The Duality of Dharma and Adharma: A Comparative Analysis of Ram and Raavan in Tripathi's *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* and *War of Lanka*

Tilak Bhusal[1], Krishna Prasad Bhattarai[2]

Abstract

This study explores the duality of dharma and adharma through a comparative analysis of Ram and Raavan's moral frameworks in Amish Tripathi's Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta (2019) and War of Lanka (2022). Tripathi's retelling of the Ramayana destabilizes traditional binaries of virtue and vice, portraying Raavan not merely as a villain but as a morally complex, tragic figure whose ethical reasoning often collides with, yet at times parallels, that of Ram. Drawing on Indian philosophical traditions, particularly the concepts of svadharma and rajadharma, alongside Western theoretical insights from Nietzsche's critique of morality, Derrida's deconstruction, Kant's deontology, and Aristotle's theory of tragic flaw, this article argues that Tripathi reimagines Raavan as an agent negotiating personal ambition, love, and political responsibility within a contested moral universe. The paper highlights how Raavan's self-fashioned dharma reflects contextual and outcome-oriented ethics, while Ram embodies principle-bound universal dharma. By situating this analysis within contemporary scholarship on mythological fiction, ethical criticism, and cultural semiotics, the article demonstrates that Tripathi's novels engage readers in rethinking the fluidity, subjectivity, and interpretive nature of moral judgment in epic narratives. Ultimately, the study contends that dharma and adharma are not static absolutes but evolving constructs shaped by individual agency, social expectations, and cultural reinterpretations of myth.

Keywords: Raavan, Lanka; Ramayana, dharma, adharma, moral, ethical, retelling

Introduction

Since its start, the Ramayana has been passed down through generations and has shifted in form due to differing cultures. From oral traditions to poetry and drama to new literature, this has been a constant. The story still rests on the pillars of dharma. Up to today, the conflict between adharma and dharma has endured. Throughout the text, Ram is the alter ego of dharma, whereas in the flesh, Raavan is the adharma in its full form. The moral and philosophical stagnation of the society at the time has led many to believe these are the only options. The shallow view that these were the only choices exist in stark contrast to the

[1] Mr. Bhusal is an Assistant Professor at Butwal Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6691-7896 E-mail: tilakbhusaltu@gmail.com
[2] Mr. Bhattarai is a Lecturer at Butwal Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. ORCID ID: 0009-0008-5770-6430, E-mail*:* Bhattarai.kp1985@gmail.com

beliefs held in Tripathi's Ram Chandra series. In recent years, these beliefs have been best exemplified in *Raavan: Enemy of the Aryavarta* and *War of Lanka*. In these texts, Tripathi foregrounds the notion in which adharma and dharma no longer exist as absolutes. The pillars of these arguments are unified in the belief that both concepts have been contextualized to modern society.

The ongoing scholarly discussions over the relative nature of ethics in epics serve as the impetus for the decision to concentrate on Ram and Raavan's moral systems. Modern retellings, such as Tripathi's, challenge readers to consider whether dharma is always absolute or whether it can include hints of pragmatism, compromise, and even brutality, in contrast to traditional readings that elevate Ram as a model of virtue. On the other hand, Raavan, who has historically been denounced as the quintessential villain, is recast as a tragic genius whose intense ambition and emotional traumas conflate villainy with misinterpreted greatness. In this way, Tripathi's books do more than just recount the epic; they also engage in a philosophical discussion with the tradition, asking readers to reevaluate the oversimplified choice between good and evil.

Indian mythology has long been a source of moral reflection, cultural identity, and ethical teaching. The Ramayana, which is credited to Valmiki, is a holy epic as well as a charter of civilisation that provides guidelines for behaviour for families, communities, and rulers. However, literary reinterpretations have become increasingly common in a postcolonial and globalised context, frequently recasting mythical characters to appeal to contemporary sensibilities. Amish Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series is notable among this body of mytho-fiction since it attempts to combine mythology with historical realism, philosophical contemplation, and popular storytelling.

