

# The Ramayana's Code of Conduct: Pathways to A Just and Harmonious Society

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## Abstract

The research titled "The Ramayana's Code of Conduct: Pathways to a Just and Harmonious Society" seeks to explore, analyze, and critically evaluate the ethical framework and values enshrined in the Valmiki Ramayana. This ancient epic, beyond its mythological and literary significance, offers a profound moral compass that has shaped the cultural and social fabric of Indian society. The study aims to identify and interpret the principles of dharma (duty), satya (truth), seva (service), and compassion that define ideal behavior and social harmony as portrayed through its characters and narratives. Employing a descriptive and analytical approach, this research integrates perspectives from cultural anthropology and historical ethics to trace the evolution of these values across time. By grounding the study in textual interpretation and value theory, it highlights how the Ramayana serves not only as a spiritual and literary text but also as a guide for building a just and equitable society in both traditional and modern contexts.

**Keywords:** *Ethical Values, Social Harmony, Valmiki Ramayana, Cultural Ethics*

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## Introduction

The Ramayana has often been analyzed through various lenses, one of which interprets it as a symbolic depiction of the ideological tension between Aryans and non-Aryans. According to Shri Anandamurti, author of *Namah-Sivaya-Santaya*, the non-Aryans represent the indigenous people of India, deeply rooted in the Tantric spiritual traditions native to the region. In contrast, the Aryans, who migrated from Central Asia via Iran and modern Afghanistan, were nomadic warriors with a strong inclination toward ritualistic worship, particularly the performance of Yajnas to appease nature deities. This cultural dissonance sparked not only physical confrontations but also deeper ideological conflicts. While Aryans leaned toward external rituals and nature worship, the non-Aryans favored monistic introspection and rejected the ritualistic lifestyle, leading to tension and eventual resistance.

This dynamic has led some scholars to argue that Valmiki's Ramayana may reflect a partiality towards Aryan ideals, especially through its portrayal of the Asuras who disrupt Vedic sacrifices. Yet, the text itself acknowledges that the Asuras were adept in Tantra and possessed mystical powers, challenging simplistic identifications of them as merely evil or non-Aryan. Rama's conflict, then, appears less about racial supremacy and more about confronting malign forces that disrupted the meditative peace of the sages, possibly representing distortions of Tantric practices for selfish ends.

Beyond its cultural commentary, the Ramayana serves as an allegory of the timeless battle between virtue and vice. Rama exemplifies moral excellence, upholding values of duty, devotion, and righteousness in every relationship and role he embodies. Conversely, Ravana, despite his intelligence and martial prowess, becomes a symbol of moral decay and unchecked ego. His downfall illustrates the vulnerability of even the most powerful when driven by desire and pride. The long ordeals faced by characters like Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana emphasize that goodness often suffers but ultimately triumphs, as seen in the downfall of figures like Ravana and Vali.

From this viewpoint, the Ramayana transcends mere mythology, becoming a cultural and ethical framework embedded in India's heritage. It is not just a doctrinal treatise or a list of moral instructions, but rather a narrative embodying values through lived human experiences. "It is not a mere narration of conflicts and battles but contains the highest ideals of political and social life as well as religious ordinances and practices prevailing in that remote age. In this epic poem, the gods have not come down as men, but men, by dint of their virtues, have become gods" (Shadhu 56).

The sage Valmiki exhibits remarkable sensitivity in his characterizations, using storytelling not merely for narrative delight but as a profound means to communicate timeless ethical values. Lord Rama embodies a synthesis of ideal roles—a just ruler (Raja Dharma), a dutiful son (Putra Dharma), a devoted husband (Svami Dharma), and a loyal brother (Bhratṛ Dharma). Similarly, Sita, Kausalya, Tara, and Mandodari reflect the essence of womanly virtue (Strī Dharma). Characters such as Sumantra, Guhaka, Bharadvaja, Jatayu, Sampati, Sabari, and Hanuman represent exemplary models of service and loyalty, capturing the spirit of Praja Dharma or Sevaka Dharma. Valmiki's poetic genius is most visible in his choice to portray these characters as deeply human, capable of profound moral heights yet also vulnerable to emotional turmoil. Even Rama, known for his composure and wisdom, succumbs to grief when separated from Sita, as expressed in the verse:

"Yam vinā notsahē vīra muhūrtam api jīvitum / kva sā prāṇasahāyā mē Sītā surasutōpamā"—underscoring his emotional depth and love. Likewise, Sita, known for her gentleness, does not refrain from chastising Lakshmana when he hesitates to leave her alone, revealing the layered nature of each character and their emotional authenticity.

