International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences
Vol-11, Issue-3; May-Jun, 2026

Peer-Reviewed Journal
Journal Home Page Available: https://ijels.com/
Journal DOI: 10.22161/ijels

Valmiki Ramayana: A Spiritual Hermeneutic Reading

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Received: 28 Apr 2026; Received in revised form: 24 May 2026; Accepted: 27 May 2026; Available online: 01 Jun 2026

Abstract— *Setting the Bala Kanda as the ethical and metaphysical axis along which the epic's moral world is established, this article comprehensively investigates the Valmiki Ramayana in a spiritual, hermeneutic mode. It refrains from reading the narrative as a mytho, historical saga and instead views the scripture as a guide that dramatizes through symbolic gesture, divine incarnation, and institutional authority of kingship and asceticism, the normative order of dharma and adharma. Using the classical Sanskrit texts, philosophical commentaries, and present-day hermeneutics as methodological tools, it interprets the birth of Rama, the sacrificial economy of Dasharatha, the enlightening role of Vishwamitra, and the performative breaking of Shiva's bow as allegories of the cosmic re-ordering and moral enlightenment. By placing Bala Kanda within the tradition of comparative review of sacred narrative and moral philosophy, the essay argues that Valmikis poem jubilates an open, ended concept of righteousness. The Ramayana is seen here not as something fixed and having the form of a static moral law but more as an interpretative system in development; a code that keeps changing and through which every human interpretative exercise has a profound effect eternally, undergoing reshaping by the continuous interplay of divine and human moral will, human agency, and social organization.*

Keywords— ***Adharma, Bala Kanda, Dharma, Hermeneutics, Sacred Narrative.***

I. INTRODUCTION

During the last two thousand years, the Valmiki Ramayana has not only been one of the most historically valuable but also one of the most philosophically and creatively significant texts in the Indic civilizational canon (Brockington, 1998). Traditionally considered the primary epic that most directly preserves cultural memory and narrative tradition, nonetheless, it has most probably influenced us deeply through the interpersonal of moral ontology and spiritual pedagogy (Prasad, 2009). Actually, as a main epic, Bala Kanda makes an extremely important, if not the most important, contribution to the establishment of the metaphysical framework in which the whole story is to be interpreted. It does not simply introduce characters and actions, but it also establishes the basis for the understanding of morality by showing human actions as being under a cosmic order ruled by dharma, and thus exposed to adharma (Valmiki, trans. Goldman, 1984).

Hermeneutics, as a method, opens the path to a meaningful reading that goes beyond historical literalism and aesthetic enjoyment and moves the interpretation to the symbolic, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the text itself. Hermeneutics asks what the function of the narrative is when it conveys a transcendental value and, in doing so, changes it into social and political norms, in the context of the sacred literature (Ricoeur, 1976). When employed on the Bata Kanda, this method suggests that the work's beginning act is an ethically conscious active dramatization: the coming of the divine into the mortal world is not merely a religious theme but a radical intervention into the moral economy of the world (Sullivan, 1990).

In this article, we've given two different interpretive frames to the Bala Kanda.

On the one side, it is interpreted in relation to classical Indian philosophical traditions that treat dharma as cosmic

law (ta) and social duty (svadharma) (Radhakrishnan, 1951).

At the same time, it is put in conversation with contemporary narrative ethics theories, ones that claim stories are moral testing grounds where readers are not only permitted but also invited to make ethical judgments and to use their social imagination (Nussbaum, 1990).

Such coupling makes it possible to understand the Ramayana as metaphysical and political, transcendental and immanent (Hiltebeitel, 2001). Interpreting the Bala Kanda is, in fact, a narrative problem in itself, which should be solved first. The epic starts when Valmiki meets Narada, and Narada poses the question of whether there can be any human who is completely virtuous. This reading goes beyond the rhetorical one; hence, it is also locating the epic as a story, telling an answer to the philosophical question whether there can be any form of "instrumental" goodness in a world that is morally divided (Goldman, 1984).

In such a way, Rama's life is the solution to the question raised by hermeneutics of how divine perfection can be made to be understood within the limits of human life.

Viewed within this context, the article argues that the first book of the

Ramayana is the threshold book, opening and engaging the reader in a symbolic matrix where ritual, royal kingship, ascetic authority, and divine influence are not the domain of the individual but rather interacting forms of moral structure (Sharma, 2003). The sacrificial rites of Dasharatha are not only manifestations of royal piety but acts of cosmological logic through which human desire is reduced to ritualised conformity with divine orders (Pollock, 1986). From the sacrificial economy that gave rise to it, the birth of Rama shall be seen as a cosmic response to a crisis in ethics, the mixture of divine ethical will and its historical antecedents (Doniger, 2009).

