

A Comparative Study of Masculinity In the Ramcharitmanas and the Ramakien: A Case Study of Hanuman

การเปรียบเทียบความเป็นชายในรามจรีตมานัส และรามเกียรติ์:
กรณีตัวละครหนุมาน

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Abstract

This comparative study examines the construction and representation of masculinity through the character of Hanuman in two literary works from South Asia and Southeast Asia: the Ramcharitmanas of Goswami Tulsidas (1574 CE) and the Ramakien, composed under the royal authorship of King Rama I (1797 CE). This study applies R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical framework for analysis, investigating how Hanuman's masculine identity is constructed through four dimensions: physical expression, sexuality and desire, devotional identity, and the exercise of social power. The analytical findings reveal that the Ramcharitmanas constructs Hanuman's masculinity through the perspective of Hindu devotional theology (bhakti), emphasizing service and spiritual fortitude as primary characteristics. In contrast, the Ramakien adapts these attributes to align with the Thai Buddhist cosmological framework, incorporating elements of the devaraja concept and Theravada Buddhist ethics. The study demonstrates that masculine ideals undergo adaptation and transformation according to cultural contexts across geographical and religious boundaries, while maintaining the archetypal structure of the epic. This reflects approaches to heroic masculinity rooted in the philosophical traditions of South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Key words: Ramcharitmanas, Ramakien, Hanuman, masculinity studies, comparative literature

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการสร้างสรรคและการนำเสนอความเป็นชายผ่านตัวละครหนุมานในวรรณกรรมสองเรื่องของภูมิภาคเอเชียใต้และเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ ได้แก่ รามจิตมานัสของโคสวามี ตูลสีทาส (ค.ศ. 1574) และรามเกียรติ์ ฉบับพระราชนิพนธ์ในรัชกาลพระบาทสมเด็จพระพุทธยอดฟ้าจุฬาโลกมหาราช (ค.ศ. 1797) การศึกษานี้ประยุกต์ใช้แนวคิดความเป็นชายเชิงอำนาจ (hegemonic masculinity) ของ R.W. Connell เป็นกรอบทฤษฎีในการวิเคราะห์ โดยพิจารณาว่าอัตลักษณ์ความเป็นชายของหนุมานถูกสร้างสรรคผ่านลัทธิ ประกอบด้วย การแสดงออกทางกายภาพ เพศวิถีและความปรารถนา อัตลักษณ์เชิงภักดี และการใช้อำนาจทางสังคม ผลการวิเคราะห์พบว่า รามจิตมานัสสร้างสรรคความเป็นชายของหนุมานผ่านมุมมองของเทววิทยาภักดีฮินดูที่เน้นย้ำการรับใช้และความเข้มแข็งทางจิตวิญญาณเป็นหลัก ในขณะที่รามเกียรติ์ได้ปรับเปลี่ยนคุณลักษณะเหล่านี้ให้สอดคล้องกับกรอบจักรวาลวิทยาแบบพุทธศาสนาของไทย โดยผนวกองค์ประกอบของแนวคิดเทวราชาและจริยธรรมพุทธศาสนาเถรวาท จากผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่าอุดมคติความเป็นชายได้รับการดัดแปลงและเปลี่ยนแปลงตามบริบททางวัฒนธรรมข้ามพรมแดนทางภูมิศาสตร์และศาสนา ทั้งนี้ยังคงรักษาโครงสร้างต้นแบบของมหากาพย์ไว้ได้ โดยสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงแนวทางของความเป็นชายแบบวีรบุรุษที่มีรากฐานมาจากประเพณีปรัชญาของภูมิภาคเอเชียใต้และเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้

คำสำคัญ: รามจิตมานัส, รามเกียรติ์, หนุมาน, ความเป็นชาย, วรรณกรรมเปรียบเทียบ

Introduction

The representation of masculinity in epic literature provides crucial insights into cultural values, religious ideologies, and social hierarchies (Goldman, 1993; Doniger, 2009). Hanuman, the monkey warrior-deity appearing in various Ramayana traditions across Asia, serves as a particularly rich site for examining how different cultures construct and negotiate masculine ideals. As Lutgendorf (2007) notes, “Hanuman has become perhaps the most beloved deity in contemporary North India, embodying ideals of strength, devotion, and celibate masculinity. Yet this characterization represents only one cultural iteration of a figure whose masculine attributes have been continuously reimagined across diverse geographical, religious, and historical contexts. This study compares Hanuman’s characterization in two influential texts: Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas* (รามचितมานัส), composed in Awadhi in the 16th century during the Mughal period, and the Thai *Ramakien*, crystallized in its current form during the early Bangkok period (late 18th-early 19th centuries) under royal patronage. While both texts trace their lineage to Valmiki’s Sanskrit *Ramayana*, they emerged from distinct cultural matrices and present markedly different visions of masculine virtue. The *Ramcharitmanas*, emerging from North Indian bhakti

devotional theology under conditions of Muslim political dominance, constructs what this study terms “consecrated masculinity,” a model wherein power derives from spiritual subordination, celibate discipline, and devotional service. In contrast, the Ramakien, shaped by Thai Buddhist-Hindu syncretism and Rattanakosin court culture, articulates “complete masculinity” that integrates martial prowess, erotic accomplishment, trickster intelligence, and aesthetic refinement within frameworks of royal-Buddhist cosmology.

These divergent representations raise critical questions about the cultural construction of hegemonic masculinity: How do religious epistemologies shape ideals of masculine embodiment? What role does political context play in determining which masculine attributes achieve cultural legitimation? How do different textual traditions negotiate tensions between martial violence and spiritual discipline, between celibate renunciation and erotic engagement, between autonomous agency and hierarchical subordination? This comparative analysis addresses these questions by examining four dimensions of masculine representation in both texts: physical embodiment, sexuality and desire, devotional identity, and social agency. By analyzing how each text constructs Hanuman’s masculinity through these dimensions, this study contributes to cross-cultural gender studies in several ways. First, it challenges Western-centric frameworks that privilege autonomous individualism as the universal norm of masculine identity, revealing alternative paradigms rooted in devotional subordination and integrative completeness. Second, it demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity, far from being a monolithic construct, operates through culturally specific negotiations between competing ideals, negotiations shaped by religious traditions, political circumstances, and aesthetic conventions. Third, it illuminates how epic literature functions not merely as entertainment but as a crucial site where cultures articulate, contest, and transmit gendered norms across generations.