The Ramayana stands as a symbolic expression of Indian cultural consciousness, continuing the rich tradition of Vedic and Upanishadic values. Valmiki weaves key philosophical concepts like *ṛta* (cosmic order) and karma (moral causality) into his narrative. *Ṛta* reflects the unchangeable principles that guide the universe—from planetary motion and natural rhythms to moral cause and effect—stemming from the Upanishadic belief that all existence is an expression of Brahman. The commitment of characters to uphold Dharma, even in suffering, illustrates this cosmic principle. For example, King Dasaratha, despite his heartbreak, honors the promise made to Kaikeyi, underscoring the sanctity of one's word in Vedic ethics, a sentiment echoed in Tulsidas's words:

"Pran jaye par vachan na jaye"

Rama's encounter with the ocean god offers another philosophical metaphor. When the ocean fails to part, Rama threatens to punish it with his bow. However, the ocean god appears and explains that even he cannot violate the eternal laws of nature. This interaction—where water remains true to its essence—illustrates the inviolability of natural Dharma and reaffirms the *ṛta* doctrine as a guiding truth.

Divine forces, including gods, are portrayed supporting Rama in his mission against Ravana, reinforcing the belief in a universal moral framework where righteousness ultimately receives cosmic assistance. Rama's defeat of Ravana is not just a tale of heroism but a moral conquest aligned with the universe's ethical order. The Ramayana is a reservoir of universal human values suited to various social roles. While composed during a time of monarchies and different socio-political dynamics, its message retains relevance in the modern era. The values and ethical teachings it impart—grounded in love, truth, duty, and justice—remain applicable across time and cultures, offering profound guidance for personal and societal conduct.

### **Social Well-Being**

Social well-being refers to “the equilibrium junction between individuals' resources availability and challenges faced, as well as a condition of quality of life and satisfaction.” It signifies a balanced state where personal capabilities align with societal demands, resulting in a fulfilling and harmonious life experience within a community.

### **Methodology**

The research employed descriptive and analytical methods throughout its execution. It draws mainly from secondary sources including literary works, academic journals, newspapers, magazines, archives, and online platforms. “Simply put, this research is the simplest form and collaborative effort that represents an overall concept about Value as depicted in the Ramayana, explains the significance of the idea of ethos and values in ethical research, and investigates how ethical values have adopted this pioneering area to create one of their own.” The study aims to offer a cohesive insight into how traditional ethics are explored and understood through textual interpretation.

### **The Historical Background and Evaluation of Value Represented in Epics Based Research**

This study is a modest endeavor to examine and interpret the ethical values embedded in the Valmiki Ramayana. The objective is to provide a comprehensive explanation of the moral principles presented in the epic. “The present work is a humble attempt to explore and analyze the values enshrined in the Valmiki Ramayana. In other words, it aims at spelling out in details the ethics of the Ramayana. As this work is text based, all the observations and criticisms are substantiated by the relevant verses from the text. The Critical Edition on Valmiki Ramayana has been consulted all through. Since the verses have been quoted for thematic corroboration, the literal translation of them has not been attempted. We regret certain typographical omissions in respect of the diacritical marks.” The methodology includes critical references to the original Sanskrit verses, ensuring alignment with thematic interpretations drawn directly from the epic narrative.

### **Ethos And Values, Well-Being and Their Presentation Through Ramayana**

The Ramayana holds a significant place in Hindu mythology and serves not just as an epic tale but also as a source of moral education and ethical guidance. “The Ramayana is one of Hindu mythology's major epics. The Ramayana, written by the Hindu teacher Valmiki, is not only a story, but also an instructional tool that ancient sages used to emphasize the significance of performing your dharma (duty) in relationships. Characters such as the ideal parent, ideal son, ideal brother, ideal leader, ideal wife, and others are depicted in the Ramayana.” Through the narrative, young minds can grasp the core principles of right conduct and duty. “Children can be taught important values and ethics through storytelling. The Ramayana and Mahabharata, in particular, espouse a number of ideals that we would like to instill in our children. They are, after all, the most widely taught epics since antiquity.” These texts serve as timeless moral frameworks that can guide present and future generations toward a balanced and value-centered life.

