

# RE-GESTATING THE ECO-ETHICS OF *RĀMĀYAṆA* IN ANTHROPOCENE: An Eco-Aesthetical Approach

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**Abstract:** The paper critically evaluates the eco-ethical practices of the knowledge society in the period of *Rāmāyaṇa* from an eco-aesthetical perspective. In the current anthropocentric epoch, reorienting people toward eco-ethical values is a considerable challenge. Ecological ethics is one of the key concepts of eco-aesthetics, which can be read through the ancient Indian epic *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa*. Also, the articulation of human-nature interrelations is deeply embedded in the Sanskrit literary tradition, which Vālmīki's epic narrative illustrates in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Against this backdrop, this article proceeds with a discussion of the root causes of the ecological crisis in the Anthropocene. The paper explores the ecological ethos and knowledge rooted in the Hindu religion through a few select secondary works of literature. Further, the paper discusses the concept of eco-aesthetics in the present ecosophical discourse. Finally, the article critically assesses the text of *Rāmāyaṇa* for the philosophical and aesthetical deliberations of eco-caring, seeking to bring those eco-ethical notions from the epic to the fore that can potentially induce ecological awareness in people.

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## 1. Introduction

In the Anthropocene, it is conspicuous that one species, homo-sapiens, has attained dominance over nature, jeopardising its own existence and fellow species. Anil K. Tiwari notes that anthropocentrism considers human life superior to any other life form, and other life forms are significant only if they serve a purpose to humans. It is this human attitude that led to the emergence of the present era, the Anthropocene (Tiwari 527). As a result, the earth is struggling against many influenced incursions, from the depletion of natural resources and extinction of species to environmental pollution (Tucker and Grim XV). If the situation does not improve, our future generations will face a severer ecological crisis for which the current generation will be held responsible. Nevertheless, the problem is not sudden and new but has been growing since the Industrial Revolution and the inception of modern capitalist lifestyles. This could be understood by illustrating the intensity to which humans have wreaked ecological damage by intervening in nature. In this regard, Rachel Carson, in her seminal book *Silent Spring* asserts, "The history of life on earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings... Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species—man—acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world" (23).

Analysing the root cause of environmental problems in the modern world, Gregory Bateson argues that the root of the ecological crisis lies in the collaborative activities of technological advances, rapid increments in population, and conventional ideas and attitudes of the Occidental world towards the environment: "... certain error in thinking and attitudes of Occidental culture. Our *values* are wrong" (Bateson 490). Here, Bateson considers Occidental culture and values largely responsible for the ecological crisis. However, even Oriental cultures, including India and China, which broadened

the gap between their religious theory and practices under the influence of globalised materialism and industrialism led by the West, are also responsible for the prevailing crisis (Tucker and Grim XX, XXIV). Lynn White accuses the Judeo-Christian practices for the ecological crisis on this planet. He identifies *Genesis 1:28* for the Christian understanding of this universe, in which the conception of human dominion over nature and fellow creatures advocates technology's emergence and growth to dominate the planet (White 1205). Here, like Bateson, White holds Judeo-Christianity, a dominant value in the western culture, responsible for the ecological crisis. However, we believe that non-Christian values are equally responsible for the ecological crisis as their eco-friendly religio-cultural values took a back seat in the process of adopting lifestyles led by the anthropocentric value system and modernisation. This can be well understood through Rachel Carson's attacks on the stature and decency of the scientific establishment and the dominance of technology. She blames modern society for the increasing exploitation of natural resources and the cultural orientation to see nature as a commodity to be exploited rather than an integrated living whole (Carson 23). Considering the arguments of these scholars, it is obvious that many factors are behind environmental degradation; one of the most inclusive roots is one's religio-cultural beliefs, which have weakened with embracing the modern anthropocentric approach.

