



Six Reflections on Shri Rama: A Devotional and Interpretive Essay

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Abstract

Devotion to Shri Rama is often presented as a single, undifferentiated whole, with little attention to how its practices, narratives, metaphysics and ethics relate to one another or to the scriptural sources on which they rest. This essay addresses that problem through six linked reflections that move from the personal to the public: the Divine Name, devotional service, community, the epic narrative, ultimate reality, and just rule. It adopts an interpretive, devotional-hermeneutic approach. Primary texts, namely the Valmiki Ramayana, the Ramcharitmanas, the Adhyatma Ramayana, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, are read alongside modern scholarship, and scriptural statements, traditional interpretations and the author's own reflections are kept distinct. The reflections show that chanting reorients attention and cultivates surrender rather than guaranteeing outcomes; that service is best understood as a disposition rather than employment; that Name-centred communities have documented precedents; that the epic can be retold in condensed devotional form; that Rama can be coherently related to Brahman, Purushottama and dharma within a bhakti-oriented Vedanta; and that the ideal of Rama Rajya can be translated into accountable institutional principles. The essay concludes that these themes form one connected devotional vision, while distinguishing faith-based claims from claims open to scholarly or empirical test.

Keywords: Rama Nama; bhakti; Ramayana; Vedanta; Rama Rajya

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and Motivation

Shri Rama stands at the centre of one of the most widely retold narratives in the world. The Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* attributed to Valmiki is traditionally honoured as the first poem of Sanskrit literature (the *ādikāvya*) [1], and its story has been retold in many languages and genres across South Asia and beyond [2], [3]. In the sixteenth century Tulsidas composed the *Rāmcaritmānas* in Awadhi, a work that has shaped devotional life and ritual performance in northern India [4], [5].

Devotion to Rama finds expression in several distinct but overlapping forms: chanting the Divine Name, serving the Lord, gathering in communities of devotees, retelling the epic, reflecting on Rama's ultimate nature, and invoking Rama Rajya as an ideal of just rule. Scholarship has examined these forms largely in isolation: the textual history of the epic [6], its performance and reception [5], [7], its political uses [8], and the *bhakti* movements through which devotion has been organised [9]. Devotional writing, for its part, often presents practice, narrative and metaphysics together without distinguishing what scriptures state, what traditions teach and what an individual author reflects, and often without engaging scholarship.



1.2. Research Gap and Problem

The problem addressed here is therefore twofold. First, to the author's knowledge, few studies place the six forms of devotion named above within a single conceptual framework. Second, where devotional and scholarly perspectives do meet, the epistemic status of the claims made is seldom stated. This article offers a framework that connects the six dimensions and keeps their epistemic registers explicit.

1.3. Genre and Scope

This article is a hybrid work, and it states its genre plainly. Its core is an *interpretive essay in the philosophy of religion and devotional studies*, written from the standpoint of a participant in the Rama-bhakti tradition who engages critically with primary sources and scholarship. It is not an empirical study, it collects no data, and it makes no claim that the divinity of Rama can be demonstrated by evidence. Where it reports what devotees or traditions believe, it presents those beliefs as the tradition's own claims. Two short passages, in Sections 6.4 and 7.2, are creative devotional exercises, and their purpose is explained where they appear.

1.4. Objectives and Conceptual Framework

The article has four objectives: (i) to propose a conceptual framework connecting six devotional dimensions; (ii) to ground each dimension in primary texts and scholarship while keeping scripture, tradition and personal reflection distinct; (iii) to develop an account of the relationship between Rama, Brahman, Purushottama and *dharma* and to identify the philosophical tradition adopted; and (iv) to clarify the status of a proposed community and public-welfare initiative and to translate its ethical principles into institutional arrangements.

The framework treats the six reflections as stages in a movement from the personal to the public (Table 1). The Name is the point of access to the divine; service is the disposition the Name cultivates; community is where that disposition is shared; the epic is the narrative memory that sustains the community; ultimate reality is the metaphysical ground to which the epic points; and just rule is the public expression of that ground. Section 2 reviews the literature, Section 3 describes the method, Sections 4–9 present the six reflections, Section 10 synthesises them, and Section 11 concludes.

Table 1. The six reflections and their conceptual roles.

No.	Reflection	Dimension	Guiding question
1	The Divine Name	Practice	How does chanting the Name act on the devotee?
2	Devotional service	Disposition	What does it mean to serve without payment?
3	Community	Association	How can a community centred on the Name be organised responsibly?
4	The epic retold	Narrative	How is the story carried through condensed devotional retelling?
5	Ultimate reality	Metaphysics	How are Rama, Brahman, Purushottama and <i>dharma</i> related?
6	Just rule	Public ethics	How can Rama Rajya be translated into accountable institutions?

2. Literature Review

The literature is reviewed thematically, following the dimensions of the framework, because the sources relevant to each dimension differ in kind.

