Exploring Divergences of Three Rāmāyaṇas

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ABSTRACT

The *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* is a living and universal tradition that has continued to resonate with people and region across time. This *mahākāvya* has prevailed due to several adaptations and renditions in Sanskrit and various languages / scripts across Asia. The *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*, attributed to Vedavyāsa is one of the most popular Sanskrit renditions that could be viewed as a revival of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition. In the later period, this led to the adaptations of *Rāmāyaṇa* in languages other than Sanskrit like Ekanātha's the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* was composed in old Marāṭhi. The noteworthy aspect of the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*s is that they have supplemented the *Vālmikī*'s version with principles of *advaita* (non-dualism) *bhakti* (devotion). The *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*, particularly was composed during the bhakti movement and is a distinctive text that subtly conveys the principles of *dharma* from *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa*. Accordingly, the interlinkages between the three *Rāmāyaṇa*s are presented through a common story line 'The Birth of Rāma' along with the events prior to the birth and its effects during and subsequent to the birth. Overall, the three *Rāmāyaṇa*s are distinctive texts that attempt to stimulate self-discovery and self-awakening that could expand beyond an individual and could encompass a society.

Keywords: Advaita, Bhakti, Dharma, Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa, Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa, Vedavyāsa Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa, Ekanātha.

Introduction

The *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* has been a major inspiration for many *Rāmāyaṇa*s in and across Asia. Many of them are translations of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* in different languages[1] like Annamese, Balinese, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, Gujarati, Javanese, Kannada, Kashmiri, etc., and scripts[2] like, Śāradā, Grantha, Telugu, Nepali, Malayalam, etc. Accordingly, the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition has travelled in South and South East Asia, and transformed into distinctive texts reflective of the respective languages, customs, culture, religions and/or political order and ideology to be imposed / practiced. Kampaṉ Irāmāvatāram (Tamil) (Kampaṉ, ca. 12th century/1983), Ramakien / Ramakirti (Thai), Hikayet Seri Rama (Malay), Tulasidāsa's *Rāmcaritmānas*, etc., are examples of different versions the *Rāmāyaṇa*s that indicate the significance of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* as a living tradition, culture and/or religion (Mahulikar, 2001). The prevalence of this oldest *mahākāvya* across time suggests that the topics, characters and storylines are universal that resonates with the daily lives of people across the world. It provides insights and perspectives through symbolism with regards to the code of conduct, standard of living, truth and equality. Accordingly, this relevance of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* has been revived and reused by several authors across time.

The renditions of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* by authors in the later period strived to make its underlying principles accessible, re-applicable and reusable to diverse sections of the society across language or class. These insightful authors transcribed the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* and methodically imparted Indian philosophy and knowledge systems through their respective transformed texts, depending upon the circumstances predominant in the society. The choice of a specific language / script catered to a targeted audience to meet a specific objective. Accordingly, this paper attempts to examine the revival and application of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇas* principles during the *bhakti* movement around 7th – 16th century CE (Jha, 2022). This period witnessed rise of many *bhakti* poet-saints like Kabira, Mīrā, Āndāla, Tulasidāsa, Ekanātha, Guru Nānaka, Jñānadeva, et. al, whose literary works and ideology continues to be practiced in the present times[3].

Tulasidāsa's *Rāmacaritamānasa*, Eḻuttacchan[4]'s *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇam* and Ekanātha's *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* are very popular compositions in Avadhi, Malayalam and Marathi languages, respectively (Lamb, 2002). These *Rāmāyaṇa*s of the *bhakti*-saint poets were also inspired from several Sanskrit renditions

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[1] Ramanujan, *Three hundred Ramayanas* (1991), 133.
[2] Bhatt, *Vālmikī Rāmāyaṇa* (1958), Introduction, xxx.
[3] Ibid
[4] The bhakti saint-poet's full name is Tuñcattū Rāmānujan Eḻuttacchan

such as the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa,* the *Yoga-Vasiṣṭharāmāyaṇa,* the *Laghu-Yoga-Vasiṣṭha,* the *Ānandarāmāyaṇa,* the *Agastyarāmāyaṇa,* the *Adbhutarāmāyaṇa, etc[1]* that have attempted to revive *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* over the years. Accordingly, the time frame about the composition of these Sanskrit renditions is debatable and is not in the scope of the paper. Nonetheless, the acknowledgements given by bhakti saint-poets in their respective writings as well as empirical studies suggest that bhakti literature were influenced by Sanskrit renditions of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa.* The *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* is one of the most acknowledged Sanskrit renditions of *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa,* which has particularly inspired several *bhakti* saints like Tulasidāsa, Ekanātha, etc (Ramanujan, 1991).

