

Geography of Ramayana and the Importance of Raja Ram in National Unity and Security of Bhāratavarṣa

Dr. Dheerendra Singh^{1,*}

¹Independent Research Scholar, India

*Corresponding author: dhsingh2023@gmail.com

Abstract: This research paper presents a study of the role of King Ram in national unity and security by analysing the geographical places mentioned in Ramayana. The study of the geography of the Ramayana period is not only helpful in understanding the geographical structure of ancient India, but it also sheds light on the socio-political system of that time. Different places mentioned in Ramayana, such as Ayodhya, Prayag, Chitrakoot, Dandakaranya, Kishkindha, etc. exist today and their geographical locations correspond to the descriptions in Ramayana. The exile journey of King Ram was not only important from the geographic point of view as it extended from North India into South India, but it also helped to forge unity amongst different states and communities. It is evident in the research that King Ram formed diplomatic relations with several states during his journey. Alliances with Nishadraja Guha, Vanaraja Sugriva, and Vibhishana not only added strength in fighting against Ravana but also became an emblem of national unity. These relationships made by Ram transcended caste, religion, and regional boundaries, indicating his inclusive policy.

Ancient Indian geography is well illustrated, particularly by the rivers, mountains, and forests described in the Ramayana which depict natural boundaries and geographical diversities. Especially Dandakaranya, which extended across Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra, gives an indication of the expanded forest area in ancient India. This work further elaborates on the strategic foresight of Ram in the context of national security. Successful campaigns against invaders such as Ravana not only reflect military prowess but also show his commitment to national security. This study seeks to present geography during the Ramayana era along with King Ram's vision for nation-building in contemporary times. This study provides significant perspectives on national unity and national security for our times.

Keywords: Geography, Ramayana, National, Unity and Security

1. Introduction:

The Ramayana is not just an epic of Indian civilization, integrating moral and religious values, but also an important document of the geographical, political, and social landscape of ancient India. From Ayodhya to Lanka, the whole journey of King Ram details various kingdoms, cities, forests, and rivers of ancient India. This epic reveals not only the geographical unity and diversity of the Indian subcontinent but also serves as an important tool of national integration. The journey of King Ram connects various kingdoms and regions from north to south. From Ayodhya to Prayag, Chitrakoot, Dandakaranya, Kishkindha, and Rameswaram, each of these places is distinctively identified in the geographical, cultural, and political setting. The

important cities along the way- Ayodhya, Prayag, Chitrakoot, Kishkindha, etc. were undeniably the centres of their time. And even today, they continue to be important places of Indian culture and heritage.

The geographical details mentioned in the Ramayana are wonderful in their accuracy. For instance, the description of Dandakaranya that fits into what are Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra respectively today gives a perfect description of the boundaries of the ancient forest sector. The mention of different rivers, including Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, and Kaveri, provides geographical references and reveals also the water culture of India. However, his contribution to the Indian cause of national unity and security is perhaps his greatest. He created alliances with different states and triggered the idea of a united India. In fact, the story of his friendship with Nishadraja Guha, the alliance with Sugriva, and offering shelter to Vibhishana in this epic would be examples of political diplomacy and social integration. The cooperation of various nations and communities in the struggle against Ravana is a symbol of national unity. The geography of Ramayana not only presents mere topographical knowledge of sites but reflects the composite diversity in Indian culture. The cultural practices, traditions, and lifestyles of an area represent the richness of Indian civilization. The relationships formed during Ram's journey exist even today in the reflection of a united cultural fabric in Indian society. This paper is an attempt to take a cursory examination of the geography of Ramayana times and an assessment of Ram's role in national unity and security. The study is relevant not only for historical reasons but also provides suitable guidelines for national unity and social harmony in contemporary times.

