

# The Authors as Theologians: Homer and Valmiki in the Creation of Olympian and Hindu Divinity

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## Abstract

Homer, credited with composing the Iliad and the Odyssey, and Valmiki, revered as the author of the Ramayana, have long transcended the confines of secular authorship to ascend to a unique, quasi-theological stature. Their epics not only laid the literary foundations for ancient Greek and Hindu civilizations but also served as formative texts that profoundly shaped religious consciousness. While Homer's Olympian deities, capricious, awe-inspiring, and occasionally prone to human folly, captured the spiritual imagination of the ancient Greeks, Valmiki's portrayal of divine figures, including Rama and the pantheon of Hindu gods, continues to guide religious practices in the Indian subcontinent. Through these epic narratives, both authors embedded theological principles within their storytelling, creating moral, metaphysical, and spiritual paradigms.

In both the Iliad and the Ramayana, the storytellers, Homer and Valmiki, go beyond mere narrative to weave profound theological elements into the fabric of their epics. Each text portrays divine beings intimately involved in human affairs, illustrating moral codes and higher laws that govern the cosmos. In the Iliad, Olympian gods reflect both humanity's failings and nobility, underscoring themes such as honour, fate, and the sacred power of oaths. Characters experience divine intervention in battles, and the ethical ramifications of pride, hospitality, and loyalty are foregrounded, transforming battlefield valour into a reflection on existential order.

Our findings suggest that it was the unification of grand narrative artistry, sophisticated moral philosophy, and their epics' openness to varied interpretations that granted Homer and Valmiki their theological prominence. This research contends that their works served as more than cultural artifacts; they became living scriptures that continue to influence faith, worship, and moral reflection for millions of adherents worldwide.

**Keywords:** Homer, Valmiki, Iliad, Ramayana, Theology, Olympian Gods, Hindu Divinity

## 1. Introduction

Few literary endeavours in human history have attained the dual distinction of being foundational works of art and sources of religious ethos. Homer's Iliad has often been described as the cornerstone of ancient Greek literature, while Valmiki's Ramayana is frequently revered as one of Hinduism's most pivotal texts. Over time, Homer and Valmiki have come to be regarded not merely as poets or historians but as theologians, shaping how divine entities are conceptualized, worshipped, and integrated into the moral and cosmological frameworks of their respective societies.

Homer's Iliad, composed around the 8th century BCE, depicts a pantheon led by Zeus, whose power surpasses all others yet remains entangled in familial disputes, vendettas, and personal desires. The lines from Book I, "Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus" (Iliad 1.1), ***immediately bring the audience into a world where gods and mortals closely interact.*** Similarly, Valmiki's Ramayana, widely dated between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE (though oral traditions may be older), weaves the life story of Rama, an incarnation of the god Visnu, demonstrating the integral unity of the divine and the mundane. In Bala Kanda of the Ramayana, we find the shloka:

“नारायणं नमस्कृत्य नरं चैव नरोत्तमम् ।

देवीं सरस्वतीं चैव ततो जयमुदीरयेत् ॥”

(Valmiki Ramayana, Bāla Kāṇḍa 1.1)

***This invocation underscores a narrative that immediately places the text within a sacred sphere.*** By dissecting these foundational works, we see the transformation of each author's role from a bard recounting a heroic saga to a revered shaper of spiritual doctrine.

From their opening invocations, both Homer and Valmiki establish that their epics are not mere stories but sacred narratives deeply entwined with the divine. In the *Iliad*, Homer begins by addressing the Muse, an immediate appeal to a higher power for creative inspiration, thus placing the entire saga under divine sanction. Similarly, the *Ramayana* integrates ritual blessings and praises to the gods, framing Rama's actions as both heroic and spiritually consequential. These invocations do more than introduce characters; they signal to the audience that gods and mortals occupy a shared, sacred sphere, where divine will intersects with human destiny. By weaving theological themes into every layer of the text, from invocations to plot structure, both authors transcend the role of mere storytellers and ascend to the status of theologians, shaping moral and cosmic understanding for generations.

## 2. Background and Rationale

The impetus to explore Homer and Valmiki side by side arises from a broader scholarly interest in how mythic narratives become institutionalized as religion. In many ancient cultures, mythological epics started as oral traditions primarily intended for entertainment and moral instruction. Over centuries, these texts gained canonical status, influencing theological assumptions and worship practices. Homeric epics served as moral and educational texts for the Greek polis. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contributed to Greek identity, shaping collective values such as arete (excellence) and xenia (hospitality). The *Ramayana* similarly formed a cultural bedrock in the Indian subcontinent, articulating ideals like dharma (righteousness) and familial duty.

