

MYTHOS AND ADAPTATION: THE RĀMĀYAṆA'S JOURNEY TO THE RAMAKIEN

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ABSTRACT

A timeless Indian epic, the Rāmāyaṇa evolved into diverse localised forms throughout Southeast Asia, transcending cultural and geographic boundaries. The *Ramakien* of Thailand stands out among them as a striking example of the epic's versatility and timeless appeal. The primary focus of this study, "Mythos and Adaptation: The Rāmāyaṇa's Journey to the Ramakien," explores the gradual alterations that occurred as the Rāmāyaṇa transitioned from its Indian roots to its Thai version. This study aims to shed light on how the Rāmāyaṇa was amended to reflect Thai customs while retaining its key concepts by analysing the narrative, thematic, and character transformations. The research emphasises how the *Ramakien's* unique identity was influenced by Thai social, spiritual, and creative abilities. For example, the character Rama in the *Ramakien* represents Buddhist ideas, unlike his representation in the Rāmāyaṇa. The roles of well-known characters like Sita and Hanuman are also altered, giving the well-known story new depth. Using a comparative literary study, this research highlights how the *Ramakien* serves as a development and reimagination of the Rāmāyaṇa. The study illustrates how, within the vast global network of cultural transmission, masterpieces like the Rāmāyaṇa evolve as they traverse national boundaries. This paper also demonstrates how inventive civilisations may recreate universal ideas for cultural continuity and change to coexist.

Keywords: Rāmāyaṇa, *Ramakien*, cultural adaptation, Buddhism, comparative literature

I. INTRODUCTION

Indians have descended from one of the earliest societies, and while the Mahabharata is typically referred to as "Itihasa," the Rāmāyaṇa is always an epic poem (kavya). For several centuries, the 'Story of Rama' was told and retold (N.d). The Rāmāyaṇa, originally composed by Valmiki, has been widely studied for its narrative techniques, philosophical depth, and its role in shaping Hindu cultural identity. The Rāmāyaṇa is one of the earliest writings in Indian heritage whose significance transcends the class of different generations, destinations, sexes, and financial status. Its value is widely recognised in numerous situations for numerous branches of study, including history, ethics, spirituality, and law. In the words of Valmiki, the epic takes place during India's Golden Age. Valmiki's *Ramayan* is three times longer than the *Iliad* and one-quarter the length of the *Mahabharata* (N.d). Dasaratha is the perfect ruler of Ayodhya, a perfect town. Sita is the ideal companion, and Rama is the perfect royal. This epic illustrates a striking link to the principles and existence of the early Hindus. Eventually, several poets and saints like Shankaracharya, Tulsidas, Brahmanand, Namdev, Kabir Das, and others looked up to it. It is an Indian literary gem that has gained popularity throughout the world. Up to a hundred variants of Rāmāyaṇa exist. A classic of Indian literary work, the Rāmāyaṇa has influenced intellectual, ethical, and cultural ideas for

generations.

Ancient Sanskrit writing has been impacted by Rāmāyaṇa's literary style and framework, and its principal ideas are still present in works of art like Kathakali and Ram Leela. Because of its multicultural significance, the Rāmāyaṇa has influenced interpretations outside of India. Hindu cultural framework and spiritual traditions have been impacted by the epic's intellectual complexity, which explores responsibility, dedication, and divinity. Its lasting impact is further reinforced by contemporary adaptations, such as "The Rāmāyaṇa" by R.K. Narayan, "Sita: Warrior of Mithila" by Amish Tripathi, and many more. All things considered, the Rāmāyaṇa's everlasting impact on the world is highlighted by its ongoing legacy in literary works, creative art, and pop culture.

In addition to being an epic tale, the Rāmāyaṇa is a valuable tool for life lessons. It features an extensive spectrum of characters that serve as role models for both the right and wrong ways to live. It conveys significant lessons about duty, generosity, and the conquest of virtue over vice, and it uses figures like Hanuman, Rama, and Sita as representations of righteousness. The theme tells the story of life and family on a larger scale. The Rāmāyaṇa is a historical portrayal as well as a literary work. In Hindu mythology, several of the characters—including Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Hanuman, and others—are regarded as gods. Prince Rama is considered the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, whereas Hanuman is considered the incarnation of Lord Shiva. The villain of the epic, Ravana, is an iconic doomed character in Hindu mythology. Ravana is viewed as a divinity by several religious groups.

The Rāmāyaṇa examines some important topics, such as righteousness, people's ethical responsibilities, and the significance of upholding one's beliefs in life. With Rama standing for morality and Ravana for immorality, it emphasises the never-ending conflict between good and evil. The significance of carrying out one's responsibilities despite one's obstacles is demonstrated by the interwoven concepts of dignity, equality, and the complexity of humanity's feelings. In the end, it affirms the victory of justice and honesty.

