

# Common ideas in epic of beowulf and the ramayana

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Heroes can be defined in a variety of different ways. Many have completely different qualities and characteristics that lead them to their fame and glory, but they all have factors that link them together in no matter what culture or time period they reigned. In the heroic epics Beowulf and The Ramayana, the heroes are vastly different while strikingly similar. Beowulf is arrogant and prideful while Rama remains humble and obedient. Even though they share numerous differences, they are both courageous and passionate in all their endeavors. While the opposing traits add diversity in the cultures, they also remain closely related through their honorable courage and passion for their country and people.

To those who stand in the crowd to watch their magnificent hero receive more rewards and gifts for their bold acts, the characteristics of passion and courage are to be honored and placed upon a pedestal for all to see, but only if these traits are accompanied by other respected qualities such as kindness and humility in which Beowulf lacked. Beowulf was a great and powerful leader as he defeated numerous enemies and boasted as he stood, “indifferent to death,” (Beowulf, 145). His pride and arrogant personality made him all the more revered, but also landed him a place at death’s doorstep. Death was never an issue for Beowulf since he lived without fear and a zealous belief that, “fate goes ever as fate must” (121). His idea of life was not in what happens after death, but what is done before death that can ultimately lead to fame and glory for many years to come. Making a name that would never die was his main goal and he made it widely known to his people when he said, “let whoever can, win glory before death” (144). He strived for honor among his people through his acts of violence and killing.

Slaying all the beasts and fighting all the battles that he could with the least amount of help was how his pride and fame rose. He boasts of his “awesome strength,” and counts himself as dangerous as Grendel any day (121; 127). He never stops to humbly thank everyone for the support and high honors he receives, but is only fueled from all the attention. This leaves him thirsty for more as he basks in the light of his fame.

Nonetheless, Beowulf’s acts of pride and arrogance are driven by nothing more than courage and passion. He may act out in bold and often daring acts to receive his glory and honor, he does it in a way they leaves him as a hero to be praised. He even said, “ I shall win the gold by my courage” (169). His courage is what pulses through his soul, encouraging him to push harder and attain a higher status among his people. His courage is his passion and with it he rises to the top. He is described to have, “ bore himself with valor,” as he went into battle among his many enemies, while he also “ behaved with honor,” as he stuck close to what was true and noble (161). Even though his courage leads him to his death, he does so with dignity that makes his death only the beginning of the legacy he dreamed of leaving behind.

Contrary to Beowulf is Rama, who in his actions lived an obedient and humble life among his people. He treats everyone with the highest respect and accepts any hardships that disrupt his pleasant life “ without the least sign of displeasure,” (The Ramayana, 1177). In fact, when he is sentenced to an unfair banishment, he simply replies with, “ So be it” (1177). He acts with poise and grace that emanate a peaceful ambiance wherever he goes. This

is what draws him to the favor of his people. His love for happiness and aversion towards violence give the people something more to hope for. He is automatically a hero to begin with just by his attitude and character. He lives with an opinion that is “not fond of wealth and pleasure,” but believes that the universe “rests on truth,” leaving him “devoted to truth” (1179). His desired to gain simple and non-tangible rewards such as peace, truth, and love. These were a few of the acts that would earn a spot in heaven and not fame and glory down on earth. His banishment to the forest only proved this character he portrayed to be genuine as he urges that “there be no hostility towards Kaikeyi... she is not to blame,” (1180). Even though she is the one who decided on this horrible fate that Rama would have to endure for the next fourteen years. He possesses the action of forgiveness early on which gives him even more respect from those around him who witness his humility and love towards those who plot against him. Many do not recognize his character as something positive and he begins to think “our meekness is misunderstood to be weakness,” (1201). Rama does not want to be known as weak, but he that does not change the way he carries himself or the way he treats those around him. His humility is important to him along with being “full of self-control, compassion and devotion...,” to everyone and everything (1201). His obedience allows others to take advantage of him, but he remains the same through all of his trials. He pushes past all the negative outcomes and fights until all is just and fair in his life.

Even though Rama seems peaceful with great humility and poise, he also possesses the same qualities of passion and courage that Beowulf portrayed

as well. Once his beautiful wife, Sita, is snatched away Rama does not give up until she is rescued. He proclaims that “ I shall destroy all of them,” when he refers to the demons who took her away. (1200). Along with his peaceful and humble side, Rama will prove his courage and bravery when the time comes. He will not let others walk all over him and he will rise up and take back what is rightfully his. His great courage brings him glory and honor that he humbly accepts. His passion may have a different force guiding it than Beowulf, but it is still passion for what he believes and for his people. These traits leave people to love and adore Rama. He is even described to be “ the truth and eternal,” (1230). He placed in the spotlight and glorified for his actions and deeds. Once he is proclaimed as king, it was said that “ there was no poverty, no crime, no fear and no unrighteousness” (1233). Just the way Rama lived his life before, now as king he puts those beliefs and values into how he rules his people. He is loved and becomes a hero for many great reasons contrary to wealth and violence.

These two cultures are much different, but how these two heroes act goes hand in hand with the time period and background they were raised up with. The people that Rama was faced with were all naturally more peaceful than that of Beowulf’s culture. One more violent while the other more neutral, these two cultures can truly tell countless things about each of these heroes and how the culture shaped their character. While it is easy to see that these places and time periods are different, it also shows what was normal for day to day life in each of these places. The beliefs, morals, and values all differ which makes a hero unique wherever he may come from.

Though these two heroes look to be complete opposites through their character and actions, they still share the common traits of a hero in any day and age: courage and passion. They act with the bravery and ambition that is needed to defend their country and the ones they love. These two cultures have backgrounds that believe and support completely different morals, but the passion these heroes emit places them hand in hand, linking them through time and space.