## Objectives

The current paper aims to achieve the following key objectives:

1. "To trace how the ethics of value-based well-being has developed into a multi-dimensional variable in Indian Epics such as the 'Ramayana,' and to comprehend the development of the idea of Ethical Values, Social Well-being in Indian Epics such as the 'Ramayana.'" This includes exploring how the concept of ethics has evolved in the context of epic narratives and continues to influence contemporary socio-cultural thought.
2. "To locate ethical ideals, social well-being, and relevant literatures in epic studies that are spatially related to India." This involves identifying and compiling literary sources and frameworks that highlight value-centric traditions embedded in Indian epics.
3. "To describe the importance of ethical principles and social well-being in Epic Research, as well as to examine how researchers have embraced this pioneering area to create their own." This objective includes analyzing scholarly contributions and how they adapt these age-old moral concepts in the present academic and cultural contexts.

## Sthee Dharma

Aryan society was predominantly patriarchal, which led to the prolonged subjugation of women in social structures. Sociologists often point to this as a cause for the historical oppression and marginalization of women by men. Some even cite the Bible to argue that women were positioned as second-class citizens in society. It has been noted that women were frequently denied access to reading and interpreting the Bible themselves. Certain belief systems have even denied women the right to self-determination. In contrast, the Vedic and Upanishadic texts—forming the core of Indian cultural tradition—celebrate prominent figures such as Maitreyi, Gargi, and Lopamudra, who are renowned for their intellectual brilliance and spiritual depth.

The Ramayana, continuing the Upanishadic legacy, affirms this perspective. It upholds that in a harmonious and strong society; a woman holds equal importance to a man. Valmiki praises the multifaceted roles of a woman—as mother, wife, sister, nurse, friend, and teacher—in highly commendable terms.

The revered ideals of womanhood are vividly illustrated through characters like Sita, Kausalya, Tara, and Mandodari. Valmiki dignifies womanhood by portraying women not merely as biological vessels for continuation of the family line but as true partners to their husbands in achieving spiritual and moral merits.

It is aptly stated that — "Aryaputra pita mata bhrata putrastatha snusa

Svani punyani bnunjanah svara svam bhagyamupasate

Bhatrbhagyam tu bharyeka prapnoti puruarsabha" — meaning father, mother, son, brother, and other kin receive the rewards of their own deeds, yet the wife alone shares both the benefits and burdens of her husband's actions.

In the Ramayana, Rama urges Sita to return to Ayodhya to fulfill her responsibilities toward the aging, sorrowful king and the heartbroken Kausalya. Rama cautions her against going to the forest, warning her of dangers such as wild animals, venomous snakes, harsh winds, and violent waterfalls, which shock and deeply saddens Sita.

## Bhrit Dharma

It is undeniable that choosing to engage in a social or business setting inevitably connects an individual with others. One's role within family, organization, society, or state shapes how they relate to people around them.

The extent to which relational patterns are deeply embedded in both personal and collective consciousness influences the stability of social order. This calls for a shared internalization of values. These patterns are defined by norms or principles, which serve as benchmarks for judging actions or behavior as justified or unjustified, good or bad. They represent the standards individuals are expected to follow. Expressions like do's and don'ts capture these ideals, but their real impact comes when these values are embodied by individuals. Those who live by such ideals become role models, inspiring others across generations. Throughout history, the world has witnessed such enlightened individuals, making the narration of their virtues socially valuable in reminding society of often-overlooked principles. Additionally, literary masters contribute significantly by depicting ideal characters in plays, poems, and other artistic works. These classics play a crucial role in shaping both individual and collective mindsets toward desirable qualities.

Typically, readers and critics view Rama as the central embodiment of virtue and righteousness, with other characters seen as secondary. However, when considering the principles of brotherhood, Bharata stands out as the epitome of love, sacrifice, and moral integrity. Valmiki's portrayal of Bharata is considered among his finest achievements.

