

## **RAMA'S LEADERSHIP BETWEEN MORAL DILEMMA AND PREJUDICE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the leadership of Shri Rama in the Ramayana epic through the perspective of morality and social prejudice. The author uses the method of textual study and the approach of literary hermeneutics, to reveal the various moral dilemmas faced by Rama and the prejudices that arise against his decisions as a leader. Although viewed as an ideal leader (Rājaṛṣi), Rama's decisions in dealing with conflicts between personal, professional, and social obligations invite controversy and ethical debate. Some of the main events analyzed include his refusal to return to Ayodhya, the exile of pregnant Sita, and the banishment of Lakshmana. This paper highlights the importance of integrity, consistency to dharma, and justice in leadership, while showing that being a true leader often means making difficult decisions that are not always popular, but are based on deep ethical and moral considerations.

Keywords: Moral Dilemma, Prejudice, Rama's Leadership

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Leaders and leadership are two things that are related in relation to building a prosperous society. An ideal leader certainly has qualified leadership. Leadership is the art of leading, and not all leaders have good or ideal leadership. The welfare of society is also greatly influenced by the ability of leaders to determine policies that favor the interests of the people, not the interests of individuals or groups. Everyone is essentially a leader, but according to Kartono (Suhardana, 2008), There are three theories regarding the emergence of a leader, namely the genetic theory (a person becomes a leader because they have natural talent), the social theory (leaders are prepared through education and experience, not born), and the ecological or synthesis theory (a person can become a leader if they have talent from birth and it is honed through education and experience).

Entering the 21st century, global society is faced with various complex conditions, such as prolonged war, conflict between countries, economic decline, global crime, acts of corruption carried out by rulers, state officials, people's representatives, increasing crime rates, and so on. These conditions are not only influenced by the dominant social structure in the region, but the leadership of its leaders influences the conditions that occur. Unenforced laws cause chaos, perpetrators of crimes feel free, while their victims are certainly harmed. The firmness of the leader must also be followed by his followers.

A leader must at least have good communication skills, empathy for the condition of society, be honest, have integrity, be responsible, always oriented to uphold justice and truth. Ideal leadership like that seems rather difficult to find in the current era. In the past, being a leader was a noble task, only filled by selected people, either by descent or because of the advantages they have. Currently, people are competing to

become leaders, even though they do not have the advantages and sincere intentions to serve their nation and country and build a prosperous life for their people as a whole. Finding a leader with ideal leadership is not easy.

Ideal leadership in Hindu teachings can be termed *Rajarṣi* which consists of two words "Raja" and Ṛṣi. Raja means someone who has power and influence who leads a kingdom or a certain region. The word Ṛṣi means someone who has skills in the field of spirituality and is enlightened, a wise person or great yogi, in the Vedic tradition it is interpreted as the writer of the Vedic hymns. In short, *Raja Rajarṣi* means a leader who is not only skilled in the science of statecraft, but also has wisdom based on religious teachings. (Gunadha, 2012). An example of *Rajarṣi* is King Dasaratha (Rama's father) as expressed in the *Ramayana Kakawin* chapter I.3 as follows.

*"Gunamanta Sang Dasaratha  
Wruh Sira Ring Weda  
Bhakti ring Dewa Tarmalupeng Pitra Puja  
Masih Ta Sireng Swagotra kabeh "*

It means:

Very wise was Dasharatha  
He knew about the sacred knowledge of the Vedas  
Devotion to the Gods, and never forget the worship of ancestors  
Likewise, love for fellow creatures and their families.

Not only King Dasaratha, there is also the story of Maharsi Visvamitra who was once a king named King Kausika, then because of his extraordinary asceticism was awarded the title of Brahmarshi. In addition, the main character in the *Ramayana* epic, namely Shri Rama, who is the avatara of Visnu in the form of the main human (*Maryada Purusottama*) who aims to crush the arrogance of the giant king Ravana. Quoting Netra, avatara is the embodiment of *Hyang Widhi* (God Almighty) in his manifestation as Vishnu descending to the world by taking a form, giving guidance to free humans from misery due to the rampant adharma or evil (Netra, 2009). Shri Rama's journey in the legendary epic encounters many obstacles, if it is described like human life today, sometimes happy, sometimes sad, then happy again, and so on. Shri Rama's leadership should be an example for leaders in the current era who are increasingly uprooted.

