

EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND ETHICAL CONDUCT IN THE RAMAYANA

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ABSTRACT

The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki has been read for more than two millennia as a manual of dharma, yet scholarship has never systematically aggregated what the epic says about the governance of emotion. This paper presents a qualitative meta-analysis of thirty landmark studies published between 1923 and 2015, spanning Sanskrit philology, dharmasāstric ethics, Indian aesthetics, and modern emotion science. Works were identified through a PRISMA-inspired protocol, screened against explicit criteria, and coded on two axes: emotional dysregulation through the six adversaries of the mind (ṣaḍ-ripu) desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy and the cultivation of regulatory dispositions such as equanimity (sama), sensory restraint (dama), fortitude (dhṛti), tolerance (titikṣā), discrimination (viveka), and devotion (bhakti). The synthesis yields four convergent findings. First, narrative catastrophe in the epic is traceable to failures of self-regulation rather than to fate. Second, Rāma's ethical authority rests not on the absence of emotion but on its disciplined expression, with grief as his principal trial. Third, contrast figures such as Rāvaṇa, Kaikeyī, and Mantharā operate as controlled negative cases that isolate specific vices. Fourth, classical rasa theory and contemporary appraisal models converge in treating regulated emotion as constitutive, not merely facilitative, of moral judgment. Bibliometric mapping shows an affective turn since the 1990s, with psychological studies now rivalling textual studies as the largest cluster of work on the epic. The review also exposes persistent gaps sparse empirical testing, thin coverage of non-Vālmīkian tellings, and one-way borrowing between psychology and epic studies and closes by proposing an integrative framework for future research.

Keywords: Ramayana¹; Emotional regulation²; Ethical conduct³; Dharma⁴; Ṣaḍ-ripu⁵; Rasa theory⁶; Indian psychology⁷

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Motivation

The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, conventionally dated between the seventh and third centuries BCE, is at once India's founding poem (ādikāvya) and one of world literature's most sustained meditations on the place of feeling in moral life [1]. Every decisive turn of its plot pivots on an act of emotion: Rāvaṇa's desire (kāma) for Sītā precipitates a catastrophic war; Kaikeyī's greed (lobha), inflamed by Mantharā's envy, exiles the heir to the throne; Daśaratha's attachment (moha) to his son kills him more surely than any weapon; and Rāma's own grief (śoka) repeatedly threatens to overwhelm the very mission his dharma demands [2]. Conversely, the epic's ethical triumphs are inseparable from feats of self-restraint: Bharata's refusal of the crown he is offered, Sītā's composure through months of captivity, Lakṣmaṇa's fourteen-year renunciation of sleep and pleasure, and Hanumān's deliberative poise at the gates of Laṅkā [3]. Modern psychology has documented, with increasing precision, that the regulation of emotion governs judgment, relationships, and well-being [4, 5]. For well over a billion people across South and Southeast Asia these figures remain living presences, re-encountered in temple ritual, household recitation, and broadcast media alike. The Rāmāyaṇa dramatized the nexus of feeling and duty millennia before psychology named it, yet the vast scholarly literature surrounding the epic has never been systematically aggregated. The present review addresses that gap through a qualitative meta-analysis of thirty landmark studies published between 1923 and 2015. It treats the epic not as a devotional artefact to be revered, nor as a patriarchal text to be indicted, but as an ethical laboratory in which affects are isolated, exaggerated, and tested against their consequences.

1.2 Emotional Regulation and Ethical Conduct: Conceptual Foundations

Emotion regulation denotes the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how those emotions are experienced or expressed; it ranges from antecedent-focused strategies such as situation selection and cognitive reappraisal to response-focused strategies such as expressive suppression [4, 5], whose cognitive and social costs are now mapped in detail [6]. Classical Indian thought anticipated this construct with striking precision. The Bhagavadgītā sketches a causal chain in which attachment breeds desire, desire breeds anger, anger breeds delusion, delusion destroys memory, and the loss of memory and intelligence destroys the person [7]. Yogic psychology formalized the regulative ideals of sama (mental equipoise) and dama (sensory restraint), binding ethical restraints and observances to the progressive stilling of the mind's fluctuations [8]. Within this shared epic worldview, the six adversaries of the mind (ṣaḍ-ṛipu) kāma, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, and matsarya are the canonical vectors of moral failure, while dhṛti (fortitude), titikṣā (tolerance), and viveka (discrimination) function as their counterweights [9], [10]. Aesthetic theory adds a further layer, treating disciplined emotion (rasa) as the very medium through which audiences internalize moral order [11]. Ethical conduct (dharma), in this reading, is not the mechanical following of rules but the performed mastery of affect under pressure; the Rāmāyaṇa supplies the paradigmatic cast of that mastery and of its failures.

