

Arjuna, Yudhishtira and Rama: Rahul Gandhi- The Reclaiming of Democratic Dharma in Modern India

Dr Rajashekar Reddy P¹, Venugopal G²

^{1,2}Social Activist and Political Researcher, Hyderabad, Telangana.

Abstract

This article examines how transformational leadership theory relates to Rahul Gandhi's leadership style, interpreting it through three notable Ithihasa characters—Arjuna, Yudhishtira, and Rama. By adopting a qualitative, theoretically grounded methodology, this study analyzed Rahul Gandhi's speeches, debates, and political campaign through the lens of transformational leadership theory and political theory from 2014 to 2025. The study suggests that the leadership qualities associated with Arjuna, Yudhishtira, and Rama in the Ithihasas are reflected in Rahul Gandhi's leadership. This study is primarily theoretical and interpretative. Future studies can improve it by analyzing political speeches and public opinion surveys of the leaders. By combining modern leadership theory with the symbolic lessons from the Indian Ithihasas in a cross-cultural perspective, researchers can further study.

Keywords: Constitutionalism, Epic Archetypes, Indian Democracy, Political Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Rahul Gandhi.

1. Introduction

Political understanding in India goes beyond elections, policies, and electoral numbers; it is also influenced by moral imagination and cultural heritage (Chakravorty & Ansary, 2025). As stated by Auerbach et al. (2022), Indian political leaders' journeys are always evaluated based on ideals, values, and respect for the constitution rather than solely on their political achievements. According to Hongal and Kshirsagar (2023), "In India, how people perceive their leaders, the dharma they follow, righteousness, justice, and duties are continuously rich cultural heritage and lessons taught by the great Ithihasas like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana." The heroes in the Ithihasas are not only worshipped but also serve as classic examples of leadership qualities (Hongal & Kshirsagar, 2023; Kumar et al., 2024). Their constant dedication to truth, bravery, questioning, critical thinking, and Empathy towards the people, despite exile and the anguish of war, has shown how moral integrity creates inner peace. The warrior and great character in the Mahabharata, Arjuna, during the Kurukshetra battlefield, underwent tremendous moral and mental agony. Lord Krishna patiently answered all Arjuna's ethical questions and taught him Dharma. In the Mahabharata, Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava, stands out as an embodiment of Dharma (righteousness), ethical conduct, and virtue. Known as Dharmaraja, the ruler who prioritized Dharma above personal gain, Yudhishtira's life offers timeless lessons that remain relevant even in today's fast-paced, morally complex world. When Yudhishtira was tricked by Shakuni and his cousins, the Kauravas, into playing a dice game, he lost everything, including his kingdom, his wife, his brothers, and even himself. His

character in the game of dice demonstrated commitment to Dharma, even though this may seem like a moment of weakness. His decision to accept the outcome of the game and go into exile for 13 years, even though it meant great personal loss, was a manifestation of his understanding of detachment and his respect for Karma (Radha Krishna Temple, 2025). He displayed humility by accepting his mistakes and relying on his family's counsel, which ultimately helped him achieve victory in the Kurukshetra War (Radha Krishna Temple, 2025). These brothers teach us that true leadership goes beyond power to staying strong, adapting, commitment to Dharma, and following one's own principles in the face of adversity.



Rahul Gandhi: The rise of India's political scion - BBC News

The Ithihasa Ramayana symbolises Rama's duty and sacrifice through selfless stewardship grounded in social responsibility, where personal interests are subordinated to the well-being of the community, aligning with the transformational leadership principle of inspirational motivation. The Rama's character in the Ramayana emphasizes ideals such as loyalty, devotion, and righteousness. Unlike the Pandavas and Rama, Rahul Gandhi's leadership journey has guided contemporary Indian politics with the same ethical behaviour, constitutional values, and democratic responsibility. Rahul Gandhi has faced Persistent political difficulties, criticism, character assassination, humiliation and electoral defeats on his political path since 2014. Despite all these challenges, Rahul Gandhi kept speaking up for people and drawing attention to the issues faced by youth, farmers, laborers, and underprivileged people. In his several public gatherings, he stressed that democratic governance can function effectively if the people remain at its center. Rahul Gandhi has remained actively engaged with the nation's political and social debates rather than withdrawing from public life after electoral setbacks (Rao, 2023). He has continued to offer constructive criticism of policies, highlighted economic inequality, and drawn attention to the struggles of those who are often unheard in national discussions (Rao, 2023).