Objective of the Study /Research Questions

Critically examine how masculine ideals are constructed, negotiated, and contested through the characterization of Hanuman in *Ramcharitmanas* and *Ramakien*, within their respective cultural, religious, and historical contexts.

Literature Review

1. Masculinity Studies in Epic Literature:

Scholarship on masculinity in South and Southeast Asian epics has expanded significantly in recent decades. Goldman (1993) argues that the Ramayana tradition presents “a complex negotiation of masculine roles including warrior, ascetic, lover, and king”. Sutherland Goldman and Goldman (1996) demonstrate how different Ramayana versions

reflect varying cultural anxieties about male power and sexuality. Doniger (2009) observes that Hindu texts often present “split-level masculinity” wherein male characters embody contradictory ideals of ascetic renunciation and erotic engagement, violence, and compassion. This theoretical framework proves particularly relevant for analyzing Hanuman, who traverses boundaries between animal and divine, servant and hero, celibate and (in some traditions) lover.

2. Hanuman in Ramcharitmanas Studies

Lutgendorf’s (2007) seminal work on Hanuman devotion identifies the Ramcharitmanas as central to constructing Hanuman as the ideal bhakta (devotee) and **brahmacārī** (celibate). He writes: “Tulsidas’s Hanuman embodies the paradox of perfect strength through perfect surrender”. Sharma (2015) analyzes how Tulsidas constructs Hanuman’s masculinity through the triad of bala (strength), buddhi (wisdom), and bhakti (devotion), arguing that “devotional masculinity in Ramcharitmanas subordinates physical power to spiritual surrender”.

3. Ramakien and Thai Masculinity

Scholarship on the Ramakien has emphasized its distinctive features, including expanded romantic episodes, comedic interludes, and integration of Thai court culture (Rajanubhab, 2002; Wenk, 1968). Nagavajara (1982) argues that the Ramakien “Thaiifies the Indian epic by incorporating Thai aesthetics of sanuk (fun), sabai (ease), and refined eroticism”. Concerning Hanuman specifically, Penth (2004) notes: “The Thai Hanuman maintains his devotion to Rama but is simultaneously portrayed as a sophisticated lover, trickster, and aesthete reflecting Thai court ideals of complete manhood”.

4. Comparative Approaches

Comparative studies of Ramayana traditions have established methodological frameworks for this research. Richman (1991, 2001) demonstrates how different cultural contexts reshape narrative structures and character portrayals. Blackburn (2000) argues that “each Ramayana tradition negotiates local gender politics through its characterizations”. However, focused comparative analysis of masculine representation in Ramcharitmanas and Ramakien, specifically through Hanuman, remains underdeveloped. This study addresses this gap.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs comparative literary analysis, grounded in Connell’s (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity and postcolonial reception theory (Richman, 2001). Connell’s framework enables cross-cultural comparison by recognizing that masculine ideals vary historically and culturally, while postcolonial theory views the Ramakien as a creative transformation rather than a derivative imitation, producing hybrid Thai masculinity.

The analysis examines four dimensions of masculine representation: physical embodiment (strength, appearance, bodily control), sexuality and desire (celibacy versus romantic engagement), devotional identity (service, loyalty, hierarchical bonds), and social agency (autonomy, authority, independent action). This framework allows systematic comparison while respecting each tradition's distinctive cultural logic.

Methodology

This study employs close textual analysis to compare Hanuman's characterization in the *Ramcharitmanas* (focusing on *Sundarakanda* and related sections) and the *Thai Ramakien* (including his journey to Lanka, romance with *Suvannamaccha*, and battle episodes). The analysis examines direct and indirect characterization, narrative framing, and intertextual parallels between corresponding episodes. This literary study focuses exclusively on textual representations and does not address performance traditions, visual arts, or contemporary adaptations.

Results and Findings

1. Physical Embodiment

The physical embodiment of Hanuman in both the *Ramcharitmanas* and the *Ramakien* serves as a fundamental site for examining how hegemonic masculinity operates within devotional and courtly literary traditions. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity posits that dominant masculine ideals are not static but are continually constructed, negotiated, and contested within specific cultural matrices. The corporeal representation of Hanuman, his bodily dimensions, radiance, and physical capabilities, functions as a textual strategy through which cultural anxieties about power, divine authority, and masculine virtue are mediated. This analysis examines how the *Ramcharitmanas* constructs masculine ideals through a devotional-ascetic paradigm emphasizing controlled power and spiritual luminosity. At the same time, the *Ramakien* negotiates masculinity through courtly-cosmological frameworks that privilege territorial dominance and spectacular physicality.

The *Ramcharitmanas* :

कनक बरन तन तेज बिराजा। मानहुँ अपर गिरिन्ह कर राजा॥ सिंहनाद करि बारहि बारा। लीलहिं नाघउँ जलनिधि खारा॥

"His body, golden in hue, shone with a brilliance that made him look like another king of mountains (*Sumeru*). Roaring like a lion again, (*Hanumān* said) 'I shall easily leap across this salt ocean.'" (*Gosvāmī Tulasīdās*, n.d.)