Shri Rama's leadership is filled with various interesting stories, creating moral dilemmas for Shri Rama himself and creating prejudice for his society at that time, including readers of the *Ramayana* epic today. Becoming an ideal leader is not like turning the palm of your hand, you will encounter many obstacles, rejections, stereotypes and so on. For that reason, this article is presented as a medium to describe the moral dilemmas faced by Shri Rama during his leadership and prejudices that can be given logical reasons from the author's objective perspective.

## II. METHOD

As a masterpiece (mahakavya) and also the first literary work (Adikavya), *Ramayana* has moved the hearts of many writers to produce works that are in-depth studies of the *Ramayana* manuscript from various perspectives. Some of the perspectives used include literature, education, leadership, history, politics, and so on. This is because *Ramayana* contains various aspects of life that are narrated in each part (kanda). The method used in this paper is a textual study of the *Ramayana* manuscript using the perspective of leadership and morals. Using the theory of literary hermeneutics to interpret the meaning

of Rama's leadership and to find the moral dilemmas faced and the prejudices that arise against him. Hermeneutics is a theory about how understanding works in interpreting texts (Ricoeur, 2009).

### **III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

In line with the words of Rsi Valmiki that "As long as the mountains still stand tall, as long as the rivers still flow, so long will the story of Ramayana be eternal. Leadership in Ramayana. Before explaining the moral dilemma and prejudice found in the Ramayana epic, it is necessary to briefly describe the contents of each part or kanda in the Ramayana. The goal is to make it easier for readers to get involved in understanding the moral dilemma faced by Rama and the prejudice against him.

#### **3.1. Brief Content of *Sapta Kanda***

Several reference sources write the Ramayana epic in a very long review, and if compared, it is likely to find some differences or interpolations in each version. This is not surprising, because the addition of stories is intended to strengthen the message or character of the figures in it, and even so, it does not reduce the value and meaning of the moral and religious messages conveyed. The following is a summary taken from the Ramayana reading source by Kamala Subramaniam. Not all stories can be told in detail in this summary, because it only takes the essence of each sub-chapter, then supplemented with the author's knowledge through reading, discussing, conducting research, and conveying dharma messages in the Ramayana through teaching activities in lecture rooms and scientific papers in the form of scientific articles.

##### **3.1.1. *Bala Kanda***

This story begins with the meeting of Valmiki, Narada, and Lord Brahma, followed by the birth of Rama, the main soul, the ideal human (*Maryada Purusottama*). The rescue of *Yaga Visvamitra* by Rama and Laksmana then the killing of the Giant Tataka, then telling about the history of the Ganga's River, the Dormitory of Rsi Gautama, the story of Visvamitra who was once a king named Kausika who received a gift because of his tenacity and became a Brahmarsi. This continues with Rama winning the competition to lift the Mahadeva Bow and marrying Sita, and ends with the story of Rama's meeting with Parasurama, the Bhargava, both of whom are avatars of Vishnu.

##### **3.1.2. *Ayodhya Kanda***

*Ayodhya Kanda* begins with a plan to enthrone Rama as *Yuvaraja* by Dasaratha, but the plan fails because Kekayi demands the two gifts that Dasaratha had previously promised. Kekayi was instigated by Mantara, his loyal servant who had a grudge against Rama. Rama's coronation was canceled, and Rama asked his father to be faithful to his promise. Rama, Sita and Laksmana prepare to go into exile for 14 years in the Dandaka forest. It is also told about Dasaratha's sadness because his beloved son, Rama, was left behind. Rama's journey is told about his meeting with Guha, his friend and leader of the hunters. Then the journey to the Rsi Bharadvaja Dormitory, the story of Rama, Sita, Laksmana arriving in Citrakuta. The story continues with Dasaratha's memories of the curse of an Rsi, the father of Sravana Kumara, who he accidentally killed when Dasaratha was hunting in the forest. The sadness continued when King Dasaratha died due to deep sadness, apart from being a result of the curse. Next, it is said that Bharata was angry with

