

Original Article

Revisiting the Ramayana Modern Interpretations of Sita, Ravana, and Rama

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ABSTRACT: *The Ramayana is one of the five most influential epics in India and still inspires reinterpretations that go beyond its traditionally religious limits. Writers like Amish Tripathi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Devdutt Pattanaik, Anand Neelakantan, and Volga rewrite the Ramayana, focusing on its heroes Sita, Ravana, and Rama to rethink questions of gender, ethics, identity, leadership, and spirituality. Whereas these figures were often considered immutable moral avatars in highbrow literature, contemporary reimaginings eschew blind fidelity to religious law, instead depicting spirituality as a relatable process of self-discovery. This article explores how these reimaginings change the impetus of the Ramayana and contends that modern works ground their spirituality not in divine flawless action but in subjective consciousness, moral imperfection, empathy, and internal metamorphosis. These readings render the epic ever more applicable for twenty-first-century readers seeking ethical orientation amid contemporary social, political, and psychological crises.*

KEYWORDS: *Ramayana, Spirituality, Sita, Ravana, Rama, Contemporary Literature, Mythological Retellings, Indian Epics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ramayana stands at a unique threshold of Indian civilization; it is both a sacred text and a cultural narrative. Thought to have been composed by Valmiki, the epic has influenced moral underpinnings, religious beliefs, political philosophy, and arts across South and Southeast Asia. Whereas classical interpretations have tended to portray Rama as the personification of *righteousness* (dharma), Sita as the ideal of purity and devotion, and Ravana as an embodiment of ego and evil, modern literature subverts those allegorical classifications with greater nuance. Contemporary authors reappropriate these characters not in order to lessen the sacred significance of their roles somehow, but in search of psychological, philosophical, and spiritual insight. These reinterpretations seem indicative of the shifting social landscape, where spirituality is less ritual observance and more a trajectory toward ethical awareness, emotional wisdom, or self-exploration. Thus, the Ramayana transforms into a dynamic scripture, able to speak to or respond to modern-day issues on social justice, identity politics, gender equality, leadership, and vagueness of morality. Differentiating Spirituality from Institutional Religion: personal transformation, awareness of the inner world, compassion, and ethical living. In this context, modern interpretations of the Ramayana utilize such a large understanding of spirituality. Instead of portraying god-like characters as flawless entities, the current narratives portray them as those who face tough moral choices. Struggle, sacrifice, introspection, and acceptance that's how their spiritual journeys come about, not through some supernatural sense of perfection. This transformation allows readers to connect with epic characters as fellow truth seekers rather than distant divine figures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

For many centuries *The Ramayana* has been one of the literary and spiritual cornerstones of India, provoking generations of scholars to reflect on its philosophical, moral and more broadly cultural depth. Though more classical interpretations tend to stress dharma or devotion and principled kingship, the epic has been analyzed more recently through contemporary viewpoints such as feminism, postmodernism, psychology or spirituality, and myth criticism. This changing attitude indicates that Ramayana is an active narrative which can address contemporary social and existential issues.

By focusing on the diversity of Ramayana traditions, traditional scholarship has argued that there is no single authoritative account of the epic (A.K. Ramanujan, 1991). His notion of the many Ramayanas serves as a theoretical background to appreciate modern articulations of literature. Likewise, Paula Richman (1991; 2001) studies regional and contemporary reworkings that reformulate the epic frame in light of shifting ideological and cultural circumstances. These studies contribute to laying out the idea that reinterpretation is inherent within the Ramayana tradition itself.

Specifically, modern retellings have greatly enhanced the writing of *Sita, Ravana, and Rama*. The Forest of Enchantments (2019) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a reclamation of voice for the character Sita, whose spirituality rises in and out of each chapter as an independent narrator when met with humility, resilience and compassion. Similarly, The Liberation of Sita (2016) by Volga subverts patriarchal interpretations of the Ramayana through a narrative that relates Sita's journey as around

self-liberation and spiritual freedom flipped in the image of docile obedience. Such feminist reconceptualizations articulate a personal spirituality of liberation and ethical self-determination.

