

Transformational Leadership from Sri Rama: Insights from Valmiki Ramayana

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Abstract:

This essay examines Sri Rama's transformative leadership style in the Valmiki Ramayana, which has changed and still transforms millions of Indians today. Burns (1978) distinguished between two types of leadership: transformative and transactional. Based on the present values and motives of both leaders and followers, transactional leadership entails the trade of valued items. Transactional leaders place a strong focus on making tasks, work standards, and results clear. Burns (1978), on the other hand, defined transformational leadership as a process that inspires followers by making an appeal to moral principles and higher goals. A vision for their business, community, and nation may be defined and expressed by transformational leaders, and their leadership style can inspire followers to achieve better results. Before Burns (1978) and Bass and Avolio (1994) introduced and developed the transformational leadership approach, Sri Rama had already exhibited transformational leadership for thousands of years. The four dimensions of Sri Rama's transformational leadership style—Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealised Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualised Consideration (IC)—are specifically examined and explained in this paper. These dimensions were developed by Bass and Avolio (1994). The examination of transformational leadership literature and a qualitative research approach known as hermeneutics—the interpretation of an ancient or classical work of literature—form the basis of this article (Valmiki Ramayana). The author believes that Sri Rama's leadership teachings would serve as a guidance and inspiration for leaders everywhere, not only in India.

Keywords: Indian leadership; transformational leadership; Valmiki Ramayana.

Introduction:

“KUjantam rAma rAmeti madhuram madrurAksaram; Aruhya kavita sAkhAmvande vAlmiki kokiLam”

“I salute Valmiki, the cuckoo, who, perching on the tree of poesy, melodiously sing the sweet syllables – Rama, Rama” (Ranganathanda Swami cited in Subramaniam, 2003, p.vii).

Many thousands of years before Shakespeare, the Valmiki Ramayana's words were chanted in every royal court and in Indian villages. British missionaries were shocked to discover Indians talking and reciting from the Ramayana in casual conversation even 200 years ago (Vikasa, 2000). Many Indian parents still give their kids names based on characters from the Ramayana, like Sri Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughana, Kausalya, Sumitra, and others. The Ramayana has enhanced the national literatures of Southeast Asian nations, particularly Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Malaysia. It has also given inspiration for all forms of art, including dance, music, theatre, painting, and

sculpture (Ranganathanda Swami mentioned in Subramaniam, 2003). The Valmiki Ramayana, written in Sanskrit by Sri Valmiki Muni, is the original version of the Ramayana. Numerous other well-known versions of the Ramayana, including Adhyatma Ramayana (Sanskrit), Tulsidas Ramayana (Hindi), Kamba Ramayana (Tamil), Ezhuttachan Ramayana (Malayalam), and numerous others in all of India's states as well as Southeast Asian languages like Burmese, Cambodian, Thai, Javanese, Khotanese Laotian, Malay, Indonesian, and Tagalog, were derived from the Valmiki Ramayana. The Yama Pwe in Myanmar, the Maharadia Lawana in the Philippines, Hikayat Seri Rama in Malaysia, Serat Rama in Indonesia, and Ramakien in Thailand are all names for the Ramayana (Rosen, 2002). It is impossible to calculate the number of Ramakathas (Ramayana variations) in this world, according to Tulsidas, the author of Ramcharitamanas (Tulsidas Ramayana), who stated, "Ramakatha kai miti jaga nahi" (Sundaram, 2002). Over three billion people throughout the world have fallen in love with Sri Rama's lila (pastimes) and the characters that go along with it.

According to Tulsidas, "Ram katha jag mangal karni" signifies that the world shall benefit from Sri Rama's narrative (Sharma, 2002).

Valmiki Ramayana is called Adikavya, or the first poetry, and Sri Valmiki Muni is called Adikavi, or the first poet. Its 24,000 lines are included in six Kandas (books): the Bala Kanda, the Ayodhya Kanda, the Aranya Kanda, and the Yuddha Kanda. The seventh Kanda, Uttara Kanda, is separate from the main epic (Tapasyananda, 1991). In the Valmiki Ramayana, great leaders such as Sri Rama, King Dasaratha, King Sugriva, Sri Hanuman, and even King Ravana teach leadership lessons. There is also a story about Sri Rama in the Mahabharata, when a wise man informs Yudhisthira about his early exploits. The third book of the Mahabharata that covers the forest life is Aranya Parva, which contains this section, sometimes referred to as the Ramopakhyana.

