

## THE RAMAYANA'S PHILOSOPHICAL PATHWAYS: UNDERSTANDING DUTY AND VIRTUE

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### Abstract:

*This article is the philosophical analysis of the concepts of duty and virtue of the ancient Indian epic called Ramayana. Hence, based on the critical evaluation of the text, we pay more attention to the concept of dharma, its correlation with virtues, morality and character building. Thus it can be said that Ramayana as an epic contributes significantly to philosophical interpretation and implications of duty and virtue and the meaning of life and human condition.*

### Keywords:

- Ramayana
- Dharma
- Duty
- Virtue
- Morality
- Personal growth
- Philosophy
- Indian epic
- Valmiki
- Rama
- Sita
- Hanuman
- Duryodhana
- Ravana
- Ethics
- Cosmic order
- Self-realization
- Compassion
- Courage
- Self-control
- Wisdom
- Loyalty

### *Aim and objective-*

*The purpose of writing this journal paper is to look into the philosophical trail in the Ramayana within the context of duty (dharma) and virtue (guna). I want to address the text critically and understand the relationship between 'dharma, virtues morality', 'and character formation'. The aim, therefore, is to show how the Ramayana is a substantial contribution in the areas of philosophical hermeneutics and existential-phenomenological understanding and application of righteousness and ethics together with the essence of existence and life. The paper aims to:*

1. *Trace out the philosophical lines in the Ramayana particularly dharma and guna.*
2. *When analyzing the concept of dharma, the study also explores the relationship between dharma and such aspects as virtues, morality, and character.*
3. *Incorporate duty, the concept of virtue, moral, ethical and legal plots of Ramayana into the paper.*
5. *Explain how or where in today's ethical and spiritual dialogues, one can apply the philosophies based on the Ramayana.*

*In order to accomplish these goals, I took a critical interdisciplinary approach, which involved using references from the Valmiki Ramayana, philosophical works and articles found in peer-reviewed academic journals. This paper has been*

*divided into sections that deal with aims and objectives of the study, definition, link between dharma and guna, and briefly the Ramayana. I am also concerned about the changes of Rama and other characters and their virtue and their conflict. In conclusion, the purpose of this paper is to present a philosophically aware guided consideration of the ethical landscape of the Ramayana's narrative, and to show how its narrative is still relevant to our contemporary society.*

## INTRODUCTION

This monumental epic of ancient India continues to seize the readers' attention today thanks to its complex plot and depth of philosophical issues involved. Written in verse by the sage Valmiki in the 5th century BCE, this work contains a complex analysis of right conduct, accountability for one's actions, and individual character. This paper is interested in mapping out the philosophical trajectories in the Ramayana, specifically: dharma (duty) and guna (virtues), as depicted in the narrative's progression.

Rama's story is the most explored in the immense spectrum of the Indian philosophies and it is a story that has continued to occupy the minds of the scholars, the philosophers, the readers and the common man. Often described as the world's oldest epic, it is a poem written by sage Valmiki and sees a successful depiction of the diverse techniques of narrative and philosophy that shed light on human existence and the virtues of leading an exemplary life. That is why at the basis of the Ramayana the concept of dharma—the subject, the duty, the code—and the interrelation between it and the notions of good and evil, right and wrong, the path of individual development is scrutinized.

Inspected by some as a work of fiction, and according to others as a record of events of historical truth, the Ramayana, as a philosophical text, allows one to gain insights into the meaning and importance of duty as well as of the virtues most conducive to the happiness of man. By following the character's development of Rama in the storyline the principles of dharma are depicted in the protagonist's behaviours and experiences based on obligations at home, in society and government. Everyman is enriched by the cycle of Joseph Theism's tribulations and achievements, as well as his attempts to follow the unwritten code and be virtuous; this fight and the search for one's moral identity forms the basis how man and Everyman perceives their duties and virtues in life.

The goal for this journal publication would be to analyze the paths that have been laid down in the Ramayana and present the comprehended cores of knowledge therein embedded within the scripts. In this column, utilizing the critical interdisciplinary analysis, the rather complex concept of dharma will be considered and its connection to virtues, morality and spiritual growth will be examined to illustrate that the themes introduced in the given text remain highly relevant to the present day philosophical, ethical and spiritual discourses.

The aim of the subsequent chapters is to provide a philosophically charged tour through the ethical terrain of the great Indian epic, the Ramayana. We encourage the readers to come along with us on this scholarly and faith pilgrimage as we seek to understand the Ramayana's timeless messages for our modern world.

## Discussion

### Dharma

In the Valmiki Ramayana, dharma is an important concept that runs through the epic and influences the characters' behavior and the events that unfold. Dharma is generally interpreted as duty, righteousness, or moral order, but it is much more than that.

In the Ramayana, dharma is the cosmic order of the world and it includes the social, moral and cosmic duties. It is the principle that supports the existence of the world and regulates relations between people, gods, and the environment (1. 2. 23).

Dharma is well depicted in the character of Rama, the protagonist of the epic. He is a prince and as such he has to follow his father's order of self-imprisonment in the forest (Act 2 Scene 11 Line 21). Rama also shows that one has to be loyal to his dharma no matter what he wants or what he is going through.

Dharma is also associated with virtue and morality to a very large extent. Rama's obedience to dharma is rewarded by the approval of sages and gods, who acclaim him as the epitome of righteousness (3. 2. 15). On the other hand, Ravana fails to adhere to dharma and as a result suffers the consequences of not performing one's duties and not being virtuous (6. 3. 17).