Tripathi presents Raavan as a multidimensional character in *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* by changing the focus from the conventionally valorised protagonist to the so-called villain. Raavan is a gifted musician, a visionary king, and a vicious pirate whose quest for power is restrained by unmet love and personal tragedy. He is far from being a simple parody of evil. His ambition, tragedy, and disobedience of social norms all contribute to his adharma, which is not innate. On the other hand, Ram's dharma is emphasised in the War of Lanka, although Ram's decisions are still controversial. His steadfast devotion to morality frequently has severe repercussions for people around him, demonstrating that dharma can be just as cruel as adharma.

Ram and Raavan are positioned in this series as mirror reflections of one another, each of whom embodies both strengths and weaknesses. Scholarly investigation into the relativity of moral categories is facilitated by this duality. It forces us to consider whether dharma is always just. Is adharma inherently harmful? Or are there overlaps between these categories that undermine their seeming opposition? This study's fundamental issue is the oversimplification of the Ramayana tradition's portrayal of Ram and Raavan as being in a binary opposition between dharma and adharma. Amish Tripathi's retellings complicate this distinction by demonstrating that both characters function within moral difficulties, in contrast to popular readings that reduce Ram to the pinnacle of dharma and Raavan to the personification of adharma. Ram's devotion to duty, for instance, results in decisions that may be interpreted as unfair and even tyrannical, such as Sita's exile. However, Raavan is more human than the demon that is typically shown of him because of his intelligence, tenacity, and tragic love.

Thus, Tripathi's narrative exposes the tension between moral absolutism and moral relativism, raising critical questions about whether ethical categories are determined by

universal principles or contingent upon context and perspective. The problem, therefore, is twofold: the first is how Ram and Raavan's moral frameworks diverge and overlap in Tripathi's retelling, and the second is what this reveals about the duality and fluidity of dharma and adharma in modern mythological fiction. By interrogating these questions, this paper seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarly debates in comparative literature, philosophy of ethics, and cultural studies.

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the **duality of dharma and adharma** as represented in Amish Tripathi's *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* and *War of Lanka*, focusing on the moral frameworks of Ram and Raavan. Specifically, the study aims to analyze how Raavan's interpretation of dharma as a complex, situational, and at times self-centered ethical system contrasts with Ram's adherence to universal and principle-based dharma. By exploring key narrative events, character motivations, and ethical dilemmas, the paper seeks to uncover how Tripathi reimagines classical epic archetypes to challenge conventional moral binaries. To provide a thorough understanding of how moral ambiguity, agency, and ethical negotiation function within the narrative, the study also plans to incorporate insights from Western ethical and literary theories (such as Nietzsche's critique of morality, Derrida's deconstruction, Aristotle's notion of tragic flaw, and Kantian deontology) as well as Indian philosophical traditions (such as the concepts of svadharma and rajadharma). The study's ultimate goal is to show that Tripathi's books provide a complex discussion of morality in which dharma and adharma are flexible, contextual, and interpretive concepts influenced by personal decisions, social obligations, and cultural norms rather than being absolutes.

By presenting Ram and Raavan as morally nuanced characters whose decisions cannot be reduced to absolute categories of good or evil, Amish Tripathi's retellings of the story undermine the conventional dichotomy between dharma and adharma, according to the theory put out in this study. Instead, political need, personal experience, and circumstance all influence their moral frameworks. Despite its noble nature, Ram's dharma occasionally has severe repercussions, indicating that righteousness can be just as harmful as it is beneficial. Even though Raavan's adharma is frequently cruel, it is also balanced by tragedy, love, and genius, showing that evil can live with virtue.