Interest in Ravana had also been rekindled by academic circles. Amish Tripathi (2019) reconstructs Ravana—who in the Hindu epics embodies both perfect dharma and the ultimate adharma—as a three-dimensional character: a brilliant but ambitious man of enormous talent continually at odds between his contradictions of love, loyalty and lust. Based on this viewpoint, Manojkumar (2023), in *Inconspicuous Multi-personality of Raavan in Amish Tripathi's Raavan – Enemy of the Aryavarta*, argues that Tripathi portrays Ravana as a personality with multi-dimensional development and which has both virtues and flaws co-existing. Instead of portraying total evil, it shows the contradictions within Ravana that make him a tragic character whose hubris leads to his downfall despite great spiritual insight. This interpretation provides key insights into analyzing Ravana as a representation of the struggle between intellect and passion.

Recent academic discourse has likewise reexamined the conception of women's agency within mythic texts. Nathan (2025) in *Female Agency in Myth: A Comparative Study of Sita from Valmiki's Ramayana to Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Forest of Enchantments* analyses the metamorphosis of Sita in Ramayana from an ideal image of obedience into her idea as a person with agency and autonomy. In this study, it is argued that the contemporary versions of Ramayana foreground Sita's moral consciousness and define her integrity but retain spiritual integrity. This comparative perspective provides a rationale for considering spirituality in the present study as empowerment rather than submission.

Spirituality has been an age old preoccupation of Indian literary scholarship. Nathan (2017) outlines self-realisation, ethical discipline and divine consciousness as key aspects of Tamil spiritual philosophy in his study of Thirumular's *Tirumandiram: a Spiritual Treasure Trove*. Despite being a study specific to Tirumandiram, it provides a significant conceptual frame of reference for understanding spirituality and drawing distinctions between ritualistic religion versus pure spirituality. The focus on inner change is consistent with recent adaptations of Ramayana, where spirituality manifests itself in self-awareness and accountability.

Nathan's overall work in literary criticism continues to show the long-lasting effects of identity, ethics, mythology, and philosophical inquiry. His books *Siddhartha* (2025), *Frankenstein* (2025), *Gun Island* (2026) and *Four Custers: Louis Erdrich's Fiction* (2026) induce existential meaning, posthuman ethics, environmental consciousness and cultural identity. While these texts explore varying literary traditions, they are all concerned with individual change and ethical consciousness. This view adds an interdisciplinary dimension to the study of mythology by affirming literature's function in examining spiritual and ethical matters.

Devdutt Pattanaik (2013) tests the concept of myth as literature against historicity: a case is also made for reading myths as paradigms over history. Myth, Pattanaik maintains, expresses eternal truths of the human psyche, morality and *tanha*, or consciousness through metaphorical narratives. This interpretative framework allows readers to understand contemporary retellings of the Ramayana as serious philosophical exchanges, rather than discontinuities.

Researchers like Wendy Doniger (2009) have also pointed out this pluralism in Hindu literature, showing how myths innovate through remixing and reinterpretation. Mircea Eliade (1959) also agrees by explaining that sacred narratives are essentially archetypes of behavior which serve as perpetual models for human existence because generations refresh and restate spiritual truths appropriate to the historical realities each time. Such theoretical frameworks provide a rationale for approaching contemporary literary adaptations as genuine spiritual responses to ancient sources.

While much scholarship has covered feminist retellings, the psychological interpretations of Sita and Ravana or reimagining of the myth, not a lot has been integrated into one lens covering the spiritual upliftment or decomposition of Sita or Rama, or Ravana. Previous studies tend to analyze these figures separately or to largely concentrate on gender politics, narrative innovation, or myth criticism. This study fills this gap by exploring how modern retellings together reconstruct the concept of spirituality through the journeys of these three characters found at the heart of the epic. The study considers spirituality not as religious orthodoxy, but in terms of ethical awareness, inner transformation, compassion and self-actualization; thus exhibiting the contemporary relevance of Ramayana.

