

The Ramayana Ancient Epic - Guide to Moral Excellence in the Modern Educational Pedagogy

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Abstract

People follow certain moral values in their lives. Although people belong to different countries, states, cultures and religions, they share many common values, like, brotherhood, kindness, sincerity, honesty and integrity etc. these values are often taught during childhood through stories. It is true that values embedded concretely within a human being, are strongly connected to some of one's favorite characters who had upheld similar ideals through the toughest of times in their lives. Even without realizing how much those characters had impacted their thoughts, they carried them ahead in life. And at some point of time, when certain situations similar to the ones in the stories, appeared in their lives, they unconsciously sought strength from those characters.

The Ramayana is not only a great Hindu epic but also an important source of moral education. It teaches us important values such as love and respect for family, keeping promises, protecting weak, courage, truthfulness, integrity, responsibility and so on. These values are very much relevant in day to day lives and also in education system. The Ramayana is more than a classic tale, it is an effective medium for imparting values in everyday life and through teaching learning process. The objective of this study to explore how to use this greatest creation of Hindu mythology, the Ramayana, as a medium to teach a child about values and ethics in life.

The present study aims to explore the educational significance of the Ramayana and examine how its teachings can help to develop moral values and ethics among students in contemporary education. It also highlights the role of stories in teaching a child the important life value and guiding them towards becoming responsible citizen and good human beings.

Keyword: epic, Ramayana, stories, taught, values

Introduction

The Ramayana is the greatest epic of Hindu Mythology. The Ramayana, traditionally attributed to Valmiki, is not only an epic but also an important source of moral and human values. Through the lives and actions of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Hanuman and other characters, it teaches values that remain relevant in modern life and education. The Ramayana creates characters that people should aspire to be like, such as the ideal father like Dasaratha, ideal son like Rama, ideal brother like Lakshmana, ideal wife like Sita, etc.

The Ramayana propagates a lot of values and ethics that people would want their children to adopt. Generally, people command their child to give respect to elders, but they can teach them the same through the use of storytelling, examples from Ramayana. Children love to listen to a story,

people can have utilized their interest to teach moral values and ethics by greatest gems of Hindu Mythology

Indian epics and mythological literature have played a significant role in shaping the moral, social, and cultural values of society. The great Hindu epic Ramayana is not only religious or literary texts; it is also important source of ethical principles and human values. This epic present numerous characters and situations that illustrate values such as truthfulness, duty, honesty, courage, patience, compassion, respect, sacrifice, self-discipline, justice, and responsibility.

In the modern age, education is expected not only to provide knowledge and professional skills but also to pay a valuable role to develop the moral character and personality of learners. However, the escalating challenges of modern society have created a need for effective value education. The stories, characters, and incidents of the Hindu epic can serve as significant educational tools for teaching and developing human values among students.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the present study:

- To explore the major human and moral values reflected in the great Ramayana.
- To examine the educational importance of the stories, characters, and incidents presented in this epic.
- To identify values such as truth, duty, justice, courage, integrity, compassion, patience, sacrifice, and self-discipline as depicted in the epic.
- To analyse the relevance of the teachings of Ramayana in the context of modern education and society.
- To examine how epic narratives can be used as an significant tool for value education among learners.
- To suggest ways of integrating the ethical and human values of the Ramayana into the contemporary educational system.

Methodology:

This study depends on secondary qualitative analysis. Relevant secondary data was reviewed from academic literature, books, journal articles, and textual resources.

Values and Ethics

Values are the principles and beliefs that guide a person's behavior and decisions. They help us understand what is important, good and desirable in life, e.g. honesty, respect, kindness, integrity, fairness, responsibility and loyalty etc.

Ethics are rules or principles about what is right and wrong. Ethics help people decide how they should behave toward others, e.g. if anyone values honesty, he or she believes telling the truth is important. Ethics may guide him or her to tell the truth even when lying would be easier.

Values and ethics are ideas that guide how people think, behave, and make decisions. In simple terms: Values are what you believe is important; ethics are principles that guide you to do what is right.

Values Taught by the Ramayana

The Ramayana teaches many important moral and ethical values that are still relevant in modern life:

Truthfulness (Satya)– One should always follow truth and honesty. Lord Rama is regarded as an ideal example of a person who remains truthful and keeps his promise even when it is difficult.