This paper explores the significance of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* and its effect on the subsequent renditions, translations and interpretations, particularly, the *Adhyātma* and *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*s. It is an exploratory review of three the *Rāmāyaṇa*s, viz., the *Vālmikī,* the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*s to confirm whether the underlying principles of the former text were maintained and coherently conveyed through the adaptations. Accordingly, this paper is divided in five sections, of which section 1 introduces the importance of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* and its revival into Sanskrit rendition such as the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa.* Spirituality as the major theme of the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* inspired the emergence of adaptations of the *Rāmāyaṇa*s in languages other than Sanskrit is examined in section 2. This section also indicates the rationale for choosing the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* for an exploratory analysis in this paper. The potential revival of the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* and its *advaita* influences on *bhakti* saint-poets like Ekanātha is examined with the *bhakti* movement (7th – 16th century CE) as the backdrop in section 3. The interrelationship between the three *Rāmāyaṇa*s is studied by considering the storyline associated with the 'Birth of Rāma'. This storyline is explored under three aspects in section 4 under the following sub-headings: (i) Events prior to Rāma's birth; (ii) Events during Rāma's birth and; (iii) Symbolic Significance of Rāma's birth. These three aspects attempt to evaluate select elements on self-discovery, self-realisation, awakening and leadership through the inter-relationship between the three *Rāmāyaṇa*s. Finally, section 5 concludes with reflections on the purpose or need for the adaptation of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa*'s into the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*s. It also examines the perpetual

inspiration and learnings of *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* that continues to remain relevant till date.

Role of Rāmāyaṇa in Bhakti Movement

The *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* is one of the most popular Sanskrit adaptations of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa.* The title of this adaptation itself asserts the spiritual perspective of the *Rāmāyaṇa.* According to Monier-Williams's dictionary, *Adhyātma* is derived from '*adhī* as the prefix meaning beyond and '*ātma*' meaning self[2]. The Sanskrit lexicon, *Śabdakalpadruma* defines it as '*svātmani adhīyate iti*' which means that which exists in the self or pertaining to the self[3]. It may seem like an independent text but, it is believed to be a part of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* and is attributed to *Vedavyāsa* (Tapasyananda, 1985). This 4200 *śloka* Sanskrit text is believed to have been promoted by several *bhakti* saints probably since 13th century CE. The key elements of the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* include self-realisation, self-discovery, devotion and non-dualism (*advaita*) with Rāma's journey as the backdrop (Pallathadka & Deb Roy, 2025). This text is also responsible for inspiring various 16th-century CE *bhakti* poet saints such as Ekanātha who authored the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa.* *Bhāvārtha* means a discourse or content. It could also mean *bhaktibhāva* or devotion[4].

The prevalence of *bhakti* movement could be traced in the medieval times, between 7th century CE and 16-17th century CE (Jha, 2022). *Bhakti* is derived from the verb '*bhaj*[5]' meaning adore or serve and with the addition of the suffix '*ktin*' which means attachment, could make the meaning of *bhakti* to be 'devotion' or 'adoration'. However, the concept of *bhakti* is believed to have trickled from the Vedas across traditions and analysed in the *Upaniṣads,* the *Bhagavadgītā,* the *Bhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* and so on (Jha, 2022).

The *bhakti* movement during the medieval period is distinctive mainly because of the socio-economic and political environment in that time period. Post-Gupta period, particularly, involved, rise in feudalism and feudalistic oppression, decline of trade and deterioration to a closed village economy due to scarcity of resources and rise of middlemen (Jha, 2022). This period was also characterised with ritualism, religious practices, and hierarchical social customs and structures that may have been overtly exaggerated by a certain section of the society. Correspondingly, the *bhakti* movement rose as a 'movement' as a sign of protest against the oppression that divided the society and made it vulnerable. This protest led to an emergence of *bhakti* literature across several languages that contradicted the oppression,

1 Gupta, D. K., & Satija, M. P. (2024). Lights from the *Ramayana* in Ranganathan's philosophy. *Annals of Library and Information Studies, 71*(1), 44–53. https://doi.org/10.56042/alis.v71i1.8961

2 Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 18.

3 *Śabdakalpadrumaḥ*, 1:25.

4 Tulpule & Feldhaus, *A dictionary of old Marathi*, p. 516

5 The verb '*bhaj*' has several meanings such as to share, to obtain for oneself, to adore, to enjoy carnally, to honour to worship, to embrace, to possess, to prefer, to choose, to grant, to bestow. Apte, *The practical Sanskrit-English dictionary*, p. 1182

conflicts, inequalities and confusions and countered them with the principles of harmony and equality (Pandey, 1987). Further, this led to the rise in translations and adaptations as a means to revive Sanskrit texts like *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* in different regional languages that can reach out to all masses. The bhakti saint-poets themselves sang / danced individually and in groups their own renditions as a means of stimulating and awakening the masses about their rights and duties, thus instilling devotion / *bhaktibhāva*. This emergence of multi-lingual *bhakti* literature was majorly aimed at redeeming and reviving *dharma*[1] or righteousness / justice and *samāj* (Jha, 2022) or society[2].

