Rama's Leadership with Consciousness: An Inner Journey with Virtues and Values

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Leadership in Turbulent Times

COVID pandemic crisis has brought quarantine and social isolation at work and in our personal lives. In addition to the disruptive changes in our exterior landscape, COVID also drastically impacted our interior landscape (Abraham & Mazumdar, 2021). It has forced many to explore their interior realities. This inner impact may be as significant or even more lasting than the more visible external impacts of COVID. Some experienced more fears and anxieties within their inner consciousness. Sister Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth -century Spanish Carmelite nun, referred this as visiting "*The Interior Castle*" (Kirvan, 1996). Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1956, 1967) studied the relationship of the individuals with their own depth psychology. He underscored that the deepest part of our psyche is trans-personal, and part of a collective consciousness.

The current crises call for leaders who can be effective in the new reality of complex personal internal realities. Traditionally the research on leadership theories and practices has focused on the externally observable material actions and/or financial accomplishments of leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass, 1990). This evaluation and classification is done largely at the materialistic level. The focus is also on the leader's physical stamina, mental toughness, or intellectual brilliance. Their actions, sacrifices, and accomplishments of leaders are often hailed and applauded. A superhero's extra-ordinary material achievements are lionized.

Thus, leaders have been traditionally classified as Transactional (Bass, 1990) and Transformational (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). However there has been a silent flourishing of interior-based leadership theories such as Resonant (McKee et al., 2008), Virtuous (Pearce et al., 2008), Servant (Greenleaf, 2002), Spiritual (Fry, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999), braver (McLaughlin & Cox, 2015), and Integral (LaLoux & Wilber, 2014; Wilber, 1996). Gehani (2019) and Gehani and Maheshwari (2020) highlighted how the interior lives of Mahatma Gandhi, and others inspired by Gandhi such as Dr. Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela, played a significant role in their actions and their ground-breaking achievements. In this chapter we contribute to this growing trend by focusing on a paramount virtuous leader, Lord Rama, whose name is synonymous with

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perfect ruler, and whose reign called Ram Rajya is synonymous with flourishing times. We will describe Rama's leadership model as Resonant Virtuous Leadership model. We will use Maharishi Valmiki's *Ramayana* (MVR), one of the civilized world's oldest scriptures, compiled circa 1000–600 BCE, as our primary source for the Rama story. Based on MVR, Prince Rama's Journey too is often primarily explored with respect to his actions in the outer material world across the Indian sub-continent (Egnes & Reddy, 2016; Gehani, 2020). These actions include Rama, on the eve of his coronation, yielding his crown and accepting a 14-year exile by command of his father King Dashratha who wanted to uphold his father's promises to his youngest queen Kaikeyi to make her son Bharat the king. During Rama's long exile he confronted different oppressive ogres and ogresses, and had breakthrough accomplishments such as defeating the mighty king Ravana of golden Sri Lanka. Rama is also known for his inclusive alliances with other diverse species in Kishkindha capital of monkey-men Hanumana and Sugriva, large wise bears such as Jambavad, and birds such as eagle king Jatayu and Sampati (Egnes & Reddy, 2016; Gehani, 2020). We will explore how engagement with these key external characters in Rama's arduous journey may have affected Rama's less visible internal landscape.

Our Approach: Exploring Rama's Inner Journey

Rama's life can also be symbolically examined as a deep-diving journey within. In his 'Inner Palace,' Rama's consciousness discovered treasures such as the beautiful pristine nature, and intimate and almost spiritual friendship with other species such as friendly vultures (Jatayu and Sampati), monkey-men (Hanumana and Sugriva), and big bears (Jambavan). And Rama also encountered somewhat ambivalent relations between righteous Rama and his faithful Sita during the different stages of their challenging marital life together. In his journey through his 'Inner Palace,' Rama also encountered lustful and desire-driven oppressive mighty rakshasa' king Ravana along with his lazy monster brother Kumbha-Karan as well as their ogress (*rakshasa*) sister Surpa-nakha. Rama's relationships with all these key characters were informed by his inner development.

In this phenomenological hermeneutic research study based on a classic literature (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), we first identified the need to fill a significant gap for more research in the study of leaders' inner journeys.