According to Amrith Lal in an editorial published on 8 January 2023, 'Gandhi's determination reflects an emblematic leadership style that does not give up easily and is not concerned with political pressure; he has continued to draw attention to the suffering of the voiceless, question policies, and shed light on economic inequalities.' Gandhi stood up for their rights on several occasions by showing dedication to help the economically weaker and socially downtrodden people. Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra exemplified that genuine insight emerges not from the halls of power but from journeys among the people. On the first anniversary of Bharat Jodo Yatra, Pawan Khera, INC spokesperson, said the yatra was not measured in kilometres but in the dreams, aspirations, tears, smiles, and hopes of millions of Indians, symbolically uniting diverse voices and experiences (Indian National Congress, 2023). Reflecting Rama's

dutiful exile and the Pandavas' hardships, it reborn leadership through introspection, empathy, and togetherness in times of difficulties. This study connects Rahul Gandhi's leadership ideas with the eternal lessons of the Ithihasa, drawing on his public talks and speeches in Parliament from 2014 to 2025.



Opinion: Giant blisters and leg fractures. Inside a marathon march to 'remake India' | CNN

1.1 Rama's Path, Arjuna's Courage, and Yudhishtira's Truth: How the Bharat Jodo Yatra Brought India Together

The Indian National Congress initiated the Bharat Jodo Yatra from Kanniyakumari to Kashmir on September 7, 2022. Rahul's Yatra covered more than 4,080 kilometres across 14 States and 2 Union Territories, with former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and 120 other Bharat yatris walking the whole journey over 268 days.

Rahul Gandhi addressed 12 public gatherings, over 100 street-corner meetings, 13 press conferences, more than 200 sitting interactions, and more than 200 planned walking interactions during the Yatra, which arrived in Srinagar on January 30, 2023. In all, he had connected with over 10 crore people. To mark its first anniversary, the Congress party Mallikarjun Kharge held Bharat Jodo Yatras across 722 districts, with senior leaders joining district-level events. On September 7, 2023, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge called the Yatra a people's movement "unequaled in history." He said it aims to highlight real issues—economic inequality, price rise, unemployment, social injustice, and attacks on the Constitution. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh stated the Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJD) transformed "rising economic inequalities, increasing social polarisation and deepening political authoritarianism".



Rahul Gandhi with supporters during the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' in Hingoli. From "Kolhapur leaves imprint in Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra," by Deccan Herald News Service, 2022, Deccan Herald.

1.1.1 Arjuna's Courage: Asking the Right Questions

Like Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Gandhi would not accept anything without questioning it (Morton, 2022). Along the way, he asked people in town halls who really benefited from India's growth. Since 42% of young people are unemployed, he asked farmers and labourers, "What does justice look like for the unseen?" This point of view led to valuable debates. The number of Congress seats in the Lok Sabha would rise from 52 to 99 by 2024 (Saxena, 2026). This indicates that asking the right questions might wake up a nation.

1.1.2 Yudhishtira's Truth: Standing Firm on Ethics

Rahul Gandhi, addressing a programme organised by Dalit influencers on January 31, 2025, commented that the Congress has lost the confidence of Dalits because it did not protect the interests of the Dalits and backwards the way it should have in the 1990s, has been accepted by the young generation of the party (NDTV, 2025, January 31). "Such an admission is a sign of his large-heartedness," said party MP Tanuj Punia. Rahul Gandhi walked with honesty, much like Pandava elder brother Yudhishtira, who held onto truth and dharma even during his hardest days in exile. Rahul Gandhi did not pretend to be perfect. People trusted him because of that trait and attitude (Rao, 2023).

"India Today: Mood of the Nation" (August 2024) reports that Gandhi's support as the best leader of the INDIA bloc rose from 21% in February 2024 to 32% after the Lok Sabha results, a 52% increase. This was because young people and urban voters saw him as a stronger alternative to Modi. They stated the Bharat Jodo Yatra "made politics human again." Because of this walk, more than 10,000 volunteers, mostly women and young people, are now in charge of Congress in their states.