One of the criticisms lodged at this point by scholars is that it attempts to look outside the simplest moral interpretation (considering the Ramayana as a rigid code of conduct). Rather, it argues in a hermeneutics where dharma is seen as a place of tension between an ethical ideal and its realization rather than for being a collection of static rules. The contemporary academic scholarship has bolstered this position as well, recognizing the diversity of traditions contained within the Ramayana and the adaptable interpretive role the text serves in diverse societies and contexts (Richman, 1991). Here, concentrating on the Bala Kanda, we are now aware that this plurality has been an inherent feature of the epic right from its beginning.

Thus, the article is twofold. Initially, it performs a close textual reading of the main moments in the central episodes of the Bala Kanda: the invocation of the deity, the character of sage Vishwamitra, and the performative symbolism of Shiva's bow; it reveals that these scenes convey a spiritual dialectic between order and disorder/dissonance (Bhattacharji, 2000). Secondly, it situates these readings in a wider comparative framework, referring to philosophical hermeneutics and narrative ethical theories to show the epic's crucial importance in relation to present debates on moral agency, political authority, and sacred/social demarcation (Chatterjee, 2011).

In light of this, the article casts the Valmiki Ramayana as a living book in this way: alive not in the closure of its dogma, but in its "openness to interpret a way in which interpretations (and ethical responses) can develop, in time and across time and cultures (Lutgendorf, 1991: 17) to be activated (Lutgendorf, 1991). The Bala Kanda serves as the epic's ethical prologue: It forces us to confront the foundational question that propels the entirety: How can righteousness be performed in an ordered world made by power and desire, history and contingency?

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW: HERMENEUTICS AND THE SACRED NARRATIVE

Religious hermeneutics in sacred texts is considered to be the struggle of taking historical detail to transcendent meaning. Gadamer (1975), in his classical hermeneutic theory, focused more on "fusion of horizons" as how the historical landscape of the text interacts with the interpretive context of the reader within a dialogic space. Using Bala Kanda as an example, this theory is used to demonstrate through the translation that the ethical assertions of the epic are not defined by, nor limited to, the sociopolitical moment. They certainly belong to a continuum of meaning, just as a single object allows for continuous reinterpretation (Clooney, 1990).

In the Indic tradition, pluralistic interpretation is a constitutive feature of textual transmission, not a matter of curiosity. The Ramayana has been stylized to resemble multiple kinds of rewrites and vernacular retellings, which culminate in an articulation of the ethical significance of Rama's life that is a response to localized, culturally oriented issues (Richman, 1991). Such a multiplicity indicates that the text not only functions in a kind of hermeneutic opening, but it also questions the scholarly necessity to discover a coherent, authoritative meaning (Hess, 1999).

The Bala Kanda is like a base that allows this sort of openness. The epic is not really seen as a mere first-hand doctrinal statement, but rather as an answer to a philosophical question (Goldman, 1984). Ethical reflection

through story offers a different perspective of Ramayana as a text of morality. Nussbaum (1990) claims that the narratives of an epic help to shape ethical understanding through the introduction of such ethical problems into a social and emotional environment.

Like in the Bala Kanda, ethical musing is made through act in fiction: the king's own wish for a son, the sage's command of the land, and the divine will to incarnate all, the present difficulties to ethics, in short, to bring out all the present moral dilemmas those that are simultaneously personal, political, cosmic (Kishwar, 2001).

These kinds of tales are set up for a reader to struggle with ethical questions rather than to find moral rules. Dharma philosophy will not allow easily reducible and reified terms. They go through the domains of law, duty, righteousness, and cosmic order as both descriptive and normative features (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Matilal, 2002).

The Bala Kanda brings out that subtle difference in the meaning of dharma. Dharma is thus not just an abstract idea but rather a reality experienced through rituals, duties, and self-sacrifices, as referred here. On the other hand, Adharma is not simply the lack of virtue, but it is portrayed as a force of tension and change that human beings and God (Biardeau, 1997) have to first perceive and then engage with. Ricoeur's idea that a symbol is a structural process constitutive of thought (Ricoeur, 1976) resonates with this contrast. The Bala Kanda, by virtue of its symbolic gestures of sacrifice and the breaking of Shiva's bow, tremendously condenses the deeply philosophical and moral themes of the narrative. At the same time, they invite me to think about the aspect of power, authority, and divine sanction, which go beyond the literal meaning of the text (Rukmani, 2001). As such, by integrating these theoretical perspectives, the article, ultimately, constructs a hermeneutic framework that accounts for the inner logics and universal philosophies underlying the Ramayana in the Indian spiritual cosmos (Clooney, 2007).

