

John the Baptist, Lakshman, Balaram and the Brotherhood of MDZS: A Comparative Study of Prophetic Witness and Brotherly Selflessness

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Abstract

This Research article explores the convergences of prophetic witness and adopts a cross-scriptural inquiry into the preparatory roles of John the Baptist in the Holy Bible, Lakshman in the Ramayana, and Balaram in the Mahabharata, and compares them with the characters of The Grand Master of Demonic cultivation. It explores how they function as a threshold figure: a divinely chosen intermediary bridging mortal existence and divine revelation, revealing a trans-religious archetype of sacred service, loyalty, and moral witness. Drawing on theological hermeneutics and literary narratology, this study argues that John's harsh prophecy parallels Lakshman's disciplined devotion to his elder sibling Ram and Balaram's guidance of Krishna, his younger sibling. They are not only supplementary personas but also spiritual conduits, shaping the ethical imagination of their respective civilizations. Portraying the frameworks of comparative theology, the study argues that John's ascetic ministry, Lakshman's brotherly selflessness, and Balaram's detached strength reveal convergent moral cosmologies where divine purpose intersects with human restraint. This study synthesizes theological, literary, and ecological appraisals to illuminate how these praiseworthy men mediate divine order through obedience and purity, offering models to understand inter-religious ethics in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Prophecy, Comparative Theology, John the Baptist, Lakshman, Balaram, Ethical Archetype, Brotherly Selflessness

Introduction

Comparative theology has progressively sought to move beyond apologetic contrast towards a dialogical appreciation of religious imagination. In this spirit, this study juxtaposes the Gospel charisma of John the Baptist with Lakshman of the Ramayana and Balaram of the Mahabharata, reading them as parallel embodiments of prophetic discipline and moral guardianship. While ambitious, the comparison rests on a shared anthropological intuition: that sacred history requires intermediaries who prepare humanity for divine encounter. Whether standing on the banks of the Jordan or the Sarayu, these remarkable men manifest the strain between proximity to divinity and service to humanity.

This archetypal structure resonates unexpectedly in contemporary narrative art. The Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation (Mo Dao Zu Shi), a twenty-first-century xianxia novel, reimagines the fraternal threshold figure across three sacrificial configurations: the concealed self-donation of Jiang Cheng to Wei Wuxian, the pedagogical guardianship of LanQiren, and the performative

deception of Nie Huaisang. These modern iterations neither replicate nor reject the Biblical and Indic models; rather, they extend the prophetic companion into registers of trauma, secrecy, and retributive justice, demonstrating that the archetype survives the transition from scripture to contemporary fiction.

Contextual Framework

John the Baptist: Prophet of Preparation

John the Baptist bridges prophetic Judaism and Christian revelation. Clothed in camel's hair and nourished by locusts and wild honey (Mk 1:6), John embodies radical austerity. His baptismal ministry in the Jordan River symbolizes both purification and the anticipation of divine renewal (Matt. 3:11). John's theology centres on repentance and moral rectitude. The prophet's baptismal ritual converts the Jordan River into a threshold of repentance. Similarly, Valmiki's Ramayana portrays Lakshman as the vigilant brother whose unwavering Dharma protects Rama's moral and spiritual mission. Lakshman's sleepless service during exile and his refusal to abandon duty echo John's steadfast proclamation to Christ. The Mahabharata, meanwhile, situates Balam as a teacher and moral anchor who resists the catastrophic Kurukshetra war, withdrawing rather than compromising righteousness. Each dramatizes obedience without possession and authority without ambition.

Lakshman: The Dharma of Fraternal Service in The Ramayana

In Valmiki's Ramayana, Lakshman exemplifies the dharma of loyal service (seva). As Ram's younger brother, he chooses voluntary exile rather than enjoy royal comfort, attending to him and his wife throughout their forest sojourn. His watchful wakefulness is symbolized by his vow never to sleep, which expresses his vigilance in upholding righteousness (Book II, Ayodhya Kanda). Lakshman's ethics are not merely familial; they embody the idea that dharma is relational. His renunciation of domestic life parallels John's asceticism. Both act without seeking recognition: John diminishes himself for Christ's revelation, and Lakshman effaces his personal desire for Ram's Dharma. Lakshman's acerbic mutilation of the

demoness Surpanakha when she insults his brother illustrates the paradox of duty: righteous anger in the defence of virtue. Similarly, John rebukes King Herod for moral transgression, leading to his martyrdom (Mark 6:17-29). Both works demonstrate that fidelity to the moral law invites worldly peril.