The study of the *Vālmikī*, the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*s are chosen for this paper because these three exemplify the virtues of an individual or a true King / leader (Rāma) who can uphold the well-being, righteousness, duty, order and prosperity in a society (Mishra, 2025). *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* emphasised on upholding *dharma* of an ideal King who maintained a societal balance, mutual respect and welfare[3]. The *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* focussed on spiritual self-discovery[4] of an individual / King leading to maintaining truth (*satya*), righteousness (*dharma*) and justice (*nyāya*). The *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* highlighted the significance of spiritual self and interconnectedness with the society that prioritised harmony and equality rooted in *dharma*[5]. Correspondingly, these texts are consistent with the basis for *bhakti* movement which probably continues in the present times.

The *bhakti* movement explored the relationship between the worshipper and the worshiped enabling theory of dualism (*dvaita*) and non-dualism (*advaita*). Dualism made a distinction between the worshipper and the worshiped while non-dualism considered them the same. This further implies that the identity of the individual self and the divine / supreme self is different in dualism[6] and the same in non-dualism[7]. The *bhakti* emotions in *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* were examined through the lens of *advaita* philosophy. This became an inspiration to several

bhakti saints like (Tulasidāsa, Eḻuttacchan, etc) to compose their own versions and/or translated versions (Ramanujan, 1991) including Ekanātha's *Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa*[8]. Accordingly, this paper assumes that the principles of *dharma* from *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* have trickled down to the masses in the form *bhakti* in *Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa* through the *advaita* approach in the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* as discussed in section 3. This assumption can be proven by considering the 'Birth of Rāma' as the main storyline in Bālakāṇḍa that is discussed in section 4.

Advaita Principles of Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa and Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa

The *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*, broadly expresses the principles of *advaita* but it is observed under *Vaishnavite* religious practices and beliefs. It incorporates *Śaiviate* elements in the beginning of the text to initiate the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* in the form of a dialogue between Mahādeva (Śiva) and his consort Pārvatī[9]. However, the text in the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* may or may not have specified anything about Śaivism and Vaishnavism and this requires a separate study. However, the text highlights an inclusive approach by introducing Rāma's journey through a dialogue between an unbiased narrator / facilitator (Śiva) and the recipient (Pārvatī). The recipient enquires about the description of the supreme self/truth (Rāma) or an eternal source of knowledge complemented with devotion (*bhakti*) detachment (*vairāgya*) and *ātmajñāna* or self-knowledge[10]. The facilitator (Śiva) briefly explains that Rāma is the supreme absolute truth and bliss who is free from any illusions and ignorance[11]. In addition, the knowledge of of Rāma /Supreme self through the narration of his story could lead to self-knowledge and self-discovery that can remove all ignorance leading to bliss. The 'Supreme Self' is also the root-cause of creation, maintenance and destruction, thus implying the principles of *Advaita Vedānta*. This Śiva- Pārvatī dialogue is communicated indirectly to the target audience who can

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1 *dhṛtiḥ kṣamā damo'steyaṃ śaucamindriyanigrahaḥ | dhīrvidyā satyamakrodho daśakaṃ dharmalakṣaṇam* MS.*6.92*. There are 10 *lakṣaṇa*s of dharma: 1) *dhṛtiḥ*-endurance 2) *kṣamā* – patience 3) *damaḥ*-self-restraint 4) *asteyaṃ*-non-stealing 5) *śaucam*-cleanliness 6) *indriyanigrahaḥ*- control of senses 7) *dhī*-intellect 8) *vidyā*-knowledge 9) *satyaṃ*-truth 10) *akrodhaḥ*-absence of anger

2 Apte, *The practical Sanskrit-English dictionary*, p. 1633.

3 "*tēna satyābhisandhēna trivargamanutiṣṭhatā. pālitā sā purī śrēṣṭhā indrēṇēvāmarāvatī*", RY.1.6.5

4 "*"atha rājā daśarathaḥ śrīmānsatyaparāyaṇaḥ . ayodhyādhipatirvīraḥ sarvalokeṣu viśrutaḥ"* Ad.RY *1.3.1*

5 "*te sūryavaṃśīṃ ajācā suta . ahamātmā' janmalā daśaratha . aikā tyācā vṛttāṃta . dharmayukta svadharmī*", Bh.RY 1.1.44

6 *dvaita* means *bhedaḥ*, i.e., "difference, duality." Reference: Rādhākānta Deva. (1967). *Śabdakalpadrumaḥ* (Vol. 1). Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series.

7 *advaita* means *dvitīyābhāvaḥ or* "the absence of a second" .Rādhākānta Deva. (1967). *Śabdakalpadrumaḥ* (Vol. 1). Varanasi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series.

