

Aesthetics and philosophy of characterization in a few chosen Bhakti works of Rāmāyaṇa - Dancer's Perspective

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Abstract:

India has been a country which has been a home to diversity, yet constantly being guided by the universality of Sanātana Dharma - the eternal religion¹. Though the intensity of the spiritual fostering varies in individuals, the basic spiritual and cultural foundation laid in a Bhāratīya as a part of the system strengthens the cognitive and emotional aspects of a human mind. This has made India withstand many challenges and crises starting from Islamic invasion to the most recent covid crisis. Time and again, unity that has been developed and nourished in such a diversified country has transcended all religious barriers by acquiring its sustenance through “faith in the supreme power”. The ideology of Bhakti has been serving as a profound vehicle to experience the path of faith.

Rāmāyaṇa and Mahabhārata are the two classics which have been a household name initially in India and now globally too. Prominent characters of Rāmāyaṇa have a multi-dimensional identity in India. These identities are highly layered in nature. On one hand, these identities are often shaped by diverse philosophical doctrines, human idealistic aspirations take the form of attributions through these characters and on the other hand, each character serves as a medium to explore the complexity of human nature unveiled through the poetic eye.

While reflecting the above thought through Rāmāyaṇa, it is an Indian work that is staunchly worshiped till date and it is also a work that is artistically celebrated as the first classic poetry of India (Ādikāvya).

One might prompted to wonder whether the poetic imagery of the protagonist in Vālmīki’s Rāmāyaṇa (the one embodying the 16 ideal guṇas of an ideal human) to be more a fictional character than realistic one? Can such a confluence of virtues truly manifest in a single individual? Wouldn’t it be appropriate to address this ideal Human of Vālmiki as the Daiva or the supreme being or, as is widely practiced, to revere him as God?

¹ “The expression dharma has three senses: God; any spiritual discipline that leads to God; duty. Sanatana or eternal-ultimately leading to God, the eternal truth” - Hindu Encyclopedia, Vol 3, Page 195)

What would be the purpose of crafting a narrative around such a figure who has continued to be venerated as the ideal human on till date?

Well one can possibly answer these ever existing questions is the conscious interweaving of aesthetics and philosophy throughout Rāmāyaṇa as a poetic work. Rāma emerges as not merely the protagonist (*nāyaka*) but as an embodiment of aesthetic grace shaped by philosophical conviction². He is explored implicitly through his inner alignment with svadharma through the epical poem, while his noble attributes are celebrated more explicitly in the vast corpus of Bhakti literature that followed.³ In this dual portrayal, Rāma transcends the boundaries of narrative to become both a literary ideal and a spiritual archetype.

Nevertheless, an impersonalized artistic representation of various poetic expressions of Bhakti through the medium of dance simplified the process of establishing a personalized connect between a Bhakta and his deity due to its entertainment value (*ranjakatva*). A visual experience of Bhakti through the Bhakti narrative succeeded in transporting a bhakta into a momentary state of transcendence trance and thus providing the joy of experiencing temporary proximity to the divine.

In the Indian context, such an experiential mode of devotion became an integral part of the Bhakti movement wherein Indian classical arts became a potent medium for visually manifesting Rāma Bhakti. Rama Bhakti is embedded with a multi layered fabric revolving around the most powerful emotion of “sharanagti” or surrender to the ideal.

This paper seeks to explore the characterization in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa through select Bhakti poetic traditions, examining how these expressions embody the philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of Rāma as both an ideal and a divine presence.

Key words: Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa, Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa, Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa, Bhakta, Bhakti, Bhakti movement, philosophy, Shaivite, Vishnavite, Sakta, Doctrines, Ranjakatva, Danceability.

² “Nāyaka is the one who attains life goals in the path of Dharma

³ Various doctrines of philosophy deliver the values in the ideology of Bhakti through heros/nayakas of classic literature like Rāmāyaṇa and Mahabharata.

Objective:

- To identify and analyse characteristics of Rama as a nayaka based on a few chosen episodes of Adbhuta, Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa and Tulasi Ramacaritamanas through philosophical doctrines propagated in selected Bhakti literature.
- To compare and analyse the plot of the above chosen episodes of Adbhuta, Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa with Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa
- To explore aspects of danceability of the chosen episodes based on philosophy and aesthetics.

