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A Comparative Study of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Ravana in the *Ramayana*: Fallen but Charismatic

Maitray Kaushik
Independent Researcher,
110092, Delhi
maitraywork@gmail.com
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0760-6819

Abstract

This paper undertakes a comparative study of two epic antagonists—John Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Valmiki's Ravana in the *Ramayana* (c. 5th century BCE)—as archetypes of "fallen but charismatic" figures. Both characters embody the paradox of villainy: condemned as embodiments of evil yet admired for their eloquence, power, and tragic grandeur. The analysis explores key thematic parallels, including pride and ego as tragic flaws, rhetorical brilliance as a persuasive weapon, and gendered dynamics in their interactions with Eve and Sita. It further highlights how Satan and Ravana's defiance reflects distinct cosmological frameworks: Christian dualism, where rebellion signifies eternal damnation, versus Hindu cosmology, where transgression disrupts dharma yet is still acknowledged with dignity. Drawing on critical traditions from Blake, Empson, Fish, Ramanujan, and Richman, the paper situates these figures within broader philosophical, theological, and cultural debates. Ultimately, the study argues that Satan and Ravana exemplify the universal fascination with charismatic rebels, illustrating how epic literature across cultures grapples with moral conflict, ambition, disobedience, and the allure of power.

Keywords: Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Valmiki, *Ramayana*, Ravana, comparative literature, postcolonial studies

Introduction

In literature from all over the world, the rebel theme—characters who defy cosmic authority, moral law, or divine order—recurs frequently. People whose greatness is paradoxically enhanced by their fall are especially appealing to epic traditions. Two of these figures are particularly prominent in popular culture: Ravana from Valmiki's *Ramayana* (c. 5th century

BCE) and Satan from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Both embody the paradox of villainy: demonised as expressions of malevolence, yet revered for their charm, power, and linguistic prowess. Their tales make others feel sorry for them as tragic people while also exposing deep-seated fears about pride, rebellion, and the allure of power (Fish 45).

John Milton, a Puritan poet from the seventeenth century, wrote Paradise Lost with the intention of "justifying the ways of God to men" (Paradise Lost 1.26). However, Satan—the angel who rebels against Heaven and is consigned to Hell—is the most fascinating character in the poem, not Adam, Eve, or even God. Satan has captivated and enraged readers for millennia, as evidenced by his declarations in Book I and his temptation of Eve in Book IX (Empson 102). Even as his conceit and deceit solidify his position as the great antagonist, his contempt for divine authority, his eloquence, and his insistence on freedom speak to human longing. Whether intentionally or not, critics ranging from Blake to Empson have claimed that Milton made Satan a hero. This tension between literary appeal and religious condemnation continues to play a significant role in debates surrounding the poem (Blake 6; Empson 108).

The sage Valmiki is credited with writing the *Ramayana*, which continues to hold a central position in Hindu literature and culture. Similar to *Paradise Lost*, it depicts a cosmic conflict between right and wrong, personified in the conflict between Ravana, the ten-headed demon-king of Lanka, and Rama, the ideal prince and Vishnu's avatar (Goldman 3.112). Ravana is portrayed as being extremely intelligent, a Brahmin by birth, an excellent fighter, and a devotee of Shiva. However, his obsession with ambition, pride (ahankara), and desire leads him to kidnap Rama's wife Sita. Ravana's demise results from his transgression of dharma, or cosmic order. However, his tragic dignity and grandeur have made him a timeless figure in Indian culture, and some traditions even honor him (Pattanaik 204).

This study compares two epic villains with thematic resonances across vastly different cultural, religious, and historical contexts by contrasting Milton's Satan with Valmiki's Ravana. Through their interactions with Eve and Sita, both characters deal with gendered dynamics, both use eloquence as a persuasive tool, and both embody the dangers of arrogance and disobedience. Yet, they also diverge greatly: Ravana lives within a Hindu universe that

places his demise within cycles of karma and cosmic balance, whereas Satan inhabits a dualistic Christian framework where rebellion results in eternal damnation (Ramanujan 33).