2. Literature Review:

The geographical study of the Ramayana period and the significance of King Ram in the unity and security of India have intrigued many researchers. Identifying Indian tradition with one book, one state, one language, or one religion is like identifying a yard of cloth with one thread. The Ramayana thread in this great civilization's fabric recurs in different forms and different shades (Rajagopalan, 2006). Among them, Ravi (2023) has presented one of the most detailed studies concerning the geographical aspects of ancient India. According to Valmiki, the geographical locations of various sites mentioned in the Ramayana, such as Ayodhya, Prayag, and Chitrakoot, fit in with the existing placement of these sites (2023). Shukla (2003), who performed a comparative study of Ramayana period sites and their existing geography, verified this. Singh (2014) describes India during the Ramayana period in detail, accompanied by an analysis of the socio-political scenario of those times. Agnihotri (2020) gives a detailed description of the route taken by Ram through the forest, which provides essential information on the routes and geographical structure during this period. Arya (2019), in his research, has elucidated the geographical and cultural conditions of that period through an analysis of the chronology of the Ramayana period. In the context of national integration, Bhattacharya (2023) has undertaken a comparative study of the concept of Ram Rajya and contemporary governance. Mehrotra (2016) has analysed the inclusive policies and diplomatic approach of Ram during his rise to fame in history. Mishra (1986) discusses the process of nation-building by providing an elaborate analysis of the life of Ram and his vision. Poddar (1980) elaborates on the Ramayana culture of India, pinpointing the contribution of Ram to national integration. The rulers of the epic are commended for the way they govern. Ram's reign, that is, Ramarajya,

is the epitome of a utopian kingdom where perfect health, prosperity, and virtue exist in the lives of people (Rajagopalan, 2006).

These studies furnish us with the idea that the geographical study of the Ramayana period not only aids in the scholarly understanding of the geographical structure of ancient India but also finds relevance in contemporary discussions on national integration and security. King Ram's inclusive policies, diplomatic skills and vision of national security are relevant even today. But all these have not discussed the role of Ramayana and its geography with reference of the unity and national security of India. This research focuses on the geographical unity and geo-strategical security of India in the light of Ramayana.

3. Study Area:

The southern part of Jambūdvīpa was called Bhāratavarṣa; it extended from the Himalayas in the north to the sea in the south and from east to west for a thousand yojanas. The part of the land which is known today as India or Bharat, was much bigger than today's India. Bharat has 28 states and eight union territories. It is located between 6°45' north and 37°6' north latitudes and 68°7' and 97°25' east longitudes. Greater Bhāratavarṣa was chosen as the study area based on the land area of Bhāratavarṣa described in the Ramayana so that it could be made a prosperous and powerful state in the world. In the present study, the entire land area of India situated in the land area of Bhāratavarṣa described in the Ramayana has been chosen as the study area so that based on geographical knowledge of the Ramayana, we can recommit ourselves to the unity and security of present India. The area from the state of Kaushal in the north to Rameswaram in the far south and beyond has been included in this study. This study area was chosen to build a developed India by establishing the national unity and security of the same Ram Rajya on which King Ram established his kingdom through social and political ideals.

4. Objectives:

- a. To analyse the geographical sites mentioned in the Ramayana and establish their current relevance in understanding the territorial integrity of Bhāratavarṣa.
- b. To study the diplomatic strategies and governance principles of King Ram in promoting national integration and security in Bhāratavarṣa.

5. Research Questions:

- a. How do the geographical descriptions of the places mention in the Ramayana match with the places in the present-day Indian subcontinent?
- b. What was the role of natural boundaries in defining the territorial boundaries of ancient Bhāratavarṣa as described in the Ramayana?
- c. How did King Ram's diplomatic relations with various kingdoms (such as Nishadraj, Sugriv and Vibhishana) contribute to promoting national unity transcending caste, religion and territorial boundaries?
- d. Which strategic principles of King Ram's governance model are relevant in addressing the contemporary challenges of national security and integration in India?