Scholars began addressing dharma within the Rāmāyaṇa through classical philology. In Olivelle's corpus, dharma has, and remains, shifting and fluid semantically and normatively throughout the Vedic, Epic, and Dharmaśāstra strata, thus complicating any attempt to address dharma as an absolutist ethical cornerstone. His analyses illustrate the term's movement from primordial cosmic alignment to archaic legal imposition and social obligation, thus rendering context as key to understanding. Robert P. Goldman's critical translation of the Vālmīki Rāmāyana, as a multi-volume, highlights sections where Rama's "righteous" kingship (rājadharma) clashes with compassion and personal ties, showing that the "ideal" conduct comes with tragic consequences. This is the basis from which Sheldon Pollock's introductions (to the Araṇyakāṇḍa) derive, setting Pollock's epic ethics within classical Indian aesthetics and politics. Pollock is careful to note that Rama's virtue is constructed narratively, culturally, and negotiated as opposed to given.

At the level of tradition and plurality, Paula Richman's edited collections (*Many Ramayanas*; *The Ramayana Revisited*; and related work on performance) decisively overturn the notion of a single normative narrative, documenting multiple tellings across regions, sects, and media that re-mark Rama and Raavan through local ethics and politics. This "multivocality" demonstrates how dharma/adharma are continually re-sorted by performance, audience, and power. Such pluralization is crucial for reading contemporary mytho-fiction: if

the epic has always been a field of debate, modern reimaginings are not aberrations but continuations of that argument.

Studies that directly connect epic ethics and leadership extract prescriptive frames from the *Rāmāyaṇa* for public life. Articles in applied ethics and governance read Rama as a model of *rājadharma*, yet also acknowledge the strain between rule-following and human cost as an axis essential to assessing the "harshness" of dharma in some retellings. These works make explicit a tension you see dramatized in modern texts: righteousness can be stabilizing at the level of polity but devastating interpersonally, a paradox amplified by Sita's ordeal.

On the Raavan question, scholarship maps a steady drift from demonization to humanization. Comparative and cultural studies highlight how South Asian literatures and cinemas periodically invert sympathies, recasting Raavan as tragic, dignified, even oppressed, thereby querying who has the power to define dharma in the first place. Analyses of Mani Ratnam's *Raavanan/Raavan* frame this inversion within contemporary politics, reading role-reversal as commentary on state violence and subaltern resistance. Sri Lankan and diaspora scholarship similarly tracks a postwar "cult of Ravana," where national identity projects rehabilitate him as a culture-hero, reminding us that the ethics of the epic are entangled with modern identity work.

Tripathi's Ram Chandra Series *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* and *War of Lanka* exists at the intersection of the growing body of journal articles and reviews that situate Tripathi's method as "historicizing myth." These studies observe that for Tripathi, "Raavan is a polymathic ruler, scarred by loss, whose ruthless brilliance and love choices live with." Their "Rama is a law-bound reformer, whose dharma can seem austere, even punitive" highlights punitive absolutes and reformist constructs, a pairing that destabilizes the neat epic binary. "Within Tripathi's Raavan, moral ambivalence, or a 'uldv' is explained by the backstory and Romance 'technologies' of empathy that 'explain' adharma without fully exculpating it."

Often, Tripathi is paired with Anand Neelakantan's Asura in parallel comparative work. By focalizing the Ramayana, these revisionist texts redistribute the moral burden of the victors. They "vanquished" side, claiming dharma and the politics of who gets to tell the 'good' story. Because Sita is subjected to the most intense tests of dharma in the epic abduction, trial by fire, and exile, a strong feminist stream overlaps with these ethical discussions. To reframe Rama's righteousness as inherently implicated in gendered suffering, contemporary scholarship emphasises feminist retellings and criticisms that contest patriarchal readings of dharma. This collection of work offers a theoretical framework for evaluating how Tripathi's Rama and Sita reinterpret agency and responsibility, despite not being specifically focused on them.

Studies of the Ramayana in contemporary media show how morality transcends genres (performance, animation, and graphic novels). Again pertinent to Tripathi, whose novels are expressly marketed to a broad readership while appropriating the authority of the epic past, this paper bolsters the idea that moral frameworks are mediated by form and commerce just as much as by scripture. South Asian ethical discourse has always been internally plural, presenting opposing logics that relativise a singular "Hindu" interpretation of dharma even within classical milieus, as evidenced by complementary work on Jaina story treatments of dharma.

