

A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF SRIRAMCHARITMANAS VIA KIERKEGAARD'S EXISTENTIALISM

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ABSTRACT

Philosophy, as B. Charles Henry articulates, serves as a bridge between historical foundations, contextual relevance, and contemporary reality, offering profound insights into human expectations and outcomes. It shapes moral judgment, rational discourse, and the pursuit of knowledge in meaningful ways (Henry, p. 593). This research paper applies this philosophical perspective to Tulsidas's *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, analyzing its continued relevance in the modern world. The text, deeply rooted in the Bhakti tradition, offers insights into human perseverance, faith, and the struggle between spiritual surrender and existential challenges. A central theme explored in this paper is the human tendency to experience fatigue, despair, and the possibility of giving up, particularly in the face of adversity. This theme is examined through the lens of Bhakti (*devotional surrender*) and the existential philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. By employing Kierkegaard's theory of subjectivity, this study investigates how the dilemmas presented in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* mirror modern existential concerns—such as the search for meaning, personal responsibility, and the balance between faith and free will. Moreover, the paper delves into the duality of the doha (couplets) in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* and their philosophical implications in today's world. The juxtaposition of devotion (*bhakti*) and personal struggle within these verses resonates with contemporary existential thought. To further substantiate these ideas, the research incorporates Indian philosophical aesthetics, exploring how Tulsidas employs poetic and narrative techniques to convey deeper truths about human existence. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the paper highlights how *Sri Ramcharitmanas* is not just a religious scripture but also a profound philosophical text that continues to offer guidance on existential and spiritual dilemmas in the modern era.

Keywords: Bhakti, Tulsidas, philosophy, modern & traditional aesthetics, existentialism, duty, ethics, subjectivity

I. INTRODUCTION

India, a land of immense historical development, has also witnessed repeated invasions and cultural transformations, shaping its religious and philosophical landscape. Yet, through these changes, one aspect has remained constant: the deep-rooted faith in the divine. The Bhakti movement, which emerged as a response to socio-religious upheavals, was a powerful force that aimed to restore faith and devotion to the Supreme. It sought to bridge the gap between the divine and the common people by emphasizing love, surrender, and personal devotion over rigid rituals and caste-based restrictions.

One of the greatest contributions to this movement was made by Sant and poet Tulsidas, who composed *Sri Ramcharitmanas* in 1633, writing a total of 10,902 verses in Awadhi, a dialect of Hindi. Unlike Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which was written in Sanskrit and largely confined to the educated elite, *Sri Ramcharitmanas* was meant for everyone—rich or poor, scholar or layperson, privileged or marginalized. This accessibility played a crucial role in its widespread acceptance and enduring legacy.

It is believed that Tulsidas underwent severe austerities and received a divine boon from Lord Hanuman, granting him the ability to retell the *Ramayana* in a way that would resonate with the common people. Hanuman, as a symbol of unwavering devotion (*bhakti*), reinforces the idea that the essence of the epic revolves around complete surrender to God. The very act of making Hanuman a central figure in the narration reflects the spirit of devotion and submission, a theme that runs through the entire text.

Even centuries later, *Sri Ramcharitmanas* continues to be studied, recited, and revered. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of India, held this version of the *Ramayana* in the highest regard and even considered it to be more spiritually profound than Valmiki's original text. The continued relevance of *Sri Ramcharitmanas* raises a crucial question—why does a text written in the 17th century still resonate with readers in the modern world? What makes it more than just an ancient literary work?

One of the primary reasons behind the text's enduring significance is its connection to oral tradition. Unlike many classical scriptures that remained confined to temples or scholarly debates, *Sri Ramcharitmanas* was composed in a way that encouraged it to be sung, narrated, and performed. It became an inseparable part of people's lives, ensuring that its messages were accessible to those who could not read or write. Since it was written in Awadhi rather than Sanskrit, it was not restricted to the upper-caste Brahmins who historically had a monopoly over sacred texts. The use of vernacular language was a revolutionary decision, as it ensured that divine wisdom was no longer the privilege of a select few but a shared treasure for all. This accessibility was crucial in making *Sri Ramcharitmanas* a people's text, one that transcended caste, class, and educational barriers.

Beyond its accessibility, the poetic and literary beauty of *Sri Ramcharitmanas* further adds to its timelessness. Tulsidas did not merely translate Valmiki's *Ramayana*—he reimagined it, adding layers of meaning through metaphors, symbolism, and intricate poetic structures. The rhythmic beauty of the verses makes them easy to memorize, ensuring their transmission across generations. His use of foreshadowing, where events are subtly hinted at long before they occur, builds intrigue and emotional depth. Similarly, he employs side-shadowing, where parallel stories and themes unfold simultaneously, adding layers of meaning to the narrative. The result is a text that is not only devotional but also deeply immersive, drawing readers into its world with literary brilliance.

