



## Rethinking Greek Mythology and Indian Mythology

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.6945380

### Abstract

*This paper aims to look at Greek mythology, the “Iliad” and Indian mythology, “Ramayana” as a comparative study to foster common similarities based on plot construction and art of characterization. For this purpose, it would like to examine male and female characters in Greek mythology; myth in gender studies, gender in myth studies; truth, falsehood, and human knowledge; Ramayana as a reflection of social life; its impact on human life, culture and literature. The paper aims to motivate emerging scholars and novice researchers by making a comparative study between two great epics.*

**Keywords:** Greek Myth, Indian Myth, Achilles, Ravana, Sita, *Iliad*, and *Ramayana*.

### Introduction

Epics are long and elaborate poems. Usually, the heroism of a country or a particular culture and elaborate details of events are reflected in epic. In ancient times, oral poetry was also given the status of an epic. However, any story that is full of coherence and continuity within the poem is called a long narrative poem. And when the narrative poem becomes the reservoir of national philosophy, the image and character in its narrative are enhanced, and then that work attains the status of an epic poem. Nineteenth-century Bengali poets like Byron, Moore, Scott, etc. were attracted to epic. They feel the romantic imagination, variety, and drama of narrative poetry as the glory of poetry. They also think that epics are suitable mediums for expressing patriotism.

In the history of poetry, epic has occupied an important and exalted place since ancient times. Just as many differences can be observed in terms of inner nature and structural features between the works of different eras marked by the term ‘epic’, similarly, different ideas about the nature of epics have been prevalent for a long time. According to popular belief, *Ramayana* was composed by Valmiki, the earliest poet of India. There is no dispute in Indian culture that Rishi Valmiki, a contemporary of Rama and one of the characters of this epic, composed this epic. The original text of *Ramayana* written in Sanskrit is known as Valmiki Ramayana. The date of composition of this book is approximately the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.

According to Hindu belief, sage Valmiki is the author of this epic that belongs to the Smriti class of Hindu Shastra. In the epic, the ideals of human society are explained by presenting the roles of the ideal servant, ideal brother, the ideal wife and ideal king in



addition to describing the mutual duties of various relationships. Its influence on later Sanskrit poetry and Indian life and culture was immense.

For this purpose, in the paper, the researcher would like to make a comparative study between globally popular and familiar epics, namely the *Iliad*, and *Ramayana* to foster ancient thoughts and ideas regarding the roles of mortals, gods, and goddesses on battlefields. He has examined the characters and plots of both epics in a very short-cut way just to motivate emerging scholars and novice researchers from around the world.

### **Character in Greek Myth**

The heroic acts of Diomedes' father Tydeus, as recalled by him and other characters who knew him or knew about him, such as Agamemnon, who did not meet him, or Athene, who did, seem to be used by Homeric poetry to emphasize character. Agamemnon, the captain of the Greek army, was so enraged that Achilles, the greatest hero on their side, had taken possession of a slave girl, withdrew from the battle and took refuge in his camp. Deprived of his powerful aid, the Greek army collapsed. Agamemnon sends an emissary to offer him a lucrative compensation to appease Achilles' anger, but his anger is not appeased. As the Trojans scatter the Greeks and set their ships on fire, Achilles' friend and companion Patroclus could no longer stand still. With Achilles' permission, he advances to resist the Trojans. They retreat, but Patroclus is killed by Hector, the greatest hero on the Trojan side. Being maddened by that grief, Achilles returns to battle for revenge, not only killing Hector, but also neglecting chivalry in an act of ruthless revenge, and shows utter disrespect to his corpse. Achilles' anger subsides when Priam, the aged king of Troy, requests the return of his son's body, and, fills with pity; he returns the body as requested. Nestor frequently laments the loss of his youth and vitality, which inspires stories about his magnificent past and elevates him to the status of a legendary prior generation in his mind. Heroes typically pass away at a young age, as in Homer's *Iliad*, when Sarpedon, the son of Zeus, was killed by Patroclus, and by Hector, Patroclus, and Hectors, respectively. Achilles will soon pass away after killing Hector, as Patroclus, his horse Xanthos, his mother Thetis, and the dying Hector all warn and remind him of different times. On the other hand, Nestor has miraculously survived his own time by being a hero; in addition, as seen by his nostalgia in front of Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, he also survives his son Antilochus. Odysseus will either recount his illustrious past himself to the Phaeacians on Scheria and his family in Ithaca, or he will hear a bard do it. He and Nestor are exceptions to the rule that the hero does not live to recount his valiant acts; rather, his demise is the prerequisite for those deeds to transform into the peculiar thing in Greek myth. As a result, the narrator depicts Achilles, the best of the Achaeans, singing the "deeds of heroes" (*Iliad* 9.189) in front of a contemplative and silent Patroclus—actions that, of course, were not his own. Hector's dying request was for future generations to learn his heroic battles, and his passing.

