

# Encountering the difficulties of Entrepreneurship: Lesson from Ramayana

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## Abstract

Scholars could not come to unanimity on definition of entrepreneurship but agreement exist that an entrepreneur should be a natural leader having thorough understanding of the business and visualize the changes and take calculated risk. Skills and abilities required for entrepreneurship are so great and numerous that it is difficult to find persons having entrepreneurship traits. Most of the entrepreneurs either fail at early stages or unable to expand the business beyond a small shop. A successful entrepreneur in addition to being a visionary and possessing qualities like innovativeness, resilience, perseverance etc. should have **the honest belief in self and unflinching faith in 'Karma' like 'Rama of Ramayana'** so that he can face the challenges and pursue the goal with limited resources.

Religious philosophy helps the people in developing traits useful in life. Holy books like the Ramayana not just deals with spirituality but management principles hidden in it help an individual to develop entrepreneurship skills and role effectiveness. Primarily, Ramayana is a story and pursuit of the Ramayana does not automatically get translated into entrepreneurship qualities as background was quite different than today's business scenario. However, Rama, a role-model of **Gyan-yog and Karm-yog**, can be compared with an entrepreneur who started from scraps like entrepreneur but by linking of his goals with social values and following highest standard of ethics, he could make strategic alliances with Sugriva and Vibheeshana and created Ram & Company and inducted less skilled, less equipped but **well dedicated Vanar in army** and fought against Ravana (the greatest demon) having well equipped army, to make the earth free from devils and liberate Sita and save the dignity of women (**social cause**). Principles hidden in the Ramayana show holistic vision and, if followed, by an entrepreneur will help him to establish a successful business model.

This article is a modest attempt of exploring attributes of Ram and principles/ methodology adopted by him in his fight against Ravana understood through interpretation of stanzas/ verses mentioned in Ramcharit Manas and correlate them with formation of strategy, goal orientation, strategic alliance, change management etc. ideally required by entrepreneurs to establish and grow his business in modern day competitive scenario.

**Key words:** Innovation, Creativity, Visionary, Strategic alliance, LPG (Liberalization, privatization and Globalization).

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## Introduction:

Though the traits and skills of entrepreneurship were existence in human beings since centuries, this concept has been professionally advocated by scholars and professional since last few decades. Fast changing economy after entry of LPG has forced the organization to remain innovative and grab the opportunity.

If we look at the Ramayana, we can observe that heroes of Ramayana, Rama & Laxmana exiled for fourteen years, having no resources but still assembled vanar army and defeated Ravana like a modern entrepreneur who starts from the scratch. This paper discusses how the life of Rama, who was motivated by the right cause, encourages and inspires an entrepreneur to develop entrepreneurship qualities to achieve goals while continuing to keep social and moral values intact. An entrepreneur has to have a questioning attitude as two basic challenges before entrepreneur are innovation and opportunities and his ability of exploring the question helps him in opening of his mind as Gita says question is dynamic but answer is static, question is a search but answer is a conclusion. An entrepreneur needs to explore various questions like:

- What to do (Developing a business idea)?
- How to do (broad picture of the plan)?
- Where to do (searching the geographical area for business):
- Who are those people who can help me?
- Why to do (whether individualistic approach or creating value for the society)?
- What skill I need to have to do what I want to do?

Finding the right opportunity or developing an idea into business (what to do) is normally the first challenge for starting a business as he should be able to see what others cannot see. He must be able to see opportunities in challenges while others might be busy in seeing problems. But seeing opportunities in challenges is just the beginning of the journey, he needs to be an economic leader who must have vision and the ability to recognize new opportunities of business, introduction of an innovative product, new technique of production and new source of supply etc. like Rama. Journey of an entrepreneur involves creating value out of nothing and therefore, he must be honest, righteous, warm loving and humble who listens the people and respect views and seek advices and be able to assemble the resources required for the business and organizes them to produce new kind of product/ service. It is like turning lead into gold.

## Review of Literature:

The term “entrepreneurship” is derived from the German word “unternehmen” and French word “entreprendre” means to undertake. Since 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the concept was first established, scholars and researchers have been debating the definition of entrepreneurship but no consensus has been arrived. The entrepreneurial process is defined by Grave and Hofer (1891) as 'involving all the functions, activities, and actions associated with perceiving of opportunities and creation of organizations to pursue them”.

