Why is Rama Blue?



Posted on December 9, 2018 by team

We are all aware about Yogacharya T.Krishnamacharya being a pioneer in using yoga (specifically asana and pranayama) for therapy and well-being. But little did we know that he was a great scholar of our sacred knowledge and traditions. One of his long-standing students Raghu Ananthanarayanan has put together an interesting note about Ramayana from a yogic lens based on his understanding of various aspects of the epic as taught by Sri Krishnamacharya.

He has used the device of an innocent conversation between a young, curious child, Chiku, and an elderly teacher Rita, just like the dialogues that used to take place between student and teachers at ashrams. In my discussions with Raghu I learnt that he wrote this because he was very disturbed after watching "Sita Sings the Blues", a film that narrates the story of oppression that a woman feels. While the animated film is made in an artistic way and was probably not intended to be a

negative portrayal, it nevertheless reflected all the current stereotypical way in which the Hindu myths are misunderstood.

Chiku: Why is Rama blue?

Rita: What do you mean?

Chiku: He is always painted blue in colour, is he not?

Rita: Ah! Yes that's because he is the colour of Vishnu, the colour of N0-Thing, the colour of the dark night sky just before the moon rises.

Chiku: Then what is the story all about? Why does my mother keep telling me the story and saying all good boys must be like Rama!

Rita: Ok, but lets keep Rama's story aside and let me tell you another story: This is the story of two young boys. They were the precious gifts born to an ageing king. When they were in their early teens, a wise sage who lived in the forest asked the King for help. "Your sons have come of age, they must study and learn. I also need to maintain the peace of my ashram; there are denizens in the forest who keep bothering us. Your sons will learn the art of war and the wisdom of the great wise people of the land". The King thought about it, and agreed, it was time to let them go. In the ashram the boys learnt wisdom from the sages and helped them to fight off demons and ogres who often disturbed the peace of the ashram. The boys grew up to be courageous and skillful warriors. They transformed into wise, brave and handsome young men.

While they were going back to their father's home, they happened to go through a neighboring kingdom. The young princess of this kingdom was especially beautiful and gifted. It so happened that the king had arranged for her to be betrothed and had invited all the brave eligible suitors from far and near to his palace on that day. A great test of strength and valour was planned for the candidates.

When the princess saw these young men walk down the main street, she was so entranced by the elder one that her heart went out to him. The sage who was accompanying the young man urged him to bid for the challenge. While the maiden fervently prayed for his success, the young man came through the test with great ease. The two young men were married in great pomp and glory, to the princess and her sister.

When they reached their home, they found their father waiting and eager to hand over his kingdom to his eldest son. However, an intrigue among the queens wrested the throne away from the son even as the rituals and celebrations of the crowning had begun. The young man had to go away to a forest for fourteen years.

Chiku: Hey, you are tricking me! You are telling me Rama's story, but making it seem like a great hero story! This is not the story of a good obedient boy that my mother relates to me!!

Rita: I did nothing, I just related the story, and yes it is heroic for a young boy to grow up in a place that is beautiful, adventurous and filled with great mentors.

Chiku: So, how are you going to take the story forward!

Rita: There are many ways to tell a story, and many more ways to interpret them. The most meaningful way is to allow it to evoke the best, the most heroic and the most sacred in you.

Chiku: Really? Are there other ways?

Rita: Yes, unfortunately there are. One can use it to illustrate norms and social assumptions. One can make fun of some things people hold as valuable or use modern theories to make the story seem awful and regressive.

Chiku: That's not what I am interested in. You have got me interested in the story. Please don't stop, carry on with it!

Rita: Yes, let's get back to the story: the brothers are Rama and Lakshmana, Sita is the bride, Dasharatha the king and Vasishta the sage.

Rama and Lakshmana thought about the prospect of going away into the forest. They said to each other, "if our father who loves us should fall prey to such palace intrigue, we cannot live and rule this place in an honorable way". "This is a Dharma Sankata, and the sages told us that only true leaders are the ones that can see a Dharma Sankata."

Chiku: What is a Dharma Sankata?

Rita: A Dharma sankata is a dilemma that one faces in a situation where any choice one makes has equal positive and negative impacts. In this case "If we stay, we make our people happy, but we are not wise enough to live up to their expectations. If we go away, we may lose our right to rule, but we will have an opportunity to learn from life and the many Rishis who we will meet in the forest. We will be able to play the 'palace intrigue game' from a

place of wisdom." They said to each other as they weighed the pros and cons of the Dharma sankata. They weighed four sides of the dilemma, the plus and minus of the polarity, ways of compromising between the two, and looking for creative solutions beyond the alternatives presented. And then they said to each other "Let us decide to go to the forest and face the world alone. There is much to learn. The sages have told us that any barrier or demon outside is but a reflection of seeds of *rajas* and *tamas* within that have yet to be burnt." They discussed their thoughts with their young brides long into the night. They were excited by the possibility of a few more years of freedom and adventure, at the same time, they were afraid of letting go of the security of a ready made setting for their future. But the sense of adventure and the need to really discover their true worth prevailed, so they went to the king and conveyed their decision.