Various civilisations and places have interpreted the Rāmāyaṇa in numerous manners. Since its inception in India, it has expanded greatly and is now an essential component of Asian literary and cultural life. While numerous adaptations remain faithful to the original, some add new elements to the original characters as well as new themes and characters. As demonstrated by King Jayavarman VII of the Khmer Empire, who was declared to be descended from characters in the Rāmāyaṇa and used this link to justify his supreme obligation to rule over others, the narrative's success resulted in its implementation by rulers as a means of validating their supremacy. His power and religious credibility were strengthened by this affiliation. Khmer sanctuaries scattered throughout northeastern Thailand are rich in iconography depicting Hindu gods and *Ramayana* scenes (N.d). Even though Indonesia has a Muslim majority, the Rāmāyaṇa has influenced Indonesian artistic endeavours and heritage greatly. As it spread beyond India, it took on new forms and interpretations. The Cambodian Reamker, the Indonesian Kakawin Rāmāyaṇa, and the Thai *Ramakien* all demonstrate how different cultures infused their own beliefs and values into the epic.

Lastly, *Ramakien* is the national epic of Thailand. The Thai king is still regarded as the personification of Rama. Thailand's adaptation of the Rāmāyaṇa into the *Ramakien* was formalized during the reign of King Rama I in the late 18th century. The *Ramakien* has been shaped by Buddhist ideology, courtly traditions, and theatrical adaptations. The name Ayutthaya is a translation of Rama's kingdom of Ayodhya. Every khon and nang

performance in Thailand now is based on the *Ramakien*, which is regarded as the crowning achievement of Thai writing. As regards the Thai folk versions of the Rama story, a recent comparative study of the Thai folk versions entitled Phra Lak-Phra Lam, Rama Jataka, Horaman, Prommachak and *Ramakien* has shown that the Rama story in the course of transmission as folk tales has undergone several changes of detail, expansion, reduction, and transposition (Singaravelu, S.). Since its initial reading by its inhabitants, it has been ingrained in Thai society and remains taught in educational institutions, regarded as one of the most notable pieces of Thai literary works.

1.1. Research Aims and Objectives

This research paper titled “Mythos and Adaptation: The Rāmāyaṇa's Journey to the Ramakien” aims to discover more about how the famous Indian tale Rāmāyaṇa changed into its Thai counterpart, the *Ramakien*. The goal of this study is to understand this unique adaptation and the significant changes in the characters, themes, and storytelling framework that took place as the tale progressed from one country to another. The core social, religious, and artistic influences that drove this change will also be examined in the study. This research attempts to throw light on how a legendary tale gets rewritten in a fresh religious and historical setting while staying true to the original elements.

This study's main goal is to explore the changes that the Rāmāyaṇa experienced on its journey to Thailand and how it changed into the *Ramakien*. With a focus on the changes in story and form that occurred as the tale was adapted to suit the Thai literary and creative setting, this research will follow the Rāmāyaṇa as it passed through various barriers. The Rāmāyaṇa's spread from India to Southeast Asia led to the emergence of multiple regional versions, each adapting the core story to local traditions. The *Ramakien*, which is Thailand's version, is one of the most famous translations and keeps many parts of the original text. It does, however, include some changes that aren't in the original tale.

The second objective of the research is to fully analyse the narrative, thematic, and character alterations that occurred when the Rāmāyaṇa was transformed into the *Ramakien*. Within its detailed plot, the Rāmāyaṇa presents multiple themes, plentiful philosophical underpinnings, and many characters, all of which are important to Indian culture and religion. Nevertheless, following its transplantation into Thailand, the epic encountered many different cultural standards, religious beliefs, and artistic traditions.

How these differences changed the Rāmāyaṇa, structurally and presentationally, will be studied in this research. Rama, an avatar of Vishnu, along with a god-king originally, may have transformed the *Ramakien*, where such a figure is depicted differently to national identity as well as all Thai royal symbolism. It is also possible that Ravana, Sita, Hanuman, and other characters had alterations to what they did, their good qualities, and their moral principles to fit better with Thai thoughts on dharma (righteousness) and ethics.

Examining all thematic shifts is additionally necessary. Due to themes of dharma, karma, devotion, and the divine order, the Rāmāyaṇa has a certain place in Hindu religious thought. The Thai version possibly changed or reinterpreted these themes to thoroughly reflect local religious contexts, like the effect of Buddhism and animist beliefs. The research will highlight shifts in narrative, theme, and character portrayal to show how the core elements of the Rāmāyaṇa were changed to fit within the Thai cultural fabric, which made the epic relevant and meaningful to its new audience.

The third objective is to examine the meaningful influence of Thai cultural, spiritual, and original environments on the Rāmāyaṇa's transformation into the *Ramakien*.

Thai culture, improved by Buddhism, animism, and native customs, offered a wealthy, special setting for the Rāmāyaṇa's reimagining. A cultural product of huge importance, the *Ramakien* was moulded deeply by the beliefs coupled with the aesthetics in conjunction with the social structures of its era, making it more than simply a literary adaptation.

The objective is to understand the many ways that Thai spiritual beliefs, especially those related to Buddhism, influenced multiple moral lessons and philosophical ideas of the *Ramakien*. Some characters or events, for example, might have been presented differently because of Buddhist thoughts on change and caring. Many Thai traditions contributed to the visual and theatrical aspects of the *Ramakien*. The research will offer an understanding of the relationship between the epic and its new cultural context by analysing these cultural influences, showing how the *Ramakien* mirrors Thailand's cultural, spiritual, and artistic identity.