2.1. REIMAGINING SITA: SPIRITUAL STRENGTH AND INNER LIBERATION

Many traditional versions honor Sita for her obedience, purity, and fidelity. In modern treatment, however, she is seen as a free, spiritual being with great wisdom and strength and moral authority. Writers like Volga take this mythological narrative of Sita being sent into exile to define the very meaning of self-realization, presenting it not as a story of suffering but rather a divine intervention promoting her spiritual awakening. These narratives position her as discovering her own agency rather than defining herself through Rama. Her spirituality is based on forgiveness, compassion, emotional resilience, and self-respect. Likewise, the focus on Sita as narrator and philosopher can also be found in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*. Her musings illustrate that spirituality is ultimately being able to grasp your own value and find compassion for

people who hurt you. Sita thus transformed from a perfect wife as defined by her husband or others into an independent spiritual mistress whose insight still serves as a compass in modern-day dialogues around gender justice and women's empowerment.

Sita is one of the most central characters from the Ramayana, has historically been seen as a figure known for her purity, obedience and patience, and unflinching loyalty to her husband. In a mainstream golden age narrative, she outshines the rest of her female mold where her entire identity revolves being part of Rama and his ideal wife. On the other hand, new retellings complicate this one-dimensional view by reestablishing Sita as a distinct character with her own will, ethical sense and spiritual freedom. Instead of degenerating from her classic virtues, these rearticulations unveil a deeper comprehension of her as a seeker whose adventure is characterized by fortitude, self-awareness, and independence. Thus, Sita and her significance go beyond that of a counsel object; she is truly a spiritual icon whose strength is in transforming pain into wisdom. Sita is not seeking to communicate a story of suffering in the spiritual domain but a tale of active transformation. She goes through banishment, captivity, public distrust, separation and finally she disappears from this world. But those experiences do not diminish her spirituality. They are not as a battleground, but rather, as arenas of an inner exploration that allows her to reach emotional clarity, moral certainty and uncompromising faith in the truth she believes. Sita draws her power not from external authority or conquest but from self-mastery, kindness and an unassailable awareness of inherent worth.

That spiritual aspect of Sita has been greatly magnified by modern authors. More recently, and more graphically, in her novel *The Forest of Enchantments*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni rendered Sita voiceless — but the nature of those silences illustrate why in this retelling she gives Sita herself a voice! Sita is no longer falling into the narratives created by kings, sages, or warriors; she writes her own destiny. Her musings reveal a woman who grapples with injustice, seeks insight into the ties that bind us all together, and finds spiritual wisdom through self-examination instead of acquiescence. Divakaruni's treatment brings forth that true spirituality never silences women but rather supports them to articulate the truth from their own lived experiences.

In a similar vein, Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* reinterprets exile as a spiritual journey rather than punishment. Sita enters into her own understanding of emancipation only through the interactions with women like Surpanakha, Renuka, Urmila and Ahalya who were wrongly held in subjugation by so-called social formations or relations. The only freedom comes from the way of being self-aware and compassionate and dismissing identities given by patriarchs. This re-reading of Volga uproots the component of spirituality as ritual obedience and festivals to a connotation embedded with inner strength: liberation (moksha) lays in unearthing the truer self. Recent scholarship reinforces this perspective. In *Male Agency in Myth: A Comparison of Sita in Valmiki's Ramayana to the Modern Retelling The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (2025), Nathan argues that rather than being submissive followers, modern retellings shift Sita into a role as an active moral agent who acts upon decisions informed by ethical consciousness. Nathan also claims that Sita's individuality only enhances her spirituality by showing how real faith goes hand in hand with self-respect, wisdom, and integrity. This new reading contests ingrained assumptions that imbue silence and self-denial with feminine virtue.