Introduction:

“Sri Ram jaya Ram Jai Jai Ram” has been one of the most popular and celebrated “chanting” which has effectively been boosting the morale, confidence and spirit of many bhaktas to celebrate the supreme. This is one of the most powerful phrases of Stuti tradition which has been concretising and spreading Rāma Bhakti all over the world. Exploration of “poetic grandeur of Rama bhakti” in the medium of Indian classical dance forms has played an integral role in catering to both the aspects of entertainment and elevation and thereby succeeding in achieving the very purpose of art.⁴ Though Classical dance forms of India were highly influenced by the sangita sampradya (musical traditions), during the Bhakti movement., they sought to seek success for their visual impact through the aspect of natya as reflected in Bhakti works of Indian literature. Visual representation of Rama is prevalent both in folk and classical mediums of dance of India . For instance, in Tamil nadu, Celebrated plots Kamba Ramayanam, Divya prabandhams of alvars, vedanta desikar’s Ragahavabhyudayam etc following the theory of “sarangati/surreder” have been extensively explored in the medium of dance due to their wide range of ideas to nurture dramatisation⁵. Rāmasya- aayanah- The path of Rāma’s life as envisioned by Vālmīki paves its way to represent the play of

⁴ If poetry is a medium of exploration of Vāk (Speech) and artha (meaning) with an underlined element of philosophy (Tattva) and aesthetics, Indian classical dance forms are a medium to realise the Tattva in poetry with a sense of aesthetics to elevate an artiste and its connoisseur to experience the eternal bliss(Rasa) - Ganesh R,

⁵ <https://www.prekshaa.in/brief-survey-tradition-rama-and-ramayana-tamil-nadu>

emotions in different circumstances of Rama's life which further blossoms into the realisation of "Rāmasatva" and "Rāmatatva".

Rāma is envisioned to be a character who justifies the 16 Guṇas of a hero (as enumerated by Vālmīki to Nārada Maharshi in the first kānda of Rāmāyaṇa), is undoubtedly a picturisation of a "Viśwanāyaka" in the eyes of a Poet and a Bhakta.⁶ Time and again, the prowess of Vālmīki's aesthetic intellect and intelligence has made Rāma a befitting hero to kindle the poetic spirit in a poet. Every poet who has created a parallel work to VR has paved Rāma's path to justify his/her philosophical acceptance and connect to the supreme. The "ṣoḍaśaguṇasampanna" of Vālmīki can be seen both as a nāyaka (Mānusha) bound to the path of Dharma or as a divine embodiment (Daiva) to whom the idealness in every way can be attributed. Both these creative lenses aim to head towards going beyond the mundane existence of life or in other words, "ātmoddhara".

As Rāma proclaims in Yuddha kānda of VR, "Ātmānam Mānuśam Manye", the Ādikāvya is a work where humanness in characterization and plot enriches "Bhāvasangharṣa" (conflict of emotions). Within this framework, life itself is reflected as a dynamic interplay of emotions that are organically anchored in *dharma* (way of life)⁷—the moral and existential code of living.

Vālmīki's depiction of Rāma as a "Viśwanāyaka" or "Marayadāpuruṣa" might have inspired Bhakti saints across traditions to adopt the narrative of Rāma's life as a vessel through which to articulate and transmit the essence of their respective philosophical doctrines. Hence, works like Rāmacaritmānas and other versions of Rāmāyaṇa have touched the lives of many through the motif of "pātrasangharṣa" where the life events of Rāma as a nāyaka becomes a narrative pretext for self-introspection by reaffirming the relevance of practicing *sāmānya dharma* (universal ethical principles) in everyday life.⁸ Exploration of the above

⁶ "Sodasaguna of Rama" - Balakanda, VR

⁷ "Dharma is something that guides everyone on the right path, a fundamental principle, a nourishing elixir and a strong support system" - Ganesh R, "Your Dharma and Mine", Page 22)

⁸ "The Samanya Dharma principles universally apply to all citizens of the world without distinction of place, time, class, race, religion, faith, gender, customs, age, status and standing- always and in all ways" - (Ganesh R, "Your Dharma and Mine", Page 40)

perspective of Rāma as a nāyaka in the purview of aesthetics and philosophy will be pursued based on the following Bhakti works:

- **Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa:**

- Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa is a work divided into 29 cantos that is supposedly dated around 14th to 15th century in North India. This is a text which is also called “adbhuttotara kānda”, an addition to Vālmīki’s 7 kaandas which emphasizes on describing the glory of Sita. The “Brhaddharma” is believed to be the source of Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa (Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa’s other than Vālmīkis, V Raghavan, Page 17) . This work believes in propagating the Sakta doctrine⁹ of philosophy by considering Rāma as the brahman and Sita is observed as the Mūla Prakṛti (Primordial matter) who manifests as a female deity for restoring Dharma. Both the absolute and the Prakṛti cannot be differentiated. It also is a text where the narrative chooses a few episodes of VR to justify the philosophical concepts of the Sākta cult. In addition, it is a text which has attempted to glorify Vālmīki’s vision of “Sitayāh caritam”.