In summary, the research intends to analyse the Rāmāyaṇa's transformation into the *Ramakien*, spotlighting each narrative, thematic, and character-related change that occurred due to certain Thai cultural and spiritual forces in addition to original forces. The study of these things will help people understand the number of mythological stories that change across cultures and connect to new listeners.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The study “Mythos and Adaptation: The Rāmāyaṇa's Journey to the *Ramakien*” provides a meaningful understanding of the detailed processes of cultural adaptation and the universal nature of epic narratives. Analysing the transformation of the Indian epic Rāmāyaṇa into the Thai *Ramakien*, this research shows how stories change when moved between cultures and also lets people learn more about how Literature, culture, and identity relate. Comparative literature becomes quite important for understanding the evolution of stories, myths, and narratives when these are shared across multiple cultures, regions, and historical periods. The Rāmāyaṇa and the *Ramakien* may appear similar, but this research shows that cultural context causes them to diverge considerably.

Adaptation involves more than translating text, as it requires rethinking characters, themes, and values to reflect the social, religious, and cultural background of the culture receiving it. This study offers a single study of the ways a classic epic is reinterpreted in addition to being localised: the transformation of the Rāmāyaṇa into the *Ramakien*. Looking at shifts such as the mixing of native beliefs with foreign ideas, new definitions for right and wrong, as well as when local art becomes part of other customs, the study gives a key understanding of how culture changes. For instance, the Rāmāyaṇa, first linked to Hindu traditions and beliefs, encountered other effects once it arrived in Thailand, a largely Buddhist nation. The *Ramakien's* retelling of themes and characters reflects multiple Thai spiritual and cultural values that often differ from the original Indian context. This study employs comparative literature to improve our comprehension of how epics such as the Rāmāyaṇa change and thrive in different societies, along with how they spread cultural in addition to religious beliefs.

This research is also meaningful because it improves the active discussion of the flexible and universal qualities of epic stories. The Rāmāyaṇa, a respected old text that has travelled past India, has affected many cultures as well as literary customs all over Asia. When analysing epics, the main question is whether certain stories have a universal nature, allowing them to transcend their origins and relate to multiple audiences. The change of the Rāmāyaṇa into the *Ramakien* clearly shows this phenomenon.

This research helps people to completely understand how grand stories maintain

their main ideas—such as the fight of good versus bad, a deep look into dharma (righteousness), and a complete showing of heroism—regardless of multiple changes to shape and details. While the *Ramakien* thoroughly preserves the full story of the Rāmāyaṇa, it changes the story in particular ways that mirror Thai cultural and spiritual realities. For example, Rāmāyaṇa elements might be changed to align with Buddhist views on karma, compassion, and impermanence or to fit the artistic standards of Thai performance types like Khon (classical dance-drama). The research points out the flexibility of many epic stories, as it shows their core can stay largely the same while changing throughout many cultures. Even though multiple cultural contexts do influence exactly how the stories are told, these stories explore fundamental human themes that remain widely relatable across time as well as space. By exploring the Rāmāyaṇa's adventure into the *Ramakien*, the research points out how epics still appeal as a way to tell stories dealing with common human topics like right and wrong, responsibility, and what is divine. This study precisely speaks to the continuing timelessness and lasting resilience of epic narratives; these narratives evolve and change, but they stay relevant to new generations and multiple cultural environments.

All in all, this research paper is considerably important for developing our comprehension of cultural adaptation, comparative literature, and the universal nature of epic stories. Looking at the entire adventure of the Rāmāyaṇa as it turns into the *Ramakien* gives a close look at how mythical epic tales are changed, as well as how they can echo throughout many cultures, thus backing up the idea that many big stories can exceed limits. They also keep on encouraging revolutionary takes, including special forms.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1. Studies on the Rāmāyaṇa

The Rāmāyaṇa has received important scholarly interest, and important Indian texts and commentaries are key resources for understanding its central ideas and versions in different areas. Rāmāyaṇa by Valmiki, the initial and most trustworthy version of the epic, has been extensively studied for its narrative methods, its portrayal of character development, and its depiction of dharma (righteousness). Many scholars, in addition to William Buck (The Rāmāyaṇa of Valmiki), have focused on translating as well as studying Valmiki's text and, importantly, the moral and philosophical ideas that are at its base. Another key retelling, Kamban's Tamil version of the Rāmāyaṇa (Iramavataram), also provides multiple regional interpretations. Kamban's version, wealthy in Tamil culture and language, shows how well the Rāmāyaṇa was able to be changed in South India, and it mirrors different local religious behaviours and ways of telling stories.

Many scholarly works have examined the spread of the Rāmāyaṇa in Southeast Asia. Researchers like J. Gonda (The Rāmāyaṇa in Southeast Asia), in addition to S. Ramaswamy, have explored how the Rāmāyaṇa travelled to Southeast Asia, where it was integrated into local myths along with legends, yielding adaptations such as the *Ramakien* in Thailand, the *Hikayat Seri Rama* in Malaysia, as well as *Kritik* in Indonesia. These studies examine how the Rāmāyaṇa's cultural reinterpretation matched its linguistic translation per the spiritual, social, and political climates of Southeast Asian societies. Key understandings come from how regional versions, such as the *Ramakien*, show particular cultural values yet keep the main story shaped from the first Indian story. Because of the Ramayana's continued popularity and cultural legacy all over Southeast Asia and the world, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations has, in recent years, spearheaded the International Ramayana Festival, where the many versions of the Ramayana are performed and celebrated (School, J. 2018).

