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A Comparative Analysis**

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Achilles and Rāma, Protagonists of the Iliad and the Rāmāyana: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

Homer's Iliad is the poem of Achilles—who "has allowed thymos to dominate his soul" (Edmundson 2012)—and his wrath. Rama of Valmiki's Ramayana is a man of righteousness personified, with an admirable mixture of wisdom and strength, courage and compassion, conviction and consideration, dedication and detachment—the basic virtues that make a man complete. Reading about Achilles' blind submission to pride and anger that brought endless sufferings to his own side, and ultimately to himself, makes a reader wearisome. On the other hand, Rama's submission to Dharma, even in the midst of the malice of circumstances, by the glory of his own choice bestows a grace, dignity and significance to his character. If poetry is "a vehicle of inspiration" for building the ideal human society, Rama becomes the choice to idealize, which is what this paper attempts to delineate.

Keywords: Achilles, Rama, Iliad, Ramayana, Agamemnon, Grief, Anger, Pride, Honour, Dharma, Courage, Humility, Nobility

As the very beginning of the *Iliad*—"Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring/Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly goddess, sing!/That wrath which hurl'd to Pluto's gloomy reign ..." (Book 1)—indicates, it is a war poem that essentially centres around the wrath of Achilles, which is a larger, more complicated, and more dramatic theme. Driven by the craving for "fame", Achilles has simply behaved as though he lost the very sense of "reason". The art of modulating his character as the situation demands is something not known to him. On the other hand, the ability to go mad at the slightest provocation has almost become an inseparable trait of him. Obviously, this has made him unaware of fear, which would have indeed made him unstoppable in war. However, the resulting ever-lasting killing—unmindful of even being killed—by Achilles often turns a reader wearisome.

On the contrary, the Indian epic *Ramayana* begins with the poet Valmiki asking sage Narada, as though to let the audience know the theme of his poem:

O Maharshi, Who in this world lives today endowed with excellent qualities, prowess, righteousness, gratitude, truthfulness and firmness in his vows? Who is self-restrained? Who has conquered anger? Who is endowed with brilliance and free from envy? Who is that when excited to wrath even the gods are afraid of? (1.1.3,4), please tell me.

Narada, confessing that rare indeed are men endowed with all the qualities that he has described, narrates the story of one such man called Rama. It is based on this narration that Valmiki composed his epic, *Ramayana*. It is a rare combination of literary excellence and a vivid portrayal of high moral values: "the sacredness of a pledge, its high ideals of duty, truthfulness and self-control, its living examples of domestic and social virtues, its deep faith in the ultimate meaning of life as a struggle between good and evil" (Bulcke 2010: 33), which had conquered the heart of religious-minded Indians forever.

This portrayal of ideal humanism by the poet in *Ramayana* has, however, attracted adverse comments from western scholars. Monier Williams (1863: 53) wondered in one of his lectures:

How far more natural is Achilles, with all his faults, than Rama, with his almost painful correctness of conduct! Even the cruel vengeance that Achilles perpetrates on the dead Hector strikes us as more likely to be true than Rama's magnanimous treatment of the fallen Ravana.

A Socratic-like dissection of this statement, however, reveals a different picture: this "magnanimous treatment of the fallen Ravana" by Rama is not a onetime exhibition. There is consistency in Rama's righteous behaviour. Interestingly, it is more out of his own volition: a conscious "willing" that enabled him to be always right in his disposition, a kind of disposition that we witness when Achilles receives Priam who came to his hut seeking his son's mortal remains. It is this righteous behaviour even in the midst of unfair circumstances that makes his character more inspiring to the readers. That is

what this paper now attempts to examine by comparing the journey of these two protagonists.

Achilles: Incongruities and Irritants

In Homer's paradise—*Iliad*—we come across a cute but "wild" flower named Achilles, an infinitely great warrior, who burns with fury irresistibly. Homer depicts Achilles not only as furious but also as "a paradigm of obstinacy". It is this singular trait of Achilles that proved bad for the Greeks but catastrophic for himself. Driven by a single-minded devotion to revenge, he slides off the scale of human normality. Although Achilles has appreciation for the social order, it is his petulance, over-flowing pride, and argumentative nature that often undermine his heroic disposition. To borrow Patroclus' words, it indeed "warp[ed] a noble nature to ignoble ends". We shall now examine some important events from the epic that will enable us to better understand Achilles' character and the flaws, if any, that go against the philosophy of "*Arete*".

Achilles Convenes to Council All the Grecian Train ...

Disturbed by the unabated funeral pyres all around, and perhaps, in his anxiety to set the camp in order, on the 10th day of plague, Achilles has summoned army to assembly and suggests to consult a prophet who can let them know the cause for Apollo's anger. Then an Achaian soothsayer volunteers to reveal the cause of the pestilence provided his safety is guaranteed. Achilles, standing up, guarantees his safety so "long as Achilles breathes vital air" and asks him to "Speak what thou know'st ..."

The soothsayer says that the plague is the result of Agamemnon insulting the priest by not freeing his daughter, Chryseis. Though he becomes furious at being publicly made responsible for the plague, Agamemnon says that in the interest of his people he is willing to give Chryseis up, provided he is given another prize at once. Getting up, Achilles replies: "Most glorious Agamemnon, unequalled in your greed, where will the Greeks find you a fresh-prize? ... No: give the girl back now, we will compensate you ... if ever we could sack this Trojan town". However, Agamemnon, insisting that he must immediately be compensated to his satisfaction, says, "If not, I shall come and help myself to your prize, or Ajax's, or walk off with Odysseus".

Stunned by this public disgrace, Achilles, calling him "shameless and self-centred" and refusing to accept the indignity, furiously says:

We joined your expedition, you shameless swine, to please you ... heat and burden of the fighting fall on me, but when it comes to dealing out the spoils, it's you that takes the lion's share, leaving me ... with some pathetic portion ... so, I shall now go back home ...

