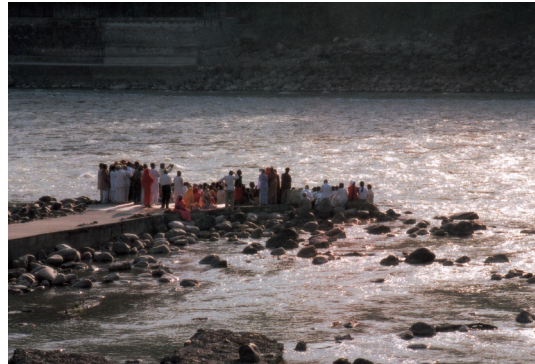


not necessarily mean good and bad; they are two conflicting life philosophies. It is the struggle between the body and that which is beyond the body. What enhances the value of the epic is that there is no character who is totally good or totally evil. With regard to Rāma, it is said that his character shows us how a man by his actions can reach divinity. Rāma is depicted by Vālmīki as not just a man, but as ‘narottama’ (a superman), far above the run of common men, unique in the achievement of karma and the fulfilment of dharma.

Radhakrishnan (1947: 105) points out that under the concept of dharma, the Hindu considers the forms and activities that shape and sustain life. Thus dharma is any activity of man which helps the self to realise its identity and spread harmony in society. According to Radhakrishnan (ibid.: 107) dharma is the whole duty of man in relation to the four-fold purpose of life (dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa) by the members of caturvarṇa (four groups) in caturāśrama (four stages of life). Dharma as a concrete principle means all the duties of a man as a biological, social, political, economical and spiritual being performed reasonably to the best of his ability for personal as well as social betterment. ‘*Dharmānugo gacchati jīva ekaḥ*’ (Dharma is the guardian angel, the only friend who follows man even after death, even as the body perishes and everything is left behind).

Dharma in *Rāmāyaṇa*

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is concerned primarily with human experience. It is not guru sammīta, i.e. it is not scripture. It is both *sakhi sammīta* and *kāntā sammīta* i.e. it has an ethical purpose as an epic, but the lesson is not stated—rather, it is to be inferred. It is because of this quality that the *Rāmāyaṇa* has retained the enduring quality of great literature. The character of Rāma makes it amply clear that dharma is a moral code and at the same time it indicates one’s duty or action. One can fulfil one’s duty by pursuing the puruṣārtha, i.e. kāma (worldly desire) and artha (wealth), whereas knowledge is the means by which mokṣa (emancipation) is attained. Now, both Kāma and artha, or, fulfilment of one’s desires and acquisition of wealth, are to be hedged in by dharma, as otherwise these may lead to the destruction of man. Dharma, kāma and artha are achievements of life but if pursued independently of each other, especially dharma, they become mortal evil. They lose their character of values and turn into worldly lusts. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, one can see the lust for the throne in the case of Kaikeyī and lust for carnal desires in the case of Rāvaṇa and Śūrpaṇakhā, which end in their destruction.



[Worshipping Ganga at Muni ki Reti, Rishikesh for mokṣa]