If religion has played an important role in developing human civilisations, it is apparent that there must have been something in religious thinking and practices which have been misinterpreted or misunderstood, and, now, that needs rethinking and re-appropriation. This might help reorient human attitudes and curb the prevailing ecological crisis. Because it is religious sources that would provide a solution to the current problem in the form of ancient eco-ethical wisdom and knowledge. In this regard, Jose Nandhikkara's editorial remark supports my contention, "Listening to great experiences and insights of religious traditions of humanity is a source of knowledge and ignoring it would be an unacceptable policing

by academia, economics, and politics" ("Role of Religion," 151). Against this backdrop, our conventional ideas and approach to nature must be revised and re-evaluated. We must redirect our traditional ecological knowledge from the fundamental sources of our religious/cultural beliefs and understandings. Thereby, this paper takes up the task of relooking one of the classical epics of India, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is not just a literary production but an embodiment of the Hindu religio-cultural practices.

## **2. Ecology, Eco-aesthetics, and Eco-ethics**

Ecology is the study of the interrelations of living organisms and their environments (*Chapman and Reiss 2*). In other words, it is the study of living bodies (including humans) and their dwelling places, their response to the surroundings, interactions among various species, and the processing of energy and materials in ecosystems (Nadkarni 412). The relationships among different species have been a matter of the natural history of human development. The human relationship starts at home, moves on to the surrounding environment, and finally reaches the whole biotic and non-biotic components (Naess 29). To understand human relations with fellow living and non-living components, aesthetics provides a good rationale.

Aesthetics, with regard to the environment, investigates the interrelations between a subject and an object (fellow subject). It denounces the perception of seeing the world as an object as it implies exploitation; rather, it focuses on seeing the world as a reflection of our own self, which implies a sense of eco-caring (Miles 59–60). So, eco-aesthetics is the interface between ecology and aesthetics, exploring the aesthetic appreciation of nature. It shows the link between aesthetic appreciation of the environment and ethics, that is, between how we aesthetically engage with environments and how we should deal with them (Carlson 399). In other words, eco-aesthetics paves the way for a friendly and sympathetic approach towards fellow species, underlining the eco-caring principle. This eco-caring attitude towards the world is the cornerstone of eco-ethics, which lays its foundation on human thoughts and actions oriented to what is

right or wrong, protecting the environment of fellow creatures, accepting human responsibility towards other ecosystem components, obtaining ecological knowledge and developing values of self-restraint, modesty, honesty, help and love (Kinne 2). Eco-ethics serves as the theoretical base of eco-aesthetics interlinking aesthetics and ethics of nature.

### 3. *Dharma* and *Ṛta* and Their Relation to Eco-ethics

The history of India has always been rich in the form of eco-ethical practices for ages. People have always been revering nature, natural phenomena and various cosmic bodies as a mark of respect to show their relevance in earthly lives and their contributions to the ecosystem. Throughout the long history of Hindu civilisation, there have been many written scriptures (mainly in Sanskrit) in different periods, such as the *Vedas* (1500-1000 BCE), the *Upaniṣads* (800-400 BCE), and the *Purāṇas* (500-200 BCE). We also find Sanskrit epics like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and many others. These scriptures and epics are vast compendiums of rituals, practices, and eco-ethical conceptions of *dharma* (righteousness) and *ṛta* (cosmic order).

*Dharma*, rooted in the Sanskrit word *dhṛ* (sustaining), purports a holistic ecological perspective against a nature-subjugating and idiosyncratic environment within which we conceptualise ethics (Bilimoria et al. 25). To elucidate, the conception of *dharma* connotes different virtue, duty and ethics. In the present context, *dharma* stands for acts of righteousness, i.e., right action toward the environment and fellow beings. In this regard, Bilimoria and colleagues remark, "*Dharma*... connotes a general principle or law of nature to which the individual is bound in a two-fold sense, both in terms of supporting the cosmic, social, and personal orders and deriving from them a corresponding obligation" (24). Drawing from this, it is conspicuous that the Hindu view of ethics, as laid down in *dharma*, incorporates different social and religious norms meant for upholding ecological integrity.