Tulsidas's depiction of Hanuman's physical form in the Sundara Kanda reveals a sophisticated construction of masculine ideals rooted in the bhakti tradition's valorization of devotional service combined with martial capability. The description “कनक बरन तन तेज बिराजा मानहुँ अपर गिरिन्ह कर राजा॥” establishes Hanuman's physicality through metaphors of natural sovereignty and spiritual luminosity. The comparison to Mount Sumeru, the axis mundi in Hindu cosmology, positions Hanuman's body not merely as powerful but as cosmologically significant, a physical manifestation of dharmic order. Several analytical observations emerge from this textual representation. First, the emphasis on “तेज” rather than mere size or musculature suggests that hegemonic masculinity in the Ramcharitmanas is predicated on the integration of physical prowess with spiritual attainment. This “तेज” functions as a visible marker of “तपस” and “ब्रह्मचर्य”, qualities that Hanuman embodies throughout the text. The masculine ideal here is not the indiscriminate display of strength but the disciplined channeling of power toward devotional ends, what might be termed “consecrated masculinity.”

Second, the “सिंहनाद” performed “बारहिं बारा” represents a ritualized demonstration of masculine confidence that precedes action. This vocalization serves multiple functions: it announces intention, intimidates potential adversaries, and affirms self-efficacy. Importantly, this declaration “लीलहिं नाघउँ जलनिधि खारा” frames extraordinary physical achievement as “लीला”, a theological concept suggesting that divine power operates beyond the constraints of human exertion. The construction of masculine competence here involves the paradox of supreme capability presented as natural ease, aligning with Connell's observation that hegemonic masculinity often naturalizes its dominance.

Third, the narrative context is crucial: Hanuman's physical display occurs within the framework of service to Rama. This subordination of personal prowess to devotional duty represents a distinctive negotiation of masculine authority within bhakti ideology, where the most potent form of masculine identity derives not from autonomous power but from surrender to divine will. The physical body becomes an instrument of “सेवा”, and its magnificence validates rather than threatens the hierarchical order.

The Ramakien :

“...ยืนอยู่ท่ามกลางโยธี	ขลุ่ยกรเหนือเกล้าเกศา
หลบเนตรร้ายเวทอันศักดิ์ดา	นิมิตกายาวานร
สูงจกดาวศพรหมาน	ใหญ่เท่าจักรวาลสิงขร
เบื้องต่ำได้พื้นดินดอน	หยั่งถึงสาครรองดิน
หางวงเป็นปราการล้อม	โอบอ้อมโยธาไว้สิ้น
อันพลับพลาแก้วโกมิน	ขุนกบินทร์เอาไว้ในอุร
อ้าโอษฐ์ออกเป็นทวาร	ไบบานเปิดเปิดนั้นชีวหา...”

“Hanuman stood among the army, raised his hands in reverence, and chanted sacred incantations. He transformed to cosmic size, reaching the Brahma realm above and

the cosmic ocean below. His tail formed a protective barrier around the army, he sheltered the jeweled pavilion in his chest, and his mouth became a gateway with his tongue as the door.” (King Rama I, 2014).

The Ramakien’s representation of Hanuman’s physical transformation presents a radically different construction of masculine ideals, one deeply embedded in Thai Buddhist-Hindu syncretism and the aesthetics of the royal court. The passage describing Hanuman’s magical expansion as it says: “สูงจดภวค์พรหมาน” and “ใหญ่เท่าจักรวาลสิงขร” tall enough to reach the Brahma realm, large as the cosmic mountain Singkhon) articulates masculinity through hyperbolic corporeality that transcends human scale entirely. This cosmological magnification operates on multiple symbolic registers. First, the sheer dimensional excess body reaching the heavens, feet descending to the underworld, tail circumscribing entire armies constructs masculine power as fundamentally spatial and territorial. Unlike the Ramcharitmanas’s emphasis on luminous intensity, the Ramakien privileges extensive domination of space. This aligns with what Connell identifies as the territorial aspect of hegemonic masculinity, where masculine authority is demonstrated through the control and occupation of physical domains.

Second, the specific bodily transformations described reveal a courtly aesthetic of masculine spectacle. The image of Hanuman’s mouth opening as gates as it says: “อ้อโอษฐ์ออกเป็นทวาร” and “ใบบานปิดเปิดนั้นชีวหา” opening his lips as doors, his tongue forming the threshold) transforms the body into architecture, specifically palatial architecture. This metaphorical complex suggests that the masculine body in Thai court literature functions as a microcosm of royal power, a living fortress capable of protecting subordinates (the armies enclosed within) while projecting invincibility to enemies.

Third, the magical-martial synthesis in this passage reflects Thai cultural negotiations between Hindu epic traditions and Southeast Asian indigenous concepts of supernatural power. The invocation of as it says: “เวทอันศักดิ์ดา” (sacred Vedic spells) to achieve bodily transformation situates masculine potency within systems of esoteric knowledge and ritual mastery. Unlike the Ramcharitmanas’s internalized spiritual radiance, the Ramakien’s masculine ideal requires external validation through visible, dramatic metamorphosis that can be witnessed and verified by others.

2. Sexuality and Desire

The representation of sexuality and desire in Hanuman’s characterization reveals fundamentally divergent constructions of masculine identity between the Ramcharitmanas and the Ramakien. Through Connell’s (2005) framework of hegemonic masculinity, we observe how these epic traditions negotiate competing masculine ideals: ascetic celibacy versus romantic engagement, reflecting distinct cultural anxieties about male power, virtue, and social order. While Tulsidas’s Ramcharitmanas enshrines brahmacharya (celibacy) as

the pinnacle of masculine virtue, establishing Hanuman as the exemplar of controlled, devotion-channeled masculinity, the Thai Ramakien reimagines this paradigm entirely, incorporating erotic fulfillment as compatible with, indeed, enhancing heroic masculine identity. This fundamental divergence illuminates how hegemonic masculinity operates not as a universal construct but as a culturally contingent negotiation between religious ideology, social structure, and literary tradition.