Joseph Schumpeter (1934) revived the modern definition of entrepreneurship “as the ability to break away from routine, to destroy existing structures, to move the system away from the event, circular flow of equilibrium.” Kuratko and Hodgetts (2004) define entrepreneurship “as a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation. It requires an application of energy and passion

towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions”.

Blenker, Dreiler & Kjeldsen, 2006 says that the concept of entrepreneurship is too complex. Obschonka, Silbereisen & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2010, suggests that entrepreneurs have particular personality and mindset. His traits are innovation, creativity, risk-tolerance, achievement orientation, openness and self-confidence. One school of thought points that entrepreneurs' role involves risk-bearing capacity during uncertainty and imperfect information.

Peter Drucker says that 'entrepreneurship' is a practice, means it is not a state of being nor can be characterized by making plans on which no action is taken. According to Marshall the entrepreneurship skills are rare and limited. He claims that the abilities required by an entrepreneur are “so great and so numerous that very few people can exhibit them in all in a very high degree”. Summarily, analysis of various definitions reveals that entrepreneurship constitutes the following attributes/ fact/ components:

- Innovation and opportunity are two main challenges and vital ingredient of entrepreneurship;
- Behind most of the innovative efforts entrepreneur has novel idea of solving the problem of people;
- Either there is no resource or resources are very limited;
- Entrepreneur collects the likeminded people and forms the group to implement those ideas;
- Even in the face of uncertainty and obstacles, he doesn't give up the idea until he disseminates and embeds his idea deeper as much as possible;

- Entrepreneur has the ability and willingness to perceive and create new economic opportunities;
- Self discipline and alertness of the entrepreneur are keys of innovative actions of entrepreneurs.
- Entrepreneurship creates values to the society.

If we look at the life of Rama who could prepare a vanar army to fight the war against Ravana's well equipped, well skilled huge army, we may find entrepreneurial roots in the Satyuga. There are number of articles, journals, books which describe about entrepreneurship theories and provide real life case studies but these principles and concepts of entrepreneurship have already been explained through real life experience by writer like Valmiki and Tulsidas in Ramayana and Ramcharit Manas. If one reads their life carefully, several incidents teach lesson of entrepreneurship. This paper is an attempt to draw insights form Ramyana and Ramcharit Manas to enrich modern entrepreneurship principles.

### **Entrepreneurship skill and Ramayana:**

Globalization has given jolt to manipulative/ traditional / family-managed businesses and new leaders entered the market with small capital but with big ideas like N.R. Narayana Murthy, who with an initial capital of Rs. 10,000 along with some of his colleagues co-founded Infosys Ltd. in 1981. The recent trend shows that instead of choosing stable path, large numbers of young people are choosing entrepreneurship as a career. A range of challenges are being faced with number of opportunities by growing entrepreneurs. This paper outlines challenges and opportunities before the entrepreneurs and how the strategy adopted by Rama to fight against Ravana could guide entrepreneur to solve their problem. The important skills/ traits/ characteristics of the entrepreneur are:

**a) Visionary:**

Entrepreneur as a visionary should be able to see what others could not and share his vision with others like Rama who shared his vision of saving the social values, dignity of women and reforming/punishing those who are a threat to those values. Clarity of vision helps the team to be clear about the goal and team remain motivated. Entrepreneurs look the opportunities while others see the problem. Most of the persons like status quo but an entrepreneur envisages the future and forecast it. Rama, as a visionary was aware that Ravana was one of the great Bhakta of Shiva and during the war, Ravana may take shelter of Shiva and therefore, he worshipped Shiva before going for war so that Ravana could not get his blessings and moral support.

