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Ramayana And Mahabharata: The Role Model For The Development Of The Nation

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ABSTRACT

It is rooted in the ancient Vedic tradition, while still progressively adapting over thousands of years, both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are cultural texts which transmit values, navigate social questions, and create a sense of commonality amid their diversity. Historically, these epics have served as valuable resources for the construction of a national identity, especially during India's freedom struggle.

Objective: The study aims to explore the role models of Ramayana and Mahabharata for the development of a nation. **Research Methodology:** This investigation employs a qualitative, descriptive and interpretive approach based on textual analysis. **Results and Discussions:** The Ramayana and Mahabharata are not just two great epics in their poetic form and mythological interest; they are the sacred texts of Indian civilisation that continue to hold meaning in India's ethical, political and national consciousness.

Lessons through Ramayana and the Mahabharata: The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the twin epics of ancient Indian civilisation, are not just hallowed texts of religion and mythology but templates of civilisation and models for ethical, political, economic, and cultural development of a nation. **Conclusion:** The epics provide broad implications for nation-building. They highlight that the most important components of a strong nation are not economic or military power, but ethical governance, justice, a cohesive identity, responsible leadership and citizens' responsibilities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, two of ancient India's most significant and valued epics, have played a foundational role in developing the moral, cultural, and political consciousness of the Indian sub-continent. Beyond their literary value, these epics have served for the last two thousand years and continue to serve as frameworks for good governance, social duties (dharma), and collective identity, shaping India's nation-building process. It is rooted in the ancient Vedic

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tradition, while still progressively adapting over thousands of years, both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are cultural texts which transmit values, navigate social questions, and create a sense of commonality amid their diversity (Brockington, 1998; Doniger, 2009). The Ramayana, composed by the sage Valmiki, provides a transcendental view of a righteous king in the character of Rama, the embodiment of truth, sacrifice, and justice. His notion of dharma and the ideal of Ram Rajya (the rule of Rama) have reached recurring levels of reference in India's political milieu of good governance and moral responsibility (Sharma, 2007). The Mahabharata, attributed to Vyasa, provided a more nuanced moral universe, chronically contending with conflict between kinship, duty, and justice, through the Kuru dynasty and Krishna, whose dialogues in the Bhagavad Gita provide timeless ethical lessons for individuals and rulers alike (Buitenen, 1973; Radhakrishnan, 1993).

Historically, these epics have served as valuable resources for the construction of a national identity, especially during India's freedom struggle, where thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Aurobindo Ghosh interpreted and popularised the myths of duty, self-sacrifice, and collective responsibility it offered (Pattanaik, 2010). Currently, the Ramayana and Mahabharata continue to provide a wealth of civilisational values to the sociological journals that contribute to discourses around social justice, secularism, and political and cultural nationalism in contemporary India. The texts' narratives cut across religions and provide an agenda for ethical citizenship and inclusive governance urgently sought for nation-building in a unifying and pluralistic approach. Additionally, both texts offer deep realities, particularly now, as we function in a world reconfigured by moral and ethical rupture, and rapid contingencies and social changes develop extreme psychological stressors. Both texts developed as living epics that vitally inspire, warn and educate many generations to aim for a reasonably balanced, prosperous and wise life thereafter (Mandal, 2025). As long as a nation adheres to the ethics of both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the country will develop.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the study has tried to explore the role model of Ramayana and Mahabharata for the development of a nation.

II RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This investigation employs a qualitative, descriptive and interpretive methodology based on textual analysis in examining the Ramayana and Mahabharata as not solely literary or religious texts but as civilisation templates contributing to ethical governance,



societal order, and the development of a nation. This method brings together aspects of classical textual exegesis, philosophy, and socio-political analysis.

1. Research Nature: The research is qualitative and conceptual in nature whereby it explores epistemological and ethical aspects of two classical epics in the context of nation-building, reflecting the contemporary aspirations and anxieties of our time. The research is not based on empirical, field data because we are not dealing with morals or contexts of description, but drawing on primary ancient texts and secondary scholarly interpretations to examine civilizational issues that have relevance for governance, leadership of modern nations and identity.