II.2. The *Ramakien*: Thai Literature and Cultural Identity

The *Ramakien*, Thailand's national epic, represents the country's culture and spirit. Ever since 1902, when the *Ramakien* became part of the Thai school curriculum, millions of Thais have been exposed to the epic's literary, artistic and moral influences and enchanted by its combination of romance, adventure and heroism (N.d). Even though there are some fragments of verse remaining from the Ayutthaya era, it is not until the start of the Bangkok period, 1782 CE to present, under King Rama I, that *Ramakien* took its full epic form as we know it today (Goss, F. 2012). Even with its basis in the Indian Rāmāyaṇa, the *Ramakien* saw plentiful transformations that mirrored the religious, cultural, and political atmosphere throughout Thailand. Already well-known in Southeast Asia during an outstanding time of cultural exchange, the Rāmāyaṇa underwent a truly historical change as it was extensively reworked to align with Thai royal ideas, Buddhist principles, and specific regional stories.

Earlier scholarly works have given a large focus to the narrative structure and cultural importance of the *Ramakien*. Studies like Phya Anuman Rajadhon's "The *Ramakien*: Thai Epic Literature" explore how the epic changed from its Indian source, concentrating on alterations to plot, character, and theme. Inside *Ramakien*, one will find time-honored themes of love and devotion, good versus evil, right over wrong, presented through intricate plots and sub-plots with a multitude of characters. The actions and behavior of these characters often exemplifies the basic characteristics of traditional Thai society (Goss, f. 2012). Characters like Rama, Sita, and Hanuman are reinterpreted many times, showing Thai ideas about kingship, virtue, and loyalty. For example, the role of Hanuman is expanded, emphasizing his wit and charisma, which aligns with Thai aesthetics and folklore. Along with its cultural importance when it comes to Thai identity, the *Ramakien* has been studied, especially concerning both national identity and royal support. The *Ramakien* explores how the epic's themes resonate with the Thai concept of "dharma" and its reflection in statecraft as well as in the arts, which include dance-drama and murals in royal palaces. These studies highlight some aspects showing that the *Ramakien* serves not only as a literary and artistic treasure but also as a symbol of Thai cultural pride and unity.

II.3. Gaps in Existing Research

While existing research on the Rāmāyaṇa and *Ramakien* offers genuinely important understandings of their particular cultural contexts and special narratives, an important gap remains in the comparative focus on all narrative and thematic transformations between the two epics. Scholarship mostly focuses on the Indian roots of the Rāmāyaṇa or the Thai expression of the *Ramakien* separately, not systematically studying the particular shifts in structure, character development, or theme as the story moves across cultural lines. We don't fully understand how the *Ramakien* reinterpreted the Rāmāyaṇa's main themes to fit local ideas about kingship, loyalty, and morality since detailed comparative studies of these changes are scarce. A more sharply focused comparative analysis might reveal how quite different cultural, spiritual, and social frameworks considerably shaped the same narrative.

In addition, further investigation of Buddhism's effect on the *Ramakien* is needed. It is widely acknowledged that the *Ramakien* reflects several elements of Buddhist thought, especially in its treatment of karma, morality, and impermanence; however, only a few scholarly works discuss how these Buddhist principles actively transformed the original Rāmāyaṇa narrative. How Hinduism and Buddhism worked together requires

more study, particularly since Indian stories changed in Southeast Asia. By thoroughly examining all these Buddhist influences, the study can offer a more complete understanding of all special spiritual and philosophical aspects that affect the *Ramakien* and how it changes the Rāmāyaṇa.

III.METHOD

My research paper, “Mythos and Adaptation: The Rāmāyaṇa's Journey to the Ramakien” studies how the Rāmāyaṇa was changed into the *Ramakien* by using comparative literary analysis. The methodology carefully compares several key elements of both epics, with a special focus on narrative structure, thematic content, and character development. The paper identifies many similarities and differences to uncover how the *Ramakien* retains several core aspects of the Rāmāyaṇa, also incorporating diverse local cultural, spiritual, and artistic influences.

The analysis starts by carefully reading the two texts, examining the core narratives within each, in addition to the roles of important figures such as Rama, Sita, and Ravana, as well as the individual moral trajectories each undertakes. The study has also assessed how particular specific themes are changed to appropriately accommodate the Thai cultural context in the *Ramakien*—for example, the especially intense battle between good and evil, deep duty (dharma), and important devotion. This research paper also analyses how Thai royal symbolism, in conjunction with Buddhist influences, has reshaped these themes and characters.

Character development is also explored by the research, which points out that its depiction in the *Ramakien* is different from the Rāmāyaṇa in several ways. This comparative framework will clarify how the epic changed but kept its main mythos by giving a comprehension of the cultural adaptation process.

