

# Embodying 'Ramayana' Masterclass

**Bruce Howard Bayley**

*This masterclass took place in Pune, Maharashtra, India*

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As an India-born Anglo-Indian, I was absolutely delighted and thrilled to have been invited to present two days of Dramatherapy working with the epic of Ramayana in Pune, Maharashtra in the month following the Conference in Bengaluru (Bangalore). Billed as a Master Class the workshops focused on Ramayana not only as classical mythology of India but also as the source for working with universal human mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual qualities.

Working with some material presented in my chapter "Embodying Ramayana: the Drama Within" in *The Routledge International Handbook of Dramatherapy* (2017, eds. Sue Jennings & Clive Holmwood), the exploration drew on Giduturi Lakshmi Narayan's work in *Understanding Ramayana as Rama Within* (2006, Vakil, Feffer and Simons).

The 23 participants in the workshop explored the narrative and characters in Ramayana as enacted within the Human Body as well as the practical healing uses of these metaphors and symbols within Dramatherapy: the image of the divided City of Ayodhya as a metaphor of the conflicted Self and the epic characters of Rama (the Soul), Sita (the Mind), Laxman (the Body), Hanuman, the Monkey-God (the Breath) and Ravanna (the multiple Desires and Appetites) as archetypes within the Divided Self.

Using body movement, role play, the exploration of space, aspects of single characters as well as collective composite characters, participants accessed ways to remember, to acknowledge feelings of a lost time and the sometimes painful issues of Loss and Disconnection. Through movement, story and role-play they created characters and narratives from Ramayana, discovering how dramatic embodiment can assist us to review conflicts between polarized aspects of ourselves and gradually access a sense of internal integration.

The Master Class was founded within the approach that I have developed within my *tribhuvan threefold dramatherapy* practice which focuses on the simultaneous exploration of three areas: Being, Conscious Soul Development and Renewal of the Ego and Persona in the dramas of everyday life. The approach is based in a Goethean approach to "living" process utilizing aspects from Rudolf Steiner's Triad of Thinking (the Head), Feeling (the rhythmic Breathing System of Heart and Lung) and Willing (activated by the limbic system and the "I"), as well as the Kinesthetic Body work of Jungian psychotherapist, Dr. Jean Houston.

Bruce Howard Bayley



*From Anshuma Kshetrapal, Course Director, Advisory Board Member, CMTAI (Creative Movement Therapy Association of India) and Co-founder of The Arts Therapists Co-Lab (tadc)*

Listening to Dr. Bayley's contribution to the keynote speech at the BADth 2019 conference in Chester University, I was immediately drawn to his intense and enigmatic presence. Speaking to him after also assured me of his approachability and openness. All of this, also, shone through in the workshop and the days leading up to it. I was very excited to have the opportunity to host the workshop 'Embodying the Ramayana' through my endeavour The Arts Therapists Co-Lab that is envisioned to conduct such collaborative work and bring it into India.

This was our third international masterclass for therapists, psychologists, social workers and artists in two months. We aim to provide access within reasonable financial means to the plethora of wonderful work happening around the world and within India. Along with my partner, Preetha Ramasubramanian, I run short courses, listening circles, supervision trainings and masterclasses such as this one for people who cannot afford to travel out of the country and yet display a passion for the work. For this particular workshop, we were fortunate enough to find the right city, venue and the participants for the success that it was. Even though we only had a short three weeks to put it together and market it, we had a lot of interest and people flew in specifically from different parts of the country, for the weekend. It is testament to not only the need for dramatherapy in India as it tries to grapple modernity while not wanting to lose touch with its mythology, but was also because of the magnanimity and influence of the facilitator.

