



Analysing The Moral Values Of Ramayana In Contemporary Society Through The Perspective Of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari

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Abstract: Ramayana is the oldest classic literature or Itihasa, is the treasure house of knowledge, which has a special place in Indian Culture and Sanskrit literature. It is also known as the treatise of Dharma. The Ramayana is strewn with the exposition of the values of life from great sages. The Ramayana's ability to transmit moral and ethical lessons via engrossing stories is one of its greatest assets. The characters' decisions, struggles, and the results of their actions all provide important life lessons. Chakravarti Rajagopalachari was a meticulous crusader for human rights, an untiring social educator, a stupendous exponent of the spiritual heritage of India, a seasoned politician, a staunch moralist and at the same time a literary giant. His Ramayana, an exquisite blend of Valmiki, Kamban, Tulsidas and modern sensibility, is an index of his thorough enjoyment of the work.

In this paper, I have discussed the Ramayana's events and incidents, which taught us morality and virtues. As Rajagopalachari writes, "In every episode of Ramayana, some lesson which we should learn for our daily life is taught. The meaning in some places is clear, while in others, it may lie hidden. If we read with reverence and think deeply, we can always see the moral". It teaches adherence to dharma, raising human nature like Bharata, staying steadfast in the face of adversity, and emphasises the importance of loyalty, integrity, devotion and many more.

Index Terms - Ramayana, Moral Values, Valmiki, Tulsidas, Rajagopalachari

1.INTRODUCTION

India is one of the great and old countries in the world, in terms of its history, civilisation, culture and literature. In the vast realm of ancient India, where the confluence of history, spirituality and culture intertwines, lies a timeless Itihasa; Valmiki's Ramayana, that has captivated generations with its profound teachings and rich narrative. The Ramayana is regarded as the Adi-Kavya or Itihasa of the Indian culture. It is considered as the model for ethics, morality, virtue and appropriate behaviour for people worldwide. Studying the Ramayana is not about studying a story, but rather studying culture, society and religion. Since

antiquity, the Ramayana has perennially influenced the minds and attitudes of men and women in India. The reason for this popularity rests on the fact that “it has blended actuality with idealism, philosophy with religion, culture with society, rationality with animality, passion with morality, and past with the present” (Uma, 2005).

The Ramayana does not exist in a standardised form. The format in which Ramayana exists and the geographic location from where it originates influence its contents. The story is constructed and reconstructed every time the story is read, performed, drawn or sung. Despite the different versions of the Ramayana, “the essence of it has remained preserved as a universal source of inspiration regarding aesthetic and human values” (Djojonegoro, 1995). It may be because the principal concerns or messages of the Ramayana, has written in different periods are the same i.e. about ethics, virtue, management, politics and ideals for the people.

2. Valmiki, Kamban and Tulsidas

The telling of Ramayana by Valmiki, Kamban and Tulsidas is representative of the dominant culture throughout India. Valmiki's Ramayana is frequently considered as the foundation of all other versions of Ramayana. It was composed between the 2nd century BCE and to 2nd Century CE, in the Sanskrit language, consisting of 24,000 shlokas. The term ‘Ramayana’ comes from the two words ‘Ram’ and ‘Ayanam’. The word ‘ayanam’ in Sanskrit has a special connotation: it means the ‘course’ or ‘orbiting’ and is used in reference to a celestial luminary, such as the Sun (Sital, 1992). The meaning of Ramayana is ‘the coursing’ or ‘the orbiting’ of Ram on the earth.

Tulsidas composed the Ramcharitmanas around the 16th century in the Awadhi language. ‘Ramcharitmanas’ (Ram + Charita + Manas = Lake/ Sarovar) means the lake of holy acts of Rama. It was composed in the background of the Bhakti movement. Therefore, Tulsidas presents Ram and Sita as deities. Throughout the text, Ram is well aware of himself as a deity, an avatar of Vishnu. On the contrary, Valmiki presents Ram and Sita as mortal beings with divine qualities.

Kamban wrote the Ramavartam (which means Ram, the incarnation) between the 9th and 12th centuries in the Tamil language. Ram is repeatedly identified in the text as an incarnation of Vishnu by individuals who encounter and face him, yet he hardly ever demonstrates a direct understanding of his status as the highest deity.