1.1.3 Rama's Path: Walking in Selfless Duty

Rama's 14 years of forest exile were to honour his father's word, protect dharma and serve as an ideal of self-sacrifice for the people and society (Jain, 2022). Like Rama, who walked through forests not for himself but for his people, Gandhi walked barefoot during the Bharat Jodo Yatra (2022–2023) across India. During Yatra, Rahul Gandhi emphasised walking not for self or the Congress party's gain, but to listen to the downtrodden, rebuild connections, humanise politics and highlight real issues—economic inequality, price rise, unemployment, social injustice, and attacks on the Constitution (Times of India article, January 31, 2023). Speaking at the Congress plenary session in February 2023, Rahul Gandhi shared how the Yatra transformed him- "The arrogance I had when we began the yatra was wiped out after the first month." He confessed that he started as a talker but became a listener, an experience that humbled him deeply (The Federal, February 25, 2023). Rahul Gandhi's slogan was simple: "opening a shop of love in the market of hate" to counter division and promote brotherhood, respect, and unity. The Bharat Jodo Yatra amplified the voices of marginalised groups—locals, farmers, labourers, Dalits, Adivasis/Tribals (e.g., Kuki-Meitei tensions that have displaced thousands), and people experiencing poverty—who are often ignored in mainstream politics and In Bihar, Rahul Gandhi's Yatra passed through public meetings and engagements entered via Kishanganj (January 2024), drawing crowds of workers, supporters and locals, where Gandhi listened to their concerns like unemployment, farmers' rights, and livelihoods. This interaction symbolised 'Leadership through service'.

According to the reports of India Today (February 16, 2024), the Yatra raised only ₹20 Cr—through small donations (The 'Donate for Desh' campaign -launched December 2023) raised about ₹20 Cr by early 2024 from common citizens—proving that heart matters more than money in connecting with people. It inspired the 2024 Nyay Yatra and helped pressure the government to scrap electoral bonds by 2026. The Yatra

emphasized humility, direct connection, and heart over lavish spending—contrasting with big-budget campaigns. The Bharat Jodo Yatra showed that:

- Arjuna's questions “**can wake up a democracy**”
- Yudhishtira's truth “**can rebuild broken trust**”
- Rama's selfless walk “**can unite a divided nation**”

Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra highlighted that leadership is not about sitting in big offices. It flourishes along dusty roads, holding the hands of common people and listening to the voiceless. In doing so, it gave people hope for a kinder, more united India—where dharma meets Ithihasas.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Transactional and Transformational Leadership in Political Contexts

The leaders' efficiency and effectiveness must be judged by actual social change measured by intent and by the satisfaction of human need and expectations (Burns 1978). According to James MacGregor Burns (1978), there are two types of leadership. **Transactional leadership** was quite popular from the 1960s through the 1980s and reflected an increased interest in the human relations model, closed-systems thinking, and workers' viewpoints. Transformational leaders are frequently heroic leaders (Burns, 1978) because this type of leadership relieves people of conflict by allowing them to project their fears and aggressions onto another object. Thus, 'heroic leadership provides the symbolic solution of internal and external conflict' (Burns, 1978, p. 244).

The originator of **Transformational leadership theory**, James MacGregor Burns (1978), believed in the value of inspiring leaders with compelling visions. However, he also argued that these leaders needed to be held accountable by followers through democratic mechanisms. Transformational leadership is one of the most popular approaches to leadership today (Bass, 1990). The study indicates that transformational leadership enhances democracy by lifting people's hopes, bringing people together, inspiring followers to go above and beyond, building trust, and uniting diverse groups.

2.2 Epic Archetypes and Cultural Leadership Narratives

The great Indian epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana have significantly shaped Indian society, influencing its values, norms, and cultural ethos for centuries and shaping public opinion towards leaders, Nyaya, Dharma, and righteousness (Hiltebeitel, 2001; Sharma, 2007). The great heroes and leaders of these epics—Arjuna, Rama, and Yudhishtira inspire us with their leadership qualities.

Epic Archetypes	Qualities
Arjuna	Embodying Reflective Questioning Amid Moral Dilemmas (Kaipa, 2014).
Yudhishtira	The Model Of Ethical Resilience Kaipa, 2014).
Rama	The Generous Steward Of Collective Welfare (Exotic India Art, 2023).

Table-1: Epic Archetypes and their Qualities.

In modern Indian politics, these truths offer powerful justification for democratic dharma. Leaders who want to reflect like Arjuna's questioning—such as raising their voices against corruption or inequality—mobilize Reformist Zeal.

Those mirroring Yudhishtira's integrity seek guidance and do not hesitate to consult elders and allies, embodying humility and willingness to share power. Leaders must make decisions that are attuned to collective welfare and fairness. Rama's duty-bound ethos inspires adherence to dharma, continuous

sacrifice recasting power as public service and framing the Constitution as "modern dharma" to humanise policy battles. Rama motivates his followers through his calm, steadiness, and by self-control.