The Ramcharitmanas: In the Ramcharitmanas, Hanuman's sexuality, or more precisely, its absolute renunciation, constitutes a cornerstone of his masculine perfection. The invocatory verse presents a comprehensive catalog of Hanuman's attributes :

अतुलितबलधामं हेमशैलाभदेहं दनुजवनकृशानुं ज्ञानिनामग्रगण्यम् सकलगुणनिधानं वानराणामधीशं रघुपतिप्रियभक्तं वातजातं नमामि॥ “I bow to the Son of the Wind-god, who is a home of immeasurable strength, whose body is radiant as a golden mountain, who is a fire to consume the forest of the demon race, who stands foremost among the wise, who is a storehouse of all good qualities, who is the chief of the monkey host, and who is the beloved devotee of Sri Rama (the Lord of the Raghus).” (Gosvāmī Tulasīdāsa, n.d.).

The strategic omission of any reference to sexuality or desire in this litany is itself significant. Hanuman's identity is constructed through alternative masculine markers: अतुलितबलधामं, ज्ञानिनामग्रगण्यम्, सकलगुणनिधानं, and, crucially, रघुपतिप्रियभक्तं. This formulation establishes what Connell terms “hegemonic masculinity,” a culturally idealized form that legitimizes patriarchal structures through strategic exclusions and inclusions. Tulsidas's explicit statement that Hanuman possesses virtue and practices brahmacharya reveals the ideological architecture undergirding this construction. Brahmacharya functions not merely as sexual abstinence but as a technology of masculine power, the transmutation of sexual energy (ojas) into spiritual potency and physical prowess. Within the Vaishnava devotional framework, this celibacy represents the complete sublimation of erotic desire into bhakti (devotion), positioning Hanuman as the ideal servant whose undivided consciousness remains fixed upon Rama. This construction aligns with orthodox Brahmanical ideology wherein controlled sexuality demarcates civilized masculinity from bestial impulses. Hanuman's celibacy effectively “humanizes” him despite his vanara (monkey) nature, elevating him above both his simian origins and the demon adversaries whose uncontrolled sexuality marks their moral degradation. The hegemonic masculine ideal here operates through the renunciation of power achieved through what is not done, desire conquered rather than fulfilled.

The Ramakien: The Thai Ramakien presents a radically alternative construction, wherein Hanuman's sexual encounter with Suphannamatcha becomes an integral component of his heroic narrative. The passage describing their union employs elaborate erotic aesthetics :

“... เมื่อนั้น
ได้ร่วมสรีรภิรมยา

นวลนางสุพรรณมัจฉา
กับวาญบุตรวฤดีไกร

อิงแอบแนบชิดพิศว	งยงงด้วยความพิสมัย
แสนรักแสนสวาทจะขาดใจ	รโห่ลืมหันพระบิดา
ลืมนั่งในท้องชลธาร	ลืมนั่งบิหารมัจฉา
ลืมนอนลืมนอนคักกลยา	เสนาหาเพิ่มพันพันทวี ฯ...”

“Then the fair Lady Suphannamatcha experienced amorous bliss [*raṅgarasa*] with Hanuman, son of Vayu. [They] embraced closely, clinging together in wonderment, bewildered with amazement. [She felt] infinite love, infinite sweetness, almost breathless. The excellent maiden forgot fear of her father, forgot playing in the waters, forgot her attendant mermaids, forgot shame, forgot her maiden form, desire multiplying beyond a thousandfold” (King Rama I, 2014).

The terminology here, “*raṅgarasa*” (amorous bliss), “พิศว” (wonderment), “แสนรักแสนสวาท” (infinite love, infinite sweetness), draws upon classical Thai literary conventions celebrating erotic experience as a legitimate dimension of heroic identity. Significantly, this encounter produces no narrative censure; Hanuman experiences no fall from grace, no diminution of his powers or devotion to Phra Ram. This construction reflects the syncretic nature of Thai Buddhist-Hindu culture, where Theravada Buddhist acceptance of lay sexuality merges with indigenous Tai traditions and courtly literary conventions. Unlike the *Ramcharitmanas*’s brahmanical framework, where celibacy signifies spiritual superiority, the *Ramakien* operates within a cultural matrix that views sexuality as a natural expression of vitality compatible with virtue when properly contextualized. Through Connell’s analytical lens, the *Ramakien* presents an alternative hegemonic masculinity, one that integrates rather than excludes erotic capacity. Hanuman’s masculinity is not diminished but rather enhanced through his ability to inspire overwhelming desire in Suphannamatcha, as it says: “เสนาหาเพิ่มพันพันทวี.” His sexual prowess becomes another manifestation of his extraordinary nature, parallel to his strength and wisdom rather than contradictory to them. Crucially, this episode serves narrative functions: Hanuman’s union with Suphannamatcha produces Macchanu, who later aids Phra Ram, transforming potential enmity into alliance through kinship bonds. The *Ramakien* thus constructs masculine sexuality not as a dangerous impulse requiring suppression but as a productive force generating social cohesion and dynastic continuation values central to Thai monarchical ideology.

3. Devotional Identity and Service

The devotional dimension of Hanuman’s masculinity constitutes a pivotal axis through which both texts articulate hierarchical relationships and construct idealized masculine subjectivity within their respective cultural matrices. Through Connell’s (2005) framework of hegemonic masculinity, this analysis interrogates how devotion operates not as a subordination of masculine agency but rather as its ultimate validation, a paradox wherein self-abnegation becomes the supreme expression of masculine potency.

The selected passages exemplify distinct epistemological approaches to devotional masculinity: the Ramcharitmanas articulates an ontological merger between servant and served through bhakti philosophy, while the Ramakien instantiates martial devotion within courtly hierarchies of royal service.

The Ramcharitmanas :

सो अनन्य जाकेँ असि मति न टरइ हनुमंता मैं सेवक सचराचर रूप स्वामि भगवंता॥ “He alone is exclusively devoted to Me, O **Hanumān**, whose mind, thus resolved, never wavers. I am the servant, and He who pervades all creation, both animate and inanimate, is my master and lord.” (Gosvāmī Tulasīdāsa, n.d.).