The adventures and lilas (pastimes) of Sri Rama are also detailed in the ninth canto of Sri Vyasa Munis's Bhagavatam (Bhagavata Purana). India's epic poetry, the Valmiki Ramayana, tells the story of virtue's quest to eradicate vice. Aayana (journey) refers to the adventures and voyage of Sri Rama, who is the hero (Rao and Murthy, 2003). The Valmiki Ramayana is composed of exquisite, lyrical slokas (verses) that offer valuable insights and teachings on every facet of human existence. There are lessons on moksha (liberation), kama (fulfilment of wants), artha (economic development), and dharma (righteousness). The classic account of Sri Rama's life is found in the Valmiki Ramayana. When Sri Rama, the seventh avatara (incarnation) of Maha Vishnu, the aim of the Vedas, appeared as the son of King Dasaratha (VedavEdyE parE pUnsi jAtE DasarathAtmaje; Vedah prAchEtAsAdAsit sakshAdrAmAyanAtmanA), Sri Valmiki Muni truly revealed a veda (knowledge) in the form of the Ramayana. The Valmiki Ramayana is a magnificent epic that uses the heroic life of the ideal person, Sri Rama, to explain dharma (righteousness, professional obligation) (Sivananda, 1996). The life and personality of Sri Rama, who was born to King Dasaratha, the King of Ayodhya, are central to the Valmiki Ramayana's narrative. An perfect monarch, son, brother, spouse, friend, student, and even an ideal opponent were all portrayed by Sri Rama. There are no sufficient words to express the majesty of the Valmiki Ramayana. All men are inspired to work towards becoming dharma-embodiers by the life of the "ideal man" (Sri Rama) as it is told in the Valmiki Ramayana (Sivananda, 1996). It is truly impossible to describe the beauty of the Valmiki Ramayana. It is hard to explain its awesomeness unless one has read the entire Valmiki Ramayana since only people who have eaten honey can truly appreciate its sweetness, which is beyond words.

The first book of the Valmiki Ramayana, called Bala Kanda, tells the story of Sri Rama's heavenly birth,

Bharata, Lakshmana, and Satrugana. It also describes Sri Rama's early life, marriage to Sita, and encounter with Parasurama. The second book, Ayodhya Kanda, describes the events leading up to Sri Rama's coronation, the intrigue that results in his exile in the forest, Bharata's quest for Sri Rama, the meeting of the brothers, and Bharata's return to Ayodhya with Sri Rama's sandals. The woods life of Aranya Kanda, Sri Rama, Sita, and Laksmana is recounted in the third book, along with the characters they met, including Surpanaka, Sri Rama's killings of Khara and Dussana, and Ravana's kidnapping of Sita. Ravana kills Jatayu, who encounters Kabandha and Sabari before passing away on Sri Rama's knee. In the fourth book (Kishkinda Kanda), after killing Vali, Sri Rama meets Hanuman and Sugriva, establishes a strategic partnership with them, and installs Sugriva as King of Kishkinda. This book also describes how the vanaras (monkeys) met Sampati (Jatayu's brother) on their journey south, as well as the start of the search for Sita. The title of the fifth book is Sundara Kanda. This book is a beautiful account of the adventures and lila (pastimes) of Hanuman, who successfully crossed the ocean to find Sita and bring her Sri Rama's message and ring. The burning of Lanka and Hanuman's face-to-face encounter with Ravana are also covered in this book. In the sixth book, Yuddha Kanda, Vibheeshana's surrender, the building of the bridge, the eagerly anticipated conflict between Sri Rama's army and Ravana's, and Sri Rama's triumphant return to Ayodhya are all described. Separate from the main epic, the seventh book (Uttara Kanda) is a contentious one. Sita, who had been exiled by Sri Rama, gives birth to his sons Kusa and Lava at Valmiki's ashram (hermitage). The thrones of Ayodhya are eventually occupied by Kusa and Lava. However, distraught about her exile, Sita turns into the ground, and a repentant Rama leaves for his heavenly home (Rosen, 2002).

