



# *Universal Appeal of Bhagwan Ram*

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# Introduction

Bhagwan Ram, regarded as the most cherished deity in Hindu beliefs, is believed to be the seventh incarnation of Bhagwan Vishnu. Bhagwan Ram carries significant importance in the collective consciousness of Hindus across borders.

According to the Ramayana (an epic tale on Ram), Ram was born in Ayodhya to King Dasharatha and Queen Kaushalya. The epic recounts Ram's unwavering dedication to righteousness (dharma), steadfast adherence to truth (satya), and exemplary demonstration of ideal leadership qualities.

Due to his commitment to dharma, satya, and exemplary leadership, Ram attained the status of Maryada Purushottam Bhagwan Ram. Bhagwan Ram is revered as a divinity and a source of inspiration for millions because of his life and teachings' moral and spiritual value. His life, narrated in the Ramayana, an epic of great importance to Hindus, furnishes essential guidance by presenting the principles of duty, devotion and the ultimate victory of good over evil.

Bhagwan Ram's reign over Ayodhya was a golden era of justice, prosperity, and harmony. Above its religious and philosophical extents, Bhagwan Ram's story serves as a cultural touchstone, shaping the ethos of Hindu society. Festivals like Diwali, celebrating Bhagwan Ram's triumphant return after defeating Ravan, signify the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. Bhagwan Ram is worshipped in temples and households via rituals, prayers, and the "Ram mantra," which is believed to invoke divine blessings and inner strength. Bhagwan Ram holds a paramount position in Hinduness, embodying everlasting values of righteousness, duty, and devotion, his timeless narrative is a guiding light inspiring millions on their spiritual journey.

This explainer aspires to elucidate the universal appeal of Bhagwan Ram. It provides insights into the historical roots of Bhagwan Ram and delves into its profound cultural and social influence. Furthermore, it explores the teachings and values of Bhagwan Ram, revered not only by Hindus but also embraced universally by people across diverse spiritual and cultural backgrounds.

## Historical Context and Life Teachings

The roots or origin of the Bhagwan Ram can be traced in the smriti text of the ancient Bharat, such as Valmiki's Ramayan or Goswami Tulsi Das's written Ram Charitmanas. Also, there are ancient scriptures that show Bhagwan Ram's heroic presence. The origins of Bhagwan Ram can be captured in Valmiki's Ramayana, an ancient Indian epic that provides a detailed story of Bhagwan Ram's birth and life. Penned by the sage Valmiki, it is one of Sanskrit's oldest and most credible literary works. It is split into seven parts, known as Kandas, and consists of over 24,000 verses. As per the Ramayana and Skanda Puran, the saga unfolds in Treta Yuga, as Ayodhya etches its indelible mark in the historical scrolls as the majestic capital of the Ikshvaku dynasty. Under the reign of King Dasarath, the city witnessed the birth of Bhagwan Shree Ram, the paragon of virtue. The epic also tells the story of Shree Ram's exile, Ravan's abduction of Mata Sita, and his triumphant return to Ayodhya.

The comprehensiveness of Bhagwan Ram's life can be witnessed in his discipline. The embodiment of the ideal of reverence, regard and love for parents and family can be seen in Bhagwan Ram. His willingness to sacrifice to fulfil his father's wishes underlines his obeisance. Similarly, Bhagwan Ram's relationship with his wife, Sita, is often seen as an ideal of marital devotion, where his enduring commitment in the face of hardship reflects the virtues of loyalty, trust, and love within the bounds of marriage. Bhagwan Ram is the most sacred symbol of devoting life to moral principles. His ethical principles led him to be a devoted son, a loving husband, a great prince and the king of Ayodhya. He established Ram-Raj, which is followed even today.

Bhagwan Ram's period of exile and subsequent rule in Ayodhya highlights the qualities of an ideal leader. His unwavering dedication to the welfare of his people, keen sense of justice and ability to make challenging decisions for the greater good exemplify qualities widely admired as effective leadership. Known for his compassion towards all beings, Bhagwan Ram's interactions with various characters, including Vanar and animals, underline the imperative to treat every living being with compassion and empathy. Often referred to as "Maryada Purushottam", the epitome of an ideal man walking on the path of righteousness, Bhagwan Ram's steadfast commitment to truth, despite adversity, continues to inspire individuals to live a life based on honesty and integrity. Furthermore, his alliance with Bhagwan Hanuman and his acceptance of diverse beings conveys a profound message of unity in diversity, teaching the virtues of tolerance and respect for differences through the timeless narrative of the Ramayana. Even today, when any leader or party comes to power, the public expects their governance to be like Ram-Raj. Owing to the embodiment of Bhagwan Ram's exemplary characteristics and his illustrative instances, his influence has surpassed geographical boundaries and firmly taken root within people's hearts, conducts, and everyday lives.