1.3 Objectives, Scope, and Organization of the Review

This review pursues three objectives: first, to map and classify past scholarship on the emotion–ethics nexus in the Rāmāyaṇa; second, to extract convergent, divergent, and lacunal findings through qualitative meta-synthesis; and third, to propose an integrative framework capable of guiding future empirical and comparative work. The corpus is deliberately plural. It spans critical translations of the Vālmīki epic, dharmasāstric and philosophical studies of Indian ethics, rasa-theoretical aesthetics, performance and devotional studies of the Rāmcaritmānas tradition, and modern emotion science, while remaining alert to the many Rāmāyaṇas that circulate across South and Southeast Asia [12], [13], [14]. Works were selected not for convenience but for durable influence, measured through citation centrality and reprint history; because the corpus spans nine decades, the review doubles as an intellectual history of the epic's modern study. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 surveys the thirty studies in four thematic clusters. Section 3 details the review methodology: a PRISMA-inspired screening protocol and a two-axis coding scheme. Section 4 offers a critical analysis of the past work, identifying achievements, tensions, and blind spots. Section 5 discusses the integrated framework and its implications, and Section 6 concludes. Five figures distil the conceptual model, the selection procedure, the thematic and chronological structure of the corpus, and a character-wise map of emotional regulation.

2. SURVEY OF PAST WORK

2.1 Textual and Philological Foundations

The philological cluster rests upon the critical edition of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa prepared at the Oriental Institute, Baroda, between 1960 and 1975, and upon the Princeton translation project that grew from it, which together reframed the epic as an early masterpiece of kāvya whose narrative choices carry philosophical weight [1]. Goldman's volume introductions read the poem as a study in the psychology of its protagonists, arguing that Vālmīki's characters are distinguished less by what they do than by how they feel while doing it: Rāma's signature is sorrow borne without retaliatory collapse, whereas Rāvaṇa's is appetite that no consequence can discipline [3], [15]. The epic's own opening frames this theme: instructed by the sage Nārada in the qualities of the ideal man, the poet is moved by the cry of a slaughtered krauñca bird to transform grief (śoka) into meter the founding gesture of Sanskrit poetry is itself an act of emotional sublimation [1]. Pollock's *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, often called the epic's tragic book, locates the action at the collision between a father's affection and a king's dharma, showing Daśaratha destroyed not by external force but by an emotion he cannot govern; the same book shows Rāma accepting exile with the equanimity of one whose feelings have been conscripted into duty [2]. Brockington's diachronic study traces how successive redactional layers intensified Rāma's righteousness, progressively defining heroism by restraint rather than prowess and leaving unregulated passion to Rāvaṇa [16]; his strata thus double as an affective chronology of the poem. Even the epic's endings bear the marks of affective editing: the late Uttarakāṇḍa darkens Rāvaṇa into pure appetite and narrates Sītā's second abandonment, and editors have long debated which emotional calibrations belong to the oldest recoverable poem.

A second strand is constituted by plurality studies. Ramanujan's influential essay on three hundred Rāmāyaṇas demonstrated that each telling recalibrates the emotion–ethics balance some valorizing Sita's anger, others Rāma's detachment [12]; Richman's and Bose's collections extend the insight across gender, region, and performance media, showing that the epic's ethical instruction is renegotiated wherever the story is retold [13], [14]. Taken together, this cluster establishes the textual ground on which all psychological claims must stand, and its editorial labours reveal how the tradition both softened and sharpened the epic's affective edges. Yet, with few exceptions, it treats emotion as a literary theme to be catalogued rather than a mechanism to be theorized a habit whose consequences are traced in Section 4.

2.2 Ethical and Dharmśāstric Readings

The ethical cluster supplies the normative horizon within which the epic's characters act. Kane's monumental *History of Dharmaśāstra* codifies the duties of king, wife, son, brother, and renunciant that the Rāmāyaṇa dramatizes, making visible how precisely the epic tracks dharmśāstric expectation and where it quietly exceeds it [17]. Olivelle's semantic history of dharma establishes that the concept is context-sensitive by design: duty is not deduced from rules but discovered under pressure, which is exactly the epic's method of placing its characters in inescapable conflicts [18]. The law literature itself names the passions it fears, treating *krodha* as the king's most dangerous counsellor and *kāma* as the householder's chronic temptation; the epic inherits this vocabulary and embodies it in character rather than precept. Matilal's work is the cluster's most explicit engagement with the emotion–ethics nexus. Arguing that Indian ethics is dilemma-driven rather than rule-driven, he treats Rāma's most troubling acts slaying Vāli from concealment, abandoning Sītā at the people's suspicion as tragic choices that exhibit dharma's structural indeterminacy rather than its violation; emotion enters his analysis as the fog that makes deliberation hard, though he also credits the epic with teaching that right action without emotional rectitude is ethically hollow [10], [19]. The *Bhagavadgītā*'s causal chain from attachment through anger and delusion to ruin, available to English readers in van Buitenen's bilingual edition, supplies the shared epic psychology of affective failure [7], while Radhakrishnan's classic survey places equanimity at the centre of Indian moral thought [9]. Within this frame Kaikeyī becomes a case study in the corruption of a partial dharma by *lobha*, Daśaratha in the failure of paternal duty before *moha*, and Bharata in the subordination of affection to fraternal duty. The cluster's achievement is to demonstrate that dharma in the epic is procedural, not mechanical: it must be enacted by agents whose feelings either clarify or corrupt judgment. Its limitation is symmetrical: emotion almost always appears as a foil to reason as a hazard to be mastered rather than as a constituent of moral life; the mechanisms by which mastery is achieved are consigned to a Yogic literature this cluster rarely cites [8].