Yet, Agamemnon, threatens him saying that he will take away his prize, Briseis. Infuriated by these words, as Achilles is about to draw his sword from the sheath to disembowel Agamemnon, goddess Athena, intervening, calms the overwrought Achilles. Yet, his anger could not be subdued. With boiling anger in his breast, Achilles declares: "O monster! mix'd of insolence and fear, / ... Now by this sacred sceptre hear me swear, / ... / when bleeding Greece again / Shall call Achilles, she shall call in vain". Thus, they both retire in sullen majesty.

Later, despite elders advising otherwise, Agamemnon, having delivered Chryseis to appease Apollo, sends his heralds to Achilles' hut to fetch Briseis. Surrendering Briseis without making a scene, Achilles proclaims: "if Greeks ever require me again to save them from some terrible disaster, tell your prince that 'unmoved as death Achilles shall remain'". Thus ends an event, which was called for by Achilles to restore order in the camp, ironically resulting again in disorder, for individual senses of pride and honour have blinded the two leaders to the greater good.

Achilles, "... loud lamented ... 'O parent goddess!'"

After Agamemnon's guards take Briseis away, Achilles walks down to the shore and weeps in despair. In his suffering, he calls out to his mother for help. His prayer to her soon degenerates into a "statement of complaint" (Kirk 1984). As though sadness and self-pity replaced his earlier rage, "as a powerless old man, and the unprotected woman" (Rabel 1997), he, passively complaining against Agamemnon, implores at his mother to go to Zeus, to sit by him, to take him by the knees and persuade him to help the Trojans to fling the Greeks back on their ships and massacre them, so that Agamemnon will realize the delusion he is under in giving no respect to the best of all the Greeks. This appeal of Achilles sounds more as a voice of powerless victim but not as that of a great warrior, for it amounts to his relying on others to act on his behalf. Over it, his praying for the massacre of his fellow Achaians by Trojans simply runs against the very philosophy of "*arete*". Like every Greek hero he craves for fame, but ironically resorts to such an ignoble prayer, which is sure to question his heroic honour. Cumulatively, this episode is likely to challenge the sympathy of the modern reader that he had won earlier on account of his personal honour being attacked by Agamemnon by seizing his maid, Briseis, which is akin to Paris' kidnapping of Helen.

Embassy to Achilles

With Achilles withdrawing from the war, the Achaian army is routed by the Trojans. As the demoralized Achaian troops assembled that night with even the proud King, Agamemnon standing oppressed "in solemn sadness and majestic grief", says thus: "Ye sons of Greece! The war is lost. Quit these fatal fields, / Haste to the joys our native country yields; / Spread all your canvas, all your oars employ" (Book 9). As the dejected soldiers received the message in

silence, Diomedes declares that everyone should go, but he will stay back alone to fight, for it is fated that "Troy will eventually fall".

This brave declaration restores the confidence of the army. In that newfound courage, they send emissaries to the tent of the sulking hero Achilles with the message from the King admitting how he unwisely insulted the great warrior and his willingness to offer many valuable gifts to him, including the return of his maid, Briseis, if Achilles will re-join the Greek army.

Achilles receives the emissaries with great honour. It is Odysseus who, complimenting Achilles in an attempt to make him receptive to his pleading, narrates the plight of the Greek army. Sharing his fear about Hector setting their ships on fire and slaughtering them all, Odysseus pleads, "Return, Achilles: oh return, though late, / To save thy Greeks, ... / Rise to redeem; ah, yet to conquer, rise!" (Book 9). Following this, as though to influence him morally, Odysseus draws Achilles' attention to his father's advice at the time of his joining Agamemnon: "My child! with strength, with glory, and success, / Thy arms may Juno and Minerva bless! / To calm thy passions, and subdue thy rage: / And shun contention, the sure source of woe; / The virtues of humanity be thine" (Book 9). He pleads with him to give up his anger, for Agamemnon is willing to amply compensate him. Ultimately, he resorts to winning his heart with patriotic argument saying, "if not for the gifts, at least taking pity on the Greeks, you must join the war and cover yourself in glory in the eyes of the Greeks".

All this, however, could not convince Achilles to reconcile. He says, "I hate his gifts and value him at one splinter. Until he has paid back the whole heart-rending insult, Agamemnon can never win me over". Even then, Phoenix appeals to him further:

Master your tremendous pride, Achilles. However great the need of the Greek army, had Agamemnon not offered you the generous gifts and instead persisted with his vindictiveness, I would have not asked you to shed your anger. Till now no one could blame you for your anger, but do not scorn this mission of your best friends among the Greeks. Come, turn the defeat into victory, Greeks will treat you like god.

And yet, Achilles turns him down saying, "Olympian-bred Phoenix, I have no need of the Greek's honour. Don't underestimate my resolution by weeping and wailing designed to curry favour with Agamemnon ... injure the man who injures me, if you are with me".

Still, as though he has not given up hope entirely, Ajax too reveals his mind to Achilles thus: "Achilles has hardened his once noble heart and become quite unreasonable. So obstinate that he had no affection for his comrades. Achilles, gods have worked you up into this implacable fury over a girl ... Be gracious ... we are under your roof, respect your obligations." Still Achilles cannot be moved. He winds up the meeting saying, "Go now and make my decision public".

This response of Achilles to the embassy indicates that his injured pride is what matters most to him, even above the lives of his fellow Greeks. Ironically, this blind pursuit of his wounded pride and the resulting anger that drives him to declare "not to fight until the ships are burning", which sounds "deliberately brutal" (Rosner 1976) that makes it difficult for a reader to empathize with him, for it "was a fault in honour" (Bassett 1933).

Patroclus Shows the Way Forward to Achilles' Glory But With Death

Having thus stayed away from the war, Achilles causes great strife to the Greek army. Though he declared to the embassy that he would sail out the next morning to his native land, Achilles stays back watching, perhaps gleefully, the unhappy retreat of Greek army, enthusing himself with the expectation that Greeks will now join at his knees in supplication. This indeed makes him look-like the very anti-thesis of a Homeric warrior hero. Watching Nestor pulling out an injured soldier from the battle field, he directs Patroclus to go and find out who the man is.