III.1. Primary Sources

The first primary source is Valmiki's Rāmāyaṇa, the base text of the Indian epic tradition. The Rāmāyaṇa is the story's most meaningful, earliest version, offering the original story as well as themes, in addition to characters that are the foundation for future versions. The original form of Valmiki's Rāmāyaṇa has plentiful philosophical, moral, and spiritual content and catches the Hindu idea of dharma (righteousness), devotion, and the cosmic fight between good and evil. The study looks at English translations and key versions of Valmiki's Rāmāyaṇa, focusing on important chapters and character development so it can be compared to the *Ramakien*.

Scholars like William Buck and Wendy Doniger offer translations and commentary on the text, providing useful understandings regarding Valmiki's narrative choices. Several translations are used in the study to investigate the Rāmāyaṇa's narrative structure, its themes of duty, morality, and righteousness, and its portrayal of divine figures such as Rama, Sita, and Ravana. By thoroughly examining each of these elements, the study identifies many core aspects of the epic that were preserved, changed, and reinterpreted in the Thai version.

The *Ramakien*, which is the Thai version of the Rāmāyaṇa and the second primary source, originated in the 18th century during the reign of King Rama I. The *Ramakien* was painstakingly created as part of a substantially larger effort to firmly establish Thai cultural and national identity, using the incredibly well-known Indian epic as a vehicle for deeply conveying Thai values along with royal ideals and Buddhist teachings. Whereas the Rāmāyaṇa bears the political, cultural, and spiritual imprint of India, the *Ramakien* bears that of Thailand, including the monarchy, a Buddhist cosmology, and

kingdoms of performance art like classical dance and theatre. The present study pays attention to the narrative structure, the characterisation of Rama, Ravana, and Buddhist elements with emphasis on karma, impermanence, and compassion. By placing the *Ramakien* within the context of the Rāmāyaṇa, the study shows how these themes are transformed and what implications this holds for understanding the cultural adaptation process in Thai society, including the themes of duty, righteousness, and heroism.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

IV.1. Narrative Transformations

The transition from the Rāmāyaṇa to the *Ramakien* is a journey marked by major narrative changes that are a byproduct of the movement between the Indian and Thai cultural, spiritual, and political spheres. Although the *Ramakien* is derived from the Rāmāyaṇa, it takes a distinct structural and thematic direction to reflect the values and beliefs important to Thai people. The nature of these narrative shifts also indicates how the central features of the Indian epic are remoulded to suit the cherished values of Thai culture, royal ideologies, and Buddhist tenets.

The main structural difference between the Rāmāyaṇa and the *Ramakien* is found in the epic's basic organisation as well as in expanded narrative sequences. Whereas each of the seven books of Valmiki's Rāmāyaṇa covers a different stage of Rama's life in relation to the various feminine figures surrounding him, the *Ramakien* is more concerned with royal ideologies and virtues that find commonality with the Thai monarchy. Another major structural difference lies in the heightened prominence of certain subplots and characters in the *Ramakien* that receive much less emphasis in the Rāmāyaṇa. For example, the characterisation of the character of Phra Ram (Rama) as an idealised king and the symbolic representation of the Thai monarchy are made more salient, effectively connecting the epic with the state and royal power through its mythology. Unlike in the Hindu tradition, where Rama is an avatar of Vishnu, in the *Ramakien*, he exemplifies Buddhist virtues of compassion and wisdom. This moves the emphasis away from the Rāmāyaṇa's preoccupation with the individual's dharma and virtue toward a more state-centric reading.

Many noteworthy changes have been made in the *Ramakien*, including notable omissions and additions to the narrative, such that it aligns with local cultural sensibilities, which are often shaped by Buddhism. For example, the Buddhist idea of karma is a much more explicit theme in the *Ramakien*, where characters' deeds carry more immediate karmic ramifications. The karma aspect, for example, strengthens Buddhist morals about how to live one's life compared to the nature of life overall, which in many ways is secondary in the Rāmāyaṇa. The *Ramakien* also puts more focus on the idea that deeds are determined by past karma—and thus shapes characters' fates more in concrete terms than the Indian version. Additionally, Ravana's character is altered to emphasize his role as a clear antagonist, stripping away some of the complex nuances found in the Indian tradition. Ravana, as a character driven mainly by pride and ambition in the Rāmāyaṇa, becomes in the *Ramakien* a much more straightforwardly villainous character. This simplification emphasises the contrast between good and evil in a manner that is more relatable to Thai audiences, where clear moral distinctions are favoured in stories meant to serve as royal examples. In addition, the *Ramakien* cuts short or changes some episodes from the Rāmāyaṇa. The Rāmāyaṇa has a prominent subplot surrounding Shabala, the divine charioteer, which is cut from the *Ramakien*. Moreover, some of the discussions contained in the Rāmāyaṇa on divine order, fate, and dharma are underemphasised in the *Ramakien* in exchange for pragmatic morals about loyalty, duty to the king, and social

responsibility.

The inclusion of local characters and regional myths in the *Ramakien* also indicates a Thai context. Figures such as the monkey general Hanuman are more prominent, sometimes taking on a more heroic quality, and reflect values such as military prowess and loyalty that were of great importance to the central culture of the Thai kingdom in history. These two texts remain different from each other in terms of their plots and because they exhibit profound shifts in terms of their backdrop of politics, spirituality, and culture of the times of their creation and development. Such changes reconfigure not only the epic's structure but also its themes and characterisations, bending the narrative toward Thai concepts of kingship, morality, and religious tenets. The *Ramakien's* transformation is made possible through the addition of elements that resonate with Thai culture, combined with the removal of material that does not align with the tradition of Thai cultural values.