6. Research Method:

This research is based on the qualitative research method, in which a coordinated use of both analytical and descriptive methods has been done. The main sources of research include Valmiki Ramayana, other mythological texts, ancient Indian literature and modern geographical studies. In the literature review, an in-depth study of Valmiki Ramayana, analysis of ancient Indian texts and an observation of contemporary research literature have been done. In geographical study, identification of places mentioned in Ramayana, comparative study with current geographical conditions. Historical analysis includes a study of the political structure of ancient India, a chronological analysis of Ram's travels and a study of political relations and alliances. In contemporary relevance, analysis in the context of current national unity, study of dimensions of national security and identification of elements of cultural unity have been done. In data collection, Valmiki Ramayana and archaeological evidence have been used as primary sources, contemporary research papers and historical documents as secondary sources, and direct observation of major sites as a field study. Formation and factual conclusions have been drawn by doing a coordinated analysis of information obtained from various sources. In this research, an interdisciplinary approach has been adopted considering the vastness of the subject, which has made possible a holistic analysis of the geography of ancient India and the role of King Ram in national unity.

7. Ramayana and Geography of Bharatvarsha:

To briefly trace the geography of Ramayana and its significance and identify them with present-day locations. King Ram fosters unity in India and establishes a nation from north to south India. Secures Bharatvarsha by establishing relations with the contemporary kingdoms. Defeats external invader Ravana and his allies and ensures national unity and security. King Ram travels from north to south during his exile.

Ayodhya: It was the capital of Kosala district. It was a well-planned and fortified city with all the elements of town planning. Arched entrances had large doors equipped with all kinds of slingshots and weapons. It had four entrances and houses were built in a linear pattern (Valmiki, 2023).

Nandigram: The place where Bharata stayed during Lord Ram's exile has been identified as Nandgaon, which is located about 12 to 14 km south of Faizabad.

Shringaverpur: Sringavera-pura has been identified by Gen. Sir A. Cunningham with the modern town Singror, or Singor, which is situated on the left bank of the Ganges, about twenty-two miles north-west of Prayagaraj (Pargiter, 1894), which was the kingdom of Nishadraj Guha. It was here that King Ram asked Kewat to cross the Ganga to cross the river (Valmiki, 2023).

Prayag: Today's Prayag Raj is the ancient Prayag. King Ram came here and Acharya Bhardwaj's ashram is located here.

Kaushambi: It is located on the banks of the Yamuna River about 56 km south-west of Prayagraj and was the capital of the Vatsa Empire.

Varanasi: It has been a lively city since the Vedic period and is mentioned as Kashi in Vedic literature. The capital of Kashi district is named so because it is located between the Varana River in the north-east and the Asi River in the south-west. In ancient times it was an important trade centre located on a trade route (Shukla, 2003).

Chitrakoot: Chitrakoot district is situated to the south of Prayag. This was the place where Bharata reached with his army to convince Ram after the death of King Dasharatha. Bharata took the footprints of Ram from here and kept them and ruled (Valmiki, 2023).

Madhura or Madhupuri: Similar to modern Mathura, it was the capital of Surasena Janapada which was the abode of Madhu. Madhu's son Lavana was killed by Shatrughna. This city was built by the gods and it is mentioned that foreign traders lived here. Greek sources refer to it as Methora and Madaura (city of gods).

Giribbraj: It was the capital of Magadha which was also known as Vasumati as it was founded by King Vasu. Ramayana mentions the Sumagadhi river flowing through the city. It has been identified with modern Rajgir.

Rajagriha: It was situated on the eastern bank of the Vitasta (Jhelum) river. It was the capital of Kekaya ruled by Bharata's maternal grandfather Aswapati. Scholars have identified it with present-day Jalalpur in Pakistan.

Takshashila: It is one of the two cities established by Bharata in Gandhara. It is located east of Indus and is identified as Taxila which is now in western Pakistan. Bharata's son Taksha was made the ruler of this place.

Pushkalavati: It was established near the confluence of the Swat and Kabul rivers and Bharata made his son Pushkala the king here. It is similar to Charsadda in present-day Pakistan.

Dandakaranya: After Chitrakoot, King Ram went to Dandakaranya. Dandakaranya was made up of some areas of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra. Dandakaranya includes most parts of the states of Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. The area of Dandakaranya was spread from this side of the Mahanadi of Odisha to Godavari. Bhadrachalam, a city in Andhra Pradesh, is a part of this Dandakaranya. Situated on the banks of the Godavari River, this city is famous for the Sita-Ramachandra Temple. This temple is on the Bhadrachalam mountain. It is said that Shri Ram spent a few days on this Bhadrachalam mountain during his exile. According to local belief, the battle between Ravana and Jatayu took place in the sky of Dandakaranya and some parts of Jatayu fell in Dandakaranya.