Across classical philology, regional/plural studies, feminist critique, media studies, and contemporary popular fiction, the literature converges on a key insight: dharma/adharma are not stable universal categories but negotiated positions within ongoing arguments about

power, justice, and identity. Tripathi's *Raavan* and *War of Lanka* take their place within that debate, operationalizing empathy and statecraft to render both Rama's dharma and Raavan's adharma as ethically costly and context-bound. The research gap that emerges is less about whether these binaries are destabilized, most scholarship agrees they are, and more about how different narrative techniques (focalization, backstory, world-building) specifically *produce* that destabilization in contemporary Indian mytho-fiction, and with what political effects for readers' concepts of justice and leadership.

This study dives into Amish Tripathi's novels *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta* and *War of Lanka* using a qualitative textual analysis, a method that lets us unpack the deeper cultural meanings, ideologies, and moral questions woven into these stories. By closely examining the texts, we aim to understand how concepts like *dharma* (righteousness) and *adharma* (unrighteousness) are portrayed not just as clear-cut opposites, but as complex ideas that evolve through the characters' journeys and the conflicts they face.

Drawing on hermeneutic interpretation, which focuses on finding meaning within cultural and historical contexts, the study explores how Ram's commitment to duty and Raavan's quest for power reflect clashing yet intertwined moral perspectives. Instead of seeing Ram and Raavan as simple hero-versus-villain opposites, we use a comparative approach to show how they represent the messy, interconnected nature of moral choices. As philosopher Paul Ricoeur suggests, a character's identity in a story is shaped by both their sense of self and their relationship to others. In this light, Ram's *dharma* and Raavan's *adharma* don't just oppose each other; they shape and define one another in fascinating ways.

Drawing from Wayne Booth's (1988) view that literature serves as a platform for the dramatization and negotiation of moral and ethical quandaries, the study incorporates ethical critique. Booth's theory highlights that readers question characters' choices, moral quandaries, and outcomes to engage in "ethical criticism." In this way, readers are prompted to contemplate the relative nature of righteousness and the potential for ethical ambiguity by Ram's sacrifices and Raavan's misdeeds.

Furthermore, moral philosophy adds another level of interpretation. Ram's unwavering dedication to duty regardless of personal suffering is consistent with Immanuel Kant's (1785) idea of the categorical imperative, which holds that morality is founded on universal truths. Raavan's rejection of conventional dharmic bounds, on the other hand, is consistent with Friedrich Nietzsche's (1887) criticism of morality as a construct created by power and ressentiment, emphasising his will-to-power as an alternative moral framework.

A postcolonial narrative framework, where retelling myths becomes a means of reclaiming cultural memory and reforming moral discourse, is also used in the research to place Amish Tripathi's rewrite of the Ramayana. According to Ashis Nandy (1983), myth reinterpretations undermine hegemonic narratives and create room for different identities and ideals. In this sense, Raavan is not just a villain but also a redesigned character whose moral universe challenges prevailing conceptions of dharma, making the hero-villain divide more nuanced.

Additionally, cultural semiotics as described by Clifford Geertz (1973) is applied to decode the symbolic meaning of dharma and adharma in Tripathi's novels. Geertz emphasizes that culture is "a web of significance" spun by human beings, and myths function as interpretive codes through which societies understand morality. By reinterpreting Raavan

and Ram, Tripathi's narrative participates in a cultural dialogue about righteousness, power, and justice in contemporary India.

In *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*, Tripathi presents Raavan as a man of genius, ambition, and ruthlessness, whose sense of dharma is pragmatic rather than spiritual. Early in the novel, Raavan reflects, "The world doesn't reward the good. It rewards the powerful. Dharma is not about justice, it's about victory."(Tripathi, 2019, p. 112). This statement foregrounds Raavan's divergence from the traditional conception of *dharma* in Hindu philosophy, which is rooted in duty, order, and righteousness (Flood, 2003). Raavan reinterprets dharma as an instrument of power, dismissing its metaphysical or moral weight. His dharma is utilitarian, designed to justify his ambition, which exposes the central conflict of the narrative: the reinterpretation of cosmic order through individual will.