In compliance with the order, Patroclus runs to the Greeks' huts and their ships. There Nestor, drawing his attention to what his father had advised him while joining Agamemnon, suggests that Patroclus speak to war-like Achilles, for a friend's suggestion might stir his heart to change. At least, he could ask him to allow him to take the field with the Myrmidon contingent behind. Ask him to give you his fine armour to fight in, so that Trojans, taking you for him, might run away. That may give some respite to the weary Greek army.

As the battle is going on, Patroclus comes to Achilles with streams of tears rolling down his face. On enquiry about the cause for his sorrow, Patroclus, straight away shoots a question at Achilles: "You and your disastrous greatness – what will future generations have to thank you for, if you do nothing to prevent the Greeks' humiliating destruction?" (Book 16) Achilles' answer to this question reveals his conflict with himself:

I have been through in this war ... I had won Briesis with my spear. But Agamemnon snatched her from me as though I am some non-entity ... But that's over ... I am wrong in supposing a man could nurse his anger for ever ... Arm yourself then with mine armour and lead my Myrmidons into battle.

This confession clearly makes apparent that the war that was going on in his heart — the war between his nobility that keeps on goading him to go and help fellow Greeks and his obsessive sense of pride that splashes water on his saner thoughts. Fortunately, Patroclus's suggestion offers him a way forward. Snatching it immediately, he allows Patroclus into battle but with clear instructions to attack with all force to drive away the Trojans from the ships, but not to lead the Myrmidons on to Ilium in the flush of victory. Accordingly, Patroclus enters the field and drives away the Trojans flying in panic, but when he goes in to take Ilium is killed at the hands of Hector.

Patroclus Death: The Cureless Grief

Learning about the death of Patroclus, Achilles bursts into tears and picks up sooty dust to pour over his head. He throws himself on the ground. He begrimes his beautiful body with dust. Seeing Achilles sobbing out his heart, Antilochus fears that Achilles may take a knife and cut his throat. He lets out an intimidating cry, and hearing it, his mother comes to comfort him. Hearing Achilles' longing to avenge Patroclus, mother Thetis shedding tears says: "Ah then, I see thee dying, see thee dead! / When Hector falls, thou diest." Achilles is quick in replying: "—"Let Hector die, / And let me fall! For, I let my comrade be killed in the hands of Hector, while I sat here as "an idle burden on the earth" (Book 18) by my ships, though am the greatest warrior among the Greeks" (Book 18).

Interestingly, he appears to have accepted the futility of pride, rivalry and anger when he whispers: "ah how I wish rivalry could be banished from the world of gods and men, and with it anger ..." (Book 18). Having thus reconciled with his wrath against Agamemnon, Achilles now decides to kill Hector, for that alone, he believes, can assuage his sense of guilt and grief.

Revenge is All My Soul!

Achilles thus ends his wrath with Agamemnon. But a new wrath starts: Achilles is in a great hurry to avenge his friend's death. Immediately after receiving new armour, Achilles calls for an assembly of the Achaian army and announces that his quarrel with Agamemnon is ended and he is ready to join the war. He says, "We must master our pride. I now renounce my anger. Come, summon to battle immediately" (Book 19). Hearing him, Agamemnon rises and welcomes Achilles back into the army promising to return his maid, Briesis, along with many other gifts. However, Achilles is in a greater hurry to attack Trojans than to collect gifts.

As Odysseus points out that the troops are tired, hungry and need some time to renew themselves with food and wine, Achilles, agreeing to wait for the troops to eat but he himself refuses to take anything until Patroclus is avenged. Such was the intensity of his anger that he declares: "Revenge is all my soul! No meaner care, / Interest, or thought, has room to harbour there; / Destruction be my feast, and mortal wounds" (Book 19). Thus, Achilles, being a man of extremes, enters the battlefield as a wrathful warrior.

Scenes of Blood and Agonizing Sounds

Thus opens the battle with fury as Achilles clothed in martial valour joins the war with an intimidating yell. Many Trojans die at Achilles' hands. Sweeping through the field unchecked, Achilles comes face to face with Tros, son of Alastar. The poor man, not knowing the fierce passions of Achilles, comes up to him and clasps his knees hoping that he would take pity for his

tender age and would not kill him. As he attempts to supplicate him, Achilles strikes him with his sword. Such is his pitiless slaughtering.

As one section of the Greeks herded into the deep-flowing river, following them with nothing but his sword, Achilles, leaping over them like a superhuman, hacks them to death. As the slaughtering continued, the river, choked with bodies and becoming reddened with blood, getting antagonized with Achilles' mindless bloodshed, attacks him with great waves and currents. As the river thus thwarted him, Achilles for a while becomes fearful if he is going to face an ignominious death by drowning rather than the glorious death in battle.

Lycaon lays one hand on Achilles' knees and supplicates thus, "Achilles, I am at your knees, have pity on me, I already have the claims of supplicant on you, I must tell you, I was not borne by the same mother as Hector, who killed your friend, so, please don't kill me" (Book 21); Achilles answers with no mercy in his voice: "Yes, my friend, you die too. Even Patroclus died. And look at me, death is waiting for me too" (Book 21). He then strikes him with his two-edged blade. Killing has thus become so mechanical for Achilles and he himself has become indifferent to death.

Finally, as Achilles arrives at the city walls, Hector, seeing him, flees in fear. Achilles charges him around the city walls thrice. Ultimately, as they stand against each other to fight man to man, Hector makes an attempt to obtain a promise from Achilles to treat his body with respect if he is killed. Achilles, in all his fury, turns it down. After several feints, Achilles lunges at and stabs Hector in the throat. Fading fast, the once proud Hector entreats Achilles: "I pray you, by your knees, do not throw my body to the dogs ... take ransom from my parents and give up my body to Trojans for proper cremation" (Book 22). But the angry and unsatisfied victor, Achilles replies: "Dog, do not entreat me by my knees ... I wish my angry heart could urge me to cut up your flesh and devour it raw myself, such things have you done to me ... the dogs and the birds shall tear you up completely" (Book 22).

