concerned. [Here it may be said *in passim* that Seely spells Madhusudan’s surname as ‘Datta’, while Radice sticks to the poet’s own choice ‘Dutt’ while signing in English. The present study picks up the latter].

For the purpose of the short study let us juxtapose a few lines from Book I as translated by Seely and Radice (henceforward referred to as TLT<sub>1</sub> and TLT<sub>2</sub> respectively) can be juxtaposed to demonstrate how the two TLTs individually differ from each other in negotiating with their common SLT. This demonstration is crucial for the statement of the problem because, to quote Laha again, “How a TLT ... negotiates with its SLT, and with what effects, have remained central to the questions concerning the art of translation and the field of Translation Studies” (2017, ix).

SLT: Henokaale charidike sohosha bhasilo  
 Rodon-ninad mridu; ta soho mishiya  
 Bhasilo noopurdhwani, kingkinir bol  
 Ghor rolay. Hemangi songinidal-sathe,  
 Probeshila sabhataley Chitrangada devi.  
 Aloo thaloo, hai, ebe kabaribandhan!  
 Abharanhin deho, bono-sushobhini  
 Lata!Ashrumoy aankhi, nishar shishir-

Purno padmaparna jeno! Virbahu-shokay  
 Bibosha rajmohisi, bihongini jotha,  
 Jobe graase kaal foni kulaaye poshiya shaboke,  
 Shoker jhar bohilo sabhate!  
 Suro-sundorir rope shobhilo choudike  
 Bama kul; muktakesh meghamala, ghono  
 Nihshwas proloy-baayu; ashruhari-dhara  
 Asaar; jimoot-mandra hahakar-rob!  
 Chamakila lankapati kanak-aasonay!  
 Felilo chamor dooray titi netraniray  
 Kingkori; kandilo feli chhatra chhatradhar.  
 Kshobe, roshe, doubarik niskosila osi  
 Bhimroopi; patra mitra sabhasad joto,  
 Adhie, kandila sobe ghor kolaholay. (Book I: 322-44)

TLT<sub>1</sub>: Suddenly / at that time, there drifted in from all directions soft sounds / of weeping blended with anklets' tinkling, jingling girdles / and ominous outcries. Escorted by the golden-limbed women of her retinue, Queen Citrangada stepped to / the floor of that assembly – hair, alas, disheveled! Her / arms, naked, without bangles, like forest-ornamenting / vines when, in snow, they lack gemlike blossoms! Her tear-filled eyes / were as the dewy lotus pads at night! The queen was quite / beside herself, lamenting over Virabahu, as / does a mother bird when some fell snake slips inside her nest / and swallows up her fledglings. A storm of woe blew into / that assembly hall! The women folk stood there, appearing / comely as the wives of the divines, their loose and flowing / hair seemed a swirl of clouds, their heaving sighs Pralaya-like / heavy winds, their streams of tears torrential rains, their wailing / moans the thunder's rumble! Lanka's sovereign on his gold throne / was startled. Maidens in attendance, tear-soaked, dropped their / yak-tail whisks; the umbrella bearer let slip the parasol / and wept; angry and confused, the guardsman unsheathed his dread / sword; and the ministers, the counselors, and members of / the court, alarmed, broke down crying, causing utter havoc. (Book I: 322-44)

TLT<sub>2</sub>: Then, suddenly, the sound of feminine weeping flooded in from all sides,  
 Mingled with the tinkling of anklets, and the sonorous jingling of girdle-bells. Chitrangada-devi came into the chamber, with her gold-complexioned attendants. Her hair was unplaited, alas,  
 Loose and disheveled! Her body was without ornament, like a forest-adorning creeper in the snow,  
 Bereft of its jewel-like blossoms! Her eyes were full of tears, like petals of a lotus brimming with night's dew!  
 The queen was benumbed with grief for Virabâhu, like a mother-bird after a deadly snake enters her nest and devours her young!  
 A storm of grief swept through the court!  
 The golden skin of her women flashed all around like lightning; their unbound hair was a bank of clouds; their heavy sighing was a hurricane wind;

Their tears **streamed** like a cloudburst; their weeping and wailing boomed like **thunder!** The lord of Lankā on his **golden** throne started!

Handmaidens dropped their fly-whisks as their eyes moistened; the weeping umbrella-bearer dropped his umbrella; shocked, **Angered**, the guard at the door unsheathed his awesome sword; **councilors**, Ministers and the rest of the court were all alarmed, all in tears, all weeping noisily!

