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### A Reading of Veera in *Raavanan* as a Byronic Hero

#### Abstract

The Byronic hero is a type of character popularized by works of lord Byron, whose protagonists often embodied this archetype. Most literary scholars and historians considers Byron' "Childe Herold's Pilgrimage as the first literary Byronic hero. Many of his contemporaries and predecessors also have produced Byronic heroes. Its wide variety extended from Mary Shelley's victor Frankenstein in Frankenstein to Charlotte Bronte's Mr. Rochester in Jane Eyre and Emily Bronte's Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights. This paper seeks present Ravanan movie by Mani Rathnam as a Byronic movie by portraying the character of Veera (Vikram) as a Byronic hero.

Key Words: Byronic heroes, Raavanan, Tormented souls

## Introduction

According to critics “Byron wants to introduce a hero archetype that would be not only appealing to readers but also more psychologically realistic”. They have distaste for social institutions and strictly follows their own personal moral codes. Byronic Heroes are charismatic characters with strong passions and ideals, but are mysterious and may act in ways which are anti-social. He is always self-centered and has his own set of beliefs which will not shake according to any circumstances.

Internal conflicts of Byronic heroes are heavily romanticized. Some of them are portrayed with a hint of dark crimes or tragedies in their part.

## OBJECTIVE

The main objective is to conceptualize Veera, the protagonist in the movie ‘*Raavanan*’ by Mani Rathnam as a Byronic Hero

## RESERCH METHODOLOGY

Byronic characters are usually a physically attractive male characters. In terms of personality, they are always fascinating and charismatic. He is very intelligent, educated, perceptive, worldly experienced, cunning, manipulative, but also self-cantered, arrogant and often traumatized and struggles with his own personal integrity and more than that “he is a he”.

He is emotionally and intellectually sensitive which often leads to an outburst of anger and disastrous. He is intensely self-critical, introspective and often suicidal. The mysterious and troubled past made him a tormented soul, exhausted, isolated (both physical and emotional) and mistrustful figure. He is extremely passionate with strong personal belief and considers his own passions and values above and better than those of others. Often his

intense determination to follow his own ideologies and philosophies by disrespecting others philosophies produce conflicts. Because of this he tends to rebel against the conventional modes of behavior and thoughts and shows disregards for ranks and privileges. This rebellion often results in social isolation, rejection or exile from the community.

Peter Thorslev's 'The Byronic Hero: Types and prototypes' is one of the most extensive works on the Byronic hero. According to Thorslev, the Byronic hero is one of the most important archetype of Romantic period,

"Romantic heroes", says Thorslev "represent an important tradition in our literature.... in England we have a reinterpreted Paradise Lost, a number of Gothic novels and dramas... the heroic romance of the younger Scott, Some of the poetry of Shelley, and the works of Byron. In all of these works the Byronic Hero is the one protagonist who in stature and in temperament best represents the [heroic] tradition in England (Thorslev 189)"

#### ANALYSIS

The Byronic hero is a type of character developed by the works of 19th century English romantic poet Lord Byron. This type of character gained importance during Romanticism.

Most literary scholars and historians considers Byron's Child Harold the protagonist of his great epic narrative poem "Child Herold's Pilgrimage" as the first literary Byronic hero. This archetype later emerged in Byron's major works such as Manfred and Don Juan. Lord Byron's works are often fictive and therefor they exhibit various cultures. This lead to change in Byronic Heroes with change of cultures. The concept of Byronic Hero is extremely different from Romantic Hero.

A romantic hero is a literary archetype having the characteristics like rejection and questioning the decorum and existing norms of social standards.

Byronic hero shares uniformity with the figure of Traditional heroes. Both tend to rebel against the conventional modes of behavior and thoughts, they are alien to the larger oppressive authority, but are focused on the 'self' as the center of existence. But Byronic heroes have a greater degree of psychological and emotional entanglement than Traditional heroes. The archetype of Byronic hero is not confined to the major poetic works of Lord Byron. Many of his contemporaries and predecessors also have produced Byronic heroes. Its wide variety extended from Mary Shelley's 'Victor Frankenstein' in Frankenstein to Charlotte Bronte's 'Mr. Rochester' in Jane Eyre and Emily Bronte's 'Heathcliff' in Wuthering Heights. The character of Byronic hero later become an influence for the formation of many leading puzzling protagonists.

The Byronic Hero has become everlasting figure in literature, films, and other forms of cultural phenomena. Byronic heroes fight against injustice, usually those done to them. Instead of having heroic virtues, they are pictured with some dark qualities and puzzling nature and often remote from society, seeking personal fulfilment. This archetype mysterious protagonist includes Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights, Mr. Rochester in Jane Eyre, Snape in Harry Potter series and Edward Collin in Twilight etc.