This comparative analysis is conducted on multiple levels. It begins by examining the critical studies of both characters, following arguments about the bravery of Satan and the variety of Ravana's representations. A thorough comparative study of their pride, eloquence, gendered interactions, defiance, and demise follows. It then examines how Christian and Hindu traditions view evil and revolt, placing these individuals within philosophical and cultural contexts. Lastly, it emphasizes how Satan and Ravana continue to exist in literature, art, and cultural memory.

By using this analysis, the paper argues that Satan and Ravana are archetypal examples of "fallen but charismatic" beings that represent the duality of evil: destructive yet alluring, condemned yet adored, villainous yet oddly heroic. Their tales demonstrate not only the cultural differences between Hindu and Christian worldviews but also the universal human interest in conceit, disobedience, and tragic grandeur (Richman 27).

This study brings Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Valmiki's *Ramayana* into conversation as part of a broader dialogue between Western and South Asian epic traditions. In doing so, it speaks to questions central to comparative literature, South Asian culture, and postcolonial debates

Review of Literature

Scholarly debates about Satan and Ravana show how these beings defy simple classification as villains. Commentators have been debating whether to see them as tragic heroes, villains, or complex combinations of both for centuries (Fish 48).

Miltonic Criticism's Satan

Satan captured readers' imaginations as soon as Paradise Lost was released. While maintaining his criticism of the religious message, John Dryden praised Milton's work, highlighting the grandeur of Satan's words (Dryden 142). Satan was elevated to almost heroic proportions by the Romantic poets. Milton was "of the Devil's party without knowing it," according to William Blake's well-known statement in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

(Blake 6). In contrast to what Blake perceived as God's despotism, Satan stood for creative vitality and resistance to oppressive power (Blake 7). In his *Defence of Poetry*, Percy Bysshe Shelley also praised Satan's "magnanimity" and "courage," viewing him as a representation of resistance to unfair authority (Shelley 59).

Long-lasting debates were sparked by this romantic restoration of Satan. During the 20th century, in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, C.S. Lewis made a compelling counterargument, arguing that Satan is a deluded figure whose greatness is a transient illusion rather than a hero (Lewis 32). Lewis emphasized how, especially as the poem progresses from Book I to Book X (Paradise Lost 1.1090–1110), Satan's apparent bravery dissolves into foolishness, cowardice, and degradation. In *Surprised by Sin*, Stanley Fish supported this viewpoint by claiming that Milton deliberately tries to make readers feel sorry for Satan in order to highlight their moral failings (Fish 112). Fish views the experience of "falling" for Satan as a teaching moment that mirrors Adam and Eve's temptation.

In *Milton's God*, however, William Empson presented a more empathetic perspective, arguing that Milton's attempt to defend God inevitably made Satan seem more plausible (Empson 115). Even though they acknowledge Satan's villainy, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, and others have also emphasized his tragic stature (Frye 92; Bloom 78). This critical history demonstrates how Satan is a paradox: he is both God's enemy and the poem's most intriguing character, both seductive and repulsive.

In Ramayana Studies, Ravana

The critical response to Ravana is also nuanced. He is the main antagonist in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, upsetting the cosmic order with his arrogance, ambition, and desire. He is portrayed as a fierce warrior, a master of the Vedas, and a monarch with significant accomplishments, but the text itself acknowledges his greatness (Goldman 3.112). His inability to control his desires, rather than a lack of competence, is his fatal weakness (Pattanaik 205).

Ravana's role has long been disputed by Indian academics and storytellers. Paula Richman emphasises in *Many Ramayanas* how Ravana's representations vary depending on the region (Richman 22). Ravana is portrayed more sympathetically in some South Indian

and Southeast Asian interpretations, occasionally even as a great monarch whose devotion to Shiva atones for some of his villainous traits (Richman 31). In *Three Hundred Ramayanas*, A.K. Ramanujan emphasises this diversity by demonstrating how, depending on the cultural context, Ravana can be either humanised, demonised, or elevated (Ramanujan 33).