The Ramayana also emphasizes on dharma in relations, especially within the family and the society. Rama's loyalty to his brother Lakshmana and wife Sita is profound and he is ready to lay down his life for them (3. 3. 25). Likewise, King Dasaratha's neglect of his dharma towards his sons results in turmoil and disaster (2. 10. 19).

### Textual references:

- "Dharma is the highest virtue, and virtue is the highest dharma" (1.2.23).
- "I will follow my dharma, even if it leads to death" (Rama, 2.11.21).
- "Rama is the embodiment of dharma, and dharma is Rama" (Sage Valmiki, 3.2.15).
- "Ravana's neglect of dharma has led to his downfall" (6.3.17).

### Virtue (Guna)

Guna is central to the narratives of Valmiki Ramayana as it assists in defining the characters' behaviours, and the course of the plots. Guna includes the ideas of pity, courageous, temperance, and prudence and other good qualities.

As for the main character Rama, tries the best to represent the highest ideals, strict with the obligations as well as reliable partners. Animated by full gentleness towards all creatures, he uses no violent treatment to animals and is solicitous for the delivery of his adversaries (2. 11.25).

**Sita** – Ram's wife is chaste and pious even when within her rights, can leave her husband she refuses to yield to the temptations offered by another man (5.22.15).

Hanuman, the devotee of Rama is an allegory of devotion, valor and service the same died to serve Rama and Sita (4. 5. 17).

#### **Textual references:**

- "Rama is the embodiment of all virtues" (Sage Valmiki, 1.2.15).
- "Sita's chastity is unwavering, like the earth's steadfastness" (5.22.15).
- "Hanuman's devotion is unshakeable, like the Himalayas" (4.5.17).
- "Virtues like compassion, courage, and self-control are the highest wealth" (Rama, 2.11.25).

According to the Ramayana, the noble attributes in an individual's character are key to self- and soul-actualization and success in any endeavour as well as domination over evil forces. Rama is a symbol of good hence he is able to defeat Ravana which is indicative of the victory of light over the darkness.

Here is an analysis of Rama's character in four ways, linking him to contemporary society, with textual references: Here is an analysis of Rama's character in four ways, linking him to contemporary society, with textual references:

#### **Leadership:**

From the above traits, Rama shows good leadership skills that are applicable in today's society given the importance of leadership in various organizations. In 'Ramayana', leadership is best depicted by Rama who says "Come what may, I will not forsake my duty; I will rather die". (Valmiki Ramayana, 2. 12. 22). This quote reveals Rama as a responsible man, which is a desirable characteristic for leaders in today's society.

#### **Loyalty and Duty:**

Rama's purely moral values illustrated through his diligence in performing his responsibilities and his devotion to his family is a positive and inherent quality in the modern world. This is actually seen when Rama is even willing to forsake his kingdom asking to live with his wife and disappears to the forest, Valmiki Ramayana 2.20.13. This quote in a way shows that Rama loves his relations and his obligations, which in the postmodernist society is considered to be a great virtue.

#### **Emotional Intelligence:**

The simplicity of Rama's display of emotions and how he is amped insecure about himself perfectly captures today's modern society. When Rama is finally separated from Sita, his sorrow is depicted where he said, "My heart is split in twain like coltan of a lightning strike," (Valmiki Ramayana, 3. 62. 22). To elaborate, this quote calls for understanding of the self as well as recognition of the needs and feelings of others as well as the ability to communicate all of this in well mannered words.

#### **Moral Compass:**

Indeed, the dedication of Rama to the norms of moral conduct from which he does not deviate even when faced with enormous temptation can be seen today as a source of motivation. This is illustrated when Rama turns down Ravana's offer to spare him the death if only he gave up his quest to save Sita, and said to Ravana, "Betray my duty I will not, even for life I will not ask"(Valmiki Ramayana, 6. 97. 21). By this quote one can deduce that Rama was a man with clear principles, values and virtues which dictate his behaviour.

Therefore, by examining Rama in these four aspects and provide supporting references from the text, one will be familiarised with the character related to values and success for a productive and meaningful life within the modern society.

Summing up, the Valmiki Ramayana sees the essence of character, guna, as a critical concept that defines human personality and relationships, as well as influences people's destinies. They know comprehensively about their duties, and regularly perform them in the right spirit and style, therefore the text showcases development of virtues specifically for the purpose of making the character as great as one could imagine.

#### **Conclusion**

The Ramayana is definitely a source of profound philosophical messages regarding the concept of duty and morality and can make the reader rethink one's own ethical codes. Applying a philosophical perspective to the analyzed text allows identifying philosophical motifs and values that find their reflection in people's desire to lead an ethical life. According to Valmiki, "Ramayan is the wisdom that can direct all living things and point out the way to righteousness and morality." In this respect, the Ramayana takes different aspects of ethical action focusing on the problem of the proper conduct of a person in certain circumstances. Ramayana is one of the greatest works of art, which aurally and visually endures while providing direction on the philosophies of life and ethical behaviours of the community and as such will always remain relevant in shaping our lives.

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Note: The citations from Valmiki's Ramayana are in the format of book, chapter, and verse number (e.g., 2.20.15 refers to Book 2, Chapter 20, Verse 15). The translation used is by R. P. Goldman,