Apart from these, it (Ramayanam) has been translated into the Telugu language by Ranganatha (12th century CE), Bhaskar (14th century CE), and Atukuri Molla (16th century CE) are equally famous. In Assam, Madhya Kandali wrote his Ramayana in the 14th century CE. In Orissa, Jagmohan, Ramdas and Dandi had composed the Ramayana around the 15th century CE. Eknath wrote the oldest Ramayana in Maharashtra in the 16th Century CE. In Gujarat, the best-known work on Ramayana was written by Gridhar Das in the 19th century. The Ramayana has left an undying influence, not only in India but also in other countries. It was translated into the Chinese language as Anamajatakam and Dasaratha Karthanam in the 3rd and 5th centuries CE, respectively. There is also a Tibetan Ramayana composed in the 8th century CE. The complete story of Ramayana was inscribed on stone in Java. Malaya, South Annam, and Cambodia are also impacted deeply. Traditionally, Valmiki's Ramayana is divided into seven Kandas. They are “Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kiskindha Kanda, Sundara Kanda, Yuddha Kanda and Uttara Kanda” (The Seven Kandas of Ramayana, 2016). There is one change in the Ramcharitmanas; instead of Yuddha Kanda, Tulsidas has

mentioned Lanka Kanda. The first book of the Ramayana depicts “the origin of Lord Ram and His siblings, their education and marriages. The Ayodhya Kanda deals with the events that led to his exile in the forest for fourteen years as well as Bharata’s effort to bring the Ram back to Ayodhya. The Aranya Kanda has detailed accounts of the last years of exile of Ram, Sita and Lakshmana, in the forest” (The Seven Kandas of Ramayana, 2016). Kishkindha Kand primarily focuses on the story of Vanara King Vali. The Sundar Kanda consists of detailed and vivid accounts of the adventures of Hanuman. The Yuddha Kanda is the greatest of the Kandas, as it contains the account of the Great Ramayana war between the army of Ram and Ravana. The last Kanda, Uttara Kanda, deals with the final years of Ram, Sita and his brothers.

3. Rajagopalachari’s Ramayana

Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, also known as “C.R.” or “Rajaji”, was a meticulous crusader for human rights, an untiring social educator, a stupendous exponent of the spiritual heritage of India, a seasoned politician, a staunch moralist and at the same time a literary giant. His Ramayana, an exquisite blend of Valmiki, Kamban, Tulsidas and modern sensibility, is an index of his thorough enjoyment of the work. He took seventeen months to complete the book of the Ramayana. He has written seventy-five chapters in the book, categorised on the basis of the chronological incident, which tries to teach morals and practical values to the people.

J.P. Waghorne writes that “The story-voice of Rajaji is at once the most revered and the most criticised of his styles. It is the element in the story of Rajaji, which entitles him to the name of Rajarshi – a royal sage” (Waghorne, 1985). He designated his two writings, Ramayana and Mahabharata, as the “best service I have rendered to my people” (Rajagopalachari, 2019). In 1958, Rajagopalachari was awarded a prize, the Sahitya Akademi Award in Tamil, for his retelling of the Ramayana- Chakravarti Thirumagan.

As I discussed earlier, the Ramayana has been repeated by poets in all Indian languages, each with their own additions and modifications. According to C. Rajagopalachari, “it is good to have the narrative written up for young people as told in the original literature” (Rajagopalachari, 2019). Rajaji further writes, “They are not just story books, they are the records of the mind and spirit of our forefathers who cared for the good, ever so much more than for the pleasant and who saw more of the mystery of life than we can do in our interminable pursuit for petty and illusory achievements in the material plane” (Rajagopalachari, 2019)

4. Relevance of Ramayana’s moral values in contemporary society

We learn the threefold dharma (code of behaviour) from the Ramayana, which applies to the individual, the family, and society. Everyone should aspire to the Ramayana's objectives. It discusses the sanctity of society, the true meaning of the family, and the true identity of the individual. Human value is emphasised in the Ramayana. Ram is a wonderful example of a person who upholds moral principles in society.

4.1 Ram: Maryada Purushottam

Sri Ram’s pure character, who was the best of men (Purushottam) and who observed due bounds of propriety in his behaviour, is inspiring and is guiding every individual even today after lakhs of years. According to Rajagopalachari, “Valmiki has filled pages with the tale of Ram’s Virtue. He wrote that Ram’s graceful frame and virile beauty, his strength, his courage, the purity of his heart, his perfect life, his compassion, sweetness of speech, his serenity, his deep wisdom, and his statesmanship were admired by the people” (Rajagopalachari, 2019).