Ravana's image is also distorted in contemporary retellings. According to Devdutt Pattanaik, Ravana is a tragic individual and a villain whose failure to control his ego leads to his downfall (Pattanaik 209). Local opposition to the dominance of the Rama-centred narrative is reflected in modern reinterpretations that even exalt Ravana as a cultural hero, especially in Sri Lanka and portions of Tamil Nadu (Richman 36).

In his critical edition of the *Ramayana*, scholars like Robert P. Goldman emphasise Ravana's dual nature as a warrior and a scholar, a demon and a Brahmin. Although his awful ahankara flaw reflects the Christian concept of pride, his position in Hindu cosmology is less clear (Goldman 3.115). At the point of death, Rama himself recognises Ravana as a great monarch whose valour merits praise, in contrast to Satan, who is condemned to eternal damnation (Valmiki 6.112).

Theoretical and Comparative Frameworks

The similarities between Satan and Ravana as legendary rebels have been noted by comparative analysts. These characters are positioned within mythical patterns of defiance against cosmic order in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell 204). According to Carl Jung's archetypal critique, they are manifestations of the "shadow" archetype, which is made up of people who represent human pride, ambition, and the need for independence (Jung 45). While Western critics frequently place Satan in connection with political resistance, particularly Milton's animosity toward monarchy, postcolonial critics have also examined Ravana as a counter-narrative to hegemonic interpretations of the *Ramayana* (Fish 78; Frye 98).

As a result, both Satan and Ravana are part of broad critical traditions that oscillate between orthodoxy and subversion, adoration and condemnation. Comparative analysis reveals not only the common archetype of the charismatic rebel but also the different cultural

frameworks that influence how they are portrayed, such as Hindu cosmology and Christian dualism (Richman 29; Empson 118).

Analysis by Comparison

Ego and Pride as Tragic Illnesses

Pride, the root of all sin according to Christian doctrine, is the cause of Satan's uprising in Paradise Lost. He rejects God's supremacy despite being the highest of angels: "It is better to rule in Hell than to serve in Heaven" (Milton 1.263–264). His arrogance is exemplified by this statement, which presents disobedience as freedom. Milton uses the figure of Satan to dramatise the theological truth that pride (superbia) was the root cause of the Fall, as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas had long warned (Lewis 34). His tragedy lies in putting his will above divine authority and confusing service to God with tyranny.

Ego, or ahankara, is Ravana's weakness. He is strong and knowledgeable, but his conceit makes him blind. Ravana declares, "I will not bow to the will of mortals or gods," in response to his brother Vibhishana's advice to return Sita (Valmiki 6.9). Legitimate kingship is turned into tyranny by his vanity. Ravana is a prime example of the Sanskrit epics' frequent warnings against ahankara as the cause of destruction (Pattanaik 207). He combines strength and ego, just like Satan, and uses obstinacy to seal his doom.

Both characters show how arrogance turns grandeur into devastation. However, Ravana's ahankara upsets dharma and upsets the cosmic balance, whereas Satan's arrogance threatens a monotheistic God (Ramanujan 34).

Rhetoric and Eloquence

Satan's eloquence is what makes him appealing. The fallen angels are inspired by his words in Book I of Paradise Lost: "Awaken, arise, or be for ever fall!" (Milton 1.330). His speech conceals defeat with resistance, turning sorrow into resolve. According to critics, Milton uses Homer and Virgil as classical models of eloquence to depict Satan in an epic manner (Empson 110). Despite its deceit, his language captivates readers and followers alike (Frye 95).