2.1. The Ramayana Tradition and Its Sources

The textual foundation is the Sanskrit epic attributed to Valmiki, available in an annotated seven-volume English translation based on the critical edition [1], [10]–[15]. Brockington's study of the epic's evolution argues that it grew in stages and that the figure of Rama was gradually raised from heroic prince to divine incarnation [6]. Ramanujan's well-known essay stresses that the story exists as a plurality of tellings rather than a single original with variants [2], a theme extended in two collections edited by Richman [3], [16]. Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas* is accessible in Hill's translation [4], and Lutgendorf shows that it lives chiefly through performance, recitation and commentary [5]. The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, a Sanskrit text that presents the story in Vedantic terms, is available in an early twentieth-century translation [17].

2.2. The Name and Devotional Practice

In the Bhagavad Gita, the sacrifice of silent repetition (*japa*) is named as the most exalted of sacrifices [18]. Scholarship on mantra has emphasised that Indian traditions understand a repeated sacred formula less as a statement about something than as a form of action whose force lies in its use [19]. Hawley's survey of the bhakti movement shows how the singing and repetition of divine names became a vehicle of religious life across regions and languages [9]. In the twentieth century Gandhi made the repetition of Rama's name a lifelong discipline and recalled having been taught it in childhood as a remedy for fear [20].

2.3. Community and Service

Name-centred communities have been studied in some detail. Lamb's ethnography of the Ramnamis of central India documents a community that defines itself by the Name of Rama and inscribes it on the body [21]. Bryant and Ekstrand's collection examines the institutional history of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, including the challenges of governance and succession that followed the death of its founder [22]. Lutgendorf's study of Hanuman treats the monkey devotee of Rama as the central exemplar of service in the tradition [7].

2.4. Metaphysics: Vedanta and Rama

The metaphysical vocabulary of the tradition draws on the Upanishads [23], on Shankara's non-dualist commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra* [24], and on Ramanuja's qualified non-dualism, which treats Brahman as a personal God with souls and matter as his body [25]. The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* combines non-dual metaphysics with devotion to Rama [17]. The concept of dharma has a long and complex history in law, religion and narrative [26].

2.5. Rama Rajya and Public Ethics

Pollock has shown how the Ramayana has been used as a political resource, particularly in recent decades [8]. Gandhi, by contrast, used the term Rama Rajya for a moral ideal that he explicitly distinguished from any Hindu state [27]. For institutional questions, classical statecraft such as the *Arthaśāstra* [28], the capability approach to development [29], and modern codes of public conduct [30] provide vocabularies for turning ethical principles into administrative arrangements.

2.6. Synthesis and Gap

These literatures are rich but largely separate. Textual scholarship does not usually address devotional practice; studies of devotion rarely treat metaphysics or public ethics; and work on Rama Rajya seldom engages the practices through which devotees live their faith. The present essay brings the strands together in one framework and, because it writes from within the tradition, states explicitly which of its claims belong to scripture, to tradition and to personal reflection.

3. Methodology

3.1. Approach

The study uses interpretive (hermeneutic) analysis of texts. Each reflection begins from passages and concepts in primary sources, consults scholarship to understand how those sources have been read, and then offers an interpretive judgement. The standpoint is that of a participant who is also a critical reader. The essay does not hide its devotional orientation, and it does not treat that orientation as a substitute for evidence.

3.2. Sources and Selection

Primary sources are consulted in standard English translations: the Valmiki Ramayana in its critical translation, the *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, the Upanishads, the Gita and Shankara's commentary. Secondary sources are monographs and chapters from university presses and peer-reviewed journals on the Ramayana tradition, bhakti, Vedanta and public ethics, selected because they address Rama devotion or the specific concepts discussed. Gita passages are identified by chapter and verse. Because chapter numbering of the Ramayana differs between recensions, its passages are identified by book (*kāṇḍa*) rather than by verse.

3.3. Epistemic Registers

To distinguish devotional assertions from claims that call for scholarly support, every statement belongs to one of three registers:

- *Scriptural*: what a named text states. These statements are attributed to the text and, where possible, to a translation.
- *Traditional*: what a school, commentator or community holds. These statements are attributed to the tradition or to scholarship describing it.
- *Reflective*: the author's interpretive judgement or devotional conviction. These statements are introduced as the author's own.

Each reflection closes with an "Epistemic Status" subsection that sorts its principal claims into these registers and notes what would be needed to evaluate them. Faith claims, such as the claim that Rama is the Supreme Being, are presented as the tradition's own and are not offered as empirically demonstrated.

3.4. Conventions

Proper names and widely anglicised terms (Rama, Ramayana, Hanuman, Sita, Brahman, Purushottama, Vishnu, Rama Rajya) appear without diacritics. Technical Sanskrit terms appear in italics with diacritics on first use. The spelling "Rajyam" is used only where it forms part of the name of the proposed initiative in Section 9, being the form used in Telugu and some other languages. Citations follow the IEEE numeric style [31].