The adaptability of *Sri Ramcharitmanas* is another factor contributing to its continued relevance. As societies evolve, so do interpretations of the text. The story has been retold and reinterpreted countless times, often shaped by the cultural, political, and philosophical context of its audience. Historian Paula Richman, in *Many Ramayanas*, argues that no single version of the *Ramayana* can exist in isolation; instead, each retelling reflects the time, place, and community that engages with it. Similarly, Romila Thapar emphasizes that religious texts are never static but are continuously reinterpreted to fit new generations' needs. This is evident in how *Sri Ramcharitmanas* has been adapted in different forms—devotional recitations, theatrical performances like *Ramlila*, and even contemporary debates on its portrayal of gender and social hierarchies.

The text's ability to evolve ensures that it remains relevant in every era. While some approach it as a guide to spiritual devotion, others analyze its philosophical undertones, literary depth, or ethical teachings. Whether viewed through the lens of Bhakti, existential philosophy, or literary critique, *Sri Ramcharitmanas* offers something for everyone. It is not just a scripture—it is a

living, breathing text that continues to inspire, challenge, and comfort its readers across generations. Understanding *Sri Ramcharitmanas* in a modern context requires exploring both its philosophical depth and its literary brilliance. The following sections of this paper will examine how Kierkegaard's existentialism, Sartre's humanism, and Indian aesthetics contribute to a deeper comprehension of this timeless epic.

II. METHOD

The philosophical theories of Søren Kierkegaard serve as a significant framework for exploring the intersection of religion and existential thought in *Sri Ramcharitmanas*. Kierkegaard's existentialism is rooted in the notion that human life progresses through three stages: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Each of these stages represents a different approach to existence, leading an individual from superficial pleasure to moral responsibility, and ultimately to faith in the divine. These three stages are deeply reflected in the characters and themes of *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, making it an ideal text for existentialist analysis. The dilemmas faced by Lord Rama and other central figures highlight the complexities of free will, moral duty, and divine surrender, which are central concerns in existentialist philosophy. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, particularly his assertion that "existence precedes essence," further enriches this analysis. Sartre believed that individuals are not born with a predetermined purpose; instead, they must define themselves through their choices and actions. This perspective collides and intersects with the deterministic worldview often associated with religious texts, yet *Sri Ramcharitmanas* offers a nuanced view of destiny and free will. While Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu and has a divine mission to fulfill, he is also bound by human limitations and ethical dilemmas. His choices—whether to accept exile, fulfill his dharma as a king, or battle Ravana—demonstrate the existential struggle between predetermined duty and personal agency. Unlike a passive divine figure who simply executes fate, Rama actively engages with moral decision-making, embodying Kierkegaard's ethical stage while moving toward the ultimate surrender of the religious stage.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard's discussion on subjective individual truth is relevant in understanding devotion (*bhakti*) in *Sri Ramcharitmanas*. Tulsidas presents bhakti as a deeply personal experience rather than a rigid doctrine, aligning with Kierkegaard's argument that true faith is not about objective proofs but about personal commitment and inward transformation. This aspect of the text challenges conventional theological interpretations and instead highlights the existential struggle of individuals seeking meaning and connection with the divine. Thus, by incorporating both Kierkegaard's existential stages and Sartre's humanistic existentialism, *Sri Ramcharitmanas* emerges as not just a religious epic, but a philosophical exploration of human purpose, choice, and devotion.

III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Aesthetic Philosophy in *Sri Ramcharitmanas*

The *Baalkanda* of *Sri Ramcharitmanas* introduces fundamental values that an individual should strive to embody, using the character of Lord Rama as the ideal representation of virtue. The verse "*Sadhu-susila-sumati-saral subhava – Rama neeti rata*" emphasizes qualities such as purity of heart, civility, optimism, nobility, and kindness. These attributes, deeply embedded in Rama's character, serve as guiding principles for human conduct. Tulsidas presents Rama as the embodiment of righteousness (*dharma*), encouraging individuals to cultivate these

qualities and detach themselves from materialistic pursuits. Similarly, Sita's characterization also reinforces this idea, particularly in the way she is symbolically contrasted with gold. By associating Sita's essence with values of virtue and inner purity rather than material wealth, Tulsidas underscores the importance of renouncing superficial attachments in favor of spiritual elevation.