Balam: The Strength of Detachment in The Mahabharata

Balam, the elder brother of Lord Krishna, is known for his mastery of the plow and the mace; he symbolizes agricultural fertility and physical might. Paradoxically, his narrative emphasizes detachment and neutrality during the Kurukshetra War and a refusal to fight despite allegiance to kin on both sides. Balam's withdrawal mirrors John the Baptist's separation from political power. Just as John declines priestly privilege to dwell in the wilderness, Balam renounces the allure of heroic warfare to pursue pilgrimage along the river Sarasvati. His agricultural symbolism also links him to cosmic renewal; the plow (hala) becomes both weapon and sacrament, turning soil as baptism turns the soul. Through disciplined strength and ecological consciousness, Balam represents Dharma as the beam balance—the moral mean between tolerance and belligerence.

Literature Review

Comparative readings of prophecy across scriptures have a long lineage, yet few studies have juxtaposed John the Baptist with secondary divine companions in Indian epics. While V. Manimala's *The Bhagavad Gita and the Gospel* (2024), focuses on doctrinal analogues between Lord Krishna and Jesus Christ, Simon Brodbeck (2019) analyses the divine descent in the Mahabharata.

Scholarship comparing Indic and Biblical traditions has evolved from early Orientalist curiosity to nuanced theological dialogue. Rudolf Garbe's pioneering essay *Christian Elements in the Mahabharata* (1913) has marked one of the first attempts to identify narrative and ethical parallels between the two corpora, through a colonial hermeneutics that often subordinates the epics to Biblical prototypes.

Later critics, such as Spencer (2014) and Manimala (2024), reframed such comparisons within

the discourse of comparative theology, seeking reciprocity rather than hierarchy. Spencer interprets the parallel visions of Arjuna and John the Baptist as encounters with revelatory light that transform ethical perception, while Manimala situates the Bhagavad-Gita's call to action alongside the Gospel's invitation to faith, arguing that both texts construct a pedagogy of divine participation.

Building on this lineage, Freek Bakker's *The Birth of Jesus and Rama* (2010) foregrounds narrative birth motifs to reveal how the incarnation mediates between cosmic order and human fragility. His work is on Ram rather than Lakshman, highlighting the textual proximity of divine and human agency, a principle obvious in Lakshman's shadowed devotion. Curtis's dissertation, *Descending to the Transcendent* (2016), deepens this conversation by aligning Gita ethics with Pauline theology, proposing that revelation functions as a dynamic movement between transcendence and immanence. This movement parallels the oscillation between Dharma and grace that underlies both epics.

Contemporary Indian scholarship, especially Janetius's edited volume, *Visions in Mahabharata and Bible: Comparative Perspectives* (2017), includes moral and ecological hermeneutics. Janetius and his contributors emphasize that comparative theology must address not only textual similarities but also shared existential questions: suffering, duty and salvation that underpin human religiosity. Their approach legitimizes reading Lakshman's exile and John's ascetic solitude as structurally analogous enactments of moral purification.

Chakravarti's *Ethics in the Mahabharata* (2018), Tilak's *Vedanta and Christian Theology* (2013) and Sunwar's dissertation (2019) examine the convergence of Dharma and Christian morality as frameworks for social justice. These works collectively situate prophetic consciousness within a continuum of ethical decision-making rather than metaphysical abstraction. Horrell's *The Bible and the Environment* (2013) and Leese's *Ecofaith* (2019) further illuminate the ecological undercurrents of Revelation, showing how wilderness and river imagery in sacred texts signal both environmental and spiritual renewal.

Research Gap

Despite these advances, few studies have

juxtaposed the Ramayana and the Mahabharata with the Bible to explore prophetic imagination across epics. Existing research tends to isolate either the theological (incarnation) or ethical (duty) dimension, seldom integrating literary and ecological symbolism in their analyses.

Thesis Statement

This research encompasses the hermeneutic crossing by focusing not on the divine hero but on the prophetic companion who announces, guards, and interprets the divine mission. Historically, prophecy in the Abrahamic perception is oriented towards revelation and moral reform, while in Dharmicepics, it is embedded in the maintenance of the cosmic order. However, both depend on the ethics of restraint.