Achilles, as Hector accused, with a "heart as hard as iron", strips Hector of his armour and fastens his body to his chariot by the heels leaving the head to drag. The irony is it is the same Achilles, who while joining the Greeks after the death of Patroclus, wished for rivalry being banished from the world of gods and men, and with it anger. However, now it is with the same uncontrollable anger he is ill-treating Hector's corpse.

Funeral Games in Honour of Patroclus

Returning to the camp with Hector's corpse, Achilles and Myrmidons drive their chariots in a ritual around the bier of Patroclus. Next morning, they consign Patroclus body to funeral pyre. Later Achilles conducts funeral games in honour of Patroclus. As Achilles' anger shifted from Agamemnon to Hector, his behaviour crossed all permissible bonds of civility. Even nine days after the funeral of Patroclus, Achilles ties the body of Hector to his chariot and draws it around the barrow of Patroclus. This beastly behaviour is even desisted by

gods when Apollo says: "Let that man beware, ... – look, he outrages the senseless clay in all his fury" (Book 24). Given Achilles' rage of mindless vengeance towards Hector's corpse, no reader now feels sympathetic towards him. Indeed, his behaviour towards Hector's corpse points out his total alienation from the quiet humanity.

A Great "Quiet" Descends upon Achilles ...

Inspired by the gods, King Priam, father of Hector, visits Achilles in his camp by night and pleads for his son's body: "Most worship-full Achilles ..., / show deference to the gods / and pity for myself, remembering / your own father" and release the body of Hector for proper funeral. In all earnestness to accomplish the mission, King Priam further appeals: "Of the two old men, / I'm more pitiful, because I have endured / what no living mortal on this earth has borne— / I've lifted to my lips and kissed / the hands of the man who killed my son" (Book 24). Can such a poetic and poignant questioning that penetrates any listener's consciousness go unheeded? No wonder, it makes Achilles think of his father, which brings him to the verge of tears. As Achilles, taking the old man's hand, gently keeps it away from him, Priam, crouching at Achilles' feet, bitterly prays for Hector, while Achilles weeps for his father and later again for Patroclus.

As Achilles recovers his composure, he leaps from his chair and in compassion for the old man's "grey head and beard" takes him by the arm and raises him saying: "You unhappy man, / How could you dare come to the Achaea's ships, / when I've killed so many noble sons of yours? / You must have a heart of iron". He then requests him to be seated on the chair.

He goes on to say: "Though we're both feeling pain, / we'll let our grief lie quiet on our hearts. / For there's no benefit in frigid tears. / That's the way the gods have spun the threads / for wretched mortal men, so they live in pain". Such is the impact of the words spoken by King Priam on Achilles who in his wrath — in un-philosophical sophistication pined for a thousand assuagements, demanding novelties, excitements, distractions, agreeable shocks, tributes to his vanity, and a thousand sweet morsels for the palate of his insatiable egoism — had tied the body of Hector to his chariot and savagely hauls it three times round Patroclus' barrow.

The venerable Priam then pleads:

Don't make me sit down on a chair, my lord, / while Hector lies uncared for in your huts. / But quickly give him back, so my own eyes / can see him. And take the enormous ransom / we've brought here for you. May it give you joy. / And may you get back to your native land, / since you've now let me live to see the sunlight.

Achilles — for whom old habits die hard, perhaps — frowns at him and says swiftly, "Old man, don't provoke me. I myself intend to give you Hector. Zeus sent me here a messenger. So don't agitate my grieving heart still more.

Or, I might not spare even you, old man, though you're a suppliant in my hut. I could transgress what Zeus has ordered".

This reprimand frightens the old man. Then Achilles dashes out of doors with his two favourite aides. He calls some women servants and tells them to wash and anoint Hector's body in another part of the house. For, he fears that if Priam, seeing his son's corpse in that bad shape, being unable to contain his anguish, might say something harsh, hearing which, his own spirit might then get so aroused that he could kill Priam, disobeying Zeus' orders. Hence, he executes the needful in such a way that it affords a noble relief — an exemplary display of civility by the same Achilles who, while handling Hector's body previously, was at the height of savagery.

As the women servants anointed the body with olive oil and wrapped it in a fine mantel and tunic, Achilles lifts it with his own hands onto a bier. As his comrades help, he keeps it in the wagon. In a groan, he then addresses his beloved friend: "O Patroclus, / don't be angry with me, if you learn, / even in Hades' house, that I gave back / godlike Hector to his dear father. / He's brought to me a fitting ransom. / I'll be giving you your full share of it, / as is appropriate".

This terrific scene portrays moments of radiant exaltation — in it we witness a solemn quiet of fate accepted, of life not exuberantly commanded, but taken for what it is, grim and pitiful, with its own strange, sad beauty, and at least able to be justified.

Then Achilles walks into the hut saying, "Old man, your son has been given back, /... so, my royal Lord, let us two also think of food". As Achilles' attendants fetch bread and meat, they help themselves to the good things spread before them. Once their thirst and hunger is satisfied, they look at each other with admiration. Then King Priam begs to retire for the night. Thereupon Achilles tells Priam: "you must sleep outdoors, my friend, in case some Achaean general pays me a visit ... your recovery of the body will be delayed".

He also enquires: "... tell me ... / how many days do you require to bury / godlike Hector, so I can stop that long / and keep the troops in check?" The king replies: "If you really wish me to give Prince Hector a proper funeral, grant us eleven days". Saying, "All right ... things will be arranged / as you request" (Book 24), Achilles takes the old man's wrist on his right hand, to banish all apprehensions from his heart.