his mother's actions, then he followed and met Rama in the forest and invited him to return to Ayodhya Bharata to become king, but Rama refused because that was the principle he had adopted. Rama then gave a pair of his sandals (paduka) to Bharata as a replacement and symbol of him leading Ayodhya. Bharata refused to become king of Ayodhya and lived in an ashram, while overseeing the kingdom, and Rama's sandals were placed on the throne as a symbol of Rama leading the kingdom. When there was a problem, Bharata discussed it with Rama through the sandal.

### **3.1.3. *Aranya Kanda***

*Aranya Kanda* begins with the journey of Rama, Sita, and Laksmana leaving Citrakuta, then met with Rsi Atri and Anasuya. Stories about the Dandaka Forest and all its mysteries. The killing of the giant Viradha, the meeting with Rsi Sarabahanga, Rsi Sutiksna, Sita's reprimand/warning to Rama not to hurt other people who have never hurt him, in this case meant that is the giants who have threatened the safety of the Rsi in the forest. The story about the greatness of Rsi Agastya and his dormitory. A glance at Pancavati. Surphanaka's revenge for feeling mocked by Rama and Laksmana, Rama and Laksmana's battle with Khara, Dhusana, and Trisira. Ravana learned about the incident in Janasthana, Surphanaka and her sad story, Ravana went to Marica's dormitory and asked her to help in his mission to kidnap Sita, Marica was asked to change her form into a golden deer to divert Sita's attention, Marica had no other choice and preferred to die in Rama's hands rather than die in Ravana's hand. After Marica died, Ravana in his disguise robe pretended to be a brahmin and kidnapped Sita, while Rama hunted for the golden deer that had become Marica's incarnation and was followed by Laksmana. It is also told about the defeat of Jatayu who tried to save Sita. The story about Sita's sadness in Ravana's city, Lanka. It is told about Rama's sadness after Sita was kidnapped, and Rama saw Jatayu who was lying down and then burned Jatayu's body. The story of Ayomukhi and Kabandha also appears in this *kanda*, as well as Rama and Lakshmana's meeting with Sabhari, a noble ascetic woman. It also tells about Lake Pampa.

### **3.1.4. *Kiskhinda Kanda***

This part tells the story of Rama and Laksmana's meeting with Sugriva and Hanuman. Rama helps Sugriva defeat Vali, his own brother due to a misunderstanding. The coronation of Sugriva and Anggada is also the topic of the story in this *kanda*. After the coronation, Rama and Laksmana began to feel anxious because they were worried that Sugriva would not remember his promise to help him save Sita. The search for Sita began by dividing the Vanara troops towards the south. It is also told about the troops' meeting with Sampati, Jatayu's brother. The sea stretched wide, making it difficult for Vanara troops to cross the sea. It is also told about the greatness of Hanuman, the son of Deva Vayu.

### **3.1.5. *Sundara Kanda***

*Sundara Kanda* begins with the story of Hanuman who was able to fly and entered the city of Lanka. Also depicted is the majestic and unique City of Lanka. Hanuman saw Mandodari and thought it is Sita. Hanuman finally saw and met Sita and told her about Rama's sadness. Sita then sent a message to Rama through Hanuman. The story about the destruction of Asoka Garden by Hanuman, then the greatness of the Brahmastra wrapped

around Hanuman's body, Hanuman at Ravana's trial, the great fire in Lanka which was deliberately set by Hanuman to measure the strength of Ravana's troops. After returning from Lanka, Hanuman told about the things he saw in Lanka to Sugriva and especially Rama.