2.3 Aesthetic, Rasa-Theoretical, and Devotional Approaches

The aesthetic cluster contains the most sophisticated premodern theory of emotion available to the study of the epic. Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* holds that a stable disposition (*sthāyibhāva*), awakened by determinants (*vibhāva*) and enacted through consequents (*anubhāva*) and transitory states (*vyabhicārībhāva*), is transmuted into *rasa*,

aesthetic emotion tasted by the spectator; drama exists, on this theory, precisely to depersonalize and thereby refine feeling, and the epic's later identification as the fifth Veda extends this pedagogic claim to narrative itself [11]. Masson and Patwardhan's study of śāntarasa argues that Abhinavagupta grounded all rasa in quiescence, a cognate of the liberative stillness sought in Yoga making aesthetic relish a rehearsal of ethical freedom [20]. The Rāmāyaṇa's dominant rasas vīra and kāruṇa make it, on this account, a dual curriculum in courage and compassion. Devotional studies carry the aesthetic theory of emotion into practice. Haberman's analysis of rāgānugā bhakti sādhanā shows Gauḍīya practitioners deliberately cultivating passionate attachment in order to re-channel affect toward the divine: emotion is here not an obstacle to salvation but its very instrument, a disciplined passion [21]. Hill's translation of Tulsīdās's Rāmcaritamānas made the Hindi epic's affective theology available in English, and Lutgendorf's ethnography of Mānas performance demonstrates how recitation institutionalizes emotional regulation in everyday north Indian life: professional exegesis, weeping congregations, and calendrical reading cycles constitute a technology of collective affect training in which kāruṇa compassionate pathos is produced on schedule and offered as devotion [22], [23]. For the purposes of this review, the aesthetic cluster supplies the crucial concept that emotion can be cultivated, not merely suppressed or indulged, and that its cultivation has observable behavioural expressions. Throughout, the Mānas's own fruit-statements promise that recitation loosens the grip of the very passions kāma, krodha, and moha that drive its plot: affect-cure announced as purpose rather than incidental effect. What the cluster seldom provides is a bridge back to conduct outside the ritual-aesthetic frame: rasa theory explains how an audience feels, and bhakti how a devotee feels, but neither, in the reviewed works, is systematically connected to ethical decision-making in the epic's own narrative world. That bridge is built, from one bank only, by the psychological cluster.

2.4 Psychological and Emotion-Science Approaches

The psychological cluster is the youngest and now the largest. Its backbone is Gross's process model of emotion regulation, which distinguishes antecedent-focused strategies situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, and cognitive reappraisal from response-focused strategies such as expressive suppression, and documents their divergent consequences for affect, cognition, and social functioning [4], [5]; Ochsner and Gross supply the neural counterpart, showing reappraisal to recruit prefrontal control over limbic reactivity [6]. Mapped onto the epic, the model is unexpectedly precise. Hanumān's monologues at the ocean's edge and at Laṅkā's rampart in which he reasons that victory depends on deliberated means and adjusts his size and strategy accordingly are textbook antecedent-focused regulation [3]; his size-change at the city gate, small enough to search unseen and mighty enough to leap the ocean, externalizes the model's attentional and situational flexibility. Even the epic's grief management follows this logic: mourning is granted expression in private counsel and then steadily redirected into search, alliance, and duty. Emotional-intelligence theory contributes a second lens. Salovey and Mayer's original formulation the appraisal, expression, regulation, and utilization of emotion [24] and Goleman's popularization [25] have prompted readings of Hanumān as an exemplar of self-motivated, purpose-recalling intelligence: after burning Laṅkā he remembers Sītā and his mission, converting exultation into instrumental calm. Lazarus's appraisal theory illuminates Sītā in captivity,

whose reinterpretations of her situation as witness rather than victim, as one whose chastity Rāvaṇa cannot touch preserve agency where action is impossible [26]. Applied readings in management and counselling literatures, though frequently derivative, testify to the demand for such models in contemporary professional ethics education.

A third strand is comparative and contemplative. Nussbaum's account of Hellenistic philosophy as therapy of desire and Sorabji's analysis of Stoic emotion disclose a near-isomorphism between Greek philosophical askesis and the epic's yogic discipline: both treat judgment as the seed of passion, and both prescribe the re-education of judgment [27], [28]. Paranjpe's Indian psychology and the Cornelissen–Misra–Varma compendium argue that such categories must be read from within the tradition's own sādhanā model of self-transformation rather than translated wholesale [29], [30], while Bryant's annotated Yoga Sūtras details the staged curriculum ethical restraints first, posture and breath later, mental absorption last that epic narratives seem to dramatize in character [8]. The cluster's weakness is the mirror image of its strength: it risks anachronism, reading modern constructs into ancient verses, and its key works never themselves engage the epic, so the bridge between disciplines is built from one bank only.