This whole episode reveals the magic of words in bringing the much-desired healing for Achilles that totally evades definition. It is under the touch of this magic, a great quiet descends upon Achilles and he grows ashamed of his turbulence, his fury, his ignoble self-pity, his insatiable discontent. Perhaps hearing the voice of his personal wrongs, he emerges as a saviour full of tender expressions of an almost religious solemnity. Thus, Achilles finally becomes fully integrated with humanity, but of course, only after causing great turmoil to himself and to the people around him.

Rama: Dharma Personified

Valmiki's Ramayana runs true to the definition of an epic given by Stephens: "[It] is a monumental relation of events grouped round a central theme of racial interest in particular, of human interest in general" (Sreenivasa Iyengar 1962). It seems, as Srinivasa Iyengar said, "somehow to be implicated in our [Indian] very lives; so far off in point of time, it seems to be perturbingly near ... Rama, Sita ... and the rest are, as it were, the crystallizations of the racial achievements of the Hindus. At the same time, they are recognizably men and women, and hence appeal to all humanity". Valmiki carves the character of Rama as "the idealized personification of certain human qualities" such as nobility, love for living beings, loyalty, submission to the established social norms, service, chastity, etc. It is perhaps with this unique value-system that Rama still has a living presence in India — he exists as a cherished ideal, though not as an actual guideline for day-to-day living. We shall now trace a few such cherished ideals that Rama exhibits in his long journey.

Respects Well-Established Norms

Having been sent by King Dasharatha to protect the *yajna* being performed by Vishvamitra, as Rama and Lakshmana are proceeding to the forest along with Vishvamitra, he advises Rama:

... the first duty of princes like you is to protect the subjects from harm ... For the reason of protecting people, if it is necessary to kill a woman, a protector has to kill a woman. You will now encounter one such ogress, Tataka. I warn you beforehand. Do not show any compassion to her. Do not suppose I am asking you to be the first king in the world to kill a woman (1.25.17-21).

Rama replies: "Since my father enjoined me to follow you and obey you to do whatever you bade me to do, who am I to say no" (1.26.2-3). However, as Tataka appears a little later before him, Rama, with his inborn instincts on the alert, says to Lakshmana, "I cannot forget the fact that this grisly and ghastly demon is a woman ... let us cut off her hand, the lobes of her ears, deform her and send her away ... so that she can do no harm to the *yajna*" (1.26.12). He indeed cuts off her arms. Lakshmana cuts off her ears by shooting an arrow. Yet the woman, assuming protean forms, showers stones on them unabated. She harasses them to no end. Seeing the trouble caused by her, Vishvamitra reminds Rama: "I told you ... she is not a woman to whom you ought to show any mercy. Kill her" (1.26.20-22). So, Rama kills her.

This incident shows Rama's innate concern for honouring well-established norms. It is only his courage of conviction that emboldens him to say, "If I can in spirit obey Vishvamitra, it is enough ... I will make her absolutely powerless" (1.26.12). It is only once things go beyond control that he violates the norm for ensuring the safety of the *yajna*, which again, as Vishvamitra said,

is the prime duty of a king. That is Rama's concern for dharma, even at that young formative phase of his life.

Firmly Entrenched in Dharma

Rama upholds dharma—a Hindu concept with multiple meanings but generally means "righteous action" that enables a man "to achieve what is beneficial and desirable"; "to live without malice, or at least with minimum malice towards beings" (Satchidananda 1993: 3, 64)—as the axis of the universe, which revolves round the twin poles of compassion and renunciation. The lofty ethic he stands for is that dharma is all. The exposition of dharma commences with Emperor Dasharatha announcing the installation of Rama as Prince Regent. But no sooner is Rama told that he is to be installed as Prince Regent, then he, at the behest of his half-mother Kaikeyi, is exiled to the forest for 14 years by his father. Now, Bharata, his younger brother, is to be installed as Prince Regent.

This banishment has, however, no impact on him. Loss of kingdom could not diminish his splendour. Not a muscle moved on the noble countenance. It shone in full lustre as it always did (2-19:32). As he nears his mother to tell the news of his banishment to forest, he feels unhappiness, but controls it within his heart (2-19:35). It becomes still worse, when he has to convey the news to Sia, his wife, indicating that, however sublime Rama is in his ethical stance, he could not overcome the depressing character of the circumstances.

Hearing the sad news, Rama's mother, lamenting at her fate, expresses her desire to follow him to the forest, and Lakshmana, his brother, infuriated by his father's unfairness, advises Rama to practice his Kshatriya dharma by asserting his right to kingdom. This means, if required, he will slay the king, for "even a preceptor who follows the unrighteous path and is filled with haughtiness and does not know how to discriminate between good and bad, deserves to be punished" (2.21.13).

Rama, being consistent in his belief about righteousness, responds thus:

O Lakshmana! dharma (righteousness), *artha* (wealth) and *kāma* (objects of desire), which are adjudged in this world according to the fruits of righteous action, are there in my decision to go to the forest. Whatever a preceptor, a king and a father commands must be carried out as dharma. Therefore, I cannot but duly implement this pledge of my father. Even for mother Kausalya, he is her husband, her refuge and her dharma. While the righteous king is living, how can the empress, like an ordinary widow, accompany me leaving this city? I am not going to accept the trivial rulership through unrighteousness (2-21:56-63).

Rama, by connecting with his mother and brother through love and by allowing them to freely air their views, logically dispels their objections. Further, by discharging his filial responsibilities thus, he proves himself to be a man of family, of kinship.

In the course of these deliberations, he also expresses his anxiety about his mother's safety in his absence. When Lakshmana seeks his permission to accompany him to the forest, he opens up his heart:

O Laksmana, if you also accompany me to the forest, who will take care of mother Kausalya and the illustrious Sumitra? ... Once Kaikeyi gains control over the kingdom, she will do nothing to help her afflicted cowives [Kausalya and Sumitra]...O son of Sumitra, lend support to venerable Kausalya. ... do this for my sake (2-31:10-17).