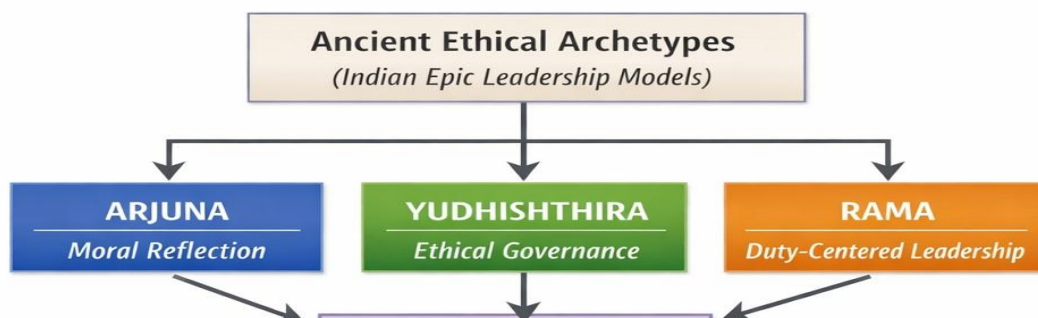
3 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Linking Epic Archetypes, Rahul Gandhi, and Transformational Leadership

Epic Archetype	Ethical Trait	Leadership Quality	Transformational Leadership Dimension	Contemporary Democratic Rahul Gandhi's Leadership (2014–2025)
Arjuna	Taking time to think deeply about what is right and wrong.	Courage to question authority and knowing when to pause.	Intellectual Stimulation	Probing parliamentary questions on policy failures sparking public discourse on transparency and reform.
Yudhishtira	Truth and justice	Unflinching integrity and moral accountability, valuing equity over expediency even in loss.	Idealized Influence	Resigning as Congress president post-2019 defeat to own collective shortcomings, advocating for farmers' MSP rights and minority protections, modeling ethical resilience amid polarization.
Rama	Duty and sacrifice	Selfless stewardship rooted in societal obligation	Inspirational Motivation	Bharat Jodo Yatra's 4,000+ km march as a sacrificial pilgrimage for unit.
Integrated: Rahul Gandhi	Doing what is morally right within a democratic system	Participatory moral agency, justice, and duty into inclusive action	Holistic Transformational Synthesis	Nationwide yatras and questioning accountability and constitutional fealty and duty.

Table-2: Linking Epic Archetypes, Rahul Gandhi, and Transformational Leadership

Conceptual Framework





Source: Author's Construction

4. Research Objectives

- “To identify the leadership qualities of Arjuna, Yudhishtira and Rama rooted in the Ramayana, Mahabharata Ithihasas.”
- “To analyse the communication strategies, and moral frameworks in Bharat Jodo Yatra Documentation, Rahul Gandhi's public speeches, parliamentary debates, and campaign narratives (2014-2025).”
- “To examine how Rahul Gandhi's expression of constitutional values and democratic challenges parallels the righteous responses of these epic personalities.”

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative analysis of primary epic sources (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata Ithihasas) and secondary academic literature, using interpretive and thematic analysis to extract leadership concepts. This study examines Key instances from these epic narratives and critically compares them with modern political leadership.

5.2 Data Collection

The Ramayana, Mahabharata Ithihasas, Indian National Congress Archives, Lok Sabha Records, verified News Reports, Bharat Jodo Yatra Documentation, public speeches of Gandhi.

5.3 Analytical Approach

Comparative Analysis: Examined similarities and differences across the Ithihasa with balanced representation of Gandhi's narrative.

6. Findings and Analysis: Epic Heroes in Modern Politics

Here, Rahul Gandhi's leadership approach from 2014 to 2025 reminds us of the great epic characters Arjuna, Rama, and Yudhishtira from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Each character illustrates how modern democratic societies are linked to ancient Indian wisdom. Further, it can link political situations to ethical principles, values, and dharma.