We launch our qualitative research study by addressing the basic question: Who was legendary leader Rama? What were his traits and qualities, and why was he called *Purushottam* or the 'Perfect Person'? This is followed by a brief review of Rama's inner journey, characterized by his engagement and close encounters with a few key characters that include (a) his faithful wife Sita, (b) his devoted brother Laxmana, (c) his devoted follower Hanumana, and (d) Rama's arch-enemy demonic king Ravana.

Next comes a brief review of Rama's just and virtuous rulership. His reign is renowned as Ram Rajya, a sustainable ideal way to rule a kingdom, or an organization. Thus, with much reflection and some discussion we present a leadership model for Rama. This is the primary purpose of this chapter. Finally, we discuss some of the limitations with respect to translation, and some implications for future leadership research and practitioners.

Rama the Person

Rama in MVR is a mortal human being, just like other people, facing and overcoming his obstacles. He is the son of the aging king Dashratha of Koshala kingdom and his eldest queen Kaushalya. Rama has three younger brothers: Laxmana, Bharat, and Shatrughana. Rama is the most competent and inspiring of all brothers, and he is favored by his father, and almost everyone else, to be the next ruler of Ayodhya. On the eve of his coronation, Rama's step-mother Kaikeyi demands two boons from King Dashratha that (A) Rama be exiled to distant demon-infested Dandaka forest, and (B) her son Bharata be coronated as the next king. King Dashratha passes away in grief, and even though Bharata pleads Rama to take over, Rama insists on honoring his father's words. Rama's faithful wife and devoted brother insist on accompanying Rama on his exile. Toward the end of their exile, demon-king Ravana abducts Sita. Rama and Laxmana take the help of monkeys and bears to wage a war against mighty Ravana, win the war, retrieve Sita, and return back to Ayodhya when Rama is promptly coronated after a 14-year delay—as planned earlier.

Interestingly, Rama is unaware of his godly incarnation or divine consciousness. If Rama was divine he would have known the fate of his wife Sita's abduction by Ravana, well in advance. He would have known where Ravana had taken and hidden Sita. He would have known of her faithful purity and piety even after long captivity in kidnapper Ravana's

abode. To serve his life's intended purpose, Rama had to be born as a mortal human, and he had to be unaware of any of his divine powers and supporters. This was mandated in order for a mortal Rama to be able to kill mighty demonic Ravana on a somewhat uneven playing field. Ravana had acquired divine boons and he was guaranteed protections from other super-powerful entities through his wisdom and penances (Egnes & Reddy, 2016; Gehani, 2020).

In MVR Book-4 *Kishkindha Kanda*, Chapter-12, when his wife Sita was abducted by demon-king Ravana, Rama is shown to be sobbing everyday just like another mortal man. In Book-6 *Yuddha Kanda*, Chapter-37 when Rama's dear brother Laxmana was critically injured and made unconscious by Ravana's magical super-strong weapons, Rama sobbed and cried where he would find another brother like Laxmana. At that time, Rama felt devastated as if he had lost the war.

In MVR Book-1 *Bala Kanda* chapter-1, Rama grew up as a powerful bull among men. When the sage Narada asks him to elaborate, Valmiki describes leader Rama as follows (Gehani, 2020, pp. 51–52):

> …he is brave and illustrious, disciplined
> and renowned in all three worlds.
> He is wise and well-versed in the science of polity
> He is well-spoken and glorious.
> This man, slayer of his enemies, has broad shoulders
> and strong upper arms, a graceful neck and a strong jaw.
> He is a skilled archer with a muscular body and long arms.
> He holds his head with pride, and he walks with long strides.
> Splendid and prosperous, he has smooth skin and large eyes.
> His well-proportioned body is endowed with all auspicious marks.

Rama was caring, compassionate, and forgiving others while serving—whether he was in prosperity or in adversity. In Book-4 *KishKindha Kanda*, Chapter-14 the newly reinstated monkey king Sugriva delayed organizing his monkey forces to search for Sita. He was reprimanded by his minister Hanumana. Laxman too cautioned Sugriva. Sugriva rushes and falls at the feet of Rama for forgiveness. Rama forgives Sugriva and advises Sugriva that,

> A friendship should help at the right time.
> Only then the friendship will remain.