On the other hand, the idea is to interpret the Bala Kanda as a location where narrative, ritual, and moral issues come together to produce a spiritual story that, although it is culturally very specific, is spiritually universal (Sax, 2000).

III. THE SACRIFICIAL ECONOMY OF KINGSHIP AND COSMIC ORIGIN

The Bala Kanda has King Dasharatha at the center of the cosmic and royal duties crossroads. Dharmathe king's childlessness should not be viewed as a mere personal suffering but as a metaphysical phenomenon, a metaphysical phenomenon that threatens the continuation of dynastic and cosmic order.

According to Classical Indian political theology, the king's power is not seen as his own possession; it rather assumes the role of the royal officiant and mediator between the human and divine and is charged with the maintenance of rta, the cosmic principle of order which is indispensable for moral and social life (Radhakrishnan, 1951). In effect, by his unwillingness to have an heir, the king thus embodies a rupture in the chain of the divine law in the historical time (Heesterman, 1985).

The solution to such a rupture is shown to be in the ritual logic of sacrifice. Dasharatha's performance of the putrakmei yaja is not merely an act of individual devotion; it is a public and cosmic ritual which reinstates the king in his role as the ethical vehicle. Pollock (1986) argues that Sacrifice in the Sanskrit epic is essentially the expression of fallen human desire according to divine plan; thus, the individual desire is converted into cosmologically valid demand.

Actually, the king's desire for children is at the level of metaphysics, whereas the gods respond to human behaviour according to a moral domain that requires the ritualizing of the assertion (Smith, 1989).

The divinity assembly agreeing on Vishnu's incarnation was a very important hermeneutic act of understanding. The act of Rama's incarnation was thus not only a theological, abstract one but also a moral one by their joint fear of Ravana's tyranny (Valmiki, trans. Goldman, 1984). Such a change thus maps the relationship between transcendence and immanence differently.

God does not get away from the moral problems faced by the world. Instead, God participates in human history to set things right (Doniger, 2009). God's coming down is also the hermeneutical interpretation of the text's main proposition, that dharma itself should be lived and not merely contemplated (Sullivan, 1990).

The sacrificial economy thus generates a reciprocity of obligation. The king's ritual, which is according to divine law, brings about the divine reply, which is, in this case, the human genealogy. This dialectical aspect subverts simplistic notions of divine omnipotence by presenting the gods as morally reactive creatures so implicated in the morality as to necessitate both their actions and their obligations. Ricoeur's (1976) idea of narrative as the vehicle through which ethical worlds are mediated and interrogated has such a framework; in fact, it is in harmony with it.

The birth of Rama and his brothers is the true reflection of moral intent.

Rama seems to be a person beyond a mere human measure of development who had the potential to be a transcendent ideal, but was a prince whose divinity was not as a personal

role but a social rank mediated by society. This duality refutes the idea that the epic can be turned into a myth of a kind or a historical chronicle.

On the contrary, a person has to read Bala Kanda according to its essence to understand it as a method of theological transcendence and social realism, as well as to see how it handles the productive tension (Hiltebeitel 2001). Here, that tension is royal dharma politically expressed.

The king is not an autocratic one, but rather a law of nature keeper, and his authority can only be derived from his righteousness and ritual behavior. This interpretation is in contrast with modern models of government, where a ruler's legitimacy is decided by the people's choice or the government itself. On the contrary, Ramayana sees legitimacy as cosmic, grounded in the harmony with the divine order and supported by one's virtue (Radhakrishnan, 1951; Sharma, 2003).

The royal rites serve as a public testimony of the king's morality, thus elevating kingship from an inert status into a dynamic practice of dharma.

Dasharatha's character is, however, here used to mirror the agony of this sort of political legitimacy. His reliance on priests and the divine as sources of authority shows the power limits of kings (Heesterman, 1985). He cannot navigate the succession puzzle alone; he needs to choose the higher, deeper morality. It is of great importance for the man of God. This paper challenges hierarchical readings of the epic which stress royal authority, arguing instead for a relational view from which kings, sages and gods can in all probability be understood to wield different degrees of authority (Shulman 2001).