IV.2. Thematic Adaptations

The *Ramakien's* thematic adaptations of the Rāmāyaṇa deeply show major cultural, religious, and philosophical changes, as they were shaped by Thailand's very common Buddhist beliefs. Thailand's countless spiritual and social values influence the expression of the original epic's core themes, including duty, honour, and the battle between good and evil, all of which are still present. The *Ramakien's* reinterpretations of dharma (duty) are largely affected by Buddhism. The karma concept also has a large bearing on heroism's themes.

In the Rāmāyaṇa, devotion to dharma and gods, like Hindu values, matters most. However, the *Ramakien* includes a more coherent Buddhist view. As shown in the Thai version, all of the characters' actions directly relate to their eventual fates, as karma is a core element that depicts Buddhist ideas of cause and effect. For instance, the *Ramakien* frames Ravana's downfall as the inevitable outcome of bad karma. It is not just the result of pride along with arrogance. This focus on karmic results backs up how important proper behaviour is, as it brings the epic in line with the Buddhist idea that each action has a moral result.

The *Ramakien* displays one especially important thematic shift: the depiction of Rama as a Bodhisattva figure, a concept that is central to Mahayana Buddhism. In the *Ramakien*, Rama has depictions that represent every quality of a Bodhisattva—an individual who strives for complete enlightenment and the total welfare of others—but in the Rāmāyaṇa, Rama is a completely divine incarnation of Vishnu. This is clear in how Rama's compassion and self-sacrifice are shown, traits that go along with the Buddhist idea of a Bodhisattva who will suffer for the good of others. Throughout the *Ramakien*, Rama's role extensively goes beyond a heroic king; it turns into an actual symbol of complete moral purity in conjunction with absolute benevolence, like a Buddha in waiting.

Within the *Ramakien*, Rama's courageous efforts to rescue his beloved wife Sita from the evil Ravana and his deep devotion to her are deeply infused with a powerful sense of moral duty and intense compassion, not simply simple acts of heroism. This portrayal stresses the importance of many selfless acts and righteous behaviours. The spiritual progress of the community is advanced by an individual's suffering and multiple actions along the Bodhisattva path, where these traits are found. Moral and spiritual values are shown to be changed from the Rāmāyaṇa in the *Ramakien*, which focuses on Thai social standards. Duty (dharma) has a new meaning that fits Thailand's hierarchical society and royal family. Dharma in the Rāmāyaṇa is mainly a personal moral code that

people follow depending on where they are in society. The *Ramakien*, however, places more importance on the king's duty to protect the kingdom and uphold righteousness. Rama's role as a king became a model for Thai rulers. Thereby strongly reinforcing the important idea that a ruler must diligently uphold moral governance as well as morality for the state's general welfare. The *Ramakien* also frames the royal family as divinely ordained, in keeping with the central role of the Thai monarchy in society. This emphasis on royal duty in the *Ramakien* stands in contrast to the more personal focus on the dharma of the Rāmāyaṇa, indicating that the Thai version is consistent with the culture and politics of Thailand.

Thus, while dharma is central in both the Rāmāyaṇa and the *Ramakien*, it is interpreted according to different cultural and religious lenses. In the Rāmāyaṇa, dharma is the moral law governing how individuals are supposed to act given their caste, their family, and their responsibilities. In the *Ramakien*, however, dharma becomes more strongly linked to the responsibilities of leadership and, more specifically, the role of the king. Rama is portrayed here not only as an ideal king, an avatar, one with divine prowess, but also as one whose dedication to his duty as the ruler is where his greatness lies. For instance, Rama's exile into the forest in the Rāmāyaṇa is a personal sacrifice carried out by choice to follow his father's wishes. In the *Ramakien*, this exile is a very personal sacrifice, but it is also spun as a king's duty to preserve the integrity of the royal line and the welfare of the kingdom. The moral and spiritual lessons of the *Ramakien* emphasise the king's duty to uphold cosmic order, which chimed with Thailand's rites of reverence for the monarchy as the embodiment of people's protection.

IV.3. Character Reimagination

The move of the Rāmāyaṇa into the *Ramakien* changes how key characters are shown. These shifts in portrayal and representation are deep and meaningful. To align with Thai cultural, religious, and social values, especially the influence of Buddhism, the characters' roles and representations are fully reimaged, but their core traits are always kept. The *Ramakien* is a special cultural artifact because it reimagines key characters, such as Rama, Sita, and Hanuman, reflecting Thailand's spiritual and social ethos. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Rama is shown to be the seventh form of the Hindu god Vishnu, in addition to possessing godly traits that show that he is a god (Griffith, n.d.). He is a virtuous king. Still, his divine origin puts him above the mortal field. Rama experiences many alterations in the *Ramakien* and transitions from a Hindu deity into a more human-like figure influenced by Buddhism. In the Thai version, Rama is presented as a completely ideal ruler, representing every trait of a Bodhisattva—one who strives to achieve complete enlightenment to assist all others (Ramaswamy, 1996). His compassion, selflessness, and moral duty are stressed by this shift, and it aligns with Buddhist values of generosity and the pursuit of spiritual progress.