The connection of Sita with the nature in this context lends more spiritual meaning to her symbolism. Sita, the daughter of *Mother Earth* (Bhumi Devi), is a symbol of harmony between man and Nature. Her life is regularly rendered in forests, gardens, and hermitages which are places of meditation and sustained moral deliberation. The forest then becomes the sacred space Sita inhabits, unlike royal courts characterised by political authority and social stratification; she gains maturity, empathy and enlightenment. Thus, her return to the Earth at the end is less a repudiation than a reconciliation with that source of life that lies embodied in and among us showing too, we believe being shunted off to restaurant after restaurant yet never connecting spiritually can ultimately be peppered with emptiness, your peace returns when you return to your essence. The agni pariksha has for long been a flashpoint in the Ramayana. Seen most often in traditional readings as a trial by fire that validates Sita's virtue, modern interpreters read this scene instead as a kind of public consecration of her inner-self. So fire, you know, in many Indian specific philosophical traditions this very idea of purifying through a process of transformation and nihility. Sita, who is rescued from the flames, knows that her integrity comes from her own spiritual consciousness and cannot be determined by what the public says or how society judges. Hence, the episode becomes less of an external reference and more of a question of inner certainty.

Similarly, it is Sita's unique relationship with suffering that does not only define her but also highlights the spiritual identity of the whole society. While other characters respond with revenge or conqueror at adversity, Sita turns suffering into compassion and knowledge. She does not allow injustice to corrupt her moral sight. She has compassion, even in loss and humiliation; she has forgiveness and dignity. This ability represents one of the key teachings found throughout Indian philosophy: The liberation is within your mind, and when you allow nothing outside to determine your consciousness. So Sita is your spiritual warrior, not your passive civilian victim. This contrast between Sita and Ravana reveals to us even more about the spiritual construction happening in the Ramayana. Ravana is about getting, power and ownership whereas Sita is about renunciation, rectitude and self-realisation. Her body was kept in captivity in Lanka, but her mind has always remained free. You cannot capture consciousness. And although Ravana is the king of a rich kingdom and is widely-acclaimed to be an extremely erudite

scholar he even wrote his own 6-volume treatise on medicine, he can never rise out of his spiritual prison because he cannot overcome the shackles of ego attached to instinctual desire. Their meeting proves that true liberty is a feature of the inner human condition and not of the surrounding external situation.

Sita speaks to more than gender for contemporary readers. Against a backdrop of social pressure, identity crises, emotional pain and achievement-oriented striving, her life provides an example of internal steadiness and moral bravery. She teaches that spirituality is not determined by unquestioning obedience to dogma or worldly success but by the ability to hold on to compassion, respect and self-detection even if your circumstances are no good. Her story gives us permission to choose self awareness over external validation, fight over-festering hate, and honesty over the flavor of the month.

Atlast, Sita matures from being a victim into a living example of spirituality about suffering and freedom. She is not mighty in terms of physical prowess, political authority but a force for reminding herself and all around her of truth, compassion and freedom within. The Ramayana is a testament to this path of liberation the highest expression of man and spirituality wherein consciousness transcends itself by not escaping, but rather manifesting its ethical spirit in the world around it. And in this way, Sita remains one of the perennial exemplars of spiritual wisdom and human resilience to the very end of the epic.

2.2. RAVANA: FROM VILLAIN TO SPIRITUAL PARADOX

Ravana, even from the most perspectives and in contrast to all other characters of Ramayana remains one of the leaders plagued by monstrous spiritual intellect paradox. Traditionally, we see him simply as the antagonist whose pride leads to his ruin. But both the traditional Sanskrit Epic and modern translations expose a much more complicated character, a man whose life is emblematic of an extraordinary spiritual accomplishment marred by monumental moral collapse. Ravana is more than the opposite of Rama; he is rather the dark mirror of much spiritual knowledge that, when disconnected from self-sacrifice and humility becomes a path to self-sabotage. Ravana is not a traditional villain, he was educated in literature, Sanskrit and grammar but his characterisation is entirely unearthly; he was introduced as Brahmin by birth an accomplished scholar of the Vedas, master musician, great administrative capacity and a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He does many great austerities and earns a mighty boon from Brahma, and he is also remembered in the Shiva Tandava Stotram because of his devotion. These characteristics set him apart from mere depictions of evil. His error is not in ignorance but in the perversion of wisdom. There is, thus, anathema in the case of Ravana: a man who knows the divine realities theoretically but does not resonate with them ethically