- **Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa-**

Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa (4200 verses) considered to be a part of the Brahmānda Purana. Modern scholars however feel that it is an independent work of an unknown author and assign it to the 14th century. Cast in the form of a dialogue between Siva and Pārvati, this work is highly devotional and is dedicated to the spreading of the cult of Rāma. It abounds in beautiful hymns and quite a few philosophical discourses including the well known Rāmagita.

Scholars ascribe its time period to be 14th to 15th century AD (HE, Page 27 Vol 1). The text is divided into the same seven kāndas as Vālmīki and a work of a little over 4000 verses. This work had been clearly influenced by Vaishnavism and the influence of Bhāgavata can be seen conceptually. Propagation of doctrine of “Rāma the Brahman and Sita the Māyāsakti” can be seen throughout the plot.. All the characters

⁹ Sakta- Worshipper of Sakti. Sakti: The source and sustenance of all creation whether at the level of matter or life or mind, it is one and only. It is Sakti=energy and Brahman= the absolute are identical.

play the role of being *nimitta* and a duty bound to the pre destined play of Lord Nārāyaṇa for the resurrection of Dharma.

Methodology: Qualitative and analytical

Findings:

“The action plan for Dharma has been given in the pedagogy of *yajña* (worship, interaction, respectful sharing, celebration, service) *dāna* (philanthropy, generosity, charity), and *tapas* (toil, fortitude, will and austerity” (pg 43, Essentials of Sanatana Dharma)

The path of Rāma as a *nāyaka* (*Rāmasya āyanaḥ*) has been addressing a constant quest of a common man, a staunch devotee, an ever evolving poet, an exploratory artiste or just as an individual who seeks lessons of life. The path of Rāma’s life as envisioned by Vālmīki paves its way to represent the play of emotions in different circumstances of Rama’s life which further blossoms into the realisation of “Rāmasatva” and “Rāmatatva”.

The common thread that runs through Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa and Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa is this quality of Rāma which emerges from his unshakable commitment to the cause of dharma in all facets of his life. Hence a “**dhīrodātta nāyaka.**” The following analysis is based on episodes from the chosen works that reflect the above characteristic of Rāma through various philosophical doctrines of Bhakti. It also addresses the scope of appropriateness in visualisation to validate the philosophical and aesthetic essence of Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa.

- **Some episodes in Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa that deviate from Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa:**
- In the **Bālakāṇḍa** of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the divine essence of Rāma is not merely implied—it is **proclaimed with clarity and reverence.** Through the enlightened voice of Sage Vasiṣṭha, Rāma is identified as the **very embodiment of Nārāyaṇa**, the Supreme Being in human form. In verses 13 and 14, the poet paints a luminous tableau, drawing celestial parallels: Rāma is likened to Viṣṇu himself, Lakṣmaṇa to the ever-watchful Śeṣa, while Bharata and Śatrughna are associated with Viṣṇu’s divine attributes and extensions.

This portrayal elevates the brothers beyond mere royalty—they become **manifestations of the cosmic order**, each an integral part of Viṣṇu’s divine anatomy. The incarnation is no accident; it is a cosmic design, a **divinely orchestrated descent** (*avatāra*) to restore dharma. Further, the text

bestows a rare spiritual privilege upon Sage Viśvāmitra. It celebrates his **celestially ordained role** as the sacred intermediary chosen to facilitate the destined union of Rāma and Sītā—**Sītā, the Yogamāyā**, the personified divine energy, the very essence of cosmic balance. Thus, Viśvāmitra is not merely a sage but an **instrument of fate**, honored by the gods to shepherd this divine convergence of Nārāyaṇa and Lakṣmī on Earth.