The idea of *ṛta* connotes natural laws, cosmic order and universal harmony, as expressed in the *Ṛgveda* (Narayanan 292).

Das writes, "Research on the word *ṛta* has led to a general consensus that it means law, order, and truth. The faith in an order—a law makes for regularity and righteousness ... inviolable moral order *ṛta*" (Das 6). In other words, *ṛta* is a law of nature holding cosmic order, which is guided by *dharma*, a system of activity that directs the world so that *ṛta* is not violated (Ravikanth 55). This relationship between *dharma* and *ṛta* is upheld by humans' righteous orientation, responsibility, and action towards the world around them and by developing values of self-restraint, assistance and love, which are cornerstones of eco-ethics (Kinne 2). Thus, incorporating the value of the cosmic order, the conscience of righteousness towards the environment is a fundamental Hindu ecological ethos that could be articulated through the conceptions of *dharma* and *ṛta*.

In the Anthropocene<sup>1</sup> epoch, the conception of *dharma* and *ṛta* have taken a back seat against the greed for material things leading to excessive exploitation of natural resources. Therefore, a new way must be found to stop the exploitation of natural resources. In this regard, re-implication of ecological values of *dharma* and *ṛta* might help reorient people's attitudes towards Symbiocene, a new era with a sustainable human-nature relationship that fosters symbiotic ways of thinking for the mutual benefit of all living beings (Albrecht 13). These eco-ethical values inform the text of Ramāyaṇa.

#### 4. Eco-aesthetics for Praxis

In the contemporary discourse of eco-aesthetics, the idea of ecological harmony is well illustrated by Xiangzhan Cheng in his "Four Keystone" model. He observed that the fundamental characteristic of the metaphysical nature of a human being is to perceive the world to find a suitable position in the world. This endeavour on the part of humankind shows the integration of

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<sup>1</sup>The term denotes the current era of human dominance over natural surroundings. "The name is derived from the observed human influence and indeed increasing dominance of climatic, biophysical, and evolutionary processes occurring at a planetary scale" (Albrecht 12).

ecology and spirituality, which promotes the idea of intersubjectivity against the conventional notion of subject-object dualism (Cheng, *Ecoaesthetics*, 788). To Cheng, this intersubjectivity is the philosophical base of eco-aesthetics.

Cheng's first keystone idea proposes not to rely on the conventional idea of aesthetics that was based on the notion of antagonism between humans and the world. Instead, it takes up a model called 'aesthetic engagement' that strengthens the notion of the unity of humanity and the world. "It completely abandons a conventional aesthetics predicated on an opposition between humanity and the world. Subsequently, it is replaced by the model of aesthetic engagement that promotes the idea of the unity of humans and the world" (222). This idea of human-world unification is one of the key premises of eco-ethics.

His second keystone idea recapitulates traditional aesthetics by proposing a strengthened revised relationship between ethics and aesthetics. It suggests that ecological aesthetic appreciation is an activity based on ecological ethics, and it takes ecological awareness as a premise for ecological appreciation. That means, ecological awareness is auxiliary to eco-ethics which felicitates appreciation of nature. It purports the notion that to appreciate nature aesthetically, one must have ecological consciousness.

Ecological aesthetic appreciation is an aesthetic activity predicated on ecological ethics. It revises and strengthens the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in traditional aesthetics, and it takes ecological awareness as the premise of ecological appreciation. In this sense, the presupposition of ecological aesthetic appreciation is to have ecological consciousness (224).

This idea explains that being ecologically conscious allows one to experience unity with nature. In other words, it is ethical to be responsible towards the surrounding nature.

His third keystone idea relies on ecological knowledge to appreciate nature. It proposes that understanding basic ecology helps us engage with ecological aesthetic appreciation.

It is imperative for ecological aesthetic appreciation to rely on the ecological knowledge to refine taste and to enjoy the hidden

rich aesthetic properties of the ordinary (even the trivial). Without basic ecological knowledge, it will be impossible to engage a full ecological aesthetic appreciation (228).