Leadership

Valmiki Ramayana has lessons in all aspects of human life. It also has lessons in politics, economics, sociology, psychology, management, human values, and ethics and so on. Management is an art of getting things done through people. Ancient civilisations throughout the history had methods by which they were managed (planning, organising, staffing, leading, motivating, controlling, decision making, etc.). Every king who ruled ancient kingdoms had his own style of management, which includes administration and leadership. Leadership is an important function of management and also an important element in any organisation, society and country. What makes an organisation, society and a country successful; while another fails at most time can be attributed to leadership effectiveness. Generally, leadership is defined as the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts towards achieving certain goals. The word 'influencing' can be substituted with other words such as transforming, empowering, driving, motivating and inspiring. Inspiration means motivation that has been internalised and therefore comes from within the followers, as opposed to motivation that is simply a temporary response to external stimuli. Inspired followers make those goals of their own. In leadership, the leader is the key in transforming the followers. The leader is the most important element in leadership. The personality, behaviour and character of the leader are an important determinant for success of any organisation, society and country. Napoleon Bonaparte once said that he would have an army of rabbits led by a lion than an army of lions led by a rabbit (Sheh, 2003). It is the leader who navigates and provides vision and mission for his people. In most organisation, societies and countries, the failure or poor performance whether economically, politically or socially are not due to poor administration but poor leadership. Therefore, leadership is the life force and the spirit of an organisation that holds everything together. The wise leader uses the force from within to inspire and motivate his

people. Without the leader, an organisation, a society and a country are merely collection of people (Sheh, 2003).

Transformational leadership

Burns (1978) asserts that transformational leadership happens when a leader interacts with a follower in a way that elevates both of them to higher moral and motivational levels while working towards a shared goal. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders are charismatic, challenge followers' methods, and treat them fairly and differently depending on their needs.

Alternatively, transactional leadership is a kind of leadership conduct that focusses on how the followers' present needs might be met and highlights the interactions or agreements between the leader and the followers (Maher, 1997). Furthermore, he claims that the main traits that set transactional leadership apart from transformational leadership are that the exchanges might be psychological, political, or economic in nature.

Transactional leadership style comprises Management by Exception (ME), where leaders only step in when issues arise, and Contingent Reward (CR), which entails a relationship between the leader and follower based on resource exchange (Bass and Avolio, 1994). The majority of leaders practise both transactional and transformational leadership, but to varying degrees.

4 Four dimensions (4 Is) of transformational leadership

According to Bass and Avolio (1994), who were also referenced by Krishnan et al. (2004), transformational leadership has four main components, or the "4 Is." They are as follows: :

1. **Inspirational Motivation (IM):** Behaviours that give followers' work purpose and challenge it show this dimension. It consists of actions that set clear expectations, show dedication to the organization's overarching objectives, and foster a sense of unity via zeal and hope. According to Krishnan (2000), inspiring leadership also entails imagining a desired future state, helping followers perceive it, and demonstrating to them how to get there. Since the correct vision inspires dedication, energises people, gives them purpose, and sets a standard of excellence, envisioning is the process of turning intentions into realities by sharing that vision with others and winning their support. Vision motivates followers to go beyond the result and persuade others to fully and freely commit to something valuable.
2. **Idealised Influence (II):** II is defined as conduct that inspires respect, trust, and adoration in followers. It entails leaders sharing risks, taking followers' or their own demands into account, and acting morally and ethically. II also alludes to the charm of the leaders. According to Krishnan (2000), charisma is a type of social power that comes from trust in the leader's admirable character rather than from positions, laws, or customs. Furthermore, he claims that charismatic leaders are viewed as having extraordinary, superhuman, or at least extraordinary powers and attributes, setting them apart from other people. Only charismatic leaders might meet followers' higher order requirements with their vision and powerful demeanour. Charismatic leadership is typified by followers who have faith in the leader's convictions, accept them without question, show compassion for them, are eager to follow their instructions, and are emotionally invested in the organization's goals and objectives.
3. **Intellectual Stimulation (IS):** Leaders that exhibit this kind of transformational leadership inspire their followers to come up with fresh ideas and innovative solutions to issues, as well as to use

innovative methods of completing tasks. Krishnan (2000) asserts IS arouses in the followers the awareness of the problems and how they may be solved, and stirs the imagination and generates thoughts and insights. The leader's IS compels the followers to reconsider some of their previously unquestioned beliefs.

4. **Individualised Consideration (IC):** This is demonstrated by leaders that listen intently to their followers' thoughts and suggestions, paying particular attention to their needs for success and development. IC is defined by Krishnan (2000) as the leaders' developing attitude towards their followers. The transformational leader treats each follower as an individual, helps each follower achieve their goals, and personally attends to those followers who appear ignored. These leaders possess empathy, or the ability to intuitively understand other people's feelings and ideas.