# Bhagwan Ram Across the Globe

## Bharat (India)



Bharat, as the home of Bhagwan Ram, stands as a bastion of profound importance in the hearts of its people. Bhagwan Ram's reverence isn't confined to mere religious practices; it is a cultural convention intricately interwoven into the fabric of Hindu households nationwide. Every corner of the country echoes with some tangible or symbolic representation of Bhagwan Ram, a perpetual reminder of his legacy.

Beyond the confines of temples, Bhagwan Ram's influence extends into daily life, shaping the moral and ethical compass of the people. His footprints are not just etched in stone but reverberate through the anecdotes passed down generations, the art and architecture depicting his life, and the fervently celebrated festivals. In Bharat, Bhagwan Ram transcends the status of a mere deity; he embodies a national spirit, uniting people from diverse backgrounds. His teachings serve as guiding principles, encouraging individuals to lead virtuous lives and contribute to the collective welfare of humanity. The cultural and spiritual heritage of Bhagwan Ram sharpens the identity of Bharat, rendering him a revered and integral part of the nation's heritage.

## Nepal

Janakpur, the birthplace of Sita, the consort of Bhagwan Ram, holds immense significance as a religious pilgrimage site for Hindus. In antiquity, Janakpur served as the capital of the Kingdom of Mithila and a focal point for Maithili culture. The impressive Janaki Mandir, constructed in 1811 A.D. by Maharani Brishabhanu Kunwari Devi of Tikamgarh, India, is a testament to devotion to Janaki (Sita). Annually, the marriage anniversary of Bhagwan Ram and Sita, observed on Vivah Panchami, is commemorated in Janakpur, drawing a multitude of devotees from Nepal and India. Another significant celebration is the grand observance of Sita Jayanti, marking the birthday of Sita.



For the people of Janakpur, Sita is regarded as their 'daughter.' Adjacent to Janakpur lies Dhanusha Dham, a site intertwined with the Hindu epic Ramayana. According to the legend, one of the three fragments of the Great Bow that Bhagwan Ram broke to win Sita's hand in marriage fell on this very location, now known as Dhanusha Dham. This story encapsulates the rich cultural and religious fabric of Janakpur and its deep connection to the revered figures of Bhagwan Ram and Sita.

## **Indonesia**



India and Indonesia boast a rich fabric of cultural and commercial connections stretching over two millennia. The indelible impact of Hindu and Buddhist practices intricately permeates the



cultural landscape of Indonesia, with stories from the historic epics Ramayana and Mahabharata functioning as wellsprings for vibrant folk art and captivating dramas. This shared cultural association is a notable manifestation of the exuberant Bali Yatra, a week-long festival observed with equal enthusiasm and delight in India and Indonesia. This cultural resonance exemplifies the continuing ties between the two nations and emphasises the depth of their historical and artistic interplay.

The contemporary spoken language, Bahasa Indonesia, contains numerous Sanskrit words. It was a surprise that the aircraft was called Garuda, and the currency featured a picture of Bhagwan Ganesha. The temple walls of Prambanan intricately illustrate the entire Ramayana story, commencing with Dasharatha's yajna, seeking progeny. The story unfolds, encompassing Bhagwan Ram and Lakshman's childhood, Bhagwan Ram's exile, his alliance with Hanuman, the death of Ravan, and the rescue of Sita, referred to as Shinta.

The Ramayana Ballet still graces the open-air theatre within the temple premises. This captivating performance narrates the complete Valmiki Ramayana, albeit with some variations. The ballet draws inspiration from 9th-century CE Kakawin's interpretation of the Indonesian narrative. Participants adhere to the Indonesian dress code, while the music, following the musical Gamelan style, differentiates itself from the rhythm-based Indian tradition. The dance is presented in a harmonious amalgamation of these aspects.

## **Thailand**





The Bhagwan Ram's story has likely resonated in Thai culture since the 13th century, known there as the Ramakien. Arising from the Ayudhya period, this epic story has left a memorable mark, notably in the exclusive Khon masked dance drama. Ramakien's impact spreads across Thai culture, shaping ideas of kingship and inspiring various artistic manifestations in literature, fine arts, and performing arts. From painting and sculpture to dance and puppetry, Ramakien's impact is pervasive.

In this portrayal, Bhagwan Ram symbolises virtue or dharma, contrasting with Thotsakan's representation of evil. This dichotomy, coupled with Buddhist philosophy, highlights the impermanence of all things besides the law of cause and effect. Relevant even today, the Ramakien imparts a timeless lesson: the futility of power without moral support. It underlines that success lies with those who uphold virtue, echoing through Thai culture profoundly and enduringly.