The transformation from poetic narratives to theological references necessitated a process of sacralization. The *Iliad*'s depiction of gods who possessed human failings yet wielded cosmic authority became points of reflection for spiritual and ethical considerations. Meanwhile, in the *Ramayana*, a king who is also an incarnation of the Supreme Being blurred boundaries between human and divine realms, prompting devotees to worship Rama. In the *Iliad*, Homer's gods possess both human weaknesses and cosmic authority, transforming them into mirrors for

moral and spiritual contemplation. Their jealousies, competitions, and affections become vehicles for exploring deeper questions about fate, honour, and divine justice. Meanwhile, in the Ramayana, Valmiki presents Rama as an ideal king and an incarnation of the Supreme Being, blurring the lines between divine and human domains. By intertwining such profound theological dimensions with their storytelling, both Homer and Valmiki transcend the role of mere authors: they become theologians who shape enduring ethical and devotional frameworks for their audiences.

Ancient Greek culture did not maintain a rigid wall between literature and religion; similarly, Indian tradition integrated religious truths into epic poetry. Thus, the authors' narrative skill and the texts' dramatic potency made them ripe for theological appropriation. By weaving enthralling action, deep human emotions, and the presence of the divine into every turn of their stories, both Homer and Valmiki demonstrated a narrative mastery that transcended ordinary storytelling. The dramatic stakes of war and personal duty, combined with vivid depictions of gods intimately involved in mortal affairs, naturally invited religious interpretation and devotion. Consequently, these epics, partly through their literary grandeur, *became more than entertainment or folklore*; they evolved into cornerstones of theological thought, revered as sacred texts and studied for their moral and spiritual guidance, well beyond their original narrative purpose.

When we compare descriptions of Greek gods, often anthropomorphic, quarrelsome, and occasionally comical, to those of Hindu deities, multifaceted and sometimes morally ambiguous, we notice intriguing parallels. Erasmus famously highlighted the foolish aspects of Homer's gods, while many Hindu commentators have wrestled with Indra's jealousy and Narada's mischief. These deities' questionable actions frequently operate within complex cosmic frameworks that justify, or at least contextualize, their deeds.

### 3. Theories

Several theoretical models help frame our understanding of Homeric and Valmikiean theology

**Myth-Ritual Theory:** According to this perspective, narratives develop alongside ritual practices that reinforce communal identity. *As mythic stories become more closely tied to rituals, they accumulate religious significance.* The Iliad and the Ramayana both depict or inspire rituals, such as funeral games or traditional puja (worship), reinforcing the texts' spiritual impact. As mythic stories become integrated into ritual practices, their sacred dimensions intensify. Both the Iliad and Ramayana were recited, performed, and celebrated in communal gatherings and religious festivals, transforming them from heroic narratives into living components of cultural worship. This intimate link between story and ritual endowed Homer and Valmiki with a theological authority: their epics not only narrated divine-human interactions but also became scripts for devotion. Consequently, the authors moved beyond mere storytelling and achieved the status of theologians, their works shaping and being shaped by the religious life of their communities.

**Structuralism:** From a structuralist lens, myths serve as systems of signs that reflect deeper sociocultural binaries. The conflicts between gods in Homer's epics, Zeus vs. Hera, Ares vs. Athena, mirror moral oppositions in Greek society (order vs. chaos, justice vs. aggression). In

the Ramayana, themes like duty vs. desire or purity vs. corruption are *dramatized through divine interventions*. These oppositions elevate the text from literature to moral and metaphysical inquiry. The Olympian gods quarrel like mortals- Hera deceives Zeus with a love charm, Aphrodite flees the battlefield in tears after being wounded, and Ares is likewise hurt by a mere human (Diomedes). These scenes border on comedic yet do not detract from the gods' overarching sovereignty. Rather, they underscore that even flawed deities shape fate, forcing audiences to grapple with divinity's mysterious and multifaceted nature.