As the narrative progresses to *Ayodhyakanda*, the role of deception, manipulation, and moral testing becomes apparent through the character of Manthara. The dohas (couplets) in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* (Doha 2-79) and *Barvai Ramayan* (2, 20) offer a detailed account of Manthara's cunning counsel, which ultimately convinces Kaikeyi to demand Rama's exile. This episode serves as a reflection on the importance of discernment—one must learn to differentiate between true well-wishers and those who disguise harmful intentions under the pretense of concern. Rama's response to the situation, however, is particularly revealing. Rather than reacting with anger or distress, he remains composed, accepting his fate with calmness, serenity, and unwavering obedience to his parents' will. This profound acceptance highlights a central theme in Tulsidas's philosophy—one must learn to control circumstances through inner stability rather than being controlled by them.

A striking contrast emerges when analyzing Sita's portrayal in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* versus other versions of the *Ramayana*, such as C. Rajagopalachari's retelling. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sita is depicted as outspoken and assertive, particularly when she insists on accompanying Rama into exile. In *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, however, she is presented as calm, poised, and reserved, embodying the virtues of quiet strength and grace. This shift in characterization reflects the text's emphasis on devotion and endurance, aligning with the Bhakti movement's ideals of self-surrender and resilience in the face of adversity.

The theme of brotherhood and loyalty is reinforced through Lakshman's unwavering commitment to Rama. His immediate decision to follow Rama into exile is not merely an act of familial obligation but a testament to the ideals of selfless devotion and sacrifice. Lakshman's unwavering loyalty teaches an essential lesson about relationships—true companionship is not based on convenience but on the willingness to endure hardships together. This notion is deeply tied to *dharma*, as each character's actions reflect a conscious choice to uphold moral righteousness, regardless of personal suffering.

As the story progresses into *Aranyakanda*, the aesthetic philosophy of the text is further explored through the symbolic elements present in Sita's longing for the golden deer. Her attraction to the golden deer is often interpreted as a moment of vulnerability, highlighting the delicate balance between affection, desire, and illusion. The comparison of Sita to a golden creeper further reinforces the idea that human desires, much like nature, can be beautiful yet transient. This episode teaches the importance of self-awareness and restraint, reminding individuals that the pursuit of fleeting beauty often leads to unforeseen consequences.

Following Sita's abduction by Ravana, Rama's deep anguish is conveyed through vivid metaphors, emphasizing his emotional vulnerability and profound love. Tulsidas draws a poignant comparison between the soothing light of the moon and the scorching heat of the sun, illustrating how the absence of a loved one transforms comfort into suffering. The depth of Rama's sorrow is further highlighted in C. Rajagopalachari's text, where Rama is depicted conversing with plants and animals, desperately asking if they have seen Sita. This passage adds an element of raw human emotion to Rama's divine

persona, portraying him not as an invincible god but as a man experiencing the pain of separation. This moment serves as a reminder that true love transcends physical presence and is deeply intertwined with the soul's longing for completeness. Tulsidas masterfully weaves these elements together, crafting a narrative that is not only philosophically rich but also emotionally evocative. Through the poetic beauty of *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, he conveys profound truths about life, love, duty, and self-realization. The aesthetic philosophy embedded within the text encourages individuals to embrace virtue, practice restraint, and cultivate unwavering devotion—reminding us that the true essence of life lies not in material pursuits but in spiritual fulfillment and ethical living.

3.2. Ethical and Moral Accuracy in *Sri Ramcharitmanas*: An Existentialist Perspective

Tulsidas's *Sri Ramcharitmanas* is not only a religious text but also a philosophical exploration of ethical dilemmas, personal choices, and existential struggles. It presents characters who must make difficult decisions, often in the face of uncertainty, mirroring the existentialist concern with free will, responsibility, and the search for meaning. Existential philosophers like Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre emphasize the idea that individuals are responsible for their own moral decisions, a concept that resonates deeply with the ethical and philosophical themes explored in *Kishkindhakanda* and *Sundarakanda*.

The *Kishkindhakanda* teaches the importance of wise decision-making and taking initiative, aligning with existentialist thought that humans must actively shape their destinies rather than passively accepting fate. The exile of Sugriva, his betrayal by his brother Vali, and his eventual alliance with Rama all illustrate the existential dilemma of trust, moral responsibility, and the weight of choice. Sugriva, initially hesitant and fearful, represents the individual caught in anxiety, a central concept in Kierkegaard's philosophy. He must decide whether to take action and trust Rama or remain in hiding, consumed by fear. This internal struggle mirrors the existentialist idea that individuals must take responsibility for their choices, even when those choices involve risk and uncertainty.