However, Bass (1985) discovered that there are two components to transactional leadership. They are as follows:

1. **Contingent Reward (CR):** By making clear the responsibilities and tasks that followers must do in order to fulfil their own objectives and the aims of the organisation, leaders may reward followers for their hard work, support, and completion of tasks.
2. **Management by Exception (ME):** This means that leaders only take corrective action when followers don't live up to expectations or accomplish the objectives. According to a number of studies, transformational leaders generally inspire followers to work more and perform better than transactional leaders (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Transformational leaders inspire people to put the good of the group ahead of their own interests, according to Bass and Avolio (1994). They also provide their followers with a feeling of purpose and a vision and direction centred on a shared goal.

Table 1 gives comparisons between two-leadership style based on finding by Bass and Avolio (1994) also cited in Krishnan et al. (2004).

According to Betty and Lee (1992), a transformational strategy is probably going to be more successful than a transactional approach, which focusses on fixing technical problems while ignoring human and organisational concerns, at removing obstacles to change in companies. Every company, community, and nation requires transformative leaders in light of the growing environmental instability. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), followers of transformative leaders develop sentiments of respect, loyalty, and trust. In the years to come, transformational leaders will be in great demand; they will essentially be supermen on earth, changing the world with their gentle, calming, and golden touch (Krishnan, 1990). Every business, community, and nation need transformational leadership, hence the abilities of this type of leadership must be developed and maintained.

Table 1 :Transactional and transformational leadership: a comparison Leadership quality
Transactional approach Transformational approach

Time orientation	Short-term	Long-term
Communication	Vertical, downward	Multidirectional
Focus	Financial goals	Customer (internal and external)
Reward systems	Organisational, extrinsic	Personal, intrinsic
Source of power	Legitimate, reward	Referent, expert
Decision making	Centralised, downward	Dispersed, upward
Employees	Liability,	cost Asset
Coordination mechanism	Rules and regulations	Goals and value
Compliance mechanism	Directive	Congruence
Attitude towards change	Avoidable, resistant, status quo	Rational explanation
Guiding mechanism	Profit	Inevitable, embrace
Control Rigid	conformity	Vision and values
Perspective	Internal	Self-control
Task design	Compartmentalised	External individual Enriched, groups

The son of King Dasaratha, Sri Rama, demonstrated transformational leadership:

Before Burns (1978) and Bass and Avolio (1994) introduced and developed the transformational leadership approach, Sri Rama had already exhibited transformational leadership for thousands of years. Sri Rama's qualities and attributes are described in the first book (Bala Kanda) itself. These include being accomplished, learnt, powerful, noble-minded, truthful, grateful, clever, wise, most beautiful, never prone to anger, caring for the well-being of all living things, protecting everyone, controlling his senses, compassionate, unflinching determination, brave, heroic in battle, fully conversant in the use of weapons, impartial towards friends and foes, adhering to true religious principles, possessing all opulence, being patient, and being fully aware of himself. Because of these attributes, Sri Rama gained the respect, adoration, inspiration, and confidence of everyone in Ayodhya.

Seven traits of transformative leaders were listed by Krishnan (1990), quoting Tichy and Devanna (1990), who have also conducted in-depth research on the subject. In several occasions in the Valmiki Ramayana, Sri Rama exhibited each of the seven traits. The following are the seven traits: 1 Transformational leaders are change agents They work to enhance their organisation, community, and nation by enacting the necessary reforms. They also alter their followers' objectives, expectations, attitudes, and actions. Kiskhinda's kingdom was transferred from Vali to Sugriva by Sri Rama. After meeting Sri Rama, Sugriva underwent a metamorphosis and became the king of Kiskhinda following the death of his brother Vali at Sri Rama's hands. When Vibheeshana was crowned king of Lanka before to Sri Rama's (Sri Rama) conflict with Ravana, Sri Rama also altered the country's monarchy.

Transformational leaders are courageous people: After they make a choice, they have the guts to take risks and see that their goals and vision are realised. They don't stop once they've begun the change process. They are fearless. Sri Rama was not persuaded to reclaim Ayodhya by Bharata, his master Vasistha Muni, or any of the people of Ayodhya. In order to uphold the counsel that Kaikeyi got from his father, King Dasaratha, Sri Rama was brave and determined enough to face any risk. The people

were aware that Sri Rama was uncompromising and that nothing could change him. Even if they disapproved of Sri Rama's selection, they couldn't help but respect him because nothing could ever defeat him.