In the *Ramakien*, Rama is more than just a warrior prince, for Rama is a leader with many actions that possess meaningful social and spiritual implications. His devotion to his wife, Sita, along with a complete fight against Ravana, reveals total moral as well as karmic responsibility; these deeds, in addition to being heroic, entirely reflect the Thai Buddhist worldview. Rama's kingship thus becomes akin to the ideal king in Thai society, showing that kingship is also a model of dharma, or moral duty, in the context of society at large. Similarly, the portrayal of Sita differs, with an increased emphasis on her resilience and maternal attributes, which reflect Thai cultural ideals of femininity and virtue. Sita, in Rāmāyaṇa, is the perfect wife: devoted, pure and subservient (Griffith, n.d.). She represents the Hindu archetype of feminine virtue, marked by purity and fidelity

to her husband, Rama. Through the *Ramakien*, though, there are more nuanced changes in Sita's characterisation/depiction, in line with an ideal of Thai culture for female power (within the context of marriage and motherhood). While Sita in the *Ramakien* is still represented as loyal and virtuous, her strength is more on display. A particular twist on the figure of Sita is found in versions of the Thai epic in which she is less passive and has an impact on the story herself. In the *Ramakien*, her role as a mother is also much more prominent, reflecting the significance placed on mothers in Thai society. Although she retains the characteristics of purity and devotion, the Sita of the *Ramakien* becomes a character who exemplifies moral strength against adversity, offering a more complex presentation of femininity in the context of Thailand.

Overall, however, the *Ramakien* mirrors the ideal notion of Sita in not only being a counterpart to Rama but a woman of value in herself outside of her marriage. This stands in contrast to the more passive role of Sita in the Rāmāyaṇa, where she is mainly defined by her relationship with Rama and her contribution to the plot as the damsel in distress (Narayan & Mishra, 2006).

In *Ramakien*, the monkey general, Hanuman, becomes an important character in the reimagination. The recharacterization of Hanuman is particularly notable. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Hanuman is a devout servant of Rama, but in the *Ramakien*, he is given a more mischievous and flirtatious personality. His character in the *Ramakien* is adapted to reflect heroism, as well as more romanticised qualities that correspond with Thai cultural values, in addition to his still-loyal and gallant nature. Hanuman's devotion to Rama is one of the key elements in the *Ramakien*, but it also features him as a protagonist known for his superhuman strength and bravery. In wartime, he has a more central role in the narrative, frequently assigned duties showcasing his heroism and tactical skill, traits that extend beyond simple devotion. In this way, the character of Hanuman undergoes an evolution in the Thai tradition to become a more heroic figure, representing loyalty, bravery, and intelligence in Thai culture.

The *Ramakien* depicts a more playful and romanticised version of Hanuman. The Rāmāyaṇa is generally more serious about his service to Rama, whereas the *Ramakien* adds more of a humorous and flirtatious quality to his relationships with female characters. Hanuman's love interests in the *Ramakien* are a more human, more comic aspect of his character not observed in the Rāmāyaṇa. This playful and multifaceted portrayal of Hanuman reflects Thai cultural attitudes toward strength, devotion, and the integration of romantic and heroic ideals. His role is also significantly expanded, making him a central figure in Thai performances and storytelling.

IV.4. Cultural and Artistic Reflections

Ramakien in Thailand, as with the Ramayana in India and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, has endured the ages to remain both popular in performance and captivating in depiction (Goss, F. 2012). *Ramakien* not only re-narrates the Rāmāyaṇa through both narrational and thematic changes but also is representative of the Thai artistic elements. Thus, it is one of the most significant works of Thai text in terms of highlighting cultural identity. The adaptation also significantly adopts Thai artistic traditions, such as murals, dance performances and architecture, which have endowed the *Ramakien* with a unique visual and performative presence.

The *Ramakien* has played a significant role in Thai art and performance. The murals in Bangkok's Grand Palace depict scenes from the *Ramakien*, showcasing the epic's integration into national identity (Prapandvidya et al., 2012). Similarly, in the Grand Palace of Bangkok, scenes from the *Ramakien*, Thailand's version of the

Ramayana, are enacted as the Great Ramakien Murals line the palace walls, depicting the characters and happenings in the epic in quintessentially Thai fashion. These traditional Thai murals are painted with incredible detail, focusing on a mixture of fabulous colours and dynamic compositions that reflect traditional Thai artistic sensibilities. The basic repertoire of the Thai shadow play known as the Nang consists exclusively of the episodes drawn from the Rama story (Singaravelu, S.). Traditional Thai dance-drama, such as Khon, brings the *Ramakien* to life through elaborate costumes and stylized movements. These artistic forms serve as a medium for cultural preservation and adaptation, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of the Ramakien in Thai society. The performers of the Khon, except those playing the divine and human roles, wear masks and enact the story to the accompaniment of music and the recitation of texts containing poetic versions of the story composed by ancient poets (Singaravelu, S.). In doing so, they preserve the story and create a distinctly Thai visual and performative lineage that connects ancient mythology with contemporary culture (Ramaswamy, 1996).