### **3.1.6. *Yudha Kanda***

This *Kanda* tells of various preparations before the war between Rama's troops and Ravana. Ravana's worries began to arise when he heard about plans to attack Lanka. Ravana lost Vibhisana who had advised him to return Sita to Rama. Vibhisana met Rama and sided with him. The story continues with Rama's anger because the sea did not recede, until the construction of a bridge to Lanka which was assisted by Nala, Visvakarma's son. Meanwhile, in the kingdom of Lanka, Ravana tries to make Sita sad. It is also told about Sugriva's carelessness on the battlefield, Rama and Laksama were entangled in Nagapasa's arrows and recovered from the poison of Nagapasa's arrows. The story is about Kumbhakarna who was awakened and invited to fight, until he met his death. This battle also tells about the greatness of Indrajit, Ravana's son. It is also told about the search for the Sanjiwani medicinal plant to cure Rama, Laksmana and his troops following Indrajit's attack. It is also told about Maya Sita (artificial Sita) being killed, Laksmana attacking Indrajit until Indrajit was killed. The most interesting story in this *kanda* is when entering the final match between Rama and Ravana, and Ravana is killed. The touching story is when Rama and Sita met, it came to proving Sita's purity with a fire ritual, and Sita was also saved by Deva Agni, it was proven that Sita was still pure. The story continues with the journey back to Ayodhya and the coronation of Rama the King of Ayodhya.

### **3.1.7. *Uttara Kanda***

Some say that the Ramayana only consists of six parts, and the last part or *Uttara kanda* is an interpolation. However, in the Ramayana Manuscript which was rewritten by Kamala Subramaniam, the *Uttara Kanda* section is reviewed with several important stories. Starting with Sita's desire to visit the sages' hermitage in the forest & express their gratitude, followed by the sad incident when Rama threw Sita into the forest while she was pregnant because she heard rumors from her people that Sita was no longer pure. It is also told about the birth of Kusa and Lava (Rama Sita's sons) in Valmiki's Ashram, and then Valmiki tells the story of Rama's journey to Kusa and Lava and assigns them to tell about Rama's journey to the ashrams. Kusa Lava finally sang the story of Rama in front of Rama during the Asvamedha yadnya. Rama summons Sita back to Ayodhya and asks her to prove her chastity again. It is also said that the arrival of Sage Durvasa caused the Laksmana to be expelled from Ayodhya. To conclude this *kanda*, the story of Rama and Sita's return to Vaikuntha (Vishnu's realm) is told (Subramaniam, 2004).

## **3.2. Moral Dilemmas and Prejudice in Rama's Leadership**

Talking about moral dilemmas, it can actually happen to everyone. This happens when the conscience is faced with a choice between several conflicting obligations. Citing Christensen and Gomila, a moral dilemma occurs when the available choices and obligations do not allow for a moral outcome. In such a situation, a choice or action is required, and all available alternatives violate some moral obligations. Moral dilemmas

often occur when personal morals and professional obligations conflict (Christensen & Gomila, 2012). Rama experienced this in the following aspects.

### 3.2.1. Rama refuses to return to Ayodhya

This story is contained in Ayodhya kanda, which tells the story of Rama's journey to exile in the forest for 14 years. Rama's departure caused deep sadness, especially for King Dasaratha, because Rama was his favorite son. The king's mistake in the past when giving a gift to Kekayi, who rashly agreed to whatever Kekayi asked for later. Kekayi's attitude was very different before and after being instigated by Mantara, her loyal servant. Mantara incited Kekayi that King Dasarata deliberately asked Kekayi's son, Bharata, to visit his uncle with Satrughna because the king would crown Rama as *Yuvaraja*, and Bharata seemed not to be considered the crown prince. Mantara incited Kekayi to ask for the gift that had been promised to him by the king. The first gift was for Bharata to be crowned King of Ayodhya, not Rama. The second gift was for Rama to be exiled to the Dandaka forest for 14 years. Kekayi, who initially acted gentle, loved the four sons of Dasaratha from three queens, including Kekayi, suddenly turned into a woman who was controlled by greed, hatred, and lost love for Rama.