6.1 Arjuna: The Questioning Warrior – When One Question Woke a Nation

Visualize the Indian Parliament in November 2025. The House atmosphere is filled with hate. MPs shout across the hall like warriors on a battlefield. It resembles Kurukshetra, though with words instead of swords. Then, Rahul Gandhi stands up. “He does not shout.” Instead, Gandhi pauses—like Arjunain in the Kurukshetra. Rahul Gandhi's voice is calm but strong. "This is not democracy," he asserts once again. He holds up papers showing how companies secretly donated money to the ruling party via electoral bonds—without accountability. Then Gandhi asks the question that resounds across the country. "Where did these thousands of crores come from? Who is running them? And where did the money go? Will the

Election Commission investigate — or will it ask for an affidavit here too? Or will it change the law itself, so that this data can also be hidden?" (The Hindu, 2025, August 27).

Rahul Gandhi stood up and went beyond politics like Arjuna in the Kurukshetra. That day, Rahul Gandhi questioned, sought answers, and refused to accept injustice in silence. Millions watched Rahul Gandhi's questioning live on TV and phones. Rahul Gandhi's Reflective Questioning started a fire. Youth and Farmers from across the country gathered in the streets to demand fair elections and transparency. Rahul Gandhi's reflective questioning united opposition parties and people.

The Supreme Court of India ordered a thorough audit of EVMs by 2026. People who had lost faith in democracy started to reconsider. Rahul Gandhi's commitment and honesty touched hearts. Over 250 former judges and officers wrote open letters to the Election Commission in support of his stand.

The Leadership lesson:

Rahul Gandhi showed that one of the most courageous things one can do in a democracy is to ask: "Is this right or is this wrong?" In the Mahabharata epic, instead of making Arjuna weak, his doubt made him strong.

6.2 Yudhishtira: The Ethical Anchor – When Truth Mattered More Than Power

Imagine the dusty agricultural fields of farmers in Punjab in December 2020. The harvest was over, but there was no joy or happiness. Farmers' faces were tired, and they sat on the ground. Farmers were threatened by the government's laws, which threatened their livelihoods. The government has not directly addressed the protests. Instead, the Sangh and the lapdog media have demonised the protests.

But Rahul Gandhi stood up for the Punjab farmers and went to the fields. Moreover, Gandhi knelt in the dust with the farmers.

A Modern Dice Game: Rahul Gandhi and Yudhishtira's Shared Trial

Shakuni cheated Yudhishtira in the game of dice in the Mahabharata.

Yudhishtira knows that Shakuni rigged the dice game and cheated. However, Yudhishtira played by the rules but lost everything. Because Yudhishtira refused to leave the righteous path, he believed that truth would one day prevail, even when defeated. Similarly, like Yudhishtira, Rahul Gandhi also faced his own rigged game in March 2023.

A Surat district court convicted Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case and sentenced him to two years in jail. The Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) speaker immediately disqualified Rahul as an MP. Afterwards, Rahul Gandhi did not attack Parliament; he did not choose the path of violence.

Gandhi chose Yudhishtira's path of Dharma. He had faith in the Indian constitution. He accepted the loss, vacated his seat, and appealed to the court. Finally, on August 4, 2023, he got justice from the Supreme Court.

The Leadership lesson:

- Yudhishtira's truth cost him a kingdom—but saved his soul. Gandhi showed that in politics, being honest when you lose is more powerful than pretending when you win.
- Yudhishtira trusted Dharma when the dice game was unfair.
- Rahul Gandhi trusted the constitution of India when the Surat district court verdict felt unjust.

They both lost in the short term. By keeping faith in the system's ultimate fairness, they both won in the end. The great lesson we can learn from these two situations is sometimes the bravest thing is not to break the rules—but to believe that truth, followed faithfully, will eventually win.

6.3 The Yaksha Prashna of Our Time: Rahul Gandhi's Philosophical Press Conferences

From the Mahabharata, the great Vanaparva Yudhishtira's Yaksha Prashna is a legendary episode which

we can compare with Rahul Gandhi. We can draw similarities from this great episode. In the Yaksha prashna, Yudhishtira engages in an intense Q&A conversation with a Yaksha (revealed as Dharma/Yama in disguise).



Source: Google Images.

Yama tests Yudhishtira's wisdom, ethics, and adherence to dharma, ultimately reviving his brothers. On the other hand, Rahul Gandhi's media addresses since 2014, as Congress leader and Leader of Opposition, are modern political interactions, including press conferences, interviews, and speeches. These often focus on critiquing government policies, economic issues, democracy, and social justice.

Yudhishtira's challenge was internal, mythological, and introspective; Rahul Gandhi's is **external, political, contemporary**, and adversarial.