“*Satyam hi bhagavānrājāsatyedharmahpratiṣṭhitah | Satyamevāśrayo ’smākaṁtasmātsatyamnalopayet ||*” *Ramayana- 2.14.7*

"Truth indeed is the supreme lord, and in truth is righteousness firmly established. Truth alone is our ultimate refuge; therefore, one must never abandon or compromise the truth."

Duty and Responsibility – Lord Rama teaches us to perform our duties sincerely, even in difficult situations.

“*aham hi vacanādrājñahpateyamapipāvake | bhakṣayeyamviṣamṭīkṣṇampateyam (majjeyam) apicārṇave ||*” *Ramayana- 2.18.28*

“For the sake of my father’s word, I would even enter fire, drink fatal poison, or jump into the ocean.”

Respect for Parents and Elders – Rama's respect and obedience towards his parents demonstrate the importance of family values.

“*piturvacanānirdeśamkariṣyāminasaṁśayaḥ |*” *Ramayana- 2.26.3*

"I will follow my father's command/direction without any doubt."

The absolute highest praise for motherhood in the entire epic is found in this iconic Shloka, spoken by Lord Rama to his brother Lakshmana after the fall of Lanka.

“*apisvarṇamayilāṅkāna me lakṣmaṇarocate | jananījanmabhūmiścasvargādapigarīyasī ||*” *Ramayana- 6.123.18*

"O Lakshmana, even though this Lanka is made of pure gold, it does not attract me. One's mother (Janani) and motherland (Janmabhoomi) are far superior and greater than even heaven itself."

Sacrifice – The characters show that personal interests may sometimes be sacrificed for duty and the welfare of others. Bharata is one of the finest examples of sacrifice in the Ramayana. Although the kingdom was offered to him, he refused to accept it because he believed that Rama was the rightful king. There are so many examples of sacrifice, Lakshmana gives up the comforts of palace life and follows Rama into exile. Sita also chooses to accompany Rama into forest rather than remain safely in Ayodhya.

Loyalty and Devotion – Lakshmana's loyalty to Rama and Hanuman's devotion teach us the importance of faithfulness and dedication.

“*dāso’haṁkosalendrasyarāmasyākliṣṭakarmanah | hanumānśatrusainyānāmniḥantāmārutātmajaḥ ||*” *Ramayana- 5.42.34*

"I am the servant of Sri Rama, the Lord of Kosala, who performs every task effortlessly. I am Hanuman, the destroyer of enemy armies, and the son of the Wind-god."

Courage – The Ramayana inspires us to face difficulties with courage and determination. Jatayu courageously confronts Ravana while he is carrying Sita away, despite being an aged bird.

“*tiṣṭhathiṣṭhadaśagrīva! Naitattvaṁkartumarhasi | rākṣasādhama! Pāpātman! Paradārābhimarśanam ||*” *Ramayana- 3.51.13*

"Stop! Stop, O ten-headed one (Ravana)! You ought not to do this. O worst of the demons! O sinful soul! To touch another man's wife."

Justice and Righteousness (Dharma) – The central message of the epic is the victory of righteousness over wrongdoing.

“*dharmo hi paramo loke dharmesatyampratiṣṭhitam |*” *Ramayana- 6.114.17*

"Righteousness (Dharma) is indeed supreme in the world, and Truth (Satya) is firmly established within Dharma."

Integrity- Rama does not compromise his principles for power, comfort or personal happiness. Vibhisashana leaves Ravana when he refuses to follow righteousness.

"na ca nītyāvinārājamna ca nītirvinānṛpaḥ| "Ramayana- 6.16.19

A kingdom cannot function without righteous policies, and political wisdom cannot be implemented without a king."

"buddhyāhyānupapannenasarvakāryāṇirāghava|

naśakyaṃtavakartuṃ hi kāryaṃdharmavivarjitam|| "Ramayana- 6.16.17

"O Raghav (Rama)! All actions executed with an unreasoned or flawed intellect cannot achieve success. Similarly, any task that is devoid of Dharma (righteousness) can never be accomplished by you."

The Ramayana is not only an ancient epic but also a valuable guide for developing moral character, ethical behaviour, responsible leadership, and a harmonious society.

Significance of modern education and society

Sibling Attachment

Parents who have more than one child should draw their children's attention to the deep love and affection that existed between the brothers in the Ramayana. The example of Lakshmana demonstrates the significance of sibling love and loyalty. Although Lakshmana was used to the worldly comforts and luxuries associated with being a prince, he voluntarily gave them up to accompany his elder brother Rama during his fourteen years of exile in the forest. His decision reflected his profound love for Rama and his inability to imagine spending fourteen years away from his beloved brother.