It is interesting to note that while negotiating with the SLT, the two translators differ from each other in more ways than one. Even a cursory reading of the quoted passages would not probably fail to notice that 'drifted in soft sound of weeping' in TLT<sub>1</sub> becomes 'flooded in sound of feminine weeping' in TLT<sub>2</sub>, just as 'golden limbed' becomes 'gold complexioned', 'arms, naked, without bangles' becomes 'body...without ornament', 'forest-ornamenting vines' becomes 'forest-adorning creeper', to mention only a few. It becomes clear, too, that TLT<sub>2</sub> tries as far as possible to adhere to the SLT phraseology (cf. 'nishar shishir' / 'night's dews') while TLT<sub>1</sub> seeks to maintain the general principle of equipollence through paraphrasing (cf. 'nishar shishir' / 'Dewy...at night').

It transpires from the quotes above that the SLT – TLT movement in Seely is different from that in Radice in respect of versification as well. Rendering Madhusudan's Bengali blank verse in English is a big problem, and a close, comparative reading of TLT<sub>1</sub> and TLT<sub>2</sub> makes it clear that Seely and Radice attempt very disparate solutions to their common problem. In order to negotiate with Madhusudan's *amitraksara chanda*, Seely adheres to the fourteen-syllable, unrhymed line with enjambment although he has not forced his lines to be coterminous with the original. In other words, he frames lines based on fourteen English syllables and takes great care to end his paragraphs with a full, fourteen-syllable line. In order to maintain the 14-syllable structure, Seely often has to end his lines with little words like 'to', 'as', 'of' – words that perform grammatical, rather than lexical, functions. Seely was not unaware of the problem of putting a non-stressed language like Bangla into a stressed language like English – "So what do you do? You try a little bit, if you lose a little bit, then you compromise a little bit and it's one – not the only – solution" (Islam: 2005).

For Radice, it appears, 'phrasing' is as much important as 'metre' (the matter of syllable) in encountering Madhusudan's Bengali blank verse. Phrasing, for Radice, means "the length and balance of phrases, the placing of pauses in the line or sentence or paragraph" (Radice: 2004), and unlike Seely he never ends his lines with 'little



words'. Radice's lines, on the other hand, "are based on a count of three phrases, a phrase being defined by the pause before or after it that is indicated by any kind of punctuation mark [...] even though the phrases can vary hugely in length" (ibid.). Incidentally, we can take into account Madhusudan; letter of 1 July 1860 to Raj Narayan Basu wherein he categorically says; "Let your friends guide their voices by the pause {...}. My advice is Read, Read, Read. Teach your ears the new tune and then you will find out what it is" (ibid.). It, therefore, appears that Seely deviates from, while Radice tries and adheres to, Madhusudan's dictate, and that as a whole TLT<sub>1</sub> caters to a great extent to 'refraction' while TLT<sub>2</sub> by and large has recourse to 'reflection'.

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## Who is the Real Hero of Michael Madhusudan Datta's Meghanadavadha Kavya ("The Slaying of Meghanada")?

Peenaz Khan\*

### Abstract

World literature includes Bengali literature, and modern Bengali literature cannot be discussed without any reference to Michael Madhusudan Datta's epoch-making epic poem *Meghanadavadha Kavya* published in 1861. One of the questions that continue to puzzle its readers is: who is the real hero of the poem – Meghanada or Ravana? The title itself demands that Meghanada should be looked upon as the hero of the poem. Given that Indrajit (the other name of Meghanada) was the poet's favourite, there should apparently be no debate about who the hero of the poem is. But, as D.H. Lawrence has warned us, "trust the tale, not the teller". A narratological reading of the poem may claim that despite Meghanada's superb heroic qualities and tragic end, his father Ravana should be deemed the de facto hero owing to magnitude of his tragic endurance and fight against fate. Meghanada seems to be a supernova whose extinction only amplifies Ravana's tragedy. This paper attempts a comparative study of the tragic roles played by the son and the father across the cantos, and thereby examines the claim for the real heroism of this pioneering 'Ramayana from Colonial Bengal', as Clinton B. Seely (one of the poem's renowned translators) puts it.