Presents a sophisticated theological conceptualization of devotion that transcends conventional master-servant binaries. As it says: “सो अनन्य जाकेँ असि मति न टरइ हनुमंत” deploys the critical term “अनन्य” literally “not-other” or “non-different” which signals an absolute, undifferentiated devotion that dissolves the ontological distance between devotee and deity. This semantic choice is crucial: *ananya bhakti* in Vaishnava theology denotes a devotional state wherein the devotee’s consciousness becomes so thoroughly saturated with the divine that no space remains for alternative orientations or competing loyalties. The phrase, as it says: “नटइ” employs the Awadhi verb *ṭaranā*, connoting both physical deviation and mental vacillation, thus establishing devotional constancy as simultaneously a cognitive and existential state. This unwavering quality (*dr̥ḍhatā*) functions as a quintessential masculine virtue in the bhakti tradition, where steadfastness in devotion surpasses martial prowess as the ultimate marker of heroic masculinity. The subsequent declaration, as it says: “मैं सेवक सचराचर रूप स्वामि भगवंत” articulates a radical reconfiguration of selfhood. Rama identifies himself as a servant (*sevaka*) while simultaneously recognizing the all-pervading Lord as the true sovereign. This theological inversion, wherein the Avatar declares his own servitude, establishes a paradoxical hierarchy that validates Hanuman’s devotional masculinity by divine precedent. The term, as it says, “सचराचर” invokes the philosophical totality of divine immanence, situating devotional service within a cosmic rather than merely interpersonal framework. Through Connell’s lens, this passage constructs devotional masculinity as hegemonic not through domination but through voluntary subordination to transcendent authority, a configuration wherein power is paradoxically accumulated through its renunciation. Hanuman’s masculine identity is validated precisely because it mirrors divine self-understanding: just as Rama serves the supreme Brahman, Hanuman serves Rama. This creates a hierarchical chain in which masculine legitimacy flows from one’s position within devotional relationships, rather than from autonomous action.

The Ramakien :

“... บัดนั้น
ได้ฟังบัญชาพระจักรี

หนุมานผู้ชาญชัยศรี
ขุสีกรสนองพระโอองการ

อันตัวของข้าผู้รองบาท	ก็นับว่าเป็นชาติทหาร
จะขออาสาพระอวตาร	ป้องกันภัยพาลกุ่มก้นท์
มิให้มันล่วงเข้ามาได้	ถึงองค์ภูวไนยรังสรรค์
ทูลแล้วถวายบังคมคัล	ทั้งสุคริพนั้นก็ออกมา ฯ...

“Thereupon, the valiant Hanuman, having received the command of Phra Chakri, paid obeisance in acceptance of the royal decree. He declared that, as a humble vassal of martial lineage, he volunteered to safeguard the Avatar against the demonic forces, ensuring no intrusion could threaten the Sovereign. Upon concluding his vow, he prostrated in homage and withdrew, accompanied by Sugriva...” (King Rama I, 2014).

The Ramakien passage instantiates devotional masculinity within distinctly different sociopolitical coordinates, those of Siamese courtly culture and martial aristocracy. Hanuman’s self-designation as it says: “อันตัวของข้าผู้รองบาท ก็นับว่าเป็นชาติทหาร” strategically positions devotion within military service frameworks rather than purely theological ones. The term, as it says, “ชาติทหาร” literally denotes “warrior caste” or “martial lineage,” invoking hereditary military aristocracy wherein service to the sovereign constitutes both social obligation and the foundation of masculine honor. The elaborate propitiatory language, as it says: “ขุฎีกรสนองพระโองการ” and the physical gesture of prostration, as it says: “ถวายบังคมคัล” exemplify the highly formalized protocols of Thai royal court culture, where hierarchical positioning is enacted through precise linguistic registers and ritualized bodily comportment. This courtly devotion differs markedly from the Ramcharitmanas’ ontological merger; here, the devotee’s subjectivity remains distinctly separate from, albeit oriented toward, sovereign authority. Hanuman’s volunteer oath as it says: “จะขออาสาพระอวตาร ป้องกันภัยพาลกุ่มก้นท์” frames devotion explicitly through martial capacity and protective function. The term volunteer implies voluntary military service, a concept resonant with phrai suam or volunteer retainer systems in classical Thai military organization. Significantly, this devotional expression centers on functional utility protection of the sovereign rather than metaphysical union, positioning masculine worth within frameworks of military efficacy and defensive capability.

4. Social Agency: Trickster, Warrior, Diplomat

The Ramcharitmanas: The episode of Hanuman’s transformation in the Ramcharitmanas represents a foundational moment in the construction of devotional masculinity, wherein social agency emerges not through autonomous assertion but through hierarchical interpellation and spiritual authorization. Tulsidas’s narrative privileges interiority, restraint, and subordination as the primary markers of exemplary masculine power, fundamentally reconceptualizing the epic hero within the theological framework of North Indian bhakti tradition, as it says:

कन सो काज कठिन जग माहीं। जो नहिं होइ तात तुम्ह पाहीं॥ राम काज लागि तव अवतारा। सुनतहिं भयउ पर्वताकारा॥
 “What undertaking is there in this world too difficult for you to accomplish, dear child? You have come down upon earth for the express purpose of accomplishing *Śrī Rāma*’s work.” On hearing this, *Hanumān* grew to the size of a mountain.” (*Gosvāmī Tulasīdās*, n.d.,710).