2. Sources of Data

Primary sources: These are the Valmiki Ramayana (translated versions), the Mahabharata, especially the Bhagavad Gita, Shanti Parva, and Vidura Niti (translated by Ganguli and others).

Secondary sources: These are commentaries by established writers (e.g., Brockington, Doniger, Buitenen, Radhakrishnan), interpretive writings of thinkers in India, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Aurobindo, contemporary scholars, including Pattanaik, Mandal and Sharma, and academic literature on Indian philosophy, political thought and cultural history. These texts are also subject to critical analysis from hermeneutics and thematic analysis to obtain useful ideas relating to nation-building, governance, ethics and social development.

3. Method of Analysis: The study employs a thematic content analysis in identifying and defining themes across the epics – e.g. dharma, justice and ethical leadership, unity in diversity, educational consciousness, and environmental awareness – for present-day relevance in national development.

Civilizational Hermeneutics: The interpretations are anchored in our Indian civilizational ethos, and hence these texts can be viewed not merely as religious documents but as evolving guides for sound ethical living.

Comparative Framework: The selected ideas are compared from the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, focusing attention on complementary insights of philosophical thought and models of ethical leadership.

Historical-Philosophical Contextualization: The values from the epics can be traced through the values during the Indian freedom struggle (i.e. Ram Rajya), and ethics in the Gita and show how mytho-ethical ideals were important historically to the formation of the nation-state.

4. Research Approach: The approach is interdisciplinary and draws on the field of studies on: Literature – narrative and symbolic analysis, Political Science and Governance – ethical leadership, rule of law, and just statecraft, Philosophy and Ethics – dharma, moral agency, and justice, Cultural Studies – pluralism, and integrated national identity. The cross-field approach allows for a multi-dimensional perspective



to help understand how ancient epics provide direction for the contemporary political environment, leadership, and national cognition.

5. Scope and Limitations:

Scope: The study examines ethical and political lessons embedded in the texts and their implications for contemporary India's nation-building experience. The process is normative and prescriptive, attempting to derive ideals from a work rather than empirical data on trends.

Limitations: The study does not include ethnographic or quantitative data concerning public perceptions of the epics; neither does it consider sectarian or theological disputes about the texts. The interpretations are predominantly text-based and philosophical, and while historical influences are drawn upon (e.g. during the national movement), the inquiry is mainly theoretical.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Ramayana and Mahabharata are not just two great epics in their poetic form and mythological interest; they are the sacred texts of Indian civilisation that continue to hold meaning in India's ethical, political and national consciousness. They certainly represent the gamut of values, ideas and models of behaviour necessary for a country's holistic development. They do not talk only of the individual quest for salvation; they address broader questions of statecraft, justice, governance, leadership, and the welfare of the collective. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two great epics of Indian civilisation, do not simply provide resources for spiritual and moral development. However, they also offer enduring political and ethical education useful for all men of action and intellect. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata provide valuable lessons for nation building, and do so beyond their mythological context, examining the themes of governance, justice, leadership, social response, plurality and cultural unity - all essential to what is to become a strong and sustainable nation. In both philosophical and practical ways, the ideas, values and lessons contained in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata can provide real-world relevance for today's policy, civil society, and leadership.

1. Dharma (Righteousness and Social Order): The concept of dharma is central to both epics, and is like an octopus that has many arms and tentacles. Dharma encompasses a whole network of meanings, including righteousness, duty, law, and moral order. The Ramayana presents Rama as the ideal man, or Maryada Purushottama, who, even when it conflicts with his own happiness, holds dharma above all. And, he does this when he goes into exile in order to preserve his father's word and later sends Sita away in order to maintain the entire honour of his kingdom, which suggests that the greater social harmony is



more important than personal happiness (Sharma, 2007). While there are many lessons in each epic, an essential lesson from both epics is the emphasis on dharma, not just personal morality, which ought to be perceived in terms of a social moral code that is in place to ensure the collective.