The Ramayana also illustrates the importance of standing by one's siblings through the episode of Surpanakha and her brothers. When Surpanakha was insulted by Lakshmana, her brothers Khara and Dushana attempted to revenge her. Their actions ultimately resulted in their defeat and death. Surpanakha subsequently sought the assistance of her other brother Ravana, which eventually contributed to the chain of events leading to the great conflict between Rama and Ravana, representing the struggle between good and evil.

From this people would learn that, in the contemporary materialistic world, where disagreements and conflicts among siblings have become common, and such stories from the Ramayana need to be narrated and discussed repeatedly. Parents should encourage children not only to spend quality time with their siblings but also to support, protect and stand by one another whenever necessary. Such deep affection and mutual responsibility among siblings can be cultivated when parents consciously encourage these values and continuously emphasise the importance of love, loyalty, cooperation and mutual support among siblings.

Differentiating between Right and Wrong

The Ramayana provides an inspiring example of how an individual can distinguish between right and wrong, even when choosing the right path may involve personal sacrifice. Bharata was offered the opportunity to rule the kingdom of Ayodhya after Rama was sent into exile. However, Bharata did not accept the kingship as his own because he understood that Rama was the rightful successor.

When Bharata learned that his mother Kaikeyi had caused Rama's exile, he went to the forest to meet Rama and requested him to return to Ayodhya and assume his rightful position. His actions demonstrated his strong sense of justice, righteousness, humility and devotion towards his elder brother. When Rama refused to return before completing the fourteen years of exile, Bharata accepted the responsibility of governing Ayodhya only as a trustee of Rama. He placed Rama's sandals on the throne and administered the kingdom on Rama's behalf.

Thus, Bharata's character teaches children that something desirable should not be accepted if it is obtained through injustice. His conduct illustrates the values of righteousness, honesty, justice, selflessness, respect for rightful authority and moral courage. Parents should use Bharata's example to help children understand that choosing what is right is often more important than choosing what is personally advantageous.

The Value of a Promise

Dashrath had granted Kaikeyi two boons when she had saved his life on the battlefield. The day before Dashrath was to retire and crown his eldest son Rama as king, Kaikeyi demanded that Dashrath grant her the blessing she desired as promised. Her first desire was that Rama should be exiled to the forest for fourteen years, and the second, that her son, Bharat, be crowned King in his stead. Dashrath was naturally heartbroken at the prospect of having to send his son into exile for fourteen years, but for this noble hearted clan, honoring one's word is the highest duty. Even when Dashrath began to falter at the prospect of actually following through on his promises due to his love for his first born and pleaded with Rama not to leave, Rama reminded his father of the value of a promise given and left Ayodhya to keep his father's word.

*“sasatyavacanādrājā dharma-pāśenasamyataḥ|
vivāsayāmāsasutamrāmaṁdaśarathapriyam||”* Ramayana 1.1.23

"King Dasaratha, bound by his vow to truthfulness and restrained by the constraints of righteousness (dharma), exiled his beloved son Rama."

When Bharat begged Rama to return to Ayodhya, Rama once again reminded Bharat that he could not and would not dishonour his father by breaking the promise he had made to Kaikeyi.

It teaches them not to tarnish the value of their promise for small and unimportant things like eating, luxury staying or finishing their homework and so on.

Honour and Devotion for Parents

Rama's decision to keep his father's promise shows his deep love and respect for his parents. He willingly chose to spend 14 years in the forest to protect his father's honour. This shows how much he respected his father. Dashrath also loved Rama deeply. When Rama left for the forest, Dashrath could not bear the pain of being separated from his son for 14 years. He died because of his deep sorrow.

Rama always respected and obeyed his parents. He followed their wishes even when he was asked to give up the throne. Although he was the eldest son and the rightful heir to the kingdom, he did not go against his parents' wishes. His actions teach us the importance of respecting parents, keeping promises, and fulfilling our duties.

This example also shows the deep love parents have for their children. Dashrath's love for Rama teaches us that parents care deeply for their children. We should understand their love and respect them.