Kierkegaard describes three stages of human existence—the aesthetic, ethical, and religious—which can be applied to Sugriva's transformation. Initially, Sugriva exists in the aesthetic stage, seeking only pleasure and personal security, avoiding conflict. However, his encounter with Rama forces him into the ethical stage, where he must choose between remaining passive or actively fighting for his rightful place. Ultimately, his faith in Rama propels him toward the religious stage, where he surrenders to a higher moral duty rather than acting out of personal fear. His journey highlights the existential principle that individuals must make authentic choices based on moral conviction rather than external pressures.

Beyond Sugriva's transformation, *Kishkindhakanda* also presents a contrast between genuine friendship and deception, which aligns with Sartre's ideas on authenticity. Unlike Manthara, whose manipulative words lead to destruction and suffering, Hanuman's loyalty and Sugriva's eventual honesty demonstrate the existential importance of genuine relationships. Sartre argues that true relationships are built on authenticity and good faith rather than deception or self-interest, and *Kishkindhakanda* reinforces this idea by showing that true bonds must be tested, strengthened, and chosen freely.

While *Kishkindhakanda* introduces themes of ethical decision-making, *Sundarakanda* is the philosophical heart of the text, encapsulating existential courage,

purpose-driven action, and selfless devotion. The canto revolves around Hanuman's journey to Lanka, a metaphor for an individual's spiritual and moral quest. Existentialism teaches that each individual must define

their own purpose through conscious action, and Hanuman exemplifies this principle. Unlike characters who struggle with doubt, Hanuman's unwavering determination reflects Sartre's concept of "existence precedes essence"—he does not wait for divine intervention but actively chooses to fulfill his duty.

A critical moment in *Sundarakanda* occurs when Mainak Parvat offers Hanuman rest, as reflected in the verse:

"Mainak Parvat Jahnidhi Raghupati Dut Bichari Tai Mainak Hohi Shramhari, Hanuman Tehi Parsa Kar Puni Pranam, Ram Kaaj Kinh Binu Mohi Kaha Bishram."

This verse from *Sundarakanda* in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* captures a crucial moment in Hanuman's journey to Lanka, where Mainak Parvat, recognizing Hanuman as Raghupati Dut (Rama's messenger), rises from the ocean to offer him rest. Mainak, acting out of kindness, wishes to ease Hanuman's exhaustion by providing a moment of respite. However, Hanuman, entirely devoted to his mission, simply touches the mountain in acknowledgment, offers his respects, and continues forward, stating that he cannot rest until he has completed Rama's task. Beyond its literal meaning, this verse carries a profound lesson about commitment, devotion, and self-discipline. Hanuman, fully aware of his duty, does not allow himself to be tempted by comfort or distraction. He recognizes Mainak's gesture as well-intentioned but remains unwavering in his purpose. His response reflects a deep sense of dharma, the idea that personal needs must be secondary to the responsibilities one has undertaken. In life, obstacles and temptations arise in many forms—often disguised as comfort, ease, or shortcuts. Hanuman's refusal to stop reminds us that true dedication demands perseverance and single-minded focus, even in the face of enticing distractions.

The verse also exemplifies selfless devotion, a central theme in the Bhakti movement. Hanuman does not act for personal glory or gain; his entire existence is centered on serving Rama. He neither boasts about his capabilities nor seeks recognition—his fulfillment comes from completing the mission entrusted to him. In this way, Hanuman embodies the ideal devotee, one who acts out of pure love and faith rather than for reward or acknowledgment. His humility is evident in his brief yet respectful interaction with Mainak. Rather than rejecting the offer with arrogance, he acknowledges it with gratitude but continues forward, illustrating that true devotion lies in action rather than words.

From a philosophical perspective, this moment aligns with existentialist thought, particularly with Jean-Paul Sartre's idea that existence is defined by action. Hanuman does not simply claim to be devoted; he proves his devotion through his choices. Similarly, Søren Kierkegaard's concept of the religious stage of existentialism, which involves surrendering completely to a higher truth, is reflected in Hanuman's unwavering service. His sense of identity is not rooted in personal desires but in fulfilling Rama's work, demonstrating that true meaning comes not from seeking comfort but from wholeheartedly dedicating oneself to a purpose greater than oneself.