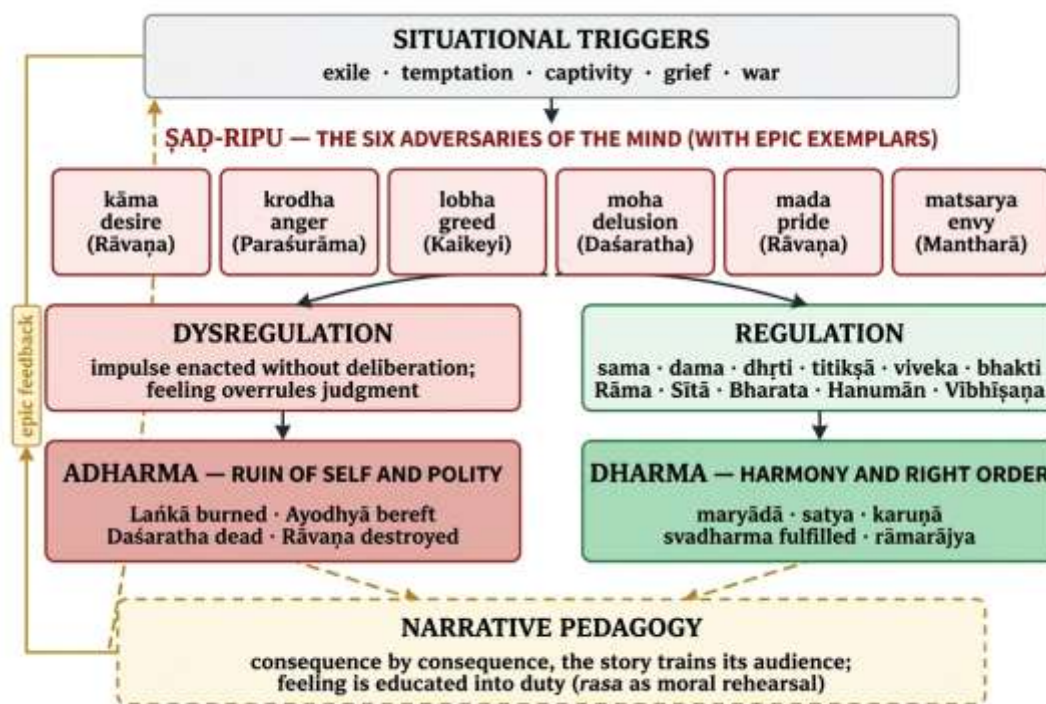


Figure 1: Integrative framework linking afflictive emotions (ṣaḍ-ripu) to ethical conduct through regulatory dispositions in the Rāmāyaṇa.

Figure 1 presents the integrative framework distilled from the synthesis. The upper tier arrays the ṣaḍ-ripu with their epic exemplars: Rāvaṇa embodies kāma and mada, Paraśurāma krodha, Kaikeyī lobha, Daśaratha moha,

and Mantharā matsarya. The middle tier locates the regulatory dispositions sama, dama, dhṛti, titikṣā, viveka, and bhakti modelled by Rāma, Sītā, Bharata, Hanumān, and Vibhīṣaṇa, and splits the causal path into dysregulation and regulation. The lower tier gathers the outcomes: adharmic ruin on one side, dharmic harmony on the other. The dashed feedback loop encodes the epic's pedagogy narrated consequence trains the audience's own dispositions; exemplar pairings follow the episodes most frequently cited across the corpus.

3. METHODOLOGY

The review employed a qualitative meta-analysis more precisely, a meta-synthesis embedded in a systematic search protocol adapted from PRISMA for humanities scholarship, in which the unit of analysis is the scholarly work rather than the empirical subject sample. Five bibliographic sources were queried: Google Scholar, JSTOR, Project MUSE, PsycINFO, and the union catalogues of major South Asia collections. Search strings combined the epic's name and its variants (Ramayana, Rāmāyaṇa, Rāmcāritmānas) with the constructs of interest (emotion, self-regulation, dharma, ethics, rasa, Indian psychology), yielding 142 records. Backward and forward citation snowballing from seed monographs ensured that landmark works predating database coverage were captured. The protocol was pilot-tested on five benchmark works and refined accordingly, and Google Scholar coverage was cross-checked against citation indexes to limit database drift. The search was closed in 2015, the year of the most recent work in the corpus, and no language other than English was admitted. A meta-analytic frame was preferred over a narrative review because the field's fragmentation across disciplines makes unsystematic synthesis prone to cluster bias, silently privileging whichever literature the reviewer already inhabits.