Like an ordinary mortal, Rama too doubts for a while the conduct of future king and begins to worry about his mother.

After all these deliberations, as he went to his father King Dasaratha to take leave of him, Dasharatha, gazing at Rama, who is unruffled and simply awaiting the king's permission for leaving to the forest, speaks thus: "Oh, Rama! I was stupefied by Kaikeyi through a boon. Now, by confining me, be you the king of Ayodhya" (2-34:26). Yet Rama, the ardent follower of dharma, replies, "Oh, king! For my sake, do not generate untruth about you". That is Rama's steadfast commitment to Dharma.

Welfare of Others is his Prime Concern

As Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are going to the forest, Dasharatha, Kausalya and others come out to have a last look at them. Not being able to put up with the separation, Dasharatha cries out to Sumanta, the charioteer: "Stop, stop". But Rama says, "Go on, drive on". Sumanta, feeling caught between the front and back wheel of the chariot, looks up to Rama saying, "I am asked by your father, the King, to do one thing and you ask me to do just the opposite". Rama then answers him: "You are perhaps afraid that when you go back to him after leaving us in the forest, he will be angry with you for not having obeyed him. Should the king question your disobedience, tell him that in the hustle and bustle of noise you did not hear him". Here Rama is advocating a departure from truth. However, he defends his act saying, it is foolish and disastrous to prolong the wail of grief. "So go on" (2-10:47). Departing from the truth momentarily, Rama relieves his father from the grief.

Cries Like an Ordinary Mortal but Bounces Back

On returning to the hermitage along with Lakshmana after killing the golden deer and seeing the lonely hut bereft of Sita, Rama wails again and again: "The timid lady must have been carried away, or devoured, or dead. Or has she gone to pluck flowers?" Running fast from tree to tree in search of Sita, Rama cries in grief, "Was my Sita seen by you? O deer, do you know of Sita? *Ah priye*, where have you gone?" (3.61.3-10).

Lakshmana pleads with him, "Don't give way to despondency, O Prince! Join in endeavour with me. Sita is fond of frequenting groves. She must have

gone deep into the forest. Let us both search for her at once. I pray, do not give over your mind to grief" (3-61:14-18).

Thus exhorted by Lakshmana, Rama regains his composure and proceeds along with him in search of Sita. They, however, fail to locate her. Agonized by Sita's absence and angered by a feeling that his "disciplined and compassionate outlook is being taken as his powerlessness" by gods, Rama, in order to let everyone know his power, says, "With my arrows, I will reduce these worlds to a state of utter confusion today if those in authority do not restore Sita to me, no matter if she has been killed or is dead" (3.64.60-71).

Looking at the agony of Rama, Lakshmana submits to him, "Having been mild, disciplined, and devoted to the good of all created beings before, you should not abandon your nature ... We shall steadfastly search everywhere for the abductor of your consort. ... If you do not recover Sita then annihilate the worlds, O ruler of men!" (3.65.11-16). Rama, listening to Lakshmana, controls his anger and returns to his righteous sense. He nudges himself toward the right action — a search for Sita with an awakened alertness. That is proof of his forbearance and fortitude.

Being Virtuous to Everyone

As Rama and Lakshmana are searching for Sita in the forest, they see some drops of clotted blood. Walking further, they see Jatāyu — the great bird that tried to stop Ravana from doing the *adharma*, of taking away Sita — lying on the ground with both of his wings severed. Rama strokes Jatāyu's head. Jatāyu feels relieved from his injuries and narrates the whole story. He describes how he was wounded while fighting with Ravana. Informing Rama that Ravana has taken Sita towards the south, he dies.

Realizing that the bird has suffered death because of him, Rama laments thus: "To me, oh, Lakshmana, anguish caused by Sita's abduction is not that much, when compared with the anguish caused by the death of Jatāyu, that too, because of me" He then confesses that how the celebrated and highly renowned king Dasharatha is venerable and honourable to him, likewise "this lord of birds is also a venerable and honourable one to him ..." (3-68:26). He then performs the funeral rites for the bird. Then both Rama and Lakshmana go to the river Godavari to oblate waters for Jatāyu. Such is Rama's virtue that he knows no difference between men and animals of good deeds.

Admits Mistakes

Being fair makes a leader dear to the followers. However, leaders have their own egos and seldom do they admit their mistakes, particularly when it comes to admitting the wrong done to their followers. Rama is different. For example, thinking that Sugriva had forgotten his promise to undertake the search for Sita and becoming impatient, he sends his brother Lakshmana to remind him of his promise and warn him of the consequences of not fulfilling it. But after knowing that Sugriva is on the job, he hugs him saying, "Is it a

wonder if the lord of Heaven sends down rain on the parched earth? It is his nature. ... so it is in the nature of things for you to do". That's not the end of it. On a subsequent occasion, perhaps reminded of his ill-founded anger at a pleasing ally like Sugriva, he tells him: "In the world there are few allies and friends so trustworthy as you are. In my impatience, imagining that you have forgotten the promise, I sent Lakshmana to you with a harsh message. Yet, forgetting the injustice done to you on that occasion, you have given me valiant assistance" (6-18:15&16).

Maryada — Sense of Honour Must Always Rule his Behaviour

Rama, who is often addressed as *Maryāda Purushōttam* — "man embodied with a sense of honour" — is trusted and relied upon by all his subjects for his deep sense of commitment to stand by the trust that they have reposed in him, as well as discharging it with grace. One such beautiful incident in the Ramayana depicts the finest delicacy of speech and unimpeachable courtesy for which Rama is known. In the course of his last great fight with Ravana, Rama, in his anxiety to stay focused on the battle and destroy Ravana, says to the charioteer, Matali, who was sent by Indra: "From the way in which he [Ravana] is darting forward from left to right with great impetuosity once more ... Therefore, take care and advance towards the enemy's chariot ... Without confusion or getting flurried and with a steady heart and vision and the movement of the reins fully controlled, drive the chariot swiftly". Then suddenly Rama says to Matali, "I am just reminding you, not teaching you" (6-106:13). That is the excellence of Rama's culture: even amidst the battle and all the anxieties associated with the battle against Ravana, he could still be conscious of Matali — the divine charioteer sent by Lord Indra (Lord of Gods) — and of his unique status. Thus he might have wondered, "How could a mortal like him instruct Matali, an immortal?" So he says hurriedly: "I am reminding you". Indeed, there is nothing wrong in Rama instructing his charioteer, for he is the occupant of the chariot. Yet, Rama will not be Rama if he did not say, "*na śiksaye* — not teaching you". That is his "*maryāda*" for others.