That is, ecological knowledge and thinking make humans take responsibility for surrounding nature, which is another premise of eco-ethics.

Finally, the fourth keystone idea sees biodiversity and ecosystem health as the most crucial ideas that influence ecological aesthetic appreciation. It proposes to overthrow the anthropocentric worldview that determines the value standard for aesthetic appreciation, preferences, and habits.

The two guiding principles of ecological value for ecological aesthetic appreciation are biodiversity and ecosystem health. Humanity must overcome and transcend anthropocentric value standards and human aesthetic preference, reflecting and criticising anthropocentric aesthetic preferences and habits (231).

In other words, restraining oneself from making anthropocentric choices, a premise of eco-ethics, would positively add to ecological health. Thus, Cheng's "keystones" model focuses on incorporating various resources such as – human-world unity, ecological facts, ethical values, biodiversity, and ecosystem health – which are essential for addressing eco-ethical values (Carlson 406). Thereby, this paper mainly relies on Cheng's eco-aesthetical model for the philosophical and aesthetical deliberations of eco-caring in the text.

## 5. Aesthetic Notions of Eco-Caring in the *Rāmāyaṇa*

The epic *Rāmāyaṇa* starts with the queries of sage Vālmīki to Nārada, the chief of hermits: "Who is possessed of right conduct and who is friendly to all living beings?"—*cāritreṇa ca ko yuktaḥ sarvabūteṣu ko hitaḥ* (Vālmīki vol. 1, 2). In response to this question (and some other queries related to the well-being of the world), Nārada unfolds the tale of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, primarily a story of the person who concerns for the welfare of all species of living beings—*sarvabūteṣu hitaḥ*. The text teaches the reader the virtue of right conduct towards a world where all living beings

can dwell happily, embracing healthy ecological practices. Based on this premise, the paper explores eco-ethical values underpinned in the epic narrative.

An eco-ethical spirit is infused in the epic even before the primary narrative begins. The maiden instance which shows the light of the ecological ethos of the then society can be observed in the very beginning of *Bālakāṇḍa* (the first book of the epic) when sage Vālmīki curses a fowler, who killed one of the pair of heron birds. He swears the fowler stating, "May you not have peace of mind for endless years, O fowler, since you killed one of the pair of cranes, infatuated with passion" (Vālmīki vol. 1, 10). Here, the sage feels offended by the inhumane act of the fowler toward the birds that were mating at the time. The empathy shown on the part of Vālmīki towards the bird is the epitome of ecological value on the part of a person who extends care and love to fellow species. Also, punishing or cursing the fowler who performs unrighteous action is a duty of *dharmajñā* (knower of dharma/learned person), who shows responsibility towards other creatures. This eco-ethical notion is also replicated by the second keystone idea of eco-aesthetics which suggests ecological aesthetic appreciation as an activity that is based on ecological ethics, and to appreciate nature aesthetically, one must have ecological consciousness (Cheng 224). Here, the eco-conscious mind of the sage Vālmīki is reflected through this episodic narrative. Moreover, this couplet that is spontaneously uttered by the sage is suggestive of the entire theme of the text, which is said to prevail in the world "so long as mountains and rivers will remain on the surface of the earth" (Vālmīki vol. 1, 10-12). That is, the text not only values humans as essential creatures on this earth, but other natural components—mountains and rivers. This eco-ethical attitude is necessary for this anthropocentric society where fellow creatures are being killed for humane greed.