King Dasaratha who heard Kekayi's request was very shocked, and offered another gift, but Kekayi was adamant, even though Rama's coronation as *yuvaraja* was only a few days away. Dasaratha did not have the courage to convey this to Rama, so Sumantra as King Dasaratha's trusted person was asked to summon Rama to meet his father. Dasaratha did not say a word when Rama met him with Kekayi, in fact Kekayi spoke to Rama in a harsh tone. Hearing this, Rama conveyed two things. *First*, the obligation of a king or leader is in addition to the welfare of his people, he must also be loyal to his promises. The virtue of a leader is seen from his loyalty to five things, which in Hindu teachings are called *Panca Satya*, namely *Satya Hrdaya* (loyal to conscience), *Satya Wacana* (speaking the truth, not lying), *Satya Semaya* (loyal and honest with promises to others), *Satya Laksana* (loyal to deeds, right deeds), and *Satya Mitra*, namely loyalty to friends or companions. (Palguna, 2011). *Second*, Rama expressed his readiness to go into exile in the forest for 14 years. Rama stated in beautiful words "*even if I asked to throw myself into the fire, if it is my father who asks me, I will definitely do it*". This statement shows the main human character in Rama, devotion to parents above all else, even though it is impossible for Dasaratha to ask him to do such an act. This statement is as written in Artha Sastra XVIII part 14 and 15 *sloka* 1 (Astana & Anomdiputro, 2003) as follows.

*"A disciplined prince, who finds life difficult, must submit to his father when asked to do an inappropriate task, unless it could endanger life or arouse the people (against) or involve a heinous sin."*

The exile was only intended for Rama, but Sita and Laksmana stated that they would accompany Rama during the exile. When Bharata returned from his uncle's house, he witnessed that the people of Ayodhya had changed, as if they hated him and did not expect his arrival. He was surprised and when he arrived at the palace, the first people he looked for were Rama and his father, Dasaratha, but it was too late, because Dasaratha had died and was being laid out, while Rama had left Ayodhya for a period of exile in the forest. Sumantra told this, then in the midst of his turbulent feelings, Bharata met his mother and expressed his disappointment to Kekayi. He even swore that he had never been born from a mother's womb like Kekayi.

The brotherhood between Rama, Bharata, Laksmana, and Satrughna has a very strong bond, even as an example of an ideal brotherhood, but the incident damaged Bharata's image in the eyes of the people including Laksmana himself. When he heard the reason for Rama's exile, Bharata immediately followed his brother to the forest and begged Rama to return to Ayodhya as King. Laksmana considered Bharata's arrival in the forest to show his power as the new King of Ayodhya, and he rushed to take his arrow to protect Rama. Laksmana misjudged Bharata's attitude. He came to the forest with good intentions and stated that he did not know anything about his mother's attitude, and he refused to become King of Ayodhya. Bharata persuaded Rama to return, but was rejected. Rama again expressed his loyalty to his heart, to his words to exile himself to the forest for 14 years, and would not return before his time was up. In return, Rama gave Bharata a pair of sandals as a symbol of his leadership. Rama and Laksmana also performed a ceremony to honor his father.

Observing the story, Rama seems to have wasted a golden opportunity. When compared to the current conditions, there are actually many people (political figures) who are ambitious to become leaders, even though they are incompetent and only want to satisfy their political desires for power. It just a few leaders are able to hold fast to promises, words, and have integrity in leading. The moral dilemma that is implicit in the story is between the attitude of making parents happy, or obeying parents' orders, and maintaining the good name of parents, but it has an impact on the psychology of parents. The next moral dilemma is when having to choose between the successor to the empty Ayodhya kingdom with loyalty to principles, conscience, and integrity. Rama shows the principles of justice and moral awareness in determining the choice in this moral dilemma. Instead of hating Kekayi, Rama respects her and exiles himself to the forest. Rama also refuses to return before his exile ends. If he returns, then Rama's determination must be doubted.