- **Virtue of Self-Control:** In contemporary society, “even if a trivial attack is inflicted on the fulfilment of our desire, we not only fly into a rage on that basis but also get ready to kill or be killed for the realisation of that desire” (Shastri, 2011). But Sri Ram was resolute like a Yogi, who was not rattled even to a small extent when he was told he would be exiled for fourteen years despite being called for the coronation ceremony.
- **Ideal Son and Promise-Keeper:** Finding an example like Sri Ram’s devotion to his father is extremely difficult to obtain in the history of the world. His life was governed by the core principle of filial duty. When he was told he would be exiled for fourteen years to keep the promise of his father. He said that “it is my duty to fulfil my father’s word. It is all the same to me, whether it is just or unjust, spontaneous or extorted by force or fraud. If I fail in this primary duty, I can gain no satisfaction or good name through any amount of wealth or power” (Rajagopalachari, 2019, p. 89).
- The learnt Jabali, one of the priests who had escorted Bharata to see Ram in the forest, interjected a lesson on worldly wisdom for Ram's benefit at Ayodhya Kanda. He said that, “You talk again and again of your father’s command but he has now rejoined the five elements. Then, why do you like the foolish prating of dharma and seek to give up the good fortune to which you were born?” (Rajagopalachari, 2019). Ram replied him with much sharpness: “Sir, you seem to set little value on truth and rectitude. Your materialist talk fills me with such abhorrence that I wonder that an unbeliever like you should have been tolerated in the court” (Rajagopalachari, 2019). Vasistha and Bharata also tried to persuade him but Ram was adamant with his decision to keep the promise of his father. Ram’s devotion to his father was unbroken and incessant.
- But today the position of descendants of that very Ram is opposite. Mutual trust with the members of the family has generally ended. Nobody has confidence in anybody’s promises. Therefore, persons go back on their statements through given on written documents which are duly witnessed.
- **Excellent Friend:** Ram had very touching relations with his friends irrespective of their status. Some of them are Nishada Raj Guha, Sugreeva (the Vanar King) and Vibhishana (Brother of Ravana). In the same way, a leader should stand by his promise to build relationships with friends and followers.
- **Great Nobility and Virtue:** Ram showed great nobility and virtue even towards his enemies. One incident is when Ram kills Ravana and tells Lakshman to hurry and take blessings, words of wisdom and life lessons from Ravana. Laxman approaches Ravana and stands at his head and requested to share the knowledge. But Ravana did not say anything. Then Ram walked and knelt at Ravana’s feet, with palms joined and with extreme respect, he took the knowledge from Ravana.

4.2 Setting Ideals for the Family

There are different characters in the Ramayana through which one can learn the lesson in contemporary times with a family perspective. The love and respect for the brothers can easily be seen in the text. The devotion of Sita to her husband Ram, can be seen as she leaves the comfort of the palace and decides to go with Ram to live a difficult life in the forest.

Bharata is the ideal example of goodness among the Ramayana's characters. Bharata's love for Ram, his sorrow for his father, his sense of remorse and humiliation for his mother's actions, and his intrinsic noble

nature should all be considered in order to comprehend his emotions. Bharata ruled Ayodhya from the Nandigram as the in-charge of Ram. He never sits at the throne rather installed the sandals of Ram at that place.

An annual event honouring the story of Ram and Bharata's encounter at Chitrakoota is celebrated by the inhabitants of the Northern villages of India. In the midst of the vile self-interest of a wicked world, there have been great and noble souls throughout the ages whose virtue shines eternally. The Ramayana's depiction of Bharata as a person of unparalleled innocence and supreme selflessness is more than just a single episode. It elevates the heart and offers a glimpse of the potential of human nature when purified by dedication and love.

In the Ramayana, "Sumitra is a woman of few words, mature wisdom, great tact and infinite courage, full of faith, in whom 'hope' shines like a flame when it has gone out in all others" (Rajagopalachari, 2019). She embraced Lakshmana and said, "Your devotion to your brother has filled your mother's heart with pride and joy" (Rajagopalachari, 2019).

4.3 Greed leads to destruction: Kaikeyi possessed a noble image and was resistant to negative notions. But Manthara's malicious advice altered Kaikeyi's innocent heart. She was led astray by greed. It hindered her from properly comprehending her own son Bharata's thought. She could not look into the future and its sorrow, for what greater grief can come to woman than the scorn of her own son.