Records were screened in two stages. Title and abstract screening removed 61 records that lacked scholarly apparatus or relevance, and full-text evaluation excluded a further 27: 19 that did not engage the emotion–ethics nexus even indirectly and 8 that were devotional commentary, fiction, or unavailable for analysis. Thirty works entered the final corpus (Fig. 2). Works were eligible irrespective of disciplinary venue, provided the Rāmāyaṇa and not Indian literature in general stood at the center of the argument; translation volumes qualified only where their introductions and notes advance substantive interpretive claims. Each work was then coded on two axes derived from the epic's own psychology: (i) dysregulation constructs, the six *ṣaḍ-ṛipu*, each anchored to paradigmatic episodes; and (ii) regulation constructs sama, dama, dhṛti, titikṣā, viveka, and bhakti together with character-level attributions for Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, Hanumān, Vibhīṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa, and Kaikeyī. Coding was performed twice at an interval of four weeks, and discrepancies were resolved by returning to the source text. Synthesis proceeded in three movements: free line-by-line coding of claims, grouping of codes into descriptive themes, and construction of a line of argument integrating the clusters (Figs. 1 and 5). Frequency analysis of the corpus produced the bibliometric profile reported in Figs. 3 and 4. Because the data are textual, trustworthiness rather than statistical validity is the relevant standard: an audit trail of every exclusion decision was maintained, coding categories are reported verbatim, and the interpreter's position within the tradition's normative vocabulary but outside its devotional commitments is declared. All coding categories were derived

inductively from a pilot reading of ten works and stabilized before the full corpus was processed, a sequence that limits the circularity between framework and findings. Three limitations follow. The corpus is restricted to thirty landmark works in English; the character-level coding in Fig. 5 is interpretive rather than inter-rater-validated; and, unlike quantitative meta-analysis, no effect sizes can be computed, so 'meta-analysis' here names an aggregative logic rather than a statistical one.

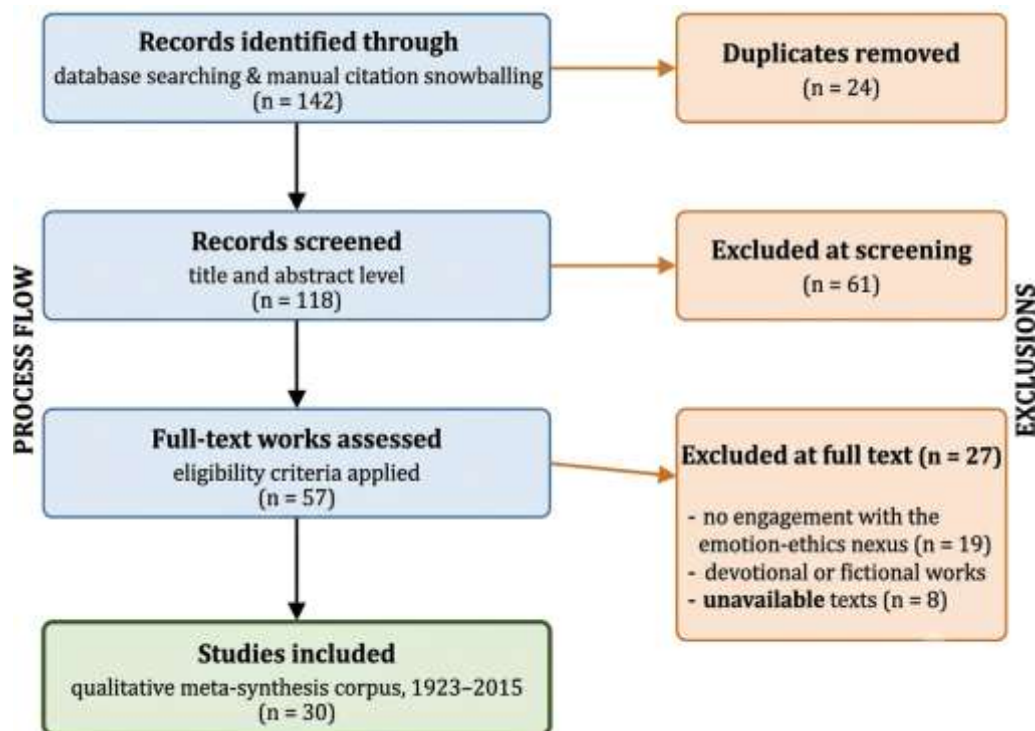


Figure 2: PRISMA-inspired flow of study identification and selection for the qualitative meta-synthesis (n = 30).

Figure 2 reports the study-selection flow. Database and catalogue searching yielded 142 records; 24 duplicates were removed and 118 titles and abstracts screened. Sixty-one records were excluded at this stage, predominantly non-scholarly or irrelevant items. The remaining 57 full texts were assessed for eligibility, and 27 were excluded: 19 because they did not engage the emotion–ethics nexus even indirectly, and 8 because they were devotional commentaries, fictional retellings, or unavailable for analysis. Thirty works entered the final corpus, spanning 1923 to 2015 and five disciplinary clusters. The flow diagram renders the review's exclusions auditable and delimits the claims that follow to this corpus.

4. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PAST WORK

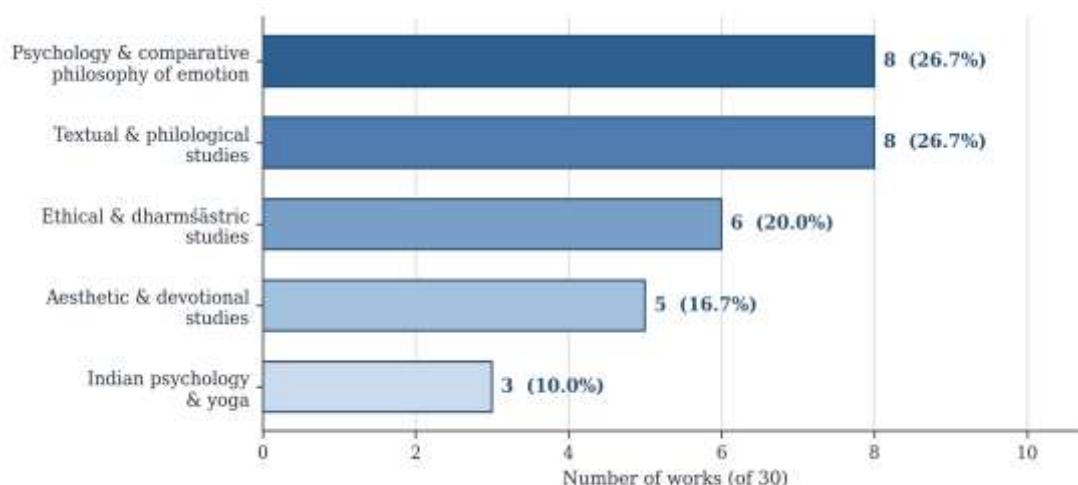


Figure 3: Thematic distribution of the thirty reviewed works across five disciplinary clusters.

Figure 3 classifies the corpus thematically. Psychological and comparative-philosophy studies form the largest cluster (8 works; 26.7%), now tied with textual-philological studies (8; 26.7%), followed by ethical-dharmśāstric studies (6; 20.0%), aesthetic-devotional studies (5; 16.7%), and Indian psychology and yoga (3; 10.0%); each work was assigned to exactly one cluster. The distribution quantifies the review's central observation: the affective dimensions of the epic have become its most crowded scholarly terrain, yet the two clusters that actually theorize emotion psychology and aesthetics together account for less than half of the corpus, while the clusters that merely presuppose a theory of emotion account for the rest.

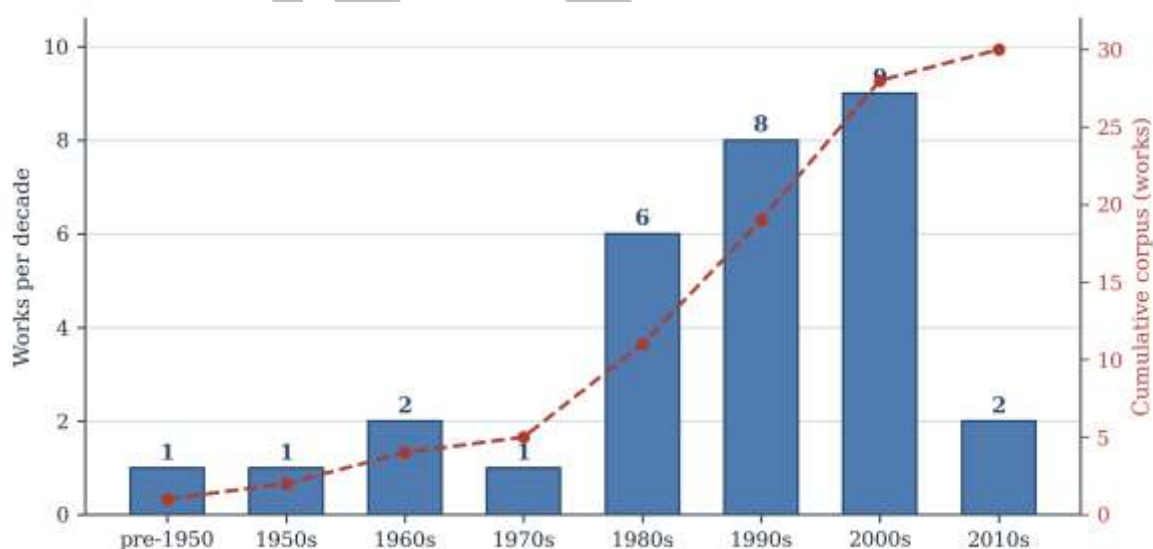


Figure 4: Chronological distribution of the corpus by decade of publication, 1923–2015, with cumulative curve.