8 Ekanātha. (2010). *Bhavārtha Rāmāyaṇa* (Vols. 1–2). Saraswati Book Distributors.p. 15

9 "*pārvatyuvāca: namo'stu te deva jagannivāsa sarvātmadṛk tvaṃ parameśvaro'si .pṛcchāmi tavaṃ puruṣottamasya sanātanaṃ tvaṃ ca sanātano'si*" Ad.RY 1.1.4

10 "*pārvatyuvāca namo'stu te deva jagannivāsa sarvātmadṛk tvaṃ parameśvaro'si . puruṣottamasya pṛcchāmi tattvaṃ sanātanaṃ tvaṃ ca sanātano'si. gopyaṃ yadatyantamananyavācyaṃ vadanti bhakteṣu mahānubhāvāḥ . tadapyaho'haṃ tava deva bhaktā jñānaṃ priyo'si me tvaṃ vada yattu pṛṣṭam*", Ad.RY 1.7-8.& "*bhaktiḥ prasiddhā bhavamokṣaṇāya nānyattataḥ sādhanamasti kiñcit . tathāpi hṛtsaṃśayabandhanaṃ me vibhettumaīśyamaloktibhistvam. vadanti rāmaṃ paramekamādyaṃ nirastamāyāguṇasaṃpravāham bhajanti cāharniśamapramattāḥ paraṃ padaṃ yānti tathaiva siddhāḥ*", Ad.RY 1.11-12

11 "*dvaita rāmaṃ viddhi paraṃ brahma saccidānandamadvayam . sarvopādhivinirmuktaṃ sattāmātramagocaram*", Ad.RY 1.32

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also participate in the journey of self-realisation and self-discovery (like Rāma).

The *Bhāvartharāmāyaṇa* directly specifies the principles of *advaita* along with the significance of the path of devotion or *bhakti* in the first *sarga*/canto. Ekanātha begins with serialised salutations in this *sarga* to Lord Gaṇeśa followed by Goddess Saraswati, the Kuladeva, his *guru* / mentor Janārdhanasvāmī and also to those who are saints and virtuous (*santasajjana*)[1]. He then defines the objective of the *Rāmāyaṇa story* starting with summarising the Sūrya dynasty lineage (Aja-Daśaratha-Rāma)[2]. He signifies Rāma's journey with the teachings of the *sāstras* / treatises and states the critical event of the journey, i.e., the war with Rāvaṇa and the Rākṣasas. The targeted audience implied by Ekanātha are diverse groups of people who can easily sing / chant the composition in old Marāṭhi. Unlike the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*, there is no specific distinction made between the facilitator/mediator and the recipient in the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*. Ekanātha's composition and his followers (individual or groups) could be both, the facilitator and the recipients of Rāma's journey. This knowledge of Rāma's journey causes self-realisation and awakening which reveals the truth about their punishments and destruction thus, causing the removal of darkness / ignorance. Accordingly, the main objective of studying the *Bhāvartharāmāyaṇa* is to recognise the truth, remove narrow-mindedness or ignorance, self-recognition and practice one's own duty (*svadharma*). These converging advaita principles of both, the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇas* are evaluated with the dharma principles of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* during Rāma's birth as discussed in section 4.

Manifestation of Prophecy in Rāmāyaṇa

The Birth of Rāma is the central theme of this paper that would examine the cascading interrelationship between the three *Rāmāyaṇa*s. This interrelationship can be examined under three layered events that followed after the prophecy was presented in the *Rāmāyaṇa*s. These three events are as follows: (i) Events that occurred prior to Rāma's birth; (ii) Events occurring during and after the birth of Rāma and; (iii) The symbolic significance of Rāma's birth and its effect on other characters and/or surroundings.

Events Prior to Rāma's Birth

The *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* particularly focuses largely on the first aspect, by providing layered stories about Daśaratha's wish of having sons for maintaining the Ikṣvāku legacy[3], the involvement of Sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga[4] and his backstory along with description of the elaborate activities for performing the *aśvamedhayajña*, along with the *pāyasam* hierarchically distributed among Daśaratha's three wives as per seniority[5]. Also, the request of the Gods/Devatās to Viṣṇu for reincarnating[6] as a mortal to destroy Rāvaṇa and the Rākṣasas whose rule had disturbed peaceful and harmonious existence of all living beings[7]. Broadly, most of the aforementioned events are categorically composed in the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇas*. However, both the texts have not included the parts related to governance, administration, Daśaratha's council of eight ministers and their function and the detailed description of the prosperity of Ayodhyā as mentioned in the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa*[8]. *Adhyātma* and *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇas* begin the story with the rationale for the prophecy that Viṣṇu will be born as a mortal to end Rāvaṇa and the Rākṣasas. Both, the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇas* viewed the end of Rāvaṇa and the Rākṣasas as the end of darkness or ignorance and the emergence of consciousness and bliss purporting the *advaita* philosophy.

In continuity with the *advaita* principles, the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* specifies a mutual respect and cordial relationships between the three wives of Daśaratha. This is reflected in the event of distribution of *pāyasam* / milk as a blessing / boon from the *aśvamedhayajña* between the wives. Half of the milk derived was offered to Kauśalyā and Kaikeyi, each[9]. And, when Sumitrā joined, both the wives joyfully and eagerly parted with their share to her. This suggested neither hierarchy nor seniority among the wives for receiving the blessings. Thus, the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* indicated the prevalence of fairness and equity in that society. However, the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*'s depiction of the wives is a drastic contrast from the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*.