From his early teenage years, Prince Rama became deeply aware of the virtuous *dharmic* injunctions he wanted to uphold under all circumstances. *Dharma* here means the righteous path. Firstly, as one born and committed to be a warrior class *Kshatriya*, his greatest virtuous *dharma* was protection of all his subjects from internal and external oppressors. Secondly, to establish virtuous *dharma* he took two major pious paths: *Satya* (Truth) and *Ahimsa* (Non-violence). The sages whom Rama admired had underscored in philosophical scriptures that whichever virtuous *dharma* path one follows with steadfastness, that virtuous *dharma* would protect one.

MVR provides insights beyond Rama's exterior physical attributes to show he developed his inner strengths and confidence. Valmiki (n.d.; 2020; Gehani, 2020, pp. 50–51) notes:

> *…Rama is aware of his duties.*
> *He is truthful and dedicated to the welfare of his subjects.*
> *He is learned, virtuous, and single-minded.*
> *…Rama has brilliant memory and a ready wit.*

> *… Rama is generous*
> *…ready to sacrifice everything for the truth.*

> *…This courteous, brave, and wise man is loved by all who know him.*
> *As all rivers flow into the sea, so all good and noble people come to Rama.*

Thus Rama has not only developed his exterior physical strength, mental toughness, and intellectual brightness, which are all tangible and transient, but he has also developed his deep inner consciousness, and strong spirit as well, which are intangible qualities and can be far more powerful. Rama continues this growth and development through the various individuals and entities he encountered during the different stages of his life and his epic journey during the 14 years of his exile.

Rama's Inner Consciousness Development

MVR presents an inspiring life story of virtuous Rama, the choices he makes, and how he overcomes obstacles in his way as he upholds his virtuous *dharmic* duties to the best of his capabilities. One can consider

the inward "ME" journey of a leader in different phases: from subconscious to self-conscious to super-conscious; and from the sensory-physical consciousness of the individual alone, to vision-logic consciousness, and the causal universal one (Wilber, 1996). These are concentric circles or nested spheres of self-actualization holarchy of unfolding and enfolding. The journey continues from the crude to subtler deeper domains, while every successive stage transcends and includes the prior stages. This is Wilber's (1996) holonic perspective. We explore this for Rama through his encounters and engagement with some of his closest associates.

Sita—The Faithful Misunderstood Wife

Rama married princess Sita, a mysteriously adopted daughter of King Janak, after winning her in a surprising bow-breaking contest (Gehani, 2020; Memon, 2001; Valmiki, n.d.; 2020). Rama and Sita fell deeply in love with each other. When Rama was exiled by his step-mother Kaikeyi, Sita insisted on accompanying Rama into the demon- and snake-infested Dandaka forest. MVR's characterization of Sita is as a paragon of many virtues, most prominent being her faithfulness to Rama. Sita believed that her primary *dharma* or virtuous duty was to follow her husband. She preferred to die rather than to live away from Rama back in Ayodhya, under Bharat's care and luxuries. She was extremely happy sojourning with Rama for the first 12–13 years of Rama's exile. When Sita was forcefully abducted by demon-king Ravana, Rama cried everyday worrying about Sita's safety. But after killing demon-king Ravana, winning the war, and after she was rescued from Ravana's kingdom in Lanka, Rama developed a turbulent unsure relationship with Sita.

In the late stage of Rama's exile, he encounters two critical situations where he questions Sita's purity and her faithfulness (Gehani, 2020). Sita opens Rama's eyes with her assertiveness, self-confidence, and courage. When Sita was forcefully abducted, and in ferocious Ravana's captivity, she never swayed from her faithfulness to Rama. She suffered enormously and at times lost any hope of being rescued. She even once wanted to take her life, but decided to live on. Sita was therefore deeply hurt when Rama questioned her fidelity and accused her of being touched by another man in whose captivity she remained for so long. Rama told Sita that he could not take her back as his wife, and Sita was free to choose anyone else as a protector—including Laxmana or the ogre Vibhishana. Sita replied with great dignity and pride (Gehani, 2020, pp. 290–291),

How harsh and cruel are the things you have said to me!
You are no vulgar man, and I am no vulgar woman.
Unworthy sentiments, I assert I am not what you suspect.
Have faith, trust. I swear on my honor, and ask you,
because some women go wrong, can you suspect the entire gender?
Suspect me not.
Remember your personal knowledge of me.
How do you refer to Ravana touching my body?
That was not of my seeking, nor even of my tolerating.
That which I can control, my heart, has always been with you.
As for my limbs, what could I do when they were overpowered?
…
If you give me up, I am indeed lost, ruined beyond redemption.
When you sent that hero Hanumana to search for me,
why did you not send the fatal message of abandonment?
If he had told me, I would have died before his eyes
and spared you all this trouble.