The protagonist of the epic, Rāma, is committed to keep the nature and environment safe from any turmoil and evil forces that hinder the beauty of nature. Rāma, during his stay at the confluence of river Gangā and Sarayū, notices some terrible

chaos in the southern side of the forest on the bank of Gangā. He enquires Viśwāmitra (the sage in the company), about the reason behind the terrible condition of the woods. Viśwāmitra tells him about an ogre named Tāṭakā (a Yakṣa woman who is capable of assuming any form at her will and possess a tremendous power) is the source of terror to the people in the principalities of Malada and Karuṣa. The ogre had been responsible for obstructing the roads of the land, due to which no one ever visits that beautiful land (Vālmīki vol. 1, 71-72). Having heard the story, Rāma was concerned about the chaos in the region and the surrounding forest and wanted to make the area free from the possession of the ogre. Viśwāmitra advised Rama,

For in the interest of the four grades of society ... even that which is sinful or wrong must invariably be done by one whose duty it is to protect. Such is the eternal duty of those charged with the onus of administration. Make short work of the impious woman, O scion; for there exists no righteousness in her (Vālmīki vol. 1, 73).

Thus, the sage reminds hesitant Rāma of the duty of a person towards the earth and fellow beings, saying, Tāṭakā having possessed no righteousness is meant not to dwell on this earth, and there is no sin in killing an unrighteous person. Following the advice of the sage, Rāma kills the ogress using his bow and arrow as a weapon and makes the region free from terror; thus, peace and prosperity are restored in the area. Here, it is suggested again that righteous action (*dharma*) on the part of a human is essential to maintain the ecological integrity of the planet. In other words, conserving and preserving ecosystem health is a key premise of eco-ethics traced in the fourth keystone notion of eco-aesthetics which proposes ecological health (integrity) as a guiding principle for ecological, aesthetic appreciation (Cheng 231). Thus, righteous actions are meant to uphold ecological health in society by maintaining interrelations between humans and fellow beings.

The eco-ethical sentiment of Rāma's character gets a powerful revelation during his meeting with his brother Bharata in the forest Citrakūṭa after the demise of his father to request

him to change his mind about keeping the words of his father by being in exile for fourteen years as he himself was no more. But Rāma's query to Bharata informs the reader about the peculiarity of Rāma. He asks, "Are the forests which are the home of elephants preserved by you? Are milch cows in abundance with you?" I hope all your workmen do not appear unhesitatingly before you nor are, they kept (altogether) out of your sight" (Vālmiki vol. 1, 503). These words of Rāma show his affection for the people of his state and fellow beings. His question reflects his eco-ethical value as he concerns for the welfare of flora and fauna in the same way as humans. So, what Rāma wishes here to protect and conserve is the human-nature relationship. This sentiment of eco-caring replicates the notion of 'aesthetic engagement' that strengthens the notion of human-world unity, the first keystone idea of eco-aesthetics (Cheng 224). This is another epitome of eco-ethics that is read through the narrative reflecting Rāma's character.

Moving deeper into the text, we observe that Rāma indulges himself in violence by killing ogres and other violent beasts who disturb the peace in the forest for the welfare of fellow beings. Sītā, his wife, considers the killing of an animal or any living being without enmity as *adharmā* (unrighteous act), and she categorises it as one of the cardinal sins born out of desire (Vālmiki vol. 1, 573). Therefore, she advises him not to kill any being without the danger of any harm. Having seen his behaviour in the Daṇḍaka, she worries about his ethical value toward the highest well-being and worldly interests. She stresses that she does not like him going towards the Daṇḍaka in the way he is proceeding (Vālmiki vol. 1, 573). She states, "The bow and the fuel when staying near the warrior and a fire respectively by greatly enhance their strength in this world" (Vālmiki vol. 1, 574). She said so because being in constant touch with a weapon, one's mind no longer remains committed to austere and *adharmā* (unrighteousness) starts leading him. It is said that an association with armour is equally dangerous as fuel and fire (Vālmiki vol. 1, 574). Thus, she lovingly advises him not to carry the bow and arrow and subsequently not to take the lives of the