Courage of Conviction

There is a scene where heroism at its peak is exhibited in the middle of a fierce battle with Ravana. Rama gains an advantage over Ravana who has lost his chariot and bow, but instead of seizing the opportunity to press his advantage and kill Ravana, he stands in dignity and says:

Now, Ravana, you are at a great disadvantage. You have fought bravely; you have fought nobly; you have accounted for many a warrior on my side. Still you are tired. You are obliged to come down and stand like me on your feet; you have lost your great bow. I give you time. Go home now.

Come tomorrow, refreshed and strong in your chariot and with a new bow and arrows. You shall then see how I can give you battle (6.59.142-143).

Obviously, acts of this nature go a long way in building the reputation of a leader as highly dependable among his followers, but it also calls for lot of courage, which is what Rama constantly exhibits.

Humility that is Consistent

Humility requires a sense of modesty about one's own significance. It is freeing oneself from vanity, egotism, great pretensions, or remaining free from extravagance. Rama cultivated humility by observing gentleness in his disposition. After the death of Ravana at the hands of Rama, Vibhishana was in two minds about performing obsequies to him. He finally goes to Rama with tears in his eyes and says, "True, he was my elder brother; true he was my king; true he protected me often; but he was wicked. ... He made unjust wars. Altogether, I do not think I shall perform his obsequies".

At this, Rama says, "No, Vibhishana, you are wrong. I did not kill an ignoble man in battle. Ravana was a great warrior; he was a great king and greatly he died". Then he says these immortal words: "Hostilities end with death. Our purpose has been accomplished. Let his funeral rites be performed. He is as much mine as yours" (6-109:25). That is the humility of Rama in the moment of his great victory.

There is yet another scene where Rama exhibits the greatest sense of humility. At the end of his coronation in Ayodhya, and while giving farewell to all the guests, Rama says, "Hanuman, you have done numerous services for me, all of the order of the first eminence. For any one of them, all my life is an adequate return. If my life is pledged in return for one of your numerous services, I shall be in debt in respect of the others". A mighty king of a prosperous kingdom admitting his inability to reward a person so publicly only shows how humble he is in admitting his gratefulness to Hanuman. That is his humility. That is the consistency in his nobility.

Discussions and Conclusion

Having observed the protagonists individually, let us now juxtapose their basic traits and evaluate them to draw logical conclusions sans the "generosity" of syncretist or the "acuity" of a partisan about their value systems and their receptivity for the reader. Valmiki portrays Rama as a pleasant conversationalist (1.1.3) with a delightful countenance (1.1.16). People perceived him as soft-spoken, as the first to speak to others, as a speaker of words pleasing to hear and though mighty, never being proud of his overwhelming strength (2.1.13). Achilles, in the words of Patroclus, "commands respect. He is easy to annoy ... what a difficult man he is, quite capable of finding fault without reason" (Book 2). As a warrior, he is great and

glorious, but his "fury" is such that even his closest friend Patroclus is afraid of Achilles' countenance.

Achilles is all for himself, always operating from within the boundaries that he defined for his pride and honour. In that frenzy, he even transgresses the established norms, such as what happened when he usurped Agamemnon's power and summoned the Achaian assembly to restore order in the camp. He often acts on the basis of his own passions, that too, with least concern as to how its consequences affect the community. Rama is a "*Sthitaprajna*" — one of stable intellect. He is a person with established intellect, he is not elated amidst pleasures, nor disturbed by misery, and is free from all attachments, fear and anger. He has also tremendous control over his own emotions and is thus capable of modulating his behaviour according to the requirements.

Rama is a man with tremendous forbearance. He has the courage to face the challenges of life on his own. When Ravana abducts Sita from the hermitage, Rama feels crest-fallen. However, aided by Lakshmana's exhortations, he pulls up his courage and goes around the forest in search of Sita. Finally tracing her in Lanka, he wages war with Ravana and frees Sita from his clutches. Achilles, like a mama's child, at every slightest inconvenience, pours out his prayers to his mother, Thetis, and even seeks her intervention in his negotiating through the crisis-prone circumstances.

Rama stands for filial values. He willingly undertakes the ordeal of going to the forest as commanded by his father for 14 years, all to implement the pledge of his father, as also to discharge his duty as a son towards his father. As his mother and brother Lakshmana urge him to defy the King by using his power to assert his right to the throne, Rama counters them with his pleasing argument as to why he cannot rise a sword against his own father and why he must obey the command of the king and father. He thus proves himself to be a faithful and dutiful son, a man of family, a man of society, and a man of his clan in upholding its noble inheritance. He cares for his commitments. Achilles, on the other hand, gets terribly disturbed when his maid, Briseis, a slave girl, is snatched away by Agamemnon. Indeed, he feels that his honour is offended, for he feels cheated and becomes highly furious withdrawing from the fellow Greeks. Even when Agamemnon, admitting his mistake and offering his Briseis back, sends embassy inviting him to join the war, Achilles turns it down. Although ambassadors plead with him to join them in war in several ways, he simply refuses to yield. He is so self-centred that nothing other than his pride and his personal honour and fury mattered to him — even the worst sufferings of the fellow Greek soldiers had no meaning for him. Even when he has rejoined the war later, it is again for his own reasons, and he is thus for himself and himself alone.