Methodology

Methodologically, this study follows Clooney's comparative theology, along with other prominent critics and theologians. The theoretical framework weaves together archetypal psychology, comparative theology and environmental ethics. The prophetic archetype is a moral intermediary whose humility preserves divine mystery. Through narrative, asceticism, and liminality, John the Baptist, Lakshman, and Balaram enact the universal drama of preparation for revelation.

The Prophetic Archetype: Theoretical and Theological Framework

To compare John the Baptist, Lakshman, and Balaram is to identify an archetypal structure that transcends doctrine. Mircea Eliade's concept of the "eternal return" suggests that mythic figures reenact primordial gestures that restore sacred order to historical time (*The Myth of the Eternal Return* 37). The prophetic companion, whether in Judea or Ayodhya, embodies this cyclical act of restoration in the novel. In Jungian terms, such figures represent the wise brother archetype, an intermediary between the ego and the Self who protects the hero during transformation (*Jung Archetypes* 131). Comparative theology extends this insight by interpreting prophetic companionship as a form of "participatory revelation," in which moral action discloses divine

truth (Clooney 12).

Each prophetic dignitary stands beside the incarnation, Christ, Ram, or Krishna, articulating the divine mission through humility. The paradox of proximity and distance structures their spirituality: they are near enough to witness revelation, yet removed enough to remind the world that divinity is not human possession. Freek L. Bakker and Francis X. Clooney contend that comparative theology must be grounded in attentive reading of the other's scripture as scripture. Bakker's *The Birth of Jesus and Rama* (2010) demonstrates how sacred narratives mirror divine incarnation across cultures, while Clooney (2010) invites theologians to cross over into the text of another faith to return enriched to their own faith.

John the Baptist's declaration "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3.30) encapsulates the same spiritual humility that governs Lakshman's and Balaram's service. Theologically, this humility forms the negative space of divinity described by Rudolf Garbe (1913), in which the human self is emptied to receive transcendence. In the Ramayana, Lakshman's renunciation of comfort during exile parallels the kenosis (self-emptying) of the Baptist, while Balaram's withdrawal from the fratricidal conflict prefigures the desert prophet's detachment from political messianism.

Literarily, all three narratives employ the liminal landscape: the wilderness, the forest, and the pilgrimage as a site of purification. The Jordan/Syrian desert, the Dandaka Forest, and pilgrimage to Naimisharanya are theological metaphors for preparation. David Horrell (2013) and J. Leese (2019) has noted that biblical wilderness motifs express both ecological fragility and spiritual renewal; the same double meaning animates the Indian forest (*vana*) as a place where human desire is tested against the order of dharma. Thus, intertextual analysis of these environments reveals a collective ecological ethics: repentance as the restoration of synchronization among the self, society, and nature.

Theologically, prophecy entails a mediation between transcendence and immanence. In the Biblical context, prophets are chosen to speak God's word to a morally wayward world. In the epics, divine companions uphold Dharma, the principle that

sustains cosmic and social equilibrium. Prophets are liminal beings, as Victor Turner writes, inhabiting the threshold between the sacred and profane (Turner 94). This liminality explains their ambivalence: John in the wilderness, Lakshman in exile, and Balaram in withdrawal. Their prophetic authenticity depends on their displacement from worldly centers of power.

Recent comparative theologians such as V. Manimala (2024) argue that revelation across scriptures occurs "through ethical performance rather than verbal proclamation" (116). In this light, the prophet is a dramatist of virtues. John's ritual of baptism, Lakshman's vow of wakefulness and Balaram's renunciation of battle all constitute performative ethics, gestures that embody the invisible. The prophetic archetype thus bridges theology and aesthetics: the moral is made visible through acts, symbols, and narrative rhythm.

Thematic and Theological Intersections

Divine Mission

Both John the Baptist and Lakshman exemplify what Mircea Eliade terms the hierophanic presence, a human who mediates the sacred through moral austerity and divine duty (Eliade 34). His asceticism reflects theological detachment from materialism, an essential precursor to the revelation of Christ. Similarly, Lakshman, in the Ramayana, renounces domestic comforts and accompanies Ram into exile out of Dharma and fraternal devotion (Valmiki, Ramayana 2.13). Both figures enact the archetype of the secondary saviour, whose moral and spiritual sacrifices sustain the principal incarnation or divine messenger. In comparative theology, these parallels underscore a universal motif of the prophetic witness: a figure who prepares the way, embodies self-effacement, and bridges divine revelation with human history (Panikkar 91).