In the Ramayana, Rama's life is an endless demonstration of the supremacy of his duty over his own self-interest and personal desires. For example, in order to fulfil his father's promise and ensure the stability of the state, he willingly accepts his exile (Sharma, 2007). The dilemmas faced by Arjuna and moral dilemmas in the Bhagavad Gita in the Mahabharata frame dharma as contextual, requiring ethical judgment relevant to the situation (Radhakrishnan, 1993). Nation-building lesson: While a nation can be governed, recognised, and controlled by laws, it is also upheld by morals and ethical principles which guide its institutions, its legal structure, and its leaders. Dharma is the underbelly of the rule of law, social justice, and public accountability.

In the Mahabharata, dharma is represented as a more fluid and context-sensitive principle. The moral quandary faced by Arjuna on the battlefield and Krishna's counsel in the Bhagavad Gita suggest that a failure to act when faced with injustice is to violate duty honourably. In this spirit of moral responsibility, Krishna tells Arjuna: "You have the right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action" (Bhagavad Gita, 2.47). Thus, dharma serves as a moral foundation for law, ethics and governance, supporting a just and sustainable social order.

2. Ram Rajya: The Ideal of Just and Moral Governance. In the Indian tradition, Ram Rajya represents a model of just and inclusive governance of the type where the ruler is a moral plan, and the people live a harmonious and prosperous life. Rama, as king, is built and valued as one who listens to his subjects, delivers justice consistently and is willing to sacrifice his personal comforts for the sake of his subjects (Pattanaik, 2010). Like other metaphors, the ideal of Ram Rajya has resurfaced many times in Indian political thinking, and was famously used by Mahatma Gandhi to describe a democratic state based on (and governments that pursue) principles of truth, non-violence and justice (Parekh, 1997). Nation-building lesson: Political leadership must be welfare-oriented, principled and ethical, transparent and responsive to what a population needs and wants. We cannot think of development in purely economic terms; development has to be just and inclusive. For his own purposes, Mahatma Gandhi would also mean taking this idea and using it in the articulation of his own vision of Swaraj or self-rule: "Ram Rajya means the rule of truth and justice.... in which the weak will have the same opportunity as the firm (Parekh, 1997, p. 24). This is part of

what modern democratic governance and participation are based upon, where the legitimacy of any government is based upon how well the government adheres to moral principles of justice and welfare.

3. Ethical Leadership and Statecraft: The epics present diverse models of leadership. Rama in the Ramayana epitomises ethical leadership. He leads by example; even though he is at the top of the political hierarchy, he is down-to-earth and is concerned with the suffering of the people. Krishna in the Mahabharata illustrates leadership that combines strategy and ethics. While Krishna's choices are often politically driven and can be understood if one is writing matter-of-factly, he was trying to restore dharma but simultaneously prevent disorder in society. The Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata is a developed treatment of rajniti (politics) that comprises a portion in which Bhishma instructs Yudhishtira in governmental structure, law, taxation, and administration. Bhishma underscores considerations for the needs of the marginalised, the meritocratic appointment and action of officials, and the security of rights (Ganguli, 1883–1896). The principles that Bhishma follows are consistent with those in a constitutional democracy that agrees a state should exist to be for all its citizens, be ruled fairly and in the public interest.

4. Pluralism and Nationality: Generally speaking, the two epics reflect a pluralistic ethos that facilitates various voices, regional standpoints, and philosophical points of reference. While the Mahabharata has the voices of women (Draupadi, Kunti, Gandhari), sages (Vyasa, Narada), tribes people (Ekalavya, Ghatotkacha), and philosophers (Vidura) added moral complexity to it. This pluralism is necessary to create a nation from a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious country like India. The epics suggest that the strength of a nation of states can derive from a nation governed by ethical considerations of diversity.