**Keywords:** tragic hero, narratology, tragic flaw, pity and terror, catharsis

As a remarkable piece of work in Bengali literature in particular and World Literature in general, Michael Madhusudan Datta's epoch-making epic poem *Meghanadavadha Kavya* (1861) continues to fascinate scholars at home and abroad alike. Even the twenty-first century has seen two of its remarkable translations: one by Clinton B. Seely in 2004, and the other by William Radice in 2010. Since Datta's poem is basically a subversion of the canonical *Ramayana*, it is only natural that it would attract attention and invite questions all the more. When one has finished reading the poem one is likely to be disturbed by a rather general question: who is the real hero of "*A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal*" as Seely (2004) subtitles his translation? An epic generically leans towards tragedy: *Beowulf* and *Paradise Lost* end tragically. *Meghanadavadha Kavya* is of course a far more grim tragedy than the two just mentioned. A tragedy requires a hero "who gives significance and tone to a tragedy" (Nicoll 150). Most tragedies take their titles after the names of the respective heroes. By that count, the heroism of *Meghanadavadha Kavya* straightaway goes to Meghanada or Indrajit (the other name of Meghanada). The central event of the poem is of course the killing or slaying of Meghanada, and here is William Radice summarising the importance of the event:

[...] the manner in which Meghnād is killed by Lakshman, in a temple, where he has come to carry out a pūjā to Agni and where he has no way of defending himself [...] is the most subversive and original feature of Madhusudan's epic, and his chief way of turning Meghnād into a tragic hero. (2010, iv)

But the problem crops up as we begin to think of such things as tragic flaw, terror and pity, catharsis- all that we associate with tragedy.

An epic is a narrative, and so demands appreciation from the viewpoint of narratology, that is, how a story gets told or narrated in spite of what the writer actually wanted to highlight. D.H. Lawrence famously advised us to trust the tale and not the teller. This means that narratology can bring to surface the contrast between 'wanting to say' and 'what is ultimately said'. Madhusudan indeed wants to present his 'favourite' Indrajit as the hero; but the question is: does the narration across the nine cantos do justice to his deep desire?

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The feelings of pity and terror towards the tragic hero constitute the cathartic effects of a tragic tale. We feel sorry for the downfall of the hero and are terrorized by it as well so that a secret identification between the hero and ourselves is established. We begin to wonder and ponder: if this can happen to such an elevated character, why should we grumble about our puny tragedies? A tragic hero must have some sort of tragic flaw in him. As Nicoll puts it:

[...] the tragic hero, while not a paragon of goodness, must [...] have noble qualities in him, but he must at the same time be capable of indulging in some error, due either to ignorance of affairs beyond his knowledge or to human passion. (150)

It can be argued that these benchmarks apply more to Ravana than to his dearest son Meghanada. We should not miss the wail of the great warrior before Lakshmana dastardly slays him:

I – who in pitched battle subdued Indra [...]

[...] am to die now by your hand? For

what false step has Providence meted out such punishment

upon this humble servant – shall I ever understand? (Seely, Canto 6, 652-55)

What are Meghanada's 'false steps', really, given in the poem? Ravana, of course, had a big one – the abduction of Sita.

With these preliminaries in mind, we would now embark upon a comparative study of the presentation of the two characters – Meghanada and Ravana – in the total framework of the tragic tale.

The two contenders vying for the position of the protagonists are father and son, that is, Ravana and Indrajit. Interestingly, there has been absolutely no conflict whatsoever between them. Rather, the bond between the father and the son is like that of confluence and fluorescence, the dusk and the dawn, the container and the content. Similarly, the question of heroship does not alienate the pair but rather yokes them together in an inseparable relevance. If Indrajit happens to be the protagonist then Ravana's refuge is indispensable for him to be so; and if Ravana transpires to be the protagonist then Ravana can by no means deny Indrajit's divine richness and heroism as an indispensable part of his aura as the King of Lanka. Let us first examine the possible rationales to vote Meghanada as the protagonist. Rhetorical rules can portray ample abundance of virtuousness that is necessary for Meghanada to be the sole hero, the protagonist. Adherent to tiptoe vigilance, utmost loyalty, duty respect, selfless service, honour and prominence, Meghanada not only exemplifies a soulful integrity of character with all heroic qualities, but beyond all perfect disciplines of his pious family life, he looks like a demi-god with absolute substance and principles, even though he appears in three cantos only. In the very first canto, we have a glimpse of his noble sense of duty when he leaves the company of his beloved and other women as the bad news of the death of his brother Virabahu is brought to him. This is how the poet depicts the moment:

Full of wrath, great warrior Meghanāda tore apart his  
garlands, threw away his golden bracelets; lying at his  
feet, his earrings shone most elegant [...]