4.4 The fruit of one's action can never be escaped

Sometimes, in their ignorance, men would do terrible things for the sake of fleeting pleasure. When the time comes, the cost must be borne. Valmiki has described the power of Dasarath in the early pages of Ramayana. According to him, "He had mastered all the Vedas and Shastras, was a farsighted person, the hero of many battles, the performer of many sacrifices, a follower of dharma, a far-famed king with many friends and no foes. His power was like Indra's, his wealth was like Kubera's. In statesmanship, he was like Manu. Fate had ordered that such a one should exile his beloved son and die of a broken heart" (Rajagopalachari, 2019). In his last phase, Dasarath was reminding his great sin (killing of Shravan) that he committed in the days that are gone. And he believes all these were the result of that sin.

4.5 Learning from Ahalya

In the aashrama close to Mithila, Sage Gautama and his spouse Ahalya spent their days in meditation and tranquilly. When the guru was not present at the aashrama one day, Indra, who had an evil longing for the lovely Ahalya, went in disguise as Gautama and made an urgent plea to the woman. Although she was not tricked by the mimicry, she lost her sense of judgement and gave in to his desire because she was arrogant about her beauty and pleased that it had won her the lord of the celestials' love. Sage not only cursed Indra but also gave his wife a lengthy punishment for her transgression.

The moral from the Ahalya narrative is that, despite the terrible nature of one's sin, one may expect that penitence and punishment may release one from its effects. We should examine our own souls and make an effort to rid them of all negative thoughts rather than blaming others for their transgressions. Even the best of us must maintain constant watchfulness in order to avoid sin. This is the lesson learnt from Ahalya's mistake.

4.6 Jataayu's selfless act

Old and unarmed, Jataayu sacrificed his life to fight against Ravana, with his wings, beaks, and talon in an attempt to preserve Sita from the Calamity. According to Rajagopalchari, "Jataayu's battle with Ravana is more important than the battles in Lanka. Jataayu's devotion and heroism have been seen by Sita with her own eyes in Dandaka forest. Unarmed, he opposed the Rakshasa who had all his weapons and armour, and humbled his pride at the cost of his own life. Later, when Ram fights and is victorious in Lanka, Sita does not see it; she is a prisoner in the Asoka forest" (Rajagopalachari, 2019).

As a result, the religious see Jataayu as an Aalvaar, a guide on the sacred path, and venerate him alongside Bharata. When we witness someone in need or in danger, we should remember Jataayu and make a determined effort to assist them no matter what.

4.7 Anger confuses the mind

The Puranas' moral lesson is exemplified by the episode involving Vali and Sugreeva. Neither Sugreeva nor Vali had done anything really wrong. Anger causes mental confusion. One who yields to anger loses the capacity to see the truth. That way lies destruction. Vali's anger led to his end. Sugreeva humbly confessed the truth, but Vali would not listen. He was beside himself with rage. Sugreeva, too, was guilty of imprudent haste. He concluded too quickly that his brother had died. Due to fear of the Victorious Asura, he closed the entrance of the cave and returned home. At first, "he was not keen on becoming king, yet he allowed himself to be persuaded by the people. He yielded to a subconscious desire without sufficient thought. So difficulties came upon him. Thoughtless action leads to unhappiness." (Rajagopalachari, 2019, p. 265). This is what Sugreeva's narrative teaches us.

What belongs to someone else shouldn't be desired. One must be extremely cautious and restrain their desires. Unlike Sugreeva, "when the ministers and subjects in Ayodhya pressed Bharata to accept the crown, he was firm in his refusal" (Rajagopalachari, 2019). Bharata had a very strong moral code. Sugreeva, however, was different. He suffered as a result of his weakness. Bharata had the strength to refuse, and his name endures.

In this connection, there is one moral dilemma about the killing of Vali by the Ram. Rajaji writes that "Vali, as he lay dying, accuses Ram of cowardice. Tradition has it that Vali could not have been killed in a face-to-face encounter because of the 'protective virtue of Indira's necklace'" (Rajagopalachari, 2019). Srinivasan writes, "But this does not justify Vali being killed, for he had not offended Ram in any way. Here, the end itself is in dispute" (Srinivasan, Hindu Spirituality and Virtue Politics, 2014). Rajaji hinted that "Ram being an avatar does not excuse his action in this instance: When God takes a lower and limited form by his own ordinance, limitation follows and we should not be confused thereby" (Rajagopalachari, 2019)

4.8 Goodness in evil

Since nature has not created anyone who is completely and irredeemably evil, great poets in all languages depict their negative characters with empathy, occasionally letting their redeeming qualities show through. The poet wants to guide the reader towards the Saatvik way, which is the path of good. The reader is compelled to sympathise with characters who possess Raajasik and Taamsik traits. The images of Ravana and Kumbhakarna by Valmiki also exhibit creative excellence in displaying boldness, determination, vitality, and other positive attributes that draw us in and provide a contrast to their blackness.