The Semiotics of Voice and Silence

The motif of the voice operates as a theological signifier in both traditions. John's cry in the wilderness functions as both a literal proclamation and a symbolic rupture in the moral complacency of his time (Isaiah 40:3). His voice is more than speech; it is a medium of divine resonance. In the Mahabharata, Balarama's silence amid the moral

chaos of the Kurukshetra war similarly functions as an ethical gesture (Vyasa, Mahabharata 9.34). His refusal to participate in the conflict, choosing instead to undertake a pilgrimage, becomes a silent prophecy of fraternal violence. The semiotics of silence are as communicative as John's proclamation.

The comparative interplay of voice and silence invites deeper reading through the lens of phenomenology. According to Paul Ricoeur, the prophetic voice "discloses the excess of meaning in history by naming the unnameable" (Ricoeur 204). John's proclamation and Balaram's moral withdrawal are both performative acts that embody a theology of transcendence. While the Gospel frames voice as logos, a creative articulation of divine will, the Mahabharata interprets silence as tapas, the disciplined containment of power. These contrasting modes converge in their function, challenging worldly corruption through moral resistance and ontological awareness.

Where John the Baptist's voice and Balaram's silence represent opposite poles of prophetic communication, Mo Dao Zu Shi introduces a third modality: concealed sacrifice. Jiang Cheng's donation of his golden core to Wei Wuxian—performed without the recipient's knowledge—exemplifies a prophetic act that refuses its own legibility. After the Wen sect destroys Lotus Pier, Wei Wuxian's golden core melts, leaving him spiritually crippled. Jiang Cheng, without informing his brother, surrenders his own core through a secret surgical transfer. He then allows Wei Wuxian to believe that his recovery was spontaneous, and he accepts Wei Wuxian's subsequent turn to demonic cultivation as a moral failing rather than disclosing the truth.

This concealment inverts the Baptist's public proclamations. John's "voice crying in the wilderness" (Matthew 3:3) makes revelation audible. Jiang Cheng's silence makes sacrifice invisible. Yet both acts serve the same structural function: the diminishment of one prophetic companion for the flourishing of another. The theological difference lies in the acknowledgment of this fact. John's decrease is witnessed, celebrated, and canonized. Jiang Cheng's decrease is unknown, unacknowledged, and becomes the seed of estrangement between the two brothers. The novel does not resolve this tragedy; it displays

it as the cost of love in a world where transparency is impossible. In comparative terms, Jiang Cheng represents the prophetic companion under conditions of trauma, the threshold figure who guards the divine mission of Wei Wuxian's survival, but that can never be recognized as having done so.

Dharma and Repentance: Ethical Universals Across Scripture

At the heart of both traditions lies an ethical continuum: the movement from transgression to restoration. John's baptism ritual, an outward sign of inward repentance, introduces the ethical transformation necessary for divine communion (Luke 3:10–14). This mirrors the Mahabharata's didactic insistence that dharma is fluid and situational, requiring introspection and moral adaptation (Hiltebeitel 122). Balaram's insistence on forgiveness and moderation often tempers his sibling Lord Krishna's strategic realism, representing ethical polarity within the divine order. Together, these figures suggest that morality in both texts is dynamic, relational, and contextually negotiated.

While Christian theology locates ethics in divine grace, the epics situate morality in karma and dharma. Yet, both systems converge on the belief that spiritual progress demands self-renunciation. John's immersion rite parallels the purificatory Snana rituals in the Mahabharata, signifying both bodily and spiritual cleansing (Coomaraswamy 78). Each emphasizes an inward renewal that reorders one's relationship with the divine and society. Such a cross-textual comparison highlights how repentance and dharma share a theological teleology: the return of the soul to its divine origin through moral realignment.

Fraternal Sacrifice as Ethical Performance in the Jiang Siblings

The ethical continuum from transgression to restoration, evident in John's baptism and Balaram's moderation, acquires a triangular structure in the Jiang siblings in MDZS. Jiang Yanli, the elder sister, occupies a sacrificial role that has no direct parallel in the Biblical or Indic texts examined above. Lacking cultivation power and political agency, she nonetheless dies protecting Wei Wuxian during the

Nightless City massacre, taking a blade meant for him. Her death is not a prophetic proclamation but a silent interposition, a body placed between violence and the beloved.