The *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* is the portrayal of Kaikeyi is shown in a dark light. When Kauśalyā received the major portion of the blessings (*pāyasam*) from the *aśvamedhayajña* due to her seniority, Kaikeyi angrily demands to have Kauśalyā's larger share by claiming to be Daśaratha's favourite wife[10]. Sage Vasiṣṭha and other advisors attempt to reason and comfort her by calling her

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[1] Bh.RY 1.1.1 to 1.1.37

[2] Bh.RY 1.1.37 to 1.1.43

[3] RY 1.08

[4] RY 1.10

[5] RY 1.14

[6] RY 1.15

[7] RY 1.16

[8] RY 1.5-6

[9] "*kausalyāyai sakaikeyyai ardhamadhaṃ prayatnataḥ. tataḥ sumitrā samprāptā jagṛdhnuḥ pautrikaṃ carum. kausalyā tu svabhāgārthaṃ dadau tasyai mudānvitā. kaikeyī ca svabhāgārthaṃ dadau prītisamanvitā. upabhujya caruṃ sarvāḥ striyo garbhasamanvitāḥ*", Ad.RY 1.3.10-12

[10] "*kaikayī mhaṇe vasiṣṭhapratī . mī rāyācī paḍhiyaṃtī' . jyeṣṭha bhāga deī majapratī . yereṃ nirutī vārilī .jyeṣṭha bhāga jyeṣṭhepratī . to keviṃ ye kaniṣṭhepratī . jevīṃ gajācī bhūṣaṇasthitī . ajeprati atibhāra*", Bh.RY 1.2.86-87

anger unfounded and unsound. They explain that her short-sightedness could threaten the future of the Ayodhyian society making it vulnerable and deprived[1]. They remind her that the fulfilment of the prophecy about the birth of Viṣṇu-reincarnated Rāma is important for the overall safety and well-being, thus necessitating Kauśalyā to consume the larger share of the blessings.

Kaikeyi unhears the advisors' words and impulsively attempts to snatch Kauśalyā's share of the *pāyasam* reflecting jealousy and anger[2]. She however, loses this attempt to divine intervention that further leads to an intense anguish, despair and loss of composure[3]. But, she is consoled by the soft-hearted and empathetic Kauśalyā symbolically suggesting how anger / *krodha* can be overpowered by being *sātvika* (good / pure) in nature[4].

The *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*, thus explored the inter-relationships between the wives differently from the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa*. Though, it discussed the fulfilment of a prophecy (of the good triumphing over evil), it did not equate the importance of Kaikeyi's actions as a necessity to restore the well-being of the entire society, like in the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*. This feature of the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* is also reflective of Ekanātha's society in 16th century C.E. that was not as prosperous and wealthy as *Vālmikī*'s Ayodhyā. Kauśalyā's *sātvika* quality and Kaikeyi[5]'s *krodha* quality indicated the adverse effects of duality that was a cause of conflicts in Ekanātha's society. He clearly conveyed the message of non-duality, i.e., detachment and self-realisation as a means to end a conflict leading to an ideal society that restores equal rights and justice.

Ekanātha's vision of an ideal society appropriately corresponds with the *Vālmikī*'s self-sufficient and self-sustaining Āyodhyiān society. He presents this message in simple and concise words with the subtleties of an all-pervasive and inclusive environment without literally specifying the principles of *dharma* as detailed in the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa*.

The *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* also reflects on conduct and attitudes within personal relationships which are not explored in the other two *Rāmāyaṇas*. It includes an entire chapter in Bālakāṇḍa 1.4., titled '*Kauśalyāce ḍohāḷe*' which is equivalent to a baby shower held during the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy. This chapter particularly, details how Daśaratha (or an ideal husband) took care of his wives' pregnancy cravings and her needs, expressed love and support, etc.. Daśaratha undertook and practiced this caring, loving and supporting approach for Kaikeyi and later for Sumitrā. Ekanātha may have specifically targeted this message among people probably to cater to the health of expectant mothers which may have been neglected during that time period.

Events During Rāma's Birth

The birth of Rāma storyline is described in Bālakāṇḍa in all the three *Rāmāyaṇa*s. The *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* presented it in canto / *sarga* 18, *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* in the third chapter /*adhyāya* and *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* presented it in the sixth chapter /*adhyāya*. *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* indicated Rāma's date of birth to be in spring on the 9th lunar month, Puṇarvasu star. It also suggests the Lagna as "Karkata (cancer)" and implies a deliberate positioning of a combination of five planets[6].

The *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* also supports this time line but specifies the day of the birth to be a 'Wednesday'. The *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* follows this suite and also considers Wednesday as the day of birth during spring but instead of Puṇarvasu star it states 'Abhijit[7]' star which refers to as adventitious / supervenient. The birth takes places during random alignment of stars and it does not specify any *lagna[8]* or auspicious time[9]. *Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa* is different from the other two *Rāmāyaṇas* as it discourages the dependence on signs, omen or irrational beliefs.