The narrator makes this approach more digestible by introducing Rishyasringa, a hermit whose ascetic purity is what allows them to perform the sacrifice. The sage's role reveals the epistemic and moral authority of the ascetic spiritual tradition that underlies the ethical foundations of the epic. Asceticism here then does not consist of the retreat from the world so much as it is an ethical capital that is at stake and capable of being wielded as a weapon to elicit a cosmic transformation (Olivelle, 1993).

Dasharatha and Rishyasringa's exchange is really a political, quasi-religious deal between two sides on various and competing moral lines. The central hermeneutic point of this story is the abandonment of the notion that the sacred and the secular are separate, distinct spheres. The Bala Kanda depicts a society based on the interdependent nature of ritual, government, and spiritual life, and their mutual dependency for coming legitimised and becoming effective. This unity is contrary to the academic tendency to separate religion from politics (Chatterjee, 2011).

The epic communicates a vision that, among other things, addresses the societal impact of spiritual practice and morality issues in political power itself. Embedding a god incarnation in the plot certainly makes it more intense. Rama is definitely not a character born outside of moral issues, but deeply involved in them. The divine is concerned with the complex issues connected to family relationships, duties, and political power, and therefore becomes the protagonist of ethical tension situations. That is why the ethics (Nussbaum, 1990) are recognised more in a feeling of being exposed and not of an application of universal moral rules. Here, Bala Kanda gives a narrative perspective to the divine, human suffering dilemma while pushing the divine virtues (Kishwar, 2001).

Hence, the sacrificial economy is understood at different hermeneutical levels. It theatrically portrays the mechanism of cosmic reciprocity (Smith, 1989) at the ritual level. At the political level, this informs an ethical model of kingship (Sharma, 2003). At the theological level, it reinterprets deity as a changeable, alive, and mutually giving being through history (Doniger, 2009). Together, these layers comprise the common theme of the epic: At a very elementary level, existence is divided between dharma and adharma, and existence is ultimately at war (Biardeau, 1997). However, the Bala Kanda does not present Rama as an archetypal pure hero of morals but rather as God's capacity, that is, a being of God susceptible of receiving God's action and thus being made good. In fact, the hermeneutic statement that dharma is not a virtue, but a condition that comes into existence as a result of a moral deed, is thereby vindicated (Matilal, 2002).

IV. ASCETIC AUTHORITY AND THE ETHICS OF INTERVENTION: VISHWAMITRA AND MORAL AGENCY

Thus, with the arrival of the sage Vishwamitra in the Bala Kanda, there is an almost complete ethical upheaval of the storyline. Nevertheless, while the sacrificial economy visibly symbolizes the mutual dependence of kingship and divinity, the ascetic's intervention brings in a third aspect of moral authority, which relies on tapas (austerity), knowledge, and spiritual discipline (Olivelle, 1993). One of the most daring moral assertions found in the story is Vishwamitra's request to King Dasharatha to let him take Lord Rama along to protect the sacrificial rites.

Several themes are involved in this situation: a challenge to paternal love, the dilemma of loyalty to one's king versus loyalty to one's father, and the rigidity of ascetic rules; in fact, the combination of these elements elevates the epic to the level of an ethical space that is further complicated by a physical drama (Valmiki, trans. Goldman, 1984).

In this way, one could say that Vishwamitra is essentially reinterpreting the scriptures in a manner similar to what Gadamer (1975) refers to as the claim of tradition (i.e., the present tradition). The hermit is the source of the authoritative voice, the one who issues commands but not in the way of political power, divine incarnation, but through the spiritual and the interpretive. It is not institutional, but epistemic authority. That distinction is crucial for the Ramayana's concept of a righteous order. Good power must be endowed with wisdom, which is the result of a conscientious and careful encounter with the sacred (Clooney, 1990).

Dasharatha's hesitation to leave at the beginning is first and foremost the human side of moral duty. The king's wavering is not portrayed as a moral weakness but rather as an emotional response stemming from the bond with family as well as political uncertainty. However, the plot eventually distances itself from the sage's directive as the main character finds the way, suggesting that moral decisions may involve giving up one's own will for the benefit of the majority (Bhattacharji 2000). This blending of elements reflects the mode in which Nussbaum (1990) portrays moral discernment as being, at times, tragic and involving choices between good things. The tension is worked out, not by abstract reasoning, but by the dramatization of the clash in the story.

