

The Asian Age

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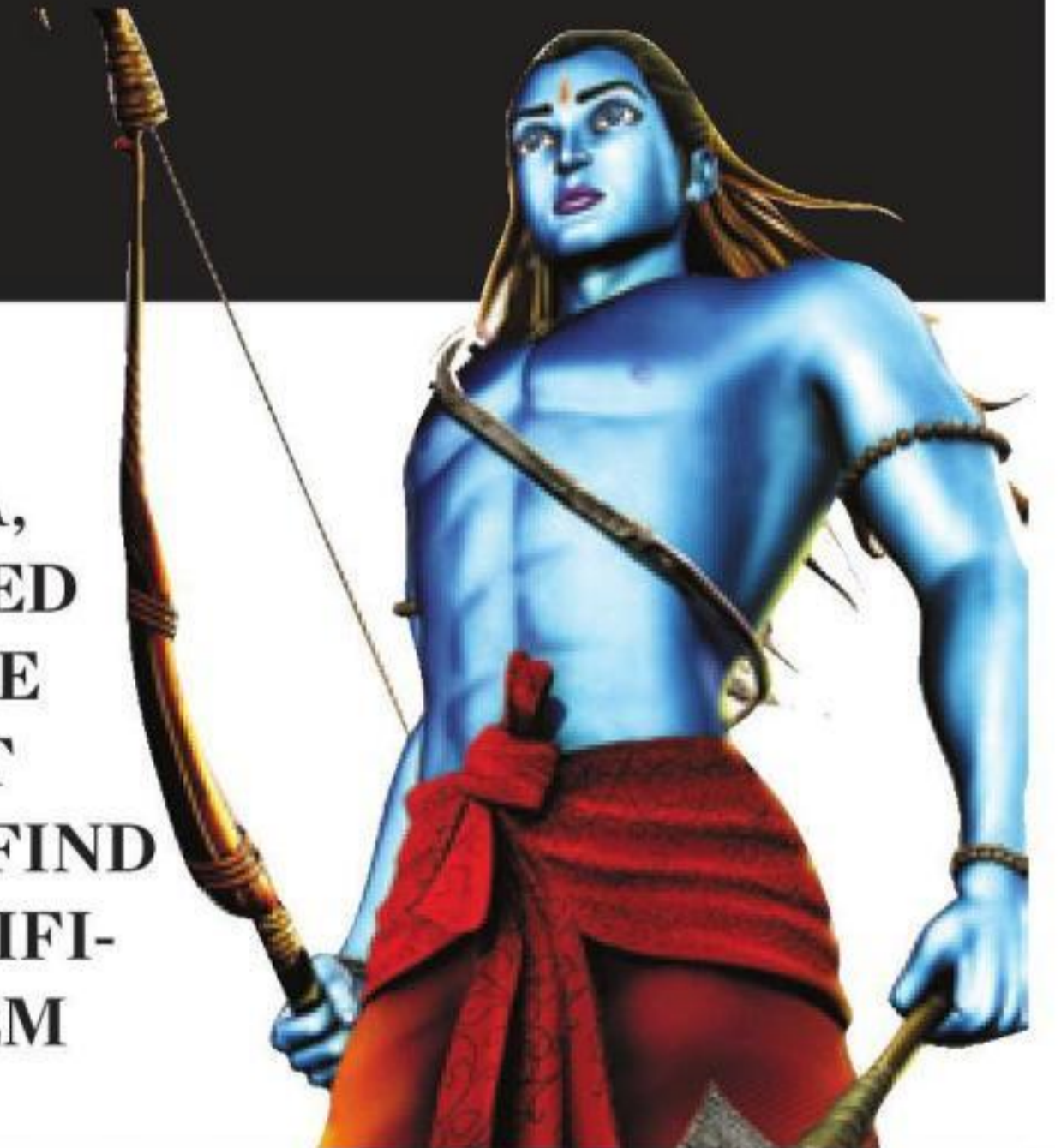
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RAMAYANA

2.0

MODERN DAY MYTHOLOGISTS ARE TAKING A RELOOK AT THE RAMAYANA, AND REINTERPRETING IT. CELEBRATED AUTHORS TALK ABOUT WHY THEY ARE DRAWN TO REVISIT THE EPIC, HOW IT INSPIRES THEM, CHARACTERS THEY FIND FASCINATING AND THE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE THAT DIWALI HOLDS FOR THEM



She transformed herself into a beautiful woman, and approached Lakshmana. But Lakshmana was not deceived. He saw a demoness, in human form, and his hands inched towards his sheathed sword.

WHAT HE DID NEXT, IN A MOMENT OF IMPULSE, WAS TO CHANGE OUR LIVES FOREVER.

Violence breeds violence, and an unjust act only begets greater injustice. Rama should have stopped him.

INSTEAD, HE SPURRED HIM ON.

ILLUSTRATION BY MOYNA CHITRAKAR. IMAGE FROM GRAPHIC NOVEL, SITA'S RAMAYANA

ASHWIN SANGHI

author of *The Krishna Key*

THE ULTIMATE VICTORY OF GOOD

Even though we usually think of the Ramayana as either the *Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas or the original epic by Valmiki, we often forget that there are over 300 versions of the story in existence. I find this fascinating (as a writer of mythological and historical fiction) because it tells me that your truth may be different to my truth.

Good stories are rarely about truth. It has often been said that a myth is a lie that reveals a deeper, concealed truth. For me the Ramayana is simply about the ultimate victory of good over evil, not about who the good ones were and who the bad ones were.

The most fascinating character within the Ramayana to my mind is Ravana. He is a bundle of contradictions. Wise and learned yet impulsive, excitable and lustful. It is Churchill who said that "history is written by the victors". I am excited by the prospect that the evil character that Ravana is portrayed as may be simply reflective of the fact that the story was written by the victors.

We can light lamps but feel darkness within. Diwali is an opportunity for enlightenment within

ASHWIN SANGHI



I grew up in a home where the chanting of the *Sunderkand* was a permanent daily feature. *Panditji* would attempt to make me recite it but I was always more interested in the delicious *prasad* that would follow!

Etymologically, 'Diwali' is a contraction of the Sanskrit 'Dipavali' (*Dipa* = lamp, *vali* = row, *Dipavali* = row of lamps). As I see it, we can light as many lamps as we want but can continue to feel darkness within. Diwali should be an opportunity for illumination of someone else's life and enlightenment within.

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