Indian movies also exhibited antiheroes, and tragic heroes. The character 'Veera' (Vikram) in the Tamil movie named Raavanan by Mani Ratham can be consider as a Byronic hero. He shares many of the salient features of Byronic hero to prove himself as an example of the archetype.

Mani Ratnam exhibits his protagonist as a violent, and strong person who jump from a hill top into the river underneath in the very first scene. The movie opens up with the hero, Veera standing on a hill top and pushes a small stone into the river flowing underneath. Then he jumps into the water from the hill top. Next scene shows some police being attacked by Veera;s followers. The very scene acts like an intercut to the scene showing Raagini, the

heroin. She is on a small boat. Then a big ship come closer to her and hits the boat and she is kidnapped. It was Veera and his people. The very first word she utters to Veera is “I’m not scared of you”. Not only that one instance there are so many scenes in which she says that, she is not scared of Veera.

Veera is a local hero who runs a parallel Government in rural areas. He is considered as a terrorist by the police and authority while for the rural people he is the hero. He kidnapped Raagini in order to take revenge for the death of his sister (Vennila). Veera bring Raagini to a cliff to shoot her, to death. She refused to being killed by Veera, and jump from the cliff in order to kill herself. Her fearlessness towards death, made him to hold off the murder. Her courage and mental strength develops an admiration and later develop into love.

There is a scene that Veera cutting the hand of a character named Venu. According to him, Venu is one of the reasons for his sister’s suicide. So he believes that cutting of Venu’s hand is not an unrighteous act. This shows his ardent love for his sister and his ideology about righteousness.

The flashback story of Veera reveals his troubled past, that is, about his sister Vennila. Dev had led the encounter team against Veera on the wedding function of Vennila. Dev shots Veera on his neck but managed to escaped. For getting Veera police arrested Vennila to get about Veera’s hideout. She refused and is subjected to physical and sexual assault. The very next day she suicides.

Veera’s story make a change in Ragini’s attitude towards him. The hatred towards him developed into sympathy and later love.

By the time Dev planned to kill Veera and entered into forest with other force. Finally, Dev encounters Veera on a rickety bridge. But then also Veera manages to escape and leaves Raagini. Dev was not happy with the exile of Veera and he use Raagini to find him. He makes Raagini angry giving her wrong information that Veera told about Raagini to

him. Raagini manages to find him to ask the truth. It was a trap by Dev to which Raagini unknowingly lead him to get Veera. Raagini tried to save him but she couldn't.

In the movie, Mani Rathnam exhibits the 'villainous Ravana', one of the major themes of Ramayana. The presentation of Rama, Sita and Ravana is in a different perspective. The villainous Ravana in Ramayana is pictured as a Byronic hero by keeping some connections to the Ravana in Ramayana. Mani Rathnam narrates a new story from an old story by exploring the villain of old story to an extent. He presented Ravana as the hero of his new story by adding some Byronic elements to the hero and gives a different outlook to the Mythical Ravana.

Mani Rathnam exhibits the character development of Veera interestingly which starts from a grey shade and converts into almost white. The graph of character development is similar to Dev but in a reverse order. Through Veera, Mani Rathnam is presenting a different point of view of Ravana in Ramayanam to his audience. The character growth of Veera, the representative of Ravana is subtle, gradual and convincing. Mani Rathnam presents the developments of both Dev and Veera in the very same scenes, but the scale to measure both are different.

## Conclusion

The dark setting of the movie adds the mysterious element. Veera is introduced as a strong, superhuman kind of person who shows distaste towards the authority. Veera continues to uphold the stereotype of the Byronic hero through his characteristics of arrogance, intelligence and independence. He keeps his 'bipolar' behavior by being soft, lovable, warm, and a happy person among his rural society and rough, violent, cunning, disastrous towards authority. He follows his own norms of righteousness, and moral principles.

The death of Veera's sister was the source of his potential to take revenge on the people who did the crime. Veera was waiting for a chance to meet Dev not in a simple way rather he wants to create his similar situation of losing the loved one. For that he kidnapped Raagini. His urge for taking revenge is clear from this act. But instead of killing the very person who are the reason for her death, Veera destructs all police officers in front of him. He was a mysterious soul and is always aware of external forces that could attack him. He is emotionally and intellectually weak and sensitive. By the end of the movie dark, violent, and mysterious character of Veera developed into white. All the characteristic features of Veera, the protagonist in the movie exhibits him as a best example of a Byronic Hero, combined with the concept of Ravana.

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