Therefore, the borderline status of Vishwamitra also serves to highlight his authority. The picture of an ancient, wise king, at the same time, the political and spiritual, is a monarch who changes his power into wisdom by ascetic practices, as shown in his biography. So this transformation of power into wisdom via ascetic practice becomes an icon of ethical transformation. These changes, according to Pollock (1986), suggest that the story of the king is a cultural negotiation of the values of worldly success versus spiritual transcendence. And thus, Vishwamitra's battle is not from a stance of rejecting this world, but defining an ideal to power in which an understanding of spirituality and right and wrong coexist (Shulman, 2001). Building upon Vishwamitra, the tale of Rama is an example of how one can develop moral agency from one's behaviour. Not only does the sage provide universal principles, he imparts celestial weapons. In this way, the sage creates scenarios for Rama where he must make ethical decisions. For instance, the story of Tataka, a demoness, presents difficult questions of violence, legitimacy, and moral responsibility. Rama's deed is made to agree with the authority of the ascetic, which is put forward as a tool to preserve the ritual order; and thus, it implies that the moral rightness of violence in the epic world originates from an insistence on dharma (Goldman, 1984). They present a challenge to justify with our current ethical senses: the idea that violence and morality are two opposing functions.

The Bala Kanda chapter presents us with an ethics of contingent valence that applauds an action if it is in harmony with the cosmic as well as the social order (Matilal, 2002). Ricoeur (1976) further elaborates on this idea through a rebuttal to narrative ethics, arguing that stories are situated judgments and therefore interpretations should only be based on the judgment given by the narratives. This is because the first few times when Rama goes against the forces of evil, such cases become ethical dilemmas, which lead the reader to wonder why the use of violence is justified. The fact that the unconditioned being holy conduct is the only path allowed by an ascetic reveals an epistemic aspect of dharma. Moral knowledge is not given or inborn; it must be acquired by those who better understand and recognize the interpretive power of the sacred order (Clooney, 2007).

In the narrative, Vishwamitra acts as a hermeneutic, turning the cosmic law into commands. The meeting with Ahalya brings in an ethical and hermeneutic layer of complexity. Ahalya's release from her curse, by the mere touch of Rama's hands, could be seen as the expression of the recognition of divine grace and the endorsement of patriarchal moral superiority, or also as a peace and order restoring symbolic act (Richman, 1991; Kishwar, 2001). The episode is seen as a meditation on sins, punishment, and redemption (Prasad, 2009), and it is suggested that this article should consider the episode in that context.

Ahalya's redemption is not the outcome of her own will. Rather, it is the result of intervention by a divine authority that has the power to enforce morality. Hence, through such a mechanism, this chapter referred to the issue of moral authority and what it requires: restoration. If one looks at narrative ethics, that is not the situation: The episode challenges its spectators to deal with the kinds of imbalances that characterize the epic society.

Ahalya's ordeal is crucial to understanding her, but her voice is not heard. The ethical solution here is Ramas gesture, rather than hers. The injustice of the situation weakens the criticism of the text's moral assumptions on the issues of gender and authority, but at the same time, it confirms the hierarchical moral structure of the epic wherein certain individuals (like gods) have the power to effect cosmic changes (Sutherland, 1989).

Vishwamitra's guidance is an excellent example of moral development, where one gains the ability to make decisions through experiencing conflicts that are then provided with an interpretive authority. Rama's good moral character, like all other virtues, comes from his trials, learning, and reflections, rather than from being a saint, by the grace of a

divine authority (Hiltebeitel, 2001). This is quite compatible with Gadamer's idea (1975) that it is the tradition itself which gives meaning to the activity, not the experience of its participants.

The ascetic authority that infiltrates this story, its highlighting over other aspects, shows the concern with higher forms of power: the power that is revealed throughout the story, the feeling of the importance of the way it is exercised as opposed to less visible forms. Dasharatha's rule has some shades of good, but without the help of his spirits, his kingship is morally weak. The sages' control over the king's compliance equally indicates that moral insight is above and beyond an institutional hierarchy (Heesterman, 1985). This change of power delegitimizes the interpretation of the epic simply as a demonstration of monarchical power when a more complex moral structure is taken into consideration, where legitimacy does not rely on formal office but on living according to dharma (Sharma, 2003).

Vishwamitra is also a moral greyzone character who, besides causing chaos, still contributes positively to such moral order. His former violent and lustful king character, before his becoming a sage, brings a moral intricacy to the way the ruling process is viewed. He is not an ideal that is eternally fixed but a person who has been through struggle and change and thus shaped by them (Shulman, 2001). It is a narrative motif that upholds the article's claim that the dharma in the Ramayana is not innate to a person but something that one can pursue.