5. Justice, Law, Welfare and Protection of the Vulnerable: Justice is a recurrent theme in both epics. Rama's kingdom was known for its just governance. In the Mahabharata, the representations of justice and justice-seeking are significant for example, Vidura's advice to Dhritarashtra, Bhishma's instructions in the Shanti Parva, and Draupadi's predicament all signal the proper place of justice in the protection of the vulnerable (Ganguli, 1883-1896). Lesson for nation-building: Justice and social justice must underpin the national policies of governance. The justified subordination of the marginalised and oppressed women, minorities and the dispossessed is obligatory for the moral science and consent of absolute legitimacy of the state. The Mahabharata consistently asserts the responsibilities of a king to maintain justice and legal order. In Shanti Parva,



Bhishma clarified, “A king must be neutral and look after all classes with the same care ... Therefore, just like fire, warming the good and burning the wicked” (Mahabharata, Book XII). This is surprisingly close to contemporary concepts of welfare states, the rule of law, and distributive justice. Yudhishtira’s coronation post-war is not a victory of power; there is a restoration (dharma yuddha), suggesting the ethical ground of legitimate politics.

6. Sacrifice and Collective Capacity: The notion of self-sacrifice for the greater good permeates both congressional holy books. Rama sacrifices his life for the kingdom as a whole; Lakshmana sacrifices his life by abandoning the palace for his brother; Bharata sacrifices his throne not unjustly to claim it for himself. In the Mahabharata, the Pandavas sacrifice an absurd amount of time in exile for dharma, and, in the end, fight for restorative justice rather than vengeance.

7. Lesson for nation-building: Citizen behaviour and leader actions and decisions must be guided by collective responsibility, civic spirit, and patriotism (not narrow self-interest). National development cannot be achieved without the public sharing in sacrifices and identifying more fully with making decisions for the public good. Rama's banishment, Sita's separation, Lakshmana's exile, and Bharata's renunciation exemplify this idea that a nation allows for moral obedience and so sacrifice, as a condition of nationhood. Similarly, in the Mahabharata, the Pandavas (while often subject to injustice) accept the opprobrium of exile, dharma, banishment, and restoring social balance collectively. In fact, the Svargarohana Parva explicitly describes the Pandavas inundated in virtuous national leadership and service to others receiving Cosmic Honour for their commitment. These folk stories serve as reminders that the collective responsibility must trounce personal interest. This value aids in the socialisation of people capable of honest leadership within strong institutions and civic responsibility.

8. Education, Dialogue, Critical Inquiry and Knowledge Systems: The epics extol education, dialogue, and reasoned moral thinking. Dialogues in the epics (study the Gita, the Yaksha-Yudhishtira episode, and Krishna’s conversations) mediate the subject matter such that it is clear that decisions, whether personal or public, must arise from reasoned understanding and ethical reflection (Radhakrishnan, 1993). Nation-building lesson: a strong nation must promote education, awareness, intellectual freedom, and moral deliberation. Policy and governance must explore possibilities through critical thinking, never dogma. The epics promote critical thinking and dialogue in action. A plethora of debate exists in the Mahabharata, including Yudhishtira and Yaksha, Krishna and Arjuna, and Draupadi and Yudhishtira, thus signalling the merit of intellectual



inquiry and discourse in ethical and political decision-making. In Ramayana, too, Rama's dialogues are instructive—discussions with contemporaries and sages such as Vasishtha and Bharadwaja—about the merit of spiritual and moral education and matters of statecraft. This dimension of the epics clearly resonates with the vital role of meaningful education in developing democratic, aware, and participative citizens in the 21st century, building blocks of nationhood.

9. Leadership and Accountability: The epics afford deep insight and engagement in ethical leadership. In the case of Rama, leadership is understood through ethical decision-making and personal sacrifice in the pursuit of justice. In the Mahabharata, it would be safe to say that Krishna's leadership approach situates itself in terms of strategies for moral consequences and foresight, whilst mediating ethical challenges and dilemmas in the midst of crisis (Buitenen, 1973). Yudhishtira, for all his imperfections, musters and upholds truth and humility, and the willingness to repent, to become a king who learns from failure. Nation-building lesson: leaders ought to balance ethical beliefs with the pragmatics of public service. Political power is not derived from personal dominance; instead, its legitimacy rests on moral integrity, servitude to society, and public trust.