Chiku: That's nice so they took full responsibility!

Rita: Yes, poor Lakshmana was torn, his wife Urmila was not ready to go on an adventure, but she encouraged Lakshmana to go. "You will regret it if you do not complete the journey that Rama and you undertook together when you went to Sage Vashishta's Ashrama" she said.

Chiku: What about Bharata?

Rita: Let's see what happens in the story: Just after Rama, Lakshmana and Sita left the kingdom Bharata came back from his apprenticeship. He was very unhappy with his mother's intrigue and rushed off to fetch Rama. The two of them met at the banks of the river and sat down for a long dialogue. Rama took the position that a period of exile was a great opportunity to learn, introspect deeply and mature as a person. "Why can't you do it while you are in the social context, and in your own home. Can one not grow and mature in that space too?" The four of them examined all the possibilities that were available to them. They genuinely appreciated the insights offered by each one. It helped each of them really understand their own positions from different aspects and with a lot more clarity. They finally said to themselves, "our lives are an experiment anyway, it is an opportunity to learn, to burn our seeds of *rajas* and *tamas*. Let us live through the path thrown open to us by the vagaries of life and discover". So, they parted from each other and Rama promising to be back after 14 years, and Bharata promising to rule as regent.

Chiku: That sounds plausible! It makes me feel good that I can have differences and be emotionally churned, but I can still have a dialogue with others.

Rita: That's great, you are learning how to listen to a story in a way that helps you to introspect and grow. Debates and destructive criticism erode you, while enquiry and

exploration help you.

Chiku: Yes, I see that. The way I see the story tells me who I am. Shows me my thinking and biases. Who knows what happened a few thousand years ago!

Rita: So let's move ahead and now tell me, what else do you want to re-examine?

Chiku: Ummm..Tell me about Ravana stealing Sita.

Rita: I hope some Yogic philosophy is ok with you?

Chiku: Sure, I love it!

Rita: Ok here goes: One's mind is a mirror. It can reflect the world (*prakruti*) and it can reflect the divine (*purusha*). Anyone can see the divine, provided they fulfil a precondition. The persons' mind and heart must be completely free of the seeds of *rajas* and *tamas*. Such a mind is called the *shuddha satvam*, it is completely integrated, and naturally devoid of desire for experiencing pleasure or fear of experiencing pain. Dasharatha is a master of ten great abilities. His son Rama is gifted with the integration of the ten and with a mind ready for *shuddha satvam*. Ravana is his counterpoint. Ravana has many extraordinary talents in music, in understanding the world, in understanding the scriptures and so on. However, he is not integrated and is filled with raw emotion.

Chiku: Hey then Rama and Ravana are two forms of the same set of potentials?

Rita: Yes. Sita is the feminine aspect of this potential. She can either attract and be attracted by Rama, when she resonates with Rama. She can also be drawn to Ravana, when she resonates with her own raw and incoherent self. Now to some turning points of the story.

Sita, Rama and Lakshmana saw the lovely golden Deer and naturally desire touched their hearts. So, Sita wanted to possess it. To be able to catch the golden deer was the ultimate affirmation of his mastery for Rama. So off he went in pursuit, the deer was a trick like all appearances of *prakruti* are! Rama is trapped in his narcissistic self and screams out for help. Lakshmana is caught in a dilemma. Sita feels guilty, and forces Lakshmana to go for help though he says, "Rama has fallen into a trap and he must extricate himself from it". Before he leaves, Laxmana draws three lines in front of Sita. Three boundaries of ourselves that we cross when fear or desire overpower our discrimination: the boundaries of physical integrity, the boundaries of emotional integrity and the boundaries of mental integrity. Ravana in his super-vision sees his opportunity and pays a visit to Sita as himself, shorn of the trappings of a King. He comes as a simple Brahmin seeking alms. Sita's compassion take over, she does

not see through the artifice of Ravana, she gives in to her compulsion to offer nourishment. The three boundaries that Lakshmana drew warn her clearly. They form fire-walls, but Sita is so blind to them.

Chiku: Why did the boundaries get inflamed?

Rita: Chiku, don't you always fell a discomfort a deep sense of letting yourself down, of not living up to your own commitment to be the best that you can be when you are doing something compulsive? A deep unconscious voice warns you every time you cross a line but you remain deaf to it.

Chiku: Hmmm. Yes I do, something does bother me, like I become anxious or feel a little guilty, but it is also exciting!

Rita: It is the same feeling told symbolically in the story. If we know how to use these sources of energy, they become the heat of self-reflection called *tapas*. This heat will burn away the seeds of *rajas* and *tamas*.

Chiku: Wow, This is exciting, tell me more.