Why undergo all these risks to your life and those of your friends?
All these might have been avoided.

You have let your ill-temper run away with your judgment,
and like a low-bred man, esteemed me lightly
as though I was no better than the ordinary type of woman.

All this has not weighed with you so much as a feather
before you condemned me and finally discarded me.

Then Sita looked straight into Rama's face. When she saw no change in Rama's stern, cold stare, Sita then turned to Laxmana, who too was standing dazed and perplexed, and said,

Build me a pyre, I pray you.
Suspected and cast away by my husband,
I cannot, I will not live any longer.
Fire, consuming fire, is the only remedy for this woe.

Sita successfully passed her fire test, and the Lord of Fire validated her purity and faithfulness. Rama was fully satisfied, and he accepted Sita back

as his dutiful life. Rama vividly saw the inner strength of Sita's faithfulness. But faithfulness is an intangible virtue, and sometimes hard to prove. It is therefore often suspected by the most trusting leaders. A perennial question to ponder is whether this doubt was fair on Rama's role as a husband.

A similar incident once again took place in Ayodhya many years later. Some citizens of Ayodhya murmured that Sita and Rama were setting a bad example for their wives, because Rama had accepted Sita back after she had lived with demon-king Ravana for many months. These people questioned Sita's purity, even after she had passed the fire test. Though Rama was shocked to hear this, to protect the stain on his reputation, Rama again asked Sita to take an oath of purity. Rama was willing to send her pregnant wife to far-off Valmiki's Ashram. This time it was too much for Sita. She chose to request Mother Earth to take her back, which it did. Why was a wise leader like Rama so harsh toward his dutiful wife? Sita made Rama realize that faith could not be doubted beyond a certain extent. When a leader crosses that limit, the faithful must leave and depart. The timid questioning leader does not deserve the faithful followers anymore.

Laxmana: A Devoted Younger Brother

Rama and Laxmana spent over a decade together in the dark demon-infested Dandaka forest. Laxmana has been interpreted to symbolize Rama's physical side. Many observers conjecture that Rama's love for his step-brother Laxmana was almost as deep as Rama's love for his wedded Sita (Sastri, 1994). Sita even tells Hanumana that Laxmana seemed dearer to Rama than herself. Laxmana never did anything without Rama's instructions.

Rama often proclaimed his passion and commitment for his duty, truthfulness, and honor. In Laxmana's relatively simpler outlook, *dharma* seemed too abstract. It had limited appeal or utility for him living his day-to-day life. In the battlefield of war with Ravana, Laxmana seemed more in favor of following *artha* or economic utility, than *dharma* or virtuous duty. Laxmana, being more physical-driven, was prone to occasional outbursts of anger. These were often followed by quick repentance. Laxmana's likes and dislikes, just like our bodies' likes and dislikes, seemed mostly tangible, transparent, and transient. Laxmana's attention, as a devoted watchful guard, rarely digressed beyond Rama's well-being and

safety. That is exactly what our body does too—protecting us and our inner spirit from the fluctuations of our surrounding environment and alien attacks.

Laxmana was also generous. He spoke little, and he was shy before women. Our physical bodies too may act in similar ways. For example, Laxmana admitted that he could not recognize Sita's discarded head or neck jewels as Laxmana always saw only Sita's feet—because his mother Sumitra had instructed Laxmana to treat Sita just like his own mother. Laxmana taught Rama as well as us that our physical body, though transient, must be cherished as a treasure. However, our chattering physical desires and temperament must be carefully regulated. Furthermore, upholding virtuous *dharma* is a higher purpose of our core human consciousness than the upkeep and survival of our physical body.

Hanumana—A Developed Servant Follower

In MVR, the wise monkey-man Hanumana was the prime minister of the exiled and reinstated king Sugriva, and played multiple pivotal roles in Rama's victory over ogre king Ravana. Everybody in *MVR* seems to have an occasional flaw—except for the devoted servant follower Hanumana.