- Both the leaders face high-stakes interrogations. Yudhishtira's answers save his family; Rahul's addresses often defend his party's stance amid political crises (e.g., disqualifications, elections).
- Yudhishtira's responses prioritise dharma. Rahul frequently highlights social justice issues, such as farmer welfare, minority rights, and economic inequality.

6.4 Rama's Path: Rahul Gandhi and the Dharma of Exile

In the Ramayana, Rama is Maryada Purushottama—the ideal of selfless duty. Rama's journey is one of continuous sacrifice and adherence to Dharma. Rama gave up his throne without bitterness, choosing 14 years of exile to uphold his father's unjust promise, not because he had done anything wrong, but because, for him, more than happiness, honour matters. Before going to Vanavasa, Rama motivated his followers through his calm steadiness and by modeling restraint and self-control even in the face of betrayal (as with Kaikeyi) and loss (of Sita). Morally rooted and duty-bound leadership is shown in these stories.

6.4.1 Rahul Gandhi's Modern Exile

In March 2023, a Surat district court convicted Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case and sentenced him to two years in jail. The speaker immediately disqualified Rahul as an MP. Afterwards, Rahul Gandhi did not attack Parliament. Rama Gandhi trusted Dharma even when exile was unfair, like Rama did in the Ramayana. He accepted the disqualification, vacated his Wayanad seat, and appealed to the court. Finally, on August 4, 2023, he got justice from the Supreme Court. The Honourable Supreme Court stayed his conviction, criticizing the trial court's haste and lack of reasoning. Rahul Gandhi was reinstated. Justice, delayed, was finally served. On August 4, 2023, the Supreme Court stayed his conviction, criticizing the

trial court's haste and lack of reasoning. Gandhi was reinstated. Justice (Dharma), delayed, was finally served.

The parallel is simple:

- Rama trusted Dharma even when exile was unfair.
- Gandhi trusted the Constitution even when the verdict felt unjust.

Rama and Gandhi walked away from power to uphold a higher principle. They both trusted that truth and Dharma, and that following it faithfully would eventually win.

The Deeper Sacrifice

This was not the first ethical surrender of Rahul Gandhi. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Rahul Gandhi resigned as Congress president, taking full responsibility and ensuring accountability for the party's performance without excuses. Rahul Gandhi did not hold on to power tightly. He did not blame anyone. No deflection. Just ensured accountability. He chose service to the party and nation over self-interest and stood with the Punjab farmers, walking 4,000 kilometers in the Bharat Jodo Yatra. He always prioritizes ethics over ambition. He is always on the path of Dharma. IN 2022, Salman Khurshid compared Rahul Gandhi to Rama, and the Indian National Congress party to Bharat, the loyal brother who kept Rama's sandals on the throne and ruled only as caretaker. Just as Bharat carried Rama's vision to every village, the Congress carries Rahul's ideals and vision where power politics cannot reach.

The Walk That Proved It

Three years earlier, in 2022, Gandhi launched a transformative political event in India, the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Jairam Ramesh, Congress leader (The Hindu, 2026, January 31), said, "Bharat Jodo Yatra" was a profoundly transformative event in India's politics, marked by the three messages of sharpening economic inequalities, deepening social polarisation, and increasing political authoritarianism.

In the Ramayana, during the exile period, how did Rama leave behind the comforts of home to live among the people? The same way Rahul Gandhi walked with farmers, labourers, students, and Adivasis. He listened to their painful stories and held their hands. His slogan was simple: "A shop of love in a market of hate."

What These Stories Tell Us

Rahul Gandhi's Journey live in the three epic heroes:

- Like **Arjuna**, he asks the questions no one dares to ask—and in asking, he wakes up a sleeping democracy.
- Like **Yudhishtira**, he stands by truth even when it costs him everything—and in standing, he rebuilds broken trust.
- Like **Rama**, he walks with the people, not for glory but for duty—and in walking, he reminds us that leadership is service.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra was a reminder about courage, truth, and love. The greatest leaders who always follow the path of dharma are willing to walk away when principles demand it. Rahul Gandhi believed that fighting for the throne is not the bravest thing to do and that good things will be recognized one day. In a world full of hate and noise, Rahul Gandhi chose to walk. He lit a flame that still burns—a flame of hope, unity, and the quiet belief that democracy can be kind again.



Source: Google Images.