Avoidance of harmful advice

Kaikeyi was originally a good-hearted woman. However, her maid Manthara gave her harmful advice. Manthara convinced Kaikeyi to send Rama into exile and ask for her son Bharat to become king. Because of Manthara's bad advice, Kaikeyi made two difficult demands. These demands caused great suffering in her family. She lost her beloved husband Dashrath, and her son Bharat also became unhappy with her actions.

This teaches us that we should be careful when listening to others. We should avoid harmful advice and think carefully before making important decisions. Bad advice can destroy peace, happiness, and relationships. This is a very important lesson for our children. It teaches them to stay on guard against bad counsel. It teaches to be vigilant in order to avoid being scammed. It teaches them to be firm of mind and not let their minds get swayed easily by people. It teaches them to question their behaviour and think of the consequences of their actions before making any big or small decisions.

Protecting the Weak

Jatayu, an aged demigod in the form of a vulture, witnessed Ravana kidnapping Sita and taking her forcefully to Lanka. Disregarding his old age, Jatayu tried to save Sita by fighting Ravana valiantly but failed. Rama and Lakshman came across him where he was lying breathing his last. Jatayu informed Rama about Sita's whereabouts and Ravana's plans before breathing his last. Moved to tears by the gallantry and courage of the aged Jatayu, Rama gave the bird its last rites as though the bird was his father.

This teaches our child that he must always stand up for the weak. If his friends begin bullying a younger child, your child's moral code will not allow him to just stand by as a gentle spectator. The fact that Jatayu was so old and still tried to take on the powerful Ravana single-handedly, teaches our child to be courageous and be unafraid to take on any challenge that comes his way and accomplish it to the best of his ability.

Patience, Determination & Enthusiasm

The story of Shabori from Ramayana is the best example for patience, determination and enthusiasm. Guru had asked Shaborito wait for Lord Ram while all other disciples and Guru himself went back to Deity. She showed her enthusiasm by working hard every day to clean the place, plucking flowers & fruits for the Lord. She had complete faith in the words of Guru and patiently waited with determination. When Rama finally visited her, she welcomed him with great love and devotion.

This Story teach students that, true value lies in sincerity, devotion, modesty, kindness and good conduct rather than wealth or social position.

Arrogance blinds one to the counsel of well-wishers

The world is a mirror of our own consciousness. Ravana was thinking Mandodari was jealous of Sita, but actually he was angry with Lord Ram. Ravana was thinking Vibhisana was unfaithful and taking the side of Lord Ram, but he was unfaithful to Kubera, his cousin brother. When we think we know, we are not willing to listen to good counsel. Spiritual progress means simplicity and humility. If they are lacking, we won't listen thinking that we know better, that was Ravana. The world often reflects our own thoughts and feelings.

These examples show that arrogant people often fail to understand the truth. They do not listen to the good advice of others because they believe they know everything. Modern education should teach students to be humble and open-minded. Students should learn to respect the opinions of teachers, parents and friends. They should accept good advice, correct their mistakes and develop the ability to think clearly. Education should develop good character along with knowledge.

Righteousness

Vibhishana came to Lord Rama for shelter because he believed in righteousness. Although many monkeys opposed him, Hanuman understood his good intentions. Vibhishana was ready to face criticism and misunderstanding because he wanted to follow the path of truth and justice.

This should teach students to stand for truth and justice, even when others disagree with them. Students should learn to support what is right, respect others and make ethical decisions. This will help them become responsible citizens and good future leaders.

Dedication, Commitment and Service – Mindedness

The character of Hanuman in the Ramayana teaches many moral values. Hanuman devoted himself completely to Lord Rama and served him without expecting personal reward. Hanuman consistently placed his assigned responsibility above his personal comfort or interest. During the construction of the “Rama setu”, Hanuman worked with the Vanara forces and contributed to the collective effort.

This Story teaches students to recognize their own potential, dedication and commitment for work and also teach how to build capacity of teamwork, coordination, responsibility and goal oriented leadership.

Conclusion

The Ramayana teaches many valuable lessons, such as truthfulness, devotion, integrity, humility, kindness, courage and justice. These values are important for the all-round development of students. In modern education and society, the Ramayana can be used as a source of moral and value education. Its stories can help students understand the difference between right and wrong and develop good behaviour.

Thus, the Ramayana is not only an important epic but also a valuable guide for educating future generations. It helps us develop responsible, honest and compassionate individuals who can contribute positively to society. The Ramayana will enrich their lives and help us mould our children to be the leaders of tomorrow, imbued with long lasting cultural and traditional foundation.

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