ogres residing in Daṇḍaka without enmity. Therefore, she enquires about the connection between a weapon and forest life. And then, Sītā teaches Rāma the harm of keeping a weapon which could lead to the unnecessary killing of animals or ogres. The same goes with the mind of people. If one is associated with foul things or dwells in the company of vicious people, their mind might fall into sinful activities and could lead to harming people and fellow beings. On the other hand, if one surrounds oneself with good things and stays in association with nature, their experiences are shaped by goodness and righteousness, which might foster eco-aesthetical sentiment towards ecology. Rāma praises his wife for being aware of the principles of *dharma* (righteous action). But in response to the objection raised by Sītā, Rāma gives her the following justification in support of his act of violence. He tells Sītā that she herself stated that a Kṣatriya bears a bow to save a person from any suffering. Having been directed by the Dharmajña (one with expertise in Dharma), Rāma promised to protect the sages and other innocent creatures. Rāma tells Sītā that he would not kill any living being who is harmless, but the ogres to protect sages and other creatures and forest dwellers. Thus, Rāma justifies his action and tells Sītā that he is not practising violence of any sort but a duty that is crucial for the welfare of the forest lives. Here, Rāma's actions suggest the responsibility (*dharma*) of a person towards wild lives and forests, which is an important principle of eco-ethics. Thus, this event also echoes one of the ethical values regarding nature which are discussed in the keystone idea of eco-aesthetics.

In another episode, when Rāma returns after chasing the deer and finds Sītā missing, it is nature that hints toward some event. Rāma, in a state of agitation, wails again and again. He does not have any clue of Sītā's whereabouts, and while he is making haste in search of his wife, he hears the loud yelling of a jackal at his back and concludes it as a sign of some evil (Vālmiki, vol. 1, 693). He also receives hints from the animals that something unpleasant has happened to Sītā. For finding Sītā's whereabouts, Rāma approaches various trees and animals in the vicinity. In a state of grief, he runs from tree to tree and asks, "Was my

celebrated darling, who is (so) fond of Kadamba flowers, seen by you, O Kadamba" (Vālmīki vol. 1, 699)? Similarly, he enquires of Bilva, Arjuna, Kakubha, Tilaka, Aśoka, Pamnyra and some other trees his wife's whereabouts. Further, addressing the animals, he asks – "O deer, do you know of Sītā whose eyes resemble those of a fawn? My darling, who glances round like a female deer, is likely to be with female deer" (Vālmīki vol. 1, 699). Similarly, he asks elephants, tigers and other animals about the trace of his wife. At the end, he gets a hint from a herd of deer in response to his query, which is decoded by his younger brother Lakṣmaṇa. On the question of the whereabouts of Sītā, the herd of deer spring on their feet and pointing towards the vault of heaven (with their eyes), all of them turn their heads towards the South. That means, they indicate that his wife has been borne away in a southerly direction through airways (Vālmīki, vol. 1, 709). Having understood the gesture of the herd, they move along the path towards the South and happen to look at the flowers fallen on the ground, which were given to Sītā by his husband to adorn her hair. Rāma further blames mountains and other natural bodies for not helping him out in search of Sītā. Finally, moving further he meets Jaṭāyu, a vulture, who tells him the entire incident of Sītā having been borne away by Rāvaṇa to the southern state, Lankā. Jaṭāyu, who, on Sītā's call to save her, had fought with Rāvaṇa and had received mortal wounds from him. He dies after passing out the information about Sītā's abduction to Rāma. Both the brothers Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa cremate him like their own relatives. Thus, we see that the people of the time had a good bonding with nature and fellow creatures around them. They were not reliant only on fellow humans for any help; instead, they were in a symbiotic relationship with nature and other fellow beings. This human-nature interrelation and interdependency are quite evident throughout the text, a premise of eco-aesthetics (Cheng 788). This further supports the ecological reading of the text.