10. Unity in Diversity and Cultural Integration: Both epics represent multiple characters, spaces, languages, and beliefs. The Mahabharata carries multiple groups of people - such as sages, rulers, forest dwellers, outcastes, etc. - that include a pan-Indian cultural picture (Doniger, 2009). Likewise, the Ramayana is a representation of the people's integration across geographic areas and population groups, from Ayodhya in the north to Lanka in the south. Nation-building lesson: For nation-building in a country like India, cultural pluralism and unity in diversity are crucial strengths that cannot be ignored. Respect for one's regional, linguistic, and ethnic diversity has to be blended with our respect for each other through shared ethical principles and inclusive citizenship.

11. National Identity and Shared Cultural Heritage: The narratives of the Ramayana and Mahabharata have historically held together many co-existing strands of shared Indian identity across regions and regional sects. Throughout history, oral traditions, temple art, adaptations to regional settings and festivals have transformed Ramayana and Mahabharata into modes that fostered a civilizational unity that preceded nationalisms in its modern emergence (Brockington, 1998). Nation-building lesson: In nation-building, a nation has to look to its common and shared cultural and moral heritage to create a sense of unity and purpose. Such identity must include and not exclude, promoting coexistence, pride in difference, and cultural continuance.



III. LESSONS THROUGH RAMAYANA AND THE MAHABHARATA

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the twin epics of ancient Indian civilisation, are not just hallowed texts of religion and mythology but templates of civilisation and models for ethical, political, economic, and cultural development of a nation. Comprehensive visions of national issues like statecraft, justice, governance, social order, ethics, the obligations of rulers and citizens are all encapsulated in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. They can be constants but foundational texts for visioning ideals of a nation, grand nationhood, ideals of leadership, and the renewed political and spiritual power of both the people and the agents of the government in their relationships, hence ongoing requirements being central to the project of creating, maintaining and developing a prosperous and just society. The Ramayana describes its vision of ideal governance with the notion (the philosophy) of Rama Rajya - justice, welfare, moral order across a whole society. In Rama, dharma is depicted not only as a virtue of purity to oneself but also as committed to the authority and agency of the king. The public authored Rama is determined by his allegiance to godly actions for good, fairness, the protection of every citizen, and abiding by just principles of accountability to the whole of society (including public opinion), even when it causes him personal suffering, like the banishing of Sita because of public perception (Valmiki, trans. 1998). The philosophy of self-sacrificing and good leadership, the leader of a nation places the needs of the people above their own personal wants or attachments, is an important notion of ethical community-based leadership and solidarity - essential criteria for building something of a nation, and possible social harmony for people to endure, in modern governance. Contrarily, the Mahabharata offers a more complex but no less rational logic and rationale for behaviour in the public sphere in ascertaining the difficulties and their dynamics associated with governing a nation.

It examines the vulnerability of state institutions in cases when justice fails, such as what occurs in the Kauravas' thievery of the Pandavas' kingdom and in the shameless disrobing of Draupadi, which signals the collapse of both order and justice. The epic warns explicitly of nepotism, untempered desire and dissipation of morality in politics. The looming war of Kurukshetra is not underscored as something to be glorified, but as a tragic manifestation of a collective political failure in governance, diplomacy, and morals (Ganguli, trans. 2003). It teaches us that a nation cannot survive if it throws off dharma, no matter how potent or rich it may be. The project of Krishna's teaching (Bhagavad-Gita) should be added to the Mahabharata's engagement in philosophising about nation-building through civilian ethos that promotes directing one's duty, taking "righteous



action," and detaching from egoistic love for self. It argues that each person must act responsibly as, for instance, a ruler, warrior, teacher, or farmer, for their socio-order to remain meaningful (Bhagavad Gita, trans. 2004). This is tantamount to a modern civics ethic where no citizen can be without meaning to the progress and the prosperity of the nation. Both epics champion education and the dissemination of knowledge as a form of national strength. Rama's tutoring under Sage Vishwamitra and Yudhishtira's consultations with sages and learned men exemplify the imperative of nurturing wisdom and clarity of mind among ruling elites.

The Vidur Niti, the counsel of Vidura, found in the Mahabharata, describes a comprehensive framework of good governance consisting of elements such as meritocracy, frugality, law enforcement, and vulnerable group welfare (Ganguli, trans. 2003). These texts promote a nation that values not only material wealth but intellectual and ethical refinement.