3.5. Use of Artificial Intelligence in Preparation

Generative AI tools assisted in drafting and revising this text. The tools, their purposes and the author's responsibility for the content are stated in the AI Usage Disclosure at the end of the article, in line with publication-ethics guidance [32] and the journal's author guidelines [31].

4. First Reflection: The Divine Name as a Path Through Difficulty

4.1. Scriptural and Traditional Basis

Devotion centred on repeating a divine name is old and widespread in the Indian traditions. In the Gita, Krishna declares that among sacrifices he is the sacrifice of silent repetition (Gita 10.25) [18]. For Rama in particular, Tulsidas devotes a sustained passage of the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmcaritmānas* to the glory of the Name (*nāma-mahimā*). On the poet's account, the Name is greater for the devotee than both the formless and the embodied aspects of the divine because it gives access to both [4], [5].

Scholars of mantra have emphasised that, in Indian traditions, a repeated sacred formula is understood as an act whose force lies in its use [19]. Gandhi, who recalled learning the repetition of Rama's name as a child, later regarded it as a discipline of the heart and not merely a verbal exercise [20].

4.2. The Name as Non-Different from the Named

A widely held devotional teaching is that the Name is non-different from the one it names. For the devotee, "Shri Rama" is not merely a word that refers to the Supreme Lord; it is regarded as the Lord Himself. A word ordinarily points to something beyond itself, but in the bhakti tradition the Divine Name is understood to be non-different from the One it names. The sound may be simple, two syllables repeated, yet the inner act is far richer: remembering God, surrendering to God, and seeking refuge in God. *Japa* is not primarily about the sound produced but about the inward movement it enacts. This is a doctrine of the tradition and not a linguistic theory, and the essay presents it as such.

4.3. How Chanting Addresses a Devotee's Difficulties

The tradition makes two connected claims, both of which can be stated without asserting that any particular outward result will follow.

4.3.1. It transforms the inner state

Fear, anxiety, confusion, anger and despair are said to weaken when the mind repeatedly rests in the Name. The thought "I have a problem, and I am helpless" gradually gives way to "Rama is with me; I place this problem at His feet." Since so much suffering is compounded by facing difficulty alone, devotees describe this shift as a form of profound help. The claim here concerns how devotees describe their experience and is not offered as a psychological finding.

4.3.2. It leads to right action

Chanting does not necessarily make every difficulty vanish. Grace is understood to arrive through what it brings into the devotee's life:

- clarity about what to do
- courage to face the situation
- patience to endure it

- wisdom to avoid a wrong decision
- the right people or opportunities
- strength to correct one's own mistakes
- acceptance when something cannot be changed

What looks outwardly like a solution may be understood, in devotional terms, as God working through the devotee's own mind, actions and circumstances. The devotee is equipped from within to meet the problem.

4.4. Complete Faith as Surrender of the Outcome

The idea has a scriptural anchor in the Gita's closing exhortation to take refuge in the Lord alone (Gita 18.66), which the tradition names *śaraṇāgati* [18]. Consider two inner postures. The surrendered devotee says, in effect:

Rama, I have done everything I can.

I do not know what will happen.

I place the result in Your hands.

This differs entirely from treating chanting as a formula, as though a fixed number of repetitions obligates Rama to deliver a desired result. Bhakti is not a transaction. The better prayer is: "Rama, I trust You. Give me what is truly good for me, and give me the strength to accept Your will." Trust joined with willingness to accept whatever comes is surrender, which the essay holds to be the fullest expression of complete faith.

4.5. The Honest Limits of the Claim

It would be too strong to claim that chanting guarantees that every worldly problem will disappear as the devotee wishes. Even the great devotees of the Ramayana experienced suffering, separation and hardship. Devotion is never presented as an exemption from life's trials. What it offers is that the devotee need not face suffering spiritually alone. Sometimes the outward problem changes. Sometimes the devotee changes. Sometimes the gift is simply strength to endure. The essay therefore makes no claim that chanting produces specific worldly results; such a claim would be empirical and is not supported here.

4.6. A Progressive Path and a Simple Practice

Chanting Rama → remembering Rama → loving Rama → trusting Rama → surrendering to Rama.

A devotee may begin because a problem needs solving, and the tradition does not discourage this. With time, the Name itself becomes a refuge. Chanting Rama because Rama is one's refuge, independent of any request, is regarded as a higher form of bhakti than chanting solely for relief.

No elaborate ritual is required. The devotee may sit quietly and chant, aloud or silently. When attention wanders, as it will, it is gently brought back to the Name without self-reproach. When a difficulty arises, the devotee places it before Rama and then undertakes whatever responsible action lies within their power, since chanting is not a substitute for right effort.

I am not alone. Rama is my refuge.