**Functionalism:** Functionalist readings emphasize the social or cultural functions served by religious texts. *By positioning moral virtues as divine commands* (e.g., Rama's adherence to dharma, Achilles's struggle with wrath), these epics channel communal values into a spiritual framework. By intertwining ethical ideals with divine decree, both Homer and Valmiki present virtues, such as honour, duty, and righteousness, not merely as human guidelines but as commandments originating from higher powers. In the Iliad, actions like upholding oaths and respecting sacred hospitality reflect the gods' demands, endowing moral codes with a sacred urgency. Meanwhile, in the Ramayana, adherence to dharma is shown as a direct reflection of cosmic law, an embodiment of the divine. In positioning moral virtues as divine commands, these authors transcend the role of storytellers and ascend to the status of theologians, guiding the ethical and spiritual life of their communities.

**Phenomenological Approach to Religion:** This theory interprets religious texts in terms of lived experiences and the sense of the sacred. Both the Iliad and the Ramayana are treated not as inert narratives but as vehicles for encounter with the divine. In many Hindu traditions, the *Ramayana is recited in temples and homes, while in ancient Greece, Homeric hymns and passages would be performed in festivals*, effectively merging literature with worship.

**Comparative Religion and Theology:** By juxtaposing the textual strategies and theological claims of Homer and Valmiki, we gain insights into how divinity can be conceptualized variably within different cultural contexts, yet yield parallel developments in canon formation and worship.

These theoretical vantage points form a foundation for examining the authors' ascension into theological spheres. Their narratives resonate on communal, ritualistic, moral, and personal levels, elevating them from skilled poets to architects of the sacred.

#### 4. Literature Review

##### Literary Context of Homeric Epics

Scholarly consensus generally places Homer in the 8th century BCE, although questions concerning his historicity abound (Nagy 45). The Iliad and the Odyssey circulated through oral tradition, performed by rhapsodes before they were written down. These epics gave ancient Greece a shared language of heroism, morality, and, crucially, theology. Greek tragedies later borrowed heavily from Homeric depictions of gods, reinforcing the epics' religious undertones (Vernant 102).

Within the Iliad, the gods influence nearly every pivotal scene: from Athena restraining Achilles's wrath (Homer, Iliad 1.188-222) to Zeus's manipulations on Mount Olympus. These

interventions solidified the epics as key interpretive texts for understanding the Greek pantheon. For instance, in Book 5, the war god Ares is injured by the mortal Diomedes, a demonstration of how the boundary between the divine and mortal realms can be porous, even comedic, *thus shaping Greek conceptions of divine vulnerability*.

### **Literary Context of the Ramayana**

Attributed to the sage-poet Valmiki, the Ramayana underwent an evolution from oral storytelling to written scripture (Goldman 13). In the Indian tradition, Valmiki holds a near-mythic status, credited with discovering the shloka meter itself. The text is divided into seven kandas (books), each chronicling the life of Prince Rama, culminating in his return to Ayodhya and ascension as a paradigmatic king.

From a theological perspective, Rama is revered as an incarnation of Vishnu. Devotional readings accentuate his divinity. This shift from epic hero to divine figure is central to Valmiki's transformation into a theologian. The moral complexities, Rama's exile, the abduction of S, the war against Ravana, are framed within a cosmic battle of good vs. evil, reflective of broader Hindu cosmological themes (Sharma 77).

### **Narrative Styles and Their Theological Implications**

Homer's style *relies on grand similes, swift narrative momentum, and direct divine intervention*. The vivid depiction of gods in the midst of human conflict invests these episodes with spiritual gravitas, even when the gods exhibit jealousy or pettiness. As Erasmus quips, "If anyone examines more closely the lives of those sober gods in Homer... he will find them all full of folly" (Erasmus, qtd. in Brown 56). Still, to the ancients, these episodes symbolized the alignment or misalignment of cosmic forces with human endeavours.

Valmiki's narrative, on the other hand, is marked by shloka meter, metaphors rooted in nature, and a highly didactic structure that underscores dharma. Even episodes featuring the moral missteps of gods, like Indra's envy or Narada's cunning, serve to highlight the tension between cosmic order and individual transgression. By weaving these elements into the main narrative, Valmiki elevates them beyond mere stories of trickster deities, suggesting deeper truths about cosmic equilibrium.

### **Reception and Religious Institutionalization**

The Homeric epics were esteemed texts in ancient Greece, recited at Panathenaic festivals, and taught in schools as moral exemplars (Nagy 210). Over time, *philosophical schools like the Stoics and Neoplatonists interpreted Homer allegorically*, attributing cosmic or moral meaning to the gods' actions. This philosophical exegesis effectively transformed Homer into a proto-theologian for the Greek intellectual class.