Among the three texts, only the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* presented Rāma as a human mortal (born through natural / normal delivery) while the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* presented him as divinity. Both, texts implied immaculate birth of Rāma without touching Kauśalyā's uterus and causing any pain or inconvenience[10]. Rāma immaculately appeared in

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1. "*haiṃ hoīla ayodhyānagarīṃ . yālāgīṃ te jāṇāvī kharī . mokṣācī prathama purī . vedaśāstrāṃ nijagajara . kāśī muktikṣetra hoya pāhīṃ . melyā mukti tiyecyā ṭhāyīṃ . sakaḷa vaikuṃṭhā gelī nāhīṃ . ayodhyecī navāī apūrva . kāśīhūni te vahilī' . ayodhyecī udāratā bhalī . trivāra nagarī vaikuṃṭhā nelī*", Bh.RY 1.2.101

2. "*jhaḍapa mārī tatkāḷa. kaikeyī ati krodhāyamāna . nijabhāgīṃ nāhīṃ mana*", Bh.RY 1.2.107-108

3. "*kaikeyīhī teṇeṃci pāḍeṃ . raḍe paḍe ati duḥkhī . keśa suṭale mokaḷe . gaḍagaḍāṃ pṛthvīvarī loḷe . aśrudhārā sravatī ḍoḷe . ati taḷamaḷe taḷamaḷīṃ . dekhoni kaikeyīceṃ duḥkha . kausalyā kaḷavaḷalī dekha . harūni ticeṃ asukha . pravarte neva sāvārthī*", Bh. RY 1.2.125-26

4. Tulpule & Feldhaus, *A Dictionary of Old Marathi*, p. 735.

5. In Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa, Kaikeyi has two sons – Bharat and Lakṣmaṇa, while Sumitrā has one son Shatrughna. Also, it specifies the closeness between Rāma with Lakṣmaṇa and Bharat with Shatrughna

6. "*tatō yajñē samāptē tu ṛtūnāṅ ṣaṭsamatyayu:.tataśca dvādaśē māsē caitrē nāvamikē tithau. nakṣatrē.ditidaivatyē svōccasaṅsthēṣu pañcasu. grahēṣu karkaṭē lagnē vākpatāvindunā saha*", RY 1.18.8-9 & "*daśame māsi kausalyā suṣuve putramadbhutam. madhumāse site pakṣe navamyāṃ karkaṭe śubhe punarvasvṛkṣasahita uccasthe grahapañcake*", Ad.RY 1.3.14

7. Molesworth, *A dictionary, Marathi and English*, p. 38.

8. Macdonell, *A practical Sanskrit dictionary*, p. 259.

9. "*sūryavaṃśā yeīla raghunātha . yālāgīṃ madhyānhīṃ ālā āditya . lagnīṃ sādhilā abhijita janmamuhūrta rāghavā. vakrī aticara hoūna . vegīṃ cāloni āpaṇa . keṃdrī āṇi uccasthāna śuddhasumanīṃ vasaṃta ṛtu . madhumāsa" ati vikhyātu . śukla pakṣa navamī āṃtu . janma raghunātha pāvalā parivāra-maṃgaḷavāra*", Bh.RY 1.6.2-4

10. "*mepaṃ pūpaṇi saṃprāpte puṣpavṛṣṭi samākule āvirāsījagannāthaḥ paramātmā sanātanaḥ*", Ad.RY 1.3.15 & "*śrīrāma svayeṃ ayonī. to*"

yellow[1] clothing that probably represented cleansing of impurities, the sun illumination, or wealth / prosperity. The implications of the colour of the clothing however, need to be explored in detail and cannot be studied in the scope of this paper.

Rāma's immaculate birth in the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇas* could also be explained through the concept of *anādi*[2]. It means that Rāma as the 'Supreme Self' is without any beginning and without any end and is eternal.

The *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇ* 's description of the baby's appearance denotes extravagance and prosperity. The baby is covered with gold ornaments, a bright crown and adorned with conches, wheels, clubs, lotuses and forest garlands as well as necklaces, anklets, etc[3]. Alternatively, the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* indicates simplicity in the description of baby Rāma. The baby is dark-complexioned with his own lustre (*nijateja*) who seemed self-enlightened or self-luminous (*svaprakāśe*) and indulged in his own divine sports (*svalīlā*)[4]. Both, *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇas* denote contrasting aspects with the former implying abundance of resources, prosperity and safety while the latter focuses on self-realisation and self-enlightenment.

Symbolic Significance of Rāma's Birth

The *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇas* both have presented elaborate events that occurred when Rāma was born similar to the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa.* The *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* attempts to recognise the intervention and/or contribution of divinity with Rāma's birth. This is shown by Apsarās, Gāndharvas rejoicing and showering flowers from heavens[5]. Also, people of the Kingdom also participate in the celebrations. However, the *Adhyātma* and *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇas* have integrated philosophical symbolism that is directed towards self-realisation at an individual level and the society at large.