4.7. Epistemic Status

Scriptural: the elevation of *japa* (Gita 10.25) and the call to take refuge (Gita 18.66). *Traditional*: the glory of the Name in Tulsidas, and the doctrine that the Name is non-different from the named. *Reflective*: the description of surrender as the fullest expression of faith, and the ordering of the progressive path. The claims

concern the devotee's inner orientation and the tradition's own teaching. They do not assert that chanting alters external events, and they could be tested only through studies of practitioners' reported experience, which this essay does not undertake.

5. Second Reflection: Devotional Service as an Unpaid Vocation

5.1. A Literary Device: The Job Posting

This reflection opens with a deliberate piece of satire, a mock job posting for the "Devotee Serving Lord Rama" (Table 2). Its literary function is to set two registers in tension: the language of the labour market (position, employer, job description, salary) and the logic of devotion, in which service is its own reward. The humour works because the reader recognises that the position has no counterpart on any payroll. Bhakti literature has a long tradition of intimate and at times irreverent address to the divine [9], and the posting belongs to that tradition of devotional play, not to institutional practice.

Table 2. Position summary of the mock job posting.

Field	Details
Position	Devotee Serving Lord Rama, a new professional title
Company	Lord Rama (God)
Job description	Chanting "Shri Rama", "Shri Rama", and so on
Salary	Unpaid

The posting reads like satire, and in a sense it is. No recruiter drafted it and no institution will process an application. Yet the position it describes has a long history in the tradition and has been filled by kings and beggars alike: a title without an office, a role without a resignation letter.

5.2. An Unusual Kind of Employer

In the opening book of Valmiki's epic, the poet asks the sage Narada who in the world possesses a set of exemplary virtues, and Narada names Rama [1]. The later tradition honours him as *maryādā-puruṣottama*, the exemplary person who keeps the bounds of right conduct. The epic shows him accepting the hospitality of Guha, the chieftain of the Nishadas, during his exile [10], and in Tulsidas's retelling the boatman who ferries him across the Ganga becomes a figure of devotion [4]. To call such a figure an "employer" is a deliberate irony. There is no hierarchy and no office politics, only a relationship in which devotion is freely given and the idea of transaction dissolves. As a reflection, the essay holds that the service is the relationship, and the relationship is the reward.

5.3. The Discipline of Repetition

The job description, chanting the name of Rama again and again, belongs to *japa*. It is deceptively modest: no scripture to master first, no threshold of merit. A child can do it, and so can someone on a deathbed. Yet practitioners describe it as anything but easy. It asks for sustained attention from a mind that resists it, and a return, over and over, to a single point of focus. It works less like a ritual obligation and more like a discipline of the mind, closer to meditation than recitation.

The exemplar of such service is Hanuman, whose devotion is marked not by grand gesture alone but by quiet constancy. The *Hanuman Chalisa*, a devotional hymn attributed to Tulsidas, holds him up because his strength is inseparable from his humility [7].

5.4. What “Unpaid” Means

The absence of salary may look like a deficiency, but the tradition proposes something else. The Gita’s teaching that one has a right to action alone and never to its fruits (Gita 2.47) [18], commonly summarised as *niṣkāma karma*, offers a frame: value is measured not in what is received but in the quality of what is given. Devotees of long practice speak not of transaction but of steadiness of mind amid difficulty, a diminished grip of anxiety, and a sense of being anchored to something larger than the self. None of this shows up on a balance sheet. The essay holds it to be hard to acquire by other means, which is a judgement of reflection and not a demonstrated claim.

5.5. A Position That Is Never Closed

What is striking is how ordinary the holders of this position are. The tradition does not ask anyone to leave household, profession or responsibilities. The Gita itself is spoken to a warrior on a battlefield, torn between duty and doubt. Devotion is a disposition carried into one’s obligations: a name repeated while stirring a meal, waiting in traffic, or lying awake before dawn. In an age preoccupied with titles and credentials, a role that confers no status and asks for no résumé, only sincerity and the willingness to keep showing up, is quietly countercultural.

| *Shri Rama, Shri Rama, Shri Rama.*

5.6. Epistemic Status

Scriptural: Narada’s description of Rama in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, and the teaching on action and its fruits (Gita 2.47). *Traditional*: the epithet *maryādā-puruṣottama*, the exemplary status of Hanuman, and the attribution of the *Hanuman Chalisa* to Tulsidas. *Reflective*: the reading of devotion as an unpaid vocation open to all, and the satirical framing. The satire is a literary device and makes no claim about any real employment or organisation.

6. Third Reflection: A Community Centred on the Name

6.1. From Individual Practice to Shared Life

Individual chanting rarely remains solitary. Bhakti has historically formed communities of singers, reciters and listeners [9], and Rama devotion has produced its own gatherings of recitation and song, in which the *Rāmcaritmānas* is sung, recited and expounded together [5]. The tradition calls the company of fellow devotees *satsaṅga*, and treats it as a support to practice and not merely a social convenience.