[...] "Fie on me,"

the crown prince chided gravely, "Fie on me! Hostile legions  
cincture golden Laṅkā, and here am I midst these charming

women! Does this befit a one like me, Indrajit, son

of Daśānana? Bring my chariot at once. I shall  
efface this infamy [...].” (Seely, Canto 1, 617-25)

Besides, Meghanada in itself is Datta’s profound creation as the central character of his poem; his quasi-divine deeds paint him to be sort of the Koh-i-Noor in the garland of gems that the epic unfolds. The poet draws his innermost self on this central character in symmetry to his core best principles that breathe life in Meghanada. Madhusudan wanted to swap his own imperfect life with Meghanada’s perfections. The poet not only depicted himself in conformity to what he is, but also comprehended all accomplishments that remained unattainable. It is not difficult to perceive the poet’s distinctive identity with Indrajit as self-regarding and privileged to be known as a beau of Madhusudan’s fond inner self. The poet’s forsaken fortune, yet a passionate desire for perfect completeness of glorified success are decorated in the persona of Indrajit. Thus, the character of Meghanada adorns the poet’s endless esteem, extreme admiration and enormous hearty charm. While expressing opinion about Indrajit, the poet said: “He (the glorious son of Ravana) was a noble fellow, and but for the scoundrel Bibhisana would have kicked the Monkey army into the sea” (quoted in Banerjee 210). No wonder, such unfair and unjust killing of Indrajit would lacerate the poet’s heart forever. The poet looks upon Ravana’s son Indrajit not only as his intimate alter ego but also as ‘my favourite Indrajit’ (210). The poet’s burning imagination stirred by the killing of Meghanada, his emotional excitement and enormous arrangements are epitomized in what he confided to his friends: “I am going to celebrate the death of my favourite Indrajit” (210). So, it is possible to argue that the poem’s foremost supreme character and the poet’s ultimate confidante should necessarily be called as the hero, the sole protagonist and that no other identity can do justice to the recognition of this exceptional persona.

Though Meghanada is a heroic character par excellence, yet it is Ravana who happens to be Meghanada’s main custodian in the poem. The reason for Meghanada being the protagonist appears debated. The moot question is whether the brief span of Meghanada emerging as a glorified incandescence into the spectrum of every gleaming eyes is enough for being the hero, or Ravana, the magnitude of whose sufferings with unpredictable mixture of weal and woes, laying the foundation to the entire tale, is the real hero? To put it differently: who should we regard as the sole motivation of the poem? Narratologically, it is Ravana and not Meghanada. That is why only three of the nine chronicle cantos comprise Meghanada and Ravana envelops the whole of the poem- Ravana is the beginning and the terminal end. The central motivation as detected by Rabindranath is about a finding of a horrendous catastrophic power; and that absolute supreme power is Ravana. “The Slaying of Meghanada” sings hymns to this power and glory, and Ravana is both circumference and real centre of the tragic world of Lanka. Meghanada only adequately illumines the readers’ understanding of Ravana’s predicament. Here I would like to quote Rabindranath Tagore at some length:

In Meghanadavadha Kavya [...] he [Madhusudan Datta] has revelled in a spontaneous but vehement play of power [...]. A great glamour surrounds this power [which] has shaken the earth. This power brooks no barriers of ethics or weapons in its way to get what it wants [...]. The poet ends his poem with heaving sighs of grief at the defeat of the proud power which cannot accept the tragic doom even being surrounded by inevitable catastrophe [...]. The Muse has garlanded this indomitable power at the very end. (quoted in Banerjee 170) (my translation)

Let us now see why Ravana should be deemed the paramount object or the sole motivation in this poem? Meghanada may have been the ideal character of Madhusudan but the poet's real reflection is not Meghanada but Ravana. Ravana's valour and vigour, his unceasing determined existence and dying affliction, with determination not to yield to terrible consequences find analogues in the poet's own life. The self-conscious poet was well aware that he possessed in himself an infinite probability; hence to his friends he would say what he could be or do and so on- quite in conformity with the doctrine of the mighty. But we know inscrutable, inseparable, untoward external forces shattered his dreams. This tragedy of unfulfilled desires is not his alone, but a universal plight of the ill-fated, and Ravana stands for the universal human tragedy. Ravana, as if, covered all, including the poet's incessant wails of sorrow stored inside his heart. So, the poet candidly admits that Ravana "was a grand fellow and the idea of Ravan elevates and kindles my imagination" (210-11), and here we can vividly see that in the poem of "The Slaying of Meghanada" Ravana is the real objective of the poet's vision.