**b) Self-discipline and alertness:**

The entrepreneur should be self-disciplined and remain alert to recognize the opportunities ahead of the time as it will enable the process of innovation. In the process of entrepreneurship, he should not get attracted with short terms benefits like to test the wisdom and self discipline of Hanuman, while he was crossing the sea in search of Sita, Mainak (a golden mount) came out of the sea and invited Hanuman to come and take rest for a while but Hanuman, as a good gesture and measure of gratitude, just touched Mainak and fled further saying that he cannot take rest till he completes the job, which is versed in Ramcharit Manas as:

“जलनिधि रघुपति दूत बिचारी।

तैं मैनाक होहि श्रमहारी।“

“हनुमान तेहि परसा कर पुनि कीन्ह प्रनाम।

राम काजु कीन्हें बिनु मोहि कहाँ बिश्राम।।“

**c) Delegation of responsibilities:**

Saying “*akela chana bhaad naheen phod sakta*” equally applies to entrepreneurs as Rama too shared his vision and delegated various responsibilities to different group of people like some were sent for searching Sita and others were assigned the work of construction of bridge over sea.

**d) Innovation and creativity:**

Innovation and creativity means ability to come up with new ideas and alternatives which are vital and essential for creating jobs and for economic and social growth. Creative imitation takes place if the imitator understands how an innovation can be applied. Entrepreneurs are innovative persons who are responsible for the growth and change in the society and needs to think out of box and find different alternatives as said about Hanuman in Hanuman Chaleesa as:

“सूक्ष्म रूप धरि सियहिं दिखावा।

बिकट रूप धरि लंक जरावा।।

भीम रूप धरि असुर सँहारे।

रामचन्द्र के काज सँवारे।।“

**e) Ethics & Values:**

Rama never depicted as a blind puritan and chooses to follow code of conduct and pursue it religiously. Several leaders first build credibility with sacrifice as strategy and after getting certain position resort to unethical practices. Rama was an ideal husband, an ideal son, an ideal king, and a pragmatic person. Value systems of Rama were even higher than of his father who had four wives but Rama had one wife while polygamy was permitted. Rama sets high standard of ethics in warfare and invariably took side of dharma or righteous that even during the war, one day when Ravana was disarmed by chivalry of Rama, he allowed Ravana to escape and return safely because he believed that an un-armed

person should not be attacked. Business is Dharma and entrepreneur must stand forth for value and ethics and stand for morality in all times whether good time or bad. Rama started with scrap but in addition to other hard and soft skill, the value and ethics followed by him created trust and everyone from Sugriva, Hanuman, Angad, Vibheeshana etc. relied upon him and supported from body and soul.

#### f) Honesty & Integrity:

The basic factor that distinguishes a person is honesty and righteousness like Rama who was motivated by the cause and commitment towards the cause. Rama was fighting for righteous cause against Ravana, the demon king having huge wealth and well trained heavily armed army as Upanishad says '*Satyamev Jayate*'. When entrepreneur approaches people, they help him mainly on the basis of two factors i.e. commitment shown towards the business model and level of honesty and righteousness. Gita describes three gates of hell which destroy the self are; lust, wrath, and greed. Also illustrated in Ramcharit Manas as:

“काम क्रोध मद लोभ सब नाथ नरक के पंथ ।

#### g) Calculated Risk-taking:

More the risk, more the profit. Risk taking is an essential ingredient of entrepreneurship but he cannot take unlimited risk as entrepreneur is a trustee of the money which he has borrowed from others. He has to prove that that he is trustworthy and therefore, needs to take holistic view and sometimes may be required to take unusual steps than otherwise required to save the interest of the people who have shown faith in him as when Laxmana became unconscious due Meghnath's Brahmastra, and having understood that he is unable to recognize the real herb, Hanuman brought the whole mountain which is versed as in Lankakand:

“देखा सैल न औषधि चीन्हा,  
सहसा कपि उपारि गिरि लीन्हा ।  
गहि गिरि नीसी नभ धावत भयऊ,  
अवधपुरी ऊपर कपि गयऊ” ॥

#### h) Keep ego asides:

While running a startup business, an entrepreneur must learn from Ramayana to keep his ego asides to get the best from the worst as when Ravana was on the death bed, Rama instructed Laxmana to go to Ravana and learn the tenets of good governance from him but when Laxmana approached him and stood near the head side of Ravana and asked him. Ravana refused to give any advice and then Rama advised Laxmana to approach him with humility and stand near his leg side and when Laxmana approached accordingly, Ravana advised about the pitfalls of procrastination and shared the knowledge about statecraft and diplomacy.