6.2. Precedents for Name-Centred Communities

Two precedents are instructive. The Ramnamis of central India, studied by Lamb, form a community defined by the Name of Rama alone; their members mark the Name on their bodies and have historically placed it above temple worship and priestly mediation [21]. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness shows a different pattern: an institution that grew rapidly around a devotional practice and later confronted the problems of succession and governance that Bryant and Ekstrand describe [22]. Together they show that a community built on a name can be egalitarian and self-defining, and also that organisational growth brings questions of authority and accountability that devotion alone does not settle.

6.3. A Proposed Society: Status and Design Questions

The name “International Society for Lord Rama Consciousness” deliberately echoes the Krishna-consciousness movement just mentioned. The society is presented here as an idea, and this article makes no claim about the existence, size, legal form or activities of any such organisation. What can be offered is an analysis of the design questions that any community built around the Name would face, drawn from the precedents above:

- *Openness*: whether participation depends on the Name and a shared practice alone, or on additional markers of identity.
- *Authority*: how leadership is chosen, limited and replaced, so that the community does not depend on a single charismatic figure.
- *Conduct and safeguarding*: how the community protects its members, especially the vulnerable, from abuse of trust.

These questions return in a more developed form in Section 9, where the ethical principles of Rama Rajya are translated into institutional arrangements.

6.4. A Creative Devotional Exercise: The Mantra-Paper

In its original form, this reflection took the shape of a research paper in which every part, from abstract to conclusion, was filled with repetitions of the Name. That form is retained here only as a brief exhibit, and its purpose is explained. The exercise parodies the conventions of the scholarly article, whose sections are expected to be full of argument, in order to make a devotional point: for the devotee, the Name exhausts the content. It stands in the company of practices in which devotees write the Name repeatedly in notebooks (*likhita japa*), and of the scholarly observation that mantras are understood through use more than meaning [19]. Its literary significance is performative and not argumentative; it asks to be read as an enactment of devotion, and it should not be assessed as scholarship. Two of its sections are shown below. The remaining sections (keywords, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion) follow the same pattern and are omitted to avoid repetition.

Abstract. Shri Rama, Shri Rama, Shri Rama.

Conclusion. Shri Rama, Shri Rama, Shri Rama.

6.5. Epistemic Status

Traditional: the existence of Name-centred communities, as documented by Lamb and by Bryant and Ekstrand. *Reflective*: the identification of openness, authority and safeguarding as the central design questions, and the reading of the mantra-paper as a performative text. No claim is made about any actual society.

7. Fourth Reflection: The Epic Retold Through the Name

7.1. The Epic as Many Tellings

The Ramayana has never existed as a single fixed text. Ramanujan’s image of “three hundred” tellings captures a tradition in which each language and region retells the story in its own idiom [2]. Retelling is therefore not a departure from the tradition but its normal mode. A devotional retelling that foregrounds the Name belongs to that long history.

7.2. Condensed Retelling as a Tradition

Condensed retelling is present in the epic from its opening. In the first book, the sage Narada summarises Rama's story in a single chapter before the poet composes the full poem [1]. The *Rāmcaritmānas*, in turn, is traditionally recited in complete cycles over a set number of days, a practice documented by Lutgendorf [5]. The title *Shrimad Ramayanam* is used here for a short devotional retelling by the author. It is not a translation, a critical edition or a claim to scriptural status.

In an earlier form, each of the seven books was represented only by repetitions of the Name. The present form keeps the Name as a closing refrain but restores narrative content, so that the retelling can be assessed as a retelling. The summaries follow the standard narrative of Valmiki's epic [1], [10]–[15], with notes where Tulsidas differs.

7.3. A Devotional Retelling in Seven Books

7.3.1. *Bala Kanda: The Childhood*

The first book narrates the birth of Rama and his three brothers to King Dasharatha of Ayodhya, Rama's boyhood training under the sage Vishvamitra, the defeat of demons who disturb sacrifices, and Rama's marriage to Sita, princess of Mithila, after he strings and breaks a great bow.

7.3.2. *Ayodhya Kanda: The Exile*

On the eve of Rama's consecration, Queen Kaikeyi, prompted by her maid Manthara, claims two boons earlier promised by Dasharatha: the throne for her son Bharata and fourteen years of forest exile for Rama. Rama accepts, Sita and Lakshmana accompany him, and Dasharatha dies of grief. Bharata refuses the kingship and governs in Rama's name, keeping Rama's sandals as a token of his rule.

7.3.3. *Aranya Kanda: The Forest*

In the forest the family meets sages and confronts demons. After the encounter with the demoness Shurpanakha, the demon king Ravana abducts Sita, aided by Maricha in the form of a golden deer. The vulture Jatayu dies trying to rescue her. Rama and Lakshmana set out in search of Sita.

7.3.4. *Kishkindha Kanda: The Alliance*

Rama allies himself with the exiled monkey king Sugriva and defeats Sugriva's brother Vali. Sugriva sends search parties in every direction, and Hanuman, his minister, emerges as the decisive figure.