Rama is always motivated to be responsible and willingly submits himself to dharma, righteousness. He took decisions by reason, with a sense of responsibility and more particularly guided by his value-system. He always has the common good as the underlying reason for all of his decisions. All these elements are reflected in his striking friendship with Sugriva, in granting asylum to Vibhishana, or in chiding Sugriva when he, risking his safety, sprang

at Ravana and entertained one to one fight with him before the war actually started (6.41.2-7). Achilles jumps at decisions more by passion, and they are mostly driven by personal urges — such as anger, pride, or honour — rather than driven by their consequences for the fellow Greeks. His walking out of the war with Trojans or re-entering it are essentially driven by his personal passions.

Achilles' anger, be it when he is sulking or when he is violent, always remained paramount. He exhibits his insane wrath at its height in his battle with the river. As the terror-stricken Trojan troops are trying to cross the stream, Achilles, angered by what Hector did to his friend, throws himself at them with his sword and slaughters many of them left and right indiscriminately. It is his mutilation of bodies and his excesses that prompt the river goddess to charge him with excessive evil and pursue him with a massive flood. In Ramayana, in his battle with Indrajit, Lakshmana, angered at the destruction wrecked by Indrajit on the monkeys, submits to Sri Rama, "I shall now use *Brahmastra* (mystic missile presided over by Brahma) to destroy all the ogres". But Rama admonishes him, "To get square with one individual you ought not to exterminate all the ogres on the earth" (6.80.38). Such is Rama's sense of proportion and power of discretion and his concern for the innocents.

The death of Patroclus arouses Achilles from inaction and he finally kills Hector. Yet his anger is not satiated. He desecrates Hector's corpse dragging it by tying to his chariot — an act of barbarity. After killing Ravana, and noticing that Vibhisana, brother of Ravana is in two minds as to perform obsequies to his brother, Rama says to Vibhisana thus: "No, Vibhisana, you are wrong. ... Hostilities end with death. Our purpose has been accomplished. Let his funeral rites be performed. He is as much mine as yours" (6-109:25). That is the humility, civility, and nobility of Sri Rama.

Incidentally, it is these two incidents that prompted Moniar Williams to observe: "How far more natural is Achilles, with all his faults, than Rama, with his almost painful correctness of conduct! ..." To understand Rama's magnanimous treatment of the fallen Ravana, let us revisit the conversation between Priam and Achilles. On arriving at Achilles' tent, Priam, while pleading for his son's body, says: "Of the two old men, / I'm more pitiful, because I have endured / what no living mortal on this earth has borne— / I've lifted to my lips and kissed / the hands of the man who killed my son". Now the real question is: How could Priam kiss the hand of his son's murderer at all? Indeed, Achilles too appears to have been haunted by this question when he says, "You unhappy man, / ... / How could you ... come alone, to rest your eyes on me, / when I've killed so many noble sons of yours?". One immediate and obvious answer to this question is god's intervention; but the real answer is Priam's consciousness. It gave him courage to go and straight away invoke Achilles' consciousness to see the reason behind his prayer. Indeed, that's what we understand from the modern psychology: in the ancient humans, "gods take the place of consciousness" (Jaynes 1976). It is this "pure consciousness" that the Vedic philosophy calls as *Brahman*. This *Brahman*, which rests in every soul, ultimately joins all of us with the "*Parabrahman*". Further, it is this

understanding and realization about the all-pervading Brahman, the pure consciousness, that facilitated Rama to perform funeral rites to Jatayu and to treat Ravana's body with courtesy. It is this same pure consciousness that prompted even Achilles to finally give up his fury and return Hector's body gracefully to Priam. This grace we see in Rama's behaviour all through the epic for he is conscious of his consciousness, while Achilles could only realize it at the end of the epic. That is the primary difference between them — Sri Rama consciously cultivated it right from the beginning, while Achilles realized it by the end of journey as death stared at him.

In conclusion, it must be said that Achilles appears as an estranged loner: always spontaneous and perhaps, prospective. The sulking Achilles appears to be brooding over the question: "What is a man's life worth?". But he won't appear to have the answer until his friend Patroclus met with death. It is upon his death that Achilles realizes that his life is worth revenge on Hector who killed Patroclus. It is to take revenge that he even chooses death. Yet, it does not grant him peace as is evidenced by his dragging Hector's body around the barrow of Patroclus even after the ninth day of burial. It is only on meeting Priam in his tent that Achilles appears to have found his solace — "life is at best a mixture of good and ill". In that solace and solitude, it dawns on him: there is more to life than revenge and slaughtering men. Through this realization, the enigmatic hero, Achilles, feeling ashamed of his ignoble self-pity, his insatiable discontent and his personal wrongs, shows the futility of fury and war, and also tells us about the necessity for men to rise above meanness and inhumanity. It is of course a different matter here that this recognition is brought about partly by divine intervention. Until his final integration with humanity, whatever great turmoil that he had undergone or inflicted on the people around him has only disturbed the psyche of a modern reader and in the process, as Bassett (1933) observed, "he ...[lost] the love and possibly admiration of many Homer's non-Greek readers".

Against this torrid experience, when we move to *Ramayana*, we encounter a certain spiritual atmosphere, in which Rama evolves gradually — exhibiting a reflective and meditative attitude (Antoine 1959) — as *Purushottama* (the best among the men). Like any other human being, he gives way to anger, grief, despair, and yields to passion. It is under their influence that he even utters words that are not befitting of his stature. However, he quickly overcomes them by disciplining his senses, emotions, passions — all of his own volition. Thus emerges Rama as a man of pure consciousness. Yet, he is no different from us except that he is Dharma personified. He therefore affords the experience of not only cultured living, but also a basis of moral conduct and the highest spiritual experience for the reader. Having consciously lived the life as per the canons of dharma, Rama is more prone to stiffen us ethically — but appealingly and with love. It is this uniqueness of Rama that makes him more inspiring for the reader to idealize.

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