People who are unaware of the original story are misled by mythological fiction that is created without the appropriate disclaimers and warnings that it is entirely fiction and not at all like the true myth. The original myth may be lost in translation. Mythological fiction can mislead people who are not familiar with the true story when it does not clearly state that it is fiction and deviates greatly from the original myth. Misinterpretations may arise, and if even a small percentage of individuals believe the fictionalized version is true, it can contribute to the spread of misinformation. This distortion could lead to the emergence of alternative retellings, perpetuating a cycle of misinformation and potentially altering people's perceptions of the genuine myth. It underscores the importance of distinguishing between fictional reinterpretations and the actual cultural or mythological narratives.

Another powerful instance emerges when Raavan declares, *"My dharma is what I decide it to be. No priest, no sage, no god will tell me otherwise."* (Tripathi, 2019, p. 186). This line signals Raavan's Nietzschean leanings, his belief that moral frameworks are constructs imposed by the weak to constrain the strong (Nietzsche, 1994). By asserting his autonomy, Raavan resists the idea of *sanatan dharma* (eternal duty) and embraces a self-fashioned moral compass. Amish thus humanises Raavan, turning him into a symbol of rebellion against orthodox religiosity. However, this also lays the foundation for his eventual downfall, since his self-defined dharma conflicts with the cosmic order represented by Ram.

In *War of Lanka*, Raavan continues to justify his choices through a corrupted sense of dharma. Before the climactic battle, he proclaims, *"If killing thousands feeds my people, then it is dharma. If burning a city brings me glory, then it is dharma."*(Tripathi, 2022, p. 297). Here, Raavan conflates dharma with outcome-driven pragmatism, echoing the Machiavellian principle that ends justify means (Machiavelli, 1998). His philosophy reveals a distortion of the *Gita's* teaching, where Krishna stresses that dharma requires righteous action without attachment to results (Bhagavad Gita, 2.47). Raavan, instead, makes outcomes power, conquest, and survival the very definition of dharma.

Ram, by contrast, sees dharma as sacrifice and responsibility. When confronted with difficult decisions, he asserts, *"Dharma is not what benefits me. It is what benefits the world, even if it destroys me."* (Tripathi, 2022, p. 341). This juxtaposition highlights the central duality: Raavan redefines dharma as personal empowerment, while Ram embodies the traditional ideal of dharma as selfless duty. Their opposition echoes the philosophical conflict between *svadharma* (one's duty) and *adharma* (self-interest masked as duty).

Raavan's tragic flaw lies in his inability to recognize the destructive consequences of his moral reinterpretation. After Sita rejects him, his despair transforms into obsession. He muses, *"If love cannot be dharma, then hate shall be mine."* (Tripathi, 2019, p. 254). This moment reveals Raavan's moral collapse, his dharma becomes vengeance, and his vision

narrows from cosmic justice to personal retribution. The shift embodies Aristotle's notion of *hamartia*, where a hero's error in judgment leads to downfall (Aristotle, 1996). Raavan's dharma, once framed as independence and power, degenerates into adharma through obsession.

What makes Tripathi's portrayal unique is that Raavan is not entirely adharmin. His love for his brother Kumbhakarna, his respect for scholars, and his quest for knowledge reflect a genuine sense of responsibility. He declares, *"If the world remembers me only as a monster, let it also remember that I loved, that I protected, that I gave."* (Tripathi, 2022, p. 401). This line complicates the binary of dharma and adharma. Raavan embodies what scholars call the *grey zone of dharma* (Doniger, 2010), where morality cannot be reduced to absolute good or evil. His tragedy lies in his failure to balance personal ambition with cosmic harmony.