### **Myth in Gender Studies, and Gender in Myth Studies**

Greek myths present women's experiences. Myth is always polysemic, and it is possible to interpret the same stories in ways that are unrelated to gender: myths of



sisterhood and displaying female unity frequently involve barriers between human and divine. How do humans respond to divine revelation? How can one cross the threshold between mortal and immortal? Many male-centred myths are particularly those of Dioscuri and Herakles. On multiple occasions, they successfully cross the line between death and life. Is feminist researchers' emphasis on myth merely a reflection of their concerns? Indeed, the importance of mythology in gender scholarship has never been matched by a substantial interest in gender among mythologists. Gender is one facet of myth interpretation, but it has not been a key one; mythology studies aim to focus on plot structure and the impact of ritual. As a result, the function of mythology in gender studies has grown far more important than gender in mythical studies. The myth invalidating and indoctrinating beliefs about men-women interactions are viewed as huge from one perspective but little from the other.

### **Truth, Falsehood, and Human Knowledge**

In terms of subject matter, Plato's myths tend to deal with non-verifiable aspects of experience beyond ordinary mortal knowledge: the nature of the soul and its fate after death, the divine creation of the cosmos. Since myths are concerned with the realm of human imagination rather than facts, questions of truth and falsehood are not straightforward. These issues are explicitly reflected in Plato's *Republic* when Socrates says that human beings, unlike the gods, cannot know about the distant past. But mythology, and especially legends of origin, can be important if falsehood which it inevitably involves is made to look as like the truth as possible. The truth to which Socrates refers is not a factual knowledge of historical events. Still, a moral or ethical truth has been presented in the *Republic*, as an example of precisely the kind of falsehood.

### **Ramayana as a Reflection of Social Life**

The epic *Ramayana* reveals how noble traits like loyalty, honesty, submission, and truthfulness foster the foundation of the civilized social order that ruled those times. The noble ideals of life that are reflected in *Ramayana* have influenced the Indian people in the field of their daily activities. Thus, it helps humankind to build human character at the early stage of life. Sri Aurobindo points out:

The work of Valmiki has been an agent of almost incalculable power in the moulding of the cultural mind of India: it has presented to it to be loved and initiated in figures like Rama and Sita, made so divinely and with such a revelation of reality as to become objects of enduring cult and worship, or like Hanuman, Laksmana, Bharata, the living human image of its ethical ideals, it has fashioned much of what is best and sweetest in the national character, and it has evoked and fixed in it those finer and exquisite yet firm soul-tones and that more delicate humanity of temperament which is a more valuable thing than the formal outsides of virtue and conducts. (Aurobindo 290)

### **Human Life, Culture and Literature**

An important theme in *Ramayana* is the profound impact that human daily lives and



cultural traditions have had on the lives of those living in various parts of India and beyond. *Ramayana*, India's oldest epic, is a treasure trove of wisdom and a treasure trove of information about ancient social and political concerns. Epic literature has a special place in the history of scholarship and religious thoughts. The activities and thoughts of Indians in succeeding times have also been profoundly influenced by the great epic called *Ramayana*. Not only it is a well-known epic, but it also serves as a moral code for Hindus. Because of its moral nature, epic teachings are simple to understand and remember. For the Hindu community, it teaches them how to live their lives following the ideas outlined in the scriptures of the Hindu faith. In this regard, the statement, made by Thein Hen, deserves anybody's special mention:

*Ramayana* is not only a literary treasure but also a source of ennobling influence on the relationship of men as parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, teachers and pupils and rulers and the ruled. (Aurobindo 290)