When seen spiritually, Ravana represents the struggle between *jnana* (knowledge) and *anubhava* (realized wisdom). Throughout Indian philosophical traditions a consistent line is drawn between knowing the scripture and behaving in accordance with it. Ravana is a master of the first and hopeless at the second. He known dharma or cosmic order, but his hunger for power and prestige as well as personal desire stops him from transmuting knowledge into inner realization. A life like his is a solution wherein intellectual capacity cannot surpass the *ego* (ahamkara); the greatest hurdle to liberation in this world. The dilemma is intensified by the traditional approach of contemporary mythological fiction that portrays Ravana as a psychologically complex figure and not just an evil one diabolical demon. In the novel Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta, Amish Tripathi's portrayal is that of a visionary king bursting with ambition, intelligence and a fervent commitment to changing society. His virtues leadership, courage, strategic brilliance, artistic sensibilities and his flaws: impulsivity, a possessive nature and an insatiable hunger for recognition. Instead of representing absolute evil, Tripathi showcases a character who is in perpetual war with his own impulses. This complexity is what Manojkumar (2023) registers as Ravana's "multi-personality", where the novel disabuses simplistic moral binaries of good and evil by demonstrating that both can exist in one person. And this makes Ravana a standing metaphor for a fragmented human psyche in which virtue and vice cannot be dissociative elements of identity.

The ten heads of Ravana have deep rooted symbolic spiritual meaning Although popular imagination treats them literally, philosophical readings treat them as metaphors of the various modalities of human consciousness. They represent the competing desires, feelings, intellects and tendencies to behave in a certain way that exist within each person. In a different tradition of interpretation, the ten heads embody the ten obstructive desires: desire, anger, greed, attachment clinging pride or ego, jealousy-envy, selfishness insensitivity to others, injustice-immorality-cruelty-rudeness-diabolisms-original sin-depth and violence. destroying Ravana within you with the powers of your will is much more devastating than any damaging external enemy: His defeat by Rama is thus not only the story of one king besting another, but an epic of disciplined consciousness triumphing over fragmented desire. Another mind-boggling spiritual aspect of Ravana is his steadfast dedication to Shiva. In contrast to most literary villains it is not a fixation on power or ambition but his genuine love of the divine that drives Ravana; indeed, he was possibly Jain and perhaps Buddhist even if not actually Hindu. And yet, he still serves out a transactional relationship, rather than transformative one. He wants divine power without submitting his ego to divine wisdom. This difference is at the heart of Indian spiritual philosophy, that depicts bhakti (devotion) as authentic only with humility and sacrifice. Ravana worships Shiva with uncommon zeal but is unable to rise beyond pride, preventing a possible spiritual transcendence. His devotion gives him external strength but shackles him internally. Hence Ravana proves that without interior transformation, religious practice cannot liberate.

This clearly highlights the spiritual effects of personal ego when Ravana chose not to return Sita even after Mandodari, Vibhishana and his ministers repeatedly advised him on this issue. He is not incapable of perceiving reality; he instead willingly ignores it. The tragedy of this character is that pride triumphs over wisdom. This makes Ravana a fundamentally human character whose greatest foe is not Rama but his own inability to rise above selfish lust. His loss thus works as a spiritual parable that the disintegration of the self begins when knowledge is put at the service of ambition rather than compassion.