The topic is particularly rife in the times where religious ideology has co-opted mythology, and the workshop was a wonderful platform, for people to be able to re-examine their relationship with their Rama, Sita, Hanuman, Ravana and Laxman (characters from the Ramayana), within themselves. That exploration was certainly achieved, but also just observing Dr. Bayley hold the space as softly but as powerfully as he did was poetic and inspirational. At no point was the Ramayana, the cultural implications or even the prowess of the facilitator demanding of attention. The participants were co-creating the collective and personal myth in that room for themselves and that was a joy to be part of. I am truly honoured to have had the privilege to bring him and his work home.

*Participant Reflection from Niharica Shah, Psychologist & Creative Arts Therapies Facilitator.  
Founder of Interior Gardening Psychological Services*

As a Therapeutic Art and Movement Facilitator, I've been fascinated in Drama Therapy for a while. When I found out that Bruce's Master Class would be focusing on embodying the Ramayana, I was hooked. Looking back, it was definitely one of the best CPD workshops I have attended. The 2 days with Bruce allowed me to access aspects of my own culture and mythology, as well as myself, that I didn't know I had overlooked. Bruce brought with him a wealth of knowledge about the Ramayana and Drama Therapy. His Anglo-Indian background, his depth of understanding, and scattered 'achha's' allowed me to temporarily let go of the fact that I was learning about my own culture from a foreigner!

The Tribhuvan method that Bruce uses, along with the thinking of Göethe and so many others, made the embodiment of the characters from Ramayana both Personal and Universal. Where I recognized a pattern in myself as Ramavana, I recognized patterns in all of humanity. I definitely learnt a lot of theory and different ways of facilitating therapeutic experiences for clients. What I found particularly helpful was the way Bruce used absolutely all cues (verbal and non-verbal) from our embodied characters to help explain client behaviour better. He beautifully held, and allowed us to hold, the dualities we saw in the characters and ourselves. The parallels he drew between the characters as representational of different parts of us, and the challenges as a result of that, was quite illuminating. All in all, the experience was playful, reflective and enlightening. I definitely look forward to attending another of his workshops!



*Participant Reflection from Anupriya Banerjee, Founder and Creative Director of Doctor Drama, an International portal for Expressive Arts Therapies; Assistant Program Coordinator for the PG. Diploma Program in Expressive Arts Therapy Diploma at St. Xavier's (Autonomous) College, Mumbai*

'Embodying Ramayana' was a two day intensive masterclass on identifying and embodying the aesthetic distance between the subjective and objective self via the narratives and roles of Ramayana in therapy. In traversing from the sensible realm (reality) to the super sensory (surplus reality) of mythology in the masterclass, there were many personal, societal and cultural beliefs that found more permission to evolve beyond a dichotomous understanding to a broader spectrum.

When one sifts beyond the societal attributions, function and cultural interpretations of a mythical role, the role then holds the potential to contain themes of universality and uniqueness of being and the needs of both the client and the therapist in the moment. It offers an unlearning of the literary narrative of the ancient mythology and an exploratory delving into the emotional narrative of every character. Be it in the role of Ram; as the non-reactive, objective therapist or the role of Sita; the distractible mind that needs to be centred. Be it in the neglected role of Laxman; the protector of the body, or the affable role of Hanuman; the loyal and playful one. Be it in empathising with the unaddressed need for healing in Raavana, the villain by many contexts. In imagining the musculature, the flow between the physical and sensory energies of these characters, there was an expressed and embodied 3-fold shift in the thinking, feeling and willingness of being in a therapeutic alliance.

As a dramatherapist, the workshop offered an assessment of the overused role of the body, to navigate the balance between the objective or 'dead' process and the subjective or 'living' process. It offered the imagination freedom to visualize and hold multiple truths in a moment and reverently explore the "uselessness" of therapy while re-envisaging its usefulness. In short, every character and element of the story became a metaphor for the mind, body and soul in the healing process. Offering a liminal space to explore power, control, truth, freedom, empathy, fear, vulnerability, bravery, spontaneity and creativity within and without structure across all kinds of cultural and mental health constructs and contexts.

Dr. Bayley showed us how the Ramayana can evolve beyond its cultural origins and be applied at a global level in taking the narrative forward.