## **China**

In the 1st century A.D., Buddhists brought the Ramayana to China. They changed the names such as Lomo or Loma (Bhagwan Ram), Poloto (Bharata), and Loman (Lakshman) to fit their cultural background better. The Pali Tripitaka underwent translation into Chinese as a component of the Taisho edition. The translations of Dasaratha Jataka and the Story of the Unnamed King in 472 and 251 AD depicted Ravana as a wicked Naga King. The Dasaratha Jataka includes an exact Pali translation of Valmiki's Sanskrit sloka.

The Buddhists sought to connect India's revered figure, Bhagwan Ram, and their cause by incorporating his story into their narrative through the Dasaratha Jataka. China adopted a range of Jataka stories about Bhagwan Ram, and the earliest known version of the Ramayana can be found in the Liudu ji Jing. These stories had a significant impact on Chinese folklore, particularly in the character of Sun Wukong, who is similar to Hanuman in the Ramayana.

Kang Seng Hua gathered a thorough compilation of Jataka stories related to Ramayana events in China, which dates back to 251 A.D. The saga of Dasaratha's suffering following Bhagwan Ram's exile, recorded in 742 AD, endures in China. In 1600 AD, His-Yii-Chii wrote "Kapi", an epic work that tells the stories of Ramayana, focusing on Hanuman.

The earliest documented reference to the Ramayana in China can be found in the Buddhist work Liudu ji Jing, which influenced the development of the fictitious character Sun Wukong, often known as the Monkey King, in the 16th-century novel Xiyou ji. Dasharatha, Bhagwan Ram, and Lakshmana are mentioned in a 5th-century Chinese literature called Shishewang yuan. Additionally, the Dai ethnic group refers to the epic as "Lanka Xihe."

The earliest documented reference to the Ramayana in China can be found in the Buddhist work *Liudu ji Jing*, which influenced the epic translated into Chinese by Buddhist monks during the Three Kingdoms, Northern Liang, and Tang Dynasty. Ji Xianlin, Jin Kemu, and other Chinese scholars did comprehensive research, revealing the profound impact of the Ramayana.

In recent years, there has been a rise in direct translations into Chinese, carried out by translators Mi Wenkai and Sun Yong, who work from English versions. Ji Xianlin's pioneering translation of Sanskrit into Chinese during the Cultural Revolution is a remarkable accomplishment, which led to him being awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2008.

Chinese universities incorporate teachings on human values derived from the Ramayana, highlighting its pertinence in contemporary settings. The translated works of Ji Xianlin are prominently featured in cultural parks, serving as evidence of the lasting cross-cultural impact between China and India.

## **Sri Lanka**

The story commences with the exile of Bhagwan Ram, who, accompanied by his devoted wife Sita and brother Lakshmana, goes on a 14-year journey in the wilderness. Although Bhagwan Ram initially intended to confront the challenges alone, Sita and Lakshmana convinced him to let them join him on this profound expedition. Their trek leads them from Ayodhya, over the revered river Sarayu, and arriving at the sacred confluence of Ganga and Yamuna at Prayag.

However, the peacefulness of their voyage is abruptly disrupted when Sita is kidnapped by Ravana and taken to Lanka. The place where Sita was held captive was Ashok Vatika. With a solid resolve to save his beloved spouse, Bhagwan Ram decided to build a bridge called 'Ram Setu' that spans from Rameshwaram to Lanka. With the assistance of the proficient Nala and Neel, Bhagwan Ram, accompanied by his army, sets out on a treacherous expedition across the bridge to confront Ravana.

The last confrontation between Bhagwan Ram and Ravana occurs in Lanka, leading to the triumph and death of the cruel Ravana at the hands of Bhagwan Ram. Historical records from ancient scriptures confirm this incident, stating that after defeating Ravana in Sri Lanka, Bhagwan Ram returned to Ayodhya. On the way back, Bhagwan Ram reportedly used the Pushpak Vimana aircraft to return to Ayodhya.

The recognition of Sri Lanka as the historical 'Lankapura' mentioned in the Ramayana, a prominent literary epic, involves an exploration of how the legendary landscape of the epic was transmitted from late mediaeval South India to the literature of Tamil temples in Sri Lanka. During the tenth century, the Cholas were pioneers in Sri Lanka with the 'Lanka' of the Ramayana, a geographical correlation that persisted through the reign of the Arya Cakravarti rulers. These rulers, self-styled as the 'guardians of Ram's bridge' (cetu kavalan), continued to uphold this equivalence, solidifying the island's connection to the historical story.