7. Discussion and Political Implications

The Transformational Leadership theory draws on the great epic characters of Arjuna, Yudhishtira, and Rama to analyze Rahul Gandhi's (2014-2025). These epic heroes represent different leadership styles. The great Pandava warrior Arjuna symbolises "critical inquiry/questioning of institutions", Yudhishtira indicates "righteousness, ethical accountability and truthfulness", and Rama symbolizes "unwavering commitment to integrity and Dharma (righteousness/ethics) and duty-driven service to society". Combining all these heroes' qualities forms a framework of "democratic dharma," through which leaders across all fields can focus on ethical governance, respect constitutional values, follow the path of dharma, and promote public participation. The Bharat Jodo Yatra represents this framework 'Democratic Dharma,' by supporting grassroots engagement. Gandhi's initiatives, such as the Bharat Jodo Yatra, represent this model by supporting grassroots engagement, Solidarity, and political polarized diversity in the political environment. The study's Democratic Dharma suggests that constitutional institutions, which promote coalition formation and strengthen opposition politics, are supported by the diverse democratic systems, ethical persistence, and people's engagement. However, the efficiency of such leadership needs more than just the leader. Not only leaders, but also the Party karyakarthis, sympathisers, grassroots sympathisers, social media warriors, and workers must actively participate in transformational leadership for the Democratic Dharma. They need to uphold the same values of ethical politics, honesty, and public service for the Democratic Dharma's ideological vision to become a reality. Leadership ideas risk being symbolic rather than bringing about significant political change in the absence of organisational and community support. All these traits, taken into consideration, may enhance modern political leaders' approach and also provide insights for the renewal of Indian democracy and other nations through cultural narratives from the great Indian Ithihasas.

8. Conclusion

The Ramayana and Mahabharata epics not only tell stories but also teach great lessons from heroes like Rama, Arjuna, and Pandava elder brother Yudhishtira. In Indian politics, the leader of the Opposition in parliament, Rahul Gandhi, and his political journey, especially from 2014 to 2025, provide insights into his leadership approach from great heroes. These great heroes, warriors, and rulers possess different leadership qualities. These qualities also inspire modern youth. Together, these heroes restore the moral duty of political leaders to protect democracy in modern India. A brave and humble leader like Rahul Gandhi's style of leadership resembles the great warrior Arjuna. Like Arjuna, he has to overcome his own doubts and step into the role of warrior Arjuna. Rahul Gandhi has steered election campaigning to win

constitutional values, equality, social justice, and national unity by integrating transformational leadership hallmarks-Critical Thinking and questioning, inquiry, ethical steadfastness, Trustworthiness, "dutiful service". Rahul Gandhi's United India March, popularly known as the Bharat Jodo Yatra, is a perfect example of how this integration transforms personal and political exile into a collective journey of hope and restoration. This study also asserts the enduring relevance of Indian epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in addressing contemporary democratic challenges. This study not only sheds light on Rahul Gandhi's leadership style, but it also helps leaders across the globe. Likewise, in Indian society, everyone's stories and epics have their own heroes who teach ethical acts and moral values. Political leaders across various democratic systems can learn lessons from these, which help them understand people's sentiments, traditions, cultures, and their expectations of them. These leaders build Democratic Dharma, not solely driven by the thirst for power. This kind of approach offers a democratic country like India a strategic direction, led by great heroes, toward a timeless path toward a more equitable and harmonious polity.

References:

1. Avolio, B. J., & Bass, B. M. (2004). Multifactor leadership questionnaire manual. Mind Garden.
2. Bass, B. M. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectations. Free Press.
3. Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational dynamics*, 18(3), 19-31.
4. Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). Transformational leadership (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
5. Brown, M. E., & Treviño, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions.
6. The Burns, J. M. (1978). Leadership. Harper & Row.
7. Campbell, J. (1949). The hero with a thousand faces. Princeton University Press.
8. Chakravarti, B. (2006). The Mahabharata: A literary study. Oxford University Press.
9. Ciulla, J. B. (2014). Ethics, the heart of leadership (3rd ed.). Praeger.
10. Deccan Herald News Service. (2022, November 13). Kolhapur leaves imprint in Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/kolhapur-leaves-imprint-in-rahul-gandhi-s-bharat-jodo-yatra-1161892.html>.
11. Den Hartog, D. N., & Belschak, F. D. (2012). When does transformational leadership enhance
12. Edelman, M. (1988). Constructing the political spectacle. University of Chicago Press.
13. Employee proactive behavior? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 33(7), 894–910.
14. Exotic India Art. (2023). Epic Leadership – Timeless Lessons from the Ramayana. <https://www.exoticindiaart.com/book/details/epic-leadership-timeless-lessons-from-ramayanah706/>
15. Ganguli, K. M. (Trans.). (1883–1896). The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa. Bharata Press.
16. Gardner, H. (2011). Leading minds: An anatomy of leadership. Basic Books.
17. Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2013). Primal leadership: Unleashing the power of emotional intelligence. Harvard Business Press.
18. Heifetz, R. (1994). Leadership without easy answers. Harvard University Press.
19. Hildebeitel, A. (2001). Rethinking the Mahabharata: A reader's guide to the education of the dharma king. University of Chicago Press.
20. Jha, D. N. (2016). Ancient India: In historical outline. Manohar Publishers.