7.3.5. *Sundara Kanda: The Discovery*

Hanuman crosses the ocean to Lanka, finds Sita in the Ashoka grove, gives her Rama's ring as a sign, burns part of the city and returns with news of her.

7.3.6. *Yuddha Kanda: The War*

Rama's army bridges the sea. Ravana's brother Vibhishana joins Rama, and a great war ends with Ravana's death. Sita undergoes a trial by fire to prove her purity, an episode that has long been debated, and Rama returns to Ayodhya for his consecration after the fourteen years.

7.3.7. *Uttara Kanda: The Return*

The final book recounts the reign of Rama, the birth of his sons Lava and Kusha, Sita's exile and final return to the earth, and Rama's departure. Many scholars regard this book, and parts of the first, as later additions to the epic [6]. Tulsidas's telling, by contrast, omits the exile and closes with an extended description of Rama's rule and of devotional teaching [4].

| *Shri Rama, Shri Rama, Shri Rama.*

7.4. Literary Significance and Purpose

The retelling serves three purposes. It makes the story accessible in a few pages to readers who may not know it. It marks, through the refrain, the devotional stance from which the story is told. And it demonstrates the principle of Section 4 that the Name and the narrative are bound together, since the epic is the story of the one whom the Name invokes. The refrain is a literary device and is not intended as a substitute for reading the epic itself.

7.5. Epistemic Status

Scriptural: the narrative events summarised above, as found in the cited translations. *Traditional*: the framing of the epic as a devotional text and the differences between Valmiki and Tulsidas noted above. *Reflective*: the choice of the Name as refrain and the interpretation of its purpose. The summaries are condensed and necessarily omit much; the cited translations should be consulted for the full text.

8. Fifth Reflection: Rama as Ultimate Reality

8.1. Scope: Metaphysical, Not Physical

This is a devotional and philosophical composition, not a scientific paper in the empirical sense. The phrase “theory of everything” is borrowed from physics only as a figure of speech. It names here a metaphysical question, namely whether a single principle explains why there is anything at all and why it is ordered as it is. The tradition answers that a single all-encompassing Reality underlies and unifies existence. That Reality is Brahman, and Rama is revered by hundreds of millions as Purushottama, the Supreme Being and an avatar of Vishnu, at once the personal God of love, dharma and grace and the impersonal ground of all that is. This does not replace the separate quest of modern physics for a unifying theory of the physical universe.

8.2. Invocation

Salutations to Shri Rama, the embodiment of righteousness, the beloved of Ayodhya, the husband of Sita, the son of Dasharatha, and, in the eyes of his devotees, the Supreme Reality itself, formless and eternal, who chose to walk the earth in human form so that humanity might have a path back to the Divine.

8.3. Four Terms and Their Relations

Four terms carry the argument: Brahman, Purushottama, Rama and dharma. Table 3 sets out where each is anchored in the sources and what role it plays in a Rama-centred account.

Table 3. Four terms in the Rama-centred metaphysical account.

Term	Principal textual locus	Role in the Rama-centred account
Brahman	The Upanishadic declaration that all this is Brahman (Chandogya Upanishad 3.14.1) [23]; the <i>Brahma Sūtra</i> definition of Brahman as that from which the world arises, is sustained and dissolves (1.1.2) [24]	The single, all-encompassing Reality that underlies existence.

Term	Principal textual locus	Role in the Rama-centred account
Purushottama	Gita 15.16–18, where the Supreme Person is said to transcend both the perishable and the imperishable [18]	The personal aspect of the Absolute: the highest Person, who is loved and not only known.
Rama	The Valmiki Ramayana [1]; the <i>Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa</i> [17]; the <i>Rāmcaritmānas</i> [4]	The prince of Ayodhya who, in devotional texts, is the <i>avatāra</i> of Vishnu and is identified with Brahman and Purushottama.
Dharma	The statement, placed in the mouth of the demon Maricha, that Rama is dharma embodied (<i>Araṇyakāṇḍa</i>) [11]; scholarship on the concept [26]	The order of right action and cosmic stability, said to be embodied in Rama.

The relations can be stated in order. Brahman names the ultimate reality as it is in itself. Purushottama names the same reality as a Person who is the highest of all. In the Gita the title Purushottama is applied by Krishna to himself; Rama-centred traditions apply it to Rama, a transfer that is itself a theological decision and not a textual given [18]. Rama is, for the tradition studied here, that Person appearing in a human life, so that the infinite can be loved and not merely contemplated. Dharma is the order that this presence sustains and displays: Rama does not merely follow dharma, he is said to embody it.

8.4. Which Tradition? Two Readings and the Position Adopted

The relationship between the personal and the impersonal is understood differently within Vedanta. In the Advaita tradition of Shankara, Brahman is ultimately without attributes, and personal forms are appearances within a reality that is non-dual [24]. The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* presents Rama as the Supreme Brahman and the narrative as the play (*līlā*) of Brahman assuming limited form, thereby combining non-dual metaphysics with devotion [17]. In the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja, by contrast, Brahman is a personal God possessing auspicious attributes, and souls and matter are his body [25]. Rama, as an avatar of Vishnu, fits naturally into this second framework.