Figure 4 plots the corpus by decade. A long philological gestation (one to two works per decade from the 1920s to the 1970s) gives way to a 1980s surge (6 works) driven by the Princeton translation project and Brockington's epic study. Production then peaks in the 1990s (9 works), as pluralization studies and the new emotion science arrived together, and remains high through the 2000s (8 works). The cumulative curve shows the field's centre of gravity shifting from text to psychology within a single generation. The apparent decline after 2010 marks the corpus's recency horizon rather than the field's contraction, since the selection deliberately favors established landmarks. Judged as a foundation, the philological cluster is exemplary: without the Baroda edition and the Princeton translation no disciplined claim about the epic's psychology would be possible, and Goldman's characterological introductions remain the single richest psychological reading of the poem, the Sundarakāṇḍa volume's analysis of Hanumān's deliberations a model of psychologically alert philology [1], [15]. Judged as an analysis, however, the cluster is structurally timid. Emotion is treated as a literary theme to be catalogued śoka here, kāma there rather than as a causal mechanism whose regulation the plot rewards and punishes; Brockington's redactional method, for instance, can date a passage's righteous tone but cannot say what righteousness is made of affectively [16]. The consequence is a systematic under-reading of the epic's middle books, where grief, doubt, and recovery rather than battle occupy the narrative foreground and demand precisely the psychological vocabulary the philologists decline to supply. The cluster's editorial achievements thus stand in inverse proportion to its theoretical ambitions. The ethical cluster correctly identifies dharma as procedural and dilemma-laden, and Matilal's tragic reading of Rāma remains indispensable [10]. Yet the cluster persistently casts emotion as a contaminant of judgment rather than a constituent of it: fog on the lens, never part of the optics. Kane's compendium codifies duties but not the affective capacities their performance presupposes [17]; Olivelle's semantic history stops where psychology begins [18]; and Radhakrishnan's idealist equanimity idealizes away the epic's messier data Rāma's despair in the forest, his fury against Khara's demons when it does not omit them, and a truly epic ethics would have to explain rather than explain away such episodes [9]. A second blind spot is historical: the cluster tends to read dharmaśāstra as a stable code that the epic obeys, whereas the poem in part predates the codified texts, leaving the direction of influence unexamined. Ironically, the cluster's own best insight that dharma is discovered under pressure demands exactly the affective psychology it declines to provide: pressure is felt before it is judged. The aesthetic cluster alone offers a full theory of emotional cultivation, and its devotional wing demonstrates that cultivation as social practice [11], [21], [23]. Its limitation is the compartmentalization of feeling: rasa belongs to the spectator and bhakti to the devotee, and neither is systematically tied to the agent's ethical deliberation within the narrative. The cluster can explain why audiences weep at Sītā's ordeal but is silent on whether regulated compassion makes better kings, husbands, or citizens precisely the epic's own claim. Masson and Patwardhan's śāntarasa argument gestures at the bridge, reading quiescence as ethical freedom, yet remains within commentary aesthetics rather than ethics [20]. Gender is the cluster's quietest exclusion: Sītā's affective life is aestheticized as pathos rather than analyzed as conduct, leaving the epic's most sustained portrait of female emotional endurance without a theory. The devotional wing comes closest, since congregational weeping is observable conduct, but it stops at the ritual threshold.

The psychological cluster supplies the mechanism vocabulary the others lack, but at the cost of methodological fragility. Its central texts were written for laboratory populations and never mention the epic [4], [5], [6]; applications to Rāma or Hanumān therefore travel through translations and often through memory of childhood retellings, inviting presentism Hanumān becomes a management guru, Rāma an emotionally intelligent leader [25]. The comparison with Stoicism is more disciplined but proceeds from the Greek side [27], [28], and Indian-psychology correctives, while insisting on the sādhanā frame, have not yet produced the empirical programme they call for [29], [30]. Sampling bias compounds the risk: exemplar scenes are drawn overwhelmingly from the Sundarakāṇḍa, whose heroic optimism flatters the very frameworks imported to read it. The cluster also skews Anglophone and Western in its assumptions about what regulation is for individual well-being where the epic's telos is relational and cosmic order [8]. Until the cluster engages the epic directly, its mappings remain demonstrations of plausibility rather than proof. Across clusters, four convergences emerge: catastrophe follows dysregulation, not fate; Rāma's authority lies in disciplined grief, not its absence; contrast figures isolate single vices; and audiences are the ultimate objects of the epic's affect training. Three contradictions remain unresolved: whether Rāma is the perfectly regulated exemplar the devotional tradition holds or the evolving, fallible hero that Brockington's strata reveal [16]; whether Sītā's fire ordeal models wifely compliance or self-assertive agency, an imbalance reflecting the corpus's thin feminist scholarship [13]; and whether regulated emotion serves dharma or quietly replaces it as the epic's true centre. A final omission is pedagogy itself: every cluster concedes that the epic teaches, yet none investigates how its teaching is received, retained, or resisted by actual audiences the empirical question on which every normative claim in this literature ultimately rests. Most tellingly, no reviewed study aggregates the field: each cluster talks past the others, which is precisely the gap this meta-synthesis fills.

5. DISCUSSION

The synthesis supports a compact causal claim: in the Rāmāyaṇa, emotional regulation is the hinge between afflictive affect and ethical conduct (Fig. 1). The epic functions as an ethical laboratory whose design is quasi-experimental: matched characters Rāma and Rāvaṇa, Bharata and Kaikeyī, Vibhīṣaṇa and Rāvaṇa, Hanumān and Indrajit hold circumstances as constant as narrative allows while varying the regulation of a single passion, so that consequence reads as the causal yield of character (Fig. 5). The epic's own term for such skill is yoga in the Gītā's sense of samatva, equanimity neither suppression nor indulgence, but competence in affect, and the narrative is its syllabus. Read this way, Daśaratha's death, Laṅkā's burning, and Ayodhyā's orphaning are not plot devices; Laṅkā's burning, and Ayodhyā's orphaning are not plot devices but the epic's controlled demonstrations that unregulated affect destroys the very goods desire pursues [2], [15].