Where John's martyrdom consolidates Christian witness and Lakshman's service preserves Ram's dharma, Jiang Yanli's sacrifice shatters the fraternal bond it was meant to protect. Her death confirms Wei Wuxian's status as a figure around whom destruction accumulates and crystallizes Jiang Cheng's grief into a weapon of vengeance. The three siblings of Jiang sect, Wei Wuxian (the recipient of concealed sacrifice), Jiang Cheng (the secret giver), and Jiang Yanli (the public intercessor) together enact an ethical drama that the classical texts leave implicit: sacrifice does not always restore order. Sometimes, it produces only debt, resentment, and estrangement.

This finding does not contradict the ethical universals identified above (repentance, dharma, and grace). Rather, it complicates them by introducing the acknowledgment variable. In the Ramayana, Lakshman's service is visible to Ram and to the reader; in the Gospels, John's humility is proclaimed from the Jordan. In the MDZS, the most radical sacrifice is one that can never be spoken. The novel thus asks whether the prophetic companion's moral authority depends on the recognition of sacrifice. Jiang Cheng's hidden action remains an action, even when it poisons the relationship between giver and receiver. This is the ethical realism of contemporary fiction: sacrifice may be unseen, unthanked, and yet still remains true.

Intermediary Figures and the Logic of Incarnation

Both John and his Indic counterparts stand at the threshold between human frailty and divine perfection. In Christian eschatology, John's proclamation of Christ fulfils prophetic typology; in Indic cosmology, Lakshman and Balaram embody divine energy (Shakti) in service of Avatara (divine descent). As Balaram is Krishna's elder brother, his life prefigures and supports the manifestation of the divine. Therefore, the logic of incarnation finds mutual expression: both traditions envision the cosmos as periodically invaded by divinity to restore order.

From a comparative theological perspective, these intermediary figures perform the crucial

function of mediation. Raimon Panikkar describes it as the "Cosmo theandric" structure of reality, where the divine, the cosmic and the human interpenetrate (Panikkar 45). John's baptismal act and Balaram's moral witness each instantiate this triadic interaction. They mediate the descent of grace into human experiences through ethical actions. The resonance between grace and dharma thus emerges not as a doctrinal coincidence but as a metaphysical correspondence.

Theological and Ethical Analysis

Theological Parallels

John the Baptist, Lakshman and Balaram each mediate between the divine and the human through distinctive theological idioms; revelation, Dharma and incarnation. In biblical theology, John's proclamation, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (Matt. 3:3) announces divine revelation through moral purification. His ritual of baptism enacts an eschatological threshold: cleansing precedes grace (Horrell 89). Likewise, Lakshman's vigilant service to Ram and Balaram's disciplined neutrality towards Krishna express modes of revelation framed not in speech but in action. Both epics portray these brothers as living conduits of the cosmic order rather than autonomous heroes (Chakravarti 52).

Clooney observes that comparative theology depends on "intra-textual fidelity and inter-textual openness" (Comparative Theology 11). Reading the Gospels beside the Sanskrit epics reveals that revelation operates relationally: John's humility mirrors Lakshman's loyalty and Balaram's restraint. Each figure channels divine intention through obedient self-limitation. Garbe's early claim that the Mahabharata contains "echoes of messianic expectation" (45) finds resonance here, where prophetic anticipation in John parallels Epic Dharma, which foresees divine order before it unfolds.

Theologically, all three embody a threshold motif. John baptizes in the Jordan, where wilderness meets civilization; Lakshman guards the forest frontier between exile and city; Balaram wanders the riverbanks during war. These thresholds symbolize sacred spaces of transformation. Manimala's study of the Gita and Gospels notes that "liminality is the precondition of revelation" (118), reinforcing the

shared motif of border mediation.