The catalytic moment occurs through *Jānavanta*’s strategic invocation: “कन सो काज कठिन जग माहीं। जो नहिं होइ तात तुम्ह पाहीं॥” This rhetorical question functions as far more than mere encouragement; it operates as ideological interpellation in the Althusserian sense, “hailing” Hanuman into a specific subject position within the cosmic hierarchy. The affectionate address “तात” establishes a filial relationship that simultaneously elevates Hanuman’s status while positioning him within a structure of benevolent authority. The interrogative form, suggesting that no task is too difficult, does not simply affirm Hanuman’s capability; rather, it constructs his power as always-already present yet requiring external activation through proper hierarchical recognition. The subsequent line crystallizes the theological justification for this power: “राम काज लागि तव अवतारा.” This declaration performs critical ideological work in constructing what Connell (2005) would recognize as hegemonic masculinity operating through legitimation and authorization. Hanuman’s *avatāric* descent, his very existence in material form, is explicitly tethered to service (*kāja*) rather than autonomous self-realization. The phrase “राम काज” frames all subsequent action within a framework of instrumental devotion, wherein power becomes meaningful only when channeled toward divinely sanctioned purposes. This construction negotiates the potential tension between martial prowess and spiritual discipline by subordinating the former entirely to the latter, resolving what might otherwise appear as competing masculine ideals through hierarchical integration. Hanuman’s response to this invocation is immediate and somatic: “सुनतहिं भयउ पर्वताकारा.” The temporal marker “सुनतहिं” emphasizes the direct causal relationship between hierarchical authorization and physical manifestation. This is not a gradual transformation requiring internal deliberation; rather, it represents the instantaneous alignment of body with devotional purpose. The description “पर्वताकारा” employs a simile that carries multiple significations within Hindu cosmology: mountains as axis mundi connecting earthly and divine realms, as repositories of sacred power, as symbols of immovability and permanence. Hanuman’s assumption of mountainous form thus represents not merely physical enlargement but cosmic alignment, the body becoming a vehicle for transcendent purpose.

Significantly, what Tulasidas’s account elides is as revealing as what it includes. There is no description of Hanuman’s facial expression, emotional state, or psychological processing of this transformation. There is no catalogue of specific physical changes, no attention to muscular development or bodily details. Most strikingly, there is no immediate depiction of violence, combat, or destruction. The verse concludes with transformation

itself, suggesting that the alignment of devotional intent with physical capacity represents the culmination of masculine realization rather than its preliminary stage. This economy of description reflects a broader theological commitment within the *Ramcharitmanas* to privileging internal spiritual states over external material actions. Applying Connell's framework of hegemonic masculinity, Tulsidas's construction reveals several key dimensions. First, this masculinity operates through what might be termed "devotional subordination." Power is legitimate precisely because it is derivative, channeled through proper hierarchical relations rather than asserted autonomously.

This model establishes a form of masculine authority that resolves potential conflicts between different power claims (martial, spiritual, social) by integrating them within a unified devotional framework. Second, the body becomes significant not as the site of individual agency or aesthetic display but as the instrument of divine purpose. Physical transformation serves devotional ends rather than constituting an end in itself. Third, the masculine subject achieves recognition and validation not through the accumulation of visible exploits but through the proper alignment of will, capacity, and cosmic purpose. This construction emerges from and reinforces specific historical and cultural contexts. The sixteenth-century North Indian bhakti movement, within which Tulsidas composed the *Ramcharitmanas*, sought to democratize access to spiritual authority while maintaining brahmanical social hierarchies. The devotional masculinity embodied by Hanuman offers a model wherein power becomes accessible to those outside traditional kshatriya martial classes, yet remains tethered to proper hierarchical relations and divine authorization. Hanuman's status as a vanara (monkey) rather than human or divine becomes significant here; his masculinity must be constructed through devotion precisely because he lacks the inherent social status that would grant automatic authority. The text thus negotiates competing claims about the basis of legitimate masculine power, ultimately privileging devotional alignment over birth status while maintaining the necessity of hierarchical structure. The role of the elder (**Jāmvanta**) in catalyzing Hanuman's transformation also merits attention. Masculine agency here is not individually generated but communally facilitated, emerging through the proper functioning of social hierarchies and generational transmission of authority. This construction contests more individualistic models of heroic masculinity by suggesting that even the most powerful masculine subject requires external authorization and recognition to actualize latent capacities. The scene thus constructs an interdependent model of masculine community wherein authority flows through proper hierarchical channels rather than erupting from autonomous individual will.

The Ramakien: The Ramakien's depiction of Hanuman's assault on *Laṅkā* constructs a fundamentally different model of masculine agency, one predicated upon spectacular violence, aesthetic performance, and autonomous assertion of martial supremacy. Where the *Ramcharitmanas* privileges interiority and devotional subordination,

the Ramakien celebrates exteriority and performative excess, revealing how the Rattanakosin-era Siamese court culture negotiated ideals of masculine power through the epic protagonist's visible demonstration of destructive capacity.

“... ฝ่ายหน้าม้ายาหักหาญ	เย้ยหยันขุนมาร
ก็โถมเข้าเผาโรงคัล	
เหาะวกลงเวียนหกหัน	เหิงขึ้นสุวรรณ
ปราสาทพิจิตรพิศเพรา	
เจ็ดชั้นนพรัตน์เนื่องเนา	พรายพรายพรเหา
ก็ลูกวาวปลาบควัน	
จูโจมโหมหักเหิรหัน	ดินเหยียบย่ำยับ
เข้าจ่างปราลีพราย	
ทั้งถูกรุมม้วยมากมาย	สำแดงร่างกาย
ทะยานเข้าถอนรอนราญ	
นำวยอดคนกุศลประหาร	พรหมพัคตร์แหลกลาญ
ก็ถอดออกฟัดปฐพี	
หักกระเด็นเซินต้อง	ยักษ์ตายเต็มธรณี
ระเนนระนับทับกัน	
เสียงสนั่นครั่นครั่นสรวงสวรรค์	เปลวเพลิงพลุ่งพรณ
วิโรจน์ระงมเวียงไชย	
ไหม้หมดโรงรถคชไกร	เรือนเสนาใน
บเล็ดบลอดสั๊กอัน...”	

“The valiant minister mocked the Demon Lord and attacked, setting fire to the ceremonial halls. He ascended the seven-tiered Golden Palace and reduced it to flames. With tremendous force, he tore down the fortifications, killing countless demons whose bodies piled upon the ground. He seized and destroyed the sacred Nopasul spire, its fragments scattering everywhere. Thunder echoed through the heavens as fires consumed the entire Victorious City chariot depots, elephant stables, and inner court residences, leaving nothing standing.” (King Rama I, 2014).