Similar to Rama's unawareness of his divine qualities, Hanumana was cursed in his childhood that he would not be conscious of his super-powerful strengths unless he was reminded and made conscious of his super-powerful strengths at the right needful juncture by someone else (Sastri, 1994, p. 252). Therefore, Hanumana did not know that he could stretch his shape to become huge like a mountain, or turn it miniscule like a common monkey, or even smaller so that he could slip under locked doors in Sri Lanka without any palace guards noticing Hanumana (unless he wanted them to do so).

Hanumana was not only physically powerful, but he was also a strategic thinker. Hanumana single-handedly planned and executed many of Rama's big strategic projects. Hanumana was also creative in using his burning tail to destroy Ravana's strategic weapons and other resources stored in different parts of Ravana's Golden Sri Lanka. Hanumana showed alternate moods of optimism and pessimism. All the qualities of Hanumana, and his immense sincerity, endeared Hanumana to Rama, Laxmana, and Sita (Sastri, 1994, p. 289). Sita gifted Hanumana her precious pearl necklace at the time of Rama and Sita's belated coronation in Ayodhya after their homecoming.

Hanumana taught Rama and us the dignity and delight of self-less devotion to our role model. Hanumana was blissfully happy serving Rama unconditionally—no matter what Rama needed. Rama was so overjoyed by Hanumana's service that Rama gave a boon to Hanumana that whenever Rama's life story is recited, Hanumana will also be always present and prayed. Therefore, we note that wherever we see Rama, Laxmana, and Sita, we also see Hanumana—as Hanumana pleaded. Hanumana is a paragon of servant leadership not only for Rama, but for all of us in modern times.

King Ravana—Mighty, Wise, but also Perverted

In MVR Ravana is described as one who achieved material greatness, and much intellectual wisdom, without caring for nurturing his spiritual goodness. Ravana was highly learned (with 10 heads worth of intellectual wisdom), and became highly knowledgeable and intellectual. However he did not develop humility. In his arrogance about his material strength and looted wealth, he disdained and ignored less physically endowed humans. He, therefore, did not even bother to ask protection from humans and monkey-men, to his great detriment. Ravana had abducted many beautiful women from many far-off kingdoms. They were imprisoned in his palaces for his periodic pleasure. In the last year of his life, a lustful Ravana was infatuated with possessing a beautiful and much younger Sita, who was lawfully married to Rama. Ravana considered Sita his lawful prey because she was in the territory he controlled with his might and ogres. Ravana's carnal desire was, however, frustrated in front of Sita's chastity and faithfulness to her husband Rama. In MVR Book-6 War *Yuddha Kanda*, Chapter-5, Ravana's brother Vibhishana cautioned his demonic and arrogant brother to return Sita to Rama with a sincere apology. Instead, Ravana insulted and kicked his brother Vibhishana in the chest. Vibhishana and his assistants then sought shelter with Rama.

At his deathbed in the battlefield, Ravana saw Rama standing humbly near his feet for receiving Ravana's last words of wisdom (Chikhalikar, 2003; Fallen, 2009; Valmiki, n.d.; 2020). Ravana raised his hand to salute Rama, congratulating Rama for his hard-fought victory. And then Ravana generously offered the following advice to victorious Rama (Shah & Shah, 2021, p. 35):

> if only I had more time as your teacher than as your enemy.

(You) Standing at my feet as a student should,
unlike your rude younger brother,
 You are a worthy recipient of my knowledge.
I have very little time so I cannot share much,
but let me tell you one important lesson
I have learnt in my life.

Things that are bad for you, seduce you easily;
you run impatiently to them.
But things that are actually good for you fail to attract you;
you shun them creatively,
Finding powerful excuses to justify your procrastination.

That is why I was impatient to abduct Sita
but avoided meeting you.

This is the wisdom of my life.
My last words.
I give to you.

Rama learned from Ravana how not to be ever attached to one's material strength, weapons, and possessions.

Rama's Leadership Style

Thus, Rama learned many significant lessons from his inner journey and his close meaningful encounters with (a) his faithful wife Sita, (b) his devoted brother Laxmana, (c) his devoted follower Hanumana, and (d) his arch-rival, wise but misguided, demon-king Ravana.

What kind of leader did that make Rama? Having considered Rama's inner journey and his key encounters, we next analyze Rama's leadership style. We do this by testing Rama's leadership philosophy and practices against some of the popular leadership theories such as resonant and virtuous leadership (RVL).