Rama is the sole focus of Bharata's devotion. He is not just Bharata's brother by birth but also the embodiment of 'Righteousness.' This is poignantly illustrated in the scene where Satrugna, alongside Kaikeyi, apprehends Manthara, the deceitful conspirator behind the tragic plot leading to their father's death and Rama's exile. Bharata cautions Satrugna against killing their mother, not merely because she is their mother, but because it would violate Rama's noble conscience, who would despise such an act of matricide. Bharata urges sparing Manthara, knowing that the righteous Rama would not approve of killing a woman who, according to Dharma's laws, is deserving of forgiveness.

"Tam preksa Bhratah krdhara Satrubhnamidambravit  
Abadyah sarvabhutanam pramadah ksanjatamiti."

This confession by Bharata—that he might consider killing his mother to avoid Rama's anger—does not suggest that Bharata lacked firm grounding in Dharma or that his love for Rama eclipsed all else.

## Mitra Dharma

The saying, "A friend in need is a friend indeed," has inspired poets, playwrights, lawmakers, philosophers, and religious thinkers from both Eastern and Western traditions to reflect on the value of friendship throughout history. An individual's rights and duties within a family, community, or society are shaped by the bonds they share within these groups. People are expected to behave in ways that align with their roles—whether as a son, father, husband, community member, worker, or citizen. For instance, a son must look after his parents' welfare; a father must care for his children; a husband must ensure the comfort of his wife; a community member must fulfill obligations to society; workers and traders must follow ethical standards; and citizens must act with loyalty. These relationships are formalized through rules or values, both explicit and implicit, upheld by the collective's norms.

Friendship, in its broadest form, is the warmth or mutual understanding that exists between individuals, groups, and even nations. At the societal level, friendship is grounded in shared interests, mutual agreements, and cooperation. On a personal level, however, true friendship is based on love, companionship, and self-sacrifice. It transcends distinctions of caste, color, gender, or race. A true friend stands by another in both prosperity and adversity.

“Utsave vyasane caiva durbhikse satr vighrahe  
Rajadvare smasaneca ya tistati sab bandhavah.”

Conversely, disloyalty, ingratitude, and betrayal of a friend's trust are considered grave moral failings. The Ramayana offers profound lessons on the ideals of friendship. Through the characters of Rama, Sugriva, and Vibhisana, a new and elevated understanding of friendship is revealed. Through the interplay of dramatic scenes and the emotional struggles expressed by its characters, Valmiki seeks to impress upon readers the essential principles of true friendship.

True friendship, as depicted in the Ramayana, is not motivated by personal gain but supports and promotes the cause of Dharma. As discussed in earlier chapters, Dharma is the central theme of the Ramayana, with other concepts revolving around it. Friendship is a related concept that can only be fully understood within the larger framework of Dharma.

### Sevaka Dharma

The previous chapter emphasized that Dharma is the central theme of the Ramayana, aiming to establish the reign of Dharma in the world. Dharma is described as the “fundamental and impersonal principle.” It serves as the stronghold of absolute truth. Vishnu is regarded as the supreme God, and Rama is believed to be an incarnation (Avatara) of Vishnu. Thus, Rama, as Vishnu's Avatara, embodies Dharma itself—he is the living manifestation of God.

“Aditya iva duspreksah samare satrbhih sada  
Bhavita hi tada Ramo nara Narayanah prabhuh”

Though he appears as the son of Dasaratha and the husband of Sita, Rama's divine nature is evident. To realize God is to be firmly rooted in Dharma. Every step taken toward spiritual elevation is essentially a step toward Dharma.

In the ancient Indian tradition, multiple paths to God are recognized, with the foremost being Karma (action), Jnana (knowledge), and Bhakti (devotion). These paths are not contradictory but rather complement one another. The most effective approach to achieving the highest state has been suggested as a combination of action and knowledge (Jnana-Karma Samucaya). Within theistic scriptures, devotion is often emphasized as the most accessible and reliable route to realizing the divine. For instance, in the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is urged to surrender himself completely at the feet of Lord Krishna:

“Sarva dharman parityeja mamekam saranam vraja  
Aham tvam sarvapapehhyah moksaisyami ma sucah”

Numerous scriptural texts also affirm that even those lacking formal education or literacy can attain knowledge of God through sincere devotion and wholehearted surrender.