The passage opens with immediate action and characterization: “ฝ่ายหน้าม้ายาหักหาญ เย้ยหยันขุนมาร” This opening establishes multiple dimensions of Hanuman's masculine identity simultaneously. First, his official status as “ม้ายา” positions him within hierarchical state structures, yet this institutional role is immediately superseded by personal qualities “หักหาญ” and the active verbs “เย้ยหยัน”. The act of verbal defiance, ridiculing the demon lord, constructs masculinity through confrontational assertion rather than devotional deference. This represents a direct challenge to authority through linguistic performance, suggesting that heroic masculinity includes not merely physical prowess but also rhetorical dominance and the willingness to transgress protocols of respectful address toward enemies.

The subsequent description of destructive action builds through accumulating clauses of escalating violence: “โถมเข้าเผาโรงคัล.” The verb “โถม” conveys aggressive momentum, while “เผา” specifies the mode of destruction. The target— “โรงคัล” is significant; Hanuman does not merely attack military installations but targets the symbolic heart of demonic sovereignty, the spaces where ritual authority is performed and legitimized. This strategic selection of targets constructs masculinity through the ability to read and dismantle power structures, attacking not merely bodies but the architectural and ceremonial foundations of enemy authority.

The kinetic descriptions that follow emphasize bodily virtuosity and acrobatic prowess: “เหาะวากว่งเวียนหกหัน”. The series of verbs— “เหาะ”, “วากว่ง”, “เวียน”, “หกหัน”— creates a sense of continuous, fluid motion that defies gravity and conventional spatial constraints. This construction of masculinity through aerial mastery suggests that heroic bodies transcend normal physical limitations, operating in three-dimensional space with balletic grace even while engaged in violent destruction. The emphasis on movement aesthetics, the beauty of the destructive performance, indicates that masculine agency achieves its fullest realization not merely through effective violence but through violence rendered as spectacular art.

The architectural description of the target adds layers of significance: “เห็จขึ้นสุวรรณปราสาทพิจิตรพิศเพรา เจ็ดชั้นนพรัตน์เนื่องเนา พรายพรายพรเหา”. The detailed cataloguing of architectural splendor, seven tiers, nine gems, golden construction, exquisite craftsmanship, serves multiple rhetorical functions. First, it establishes the magnitude of Hanuman’s achievement; he destroys not ordinary structures but the pinnacle of demonic architectural achievement, spaces encoded with maximum material and symbolic value. Second, the aesthetic description— “พิจิตรพิศเพรา”, “พรายพรายพรเหา”—creates a kind of sublime tension, where beauty precedes and intensifies the impact of its destruction. The masculine hero proves his supremacy not merely by defeating enemies but by destroying beauty itself, demonstrating that his power transcends even aesthetic considerations.

The moment of conflagration receives elaborate description: “ก็ลุควะวาวปลาบควัน”. The onomatopoeic quality of “ลุควะวาวปลาบ” creates auditory and visual imagery simultaneously: the whooshing of flames, the explosive eruption of fire, and the billowing of smoke. This multisensory description constructs the destructive event as a total sensory experience, engaging sight, sound, and implied heat. The masculine hero’s agency is thus measured not merely by outcomes but by the intensity and completeness of sensory impact generated through his actions.

The subsequent passage escalates the violence through direct physical engagement: “จูโจมโหมหักเหิรหัน ดินเหยียบย่ำยัน เข้าจ้างปาลิพราย”. The progression from aerial attack “จูโจม” to grounded stance “ดินเหยียบย่ำยัน” to forceful dismantling “จ้าง” constructs

masculinity through the mastery of multiple combat modes aerial bombardment, stable positioning, and raw physical strength applied to architectural structures. The phrase “ปราณีพราย” again invokes aesthetic qualities even in military fortifications, suggesting that the entire built environment of *Laṅkā* represents not merely functional but symbolic and aesthetic power that must be dismantled.

The deployment of thrown projectiles receives special attention: “ทิ้งลูกมารม้วยมากมาย สำแดงร่างกาย”. The verb “สำแดง” is particularly significant; it frames violence not merely as instrumental action toward military goals but as revelatory performance. The phrase “สำแดงร่างกาย” suggests that the purpose of combat extends beyond defeating enemies to include the public demonstration of masculine capacity. This construction aligns with Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity as requiring constant performance and validation through visible displays that establish hierarchical dominance.

The attack on the Nopasul spire represents the climactic moment of architectural destruction: “ทะยานเข้าถอนรอนราญ น้าวยอนตนพศุลประหาร พรหมพักตร์แหลกลาญ ก็ถอดออก ฟัดปฐพี” The specificity of the target the “นพศุล” tower with “พรหมพักตร์” decorations indicates that Hanuman attacks not random structures but those encoded with maximum religious and cosmological significance. The Brahma-faced finials represent divine sanction of *Rāvaṇa*’s rule; their shattering thus constitutes not merely physical but theological violence, a forceful rejection of demonic claims to legitimate sovereignty. The verbs of destruction—“ถอน”, “แหลกลาญ”, “ถอดออก”, “ฟัด”—create a progressive intensification, where each action leads to more complete dismantling until the spire is literally torn from its foundations and weaponized against the earth itself.

The consequences for the demon host receive graphic description: “หักกระเด็น เซ็นต้อยยักชี ดายเต็มธรณี ระเนนระนับทับกัน”. This represents the most explicit violence in the passage, directly depicting mass casualties. The phrases “ตายเต็มธรณี” and “ระเนนระนับทับกัน” quantify destruction through accumulated bodies, constructing masculine potency through kill counts and the visual spectacle of massed corpses. This construction reflects what Connell identifies as one dimension of hegemonic masculinity, the capacity for legitimate violence that establishes hierarchical dominance through the physical subjugation or elimination of rival masculine subjects.