### **3.2.2. Rama on a Mission in the Forest**

In the early days of exile, Rama, Sita, and Laksmana experienced many events. While at the hermitage of Rsi Sutiksna, Rama was about to be given a phala from the hermitage of the Rsi because of Rama's willingness to visit his hermitage, but Rama politely refused, that all of that must be obtained by his own efforts, not given by others. This reflects Rama's independence and determination. When lay people read this excerpt from the story, the view might arise that Rama had disappointed Rsi Sutiksna, because this gift would not be given to just anyone. Likewise, when the rsi and hermits in the forest asked Rama to save their *yaga* or sacred ceremony from the attack of the giants, Sita rebuked Rama's attitude in agreeing to the rsi's request and the hermits. According to Sita, the behavior of a person who is loyal to the truth can be seen from three things. First, never lie. Second, never want another person's wife or property. Third, do not hurt others who have never hurt ourselves. (Subramaniam, 2004). According to Sita, Rama has shown the first and second attitudes, but in the third, Rama actually deviated from that. Sita ask Rama's reason for killing the giants who disturbed the ritual of the rsi and the ascetic, even though he had never been disturbed or hurt by the giants. The moral dilemma between the priorities of upholding the truth is a choice that may seem difficult for people who do not yet have independence and good moral courage. Rama explains that his attitude is the duty of a Knight *Varna* to protect the people, including the *Brahmana*,

*Vaisya*, and *Sudra Varna*. The concept of *Catur Varna* is a classification of society according to their profession. This teaching can be found in the *Manava Dharmasastra* Scripture (Pudja & Sudharta, 2003). If associated with the priority scale in the context of obligations, then William David Ross's theory can be used as a reference for *prima facie* obligations or obligations at first glance. Simply put, it can be interpreted that the first moral obligation will be defeated by the second, which is stronger moral obligation. (Bertens, 2013). Rama chose the obligation to save the sages and hermits in the forest so that the *yadnya* could run smoothly and the lives of the *Brahmins* would remain safe. So the obligation to protect and save the lives of *Brahmins* is more important than the obligation to maintain integrity as someone loyal to dharma.

### **3.2.3. Rama's attitude when he lost Sita**

Rama is an avatar of Vishnu on a mission to save the world from Ravana's arrogance at that time. Ravana's arrogance was partly caused by a gift received from Lord Brahma. Ravana initially asked for the gift of eternal life, but that was impossible. He also asked for another gift, namely that no divine power, giant, or magical creatures could defeat him. Lord Brahma agreed and gave the gift. Ravana put humans aside, therefore he could be defeated by the main human figure, Rama. Although as an avatar, Rama's attitude does not seem to reflect the avatar's personality.

This attitude can be especially observed when Rama lost Sita. Rama felt such deep sadness when Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, Rama was depressed and almost desperate like humans in general. The loyal Laksmana always gave him support and motivation. Rama's annoyance was also seen when the monkey troops headed south and saw a vast ocean. It was impossible for Rama and the troops to cross it. He meditated for three days two nights, and begged the ruler of the ocean to recede the ocean, but the ocean did not budge. Rama's anger appeared immediately, and he took an arrow that was aimed at the ocean. The power of the *astra* (arrow with divine power) had disturbed the creatures living in the ocean, the ruler of the ocean finally appeared and advised Rama to build a bridge to Alengka/Lanka by asking for help from Nala, son of Visvakarma. Rama, assisted by the *vanara* (monkey) troops, managed to build a sturdy bridge to Lanka. Until now the structure of the bridge is still sturdy, and experts have found that the stones arranged on the bridge are not arranged naturally.