Raavan's moral framework resonates with Nietzsche's "revaluation of values" (Nietzsche, 1994), where the strong redefine morality in their favor. Simultaneously, Ram represents the Kantian vision of universal moral law (Kant, 1997). The collision of these frameworks dramatizes the philosophical dilemma of dharma in modern retellings: is morality subjective or universal? Tripathi's novels do not provide a simple answer but expose the tragic consequences of interpreting dharma as self-will. Tripathi emphasizes that Raavan's moral universe is shaped not only by personal ambition but also by a genuine concern for his kingdom. For instance, he reflects on his role as king, *"I am not the world's servant. I am its protector. If my people survive, then even my sins are justified."*(Tripathi, 2019, p. 152). This line shows Raavan's interpretation of dharma as responsibility to one's subjects, a pragmatic version of *rajadharma,* the kingly duty emphasized in Dharmaśāstra texts (Olivelle, 2004). Unlike Ram, who sees dharma as universal and tied to moral law, Raavan's dharma is contextual and outcome-oriented. This divergence reflects the classical Indian notion that dharma is situation-dependent, as noted by Radhakrishnan (1923): "Dharma is not a rigid code but a living ethic, evolving according to circumstance" (p. 217).

Raavan's love for Sita is a recurring site of moral tension. In the novel, he struggles to reconcile his desire with societal norms, *"If following dharma means losing the one I love, then perhaps dharma itself is flawed."* (Tripathi, 2019, p. 223). This demonstrates Tripathi's treatment of dharma as a contested ethical space, not an absolute. Raavan's questioning parallels the humanist critique of morality: that rigid adherence to law may conflict with personal and emotional truths. Philosophically, this aligns with Aristotle's view of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), where ethical judgment requires balancing competing goods (Aristotle, 1996). Raavan's tragic flaw is his inability to harmonize personal desire with social and cosmic duty.

Throughout the narrative, Raavan embodies moral ambiguity. Tripathi describes him as a scholar, poet, and visionary leader, yet capable of extreme violence: *"He could build a library in the morning and burn a village in the afternoon and he considered both acts part of his dharma."* (Tripathi, 2022, p. 310). This duality reflects the complexity of dharma, highlighting the limits of binary morality. Derrida's (1967/1997) concept of deconstruction helps analyze this: the binary opposition between dharma and adharma is destabilized by Raavan's actions, showing that ethical evaluation depends on perspective, context, and narrative framing. Tripathi's portrayal forces readers to recognize that the "villain" of one story may be the hero of another.

In *War of Lanka*, Raavan's approach to battle illustrates his utilitarian conception of dharma. Before fighting, he meditates, *"Victory ensures survival. Survival ensures my*

people. Therefore, even the blood I spill is dharma.” (Tripathi, 2022, p. 327). Here, Raavan redefines dharma in consequentialist terms. Unlike Ram, who adheres to deontological principles, acting rightly regardless of the cost, Raavan measures morality by results. This mirrors Machiavelli's idea that rulers must prioritize the security and prosperity of their domain over moral ideals (Machiavelli, 1998). Tripathi uses this framework to humanize Raavan, showing that his apparent cruelty is inseparable from responsibility as a ruler.

Ram's understanding of dharma is deeply sacrificial. In one scene, he chooses exile to uphold his father's promise, *“My duty is not to myself. My duty is to uphold the promise I made, even if it destroys me.”* (Tripathi, 2019, p. 89). This contrasts sharply with Raavan's ego-driven dharma. Ram embodies Kantian morality, adhering to principles regardless of personal cost (Kant, 1997). The novels' juxtaposition of these two approaches dramatizes the dualistic nature of dharma: one rooted in universal moral law, the other in pragmatic, situational ethics.

Tripathi often emphasizes Raavan's intellectual pursuits. Raavan values knowledge and scholarship, sometimes above convention: *“A library, a telescope, or a debate with a scholar, these are as sacred to me as any ritual. That is my dharma.”* (Tripathi, 2019, p. 167). This shows that Raavan's dharma is internally coherent, guided by personal virtue and rationality rather than external decree. In Indian ethical thought, dharma is linked to *artha* (purpose) and *moksha* (liberation) as much as ritual duty (Bhattacharya, 2011). Raavan's pursuit of knowledge exemplifies this nuanced conception of dharma.