The verse ultimately conveys a universal lesson. In every journey, there will be moments of distraction, often disguised as rest or relief. The difference between those who achieve their goals and those who do not lies in the ability to recognize and resist unnecessary diversions. Hanuman's response to Mainak teaches that one can

acknowledge kindness without straying from the path. Devotion is not passive; it is active, requiring both faith and relentless effort. True commitment to a cause means continuing forward despite obstacles, always keeping the greater purpose in sight. In this moment, Hanuman is not just a messenger of Rama—he becomes a symbol of determination, humility, and unwavering devotion, inspiring all who seek to walk the path of righteousness.

This encounter is significant in existential terms. Mainak Parvat symbolizes temptation, comfort, and distraction, forces that often derail individuals from their purpose. In existentialist thought, life presents many distractions that prevent individuals from fulfilling their true potential. Hanuman's response reflects Kierkegaard's ethical stage, where an individual learns to resist external temptations and remain true to their purpose. Rather than being lured by rest, Hanuman acknowledges Mainak's kindness but chooses to move forward, embodying the existential principle that true meaning comes through action, not comfort.

Another defining moment in *Sundarakanda* is Hanuman's humility upon succeeding in his mission. When he finally meets Sita and later returns to Rama, he does not claim personal credit. Instead, he attributes his success to Rama's grace, reinforcing Kierkegaard's concept of the "religious stage," where the individual surrenders their ego and devotes themselves entirely to a higher purpose. Hanuman's actions align with Sartre's rejection of external validation—he does not act for praise or recognition but out of authentic devotion and duty.

The contrast between Hanuman's selflessness and Ravana's arrogance further highlights existentialist themes of moral choice and self-deception. Ravana, despite his intelligence and power, chooses to ignore moral responsibility and instead deludes himself into believing in his own invincibility. Sartre's idea of "bad faith"—where individuals deceive themselves to avoid confronting the truth—perfectly describes Ravana's downfall. Unlike Hanuman, who embraces his responsibility, Ravana chooses pride over wisdom, ultimately leading to his destruction. This serves as a warning about the consequences of inauthentic living and moral blindness.

The lessons from *Kishkindhakanda* and *Sundarakanda* align with existentialist principles in profound ways. The necessity of making moral decisions, distinguishing between genuine support and hidden motives, and committing oneself to a higher cause are all central to both Tulsidas's philosophy and existentialist thought. Hanuman, through his courage, moral clarity, and selfless devotion, embodies the existential hero—one who creates meaning through action, remains authentic in his choices, and surrenders personal ego for a greater cause.

At its core, *Sri Ramcharitmanas* presents life as a series of existential choices, where characters must navigate ethical dilemmas, personal sacrifices, and the search for ultimate truth. The interplay between devotion (*bhakti*) and existentialism suggests that while faith is essential, it must be complemented by conscious moral action. In this sense, the text is not merely a religious epic but a profound philosophical work that explores the nature of free will, responsibility, and self-realization.

3.3. Religious Objective Truth in *Sri Ramcharitmanas*: Leadership, Devotion, and Self-Realization

The *Lankakanda* of *Sri Ramcharitmanas* presents a powerful blueprint for leadership, ethical conduct, and moral duty, concepts that remain deeply relevant in

contemporary times. Leadership, in Tulsidas's vision, is not just about power and dominance but about wisdom, justice, and selflessness. The Chaupai from *Lankakanda* encapsulates 23 essential leadership qualities, illustrating the characteristics necessary for a just and effective ruler.

The verse "*Sauraj dheeraj tehi rath chaka, satya seel dradh dhawaja pataka. Baal vivek dam parhit ghore, Chama krapa samata rajju jore. Ese bhavan sarathi sujana, birati charma santosh kripana. Dan parshu budhi shakti prachanda, bar bigyan kathinko danda. Amal achal man trone samana samjamniyam silimukh nana. Kavach avedh vipra guru pooja ahi sam vijay upay na duja. Sakaha dharmmay rath jaken, jitan kahan nakatun ripu taaken.*"

It provides a profound insight into ideal leadership, where the leader is expected to demonstrate courage (*sauraj*), patience (*dheeraj*), truthfulness (*satya*), self-restraint (*dam*), compassion (*kripa*), intelligence (*budhi*), and wisdom (*vivek*). Tulsidas describes leadership as a chariot of Dharma, with virtues such as valor and patience serving as its wheels, truth and integrity as its flag, and wisdom and self-control as its reins. A leader, according to this framework, must not only be strategically intelligent and strong but also morally upright, unbiased, and deeply compassionate. The qualities outlined emphasize that true leadership is not about seeking personal gain but about serving others with selflessness. Leaders must be able to balance discipline with mercy, authority with humility, and power with wisdom. They must possess clarity of vision, the ability to listen, and the discernment to distinguish right from wrong. This understanding of leadership aligns closely with existentialist principles, particularly Kierkegaard's emphasis on personal responsibility. In Kierkegaard's ethical stage of existence, an individual must rise above self-centered desires and take responsibility for their moral choices. Similarly, Tulsidas's vision of leadership stresses the leader's duty to uphold righteousness, make fair decisions, and put the welfare of others before personal ambition.