In *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* when Kauśalyā sees baby Rāma's ornaments and his big, lotus eyes full of compassion, she contemplates with folded hands, offers obeisance and joyously calls this vision as the supreme being who is infallible, infinite and perfect supreme person[6]. She adds that the baby's facial features reflect freedom from sense objects and wickedness while illuminating wisdom and knowledge. This vision transcends Kauśalyā into a stupor / trance through which she undergoes self-realisation. This self-realisation is reflective of her devotion / bhakti towards this infinite bliss that leads to freedom from ignorance and wickedness. She humbly prays and accepts her vulnerabilities and illusions, though seeks strength to overcome this darkness / ignorance. *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* has beautifully presented Kausalyā purity or *sātvika* side which also sets the basis of her *sātvika* character in *Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa*.

After Kauśalyā experiences this self-realisation / self-awakening, Rāma in the divine/immortal form of Viṣṇu emerges and reiterates the fulfillment of the prophecy. He considers himself as the means of liberation (*mokṣa*) to his mother and his divine form disappears. Subsequently, the immortal Viṣṇu turns himself into the mortal baby and the baby cries which also suggests the convergence of duality into non-duality.

Taking inspiration from the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*, the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa* has also depicted baby Rāma's face as an awakened brahman that is exempt from every sensual, sensible or mundane object of attachment or desire and in a state of happiness[7]. Kauśalyā is made aware of this view in the third person probably by the author, Ekanātha. It adds that the baby is four-armed with bows and arrows on both sides symbolic to the destruction of Rākṣasas and removal of obstacles or bondage. The baby receives donations from gods, humans and planets for obtaining freedom for bondage from the Rākṣasas. This again reflects how subtly Ekanātha has linked the Dharmaśāstra/ Arthaśāstra traditions that specify taxes/donations paid by the people to the King to acquire protection and prosperity in return[8].

Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa names gods, goddesses, the *mānasaputra*s[9] of Brahma who are pleased and grateful for Rāma's birth and pay homage at the lotus-like feet indicating purity. The sole or plantar surface of the feet is metaphorically compared to a flag symbolising divine presence or divine leadership. The baby's legs are

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sparśalā nāhīṃ janmayonī. kausalyā sanmukha dekhe nayanīṃ . āścarya maṇīṃ vismita" Bh.RY 1.6.6

[1] "nīlotpaladalaśyāmaḥ pītavāsācaturbhujaḥ", Ad.RY 1.3.16 & "toci kāṃsesīṃ pītāmbara tejeṃ durdhara dedīpyamāna pītāmbara śrīrāmakāṃsesīṃ lāgalā nijabhāvesī", Bh.RY 1.6.29

[2] "ñeyaṃ yattatpravakṣyāmi yajjñātvāmṛtamaśnute । anādimatparaṃ brahma na sattannāsaducyate", BG 13.13

[3] "sahasrārkapratīkāśaḥ kirīṭī kuścitālakaḥ. śaṅkhacakragadāpadmavanamālāvirājitaḥ. śrīvatsahārakeyūranūpurādivibhūṣaṇaḥ", Ad.RY 1.3.17

[4] "nijateja svaprakāśeṃ svalīlā nijatejeṃ ati sojvaḷā ghavaghavita ghanasāvaḷāṃ deṃ ḍoḷaṃ kausalyā", Bh.RY 1.6.8

[5] "agu: kalaṃ ca gandharvā nanṛtuścāpsarogaṇā:dēvadundubhayō nēdu: puṣpavṛṣṭiśca khāccyutā.utsavaśca mahānāsīdayōdhyāyāṃ janākula: rathyāśca janasambādhā naṭanartakasaṅkulā:gāyanaiśca virāviṇyō vādanaiśca tathā.parai", Vālmikī Rāmāyaṇa 1.18.16-18

[6] "paramātmā'cyuto'nantaḥ pūrṇa stvaṃ puruṣottamaḥ" Ad.RY 1.3.20

[7] "jyā tejāciye dīptī ravi caṃdū he svayeṃ harapatī te teja prakāśe brahmasphūrtī sukha koṃde", B.RY 1.6.12

[8] According to Kauṭiya's Arthaśāstra 01.13.06-07 & 01.13.09, people who were engaged in agriculture provided 1/6th of their produce while businesses provided 1/10th of their revenue plus some tax (gold money) and the hermits / recluses (Ṛṣīs, Sanyāsis, Munis) living in the forests would part 1/6th of the obtained charity to the King for taking up the responsibility for yogakṣema; "dhānyaṣaḍbhāgaṃ paṇyadaśabhāgaṃ hiraṇyaṃ cāsya bhāgadheyaṃ prakalpayāmāsuḥ. tena bhṛtā rājānaḥ prajānāṃ yogakṣemavahāḥ", Kauṭiya's Arthaśāstra 01.13.06-07 "tasmāduñchaṣaḍbhāgamāraṇyakāpi nirvapanti tasyaitadbhāgadheyaṃ yo'smān gopayati iti", Kauṭiya's Arthaśāstra 1.13.09

