Exploring Rāma Within



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Growing up in Kerala, this time of year brings back nostalgic memories of beautiful yet ceaseless rains of the monsoon (*idavapāthi*) that almost always coincide with the school reopening on June 1, as well as the start of the *Rāmāyaṇa Māsam* when most Hindu households engage in the daily recital of *Rāmāyaṇa* in their households. *Rāmāyaṇa Māsam* is celebrated during the *Karkidaka* month (July 17 – August 16). Per Malayalam calendar, this phase marks the transition of Sun from the *karkidaka rāśi* to the *mithuna rāśi*, giving this month its name in Kerala calendar system. This year, I feel fortunate that I have got the opportunity for an *antaraṇgasādhana* on *Rāmāyaṇa* during this time through the *Rāmāyaṇa* Exploration Online (REO)* along with 22 co-travellers from around the world. Each week we look at the stories from *Rāmāyaṇa* from a self-reflective space seeking to discover the *Rāma* space – one filled with *ramyam* (beauty) – within.

Some very critical questions about self and one's relationship with the systems around came alive in the past week's exploration.

- **Ideas of Perfection** – Rāmā's descriptions and actions evoked different ideas and associations of perfection for many of us. While for some it was aspirational, for many it also brought out the burden of meeting certain benchmarks one has created/accepted in their minds. Whose ideas of perfection have I imbibed and made my own? What is it in me that is making want to achieve perfection the moment I see it outside of me? Can one experience *dukkha* (sorrow) even when everything else is 'perfect'?
- **Engaging with One's Fears** – The attitude of Rāma and Lakshmaṇa while fighting with Tātaka brought out rich evocations around engaging with one's fears. For some, it opened up the possibility of engaging with what is ugly and frightening in life from a space of lightness. For others, it brought to the fore questions about the impact of socialisation on the identity and actions of children. The sense of betrayal that our younger selves have experienced when the elders in our lives let us down in moments when we needed their counsel also came alive for exploration.
- **Discovering One's Place in the World** – Rāma taking centre stage in the initial stories also mirrored questions around Lakshmana's role and importance for some in the group. We reflected upon what does it feel like when I take my place in the world? How much of this place is in comparison with others around me? When I feel I am in someone's shadows, how does it make me feel? What does it really mean to me?

For myself, this journey is bringing up questions that are letting me get a glimpse of the space of Rāma within and the impediments that are challenging me to access and experience this space within me.

*REO is a flagship offering of Ritambhara Ashram and the current cohort is facilitated by Hariprasad Varma and Ajay Viswanath.