The *Ramakien* is also a reflection of social and political structures within Thai society, especially concerning the hierarchical nature of monarchy and court culture. The portrayal of characters like Rama as the ultimate king serves to convey the importance of the monarch in Thai culture, emphasising values such as duty, righteousness and moral governance. Representations of the royal family in the Ramakien reinforce the idealised role of the king and his relationship with his subjects. The relationships between characters are often a reflection of the Thai social hierarchy, within which loyalty to one's ruler, family, and nation is paramount and where concepts of duty, honor, and respect for authority are central to social order (Doniger, 2009; Ramaswamy, 1996). In this way, the *Ramakien* is as much an adaptation of the Rāmāyaṇa as it is a reflection of Thai values and ideals, expressed through artistic and cultural representations that are uniquely Thai.

V.CONCLUSION

This research mainly sought to examine the transformations when the Rāmāyaṇa became the Thai *Ramakien*. The detailed comparative analysis showed key shifts in the narrative, themes, and characters, which revealed how much Thai culture and Buddhist teachings influenced the epic. By examining the thematic and character adaptations, we gain insight into the broader mechanisms of cultural transmission and literary reinterpretation. Concerning the narrative structure, the *Ramakien* closely adheres to the Rāmāyaṇa's wide-ranging arc, preserving meaningful events, for example, Rama's exile along with Sita's abduction, coupled with the exhaustive war with Ravana. However, to show the Buddhist moral framework, certain events are reshaped, and new elements are introduced. In the *Ramakien*, Rama becomes a more humanised figure. Rama fully represents every quality of a Bodhisattva, but the Rāmāyaṇa mainly focuses on Rama's complete divine nature as Vishnu's total incarnation. The shift emphasises total moral duty. It also focuses on total compassion and total selflessness, which aligns with all Buddhist ideals of enlightenment and karmic responsibility.

Buddhism's effect on thematic changes is clear in the use of Buddhist ideas like karma and dharma (moral duty), along with the focus on self-sacrifice. Each of the epics presents themes of loyalty and devotion; furthermore, those themes are currently twisted with many Buddhist ideas regarding compassion as well as enlightenment. The text additionally contains many Thai cultural values, greatly stressing royal duty, respect for each level within a hierarchy, and the overall importance of moral governance, all of which greatly relate to Thailand's deep connection to monarchy and court culture. The *Ramakien* reimagines each of the central figures like Rama, Sita, and Hanuman. Rama is

represented as a moral leader, not simply a divine hero. Sita's character reveals a more assertive, dynamic side as it reflects a larger, more energetic role for women within Thai culture. Showing heroism in addition to strength as well as romanticism, Hanuman's character grows, making him more multidimensional than in the Rāmāyaṇa. The way these characters are viewed and understood is shaped by Buddhist teachings and local traditions in Thailand's constant social and religious landscape, as shown by these transformations.

The results of this study contribute to an overall comprehension of how epics change many cultures. Looking at the *Ramakien* as a version of the Rāmāyaṇa shows that changing epics means showing new cultural values, social structures, and religious beliefs, not just changing characters and events. The *Ramakien's* shift from a Hindu-centered story to one with Buddhist influence shows epics can fit several cultural identities. Storytelling traditions are fast developing. They also remain relevant as they are passed through time and space. Furthermore, the study offers an understanding of how literary works change powerfully to reflect completely new cultural identities. The *Ramakien* depicts the ways that ancient texts are transformed to meet each spiritual, social, and political need of all new cultures. The *Ramakien* comes forth as a culturally special creation expressing Thai society's identity, values, and worldview. It acts as a base that is similar to the Rāmāyaṇa.

This adaptation demonstrates the profound power of literature to transcend its origins and become an important part of different cultural and national identities while also offering a timeless link to any reader to times, places, and sensibilities of not only the present but also wayward history. Although this study presents valuable findings, the research has limitations. There are difficulties, such as a lack of primary sources, complicating historical accuracy. With several versions of the *Ramakien*, many of them inscribed through oral recitals, it can be challenging to determine how the original Rāmāyaṇa was transformed; without concrete historical records of the first introduction of the Rāmāyaṇa to the realm of Thailand, a timeline of how this adaptation occurred is even more elusive.

While this study focuses on the transformation of the Rāmāyaṇa into the *Ramakien*, there are other adaptations of the Rāmāyaṇa across Southeast Asia, such as in Cambodia, Laos, and Indonesia, that warrant further investigation. Future research could explore these other regional adaptations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the Rāmāyaṇa has been adapted in diverse cultural contexts. By examining variations in narrative, themes, and character portrayals across different countries, scholars can better appreciate the flexibility of epic literature and its power to resonate with distinct cultural identities. By examining variations in narrative, themes, and character portrayals across different countries, scholars can better appreciate the flexibility of epic literature and its power to resonate with distinct cultural identities.

In short, the Rāmāyaṇa's metamorphosis into the *Ramakien* serves as a compelling case study of how epics adapt and transform across cultural and religious boundaries. Such study reveals not just the specific changes adopted into the *Ramakien* but also provides insight into how literature constitutes an active representation of culture, identity, and values across different times, settings and spaces.

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