## **Cambodia**

The Ramayana has had a significant and lasting influence on Cambodian culture, observed from the Angkor period (9th to 13th century A.D.) or possibly even earlier. This influence remains unmatched in its impact and continues to be visible in contemporary times. The story, depicted in great detail on the bas-reliefs of Angkor, became a popular theme for frescoes that adorned the walls of temples. The conventional form of shadow play, called speak Dham or "large leather (puppets)," solely revolved around the Ramayana storyline. In addition, the popular masked dance known as lkhon khol, which had become closely associated with the worship of local deities by the present century, took inspiration from specific scenes of the Ramayana. The artistic expressions were closely related to religious practices, as rituals and offerings preceded performances. Fabricating performance items, such as leather puppets and musical instruments, also involved sacred acts.

Episodes from the Ramayana have been incorporated into the Royal Ballet's repertoire in modern times, a practice that likely dates back to ancient times. The Cambodians hold a profound respect for the character of Bhagwan Ram that goes beyond the first Indian belief of him as a celestial entity to eliminate wickedness. In the Cambodian adaptation of the Ramayana, referred to as the Reamker, Bhagwan Ram is seen as more than just a divine being; he is depicted as the embodiment of the Buddha.

The whole Reamker was created throughout the Middle period of Khmer literature, from the 16th to the mid-19th century, with the initial composition preceding the second one. A first analysis of the information used in the two texts shows significant differences. The initial composition showcases linguistic diversity using traditional meters such as Bamnol, Brahmagiti, and Kakagati. On the other hand, the second piece has a meter called Pad baky pram-rnuoy, which is less old and has a wordier style. Both compositions are unidentified, with the beginning of the first piece exhibiting language features from a previous period, implying the involvement of multiple poets. Scholar Pou suggests that the first composition dates to the 16th to 17th centuries, while the second is believed to have developed in the 18th century.

## **Burma (Myanmar)**

King Kayanjhitha (1084-1112 AD) of Burma confidently declared his ancestry as a descendant of the revered Bhagwan Ram clan, establishing the lasting bond between the Burmese dynasty and the legendary Ramayana. In Burma, a collection of publications document incidents from the Ramayana, some of which date back to 1100 AD. Yama Zatdaw, the national epic of the country, is considered a Jataka Story of Theravada Buddhism, where Bhagwan Ram is known as Yama, and Sita is known as Thida. This collection serves as evidence of the lasting respect for this ancient story. Notable literary works like Kavyadarsh Subhasit and Ratanidhi are highly praised for their academic importance. Additionally, Taranath's commentary, referred to as Zhang-Zhungpa in the local language, provides distinctive perspectives on understanding the Ramayana within Burmese culture.

Similar to cultural manifestations found worldwide, Burma has a rich heritage of performing theatrical productions based on the Ramayana. These enthralling performances occur in different parts of the country, adding to a diverse and intricate artistic landscape.

Burma's interpretation of the Ramayana is particularly unique and closely intertwined with the cultural essence of continental Southeast Asia. In this instance, the Hindu epic transforms into a Buddhist theatre, depicting Bhagwan Ram as a highly respected predecessor to Buddha. The Burmese Ramayana is enriched with a spiritual element, which contributes a depth of cultural value to the narrative.

The epic Ramayana has been selected for the third consecutive time as the primary dramatic text for the national competition at the Myanmar National Theatre. The festival was highly esteemed and presented various competitions, including individual artists in dancing, singing, songwriting, instrumental music, and instrument troupes. This highlighted the lasting impact and flexibility of the Ramayana in Burma's cultural landscape.

## **Concluding Observations**

Bhagwan Ram is a paragon of humanity, representing values such as integrity, morality, being an ideal son, an ideal husband, and, most importantly, a perfect king. His life and acts exemplify him as the Maryada Purushottam Bhagwan Ram, showcasing a natural embodiment of virtuous attributes. Concurrently, his biography, Ramayana, has long inspired these principles and beliefs, encouraging individuals to attain their distinct humanity for generations.

Undoubtedly, Bhagwan Ram surpasses geographical limits. Although visible evidence of Bhagwan Ram's existence may be a little less, the enduring ideas and values associated with Bhagwan Ram are still evident worldwide.

In the recent past, excavations in Italy unveiled vestiges of the Astrocon culture, showcasing distinctive murals found in several buildings. Upon closer scrutiny, it was observed that the artwork included individuals possessing tails and two men with bows and arrows on their shoulders, accompanied by a woman positioned next to them. Upon careful examination, it is evident that the stories of Ramayana undeniably influenced these paintings.

A contemporary assessment of the worldwide Indian diaspora, encompassing Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), and Overseas Indians, demonstrates their existence in diverse manifestations spanning over 200 countries. The widespread influence of Bhagwan Ram in over two hundred countries is remarkable, as Indians view Maryada Purushottam Bhagwan Ram as the highest ideal. Bhagwan Ram transcends the limitations of religion, creed, and gender; he belongs to everyone and resides in every individual.

Beyond Hindi and Sanskrit, the Ramayana extends its reach into languages such as French, Polish, Russian, Arabic, English, and more.

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