The Lan sect's most prominent figure, Lan Qiren, extends this theological parallel into the domain of institutional guardianship in the novel *Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation*. Unlike John the Baptist, who preaches from the wilderness outside established religion, Lan Qiren labors entirely within the structures of orthodoxy as the elder of the Gusu Lan Sect and guardian of his nephews, Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji. His prophetic function is pedagogical: the four thousand rules inscribed on the Wall of Cloud Recesses are not instruments of oppression but a disciplinary architecture designed to cultivate internal righteousness. Lan Qiren's sacrifice is the sacrifice of legibility. He appears to readers as a pedantic traditionalist hostile to innovation, yet this appearance is the price of his guardianship. He raises his nephews after their father's withdrawal, defends the Lan sect's moral coherence through the Sunshot Campaign, and ultimately accepts Lan Wangji's marriage to Wei Wuxian despite personal disapproval. This acceptance is not capitulation but pedagogical prophecy: Lan Qiren teaches that righteousness is not rigidity. In comparative terms, he occupies the structural position of Balaram, the elder brother who withdraws from active combat to preserve a higher order. Instead of being the elder, Lan Qiren is the younger brother who suffers silently for his brother's mistakes and still loves his nephews and raises both of them. Balaram refuses to fight in the Kurukshetra war and undertakes a pilgrimage instead. Lan Qiren refuses to expel Lan Wangji from the sect, even when Lan Wangji's love violates the rules. Both embody the paradox of prophetic restraint: they could enforce orthodoxy through power, but they choose to preserve the possibility of transformation.

Ethical Parallels: Duty and Sacrificial Obedience

John's austere life, Lakshman's exile, embracing forest hardship and Balaram's renunciation of political participation display parallel renunciatory ethics. As Shirik argues, "scriptural authority in both traditions derives from disciplined moral embodiment rather than institutional sanction" (10). Lakshman's vigilance towards his brother's family typifies relational dharma: duty grounded in affection

rather than reward. Similarly, John's declaration, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), dramatizes self-effacement in the service of truth. It challenges both egoism and material desire.

Balaram's neutrality amidst fraternal conflict raises the moral question of non-participation as a virtue. Brodbeck reads Arjuna's pilgrimage during the Kurukshetra war as "the highest ethical choice—refusing to instrumentalize strength for factional gain" (214). John's non-alignment with priestly or political powers parallels this stance. Ethical greatness lies in renunciation, not domination. John's martyrdom under Herod and Lakshman's near-death exhaustion in the war against the Lankan King, Ravana (Yuddha Kanda) both dramatize the cost of fidelity. Their sacrifices affirm the theological paradox that obedience may entail loss, yet this loss manifests divine justice.

The most radical modulation of sacrificial ethics in *Mo Dao Zu Shi* is Nie Huaisang, Nie Mingjue's younger half-brother. For most of the narrative, Huaisang appears as a useless dandy known as the "Head-Shaker" who knows nothing, fears everything, and spends his days painting fans rather than cultivating his saber. Only in the final revelation do we understand that Huaisang has spent sixteen years performing incompetence as a weapon.

The Nie sect's cultivation method accumulates resentful energy, driving cultivators into qi deviations. Nie Mingjue succumbs to this fate, which is accelerated by Jin Guangyao's musical sabotage. Huaisang, having witnessed his father die of the same affliction, refuses to practice saber cultivation, which is seen as laziness but is actually a survival tactic. When his brother dies, Huaisang inherits a sect that he never wanted. His response is to become the hidden architect of justice: secretly locating his brother's dismembered body, manipulating the Sacrificial Ritual to summon Wei Wuxian back from the dead, and orchestrating Jin Guangyao's exposure and then creating opportunity to his death yet all while maintaining his persona as the frightened fool.

Nie Huaisang's sacrifice is the sacrifice of the self as it truly is. He extinguishes his own personality, desires, and potential for happiness and becomes a mask. He does not fight; instead, he waits. He does not proclaim; instead, he feigns ignorance. Where

John the Baptist's voice cries in the wilderness, Huaisang's silence screams from the center of power: In comparative terms, Huaisang inverts the Baptist. John decreases so that Christ may increase; Huaisang decreases so that his brother's murderer may fall. Both are willing to be diminished for a cause beyond their own interests. However, John's cause is revelation, and Huaisang's is retribution. The novel refuses to condemn Huaisang's vengeance as mere sin, presenting it instead as the only form of justice available in a world where institutional authority has failed. Huaisang is not a prophet of divine order; he is a prophet of human brokenness, and his witness is not hope but lamentation. This extends the ethical parallel of sacrificial duty into the domain of concealed revenge, a dark but coherent variation on the prophetic archetype.

Literary and Symbolic Dimensions

From a literary perspective, these praiseworthy men embody recurrent symbols—voice, water, and kinship—that signify purity and mediation.