- In Bālakāṇḍa (BK), the declaration of Rāma as **Nārāyaṇa-svarūpa**, happens in the BK itself through Vasiṣṭha. Verses 13–14 explicitly compare Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna to Viṣṇu and his divine manifestations. The episode also extols the fortune of Viśvāmitra, who is chosen to unite Rāma with Sītā, the **Yogamāyā**.
- Aranya Kāṇḍa - “Rāma, the all- knowing” is fully aware about Ravana’s interventions and warns Sita privately. Sita then creates an illusion of herself to become a decoy for all events for the next one year.
- ❖ Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa (KK)- Tara’s acceptance of the act of killing of her husband with maturity and humility pleases Rama who reveals his real form. This overwhelming “**darśana**” of Rama grants her the state of a **jīvanmukti**-liberated when still alive .(Canto 5, verse 37)
- ❖ In KK in canto 4, at Mālyavat Paravata, Rāma, though a *virahī* (one in separation) imparts knowledge about the practical aspects of Bhakti to Lakṣmaṇa. Here the poet intends to highlight Rāma’s profound ability to choose the path of devotion amidst suffering. Also, his state of pining for Sita is compared to a state of Maya (illusion) and is interpreted as a conscious choice—Rāma temporarily shedding his divine form to embrace the vulnerability of human emotion.
- ❖ Yuddha Kāṇḍa (YK): The influence of “Dvaitic” philosophy can evidently be seen through a few verses from YK in Ādhyātma Ramayana where the consecration of the deity of **Rāmeśvara** reflects the shade of divinity of Rāma as a spiritual teacher.

It is evident that the strong influence of Vaishnavism gets reflected through Rāma Bhakti throughout the plot of AR. The poet considers Rāma to be the “all knowing (**sarvajña**)” and omniscient supreme being. His actions in the pursuit of dharma has a flavour of “The miraculous” (Chamatkāra) and other

characters function as instruments within the narrative, their roles orchestrated to manifest the glory of Rāma.

Dancer's perspective: It follows from the above understanding that Rāma, as a *nāyaka* justifies the etymology of the word *nāyaka* itself.¹⁰ As a *lokanāyaka*—a leader of the people—he also fulfills Bharata Muni's classical prescription of an ideal *nāyaka* through the dignity of his actions and the integrity of his *dharma*-driven life. .¹¹

Episode 1:

❖ Essence of *Ahalyā-mokṣa* in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*:

❖ Act 1- Ahalya the cursed one:

Ahalyā, created by Brahmā as the epitome of flawless beauty (*a-halya* – “untouched by impurity”), becomes the devoted wife of Sage Gautama, a powerful ascetic. Bound by the duties of a *dharmapatnī*, her youthful femininity is restrained within the rigours of scriptural *dharma*. However, in Gautama's absence, Indra exploits her suppressed sensuality. This transgression, driven by both deception and desire, provokes Gautama's wrath, resulting in Ahalyā's curse. Stripped of her form, voice, and presence, she becomes a *nirjīva tapasvinī*—a lifeless ascetic, erased from worldly existence.

❖ Act 2- Ahalya gets back to life (*sajīvatva*) upon Rama's darshana-

As years passed, while the external world around Gautama's āśrama changed, a sense of lifelessness persisted within. Upon Rāma's arrival, nature itself awakened—dry leaves gleamed, trees blossomed, and birds sang. Ahalyā, moved by Rāma's empathetic presence, is released from her curse, her beauty radiating once again as Brahmā's divine creation. In awe, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa humbly bow at her feet, marking both Rāma's magnanimity as a *nāyaka* and Ahalyā's spiritual and emotional renewal through grace.

¹⁰ “nin-praapane resulting in the form of naayaNāyakaer or a guide. suffix: nvul, gives tye form of nāyaka which means 'someone who leads or guides’ - (Ganesh, trans. Bharadwaj Arjun, Prekshaniyam, Page 101)

¹¹यत्रानेकस्य भवतो व्यसनाम्युदयो पुनः ।
प्रकृष्टौ यस्य तौ स्यातां स भवेत् तत्र नायकः ॥ 24॥(NS, Chap 34, Types of character)

Act 3-

Whether it is Arjuna's awe before Kṛṣṇa's *Viśvarūpa* or a common person's marvel, the emotion of *vismaya* often culminates in gratitude or celebration. The *Ahalyā-nivedana* scene reflects this beautifully—Ahalyā is moved to tears of liberation, Gautama attains clarity, and together they reconcile, expressing heartfelt gratitude to Rāma through radiant hospitality.