The position adopted here is a bhakti-oriented Vedanta centred on Rama, as articulated in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Rāmcaritmānas*, in which the personal God (*saguṇa*) and the impersonal Absolute (*nirguṇa*) are held together as aspects of one reality [4], [17]. This is an interpretive choice. An Advaitin would regard the personal form as ultimately an appearance, and a follower of Ramanuja would deny that Brahman is without attributes. The essay does not adjudicate between these views; it adopts the synthesis as a working framework and invites critique from within and outside Vedanta.

8.5. Rama as Purushottama: The Supreme Person

In Valmiki's Ramayana and the devotional literature that followed (Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*, the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, and many regional retellings), Rama is presented as Purushottama, the Supreme Person beyond the perishable and the imperishable, who takes birth out of compassion rather than compulsion. The tradition itself is not uniform on this point. Brockington argues that the divinity of Rama is more prominent in later layers of the epic [6], and Ramanujan observes that Valmiki's Rama lives within human limits, whereas later tellings such as Kampan's present him unambiguously as God [2]. The first pillar of a Rama-centred account is therefore a devotional claim and not a textual certainty: behind the diversity of the cosmos, from

galaxies to grains of sand and from joy to sorrow, stands a single unified consciousness, appearing with a name, form and story so that the infinite could be loved, not merely contemplated.

8.6. Dharma as the Organising Principle of Existence

If a theory of everything must explain how the universe holds together, the Ramayana offers dharma: right action, cosmic order, moral law. The concept is complex and has a long history [26]. Rama's life is presented in the epic as a demonstration of dharma under every pressure:

- As son: unwavering obedience that preserves the honour of his father's word.
- As husband: fidelity and devotion through exile, loss and war.
- As king (Rama Rajya): a reign remembered as the ideal of just governance.
- As friend: loyalty to Sugriva, Vibhishana and all who sought refuge in him.
- As warrior: strength used only in defence of the righteous.

Dharma here is not an abstract rule but the fabric holding the universe in balance, and Rama, by living it, is understood as its source and sustainer. The tradition also acknowledges that some of Rama's choices, such as his treatment of Sita and his killing of Vali, are ethically contested, and these debates are part of the tradition itself [16]. A claim that Rama embodies dharma is therefore a claim of faith that coexists with critical questioning.

8.7. The Ramayana as a Map of the Soul's Journey

In devotional exegesis, the epic's geography of Ayodhya, the forest of exile and Lanka across the ocean is read symbolically as a map of the soul's journey: exile from one's true home, trials in the wilderness of worldly life, the crossing of a vast ocean of difficulty (bridged by faith and collective effort), and a return to the Divine. On this reading, every soul's destination is the same Ayodhya, the eternal, peaceful abode of God. This is one allegorical reading among several, offered here as a reflection.

8.8. Hanuman and Bhakti as a Unifying Force

If Rama represents the Supreme Reality, Hanuman represents the ideal response: total, joyful, unconditional devotion [7]. Bhakti is described as a force capable of dissolving the sense of separation between individual and Divine, and the bond of Rama and Hanuman is a template for how the finite may relate to the infinite, through love, service and surrender rather than conquest or analysis alone.

8.9. Three Kinds of Claim

To avoid conflating different kinds of statement, the claims of this reflection are distinguished. *Historical* claims, such as whether Rama lived as a person, are not argued here. *Metaphysical* claims, such as that Rama is Brahman, are argued by reasoning within Vedantic premises and cannot be demonstrated empirically. *Devotional* claims, such as that Rama is one's refuge, express a relationship and are not propositions to be proved. The assertion that "Rama is God" is a matter of religious faith, lived by an enormous number of people, and it coexists with other sincere accounts of the universe, including secular and non-theistic ones. This section does not argue theology into scientific fact or diminish other worldviews. It articulates what the Rama tradition itself teaches, for readers who wish to understand or reflect on it.

8.10. Closing Verse

“Rama is dharma embodied in a living form.” The line, spoken in the epic by the demon Maricha [11], gathers the devotee’s entire answer to the metaphysical question: goodness, order, love and truth are not abstractions floating apart from reality but, in Rama, one and the same living presence.

8.11. Epistemic Status

Scriptural: Chandogya Upanishad 3.14.1, *Brahma Sūtra* 1.1.2, Gita 15.16–18, and Maricha’s statement in the *Aranyakāṇḍa*. *Traditional*: the Advaita and qualified non-dualist readings, and the identification of Rama with Brahman and Purushottama in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Rāmcaritmānas*. *Reflective*: the choice of a bhakti-oriented Vedanta as the working framework, and the allegorical reading of the epic. The metaphysical claims are matters of philosophical argument within a tradition and of faith; they are not empirically testable.