Mahishmati: It was the capital of the Haihaya ruler Kartyaveerya Arjuna and is identified with modern Maheshwar, located about 64 km south of Indore in present-day Madhya Pradesh.

Kishkindha: From Rishyamuka Ram and Sugriva travel along a road to Kishkindha; on the way they pass the Sapta-jana Munis at some hermitages, and, after journeying a long way, see Kishkindha city (Pargiter, 1894). The capital of Bali was surrounded by arched gateways, a fortification wall and an impenetrable moat. It is said to be located close to present-day Bellary and it is said that the Kishkindha district also includes the area around Bellary (Agnihotri, 2020).

Shabari's Ashram: Crossing the Tungabhadra and Kaveri rivers, Ram and Lakshmana went in search of Sita. After meeting Jatayu and Kabandha, he reached Rishyamuk Mountain. On the way, he also visited Shabari Ashram near the Pampa River, which is located in Kerala today. 'Pampa' is the old name of the Tungabhadra River. Hampi is situated on the banks of this river. Hampi is mentioned in the mythological text 'Ramayana' as the capital of the monkey kingdom Kishkindha. Kerala's famous 'Sabarimala Temple' shrine is situated on the banks of this river.

Rameswaram: Rameswaram beach is a calm beach and the shallow water here is ideal for swimming and sunbathing. Rameswaram is a famous Hindu pilgrimage centre. According to

the epic Ramayana, Lord Shri Ram worshipped Lord Shiva here before attacking Lanka. The Shivling of Rameswaram is the Shivling established by Shri Ram (Agnihotri, 2020).

The various kingdoms mentioned in the Adikavya include Sindhu, Sauvira, Saurashtra, Dakshinapatha, Vanga, Anga, Magadha, Kashi, Mithila, Kosala and Kekaya. Similarly, a vivid description of the country travelled by Sri Ram and Lakshmana while travelling with Sage Vishwamitra is found in the Ramayana. The geographical features of north-western India are described, including the journeys undertaken by the messengers of Sage Vasishta to bring Bharata and Shatrughna, as well as the journey from Kekaya to Ayodhya. The exploration of Lord Sri Ram's journey from Ayodhya to Chitrakoot, Dandakaranya to Pampa, Kishkindha and Rameswaram illuminates the geography of India. A detailed depiction of the rivers of India from the Ganges to Tamraparni as well as the north and south Indian kingdoms is found in the Kishkindha Kanda, when Sugriva sends search parties to locate Mother Sita. We have explored only a small part of the geographical places mentioned in the Adikavya.

8. Ramayana and National Integration:

In the context of the current time, the geography of the Ramayana period and the role of King Ram in national integration have special significance. In the most difficult of times, the ideals of Ram and his strategies are needed for national integration. Geographical places of the Ramayana period are still an important cultural heritage of India. The Ram Marg from Ayodhya to Rameswaram is important both for tourism and as a symbol of national unity. The present government's effort to develop the Ramayana circuit to preserve this heritage is commendable. Moreover, in the current scenario, Ram's inclusive policy and diplomatic strategies are relevant. Just like Ram united different communities by rising above caste, class, and regionalism, there is still a need to strengthen the principle of unity in diversity. His inclusive leadership establishes an ideal for social harmony.

King Ram's strategies are also valid today, concerning national security. The strengthening of internal unity, the development of external relations through diplomacy and military preparedness to meet external threats are particularly relevant today. Many of these principles are clearly important with regard to border-parallel security and relations with neighbouring countries. Reflecting on and preserving the natural resources and forest areas from the Ramayana helps further the cause of environmental consideration. Such descriptions as that of Dandakaranya remind us of the wealth of nature. Considerations of Ramayana geography, on Ram's principles, would provide a solid foundation for the contemporary Indian state. His principles in the field of national unity, social harmony and security are today still very much alive. There is a need to understand and implement these principles in the current perspective so that a strong and united India can be built.