Rita: As Sita gets abducted her sense of regret arises, but it is too late. She is hoping that she does not get lost. All the symbols of mastery over herself that she acquired as gifts from her birth fall away, one by one as she gets pulled deeper and deeper into the Ravana space. These are found later by Rama as he searches for Sita in the forest. She is not able to stop herself from going into a dark space.

Rama and Lakshmana come back to the hut and realize what has happened. Rama sees clearly that he has wasted much of the time he had at his disposal. For 13 years he lived a simple and happy life but forgot to nurture his inner growth. "This crisis is a wake up call, I was trapped in a sense of pride and a feeling of having accomplished my full transformation, I did not live up to the promise of doing *tapas* in the forest." Thus, Rama and Lakshmana set out to find Sita. On the way they encounter the various animalistic parts of themselves that they have not fully mastered. JambavAn the bear, Hanuman the monkey self and a host of other energies of the self that need to, be owned up to are encountered. They engage with these energies and befriend them.

Sita in the meanwhile is taken to Sri Lanka. She is placed in Ashoka Vana, the one space inside Ravana that is beyond his rawness, where he becomes contemplative. He realizes that until his own being becomes coherent he cannot approach or touch Sita. He will only violate

the beauty he craves.

As she sits alone in the forest abode, Sita meditates on herself and tries to bring clarity to herself. She slowly burns the last seeds of *rajas* and *tamas* within. She has seen them in their manifest form and confronts the reality that they are about to engulf her. And as she does that, she is able to see that within Rama too there is the animalistic and that he must be able to master this aspect before they can meet again in the space of pure light and love. At this point of her transformative journey, Hanuman the animalistic alter ego of Rama finds Sita, consoles her and tells her that Rama is searching for her desperately through his own *sAdhana*. But Hanuman in an act of uncontained rage tries to destroy Sri Lanka. One cannot transform the incoherent and divergent energies of the self through rage. It must be transformed through the intensity of *dhyAna*.

Chiku: Rita, when you say one cannot transform the incoherent and divergent energies of the self through rage, and one can only do so with *dhyAna*, what does that mean? What is *dhyAna*?

Rita: Chiku that's a huge question can you hold that, come back another day and we will examine it?

Chiku: Ok!

Rita: A great war ensues finally. The raw power of Ravana and the coherent power of Rama confront each other in a final test. Each of the three protagonists of our story Sita, Rama and Ravana are but an aspect of each of us. The raw powerful self, the coherent and ordered best that we can be, and the vulnerable self, filled with love. Rama rides on Hanuman with his fully mastered raw power and helps Ravana to see his own inner fragmentation. The internal friction and fight fall away, the heads that have been leading Ravana all over the place fall away, and he becomes capable of transforming himself. Rama and Ravana meet in the battle-field for the last time and Rama pays respects to the great talent of Ravana. He asks Lakshmana to receive the gift of knowledge and wisdom from Ravana and relieve him of his debt to the gurus (*guru rna*).

Chiku: Are you saying that the story is a symbolic explication of my own journey of maturation?

Rita: Yes Chiku, all stories like the Mahabharata and Ramayana that survive through the ages reflect one's own inner drama in some deep way. That's why people read them again and again, and it stays new and fresh thousands of years after they were written. They reflect the

essential struggles of every human being caught in the daily battle for survival aspiring to discover the divine within.

Chiku: What about Sita and her trial by fire?

Rita: Oh! Yes, we need to see that through the Yogic lens too. When Sita comes to meet Rama, she sees how resplendent he has become. He has regained the pure brilliant luster she saw when he emerged from Vashishta's ashram. She too has grown and transformed but when she comes close to Rama and is about to reach out to him, the last vestiges of her desire for him and her own sense of guilt blind her. She must see the deep urges that made her blind to the advice that Lakshmana gave her when he drew the three lines on the ground. Lakshmana sees her plight and helps her go through the final steps of her *tapas*, a trial as deep and life transforming as Rama's fight with Ravana. The final transformation is complete, and Rama and Sita are united in a new universe, one that is replete with *satyam*, *rtam* and *shAntam*. This is the universe of *ananda* that can be touched only by a *shuddha satva* mind.

A long silence, then Chiku speaks: Wow that's a long journey. Are you giving a twist to the story Rita?

Rita: Firstly Chiku, I have been saying this all the time, the twist one gives is a reflection of the mind of the twister! I prefer this twist to the ones who look at the story from a feminist "Rama is an oppressor" point of view, or the twist that says "being Hindu is being regressive and superstitious", or dismissing these stories as "mere mythology", or even worse "I hate anything positive about the Hindu Tradition" point of view ☺

Chiku: Yes, I agree.

Rita: Also, I have used a well-known idea from the dance tradition known as the *ula*, which traces the inner growth of the *nayika* drawn to the beauty of Shiva. So, this twist is not mine, and it is completely consistent with Yoga and with the deeper aspects of Bhakti that is represented in dance.

Chiku. Ok, but what is *dhyAna*? You promised to elaborate more…

Rita: it is growing late Chiku. Go home now, we will speak about it another day.