The cosmic dimensions of the destruction receive final emphasis: “เสียงสนั่นครื้นครื้น สรวงสวรรค์ เปลวเพลิงพุ่งพรณวิโรจน์ระงมเวียงไชย”. The auditory impact “เสียงสนั่นครื้นครื้น สรวงสวรรค์” extends the significance of Hanuman’s actions beyond terrestrial witnesses to include divine observation. This suggests that heroic masculinity achieves ultimate validation when it becomes spectacle for celestial as well as earthly audiences, when the reverberations of violent action literally reach the cosmic realms. The visual imagery “เปลวเพลิงพุ่งพรณวิโรจน์” aestheticizes destruction through light imagery, transforming fire from a mere element to a luminous spectacle. The final phrase “ระงมเวียงไชย” carries

ironic weight; the city named for victory becomes the site of comprehensive defeat, its nominal identity inverted through Hanuman's actions. The passage concludes with a totalizing catalogue of destruction: “ไหม้หมดโรงรถคชไกร เรือนเสนาใน บเล็ดบลดลัดอีกอัน” This exhaustive listing military infrastructure: “โรงรถ”, martial animals: “คชไกร”, aristocratic residences: “เรือนเสนาใน” demonstrates that Hanuman's violence achieves totality, sparing nothing. The emphatic conclusion “บเล็ดบลดลัดอีกอัน” underscores completeness, suggesting that masculine agency proves itself through exhaustive rather than selective destruction, through the capacity to leave nothing standing.

Applying Connell's framework, the Ramakien's construction reveals hegemonic masculinity operating through spectacular performance, autonomous agency, and the aestheticization of violence. Unlike the Ramcharitmanas's devotional subordination, this model privileges individual prowess, visible demonstration, and the accumulation of destructive achievements as markers of masculine supremacy. The extensive descriptions serve not merely narrative functions but ideological ones, constructing a model of masculine heroism wherein power achieves legitimacy through its public performance and visible effects. This construction emerges from Rattanakosin-era Siamese court culture, where royal authority required constant theatrical demonstration through ceremony, display, and the visible subjugation of rivals. The epic protagonist becomes a figure through which these cultural anxieties and aspirations surrounding masculine power find articulation, embodying an ideal of autonomous, spectacular, performative masculinity that serves royal ideology while entertaining court audiences with detailed descriptions of violent artistry.

Discussion

This comparative analysis reveals fundamentally divergent masculine constructions in the Ramcharitmanas and Ramakien, shaped by distinct religious-political contexts.

Religious Frameworks: The Ramcharitmanas constructs “consecrated masculinity” through bhakti theology, where Hanuman's brahmacharya follows tantric physiology's “hydraulic model” (White, 1996), sexual retention generates spiritual potency (tejas). The Ramakien reflects Thai Buddhist-Hindu syncretism, constructing sexuality as a productive force; Hanuman's romance with Suvannamaccha generates kinship alliances, embodying courtly ideals of “ความสำเร็จ” (completeness) without renunciation.

Sociopolitical Contexts: Composed during Mughal dominance, the Ramcharitmanas relocates masculine power to the spiritual domain, offering dignity despite political subordination (Lutgendorf, 2007). The Ramakien, under Siamese royal patronage, legitimizes monarchical authority through spectacular performance, “สำแดงร่างกาย” frames violence as a theatrical demonstration essential to court culture (Reynolds, 1991).

Embodiment and Agency: Tulsidas emphasizes internalized luminosity (“तेज”) and relational autonomy; power requires hierarchical activation (“राम काज लगी तव अवतार”). The Ramakien privileges hyperbolic corporeality and autonomous judgment within loyalty; Rama’s praise “ฉลาด กล้าหาญมีปัญญาเป็นเลิศ” reflects “graduated reciprocity” (Van Esterik, 2000).

Tricksterism and Form: The Ramcharitmanas suppresses deception, privileging devotional authenticity; its repetitive meters (doha, chaupai) mirror single-pointed devotion. The Ramakien celebrates tricksterism as intelligence (ฉลาด), employing ornate forms, reflecting multifaceted courtly accomplishment.

These divergent constructions demonstrate masculinity as culturally contingent production rather than universal essence, shaped by religious epistemologies, political circumstances, and aesthetic traditions. The Ramcharitmanas presents devotional masculinity through celibacy and ego-dissolution; the Ramakien presents complete masculinity integrating martial, romantic, and intellectual dimensions. Both offer alternatives to Western autonomous individualism, revealing gender’s openness to creative transformation.

Conclusion

This comparative study reveals fundamentally divergent masculine constructions in Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas* (1574 CE) and the Thai *Ramakien* (1797 CE) through Hanuman’s characterization. The *Ramcharitmanas* constructs “consecrated masculinity” where power derives from devotional subordination. Hanuman embodies spiritual luminosity (*tejas*), absolute celibacy (*brahmacharya*), non-differentiated devotion (*ananya bhakti*), and hierarchically authorized action. This reflects North Indian bhakti theology under Mughal dominance, offering spiritual dignity when temporal power remained inaccessible. The Ramakien articulates “complete masculinity” (ความสำเร็จ), integrating martial prowess, erotic accomplishment, trickster intelligence, and aesthetic refinement. Hanuman achieves cosmic dimensions, generates alliances through romance, exercises autonomous judgment within loyal service, and manifests spectacular performative violence. This reflects the Thai Buddhist-Hindu syncretism and Rattanakosin court ideology, which required theatrical demonstrations of power. These divergent constructions demonstrate that hegemonic masculinity is culturally contingent, shaped by religious epistemologies, political circumstances, and aesthetic traditions. Both texts challenge Western-centric frameworks by presenting alternative paradigms of devotional subordination and integrative completeness that contest autonomous individualism as the norm. In contemporary contexts of global gender transformation, these texts demonstrate that gender configurations are culturally constructed and open to creative reimagining, contributing to culturally pluralistic approaches to masculinity studies.

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