It is precisely because Ravana echoes the contradictions of contemporary life, that modern readers, far removed from their cultural and contextual moorings in ancient India, find him appealing. We are steeped in technology and education that dwarfs any previous generation before us, and yet we continue to suffer through moral gulfs the likes of which we thought had been extinguished; wars over meager scraps of resources fought by nations drunk on ambition. This contradiction is personified in Ravana: immense capability without a similar restraint on vice. His character serves to remind readers that there is no substitute for humility, empathy and moral accountability authenticity and vulnerability even among very intelligent, successful, authoritative figures. Arguably the biggest change in modern retellings is in the characterization of Ravana. He was made vain, greedy and then destroyed in classical traditions for carrying his overinflated view of self too far. But contemporary writers, of human and biographical interest, go beyond this: they interrogate his intellect, his devotion, his role as political leader, and his tragic vulnerabilities. Authors like Amish Tripathi and Anand Neelakantan have presented Ravana as a deeply nuanced character, one who does not become an evil presence but rather who cannot control his hubris, his unbridled ambition. Even after being well-versed in religious wisdom and devotion to Lord Shiva, Ravana himself was not able to defeat his *Ahamkar* (ego) and hence did not attain moksha, spiritual liberation. These recontextualizations reflect an essential lesson in spirituality: Learning by developing knowledge does lead to enlightenment. Intellectual accomplishment becomes a source of spiritual devastation without an undergirding humility and compassion, and self-control. Hence Ravana represents the battle between wisdom and ego which rages within every man.

Thus Ravana must not be only read as the antagonist of Ramayana. He is more accurately considered one of its most profound spiritual teachers an imperfect parallel in himself who illuminates the hubris of spiritual entitlement. Life is not a mere competition between Rama and Ravana, it is actually the battle of wisdom against ego, devotion against domination, self realization against self-glorification as his existence itself proves. This makes Ravana one of world literature's most enduring archetypes of the two-sidedness of man: that we have the potential for greatness, and that as long as we ignore our higher calling, we are only capable of lowliness.

2.3. RAMA: HUMANIZING THE DIVINE

The traditional narratives portray Rama as the ideal king, and an avatar of perfect divine righteousness. But modern reinterpretations retain his nobler instincts while reframing them through the troubled lens of his emotional state, leadership skills, and personal sacrifices. Instead of showing an idealized character, contemporary literature shows Rama as a leader walking the tightrope between justice and compassion. The dilemma over exile, kingship and blood becomes menace and power: a mere fact of thoughtless rule, rather than willing moral quandary. Spiritually, Rama represents disciplined consciousness. His greatness does not stem simply from divinity, but also from his vow of self-restraint, responsibility, and servitude. To modern readers, therefore, Rama appears less as an unattainably puritan deity and more as a model of mindful leadership negotiating competing ethical duties. One of the most significant transformations in modern readings centers around dharma. Conventional readings present dharma as the fulfilment of prescribed social duties. Recent works of literature understand the dharma in us to include an inner search for authenticity and moral integrity.

Rama is thus a unique figure among the protagonists of Ramayana: he is both divine incarnate and paragon of humanity. Conventional understanding deems him *Maryada Purushottama* – a larger than life figure who is ideal in righteousness, restraint, justice and compassion. Yet, more modern re-conceptualisations are beginning to move away from the idea that Rama is an unerring god and towards ideas around his human suffering, emotional weakness and moral dilemma. This does not make him less divine; on the contrary it exemplifies that his spiritual greatness is because of choosing dharma, even facing great personal suffering. Many mythological heroes are divine figures who sail through the conflicts of ordinary human life by virtue of their god-like status; Rama, on the other hand, is a king but also just an imperfect man who continually faces moments where no option available to him exists without losing something. Spirit indeed, if it is the spirit of God in Christ, will not work miracles to establish its power; but, by means of accepting exile for years, sacrificing personal happiness at all times out of loyalty to his father's promise and statecraft and time perception with a heroic passion for truth above love for one who suffers dreadfully testify that spirituality is expressed only as ethical action. Thus, his divinity is not borne out of miracles but moral fortitude, emotional self control and unwavering commitment to duty.