### ***Iliad and Ramayana***

Pattanaik (2016) points out that *Iliad* and *Ramayana* have some common similarities as two epics: The most significant is the conflict and war because of a woman. The conflict between Ram and Ravan occurs as a result of Sita's abduction by Ravan, the ruler of Lanka, while the battle between the Greeks and Trojans is brought about by Helen, who elopes with Paris, the prince of Troy. Both Ram and the Greeks had to cross the sea to lay siege to Troy. Both of them have a single, unbeatable fighter, Hanuman in *Ramayana* and Achilles in *Iliad*. Naturally, Hanuman has been presented as being far more powerful, gifted with superhuman abilities, and regarded as God. Achilles, in comparison, is only powerful with human traits and the son of Goddess Thetis. Hanuman has to be reminded of his strengths to become active, whereas Achilles requires a shock to become active again in the conflict. Two heroes command the battlefield in both *Iliad* and *Ramayana*. On the other hand, Agamemnon and Menelaus in *Iliad* and Ram and Laxman in *Ramayana*. The older sons of rivals are presented as powerful heroes. Indrajit, the senior son of Ravan in *Ramayana*, and Hector, the senior son of King Priam in the *Iliad*. In both epics, their deaths alter the trajectory of the conflict. Ravan and Paris are strongly persuaded to return Sita and Helen, respectively, for moral reasons to prevent war and carnage. (Rajan 2013)

However, there are some differences between *Iliad* and *Ramayana*: *Ramayana* is used as a source of preaching and learning for a good life and morality. In contrast to *Iliad*, which remains merely a literary work, it gains such prominence that it is adopted as sacred scripture by society and faith. While the eldest brother's wife in *Ramayana* is forcibly abducted, the younger brother's wife in *Iliad* elopes. In *Iliad*, gods support both parties, but in *Ramayana*, they support only Ram. In *Iliad*, characters are people who are helped by gods, but in *Ramayana*, Ram and Hanuman are divine figures who are helped by people as well as monkeys and bears that have human traits. Even during battle, there is a conflict



between the two heroes since they are determined to defeat each other. (Roychowdhury 2017)

Hanuman, on the other hand, is a devoted follower of Ram who is ready to sacrifice anything for him. In contrast to *Ramayana*, where bears and monkeys are given human or heavenly traits, *Iliad* lacks any animal characters. In *Iliad*, no one switches allegiances, but in *Ramayana*, Vibhishana abandons Ravan in favour of Ram due to moral considerations. The treatment of women following the war is arguably the most amazing and controversial factor. Menelaus and Helen reconcile after being reunited. As a result, Menelaus pardons Helen even though she elopes with Paris, and they decide to lead happy lives. On the other hand, Sita is taken away forcibly. She does not submit to Ravan, does not know him, and avoids going to his palace. She must still go through the “Agni Pariksha” (Ordeal) to demonstrate her purity. Ram asks her to leave the courtroom when she is still pregnant and leaves her penniless in Lanka.

Though the current researcher considers Ram divine, who does he not act like a mean person in not forgiving Sita though she is not at fault and leaving her destitute in a critical situation? Chastity, purity, love, and reconciliation seem to be regional and cultural treatment. Even today, Indian critics and scholars are seen to quote the example of Sita for being devoted to their husband, chaste and pure. But the man should also understand that she had to face dire consequences, a reprimand from society and the established social norms. A woman’s character should have suitability in matrimonial alliance in a community, which is wholly based on the purity of body and she has to face wrath from society despite her being a victim, which is questionable in the established social system.

### Conclusion

*Ramayana* is not simply a narrative: the teachings of the Hindu sages are presented through narrative parables with philosophical and devotional elements. The basic elements of Indian cultural consciousness are reflected in the characters of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman and Ravana. Characters and events in *Ramayana* provide ideas and knowledge of common life and help bind the people of India irrespective of caste and language. Two of India’s biggest festive events, Dussehra and Diwali, are directly inspired by *Ramayana*. On the other hand, Homer’s *Iliad* is written about the short-lived events in the tenth year of the siege of Troy by the Greeks as a result of the abduction of Helen, the extraordinarily beautiful wife of the Greek king Menelaus, by Paris, the prince of Troy. Gods are divided into two camps, joining two opposing sides and directly intervening in the war, with characters often resorting to the supernatural powers of gods. Greeks formulate some ideals of life: the need for unity among nations and that unity guarantees the principle of freedom. Man, certainly has a right to honour his heroism in taking revenge, but it is improper to insult the dead body of an enemy. Respect for his old father and his feelings about family life are also an integral part of heroism. The idea of the Greek nation is embodied in Homer’s *Iliad*. The philosophy embodied in *Ramayana* is much more comprehensive and grander, which is unmatched in world literature.



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**Author (s) Contribution Statement:** Nil

**Author (s) Acknowledgement:** Nil

**Author (s) Declaration:** I declare that there is no competing interest in the content and authorship of this scholarly work.



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