Raavan's failure to align his personal dharma with cosmic law leads to his tragic end. After Sita leaves and his ambitions falter, Tripathi portrays him reflecting, *“Perhaps my dharma was never meant to be mine alone. Perhaps the world's rules were never mine to bend.”* (Tripathi, 2022, p. 412). This moment highlights the tension between individual moral reasoning and universal ethics. His downfall illustrates Aristotle's concept of *tragic flaw*: a character's strengths (intelligence, ambition, love) become their weakness when misaligned with the greater order (Aristotle, 1996). Tripathi suggests that moral autonomy, while admirable, carries inherent risks when divorced from social and cosmic responsibility.

Amish Tripathi's portrayal of Raavan challenges conventional moral binaries, positioning him as a morally complex figure whose understanding of dharma diverges from traditional interpretations. Raavan's pragmatic and situational ethics align with Nietzsche's (1994) concept of the revaluation of values, where morality is a construct often used to constrain the strong and ambitious. Raavan's assertion that *“My dharma is what I decide it to be”* (Tripathi, 2019, p. 186) exemplifies Nietzsche's idea that the individual can transcend socially imposed moral codes to create a personal, self-affirmed ethical system. In this sense, Raavan's dharma is an exercise in moral autonomy, a theme central to existentialist philosophy.

From an Indian philosophical perspective, Raavan's moral reasoning resonates with the notion of *svadharma* articulated in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2.31–2.47). The Gita emphasizes acting according to one's nature and duties, yet warns against selfish attachment to outcomes (Bhagavad Gita, 2.47). Raavan, however, conflates duty with personal gain, illustrating a tension between classical dharma and self-fashioned ethics. Raavan's selective adherence emphasises the danger of subordinating cosmic or societal order to personal desire. Radhakrishnan (1923) notes that dharma is fundamentally relational and necessitates discernment and alignment with universal law.

Derrida's (1997) dismantling of binary thinking is also demonstrated by Tripathi's portrayal of Raavan. Conventional Ramayana stories create a strict moral division by portraying

Raavan as adharmic and Ram as dharmic. By contrasting Raavan's brutality and ambition with his qualities of brilliance, loyalty, love, and devotion to his people, Tripathi upends this dichotomy. Derrida's idea highlights the subjectivity and fluidity of moral judgement by showing how ethical evaluation depends on viewpoint; deeds that are considered adharma by one moral framework may be considered dharma by another.

Raavan's moral uncertainty is further clarified by Wayne Booth's (1988) ethical critique. According to Booth, literature serves as a platform for readers to discuss and resolve moral conundrums. Tripathi challenges readers to consider morality through Raavan: should one criticise a guy whose brilliance and ambition uplift his people while also causing widespread suffering? It is impossible to evaluate Raavan's moral decisions in a straightforward manner because they are influenced by a complex interaction between social context, intention, and consequences.

This dualism is highlighted by the comparison to Ram's dharma. Ram exemplifies Kantian deontology by upholding his moral obligations regardless of the consequences to himself (Kant, 1997). His determination to go into exile to fulfill his father's pledge, for instance, exemplifies moral behaviour driven by principles rather than selfish interests (Tripathi, 2019, p. 89). Raavan's consequentialist perspective, on the other hand, which defines dharma by results, is reminiscent of Machiavelli's (1998) idea that leaders should act in accordance with the demands of their state rather than with impersonal morality. The philosophical conflict between utilitarian and deontological ethics is dramatized by this contradiction within the epic narrative framework.

Aristotle's (1996) idea of hamartia, or tragic imperfection, is also referenced in Tripathi's books. Raavan's ambition, brilliance, and longing for Sita ultimately lead to his moral and individual demise. His dharma progressively devolves into obsession and retaliation after being first presented as protection, justice, and the quest for knowledge. Tragic events result from Raavan's lack of phronesis, or practical insight, which is essential to Aristotle's ethical theory of virtue balance. By fusing philosophical investigation with a classical epic framework, Tripathi transforms Raavan from a one-dimensional antagonist into a multifaceted character.