[9] Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra

called *śruti*[1] (*Veda*s) and *smṛti*[2] (*Dharmaśāstra*), respectively[3]. Also, his overall body is reflective of the *Vedāntaśāstra* which anyone can acquire and enjoy that bliss. The baby is on a lotus seat which is reflective of an agreeable philosophy with proven principles that can facilitate political unity[4]. This vision can be viewed and acknowledged by all people who are knowledgeable, ascetic, dignified and arrogant. This suggests that the benefits of advaita principles are inclusive without holding prejudices against anybody. Correspondingly, baby Rāma is depicted as a well-bred, gifted with good looks, endowed with internal and external consciousness along with a strong immunity power (*vyankaṭī*)[5]. This description of baby Rāma by Ekanātha implies that it is possibly rooted in the Dharmaśāstra/ Arthaśāstra tradition that emphasises on a well-learned, educated King or leader who is also strong, well-groomed and maintains a balance between *kāma* and *artha* through *dharma*.

Concluding Reflections

Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa is clearly a timeless epic poem or mahākāvya that depicts several story lines to be relatable across time. It sets the basis for the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition that has continued to be relevant through its adaptations like the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*. Correspondingly, this paper has attempted to examine the significant interrelationships within the three aforementioned *Rāmāyaṇa*s by considering only one storyline, viz., the Birth of Rāma. This paper also suggests that the underlying principles of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* particularly, related to establishment of dharma have gradually glided as realisation of individual self in the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* and expanded into a recognition of an individual-self merged with societal self in the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*. Though the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* has influenced the composition of the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*s, the latter two have evolved as distinctive and irreplaceable texts, respectively and aptly addressing a specific audience in a different time frame. Both, the *Adhyātma* and the *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*s gained prominence during the *bhakti* movement, with the former viewed as a revival of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* tradition and the latter viewed as a revival and self-awakening experience for the betterment of the society. The *Bhāvārtharāmāyaṇa*, especially takes direct inspiration from the *Vālmikī* and *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa*s. It is one of the most exceptional texts written in old Marāṭhi with its author Ekanātha's knowledge and fluency in Sanskrit.

Ekanātha is one of the most prolific *bhakti* poet-saints who grew up in family generationally involved in social reform through teachings of Vedas and Upaniṣads.

Ekanātha was also mentored by Janārdhanasvāmi and the reverence and obeisance towards his guru / mentor is also a prominent feature in the *Bhāvartharāmāyaṇa*, abhaṅgas[6] and other literary works. Ekanātha was also a follower of Jñānadeva / Jñāneśvar's teachings and a part of the Warkari sect (still prevalent in present-day Maharashtra). Ekanātha himself was a social reformer whose writings and teachings has blazed the path for *bhakti* saint-poets like Tukāram, Rāmdas, etc., in the later period. His adaptation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Marāṭhi language could be viewed as a protest against the prevalent prejudices and inequalities of that time period.

The paper however has several limitations suggesting a need for thorough study of the three *Rāmāyaṇa*s. The socio-economic and political environment during the bhakti movement varied across the Indian sub-continent. Accordingly, the relevance and importance of the three *Rāmāyaṇa*s under such varied circumstances would require comparative research between all the adaptations of the *Rāmāyaṇa*s in other languages like Malayalam, Avadhi, Gujarati, etc. Also, the role and significance of female *bhakti* saint-poets under the purview of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition could not be included in the scope of the paper. Nonetheless, this paper is an eye-opening exercise suggesting the authority and relevance of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* across time.

The paper shows that the later adaptations of the *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa* were a deliberate and conscious effort directed towards facilitating social reform and change. The *bhakti* movement could be considered instrumental towards enabling this reform and change that had seeped into people's daily lives and awakened the Indian society to fight and restore Indian identity, truth and justice. However, additional study is required to determine whether the bhakti movement continues to be prevalent today and whether it positively or negatively impacted the society.

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[1] Macdonell, *A practical Sanskrit dictionary*, p. 322.

[2] Apte, *The practical Sanskrit-English dictionary*, p. 1733.

[3] "*śruti' āṇi smṛtī . dohīṃ pāyīṃ vāṃkī garjatī*", Bh.RY 1.6.26

[4] "*siddha pāvale tyā ṭhāyāsī cidaṃśāsī ekatveṃ*", Bh.RY 1.6.34

[5] "*dīpāmāgeṃ paḍasāī . taiśā ḍoḷyāṃmārge bhovaī vyaṃkaṭī sāṃḍoniyā pāhīṃ . śrīrāma dehī vinaṭalyā*", Bh.RY 1.6. 50

[6] abhaṅga is a particular metrical composition in praise of the Deity, and usually in the Prakrit language; a hymn.

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