Beyond Transformational Leadership

Muniapan (2007, p. 104) explored the leadership style of Rama in MVR because "he (Rama) has transformed and continues to transform millions

of Indians even today." Muniappan (2007) uses 4-I dimensions of Bass and Avolio (1994)'s model of transformational leadership to study Rama's leadership. These include: Inspirational Motivation (IM); Idealized Influence (II); Intellectual Stimulation (IS); and Individualized Consideration (IC). Muniapan employs the definitions of Burns (1978, 1982) and Bass and Avolio (1994) that a transformational leadership process appeals to higher ideals and moral values of his followers. Based on above analysis, Muniapan (2007), and others (such as Krishnan, 1990) have classified Rama as surpassing a Transformational Leader (Krishnan, 1990). We however wish to employ hermeneutic qualitative research that is often employed to interpret classical literature. Compared to leadership styles in the twentieth century, we discuss two promising dynamic, innovative, and positive forms of leadership models for the complex environment of the twenty-first century.

Resonant Leadership

Resonant Leadership inspires people by creating hope through shared vision for immediate as well as distant futures (Mckee et al., 2008). Few leadership researchers have focused on the subjective side of leaders: how do leaders lead, how do they energize themselves and others with inspiration and motivation, and how do they unleash maximum creativity and talent of their associates and followers. Leaders develop shared values and virtues to inspire mutual respect and trust. As evidenced earlier, Rama illustrates and exceeds all the key attributes of Resonant Leadership. He goes deeper into his commitment for his *dharmic* virtues and values. And, finally, Rama is very effective in defeating oppressive demons and their king Ravana, and fulfilling his purpose of restoring the balance between the good and the evil in the world.

Virtuous Leadership

Aristotle (384 BCE–322 BCE) proposed that virtues of a leader are created and cultivated over a substantial period of time through habituation (Aristotle, 1985; Barnes, 1984). Aristotle's virtue theory postulates that the purpose of life (or leadership) is to maximize flourishing and overall well-being (of self, others, and the organizations) by living in harmony (Neubert, 2011). He leveraged four key foundational virtues

such as: (1) courage, (2) justness, (3) self-control, and (4) wisdom (Annas, 1981; Bachmann, 2019; Plato, 1961).

In view of the rampant violations and the ethical compromises of leaders in the upper echelons of many businesses, many organizational researchers have shown interest in the field of virtuous leadership (Pearce et al., 2008). Based on their review of the world's leading thinkers, these researchers noted that virtuous leaders have preference for (a) caring, (b) compassion, (c) integrity, and (d) wisdom. These must be balanced with the conventional measures and drivers of organizational performance such as (e) return on investment, (f) efficiency/productivity, and (g) competitive advantage.

Based on these classical philosophers' theories, McLaughlin and Cox (2015, p. 75) proposed that in modern organizational context, virtues are "contextual, learned (internalized) habits that reflect and involve discriminating moral judgment and deliberation." Virtuous leaders discern right and wrong decisions, and actions that ensure honesty and justice. They inspire all stakeholders to connect with their higher meanings and purposes (Cameron, 2011).

Rama as Resonant Virtuous Leadership (RVL)

An ethical righteous leader's role, like Rama's, is enigmatic and hard to fathom clearly. Rama wanted to resonate with his people and fulfill his promises to his subjects even if it demanded a high sacrifice. Rama was willing to be virtuous and stand-alone, separate from his loving wife, just to preserve his *dharmic* duty. As a result of such caring and virtuousness, Rama's reign or Ram Rajya is considered as ideal reign. Since his time, Ram Rajya has stood for the perfect virtuous rule of a leader that ushers in widespread well-being for all in a kingdom or a nation (Richman, 2007). Rama's ministers had open discussions about the prosperity of the common people of the land. Rama listened to his followers, even when they criticized him. Considering his injustice to Sita, as a personal penance, Rama too switched to sleeping on a bed of grass on the floor in his palace.

Egnes and Reddy (2016, p. 346) retell idyllic Valmiki's description of Rama's reign in a highly aesthetic poetic form:

> *In the reign of Rama, no woman was ever a widow,*
> *No one suffered from sickness or disease or old age.*

In the reign of Rama, there were no thieves,
no calamities, no pain in childbirth,
and no parents buried a child.