Voice

John's is "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Matt. 3:3), heralding divine advent through sound rather than sight. Lakshman's silence and listening obedience function as its inverse: the unspoken word of devotion. Balaram's voice, commanding yet measured, represents this balance. Together, they dramatize the transition from prophetic proclamation to contemplative listening, illustrating the dialogic nature of revelation (Tilak 122).

Water

The Jordan River, the site of baptism, parallels the Ganges-Yamuna confluence and the Sarasvati pilgrimage. In both traditions, water signifies purification and renewal. Baptism and Snana share the ritual intention of cleansing as preparation for ethical transformation (Bakker 125). When Balaram submerges himself in the river to avoid war, he performs a symbolic purification akin to John's immersion rites.

Kinship

Fraternal bonds define all narratives. Lakshman

and Balaram are brothers to incarnations of divinity, and John is a cousin and spiritual brother to Christ. Kinship mediates theology; divinity is revealed through relationships. Spencer's comparative study of Christ and Krishna concludes that "divine intimacy unfolds through human fraternity" (5). This principle is evident in each pairing. The characters of the novel express their brotherhood through different actions, such as revenge, sacrifice, and silence.

Interdisciplinary Reflection

The Crossroads of Theology, Ethics and Ecology

The prophetic figures of John the Baptist, Lakshman, and Balaram are not only moral archetypes but also ecological witnesses whose spiritual practices are inseparable from the landscapes they inhabit. John's wilderness functions as what eco theologians such as Sallie McFague call a "sacramental geography," where creation becomes the medium of divine communication (McFague 64). Likewise, Lakshman's exile and Balaram's retreat to pilgrimage sites affirm the sacred interdependence between human virtue and the living environment.

In both epics, the environment reflects moral order: pollution, drought, and ecological decay signify ethical imbalance. This resonates with the biblical notion that repentance restores not only the soul but also creation itself (Rom 8:19–22). When read through an eco-theological lens, asceticism models sustainability as a spiritual discipline. Lakshman's restraint and John's simplicity anticipate that a global ethic of ecological humility must be a declaration that redemption includes the healing of the earth.

The Linguistics of Revelation

In both traditions, language functions as a theological technology. John's "voice crying in the wilderness" (John 1:23) establishes revelation as an act of speech, whereas Dharma in the Mahabharata is often articulated through silence or paradox. As Wendy Doniger notes, Indian epic discourse "invites interpretation by indirection," privileging narrative over dogma (Doniger, 112). One may perceive a convergence of metaphysical linguistics: revelation as vibration, articulation, and ethical call.

Language in *Mo Dao Zu Shi* functions as a theological technology of concealment rather than

proclamation. Where John's voice cries openly in the wilderness, the speech of MDZS's prophetic figures is characterized by indirection, performative deception, and the weaponized silence of the unsaid. Jiang Cheng's hidden sacrifice—the golden core transferred to Wei Wuxian without a word—establishes revelation as an act of withholding. No confession is uttered, and no acknowledgment is offered. The truth remains locked in the body, a secret known only to the giver and the narrative's omniscient witness (the reader). Similarly, Nie Huaisang's sixteen-year performance of incompetence transforms language into a mask: his feigned ignorance, his stammering excuses, his calculated uselessness are not failures of speech but hyper-articulate performances that conceal a decade of vengeful planning. As one reader observes, Huaisang's entire persona is a "crouching moron, hidden avenger"—a linguistic and behavioral code that must be deciphered backward, after the fact. LanQiren's four thousand rules, inscribed on the Wall of Cloud Recesses, represent the opposite pole: language as disciplinary architecture, where every transgression is named, every virtue codified. Yet even here, the rules are not dogmatic straitjackets but pedagogical instruments that teach the right judgment through internalization, not external coercion. Thus, the comparison transcends simple moral typology. It reveals a shared conviction across the Biblical, Indic, and MDZS traditions that divine or moral truth manifests through communicative energy, whether vocalized (John), silenced (Balam), concealed (Jiang Cheng), performed (NieHuaisang), or codified (LanQiren). All signals that revelation, in a fractured moral cosmos, may require not only speech but also strategic silence, not only transparency but also the holy lie that preserves justice. MDZS adds a darker, more realistic modulation: sometimes, the prophetic

witness cannot afford to be heard. Sometimes the voice must cry not in the wilderness but into the void, unanswered and unacknowledged, trusting that the act of witness is complete even when no one receives it