#### i) Patience and belief in self:

Belief in self with courage to face the adversity like Rama who inspite of odd moments did not stop the search of Sita is important characteristics of an entrepreneur. Patience and perseverance are vital. There is a saying “Rome was not built in one day”. Kabir says “*dheere dheere re mana dheere sab kuchh hoy*” equally applies to entrepreneurship. Frequent challenges and failure leads to demotivation and negative mindset but to overcome it, he need to inspire himself by learning from the life of great people like Rama and Hanuman.

#### j) Leaving the Comfort Zone:

Instead of remaining confined to the comforts and being aware of the difficulty, he was going to face, Rama accepted the instruction of his father to remain in exile for 14 years and took it as an

opportunity to learn new dimensions of life and got engaged with the ordinary citizens to understand the ground realities of life. Entrepreneurship is more difficult journey than that was of Rama as an entrepreneur has to be ready to remain in exile while leaving with his own people and making sacrifice of own comfort.

**k) Focusing long term goal rather than short term objectives:**

Modern management measure the success in terms of materialistic achievement measured in relative and short term objectives, called as Management by Objectives but the story of Ramayana deals with the long term Goal of the life. This can be compared with '*sarvabhuthahiteratha*' (means welfare of all beings) principles of the Bhagwat Gita. The entrepreneurs should not sacrifice the ultimate goal while catching the small objectives. Once Anjani, mother of Hanuman asked why did they have gone through the trouble of building bridge over the sea and fought with Ravana. Why did he not ask Sita to sit on his back and fled from Ashok Vatika? Hanuman replied that this short cut could have brought Sita but could not have brought the justice to the dignity of woman (Sita) which was put in question due to action of Ravana. In the interest of justice, it was necessary for Rama to punish Ravana to save the honour of Sita. This story conveys that long term goal is much bigger than short term objectives though easy to achieve.

**l) Adopting to change environment:**

There is saying, "Change, change, change...else change will change you". Entrepreneur needs to be goal driven and able to envisage and forecast the future and be sensitive to market fluctuations so that continuously can adapt to changing environment. Complacency can be a major threat. He needs to focus on market research and take action, otherwise may run the risk of taking

business decision on the basis of out-of-date information and giving advantage to competitors.

**m) Passion and Purpose:**

Entrepreneurship journey is exciting but terrifying too being full of challenges like instability, dynamic market, lack of support, lack of skilled labors, lack of infrastructural facilities, outdated technology, shortage of raw material etc. causing stress, negative emotions, feelings of wanting to give up etc. He should be a person of superior ability who can pursue his goals despite of obstacles adversity and failures. In order to grow, he needs to remain visionary, competent, action oriented and passionate to overcome such challenges.

**n) Be careful with Yes-men:**

Communication and learning to listen is an important skill. Ravana was a highly learned person but was surrounded by **Yes-man** ministers. No one except Vibheeshana could dare to advise the right path to Ravana but he didn't listen and rather kicked him because he was surrounded by yes-man courtiers who pumped his false ego. The following couplet in Sundara Kanda clearly advises that the king who acts on the advice of a minister who speak positively out of fear or expectation of a gain, such king will definitely loose his kingdom:

“सचिव बैद गुर तीनि जौं  
प्रिय बोलहिं भय आस ।  
राज धर्म तन तीनि  
कर होइ बेगिहीं नास ॥“

**Entrepreneurship journey and Ramayana:**

The journey of an entrepreneur passes from various stages and the following steps/measures will

smoothen the process of journey of success:-

**a) Honest assessment of self:**

The first challenge before the entrepreneur is an honest assessment of self and understanding whether he has the grey matter. Several entrepreneurs fail as they opt to be an entrepreneur by compulsion of not getting suitable salary job. Rama is a fine example who instead of running back to Ayodhya for taking helps of army of Ayodhya and fight war against Ravana decided to prepare vanar army and fight against Ravana.