Without Ravana this poem would not have gained the profundity of a successful epic. The poet embellishes the character of Meghanada with all heroic attributes but grants him a very limited space to act. The poem ultimately is about Ravana, who is the centrum of all the nine cantos. Around Ravana revolve other characters like Virabahu, Chitrangada, Mandodari, Pramila, etc. And so, does Meghanada too. However, in the star-studded universe of Ravana, Meghanada is such a planet that may have been a small fragment to Ravana's absolute regality, waiting for completeness, but has nevertheless attracted glistening radiance of the readers' heart and soul. But while sitting to judge a protagonist, mere radiance and profundity or the poet's predilections should not be all: thoroughness and details of narration are to be perceived alongside the poet's imaginative focus. Even after the demise of Meghanada we expect more to be said, because Meghanada has perished but Ravana is still there. The spontaneity of Meghanada is so complete and so impeccable that his death is his own ovation. Though this perfect and innocent character is Madhusudan's splendid creation yet he is not the poet's persona. Or else, with the death of Meghanada there would have been an end to the poem- and the countenance of the poem would have had a distinctively different aspect. This was indeed not the poet's intent. The purpose of the poet's impression and enactment of the poem could accordingly be traced in Ravana's characterization. Even after the death of Meghanada we still foster some reckoning hope, but Ravana's defeat instantly lets our last hopes and quest go with the wind, and the poem comes to a deeply tragic conclusion- because the fundamental aspiration meets an ultimate cessation. We understand that it is not the faultless phenomenal superhuman Meghanada but the heterogeneity, the admixture of good and bad in Ravana that captures the poet's esemplastic imagination. The overarching tale of Ravana is central to the poem and the deep sorrowful tears its culmination as a symbol of man's eternal tragedy expressed in immortal verse. That is why, considering the poet's desired fulfilment, Ravana can be regarded as the absolute protagonist. In this context the noted critic Mohitlal Majumdar's perceptive comments can be recalled:

Meghanada is the replica of the poet's consuming desire, a persona with profound charm, fully faultless; a product of infinite fancy, enshrined within the poet's temple of delight. But in conflict with the vagaries of destiny, this dream does not get realized, does not clinch victory in life, a dream ending in sorrows- the hopeless wails and the despairing dusk- so sweet and apt for appeasing the thirst for romantic poetry. In Meghanadavadha Kavya, Meghanada is the reason for the sorrow, the



metaphor for the poet's own expeditious devastating catastrophe [...]. But if Meghanada is his agonizing contentment, then who would be his refuge? The deep interior of it is the poet's own life, and the external image of that refuge is Ravana. That is the reason why Meghanada could not be the poem's alpha and omega [...]. Ravana's prodigiously lingering silhouette engulfs and surpasses Meghanada. The romantic lyrical passion has affected the epic design [...]. [...] though knowingly the poet characterizes Meghanada as the protagonist, yet inadvertently Ravana permeates the poet's entire righteous insight and prevails there as a fundamental enshrinement. [...] in the deeper sense of the term Ravana is distinctively the protagonist of the poem. (quoted in Banerjee 211-12) (my translation)

The tragic endurance of Ravana is indeed far more inclusive in nature, and therefore much greater in intensity, than that of Meghanada. The ruined Ravana that we see in the ninth and last canto is justly worthy of the grandeur of a true tragic hero:

The monarch of the Rākṣasas stepped forward, then spoke with anguish, "It was my hope, Meghanāda, that I would close these eyes of mine for the final time with you before me – transferring to you, son, the responsibility for this kingdom, I would set out on my greatest journey. But Fate – how shall I ever comprehend His līlā? That joy eluded me. It was my hope to soothe my eyes, dear lad, by seeing you upon the Rākṣasas' regal throne, on your left my daughter-in-law, the Lakṣmī of this clan of Rākṣasas, as consort. Futile were those hopes. [...]

[...] Did I serve with care Śiva just to gain but these ends? How shall I ever turn back now – ah, who can tell me how I might return to Lankā and our empty home? (Seely, Canto 9, 383-92, 395-98)

In the ultimate analysis, it can be said that Ravana is the protagonist and Meghanada the worthy deuteragonist of the epic. Or, borrowing the two well-known terms from the domain of Political Science, we can venture to say that the hapless father is the *de facto* hero, while the star-crossed son is the *de jure* hero of the epic since it has been named after him. We should remember that Indrajit was the poet's 'favourite', and Ravana was to him a 'grand fellow'. One was the centre of his imaginative world and the other its circumference. And the poet's constant navigation between the two problematized the question of the 'real' hero.

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APPENDIX II

Evidence of Seminars  
Attended

(as per UGC guideline)



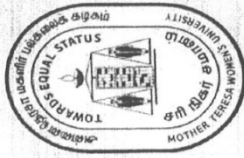
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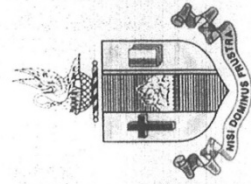
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Michael Madhusudan Bhatta's Mughadavada Kavya  
("The Slaying of Meghadada")?  
in the SELLTA International Conference on "English Language, World Literatures  
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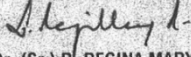
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