Rama so to speak is the manifestation of the dharma as awareness-based action. *Karma yoga* (selfless action) in the context of duty is arguably one of the most significant concepts found within the Bhagavad Gita. Even though the Gita came after Ramayana, the philosophy that is underlying this way of living was expressed by Rama in his life itself. Always choose group interest over self-interest in the decisions he made. Exile is an act of filial reverence not political loss; kingship (*rajya*) is a duty

rather than a right; and the defeat of Ravana are acts restoring moral order not simply vengeance. Rama shows through these choices that spirituality is a constant ethical commitment, even when being ethical means suffering extreme emotional loss.

This responsibility has also been projected in contemporary literary adaptations that signified a modernizing move, enabling them to humanize Rama among other considerations by foregrounding the psychological toll of these choices. Instead of showing him emotionally dead, or a robot, contemporary writers give us a king torn between the demands of family, kingdom and conscience. Such a point of view opens the reading that often leadership is much more black and white, where one has to make decisions in a morally grey situation when all decision will likely attract pain. The greatness of Rama then is his willingness to take the burden of difficult ethical decisions, rather than that he is perfect.

The relationship between Rama and Sita tells us more about his spiritual identity. Both classical and modern readings have wrestled with his choice to subject Sita to the trial-by-fire, and later exile her in response to public outcry. Though these episodes have continued to be some of the most contested elements of the Ramayana, modern scholarship increasingly sees these passages as ever-more complex manifestations of conflicts that arise when personal desire is repressed by public obligation. These stories do not make Rama an unimpeachable moral arbiter; instead, they reveal the ironies of kingship, the ways in which political duty runs afoul of private affection. This internal battle illustrates that spirituality is not having no suffering, but being able to act according to the heart instead of emotional turmoil.

More recent versions of the story Centralize Rama as a leader whose authority is service rather than dominance. In contrast to Ravana who governs with self-interest and a need for power, Rama rules with humility, duty and compassion. When he interacts with Hanuman, Bharata, Guha, Shabari and Vibhishana it is ceremonial but it extends beyond caste, social standing and birthplace. Spiritually, they remind us that true leadership is found not in the superiority of might with respect to this avoidance of error but rather egalitarianism and human dignity. The opposing forces of Rama and Ravana goes beyond the conventional between-good-and-evil dichotomy. At the level of spirit, they represent opposite orientations to power and epistemology. Ravana desires to conquer and possess the external world: Rama aspires to conquer the self through inner discipline and ethical restraint. The ultimate failure of Ravana is his lack of ability to control his lust, while Rama succeeds in using angelic powers of emotions as per their necessity to remain under dharma and override personal interest. These contrasts imply that the essential conflict of the Ramayana is not between external enemies but prohibitions vs. ego, intention vs. impulse; gives vs. gets; domination vs. service.

Rama has become increasingly relevant to contemporary readers because his trials highlight the ethical dilemmas of modern life. Political leaders, professionals, educators and ordinary folks often find themselves tangled up in dilemmas of competing harms such that every action is an unwelcome choice. Rama's journey counsels a judgment that is reflective rather than a moral absolutism. Here he shows that spirituality is not gained by perfect practices but honesty, taking responsibility for actions, love, and act of struggle to live the life we aspire together with justice and truth.

Each central character embodies a distinct spiritual response to *dharma*:

- Sita discovers dharma through self-respect, compassion, and resilience.
- Rama fulfills dharma through responsibility, sacrifice, and ethical governance.
- Ravana abandons dharma when personal ego overshadows spiritual wisdom.

These contrasting journeys demonstrate that spirituality is not defined by social status or divine birth but by one's continuous effort toward self-awareness and moral growth.