When later philosophical traditions, such as the Stoics and Neoplatonists, began reading Homer's Iliad allegorically, they effectively transformed him from an epic bard into a conveyor of deep moral and metaphysical truths. In extracting symbolic meanings from the gods and heroes, these schools reinforced Homer's status as a source of theological insight rather than mere literary entertainment. Analogously, Valmiki's Ramayana would later be explored by



philosophical and devotional movements that discovered profound spiritual teachings in its narrative. Through such interpretive efforts, both authors attained a stature that transcended literary fame, solidifying their places as theologians whose works continue to guide ethical and spiritual thought.

Philosophers of the **Stoic** tradition often read Homer's gods and heroes as metaphors for natural forces or moral principles. For instance, some Stoics interpreted **Zeus** as the personification of the universal *logos* (rational principle), while **Athena** was seen as the embodiment of wisdom guiding mortals to virtuous action. In this way, the events of the *Iliad* became symbols for inner conflicts and cosmic processes rather than mere tales of war.

Later, Neoplatonists, notably figures like Porphyry and Proclus, expanded these allegories into a grand metaphysical framework. They viewed the struggles depicted by Homer as reflective of the soul's ascent toward the divine, with Olympian deities illustrating different levels of reality, from material manifestation to higher spiritual realms. By layering these symbolic insights onto the epic narrative, Stoics and Neoplatonists effectively elevated Homer from a storyteller to a sage revealing profound truths about the universe and human nature.

Analogously, Valmiki's Ramayana also underwent devotional and philosophical readings, with certain commentators seeing Rama's exploits as an allegory for the soul's journey and cosmic order. Through these interpretive traditions, both Homer and Valmiki ceased to be seen solely as poets of epic adventures; instead, they were embraced as theologians whose works embodied deep moral, spiritual, and metaphysical teachings.

Similarly, the Ramayana found ritualistic integration through recitations in temples, dramatic enactments (e.g., Ramlila), and the creation of derivative texts like the 'Adhyatma Ramayana'. These traditions framed the poem as both a source of religious instruction and a vehicle of bhakti (devotion). Valmiki thus came to be revered not merely as a poet but as **Aadi Kavi** ("the first poet"), a saintly figure who articulated ultimate truths about virtue and divine will.

## 5. Results and Findings

Both *Iliad* and Ramayana weave the divine into mortal affairs so seamlessly that the gods appear both relatable and transcendent. Whether it is Athena checking Achilles's rage or divine sages guiding Rama, the boundary between human and divine remains permeable. This immediacy of divine presence was key to later religious appropriation, as congregations saw the epics not merely as stories but as reflections of sacred reality. The grandeur of Homer's battle scenes and Valmiki's morally charged episodes elevates each epic beyond entertainment. Homer's extended similes, invocations to the Muses, and personifications of fate serve to convey philosophical underpinnings, honor, mortality, and destiny. Valmiki employs dharma as a narrative thread, illustrating righteousness through each moral dilemma Rama faces. These stylistic and thematic devices effectively function as theological commentary, making both works cornerstones for ethical and spiritual discourse.

Public recitations of the *Iliad* in ancient Greece and Ramayana in India embedded these texts into social customs and festivals. Epic performances became communal rituals, providing moral instruction and unifying audiences under shared cultural values. The repeated enactment

of these epics in temples, courts, and public gatherings endowed them with ritual significance, conferring an almost scriptural status upon the poems and their authors. Commentators, dramatists, philosophers, and even political leaders over centuries have recontextualized the Iliad and the Ramayana to address evolving moral, social, or doctrinal issues. Stoics and Neoplatonists found allegories of cosmic reason and the soul's ascent in Homer's text, while various Hindu schools read Valmiki's work as a theological treatise on devotion (bhakti) or duty (dharma). Each new interpretation reinforced the authority of Homer and Valmiki, transforming them into perennial sources of wisdom.

While Greek and Hindu cosmologies differ, most notably in the structure of their pantheons and their theories of fate versus karma, both epics underscore the entwinement of fate and moral agency. Mortal characters are bound by divine decrees yet retain the capacity for heroic or tragic choices. The gods, despite their flaws, ultimately guide cosmic events. This convergence in theme illustrates how mythic narratives, across cultures, function to establish and reinforce communal religious identities. The divergence, notably in how moral law is upheld, whether through Zeus's somewhat inconsistent will or Rama's perfect adherence to dharma, highlights the cultural specificity that shapes each epic's theological nuance.