Observing the story, it raises questions about avatars who do not show proper behavior. Rama seems blinded by his love for Sita and forgets his true self. Rama is considered unsuccessful in leading himself from the shackles of anger. This prejudice can be answered with the following explanation. God in His manifestation is personified into three forms. *First*, Anthropomorphic when God is personified into human form with various advantages, such as four heads, four arms, and so on. *Second*, Semianthropomorphic, namely personified into a half-human or half-animal form such as Narasimha avatara, Ganesha, Hanuman, and so on. *Third*, Unanthropomorphic, namely personified into the form of animals or other great creatures such as *Garuda*, *Varaha*, *Kurma Avatara* and the like. (Titib, 2003). When God is personified into human form, even with all the advantages possessed, human nature will still be bound, because of the senses possessed. When *Atman* (pure consciousness) enters the human body, the consciousness will be reduced and forgotten, from *Vidya* (awareness of true knowledge) to *Avidya* (ignorant). Therefore, it is not surprising that Rama behaves like that,

sometimes angry, sad, laughing, and showing other emotional attitudes, because the *avatara* takes human form.

### **3.2.4. The Proof of the Purity and Banishment of Sita**

Rama and Laksmana's journey encountered many obstacles, but their success in finding Sita was not in line with Sita's expectations. Before Sita was found, Rama sent Hanuman to go to Lanka and see Sita's condition. Hanuman, who managed to enter the city of Lanka, reported on Sita's condition and the strength of Ravana's army. Sita looked shabby, her hair was loose, and asked why Hanuman was the one who picked her up, not Rama. Sita refused to be invited back by Hanuman, because she wanted Rama himself to come to pick her up. Hanuman said that Ravana had repeatedly tempted Sita and asked her to be his queen, but Sita always refused firmly..

When Rama successfully defeated Ravana in a fierce battle, he told Sita to prove her purity before returning to Ayodhya with him. Sita did not hesitate to prove her purity by throwing herself into the flames. The god Agni helped protect Sita from the proof, because it was true that Sita was still pure and had never been touched by Ravana. The first proof was accepted by Rama, but Rama asked for a second proof. This was done when Sita was called back to Ayodhya after being previously banished to the forest by Rama, because he heard rumors from his people who doubted Sita's purity. When she was banished to the forest, Sita was heavily pregnant and gave birth to twins in the ashram of Maharsi Valmiki. The two children were named Kusa and Lava and were taught religious knowledge and the story of Rama's journey by Maharsi Valmiki. When Rama performed the Asvamedha Yadnya, Kusa and Lava were invited to the palace. Kusa and Lava told about Rama and Sita's journey in detail, because of his admiration, Rama asked about her parents who were none other than Sita, of course Rama's children too. That is why Rama called Sita back to the Palace, but before being accepted back as part of the Ayodhyal kingdom, Rama asked her to prove her purity again in front of the invited guests at that time. Although Maharsi Valmiki had promised to lose the results of his penance if Sita was not pure, Rama stuck to his decision. Sita prayed to the motherland, if she was still pure, then the motherland would embrace her. Sure enough, suddenly the ground split and a throne appeared that took Sita away. Rama regretted his decision, but Sita could not return again.

Observing the story, there is a prejudice that regrets Rama's decision, accusing Rama of being a bad husband, it would be even better if Sita accepted Ravana's offer, of course Sita would be fine, not experiencing long suffering. Sita has proven her purity, so why should Sita do it again? In his position as a leader, Rama experiences a moral dilemma that demands him to make a fair decision. Rama decides to throw Sita into the forest, then after asking her again to prove her purity, it is a decision as a king or leader, not in his status as a husband. Rama wants to convey to his people that justice is unconditional, justice does not side with the ruler, but with the truth and necessity, even though it is painful. However, if we look at it again, it seems too much to have to throw a pregnant wife into the forest alone, there are other better options, for example making a statement in front of his people and proven by witnesses such as Maharsi Valmiki and other Maharsi who are believed to be true from what he said. One method to find the truth in Nyaya Darsana is Sabda or Pramana, so finding the truth through expert statements, in this case people who are sanctified. However, the Ramayana epic is indeed a history that is

equipped with many moral values to be used as guidelines for behaving in various aspects of life. In addition, as an avatara, Rama's task in the world is not to continue the lineage, but to complete the mission of eradicating Ravana's arrogance. Likewise, it is important for a leader to prosper his people not only with material, but with trust. Rama accommodated the aspirations of his people and followed up on their complaints fairly, in Hindu leadership teachings this is part of Asta Brata (the eight main behaviors of a leader who adopts the character of the eight gods, namely Candra, Surya, Agni, Vayu, Varuna, Kuvera, Yama, and Indra).