❖ One of the many possibilities for Visualization:

❖ Act 1-

- ❖ The act may commence with the raising of the curtain accompanied by *vācika abhinaya* in the form of a voice-over narration, wherein *Maharṣi Viśvāmitra* recounts the *Ahalyā-vṛttānta*. Alternatively, Viśvāmitra may himself appear as the *Sūtradhāra* to enable the plot to travel from the performer's present to the mystical past.
- ❖ The second scene depicts a time travel through the portrayal of Ahalya in two shades: Firstly, as a woman who personifies spotless beauty. Her *aṅgika abhinaya* employs elegant *nṛtta-hastas* such as **Ardharecita**, **Nitambha**, and **Keshabandha**, interwoven with graceful *mai adavus* and *cārīs* like **Sthitāvarta**. **Bhauḷī** (representing the rising sun), to convey her luminous presence. Raga Bhauḷī can be one possibility to represent Ahalya's vibrance like a rising sun. Use of rakti ragas like *vasanta*, *ritigowla* etc represents Ahalya's flawless beauty. The use of the *prose śloka* from *Bāla Kāṇḍa*—*"Prayatnāt nirmītām dhātrā divyām māyāmayīm iva"*—adds a dimension of *vācika abhinaya*, serving as an *alaṅkāra* to enhance the mood. Choice of a white costume (denoting dirtlessness) with pearled ornamentation for Ahalya can be an added possibility in a *bahu aharya* type of representation.

Gautama's entry is defined by a restrained and *niṣkampa sthiti*, with **Sama Uras** (balanced chest), denoting *brahmajñāna* and spiritual authority. He is introduced with *śānta rāga* or **Śrī rāga** played on the **vīṇā**, and the verse *"Āśramo divya saṅkāśaḥ suraiḥ api supūjitaḥ"* amplifies his *vācika abhinaya* and stature as a revered sage.

Angika of Ahalya attains a complete transition while pursuing the role of a dharmapatni of **Gautama**, reflecting her inner composure and duty-bound elegance. Her once-flowing movement vocabulary is replaced by *manda gati* marked by *dignity* and a gentle restraint reflecting a camouflage of her innermost core.

Into this sacred space enters **Indra**, through fluid and manipulative movements. Ahalyā, absorbed in her ascetic routine experiences a spark of youthful desire at the very sight of a man brimming with youth.

Vyabhicharis like mada and moha triggers the sthayi of rati in both Ahalya and Indra. Incorporation of charis like syandita and apasyandita provide scope to justify to represent the above thought. Though completely aware about the deception, Ahalya's suppressed sensuality leads its way to daihika sambhoga as an anubhaava.

If presented by two artistes, this may be suggestively represented through **mirror āṅgika abhinaya**, where both characters execute **synchronized charis and nṛtta-hastas** such as in perfect **tāla-laya** synchrony, alluding to their emotional and physical entwinement. A brief period of black out would provide a dramatic punctuation, Thereby marking the culmination of the act.

The very next moment, the stage goes well lit (red shade of light). The roar of Gautama's anger encroaches the scene with khanda nade and the use of ragas like Todi, Punnagavarali, Bhairavi introduces Gautama's fury. Gautama's disgust leads to an uncontrollable anger which gets verbally expressed in the form of a curse to Ahalya. Here, Vyabhicharis like ugrata, nirveda and amarsha facilitate the manifestation of Bhibhatsa and raudra in Gautama.

Alas, Overwhelmed by **Vrīḍā** (shame), Ahalyā collapses into sthambha—her body immobilized, her gaze fixed, her breath shallow. She transitions into a *Nirjīva Tapasvinī*—stripped of *rūpa*, *vāk*, and *sannidhāna* (form, voice, and presence), dissolving into existential silence.

❖ **Act 2:**

{A Moment of silence followed by gradual increase in the nadai metaphorically marks the passage of time.}

With Rama's graceful and divine entry, a gentle yet vibrant surge of life gushes into the premises of Gautama's ashram. A dancer can vividly depict nature's response either through referral or non-referral imagery. Dried leaves acquire their luster, bare branches of the trees get transformed into beautiful canopies and melodious birdsong fill the once-silent air. These evocative natural elements act as *uddīpanas*, symbolizing the *āśrama's* transformation from a lifeless expanse to a vibrant, sanctified space. (Page 387, chap 7, NS – AG)

At the very sight of Rama, her long sorrow and wait gets triggered and pours in the form of tears. The overwhelming disbelief of reclaiming her lost identity triggers *romāñca* (horripulation) within her.¹² Rama's entry here becomes the vibhava for Ahalya's sajjivatva.