This concept also resonates with Sartre's philosophy of authenticity, where a person must embrace responsibility and act with integrity rather than succumb to external pressures or societal expectations. An ideal leader in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* is one who is aware of their responsibility and who chooses to act with virtue rather than selfishness. Ravana, despite his immense power and intelligence, ultimately fails as a leader because he refuses to acknowledge his moral responsibility, deceiving himself into believing in his own infallibility. This self-deception aligns with Sartre's concept of "bad faith", where an individual refuses to confront the truth of their own actions and instead hides behind illusions of grandeur or self-justification. By contrast, Rama's leadership in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* is built upon moral clarity, humility, and duty, reflecting the ideal existential hero—one who fully embraces responsibility and acts with authenticity. His decisions are not made for personal gain but for the well-being of society and adherence to *dharma*.

3.4. **Uttarakanda: The Journey from Selfishness to Liberation**

The concluding section of *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, *Uttarakanda*, offers a profound meditation on devotion, detachment, and spiritual realization. Tulsidas expresses his desire to spend his life near Chitrakoot, by the Payasani River, immersed in the remembrance of Rama, Lakshman, and Sita:

"Chitrakut paya tira so suratru basa, Lakhan Ram Siya sumirahu Tulsidas."

This verse reflects the essence of spiritual longing and renunciation. Tulsidas envisions a life dedicated to devotional remembrance (sumiran), free from material concerns. His desire to stay near Chitrakoot symbolizes the aspirant's longing for divine presence,

emphasizing that true peace comes not from external wealth or worldly success but from inner contentment and surrender to the divine.

This philosophy aligns with Kierkegaard's concept of the "religious stage", where an individual transcends ethical responsibility and embraces absolute faith in God. The transition from worldly attachments (swartha, or selfish desires) to spiritual liberation (parmartha, or selfless devotion) reflects the journey from existential despair to authentic fulfillment. An interesting metaphor in *Uttarakanda* is the idea that Rama, Lakshman, and Sita together form a triangle, which remains stable regardless of how it is positioned. This imagery suggests that life, when built on a foundation of virtue, remains unshaken despite external changes. It reinforces the existential idea that the meaning of life is not dictated by external circumstances but by the internal choices an individual makes. This section of *Sri Ramcharitmanas* is deeply connected to meditative self-inquiry. The ultimate realization in *Uttarakanda* is that the journey of life is one from ego (self-centeredness) to surrender (spiritual transcendence). In existential terms, this represents the shift from an externally dictated identity to an authentic self, shaped by personal realization and divine connection.

Beyond philosophy and religious devotion, *Sri Ramcharitmanas* also offers profound insights into psychology and human personality. The characters in the text display attributes that correspond to the Big Five Personality Traits, a modern psychological framework used to describe human behavior.

3.5. Psychological Dimensions & Archetypes of *Sri Ramcharitmanas*: The Big Five Personality Traits

The Big Five Personality Traits Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Openness, and Extraversion serve as a compelling framework for understanding the characters of *Sri Ramcharitmanas* on a psychological level. These traits provide insight into their behaviors, decisions, and moral dilemmas, illustrating how human nature, with all its complexities, is woven into the fabric of the epic. Each major character in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* embodies one of these core personality dimensions, demonstrating how psychological archetypes play a significant role in the text's moral and philosophical teachings.

3.5.1. Conscientiousness: Rama as the Embodiment of Duty and Self-Discipline

Rama exemplifies conscientiousness, the trait associated with discipline, responsibility, reliability, and self-control. From the very beginning of the epic, Rama demonstrates an unwavering commitment to dharma (righteousness), prioritizing duty over personal comfort. When Kaikeyi demands his exile, Rama does not react with anger or resentment; instead, he

calmly accepts the decision, placing duty and familial obedience above personal aspirations. His self-restraint is further evident in his interactions with adversaries—whether dealing with Ravana, Vali, or Shurpanakha, he acts with moral clarity rather than impulsive aggression. Conscientious individuals are also known for their strong sense of justice and ethical reasoning, qualities that define Rama's leadership in *Sri Ramcharitmanas*. His decisions are not dictated by emotion but by what is ethically correct and beneficial for the larger good. Even after defeating Ravana, Rama ensures that justice is carried out with fairness, rather than seeking personal revenge. His ability to exercise patience, emotional regulation, and strategic thinking makes him the ultimate representation of conscientiousness and ideal leadership.