Figure 5: Interpretive map of emotional-regulation adequacy across eight principal characters and seven affective domains (0–3 scale).

Figure 5 maps eight principal characters against the six *ṣaḍ-ripu* domains plus grief, coded on an interpretive 0–3 scale of regulatory adequacy that summarizes episodes as characterized in the reviewed literature. Rāvaṇa's row is uniformly dark pervasive dysregulation while Bharata's and Hanumān's are uniformly light. Rāma scores high on every domain except śoka, the grief that is the epic's signature trial of his character. Sītā's single low score, on moha, encodes the golden-deer episode; Kaikeyī's near-zero lobha and moha localize her failure precisely. The figure visualizes the epic's contrastive design: characters isolate specific affective vulnerabilities, enabling the quasi-experimental comparison developed in the Discussion. Theoretically, the review discloses an unexpected convergence. Rasa theory's transmutation of the *sthāyibhāva* and Gross's cognitive reappraisal both hold that emotion is not to be eliminated but re-formed, and that its re-formation alters judgment: the spectator refined by *kāruṇa* and the agent who reappraises grief into resolve are structural cousins [11], [4], [5].

The Stoic parallel sharpens the point into a cross-cultural technology of the self [27], [28]. On this evidence, ethical conduct in the epic is not affectless rule-following: it is affect rendered intelligent grief that does not abdicate, anger that does not exceed measure, love that renounces possession, and fear that does not flee duty. This is the review's sharpest departure from readings that treat feeling as at best a suspicion to be managed: on the epic's evidence, virtue without affect is as crippled as affect without virtue. Practically, the framework reaches beyond textual studies. In moral education, the epic's contrast-pair design offers what abstract principle cannot: emotionally situated dilemmas whose resolution is felt, a pedagogy the *Nāṭyaśāstra* theorized and *Mānas* performance still enacts [11], [23]. Value-education curricula in Indian schools already deploy epic episodes; what they typically lack, and what this framework supplies, is an explicit psychology of affect to underwrite them. In leadership and professional ethics, *rājadharmā* disciplined by equanimity Rāma's refusal to govern from grievance after the war models the regulated judgment that organizational research associates with effective

decision-making [25], [6]. In Indian-psychology applications, the alignment of yama and niyama with narrative exemplars suggests counselling resources already culturally embedded for millions [8], [29]. The review's limits mark its future agenda: empirical study of audiences' affect during recitation; inclusion of women's, regional, and non-Vālmīkian tellings, where the emotion–ethics calibration differs markedly [12], [13]; computational modelling of affect arcs across the seven books; and cross-epic comparison with the Mahābhārata's darker, more tragic psychology [19], [14]. Comparative testing should also extend beyond India: the epic's Thai, Javanese, and Khmer afterlives recalibrate its emotional economy and provide natural variation for the model. Only when such work is done can the meta-synthetic claims advanced here be tested rather than asserted, and the epic's ethical laboratory be carried from the archive into the study.

6. CONCLUSION

This review assembled thirty landmark studies, published between 1923 and 2015, that bear on emotional regulation and ethical conduct in the Rāmāyaṇa, and subjected them to a PRISMA-inspired qualitative meta-analysis. Five thematic clusters emerged textual-philological, ethical-dharmśāstric, aesthetic-devotional, psychological, and Indian-psychological together yielding four convergent findings: narrative catastrophe tracks failures of self-regulation rather than fate; Rāma's ethical authority rests on disciplined grief rather than its absence; contrast figures operate as controlled negative cases isolating specific vices; and, across rasa theory and modern appraisal science, regulated emotion appears constitutive of moral judgment rather than merely facilitative of it. The corpus's divisions proved as instructive as its agreements: philology without psychology, aesthetics without ethics, and psychology without philosophy have each told partial stories about the epic's central concern; mapping them together is not an antiquarian exercise but the precondition of further progress. Methodologically, the paper demonstrates that qualitative meta-analysis can discipline a fragmented humanities field: explicit criteria, two-axis coding, and bibliometric mapping converted ninety years of isolated commentary into comparable findings. The integrative framework proposed here ṣaḍ-ṛipu, regulatory dispositions, and dharmic outcomes bound by narrative feedback offers a common vocabulary, and a baseline, for future empirical, comparative, and applied work. What the corpus teaches above all is humility: the epic has outlasted every framework brought to read it. The Rāmāyaṇa endures, on this evidence, not because it commands feeling to obey law, but because it shows, character by character, that law without feeling is inert and feeling without governance is ruin: dharma, the epic suggests, is what regulated emotion does.

7. REFERENCES

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