Portrayal of Ahalya's sajjivatva opens a rich spectrum of satvika bhavas for a dancer to explore. Her petrified stillness (*stambha*) gradually seeks emotional and somatic transformation through *sveda* (perspiration), *romāñca* (horripilation), and *vepathu* (trembling). Ultimately, the experience culminates in

¹² "Sparsha bhayashiitaharshaath krodhopdroogaascha romanchaha" - Vol 1, Page 386, Chap 7, NS

vaivarṇya—the radiant effulgence of a woman who is physically unburdened and emotionally emancipated from Gautama’s curse. *Āśru* (tears) and *svarabheda* (voice modulation) may be subtly integrated as she acknowledges her *sajīvatva* to Rāma.

In contrast, the *udāttatā* of Rāma as a *nāyaka* adopts a **reverent and compassionate texture**, as he and his brother **reverentially bow** at her feet. On the whole, this act of this episode serves as a **quintessential illustration** of the *sthāyī bhāva* of *vismaya* that **unfolds** into *adbhuta rasa*.

❖ **Drawing parallels from Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa in the framework of Sthayi and auchitya:**

❖ “**Ahalyā-mokṣa**” is a much explored episode in dance due to its dramatic visual appeal. In *Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, Verse 27 of the Balakanda mentions this popular narrative of Ahalya, cursed to turn into a stone¹³. Significantly, the text notes that Ahalyā beholds Rāma in the divine form of **Nārāyaṇa**, adorned with four arms—a moment of profound spiritual revelation.¹⁴ Here the poet justifies his take on celebrating Rāma through the philosophical doctrine of “**Vaiṣṇavism**”. The narrative thereby becomes a medium to convey a deeper metaphysical truth: that the *jagat* (world) is *māyā* (illusory), and that beyond the veil of worldly identity lies the **Paramātman**—the transcendent Self.

❖ When represented in the medium of dance, an inclusion of the narrative of *Ādhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* in the act 3 of the above screenplay provides scope to embody the experience of *vismaya* in Ahalya on Rama’s arrival. The explicit in portraying Rāma as **Nārāyaṇa-svarūpa** becomes a pivotal dramaturgical cue for the performer to shift from the restrained emotion of hesitation to the overflowing expression of awe, reverence, and spiritual ecstasy. Ahalya’s sense of gratification and liberation can seek a layer of embellishment when seen through the lens of divinity. In this light, the scene does more than depict personal salvation; it becomes a performative metaphor for the core *Ādhyātma* message: the world is *māyā*, and liberation lies in recognising and surrendering to the divine Self.

¹³ V Raghavan, “Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa other than Vālmiki’s”, Page 26

¹⁴ V Raghavan,

Inferences:

- ❖ Ahalya-The petrification of Ahalya is of the mind in VR and of the physical form in AR. The episode of Ahalyā serves as a crucial point in the narrative where Kāma overriding Dharma results in “repentance” which seeks its culmination in cultural refinement.
- ❖ Gautama: Gautama represents the Gautama’s response to Ahlaya is based on her actions rather than her emotions. His curse thus represents the change in her way of life in physical form.
- ❖ Rāma, embodying the ideals of a loka *nāyaka*, perceives with clarity the deeper truths concealed beneath social infringement. Rama’s *udāttatā* in this episode is in the form of reverence and nobility enables him to recognize the imbalance—*Kāma* had overrun *Dharma* in Ahalyā’s case, just as *Artha* had in Gautama’s.

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- ❖ **Episode 2:** The next episode chosen from “Adbhuta Ramayana” is the portrayal of Sita in the form of Kali. This manifestation culminates dancing on the battle field¹⁵ after the destruction of Ravana. This is a deviation which is noteworthy and seeks relevance to be explored through a dancer’s perspective.

- ❖ **Plot:** This plot has been an attempt to propagate the **Sākta doctrine**.

Verses like:

“Yaa saa maahesvari shaktirjyaanaruupatilaalasa “I

“Nartayanti chaaparaam kaaliipashyayaccha ranaagane” (29)

“Shavarupa mahaadeva hruthsamsyaam cha digambaraam” (30) (Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa’s other than Vālmīkis, V Raghavan, Page 13)

attempt to project an explicit reflection of “Brahman” being the absolute and “Sakti” being the energy in this wondrous world of creation. Rāma represents Brahman and Sita represents its male form encompassed by its feminine energy.