There is no question that moral authority can neither be handed down by birth nor office, nor can it be inherited just by being born or serving in such a capacity, and in fact, it is something that has to be assiduously earned through one's experience as a figure of moral authority (Olivelle, 1993).

This picture challenges the idea of fixed morality and shows that living morally is a matter of constant change and development. Basically, it aligns with the current thinking trends within contemporary theories of moral development that emphasize practice and reflection, practice and reflexivity, and the making of narrative identity (Nussbaum, 1990), continuation of ethics, which gives precedence to narrative construction (Nussbaum, 1990).

The conclusion of Vishwamitra's training at the court of King Janaka indicates the coming together of the spiritual and social realms: spiritual power provides the political sphere with the basis for power, legitimacy, and worthiness.

Such a statement anticipates kingship and marriage becoming the main themes of discussions on moral and political issues (Sax, 2000). The above is widely perceived as a very intricate moral environment where asceticism, kingship, and divinity intermingle in Bala kanda (Biardeau, 1997).

Vishwamitra is the link between these and also represents the small version of what the whole poem imagines in terms of morality. Good conduct is not a result of one authority dominating another, but of various kinds of authority interacting and understanding what dharma means. Vishwamitra is also a moral greyzone character who, besides causing chaos, still contributes positively to such moral order. His former violent and lustful king character, before his becoming a sage, brings a moral intricacy to the way the ruling process is viewed. He is not an ideal that is eternally fixed but a person who has been through struggle and change and thus shaped by them (Shulman, 2001).

V. SYMBOLIC TRIAL AND SOCIAL LEGITIMATION: BREAKING OF SHIVA'S BOW AND THE POLITICS OF MARRIAGE

The breaking of Shiva's bow (Pinka) at King Janak's court is probably one of the most symbolically loaded acts that have ever been placed in Bala Kanda. It is a test of physical prowess, a rite of social acceptance, a declaration of alignment with cosmic order, metaphysical (Sutherland, 1989). Interpretatively, this occurrence represents the epic's main moral principle: might (be it divine or not) is something that should be exhibited and kept through ethical behavior, not be spread or proclaimed in public (Valmiki, trans. Goldman, 1984).

Janaka's interpretation of the bow as a condition for Sita's marriage thereby places the marriage in a higher moral and political context. Marriage is seen as a public institution that brings together dynasties, legitimizes kingship, and reorders society (Sax, 2000), rather than a matter of private agreement. The bow is itself linked to Shiva; it stands for a power related to asceticism, a destructive force. By being there in the royal court, it (the bow) elevates the confrontation between two types of powers: ascetic strength, which is devoid of the world, and kingship, which is world-sustaining (Hiltebeitel, 2001).

Therefore, Ramas raising and breaking of the bow is as much indicative of his innate strength as it is about the harmonization of his two moral selves. Gadamer (1975) refers to the idea of play (Spiel) as a model of symbolic action, which means that the trial is not just a spectacle but an act in itself that produces meaning through the participation and interpretation of the actors and audience. The royal team and courtiers act as the witnesses to this scene, and their consensus gives social recognition to Rama's action.

Therefore, the ethical importance is not given but depends on the relationship and the approval of the community (Ricoeur, 1976). This is a good indication of the epic's emphasis on the social nature of dharma. Simply put, moral justice has to be tested and publicly demonstrated in a drama so that a person is known, challenged, and accepted (Pollock, 1986). The breaking of the bow is a narrative rupture that changes the moral order of the court. The fact that none of the existing kings can lift the bow is a further indication that lineage and power alone are not adequate grounds for ethical legitimacy.

To that end, Rama's triumph essentially shifts the notion of deservingness to a moral and spiritual quality (Sharma, 2003). Such a turnaround is reminiscent of what Ricoeur (1976) says about narrative being the means through which the social imagination is reshaped by providing different examples of human agency and values.

There is also more moral lift in the episode courtesy of Vishwamitra. It is his twin role as witness and intermediary between Rama's public star and his ascetic force to guide his own moral evolution that unites them. The sage's word is interpretative sealing; the symbolic act is the moral verdict (Clooney, 2007). The epic provides a type of integrative legitimacy whereby by virtue of its multilayered divine, ascetic, and social acknowledgment, moral and political deeds are legitimized with differing modes and degrees of justification (Biardeau, 1997). Even though Sita seems to appear secondary in contrast to the grand success of Rama, she plays an important role throughout the hermeneutic process. At the trial of Janaka's daughter, she represented pure womanhood, political alliance, and cosmic destiny (Kishwar, 2001).