**b) Identification of the problem:**

Long term strategy, identification of the problem and finding alternate solutions to cope up with change as per market condition is necessary. For example, when the entrepreneur is starting the business, the focus may be to attract more customers but afterwards the focus may be to build long term professional relations as in Ramayana, the initial focus of Rama was to search Sita and find alternate solutions to get Sita back through dialogue and after failing, he waged war. Rama always used to identify the problem before proceedings which can be understood from the incident that before attacking upon Lanka, Rama discussed how to cross heavy gates of Lanka, described as in Lanka kand :

“रिपु के समाचार जब पाए,  
राम सचिव सब निकट बोलाए।  
लंका बाँके चारि दुआरा,  
केही बिधि लागिअ करहु बिचारा” ॥

**c) Developing the resources and its optimum use:**

This is the most crucial challenges because normally the entrepreneur has untested idea but

hardly any resource and has to start from scratch and most of the people laugh upon him. Three important resources are:

- Managing capital
- Having the core team of right man
- Finding good employees

**Managing Capital:**

Being untested idea, Banks and other people avoid providing capital and to overcome it, he must plan ahead to anticipate financial requirement and sell his idea and vision to potential investors. He may be required to bring in investors to provide the equity or take loan from the financial institutions or add some partner but for attracting the investor/partner, he needs to be trustworthy like Rama shared his idea with Sugriva, how he can be useful for him and proposed to give his kingdom back by killing Bali and having experienced Rama, Sugriva shared his resources.

**Having core team of right man:**

This is another business challenge that an entrepreneur faces which in fact starts even before the issue of raising start-up capital. An entrepreneur as an individual can't be master of all and bound to have some weaknesses along with his strength and therefore, should develop/ appoint people in core business team who can help him to cover up or compliment his weaknesses. The entrepreneur has to ensure that the team sees the vision he is looking for and passionate to achieve as Rama could win against Ravana because of a committed and performing core team. In Ayodhya Kand, while advising about good governance, Rama says that knowledgeable, courageous, reliable and strong-willed persons who has high emotional quotient should be appointed as ministers because quality of advice of ministers determines the governance of the king. The

entrepreneur should appoint right man and not yes man who are guided by their self-interest.

### **Finding Good Employees:**

Henry Ford once said, “take away my building, take away my machinery but leave my people, I will be Henry Ford, once again”. Army commanders say, war is not won by weapons but by soldiers. Rama waged war with limited resources which backed by an army having outdated, unconventional arms but highly motivated against Lanka's army which was highly sophisticated, well trained and has history of defeating several kings and deities. Superiority of motivation levels is more important than physical resources. It is the era of knowledge based economy and finding talented, passionate and loyal employee is the most difficult task. Employees are face of the organization who can win the hearts of the customers rather than winning the wallets of the customer and company and therefore, for an entrepreneur, identifying right person for the right job and motivating him is a challenging task as it was Rama who could identify the talent of Hanuman and it was Jamwant who could motivate him which Sugriva could not do though Hanuman was already available in his army. Had Sugriva could identified the talent of Hanuman; he could not have lost his battle with Bali. This episode is versed in Ramcharit Manas as under:

“कहइ रीछपति सुनु हनुमाना  
का चुप साधि रहेहु बलवाना ॥  
पवन तयन बल पवन समाना |  
बुधि विवेक विग्यान निधाना ॥”

When Shatrughan was going to fight with Lavnasur, the powerful demon king, Rama advised Shatrughan for recruiting good people in the army, treating them with respect and love, and paying them reasonably will go a long way in motivating

the army and winning the their loyalty which modern management guru like Prahalad and Peter Drucker doctrine.

### **d) Tap the opportunity and solve the problem by integrating into business plan:**

Entrepreneur businesses run in perpetual crisis like sailing of a boat as problem and priorities changes which take much of his time in troubleshooting but instead of treating each problem as a one off, an entrepreneur needs to search opportunities and swiftly adjusts his business to the current trend and solve the problem by focusing on developing system and procedure. For example, with demonetization process, entrepreneurs those who shifted their business towards digital banking could lead the market.

### **e) Professionalization of the management:**

As the business grow, voluminous information related with customer, HR, finance etc, needs to be handled and it is difficult to keep track and therefore, entrepreneurs should move from individual driven unstructured culture to professionally managed culture and segregate the operational control of business from the beneficial ownership by delegating the operational control to professionals and restricting their role to keep an eagle view over the business and provide their vision. Example, When Nal and Neil were building the bridge over sea, they were placing stones on water which started floating. By seeing it, Rama too started placing stones on water but these stones started sinking. This story conveys a message to entrepreneur that he should leave the job of day to day management upon professionals/ experts rather than doing all jobs by him.