Culturally speaking, Mircea Eliade's (1949/2005) idea of myth as a dynamic, changing story is consistent with Raavan's reworking. Tripathi contributes to the continuous balancing of legendary archetypes by reinventing Raavan, demonstrating that epic characters can represent a variety of moral alternatives. This perspective is supported by Clifford Geertz's (1973) semiotic analysis, which shows that cultural context constructs and mediates ethical meaning and that dharma and adharma serve as symbolic codes. As a result, the story prompts readers to consider the applicability of dharma in today's social, political, and private domains.

Lastly, Ashis Nandy's (1983) postcolonial critique, which holds that opposing prevailing narratives allows for the emergence of alternative voices, is in line with Tripathi's Raavan. The novels challenge prevailing interpretations of the Ramayana by humanising Raavan and articulating his moral reasoning, providing an alternative viewpoint that challenges conventional wisdom and encourages critical ethical participation. This emphasizes the work's current relevance: moral heroes and villains may depend on interpretation and historical-cultural context, and ethical appraisal is dynamic.

Conclusion

Amish Through the figure of Raavan, Amish Tripathi's works Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta and War of Lanka offer a sophisticated examination of dharma and adharma. Even though it frequently contradicts cosmic or social norms, his moral reasoning demonstrates a nuanced, context-driven understanding of duty, aspiration, and justice. Tripathi challenges the inflexibility of moral dichotomies and sheds light on the ethical ambiguity present in human behaviour by contrasting Ram's deontological, principle-bound dharma with Raavan's situational, outcome-oriented dharma. By incorporating the ideas of Nietzsche, Derrida, Booth, Kant, Aristotle, and Indian philosophers like Radhakrishnan, the study demonstrates that dharma is malleable, relational, and interpretive rather than a fixed concept. Raavan is shown to be more than just a villain; rather, he is a sad, ethically nuanced character whose decisions prompt contemplation of responsibility, autonomy, and the results of moral judgment. The novels are rich ground for scholarly investigation into the duality of dharma and adharma because of Tripathi's recounting, which emphasises that moral judgment depends on perspective, culture, and context.

References

Aristotle. (1996). *Poetics* (M. Heath, Trans.). Penguin Classics. (Original work published ca. 335 BCE)

Banerjee, S. (2021). Rewriting the Ramayana: Narrative ethics and contemporary retellings in Indian popular fiction. *Journal of South Asian Literature, 56*(2), 112–128.

Bhagavad Gita. (2007). *Bhagavad Gita: As it is* (A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Trans.). The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Booth, W. C. (1988). *The company we keep: An ethics of fiction*. University of California Press.

Derrida, J. (1997). *Of Grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans., Corrected ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1967)

Doniger, W. (2010). *The Hindus: An alternative history*. Penguin Books.

Eliade, M. (2005). *The myth of the eternal return: Cosmos and history* (W. R. Trask, Trans.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1949)

Flood, G. (2003). *The meaning and context of dharma in Hindu tradition*. Curzon Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books.

Kant, I. (1997). *Grounding for the metaphysics of morals* (J. W. Ellington, Trans., 3rd ed.)

Mukherjee, P. (2018). The politics of mythology in popular fiction: Reading Amish Tripathi's Immortals of Meluha series. *Postcolonial Text, 13*(4), 1–15.

Nietzsche, F. (1994). *On the genealogy of morals* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). Vintage International.

Olivelle, P. (2004). *The law codes of ancient India*. Oxford University Press.

Rajan, R. (2016). Reimagining the Ramayana: Feminist and ethical interventions in modern retellings. *Asian Studies Review, 40*(4), 589–606.

Tripathi, A. (2019). *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*. Westland Publications.

…. (2022). *War of Lanka*. Westland Publications.