

**Value Education**  
**The Ramayana**

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# **The Ramayana**

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# The Ramayana

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The Ramayana is one of the most important stories in Indian culture and has influenced Indian culture and arts for thousands of years.

This story dates back to between 500-100BC.

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The *Ramayana* is an ancient Sanskrit epic which follows Prince Rama's quest to rescue his beloved wife Sita from the clutches of Ravana with the help of an army of monkeys. It is traditionally attributed to the authorship of the sage Valmiki and dated to around 500 BCE to 100 BCE.

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When Rama's father wanted to stand down from the throne and hand the reign over to his eldest son Rama, he was reminded of two promises he had made to his second wife. He had promised her that their son Bharata would succeed as king and that Rama was to be sent into exile into the forest for fourteen years.

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To help his father to make this difficult decision, Rama gave up the throne

and willingly left going into the forest with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshmana. Sadly, stricken with grief, Rama's father died.

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Rama, prince of Ayodhya, won the hand of **the beautiful princess Sita**, was exiled with her and his brother Laksmana for 14 years through the plotting of his stepmother. In the forest Sita was abducted by Ravana, and Rama gathered an army of monkeys and bears to search for her. The allies attacked Lanka, killed Ravana, and rescued Sita. In order to prove her chastity, Sita entered fire, but was vindicated by the gods and restored to her husband. After the couple's triumphant return to Ayodhya Rama's righteous rule (*Ram-raj*) inaugurated a golden age for all mankind.

# Characters of the *Ramayana*

**Rama** is the hero of the *Ramayana* epic, an incarnation of the God Vishnu. The eldest and favourite son of Dasaratha, King of Ayodhya, he is a virtuous prince and is much loved by the people. He is exiled from Ayodhya due to the plotting of his stepmother, Kaikeyi.





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**Sita** is Rama's wife and daughter of King Janaka of Mithila. Sita is the epitome of womanly purity and virtue.



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**Lakshmana (seen here) is Rama's younger brother.** Completely loyal to Rama, he chooses to go with Rama and Sita when they are exiled from Ayodhya.



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**Ravana** is the king of Lanka and has 10 heads and 20 arms. He received a boon from the God Brahma that he cannot be killed by gods, demons or by spirits, after performing a severe penance for 10,000 years. After receiving his reward from Brahma, Ravana began to lay waste to the earth and disturbed the deeds of the good Hindu sages. Vishnu incarnates as the human Rama to defeat him, assisted by an army of monkeys and bears, thus circumventing the boon given by Brahma.

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**Dasaratha** is the King of Ayodhya, Rama's father.

**Kausalya** is Rama's mother, Dasaratha's chief wife.

**Kaikeyi** is Dasaratha's wife and Rama's stepmother. She demands that Rama be banished to the forest and that her son Bharata be awarded the kingdom instead.

**Bharata** is the second son of Dasaratha. When he learns that his mother Kaikeyi had forced Rama into exile, causing Dasaratha to die broken hearted, he storms out of the palace and goes in search of Rama. When Rama refuses to return from his exile to assume the throne, Bharata obtains Rama's sandals and places them on the throne as a gesture that Rama is the true king.

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**Sumitra** is Dasharatha's wife and mother of the twins Lakshmana and Satrughna.

**Hanuman** is the wise and resourceful monkey who helps Rama in his quest to defeat Ravana and rescue Sita.

**Sugriva** is the ruler of the monkey kingdom. His throne was taken by his brother Bali, but Rama helps him to defeat the usurper in return for his assistance in finding Sita.

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## The importance of the *Ramayana* in Indian culture

The epic's poetic stature and marvellous story means that the story of Rama has been constantly retold by some of India's greatest writers both in Sanskrit and regional languages. It is one of the staples of various dramatic traditions, in court drama, dance-dramas, and in shadow-puppet theatres. In northern India, the annual *Ram-lila* or 'Rama-play' is performed at the autumn festival of Dassehra to celebrate with Rama and Sita the eventual triumph of light over darkness.

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A hugely popular television series, 'Ramayan', was aired in India 1987-1988, drawing over 100 million viewers to become 'the world's most viewed mythological serial'. Dubbed 'Ramayan' fever by *India Today* magazine, it was reported that India came to a virtual standstill as so many people who could gain access to a television stopped whatever they were doing to watch the small screen adventures of Rama. From January 2008, a new big-budget primetime series of the *Ramayana* has been appearing on television screens across India.

# Messages of the Ramayana and Diwali

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Good always conquers Evil

There should be Love and Loyalty in families.

Celebrations of Light at New Year.



# Influence outside of India

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The Ramayana has spread to many Asian countries outside of India, including Burma, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines, and China. The original Valmiki version has been adapted or translated into various regional languages, which have often been marked more or less by plot twists and thematic adaptations.

# Thank You

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