Argumentative power also defines Ravana. His intellectual prowess is evident in his debates. In an attempt to convince Sita, he uses flattery and threats to assert his power and promise her the throne of Lanka (Goldman 3.120). Despite being unethical, his language shows his confidence and learning. His linguistic prowess betrays his academic training as a Brahmin who is knowledgeable about the Vedas (Pattanaik 210).

Rhetoric, then, serves as a double-edged sword for both characters: it gives them tragic charm and elevates them above the level of villains, but it also encourages their manipulation and downfall (Richman 32).

Dimensions by Gender: Eve and Sita

The gendered elements of rebellion are highlighted by Ravana's kidnapping of Sita and Satan's temptation of Eve. By saying, "Ye shall be as Gods, knowing both good and evil," Satan plays on Eve's desire for knowledge (Milton 9.708–709). Through discourse rather than force, his argument causes humanity to collapse. Satan's temptation, according to feminist critics like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, demonstrates patriarchal concerns about female autonomy by portraying Eve as both a victim and an agent (Gilbert and Gubar 83).

In contrast, Ravana uses coercion and force to kidnap Sita. He poses as a mendicant and takes advantage of her weakness when Rama and Lakshmana are not present (Valmiki 6.40–41). His actions turn Sita into a thing that men are proud of and honour. According to Indian feminist readings, Sita becomes a site of patriarchal control, and her kidnapping sets off a conflict that is as much about male competition as it is about female agency (Pattanaik 212).

The importance of women in the story of pride and rebellion is demonstrated in both episodes. The interactions between Satan and Ravana and Eve and Sita illustrate how gender, power, and villainy are intertwined in epic stories (Ramanujan 36).

Rebellion and Disobedience

Defiance is exemplified by Ravana and Satan. Disobedience is portrayed by Satan as heroic: "What if the field were lost? The unbreakable will, the courage to never give up, and

everything is still intact" (Milton 1.105–108). His focus on self-determination transforms disobedience into a resistance ideology (Empson 112).

In a similar vein, Ravana does not give up, even when loss is unavoidable. He demonstrates his resolve to avoid shame by turning down Vibhishana's counsel (Valmiki 6.100–101). Ravana fights valiantly in his last encounter with Rama, displaying tragic dignity in spite of his impending death. His defiance transforms him into a warrior-king who maintains his grandeur despite being condemned (Goldman 3.130).

Death and the Afterlife

Satan has been completely defeated. By Book X, he has lost his grandeur and has turned into a snake: "Down at once, as far as angels' ken, he views / The dismal situation waste and wild" (Milton 10.59–60). His transformation from angel to beast serves as a metaphor for the perils of arrogance. There is only eternal agony and no salvation (Lewis 39).

In contrast, Ravana's collapse is shown with melancholy dignity. Rama respects him after killing him, saying, "Go and learn from him." He was an amazing monarch (Valmiki 6.112). Even Ravana's enemies lament his passing, acknowledging his genius in spite of his frailties (Pattanaik 215). Ravana's fate is situated within Hindu mythology, where even devils fulfill significant roles, in contrast to Satan's eternal doom (Ramanujan 38).

Literary and Cultural Importance

Ravana and Satan stand in for the respective cultures' theological underpinnings. According to Christianity, the greatest sin that results in eternal damnation is rebellion against God. This dualism is best illustrated by Satan, who is eternally estranged from grace and irredeemably evil (Empson 118). His charm makes readers uneasy, but it doesn't make his criticism any less harsh.

In contrast, Ravana is positioned within a cycle of karma in Hindu cosmology. Even in defeat, his excellence is recognised, but his villainy draws attention to the dangers of ahankara. By losing to Rama, the holy avatar, he affirms dharma (Goldman 3.140).

According to this theory, evil is a component of a larger cosmic balance rather than an absolute.

Both figures have undergone cultural reinterpretations. While Ravana is revered in many Indian and Sri Lankan traditions, Satan evolved into a symbol of resistance in Romantic poetry and contemporary literature (Blake 9; Richman 36). Their enduring appeal is evidenced by their afterlife.