Comparative Ethics

The relational ethics of John's discipleship to Jesus, Lakshman's service to Ram, and Balam's fraternal guidance of Krishna point to a universal theology of interpersonal sacredness. Emmanuel Levinas's Philosophy of the Other informs that responsibility precedes being and ethics is the first theology (Levinas 83). In each narrative, moral identity emerges not through autonomous will but through radical devotion to the divine. John's humility prepares the way for grace; Lakshman and Balam preserve cosmic equilibrium through loyalty and restraint. Both reject egoism as the root of moral chaos. Their relational ethics suggest that divine reality is not abstract transcendence but enacted compassion, a theme that unites biblical and Indic epics across cultures.

Towards a Global Theology of Witness

The interdisciplinary synthesis of theology, ethics, and literary narrative reveals that these prophetic men serve as paradigms of witness in a fractured moral landscape. Each resists violence not through domination but through their presence. In a post-secular academy, such comparisons challenge the reductionist binaries between the East and the West. They invite what Francis X. Clooney calls "comparative theology as dialogue," a methodology rooted in learning with rather than about the other (Clooney 17). Through this lens, the lives of John, Lakshman, and Balam become dialogic texts, ethical invitations to recognize sanctity in difference.

Structural analogy

Dimension	John the Baptist	Lakshman	Balam
Relation to Divinity	Forerunner of Christ	Devoted brother of Ram (Vishnu incarnate)	Elder brother of Krishna (Vishnu incarnate)
Ethical Focus	Repentance and moral purification	Selfless service and vigilance	Detachment and justice
Ascetic Symbol	Wilderness Fasting, baptism	Exile, sleepless vow	Agricultural pilgrimage, neutrality

Theological Function	Herald of salvation	Guardian of Dharma	Embodiment of balance
Outcome	Martyrdom	Liberation through service	Apotheosis and withdrawal

Findings

This research contributes a holistic perspective that unites theology, ethics, and aesthetics. It interprets prophecy as a narrative technology through which sacred texts negotiate moral transformations. By weaving together these strands of scholarship, the researcher advances the following findings:

- The prophetic figure operates as a trans-textual mediator whose authority derives from moral authenticity rather than institutional sanction.
- Prophecy is aesthetically encoded through images of water, forests, and wilderness, which externalize inner purification.
- Motifs reflect a proto-ecological ethics, aligning spiritual renewal with ecological balance.
- Through this lens, John the Baptist, Lakshman, and Balaram emerge as variations on a single archetype: the witness who speaks or remains silent so that the divine order might be reimagined within the human world.

Conclusion: Prophecy as Moral Resonance

John the Baptist alongside Lakshman and Balaram illuminates the continuity of prophetic consciousness across civilizations. They embody the ethics of renunciation, theology of mediation, and cosmology of restoration. The Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Holy Bible, though separated by geography and cosmology, converge in their portrayal of the divine-human dialogue. The analysis synthesizes earlier scholarship on the intersection of dharma and grace, while extending the discussion towards ecological and narrative symbolism. The prophets' engagement with elemental motifs—water, forest, and wilderness—becomes a meditation on purification and renewal across traditions. By juxtaposing textual ethos with theological intent, the researcher demonstrates that prophecy, in both Indic and Biblical traditions, functions less as a prediction than as a narrative intervention.

This quest finds contemporary articulation in the fraternal sacrifices of Mo Dao Zu Shi. Jiang Cheng's

concealed golden core, Lan Qiren's pedagogical guardianship, and Nie Huaisang's sixteen-year performance of incompetence are not departures from the prophetic archetype but its continuation under the conditions of trauma, institutional decay, and moral ambiguity. Where John the Baptist stands at the Jordan, Lakshman at the forest threshold, and Balaram on pilgrimage, the novel characters of The Grand Master of demonic cultivation stand as the symbols too and they are expressed in the burned ruins of Lotus Pier, the silent halls of Cloud Recesses, and the mask of the fool. Each says, in their own idiom: I will decrease, so that you may live. You may never know what I have given you. You may turn against me. However, I will decrease it. This is not a theology of success. It is a theology of witness, and that witness, whether inscripture, epic, or contemporary fiction, remains the most human response to a world that demands our diminishment for the sake of another.

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