9. Conclusion:

A comprehensive study into the geography of the Ramayana by way of research into King Ram and his role in Indian unity led to several important conclusions. The study shows that the Ramayana is no longer just a religious or a moral text, but a historical tunnelling document that gives a glimpse of the political, social and cultural backdrop and milieu of ancient India. The detailed description of places in Ramayana has been accurately matched with the present places; hence, the geographical description given in it is so realistic. Places like Ayodhya,

Nandigram, Prayag, Chitrakoot, Dandakaranya and Kishkindha still carry the marks of their old heritage within them. The geographical position of these places, the distances between them, and the natural features tally with those described in Ramayana, lending even more credibility to the historical truth of this epic.

King Ram's journey from north to south brought unprecedented cohesion among the Indian subcontinent. These relations with other states, regions, and communities formed the pillar for national integration. Especially his friendship with Nishadraj Guha, the alliance with Sugreeva, and taking shelter in Vibhishana may all be considered as symbolic of a united nation, going beyond caste, class, and regional confines. This feature is indeed something that would inspire inculcation for national unity even today. Ram's statesmanly acumen turned out to be of immense importance in terms of delimiting national security. A conglomeration of sorts includes all various states, districts, and individual communities coordinating the efforts in battling some mighty external incursion, namely Ravana, which is testimony to Ram's astounding standing both in diplomacy and military strategy. His policies still unfold numerous opportunities to consider in a national security idea.

The description of rivers, mountains and forest areas presented in the Ramayana attests to the enormity of the ancient Indian nature boundaries and geographical diversity, especially where the length and breadth of Dandakaranya would come to the fore. This range actually extends from hence the present-day Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra states and underlies the vastness and importance of forest areas in ancient India. A further study reveals that the values and principles laid down by Ram still uphold contemporary relevance. Unity in diversity, social inclusiveness, strategic diplomatic relations and consciousness towards national security continue to inspire modern India. The way that he has followed endures till today and links significant cultural and religious centres. This road is not only a symbol of geographical unity but also a manifestation of Indian culture's integrity. Temples, ashrams and places of pilgrimage built at varied points are live attestations of this great cultural heritage. This study, therefore, states that the geography of Ramayana and Ram's vision about nation-building is not only of historical significance but also has vital lessons to teach and guide current India. Ram's journey and great deeds still hold out symbols of Indian unity and integrity, which build an innate part of our national character even today. His strategic vision, diplomatic skills, and inclusive leadership provide exemplary models for modern India.

References:

1. Agnihotri, G. K. (2020). *Rāma Aitihāsikatā Evaṃ Vanagamana Mārga*. Radha Publication, New Delhi.
2. Arya, V. (2019). *The Chronology of India: From Manu to Mahabharata*. Aryabhata Publications, Hyderabad.
3. Bhattacharya, R. (2023). Ram Rajya and contemporary governance. *Indian Political Review*, 28, 112-130.
4. Mehrotra, S. (2016). *Ram Utkarsh Ka Itihas*. Lokbharti Prakashan, Allahabad.
5. Mishra, J. (1986). *Maryada Purushottam Bhagwan Ram: Jivan Aur Darshan*. Lokbharti Prakashan, Allahabad.
6. Poddar, V. (1980). *Lord Rama - Ramayana Culture of India*, Mahesh Poddar, Kolkata.
7. Ravi, J. N. (2023). *Geography of Ramayana: A Geographical Journey into the Rama Era*. Notion Press, India.

8. Shukla, R. K. (2003). *The Geography of the Ramayana*. Koshal Book Depot, New Delhi.
9. Singh, J. P. (2014). *India During Ramayana*, South Asian Publishing, India.
10. Valmiki. (2023). *Ramayana*. Gita Press, Gorakhpur.
11. Pargiter, F. E. (1894). Art. VIII.—The Geography of Ráma's Exile. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, 26, 231-264. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0035869X00143898>
12. Rajagopalan, S. (2006). Security Idea in the Valmiki Ramayana. In Rajagopalan, S. (Eds.) *Security and South Asia Ideas, Institutions and Initiatives*, Routledge, New Delhi, 24-53.