### Raja Dharma

A ruler's disbelief in God is often seen as a disqualification. This highlights the unique nature of Raja Dharma as presented in the epic. Genuine faith in God as the all-encompassing reality naturally shapes a person's attitude toward society and fellow beings, especially that of a ruler. The belief in God, or the transcendental principle as the ultimate force administering cosmic justice, imposes moral restraints on rulers, preventing

them from acting against Dharma. Consequently, the ruler's guiding principles become unwavering service, sacrifice, truth, and justice. Even when a ruler falters, the awareness of guilt or wrongdoing motivates honorable conduct. From this perspective, the king serves as a custodian for the nation, entrusted with its protection and prosperity. The ruler is hailed as the genuine agent, caretaker, and guardian of all, embodying time, ages, and the universe itself.

“Raja karta ca gopta ca sarvasya jagatah pita  
Raja kalo yugam caiva raja sarvamidam jagat.”

Rama's depiction reflects the pinnacle of moral greatness, marked by his mental generosity and self-restraint. When Lakshmana reproaches Kaikeyi for her scheming, Rama compassionately attributes her actions to evil influences beyond her control. His moral stature is further enhanced by his rejection of Dasaratha's advice to seize the throne by force, preferring instead to honor his father's wishes over worldly pleasures. Rama's refusal to abandon the forest life, even when offered royal power, adds to his noble character. Bharata is remembered for his magnanimity and renunciation. The deep pain in Bharata's heart and his pure love for Rama are vividly portrayed. His defiance of advisors urging him to claim the throne, his journey to Chitrakuta, the suspicion cast on him by Guhaka and Bharadvaja, and his honest explanations enrich his character and add emotional depth to the epic.

While Vibhishana, exiled from Lanka, seeks refuge, Sugriva and Lakshmana initially distrust Rama. Yet, Rama generously offers shelter to Vibhishana, stating he would even protect Lanka if asked.

“Raja dharmasca karaasca dravyanam cottarao nidhih  
Dharmah subham va papara va rajamulam pravattate.”

The king's role is regarded as both honored and sacred. He is considered the source of all good and evil within the kingdom, the protector of the weak and helpless, the sight for the blind, and the guide for the lost. Raja Dharma, or the ethics of rulership, stands opposed to tyranny, which reduces individuals to mere cogs in a machine. The governance system in the Ramayana draws its strength and purpose from its ethical and spiritual foundation, which restrains both ruler and subjects from deviating from truth, justice, love, tolerance, sacrifice, and the motto “Live and let live.”

It is important to remember that the Ramayana is not a historical chronicle. It does not describe how kings actually ruled in ancient India but rather sets forth ideals for how a king should govern. In this sense, the Ramayana speaks in terms of ‘ought’ rather than ‘is.’ Furthermore, it is not a manual of rigid rules. Its metaphysical outlook shapes its values, meaning these values are interconnected parts of a larger worldview. Therefore, Raja Dharma cannot be considered in isolation but must be understood within Ramayana's broader understanding of humanity, nature, and the cosmos.

## Conclusion

The Ramayana has attracted scholars from diverse fields across both Eastern and Western traditions. Numerous studies have been undertaken, commentaries composed, and international conferences convened to explore various facets of this epic. However, it has rarely been the subject of deep philosophical inquiry. Indologists such as J. L. Brockington have attempted to reconstruct the social, political, religious, and economic landscape of ancient India primarily based on internal textual evidence. While we do not deny that history can be gleaned from the Ramayana, it is important to emphasize that the Ramayana itself is not a historical chronicle. Although history can be drawn from multiple literary sources, treating them strictly as

historical records is an overextension. Establishing the historicity of such claims requires not only internal textual evidence but also corroboration from external relevant sources.

The values embedded in the Ramayana are fundamentally humanistic. Although the term 'humanism' is often linked with the European Renaissance, the Indian tradition is no stranger to this spirit. Indeed, the humanistic ethos is deeply ingrained within India's cultural and traditional fabric. If by 'humanism' we refer to a reflective and critical mindset, respect for individual freedom and dignity, and a method for realizing the self, then to claim that classical Indian tradition lacks humanism would be inaccurate. Absolute values provide ample scope for human choice and freedom, thereby affirming human dignity. Values serve as guiding principles for actions and differ from the actions themselves. They are absolutely in that they justify all actual and potential actions. If humanism signifies individual freedom, dignity, and self-fulfillment, then the Ramayana stands as a powerful embodiment of humanistic ideals. It is important to note that self-fulfillment here does not imply selfish indulgence, but rather self-sacrifice and renunciation, which form the core message of the Ramayana.

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