### 3.2.5. Rama Banishes Laksmana

In the Uttara Kanda section, there is an interesting incident that raises prejudice about Rama's leadership and actually becomes a moral dilemma for Rama himself. This happened when Rama was having a closed meeting with Sang Kala, the ruler of time. Rama ordered Laksmana to guard the entrance, because the meeting was private. Anyone who came to disturb or listen would be sentenced to death. When Rama and Sang Kala were talking and could not be disturbed, Rsi Durvasa came and insisted on meeting Rama. Laksmana, who obeyed his brother's orders, asked Rsi Durvasa to wait, but the rsi had run out of patience and threatened to curse Laksmana, Rama, Bharata, the entire Ikshvaku dynasty, the kingdom of Ayodhya, and its people if he was not allowed to meet Rama. Laksmana faced a moral dilemma at that time, his choice was difficult, if he obeyed Rsi Durvasa's request, then he would be sentenced to death, but if not, then the kingdom of Ayodhya, its people, his family, and many other victims. He decided to interrupt Rama's meeting with *Sang Kala*. Rsi Durvasa was happy because his request was granted by Rama, namely to get food after going through a long asceticism. After meeting the rsi, Rama remembered his order, and began to feel restless. Laksmana understood this and said he was ready to take responsibility for his sadness. Rama then gathered his ministers to decide on the right punishment for Laksmana. Maharsi Vasista suggested that Laksmana be punished, because if the promise is not fulfilled, then dharma will be damaged, if dharma is damaged, then everything will perish. Hearing the advice of dharma, Rama then punished Laksmana by banishing him from society, because a respectable person being banished or sentenced to death are two punishments that are no different. Laksmana then went to the Sarayu River and became moksha (gain eternal freedom) there. That's how Rama after crowning Bharata as King of Ayodhya, and giving the southern Kosala region to Kusa, and northern Kosala to Lava and giving advice and prayers to his loyal followers, Rama went to the sacred Sarayu River and returned to Vaikuntha.

If we look closely at the story, both Rama and Laksmana experience a moral dilemma that demands them to make a decision on two difficult choices. Laksmana chooses to sacrifice himself rather than his people and family and to uphold Rama's promise that has been made. Likewise, Rama asks for advice from the ministers and the holy Maharsi Vasistha to give the right punishment to Laksmana who has broken his promise, even in the midst of difficult choices and for the good of the people. The obligation to keep a promise is higher than the obligation to protect his family from breaking a promise that has been made, even though the violation is for the good of his people. People who break promises will go to hell, said Laksmana (Subramaniam, 2004). This story is a reflection for leaders to always keep their promises and make fair decisions based on mature

considerations. Adopting Haryatmoko's statement in this article, Rama's decision can be considered right and legitimate because it refers to the universal ethical principle, namely the principle of justice, concerning the issue of equal rights for everyone and respect for human dignity. (Haryatmoko, 2024)

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The leadership of Shri Rama in the Ramayana shows that the ideal leader is not a flawless figure, but rather one who is able to navigate moral complexities with integrity, fortitude, and loyalty to the principle of truth (dharma). Although his decisions often involve personal prejudice and suffering, Rama always puts the moral and collective interests first. The moral dilemmas facing Rama reflect the reality that in leadership, not all decisions can satisfy everyone, and sometimes justice demands personal sacrifice. The ideal of Rajaṛṣi leadership is not just a matter of will, but also of spiritual wisdom and moral courage in the face of social and inner pressures.

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