In the reign of Rama no one felt greed,
No one felt poor, no one felt hungry,
And all were contented to do their duty,
Whether their status was high or low.

There was widespread social justice, environmental sustainability, and climate control in the reign of Rama (Egnes & Reddy, 2016, p. 347).

Rama's virtuous *dharmic* rulership (Ram Rajya) has been seen for a long time as the perfect epitomization for a resonant virtuous leader that wishes to usher in widespread well-being to all the people of his or her kingdom (Richman, 2007). Rama cared for every single subject in his kingdom, across caste, race, gender, and class. From this annotated review of Rama's life and epic journey, and the attributes of Rama listed by sage Narada in the 1st Book of *Bala Kanda*, five key distinctive pillars of Rama's leadership attributes have emerged. As discussed below, these may be collectively hypothesized as Rama's Resonant Virtuous Leadership (RVL) Model.

Rama's RVL—Virtuous Values

Rama was an upholder of virtuous values. For him right values always trumped over everything at all costs, at all times. For example, in the thick of the battle with demon-king Ravana, his brother Vibhishana and his four followers sought Rama's refuge. Rama gave them refuge, even though some of Rama's advisors suspected them to be Ravana's tricksters or spies (Muniapan, 2007, p. 111). This is trust and forgiveness. Another core value of Rama's RVL is fair play. In the thick of battle in war *Yuddha Kanda*, Chapter-38, when Rama had destroyed Ravana's chariot, and Ravana seemed exhausted and helpless, Rama could have easily killed Ravana and ended the war. But Rama let Ravana go home, recuperate, and reflect carefully whether he should continue his immoral and unethical war or surrender (Gehani, 2022, p. 268). Like Rama, other RVL examples include Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and more who also held tightly to their core unique values (Gehani, 2019).

Rama's RVL—Mindful Presence Here and Now

In a highly dynamic reality of war and turbulence, RVLs like Rama must always stay focused on the present and now moment. Rama was waging an intense battle against mighty demon-king Ravana, who had superior armed forces and weapons. Ravana's demons were also fighting on their home island turf. Rama, supported by monkeys and bears, was fighting against tough odds. He also had to be always well-aware of the magic and tricks Ravana was capable of and deploying everyday. But Rama's constant self-awareness won the battle.

Rama's RVL—Breakthrough Visionary

Even while present in the moment, Rama was always also thinking far beyond the short-term horizon of now and tomorrows. The prime example is that Rama incarnated as a mortal human to restore the disturbing imbalance of oppressing materialist demons, overpowering and oppressing the sages and knowledge-seeking common people of Ayodhya. All of Rama's actions were fully committed to that long-term vision. Similarly, one worthy long-term breakthrough vision in the world today could be social equality and world peace.

Rama's RVL—Inclusion and Diversity

Rama's RVL leveraged the total talent pool available to them. When in need, Rama did not hesitate to seek the help and refuge of even other sub-human species such as monkeys and bears. Similarly, high-performance organizations in the twenty-first century must not limit themselves to a partial pool, using men or women only, or whites only, or Christians, or Muslims, or Buddhists only as filters. Everyone can add strength to the achievement of the vision.

Table 7.1 Rama's resonant virtual leadership model

Rama's RVL attributes	Brief descriptions
1. Upholds virtues and values	Grant refuge, honor fair play
2. Mindfully present	Attentive and alert to here and now; changes
3. Breakthrough visionary	Long-term and innovative orientation
4. Inclusion of diversity	Leverage total talent pool; all strengths
5. Caring and compassionate	Generous in helping and sharing

Rama's RVL—Caring Compassionate and Generous

Rama was caring and compassionate to all those who sought his help and refuge. In MVR Book-4, *Kishkindha Kanda*, Chapter-7, Rama was willing to help dethroned king Sugriva and kill his stronger older brother Vaali who had abducted Sugriva's wife and kingdom. When Vibhishana sought his refuge, Rama consulted with all his advisors, took everyone's opinions, and then decided to give refuge to Vibhishana and his four demon associates—just because they had sought Rama's shelter. Rama believed that his *dharmic* virtue was clear that anyone who comes to him for sanctuary must not be turned away. Table 7.1 shows a model of Rama's Resonant Virtual Leadership (RVL).