3.5.2. Agreeableness: Hanuman's Compassion, Loyalty, and Selflessness

Hanuman is the perfect embodiment of agreeableness, which includes traits like kindness, compassion, cooperation, and selfless devotion. Throughout the epic, Hanuman displays a pure-hearted willingness to serve without expecting anything in return, making him the ultimate devotee. His unwavering faith in Rama, coupled with his humility and willingness to sacrifice for a greater cause, aligns with the qualities of highly agreeable individuals who prioritize relationships and moral duty over self-interest.

One of the most defining moments of Hanuman's character is seen in *Sundarakanda*, where he crosses the ocean to find Sita. His journey is filled with obstacles, including Surasa's test and Simhika's attack, yet he remains undeterred, focusing solely on his mission. Even when he reaches Lanka, he does not allow arrogance or personal ego to cloud his actions—his only concern is to ensure Sita's well-being and relay Rama's message. His willingness to undergo

pain and hardship for the sake of others showcases his pure agreeableness and self-sacrificing devotion. Unlike other warriors who seek personal glory, Hanuman never claims credit for his deeds. Instead, he attributes his success entirely to Rama's blessings, reinforcing the Bhakti (devotional) ideal that true service is selfless and unconditional. His role as a mediator, protector, and humble servant highlights how agreeableness fosters deep, meaningful connections with others.

3.5.3. Neuroticism: Ravana's Impulsivity, Arrogance, and Emotional Instability

Ravana, the formidable antagonist of *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, is the embodiment of neuroticism, a personality trait characterized by impulsiveness, emotional instability, excessive pride, and poor decision-making under stress. While he is undoubtedly a highly intelligent and powerful ruler, his inability to control his desires and emotions leads to his downfall. Despite receiving multiple warnings—from his brother Vibhishana, from Mandodari, and even from Hanuman—he refuses to acknowledge his faults. His neurotic tendencies are particularly evident in his obsession with Sita, which clouds his judgment and blinds him to the dire consequences of his actions. Ravana's arrogance prevents him from recognizing the truth, aligning closely with Sartre's concept of "bad faith"—where an individual deceives themselves into believing something that is not true to avoid facing reality. His emotional volatility and inability to accept criticism ultimately alienate him from even his most loyal advisors. Instead of self-reflection and rational thinking, he reacts impulsively, dismissing wise counsel and escalating conflicts unnecessarily. In psychological terms, high neuroticism often leads to poor stress management and destructive behaviors, which is precisely what happens with Ravana. His short temper, inability to handle setbacks, and overconfidence in his own invincibility ensure his demise. His character serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked ambition, lack of self-awareness, and emotional recklessness.

3.5.4. Openness: Sita's Curiosity, Emotional Depth, and Faith.

Sita represents openness, a trait associated with curiosity, imagination, emotional depth, and willingness to explore new ideas. One of the most defining moments of her character is her desire for the golden deer, which ultimately leads to her abduction. This moment, while often criticized, highlights her innate curiosity and yearning for new experiences. Unlike Rama and Lakshman, who are deeply grounded in duty and rationality, Sita allows her emotions and desires to guide her choices, reflecting the openness to experience. However, openness is not just about curiosity it is also about deep emotional intelligence and resilience, both of which Sita exhibits throughout her trials. Despite facing immense suffering in Lanka, she remains firm in her devotion to Rama, embodying faith in the unknown and trust in destiny. Even when faced with temptation

by Ravana, she does not waver in her principles, demonstrating an openness that is rooted in deep spiritual wisdom rather than impulsivity. Her journey, much like that of existentialist thinkers, represents a search for meaning beyond suffering. She is not merely a passive victim but a symbol of endurance, patience, and the ability to transform adversity into strength.