4.9 Evil Counsel travels fast

When the Rakshasa king considered what Hanuman had accomplished in Lanka, he felt a mixture of fear and shame. He called his ministers and sought their advice. The members of assembly like Commander-in-chief Prahasta, Durmukha, Vajradamshtara and Nikumbha, praised Ravana for how he had invaded the city of Bhogavati, defeated the Naga King, Kuber and Yaksha. Thus, in an effort to appease Ravana, they stood up one by one and spoke courageously.

With folded hands, Vibheeshana stood at that moment and addressed the King, “Brother, what these people say is sweet to hear but not true or good to act upon. Anything done in violation of Niti Shastra (The Science of Politics) can only lead to grief and ruin. It is only after trying Saama, Daana and Bheda that one should think of using danda against a foe” (Rajagopalachari, 2019, p. 393). He further said that “We should also consider the demands of dharma. It was not right, it was indeed a great sin for you to have seized and brought Ram’s wife here. We should first cleanse ourselves of those sins. When the fault is on your side, it is morally not right that we should think of battle. Further, Warcraft requires that we take some measure of Ram’s strength before fighting” (Rajagopalachari, 2019).

Following that, Ravana summons the council once more to seek advice from his younger brother, Kumbhakarna. He addressed the sabha: “Great King! Ignoring the principles of statecraft, you have run into a great danger. If you had any grievances against Ram and Lakshmana, you should have met them face-to-face and defeated and slain them before carrying off Sita. If you had acted thus, even Sita would have admired you and there would then have been a possibility of her accepting you” (Rajagopalachari, 2019)

He further said, “You did not consult us before committing the offence and incurred the enmity of Ram, but now, when it is too late, you seek our counsel. This is not the right way of doing things that a king should follow” (Rajagopalachari, 2019). Having spoken thus harshly, Kumbhakarna agreed to fight for the sake of the brother he idolised. Rajagopalachari writes, “Some people suggest that Kumbhakarna was dull and so he thus contradicted himself; but it was not stupidity, it was due to generous affection that he accepted the inevitable fearlessly. He was a proud warrior who loved his brother and his people, and he decided on honourable death with them” (Rajagopalachari, 2019). According to Rajaji, he followed ‘ordinary morality, which is a simple thing’ (Rajagopalachari, 2019). Srinivasan writes that “While praising Kumbhakarna’s selfless loyalty, Rajaji hinted that Vibheeshana, who abandoned his brother, must be judged according to a higher morality” (Srinivasan, Gandhi's Conscience Keeper: C. Rajagopalachari and Indian Politics, 2018).

5. Conclusion

In order to approach works such as the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, readers must first make the difficult but typically unconsidered decision of “whether to see them on the one hand as some kind of historically informed mythology or, on the other, to understand them as inspired records of actual historical events” (Goldman, 2005). Rajagopalachari writes that “In every episode of Ramayana, some lesson which we should learn for our daily life is taught. The meaning in some places is clear, while in others, it may lie hidden. If we read with reverence and think deeply, we can always see the moral” (Rajagopalachari, 2019). Ram, the divine but very human king; Bharata, Ram's brother, who refused to accept the kingly authority since it was not rightfully his; and Vibheeshana, the man who prioritised dharma over all other allegiances or attachments. The significance of these special characters, whom Rajaji emphasised, is that “no character in C.R.’s narration

could place material or economic well-being above the righteous order. And, it was this sense of order that Rajagopalachari called the embodied culture of India” (Waghorne, 1985). According to Rajagopalachari, “To millions of men, women and children in India, the Ramayana is not a mere tale. It has more truth and meaning than the events in one’s own life. Just as plants grow under the influence of sunlight, the people of India grow in mental strength and culture by absorbing the glowing inspiration of the Ramayana” (Rajagopalachari, 2019).

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