In conclusion, these are the five pillars of Rama's Resonant Virtuous Leadership. We believe that these pillars are likely to perform as well in the twenty-first century, as these did in Rama's troubled times in c.7th century BCE, in the Gangetic Plains of Ancient India, based on the examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., who practiced RVL in the socio-political arena (Gehani, 2019). Hopefully the courage and values of RVL will show their benefits and impact in corporate settings as well.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study road-mapped leader Rama's inner journey to help us with our transformation as a better leader for our increasingly dynamic, uncertain, and complex times. In this chapter we found inspiration, motivation, and practical suggestions to help us become a more empathetic, caring,

and inclusive leader. With these values, our improved relationships would help sustain our effectiveness. We explored the key leadership practices of Rama to develop a solid foundation for a new model of Resonant Virtuous Leadership (RVL) in the twenty-first century.

Sanskrit Translation Challenges

A word of caution: a thoughtful translation from East to West often involves carrying over ideas across cultural boundaries and barriers. This may lose some of the essence and their contextual meaning (Egenes & Reddy, 2016; Gehani, 2020). Translating and hermeneutically interpreting an epic ancient poem like *Ramayana* in an ancient Eastern language such as Sanskrit, to a modern western language such as English, introduces additional space and time-related hardships and misunderstandings. Some scholars suggest that our much-cherished classics need to be re-translated every generation or about 20–25 years with current idioms to make the translations relevant, useful, and more meaningful.

Translating Indian classic literature, such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat*, or *The Bhagavad Gita*, demands translating and interpreting unique Sanskrit words such as *Atma* (consciousness), *Param-atma* (super-consciousness), *Dharma* (duty), *Karma* (actions), *Purusha-arth* (purpose for humans), *Prakriti* (nature), etc. This is further complicated by the fact that many Sanskrit words are heavily conjugated, and these need to be split in their appropriate parts.

There are also many culturally loaded exotic phrases that need to be retained in translation. For example, Sita is described as walking with the swaying gait of an elephant, and Rama had the strength of a bull among men. These metaphors may have been clear and much appreciated many centuries ago, but these may seem somewhat offensive to contemporary readers. Over more than 100 generations since c.700 BCE when Valmiki etched his Ramayana on Tamra tree leaves, many phrases in epic classic poems have been refined and re-refined till they became superlative and larger than life with a grandeur of emotions—which to some readers may seem somewhat excessive for our contemporary lives.

Abridging translation from the original 25,000 verses of Valmiki's Ramayana may also lose or add some of the original grandeur. For a textual analysis of MVR see Subramaniam (2023). This chapter focused on just four of the main characters around Rama, while Ramayana is replete with hundreds of other characters. We must, therefore, read

various remarks and interpretations in this research study with an open mind, and some cultural respect and tolerance. Our focus is on the core meaning intended, rather than the finer minor nuances that may vary significantly from one geographic region to another, from one context to the next. *Ramayana* can be better seen as a book of inspirations rather than as a manual of instructions. Rama and Laxmana can be better referred as Rama and Laxmana, as they are reverently called in everyday life in India.

Shah and Shah (2021, p. 13) have reported that peace and harmony are rare in today's times because "a large majority of leaders" in the upper echelons are primarily "engaged in self-serving pursuits of personal glorification and enrichment." These researchers, therefore, focused their attention on ethics and governance in the time of *Ramayana* by taking some of its "characters and situations." Their purpose is to motivate young generation and help faculty introduce new ideas into their class discussions (Shah & Shah, 2021).

Deeper non-dogmatic research studies of India's ancient literature *Ramayana* (and *Mahabharata*) with the help of more recent developments and innovations of sciences can help enormously (Subramaniam, 2023). Their interpretations with qualitative and quantitative analytical methods can provide us much more satisfactory answers than the sporadic controversies of ancient classics in India and in other traditions sometimes generate for selected few misguided people's political motives and their interest to influence or misguide gullible millions.

Valmiki's *Ramayana* is a rich ancient literature which has withstood the test of time and space over centuries and long continental distances. This research study demonstrated and contributed to the outcome that Rama's inner journey of self-realization and consciousness, with close encounters with a wide variety of individuals and other entities, is even more inspiring for the leaders around the world who may be struggling with the social distancing 'New Normal' demanded by COVID pandemic. This chapter may provide hope for leaders who are struggling and searching for greater inspiration.

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