Transformational leaders believe in people: They have a really upbeat stance towards everyone. They think that individuals are naturally capable and driven and give them authority. They think that every individual has limitless potential. Sri Rama fully believed that Sugriva will bring Sita back. He (Sri Rama) murdered Sugriva's brother, the stronger Vali, and Sugriva was granted the throne of Kishkinda. Sri Rama gave Hanuman his ring to give to Sita because he had total faith and confidence that Hanuman would be able to locate Sita. Sri Rama had been profoundly impacted by Hanuman's knowledge ever since the day he and Lakshmana first met on the slopes of Rishyamuka hill. Additionally, Sri Rama had a lot of faith in his vanara (monkey) army's capacity to vanquish Ravana's army and bring Sita back.

Transformational leaders are value driven: They are motivated by a set of fundamental principles that influence all they do. This is demonstrated by Sri Rama, who never changed his statements or departed from them. "I have promised to protect the rishis (sages) of Dandaka forest. I can give up my life, even you O Sita, as well as Lakshmana, but I cannot swerve from the my promise," Sri Rama had said to Sita in Aranya Kanda. This virtue was also shown by Sri Rama in Yuddha Kanda when he welcomed Vibheeshana, Ravana's brother who had come for safety.

Transformational leaders are life long learners: They see errors as teaching opportunities rather than as failures. They have a voracious thirst for lifelong learning and growth. An ideal illustration of a learner's life may be found in Sri Rama's life. He received instruction from Vasistha Muni when he was younger, and later from Visvamitra Muni, Bharadvaja Muni, Jabali Muni, Atri Muni, Sarabhanga Muni, Agastya Muni, and others. Several sages, including Agastya Muni, paid him visits even after Sri Rama assumed the throne of Ayodhya. He saw this as an opportunity to study as Sri Rama, under the guidance of Ayodhya, received a tremendous deal of insight from these gurus.

Transformational leaders have the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity and Uncertainty: They meet all the needs of a world growing more complicated, which calls on leaders to be able to solve complex problems. When Sri Rama was forced to make the difficult choice to exile Sita from Ayodhya, he amply demonstrated this skill. As a perfect monarch, Sri Rama had to protect his dynasty's honour. He had to lead by example so that future generations may follow. In Bhagavad Gita 3.21, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that a leader must lead by example because followers will imitate what the leader does, and the public will imitate whatever norms or examples the leader sets (Muniapan, 2005). Despite the seeming harshness of Sri Rama's choice to exile Sita, a king occasionally has to exercise harshness since ruling his subjects comes first, even if it means sacrificing one's own happiness. Henri Fayol, a French management writer from the early 20th century, created his well-known 14 principles of management many thousands of years later. Individual interests should be subordinated to organisational interests, according to Henri Fayol's sixth management principle. This implies that the interests of the organisation (community and nation) must come first. When Sri Rama had to decide whether to exile Sita from Ayodhya, he demonstrated this.

Transformational leaders are visionaries: Their visions are expansive and motivating. Missions and objectives are derived from the visions. Before departing for the forest, the inhabitants of Ayodhya were given a detailed explanation of the future vision that Sri Rama had developed for the city. When Bharata arrived to convince Sri Rama to return to Ayodhya, he was also informed of this. His

vanara (monkey) army was sent to save Sita and vanquish the rakshasas (demons). A number of objectives were established in order to accomplish this mission, including sending search parties, locating Sita, building the bridge to Lanka, and confronting and vanquishing Ravana.

Conclusions

The outcomes of Sri Rama's transformative leadership are described in the last sargas (chapters) of Uttara Kanda and Yuddha Kanda. Vikasa (2000) detailed Ayodhya's governance under Sri Rama's rule. The states, the seven islands, the seven seas, the hills, the mountains, the rivers, and the woods were all conducive to providing all living things with the basic needs of life. There was absolutely no physical or mental pain, illness, old age, loss, mourning, anguish, anxiety, or exhaustion. There were no illnesses, no robberies, and no widows to mourn the death of their spouses.

In fact, even wild animals stopped killing each other because they had given up their innate animosity. Every citizen was completely virtuous and always regarded Sri Rama as their master and ruler. In addition, they considered Sri Rama to be their essence and life. Sri Rama was the main topic of conversation. As a result, it seemed as though all of Ayodhya had changed into Vaikunta, or a paradise free from worries. The author believes that Sri Rama's leadership teachings would serve as a guidance and inspiration for leaders both in India and beyond the world.

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