The union of Rama and Sita is depicted less as a romanticizing ending to love affairs than as the merging of the moralities of two different moral principles. Janaka's role as a rajarshi (king, sage), which correlates strongly with the character of a court of political power that is not limited simply to a spiritual understanding of life and society but possessed also in a divine manner (Radhakrishnan, 1951).

Of course, the story has some gender matters to get down. Sita's freedom of selection is curtailed in a world that embraces masculine heroes and ascetic approval. Nonetheless, as a human representative (Bhmi) and paragon of virtue, she is the moral core that renders the relationship ethically productive (Sutherland, 1989). Richman (1991: 26) thinks each interpretation of the story will add a little to Sita's voice and power and hence can be varied somewhat.

But in the Bala Kanda, she is mainly at the intersection of cosmic and social orders. From the point of view of marriage politics, personal union becomes aligned with the syncretization of moral authority throughout kingdoms. The marriage between Ayodhya and Mithila is not made by a quick treaty; it is a symbolically embodied and publicly recognized divine mandate. Thus, the epic sets a precedent for how political culture can be influenced by moral performance (Sharma, 2003). The bow test is, from the moral point of view, a gateway through which the loss of the legitimacy of authority through power can be seen.

Failing kings are not only not condemned as immoral, but on the contrary, they are considered to be outside the moral order because they are not united to the divine, ascetic conceptions. Rama's victory is the hero who combines two ethical perspectives, and one that he will eventually use to reform himself from the person who must maintain the legitimacy of his regime on the basis of ethical norms (Hiltebeitel, 2001).

The beginning of a royal court by an ascetic weapon also acts as a stimulus to metaphysical insight. Shiva's bow represents ascetic power as a force of destruction. When Rama breaks it, the metaphorical meaning is that he changes bad energy into good social force (Bhattacharji, 2000).

This deed doesn't destroy the power of asceticism; it diverts it in such a way that social order through marriage and kingship can still be upheld following it. This is the central theme of the epic about how a transcendent, or moral, force coexists with an immanent ethical order (Doniger, 2009).

Ricoeur (1976) has said that the power of imagination is a major factor in explaining how this particular episode is able to generate new moral worlds. The act of going beyond the original text by making an action legitimate, a new legal basis, is an invitation to the readers to imagine a moral world in which power is granted not because it is a right but because it is an ethical act. This is understandable in the imagination, and the role of the imagination is that it is a place where the epic is seen as a game of play and renewal of the social norms (Nussbaum, 1990). The public nature of the trial also serves to illustrate how recognition can be the most significant part of the act of dharma.

The audience is the jury that hears the case, and their approval transforms Rama's literal act into one single ethical trial. Such a social and psychological relation is consistent with the contemporary model that posits that moral norms are the outcome of the practices of mutual recognition and joint judgment (Nussbaum, 1990). In its discussion of the nature of power, the episode does raise another question. Power is not an ability that only one person can claim as theirs, but it can be exercised through ritual and symbolism. The Bow Trial, however, is the moment when one's moral worth is shown to an audience. Pollock (1986) would agree with the emphasis on performance presented in this way through his exploration of the Sanskrit epic and how political and cultural ideas are

propagated. Really, if we consider the episode from a hermeneutic as well as semantic point of view in parallel with others, it is not just the presentation of the scene as visual but also a heroic act, a wedding ceremony, a political alliance, or a metaphysical declaration coupled with a politically relevant narrative. In fact, they are so intertwined that they form a complex moral fabric which cannot be merely understood (see Sax, 2000).

In this way, the Bala Kanda will facilitate a reading process at various levels as symbol, narrative, and social environment constantly interact. The breaking of Shiva's bow is a significant point in the construction of Ramas public moral character since it signifies the change from an ascetic to one who is socially accepted and the shift from a private training to a public moral discipline (Clooney, 2007). Therefore, the politics of marriage does, in fact, reflect the argument of the entire article that the Ramayana is a moral world in which personal relationships are intertwined with both the cosmic and social order (Biardeau, 1997).

Rama and Sita getting together is not only a dramatic turning point in the story, but also an ethical, political, and metaphysical junction where various paths come together as if they complement one another. This instance shows that individual destiny can never be isolated from the collective, which is exactly what the epic dramatizes (Prasad, 2009).