Philosophical and Cultural Consequences

The stories of Satan and Ravana illustrate how Christian and Hindu thought construct ideas of evil, rebellion, and cosmic order differently. They also serve as symbols for the religious and philosophical systems of their respective cultures.

According to Christianity, the greatest sin is rebellion against God, which results in eternal damnation. This dualism is symbolised by Satan, who stands for the intense opposition to divine authority (Lewis 42). His charismatic disobedience only serves to further the moral lesson that pride (superbia) breeds ruin; he is irredeemably evil and will always be cut off from grace (Empson 120). Even though Satan has poetic and majestic moments in Milton's story, his rebellion always ends in degeneration; by Book X, he is "a serpent now, / Down to the dismal bottom of the deep" (Milton 10.56–57). According to critics like C.S. Lewis and Stanley Fish, Milton deliberately portrays Satan as appealing to ensnare readers in the moral dilemma of temptation and underscores the peril of cherishing sin (Lewis 43; Fish 114).

Conversely, Ravana is situated within a cyclical and morally intricate framework in Hindu cosmology. Ramanujan (38) asserts that evil is not absolute; it constitutes a part of a broader cosmic order regulated by dharma and karma. Even though he was a villain—his desire, pride, and stubbornness upset the moral and cosmic balance—people still admire Ravana's greatness. When Rama, the divine avatar, sees Ravana's bravery as he is about to die, he says, "Go, and learn from him." He was a great king (Valmiki 6.112). Ravana's story shows how complicated dharmic law is by showing that moral flaws can exist alongside bravery, intelligence, and dedication (Goldman 3.140).

Over time, people have looked at Ravana and Satan in different ways. Romantic poets like William Blake liked Satan's character and called him a symbol of creative and rebellious energy: "Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it" (Blake 6). Shelley also praised Satan's bravery and generosity, saying that he was a symbol of standing up to unfair authority (Shelley 59). These opinions show how literary charm can turn religious criticism into cultural praise.

Regional traditions and modern retellings have also changed how people see Ravana. In South India and Sri Lanka, he is shown as a scholar, devotee, and sometimes even a hero (Richman 36; Pattanaik 215). This shows how people in those areas have reinterpreted his character and questioned the importance of Rama-centred stories. These cultural adaptations show how flexible epic stories can be and how strong villains can play a lot of different symbolic and moral roles.

The intellectual and theological disparity between Satan and Ravana exemplifies the divergent moral philosophies of Christianity and Hinduism. Christianity promotes loyalty to one divine authority and sees resistance as hopeless because it only sees good and evil in two ways (Lewis 45). Milton's Satan is a good example of this because his rebellion is pointless and terrible, even though he has moments of rhetorical genius (Empson 122). Hindu cosmology sees moral law as a balance between duties and consequences. Ravana's crime upsets this balance and shows his bravery, intelligence, and devotion, which gives a more nuanced view of evil (Ramanujan 40; Goldman 3.142).

From a philosophical point of view, both characters bring up problems with morality, freedom, and human nature. Satan represents the Christian fear that pride and self-will can lead to ruin. He is the embodiment of the conflict between autonomy and obedience (Fish 116). Ravana depicts an intricate moral landscape, wherein morality and valor coexist with transgression, and where ego and desire contend with cosmic responsibility (Pattanaik 218). Both of them make you think about the appeal of rebellion, the dangers of pride, and the lure of power.

In summary, the cultural and philosophical implications of Satan and Ravana underscore the distinct ethical paradigms of Christianity and Hinduism, while illustrating the universality of the charismatic rebel archetype. The moral, theological, and philosophical

assumptions of their respective communities are evident in how both narratives explore the ramifications of disobedience (Empson 125; Ramanujan 41). These differences show how literature reflects and shapes our ideas about morality, free will, and the order of the universe.