3.5.5. Extraversion: Lakshman's Assertiveness, Boldness, and Protective Instincts

Lakshman embodies extraversion, a trait linked to assertiveness, high energy, social engagement, and action-oriented behavior. Unlike Rama, who remains calm and composed, Lakshman is outspoken, bold, and fiercely protective of his family. His readiness to confront adversaries head-on sets him apart as a dynamic and expressive character. One of the most defining moments of Lakshman's extraversion is his reaction to Shurpanakha's advances. Unlike Rama, who diplomatically deflects her, Lakshman acts aggressively, cutting off her nose as a warning. While his actions are controversial, they demonstrate his fiery temperament and inability to tolerate perceived threats. Another example of his extraversion is his willingness to engage in battle. He does not hesitate to challenge Ravana's forces and fights with unyielding determination. His protective nature, strong moral convictions, and direct approach to conflict highlight his assertiveness and high-energy personality. Lakshman's extraversion, however, is balanced by his deep devotion to Rama and Sita. Despite his bold and confrontational nature, he places family and duty above all else, making him not just an aggressive warrior but a deeply loyal and passionate individual.

The Big Five Personality Traits provide a fascinating lens through which to analyze the characters of *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, revealing the depth of human psychology woven into the epic. From Rama's disciplined conscientiousness to Hanuman's selfless agreeableness, Ravana's destructive neuroticism, Sita's emotional openness, and Lakshman's bold extraversion, each character represents an essential aspect of human behavior. The metaphor of the canoe navigating the lake of Rama's deeds suggests that understanding these traits allows individuals to navigate their own lives with wisdom, self-awareness, and balance. By studying these psychological dimensions, *Sri Ramcharitmanas* emerges not just as a spiritual text but as a profound exploration of human nature, ethical decision-making, and the eternal struggle between righteousness and temptation. Interestingly, the initials of these five traits form the acronym CANOE, symbolizing a boat. The title *Sri Ramcharitmanas*, which translates to "the lake of Rama's deeds," metaphorically suggests that to navigate the vast lake of life, one must understand the essential virtues and flaws of human nature. Just as a canoe helps one cross a river, understanding these traits allows individuals to navigate their own lives with wisdom and self-awareness.

IV. CONCLUSION

Tulsidas's *Sri Ramcharitmanas* is far more than just an ancient scripture—it is a story about us, about the human experience, our struggles, our choices, and our search for meaning. It speaks to the timeless dilemmas we all face: How do we make the right choices when faced with uncertainty? How do we balance duty with personal desires? How do we stay true to our values in a world full of distractions? These are the same questions that existentialist philosophers like Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre have explored, and remarkably, they find answers within the pages of *Sri Ramcharitmanas*. At its core, the text teaches us that life is not about simply following a predestined path, but about actively shaping our own journey through the choices we make. Rama's unwavering commitment to righteousness, Sita's resilience in the face of

suffering, Lakshman's fierce loyalty, Hanuman's selfless devotion, and even Ravana's tragic downfall—all these stories reflect different aspects of the human condition. Each character in *Sri Ramcharitmanas* is a reminder that our decisions—whether made out of wisdom, love, pride, or fear—ultimately shape who we become. We see in Sugriva's hesitation the fear of making the wrong decision, something we all experience when facing big life changes. We see in Hanuman's journey the power of courage and faith, showing us that sometimes, we must trust our inner strength and take a leap forward, even when the path ahead is uncertain. We see in Ravana's arrogance the dangers of unchecked ego, a reminder that intelligence and power mean nothing without humility.

Beyond philosophy, the text also provides a deeply human insight into personality and emotions. Through the Big Five Personality Traits, we see that every person embodies different strengths and weaknesses. Some of us are conscientious and disciplined like Rama, always striving to do the right thing. Others are compassionate and selfless like Hanuman, putting others before themselves. Some may have the fiery energy of Lakshman, while others, like Sita, possess deep emotional depth and quiet resilience. And, of course, we all have moments when we struggle with pride or impulsiveness, just like Ravana.

What makes *Sri Ramcharitmanas* truly timeless is that it does not just tell us what is right and wrong—it makes us think, reflect, and find our own answers. It reminds us that life is not about avoiding difficulties but about facing them with courage and integrity. It reassures us that no matter how lost we feel, faith, love, and perseverance will always guide us home.

Tulsidas, in his devotion, prayed to spend his life singing the names of Rama, Lakshman, and Sita near Chitrakoot. His longing was not just for the divine, but for a life filled with meaning, purpose, and connection. Perhaps that is the greatest message of *Sri Ramcharitmanas*: that in the end, what truly matters is not how much we achieve, but how deeply we live, how sincerely we love, and how bravely we walk the path of righteousness. And so, even after centuries, this epic continues to resonate with us—not just as a religious text, but as a reflection of the journey we all must take, in search of truth, purpose, and something greater than ourselves.

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