Another important lesson found in both epics is that of social unity and inclusion, when the Ramayana unites many different communities - from the vanaras (monkey tribes) to rakshasas (demon clans) to sages and kings - under a common identity for the purpose of restoring justice, the alliance between Rama and Hanuman's tribe, indicates that a powerful nation can be formed from unity in diversity, respect for self and others, and shared values (Valmiki, trans. 1998). The Mahabharata stories indicate that the risks of internal fragmentation, jealousy and the lust for power fuel the Kaurava-Pandava conflict, which finds civil war destroys people, depopulates the region, and brings down an empire. The epic warns that internal discord fueled by caste divisions and dynastic politics can dismantle a nation from within, unless bridled by justice and restraint. Gender justice and the protection of women are at the core of a nation's moral character, not just victimisation. Sita in the Ramayana and Draupadi in the Mahabharata are the moral nexuses of their respective epics, and the treatment of Sita and Draupadi has national and cosmic consequences. National consequences can include the loss of moral legitimacy when women are dishonoured, destruction and ruin will follow (Valmiki, trans. 1998; Ganguli, trans. 2003). The stories also implicitly state that progress on a national level cannot be separated from gender equity and social justice.

Both epics go further and emphasise what can only be described as environmental, agrarian, and ethical philosophies. The Pandavas' use of natural resources during their time in exile also highlights a relationship where they functioned as stewards of the environment. A model of sustainability regarding natural wealth, environmental protection, and respect for the planet (Bhumi



Devi) emerges as a fundamental tenet of a dharmic nation (Valmiki, trans. 1998; Ganguli, trans. 2003).

These two epics also demonstrate concepts such as diplomatic relations, the ethics of warfare, and the extent of proper statecraft at an international level. Rama's erasure of Ravana and Lanka was not based on notions of empire, but rather justice and the seeking of Sita. Rama tries numerous options to settle with Ravana, establishing modalities for international engagement, including establishing peace before the war. The Mahabharata presents Krishna as attempting a peace mission right before the battle with the information that if a peaceful resolution cannot be achieved, we will have to engage in war (Ganguli, trans. 2003). These epics encourage modern nation-states to pursue peaceful resolution of conflict, international diplomacy, and concepts of just war theory.

IV. CONCLUSION

Both epics provide details regarding the relationship between the individual and society. Simply living a human life for one's own beliefs and desires only leads to alienation and ignorance. Yet, a life built around social coherence and with sociopolitical upliftment will eventually lead to a life sustained by happiness. Rama united the hermit, the hermit's community, and the animal together for a legitimate cause. This represents the potential for inclusivity and the concrete possibility for morality extending beyond nihilistic tendencies. The Mahabharata warns that kinsmen, caste, and community will destroy dharma or justice, leading society to destroy itself. Therefore, we should be encouraged by both epics to protect one's life for oneself, but also ultimately a life for society and the nation. Both of the epics provide the pathway to establish the qualities of a good leader for the nation. That is why there are both physical victories and reflective victories at the ends of both. Both finish as victors with regard to living a life; the duty, social justice and the journey/soul towards "higher" realisation.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata provide broad implications for nation-building. They highlight that the most important components of a strong nation are not economic or military power, but ethical governance, justice, a cohesive identity, responsible leadership and citizens' responsibilities. Today, with our world characterised by social fragmentation, moral ambivalence and political instability, the epics acknowledge perennial concepts for national regeneration, and as always, the challenge is implementing civilizational imperatives and values in present policies and teaching values to a humane, just, and united nation. When both epics are simultaneously - more than stories or divine beings and heroic wars - they offer civilizational blueprints for building a just, pluralistic and invigorated nation. The ideals of dharma, justice, leadership, unity in diversity, and sacrifice provide principles to refer to that can help form the moral and institutional framework of a nation. The pertinent lessons in an inclusive, equitable and zero-corruption nation state are for contemporary India, as



continued reflection is required from policymakers, educators and citizens concerning building an ethical and inclusive society.

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