¹⁵ (nanarta jaanaki devi ghorakaali mahaabalaa, verse 63) .

❖ **Challenges to justify the Appropriateness in the above episode:**

● **Plot concerns:**

- In Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* and most subsequent poetic traditions, Rāma's character is consistently upheld through the enumeration of his boundless virtues, which are not merely declared but revealed through his dhārmic conduct (*kriyā*) in a human embodiment. This steady emphasis on Rāma's *sagunatva* forms the emotional and philosophical bedrock to define his *sthāyi* throughout the epic. Introducing an element of *nirgunatva* into this established framework raises fundamental questions about philosophical consistency. Hence, does this attribution of "nirgunatva" contradict the *sthāyi* of Rama in the realm of philosophy, is a question which needs to be answered prior to visualisation.
- Though the narrative of Sita's Kāli swarūpa from Adbhuta Ramayana with an explicit display of physical strength provides the dramatic element for presentation, it aligns with a *tāmasika* register, potentially confusing her nature with that of Rāvaṇa rather than contrasting it.
- Hence, justifying the portrayal of Sita in a vengeful mode touches the extremity of inappropriateness. If Sītā is to embody *vīratva* (heroic valor), it must emerge from her innate *sattva*, not as a reactionary counter-force but as an affirmation of dhārmic strength. **Sthayi considerations:**

- According to Bharata's classification, Sītā is a *sviya nāyikā*, one whose emotional core is tethered to *dharmā-kāma*—a devotion that fuses sacred duty with personal love.¹⁶¹⁷. Bhoja widens the philosophic value of these classifications of a *sviya nāyikā* (Sītā in this case) as the one who practices "Dharma Srngara"¹⁸ while committed to a Dhirodaatta nayaka (Rama).

¹⁶ विनयार्जवादियुक्ता गृहकर्मपरा पतिव्रता स्वीया ।

vinayārjavādiyuktā gṛhakarmaparā pativrata svīyā | [\[1\]](#)

¹⁷ Chap 24, verses 94-95

¹⁸ Bhoja's Srngara Prakasha, V Raghavan, page 508

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- Sītā's strength lies in her inner capacity to channel personal trials through dhārmic resilience, thereby transforming into a *dharmā-pālinī*, one who upholds dharma through self-mastery, rather than merely a *dharmā-patnī* who mirrors her consort's path.
 - Furthermore, this alternative portrayal compels us to interrogate Rāma's *nāyakatva* itself. If the battlefield is commandeered by a wrathful Sītā, the philosophical and dramaturgical role of Rāma—his *kṣātra*, his *brahma*, and his quiet moral authority—risks being overshadowed. Thus, any attempt to visualise this episode must carefully evaluate whether such inversions support or disrupt the delicate emotional fabric (*sthāyī*) of both Rāma and Sītā as envisioned in Vālmīki's philosophical arc.¹⁹

¹⁹ Nayakatva: an amalgamation of kshatra and bramha

Conclusion: As time passed, exploration of Rama Bhakti through literary works has become a medium to communicate a particular philosophical doctrine rather than deliver the essence of Rama's characterisation. This shift has contributed to the further deification of Rāma in his most exalted form, rather than encouraging a personal assimilation of his dhārmic path at the individual level. When such philosophical frameworks are adopted by individuals or communities through their own interpretive lenses, they often evolve into cults.

However, for art to attain Siddhi or success, it needs to be free from the clutches of any cultural rigidity in thought or action. Integrating poetic liberties taken in parallel Rāmāyaṇa traditions into the dance medium requires a deep understanding of the *sthāyibhāva* and the philosophical vision of characterisation as originally envisioned by Maharṣi Vālmīki.

In addition to this, Dance, being a stylised reflection of life, must move beyond mere glorification of Rāma's attributes. The influence of *bhakti* in representing Rāma should not confine the narrative to an ornamental display of divine virtues alone. Instead, when these attributes are portrayed through the lens of relatable human emotions, the possibility of evoking *Rāmarasa* (as in “pibare rāmarasam”)—becomes more profound for both the performer and the connoisseur. Such a portrayal transcends *bhāva* and elevates the experience into *rasa*, embodying the true purpose of art in spiritual and aesthetic terms.

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