In the end, humanizing Rama allows him to become a more accessible embodiment of spiritual truth rather than simply an impersonal godly statue. He isn't divinely born with powers: the divinity is in his to live a life of ethics, compulsion, control and service. Modern retellings are encouraging readers to view Rama not as the idyllic image of virtue that is unreachable, but rather as an exemplar of mindful human being whose superiority derives from humility, service and a determined dedication to dharma. Thus, well expressed as he has used Rama for the guiding light thought of every man throughout ages upto your present and beyond.

3. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Ramayana retellings that still remain relevant highlight society's longing for eternal wisdom in an era of ever-changing landscapes. Among the challenges that modern readers stand in front of: gender equality, moral leadership, identity crisis and political accountability, psychological disorder, etc. Modern interpretations, in turn, to meet these challenges, forge spirituality as advice that one can actually take with them rather than a pet philosophy. This epic challenges the reader to look at what he is dealing with in terms of attachment, anger, ambition, forgiveness and compassion.

Modern authors reveal that the Ramayana still has spiritual relevance for modern life by putting less emphasis on debased morality, and more focus on the transformation of one's inner life. It demonstrates through the more modern retellings of

authors from Amish Tripathi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anand Neelakantan, Devdutt Pattanaik and Volga that Rama, Sita and Ravana are no longer understood as monolithic representations of good or evil. Instead, they appear as psychologically real, full-fledged human beings who are wrestling with the same questions of moral ambiguity and ethical confusion that plague modern society. Rama's ethical dilemmas echo contemporary discussions of responsible leadership and public accountability. Sita's odyssey mirrors a current debate on women's autonomy, honour and strength and defining themselves without being a mere function of male pride, while Ravana personifies the academic brilliance agonizing under the weight of an inflated ego reminding us that power without humility is personal and social suicide. The increasing stress on spirituality rather than ritualistic religiosity also makes the Ramayana more relevant. More and more, the spirit of our age calls for a spiritual wisdom which concerns itself with emotional health, moral obligation, and self-awareness rather than doctrinal fidelity. Within this framework, the epic teaches enduring truths about compassion and forgiveness, self-control, and a meditative striving towards dharma. In our contemporary world of globalisation marked by the threats of social fragmentation, technology, environmental disasters and moral indecision these values have a particularly important relevance. Also, the increase in mythological fiction that we see in millennials indicates a wider progression of young adults persuading themselves to approach ancient stories through contemporary lenses. Modern retellings ask readers to remember the traditions they have inherited, examine how multiple views shape understanding, and acknowledge that moral truth is rarely clean. These reinterpretations enable a conversation between casted aside traditions and modern societal values while showcasing that ancient epics are alive meditating upon changing social ethics as well as not losing its philosophical heft.

In the end, what makes the Ramayana relevant to modern times is not that it is a guide for blind obedience but rather a text that challenges readers to examine themselves. Contemporary readings of the epic heighten its relevance today, framing spirituality as a reflective and ethical journey marked by compassion. They exhort their audience to identify that the greatest battleground is not some external tussle between good and evil, but rather an internal contest fought every day between self vs humility, attachment v detachment, authority v responsibility and make Ramayana a permanent manual on how best we can navigate the challenges of modern being.

4. CONCLUSION

The modern adaptations of the Ramayana show us that spirituality is neither ritualistic nor about uncritical adulation. Rather, it comes from self-reflection, moral courage, emotional strength, and an everlasting willingness to recalibrate. Moreover, like they say, Sita, the epitome of righteousness, is transformed into a symbol of spiritual empowerment; the divine manifestation, Ravana, personifies the darkness of ego, even when or especially because he has mastered all branches of human knowledge, and Rama depicts the soul in conscious awareness with moral discipline as a leader. These changing depictions maintain the epic's religious significance while making it pertinent to contemporary audiences as we confront progressively intricate moral and social issues. Retellings of the Ramayana through spiritual expertise remind us how old stories still shed light on modern life, with perhaps the greatest battle being that fought within our own hearts.

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