21. Jung, C. G. (1968). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Princeton University Press.
22. Kaipa, P.L. (2014). *Making Wise Decisions: Leadership Lessons from Mahabharata*.
23. Kakar, S. (2002). *The Indians: Portrait of a people*. Penguin.
24. Kane, P. V. (2015). *History of Dharmasastra*. Motilal Banarsidass.
25. Lal, B. B. (2008). Rama: His historicity, mandir and setu. *Aryan Books. Leadership Quarterly*, 17(6), 595–616.
26. Lutgendorf, P. (1991). *The life of a text: Performing the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas*. University of California Press.
27. Menon, R. (2012). *The Mahabharata: A modern retelling*. Rupa Publications.
28. Mintzberg, H., & Laasch, O. (2020). Mintzberg on (ir) responsible management. In *Research handbook of responsible management* (pp. 73-83). Edward Elgar Publishing.
29. Northouse, P. G. (2021). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (9th ed.). Sage Publications.
30. Pattanaik, D. (2010). *Jaya: An illustrated retelling of the Mahabharata*. Penguin.
31. Pattanaik, D. (2013). *Sita: An illustrated retelling of the Ramayana*. Penguin.
32. Radha Krishna Temple. (2025, May 5). *Yudhishtira's guide to dharma: Lessons from Bhagavad Gita*. Retrieved March 10, 2026, from <https://www.radhakrishnatemple.net/blog/yudhishtira-bhagavad-gita-guide-to-dharma/>
33. Rao, A. (2014). Leadership lessons from the Mahabharata. *Journal of Human Values*, 20(1), 25–37.
34. Richman, P. (Ed.). (1991). *Many Ramayanas: The diversity of a narrative tradition in South Asia*. University of California Press.
35. Riggio, R. E. (2018). *Introduction to leadership: Concepts and practice*. Sage.
36. Sharma, A. (2007). *Classical Hindu thought: An introduction*. Oxford University Press.
37. Sinha, J. B. P. (2010). *Culture and organizational behavior*. Sage Publications.
38. Sivananda, S. (2008). *The Ramayana*. Divine Life Society.
39. Thapar, R. (2002). *Early India: From the origins to AD 1300*. Penguin.
40. The Hindu. (2025, August 27). *Rahul Gandhi cites media report on huge donations to 'anonymous parties' in Gujarat, asks 'will ECI probe'*. Retrieved March 10, 2026, from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/gujarat/rahul-gandhi-cites-media-report-on-huge-donations-to-anonymous-parties-in-gujarat-asks-will-eci-probe/article69982297.ece>
41. The Hindu. (2026, January 31). *Bharat Jodo Yatra a transformative event in India's politics- Congress*. Retrieved March 10, 2026, from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bharat-jodo-yatra-a-transformative-event-in-indias-politics-congress/article70573810.ece>.
42. Treviño, L. K., Brown, M., & Hartman, L. P. (2003). A qualitative investigation of perceived executive ethical leadership. *Human Relations*, 56(1), 5–37.
43. Valmiki. (2005). *the Ramayana* (R. Goldman, Trans) Princeton University Press.
44. Van Nooten, B., & Holland, G. (2011). *Rig Veda: A metrically restored text*. Harvard University Press.
45. Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (Vol. 2). University of California press.
46. Witzel, M. (2003). The Vedas and the epics: Some comparative notes. *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies*, 9(1), 1–29.
47. Wolpert, S. (2009). *Shameful flight: The last years of the British Empire in India*. Oxford University Press.

48. Yukl, G., Mahsud, R., Prussia, G., & Hassan, S. (2019). Effectiveness of broad and specific leadership behaviors. *Personnel Review*, 48(3), 774-783.