Summary

Satan and Ravana are both examples of how appealing the charismatic rebel character can be, even though they come from very different cultural and religious backgrounds. Both individuals occupy the threshold between villainy and valor, characterized by their pride, eloquence, and defiance. Milton's Satan audaciously and adeptly contests God's authority, yet ultimately yields to humiliation and perpetual torment (Milton 10.56–60; Lewis 42). Ravana, on the other hand, goes against the cosmic and moral order through ahankara. However, even when he dies, he keeps his courage, dignity, and even respect (Valmiki 6.112; Pattanaik 215).

A comparison of these personalities reveals many key characteristics. The primary tragic flaws that propel their plots and highlight the consequences of excessive ambition are pride and ego (Empson 120; Ramanujan 38). Second, their rhetorical and eloquent skills elevate them above the status of simple adversaries, captivating audiences and readers in a paradoxical way (Frye 95; Goldman 3.120). Third, their gendered interactions—with Eve and Sita—showcase connections of power, persuasion, and patriarchal anxiety, highlighting the significance of women as catalysts in the drama of rebellion and morality (Gilbert and Gubar 83; Pattanaik 212).

Philosophically, the differences between Ravana and Satan reflect the cosmological and moral underpinnings of their respective faiths. In contrast to Hindu cosmology, which places transgression within a complex system of karma and dharma that permits the recognition of both virtue and error, Christianity's binary moral world depicts rebellion as absolute sin (Lewis 45; Ramanujan 40). This contrast demonstrates how narrative and character development are impacted by cultural, religious, and philosophical presumptions.

Furthermore, both characters serve as prime examples of the enduring cultural influence of charismatic adversaries. Romantic reinterpretations of Satan's persona have emphasised independence, resistance, and creative fire (Blake 6; Shelley 59). The adaptability of epic narratives and cultural memory is demonstrated by the various ways that Ravana has been recast in regional and contemporary retellings, occasionally even as a hero

or beloved character (Richman 36; Pattanaik 215). The ability of literature to transcend its original moral framework and to resonate with universal human fascinations—rebellion, pride, and tragic grandeur—is attested to by these afterlives.

Finally, the comparison between Valmiki's Ravana and Milton's Satan demonstrates the universality of the "fallen but charismatic" image while clarifying the distinct ethical and philosophical frameworks of Hinduism and Christianity. Both personalities promote introspection about the nature of people, the interplay between virtue and vice, the consequences of hubris, and the temptation of power. Their stories show that resistance, even when condemned, can captivate imagination and spark enduring literary and cultural discourse, and that villainy need not be devoid of grandeur (Empson 125; Ramanujan 41).

Through an analysis of these epic antagonists, this study demonstrates how literature from many cultures addresses existential and ethical issues in a similar way, albeit from different theological, philosophical, and cultural viewpoints. The myths of Satan and Ravana serve as a reminder that the line separating heroism from villainy is frequently hazy and that the charismatic rebel is still a fascinating prism through which to examine moral conflict, human ambition, and the deadly consequences of hubris.

Placing Satan beside Ravana highlights not only their shared traits as rebellious figures but also the wider cultural and religious worlds they belong to. By drawing these worlds together, the study adds to comparative and South Asian literary discussions while opening space for fresh perspectives on rebellion, power, and morality.

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Author Bio-Note

Maitray Kaushik is an independent researcher who has qualified the University Grants Commission – National Eligibility Test (UGC-NET) in English. He holds a Master's degree in English Literature and has research interests in comparative literature, epic traditions, postcolonial studies, and South Asian cultural narratives. His work focuses on the intersections between Western and Indian literary canons, especially how characters such as Milton's Satan and Valmiki's Ravana embody universal archetypes of rebellion, power, and charisma. He is particularly engaged in exploring how cross-cultural texts can be analyzed through the frameworks of postcolonialism, cultural studies, and comparative mythology. Through his scholarship, he seeks to contribute to transcultural literary studies by bringing together Western classics and South Asian epics in a dialogic framework.

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