Moving ahead in search of Sītā, Rāma further meets Sūgriva (the monkey chief) with the help of Hanumān. Sūgriva tells Rāma that he saw his wife (Sītā) while Rāvaṇa was carrying her

off. Rāma seeks the help of Sūgriva in finding out Sītā's place, and Sūgriva promises to help him in finding whereabouts of Sītā. On the other hand, Sūgriva also seeks help from Rāma in killing Vālī (Sūgriva's elder brother), who has banished Sūgriva from his state and captivated his wife. Rāma and Sūgriva secured their friendship and promised to help each other. Sūgriva tells Rāma about his might that a common man cannot withstand. He further tells Rāma about sage Mataṅga's curse on Vālī. In a battle between Vālī and Dundubhi (a demon disguised as buffalo), Vālī kills the buffalo and throws it seizing it by the horn in the vicinity of sage Mataṅga's hermitage destroying several trees and plants (by the corpse of the buffalo). Having seen the destruction of natural vegetation and splashing of blood around, the sage curses him, stating,

If the perverted fellow by whom these trees have been smashed while throwing away the corpse of a demon ... remain in this forest of mine – which has been nurtured (by me) like my own offspring – for the destruction of its leaves and shoots as well as for the extinction of its fruits and roots, I shall assuredly curse them too (Vālmīki, vol. 1, 778).

Here, Vālī is cursed by the sage to turn into a rock if it enters into the forest ever for destructing the trees and spreading bloodshed in the forest. Like Vālmīki, here, sage Mataṅga condemns Vālī for the destruction of the trees which he reared up as his own sons. From these words of sage Mataṅga, one can easily sense the pain he feels at the destruction of natural vegetation. It feels like he himself has been severely harmed. The compassion shown here by the sage for the trees and plants is similar to the maiden episode of the text where Vālmīki curses the fowler for killing the heron bird. Here, the eco-conscious mind of the sage Mataṅga is reflected through this episodic narrative. Thus, the epic narrative is replete with events that appeal to one's eco-ethical sentiment.

## 6. Conclusion

Thus, we see that the *Rāmāyaṇa* illustrates the eco-caring characters of the protagonists and other humans of the then

society. Rāma is seen as a person who is highly sensitive to his surrounding environment, portraying his eco-ethical attitude, while the society in which we reside is immersed in the capital-centric setup, where only material greed matters. This anthropocentric world is threatening the very existence of the planet, and the only escape is to live a sustainable way of life in harmony with nature. The whole narrative of the epic is woven by an eco-conscious poet whose aesthetic sense is so replete with ecological knowledge that everything that is beautiful and righteous is closely associated with nature. Even the goodness of a character largely relies on their approach towards nature as the prominent characters that are depicted as good and righteous are eco-ethical and eco-aesthete. Seeing all kinds of life forms as a reflection of our own selves, as depicted in the text, might help us reconnect with nature in an eco-friendlier way, thus, fostering eco-ethics for conserving and protecting nature from ecological damage or biodiversity loss.

An eco-friendly interrelation and interdependency are explicitly noticeable throughout the text of *Rāmāyaṇa*. The epic has been adopted for a much eco-friendlier interpretation several times. For example, *Kanchana Sita* (1961) by C. N. Sreekantan Nair, and *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In this regard, David Lee discusses the episodic television series based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* that was telecasted on 'Doordarshan' (in the late 1980s) and had been modified for environmental purposes, imparting ecological messages about the value of planting trees (262). People still follow and imitate the practices of the then knowledge societies, and enhance their ecological understanding. Therefore, reinforcing an ecologically motivated version of the text could help people experience aesthetic impulses and spread ecological awareness for the conservation of ecology.

In addition, there could be a way of living a progressive life in modern times without damaging or ruling over natural resources and biota that need to be figured out, and I believe the *Rāmāyaṇa* may help in that. In other words, what is more important here is the embedded notions of harmony and mutual

survival necessary for a healthy world. Vālmiki's implicit depiction of ecological knowledge running through the notion of balance, integrity and interdependency teaches us mutual survival and induces an ecological sentiment. Here, Nandhikkara's editorial remarks rightly justify the message, the earth is a universal place where all living species reside together, and having born as humans with rational faculty, it is our moral responsibility to act in a righteous manner that helps uphold ecological integrity ("Planetary Ethics," 125). And, for this, the epic imparts eco-ethical understanding to sustain ecologically enhanced knowledge societies in this planetary ecosystem.

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