VI. CONCLUSION

This article has argued for a spiritual, hermeneutic interpretation of the Bala Kanda as the ethical and metaphysical limits of the Valmiki Ramayana, a narrative architectonic that serves as a fluid field whose constituents are not rigid moral categories (dharma and adharma) but lived, contested, socially constituted practices (Matilal, 2002).

The first book sets up a moral framework within which real authority is only a consequence of the ethical embodiment, public mediation, and ethical correctness (Pollock, 1986) of the image of the king, the sage, and the divine incarnation. Thus, the Bala Kanda allows for moral agency, political legitimacy, and spiritual accountability. In the examination of Dasharatha's involvement in the sacrificial economy, it was found that ritual acted as a mediating framework between human desires and celestial imperatives (Smith, 1989). The king's performance could be interpreted more as a demonstration of moral ability, which politically authorized the embedding of power within a cosmology of obligation and reciprocity, than a manifestation of personal piety. And therefore the divine reply of the incarnation of Rama recast transcendence as a historical method of solving moral conundrums, a focus more on moral performance than metaphysical abstraction (Doniger, 2009). At the same time, Vishwamitra's intervention made the ethical problem more complicated and embodied a different kind of moral authority rooted in asceticism itself (Olivelle, 1993). By involving himself in royal matters, he placed spiritual insight above the hierarchy of organization and made that spirituality a condition for doing what is right.

The sage and the prince have a teacher-student relationship that, besides being a source of mutual help, initiated the conception of dharma as a state where one comes to understand by means of self-discipline, being faced with moral dilemmas, and interpretative instruction (Clooney, 2007). In this sense, the Bala Kanda depicts moral formation as a method of reflecting on the epic through its inclusion in broader philosophical discussions of moral development (Nussbaum, 1990).

The symbolic trial of Shiva's bow and the political debates about marriage subsequently helped to display this hermeneutic approach in the public area of the discourse on societal legitimation. Since this was done to the audience of hundreds for Rama, it turned the event into an ethical one that went beyond the competence domain, thus demonstrating how the epic was concerned to show that recognition and relationality are the ethical grounds of authority (Ricoeur, 1976). This episode, in many ways, literally incarnates the very core of the Ramayana, which reveals the greatness, glory, and godliness as aspects of one another and not as separate entities in a coiled manner (Biardeau, 1997). All the narrative instances/episodes/vignettes happen to collectively serve the Bala Kanda as a path/ means/ tool/ channel/ for ethical questioning; the symbolic materials of the text provide a set of interpretative possibilities that continue to resound in and out of that era/time (Richman, 1991). The article, by interacting with hermeneutic theory and narrative ethics, demonstrates how the epic operates as a living, breathing tradition, that is, as one which is constantly re-read with a sharpening moral/social awareness (Richman, 1991).

The component of morality/the ethical aspect is not delivered through a clean, neat sequence: One turning on the epic (hearing, viewing, reading) is an act of a person who uses such devices to create parallels between the epic and the contemporary world. The generative capacity of the Ramayana traditions as a moral and spiritual instrument is demonstrated by their (different) forms (Lutgendorf, 1991). The extrinsic/intended/further consequences of these interpretations/readings, private understanding of sacred texts, are indeed the very limits of sacred literature and political theology.

Bala Kanda also outlines a moral/ethical way of life, according to which the supreme/godly/transcendental

values get manifested in the doing of everyday life, and the ruling/ political authority depends on the leader's/ ruler's/ king's being morally responsible (Sharma, 2003). In its context, it fractures the existing rift between the sacred and the secular, and it gives a structurally moral and spiritually infused visualization of public life (Chatterjee, 2011).

The epic saga, then, is the story of power, responsibility, and the divine in this world. One may even consider such a hermeneutic approach an extension to the other kandas of the Ramayana or a crosswalk among global epic literature where parallel practices are used to How specific cultures utilize the nexus of divine agency and human ethics in the text/genre to facilitate other forms of narrative and story, thereby producing an inclusive reading of these texts this project will thus better explain how a story is a powerful vehicle for moral depth and social imagination to be Bala Kanda as a moral and ethical living landscape that ultimately challenges dharma in its dialogue. At the essence of these issues is the issue of right or wrong; what kind of authority is legitimate in a society (like the exercise of power in a king and the duties of a moral agent); all those questions are something that everyone could answer as they are subject to what they perceive of that point in time. The Valmiki Ramayana is a deeply spiritually and philosophically insightful work in its blending of myth with ethics, order, and social life (Hiltebeitel, 2001).

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