One of the basic differences between Rama and Ravana was that Rama was a professional manager who could use the managerial skills of persons like



Hanuman (who was in passive stage while working with Sugriva) and Angada (who the son of Bali, an enemy killed by Rama) whereas Ravana was an unprofessional manager who not only ignored the advice of its manager but even insulted and kicked his own brother and one of the best manager, Vibheeshana which ultimately led to the demise of his own kingdom as explained in Sunderkand:

“सुमति कुमति सब के उर रहहीं,  
नाथ पुरान निगम अस कहहीं ॥  
जहाँ सुमति तहँ संपति नाना,  
जहाँ कुमति तहँ बिपति निदाना ॥ “

**f) Need based Strategic alliance with others and planning for execution:**

An up-to-date plan helps to identify action that needs to be taken to change business strategy. To grow faster, an entrepreneur must make value based strategic alliance to achieve the desired goal as it accrue long-term benefits to both parties like Rama and Sugriva made alliance. This incident is described in following stanza in Kishkindahakand:

“तब हनुमंत उभय दिसि की सब कथा सुनाइ।  
पावक साखी देइ करि जोरी प्रीति दढ़ाइ ॥“

But such alliance is possible only when both the parties are honest in developing mutual interest as Sugriva promised to provide his army to liberate Sita and Rama promised to kill Bali and get back the kingdom and wife who were snatched.

**g) Moving from unilateral to collective decision:**

In the initial stage of development of entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur needs to take prompt decision even if it may be unilateral and

tough but with the increased complexity of the organization, entrepreneur needs to institutionalize the decision making process where decisions are taken with the help of a core team of management professional. The entrepreneur should be in position to convince others in case no consensus take place to keep the core team intact as when Vibhishana approached Rama for shelter, Rama consulted his core group of ministers who suggested that a demon should not to be trusted that too when he is the brother of Ravana. But instead of rejecting or rebuking idea of its ministers, he neutralized their doubts/ incredulity and convinced that a person should not be dejected without judging him/ testing his credibility.

**h) Succession plan/ exit plan:**

The entrepreneur creates the organization from the scratch by creating value but find difficult to continue and organization die with unfortunate death of the entrepreneur. Lack of succession plan/ exit plan makes the business as one man show and absence of the person crumbles the business and erodes the value. Proper succession and exit plan is important for long term survival of the business. A good entrepreneur grooms atleast 2-3 persons as leader and ensure proper succession to the top performer peacefully and amicably. The failure of Dasarath to pass on the kingdom led to emergence of story of Ramayana. According to *Raghuvansham* of Kalidasa, even when Rama was relinquishing his body, he equitably distributed his wealth between his two sons – Lava and Kusha.

**Conclusion:**

Entrepreneurship requires a person of superior ability who is ready to face adversities, face challenges and takes risk and has passion to pursue his goals despite of innumerable obstacles, setbacks, and failure. The environment in which entrepreneur operate is changing constantly and therefore, he need to learn to act in this dynamic

equilibrium. A radical mindset change is necessary to encourage entrepreneurship as it creates values in our society rather than just earning wealth like multinationals. The steps/ process discussed in this paper are not in seriatim but steps over steps each other. In addition to possession of the skills and understanding of the journey, the entrepreneur should follow the principle of “*atmano-mokshartrtham jagat-hitay*” (advocated by Swami Vivekanada) and have right cause in the mind to get ultimate success because if you are working for the humanity and natural values of the life nature is with you like Rama who started from scratch and defeated undefeatable Ravana who was so powerful that even defeated deities too as said, “*niyat saph ho to niyati bhee saath hotee hai*”.

The journey of entrepreneurship is mission-driven love towards the social/ environmental/ humanistic goals as Bhagwat Gita says, if love is directed toward objects and people, love becomes lust and causes suffering, suffering, suffering...but if love is directed towards humanity, it gives fullness, fullness, fullness...and therefore, entrepreneur should develop love towards humanity to get success in the life.

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