## 6. Discussion

A central question emerges from these findings: how do authors transition from chroniclers of heroic adventures to theologians whose works become quasi-scriptural? Several interlinked factors provide an answer:

In both ancient Greece and the Indian subcontinent, the publics found moral and existential questions reflected in epic narratives. Concerns *about family, war, duty, and cosmic justice were dramatized in ways that demanded veneration rather than mere aesthetic admiration*. Over time, traditions arose that ascribed divine or semi-divine inspiration to Homer and Valmiki. In India, there is a widespread belief that *Valmiki composed the Ramayana after receiving blessings from Brahma*, transforming the text into a direct emanation of the divine word (Sharma 81). Similarly, though we lack a parallel notion in Greek tradition, the Muses' inspiration was deemed a quasi-divine impetus behind Homer's verses, lending them a sacred aura. The epics were taught in educational and religious institutions; *their verses were cited by priests, philosophers, and statesmen*. As a result, these texts accrued ritual and doctrinal authority, effectively linking their authorship with theological leadership.

The narratives' capacity to sustain multiple layers of meaning, literal, allegorical, moral, rendered them perennial sources for theological reflection. Whether in the comedic failings of Greek gods or the moral complexities of Hindu deities, interpreters could "harmonize various interpretations leading to stalling an impending doom," to borrow a phrase from the source excerpt. In both traditions, the gods are not unilaterally "good" in a simplistic sense. Ares's brashness and Indra's scheming reveal that *divine power often encompasses destructive impulses*. By exploring these dimensions in epic form, Homer and Valmiki provided philosophical frameworks for grappling with theodicy, the question of evil within divine dominion.

In explaining the comedic mocking of deities, Zeus by Hera or Indra's embarrassment by lesser celestial beings, the epics affirm that questioning divine conduct is permissible, thereby inviting deeper theological introspection. This "*paradox of the divine*," where gods can be simultaneously venerated and laughed at, underscores the breadth of religious expression each author facilitated. Both the Iliad and the Ramayana highlight a "paradox of the divine" in which gods are revered for their cosmic authority yet occasionally depicted in ways that invite humour or moral scrutiny. This duality honouring deities while also critiquing their foibles, broadens the scope of religious experience, allowing worshippers to see the divine as both transcendent and intimately relatable. By orchestrating narratives where gods can be simultaneously venerated and teased, Homer and Valmiki move beyond conventional storytelling, enabling multilayered theological reflection. In doing so, they transcend the role of mere authors, emerging as theologians who shape the very form and depth of religious expression.

This constant dance between divine grandeur and mortal-like vulnerability broadens the emotional and spiritual resonance of both epics. Readers and devotees can laugh at a god's caprice, then turn around and worship that same deity for the overarching cosmic purpose they serve. By orchestrating this paradoxical portrayal, Homer and Valmiki enable layered theological engagement, thus moving beyond mere authorship into the realm of profound religious instruction.

### Conclusion

Homer and Valmiki stand as monumental figures in world literature, yet their legacy extends far beyond the realm of literary achievement. By crafting epics that illuminate human and divine interplay, they unknowingly shaped religious consciousness for generations. The transference of their poetic narratives into canonical, even scriptural, status underscores a critical insight: the line between literature and religion is fluid, shaped by communal acceptance, ritual practice, and philosophical exegesis.

From the war-torn plains of Troy to the forests of Dandakarnaya, these authors populate their narratives with gods who reflect the spectrum of human emotions and cosmic principles. Whether it is Homer's portrayal of the bellicose Ares, the regal but unpredictable Zeus, or Valmiki's depiction of the noble yet tested Rama, Indra's cunning, or Narada's mischief, these characters embody universal tensions in moral and spiritual life. Their authors' skillful composition and universal themes have allowed each epic to transcend time and geography, embedding them within the ritual and theological frameworks of their respective cultures.

Above all, the theological dimensions of the Iliad and the Ramayana, elevated through continual interpretation and communal veneration, are what ultimately cement Homer and Valmiki's status as theologians. They demonstrate that the creation of religious canons is not limited to self-described prophets or messengers of the divine; rather, it can emerge from narrative genius that resonates across centuries, adopting moral, ritual, and soteriological dimensions along the way. For any author to succeed in engraving their creative vision onto the hearts and minds of millions, to the extent of becoming objects of reverence themselves, is a feat of cultural synergy and narrative brilliance rarely matched in human history.



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