9. Sixth Reflection: Rama Rajya and Public Welfare

9.1. Rama Rajya in the Sources

The concluding book of Valmiki’s *Yuddhakāṇḍa* describes the reign of Rama as a time of prosperity, order and freedom from fear [14]. Tulsidas’s *Uttarakāṇḍa* describes a rule in which no subject suffers the three afflictions, bodily, supernatural and material [4]. In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, Rama questions his brother Bharata at length on how a king should govern, covering among other matters the choice of ministers, the safeguarding of the treasury, the fair treatment of soldiers and the protection of agriculture and cattle-keeping [10]. These are scriptural descriptions. They treat just rule as a matter of conduct and administration as well as of personal virtue.

9.2. Gandhi’s Rama Rajya

In the twentieth century, Gandhi gave the term a distinctive meaning. Writing in 1929, he stated that by Ramarajya he did not mean Hindu rule but the kingdom of God, and he described it as an ideal of democracy in which even the humblest citizen could be sure of swift justice without elaborate and costly procedure [27]. Gandhi’s usage shows that Rama Rajya can be read as a moral and social ideal that does not depend on a confessional state.

9.3. A Contested Legacy

The ideal also has a contested history. Pollock traces how the Ramayana has been used as a political instrument, including in recent controversies [8]. The epic’s final book contains episodes that many readers, including within the tradition, find ethically troubling, notably the exile of Sita and the killing of the ascetic Shambuka [15], [16]. A just-rule ideal built on Rama must therefore be selective in a principled way. It draws on the principles of accountability, welfare and impartial justice, and it does not rely on episodes that contradict them.

9.4. Status of the Proposal

The “Shri Rama Rajyam Public Unlimited” initiative is presented here as a conceptual proposal for a voluntary, non-sectarian civil-society initiative. It is not a claim to state power or to a governance model for any government, and this article makes no claim about the legal form, operations or outcomes of any organisation. Its original mission, vision and taglines are reproduced in Appendix A for transparency. The remainder of this section asks what its ethical principles would require if an organisation were to adopt them.

9.5. From Principles to Institutional Arrangements

Table 4 translates each principle of the proposed initiative into an institutional arrangement and an indicative accountability measure, with the textual or conceptual basis for each. The arrangements are illustrative design proposals and have not been tested.

Table 4. From ethical principles to institutional arrangements (illustrative).

Principle	Textual or conceptual basis	Institutional arrangement	Indicative accountability measure
Truth and integrity	Rama's counsel on ministers and the treasury [10]; the principles of integrity and honesty in public life [30]	Published annual accounts, independent audit, and a register of interests for office-holders	Audit opinion published; conflicts of interest declared and recorded
Justice	Dharma as impartial order [26]; swift justice for the humblest citizen [27]	Written grievance procedure with independent review; non-discrimination policy covering faith, caste and gender	Complaints received and resolved within a stated time
Compassion and welfare	Welfare as the expansion of people's real freedoms [29]	Services targeted by need and designed with beneficiaries, such as education support and relief	Beneficiaries reached; change in outcomes defined with beneficiaries
Education	The vision that knowledge empowers everyone (Appendix A)	Open learning programmes in literacy, ethics and the study of texts	Participation and completion rates
Selfless service	The teaching on action without attachment to its fruits [18]	Volunteer code: unpaid service with reimbursed costs, no personal gain, and safeguarding training	Code signed by all volunteers; incidents logged and resolved
Accountability in governance	Supervision of officials and the treasury in classical statecraft [28]; the principle of accountability [30]	Separation of fund-holding from programme decisions; term limits; trustee oversight	Published governance charter; meeting records; term limits observed

The arrangements respond directly to the design questions raised in Section 6: openness is secured by the non-discrimination policy, authority by term limits and oversight, and safeguarding by the volunteer code.

9.6. Safeguards and Limits

Three safeguards follow from the discussion above. First, services are offered irrespective of the recipient's religion, caste or gender, in keeping with Gandhi's reading of the ideal. Second, the initiative operates within the law of the jurisdiction in which it is registered and makes no political claims in the name of Rama, to avoid the appropriation Pollock describes. Third, claims about its effectiveness would be made only on the basis of outcomes measured and published, and not on the strength of devotional conviction alone.

9.7. Epistemic Status

Scriptural: the descriptions of Rama's rule and Rama's counsel to Bharata. *Traditional*: Gandhi's interpretation of Rama Rajya and the debates over its political uses. *Reflective*: the translation of principles into the arrangements in Table 4, which are proposals and not findings. No empirical claim is made about any implementation.

10. Discussion

10.1. Synthesis: A Single Arc

The six reflections trace one arc from the personal to the public. The Name gives the devotee access to the divine (Section 4); service is the disposition that access cultivates (Section 5); community is where that disposition is shared and where questions of authority arise (Section 6); the epic preserves the narrative memory that sustains the community (Section 7); ultimate reality is the ground to which the narrative points (Section 8); and just rule is the public expression of that ground (Section 9). Three ideas recur across the reflections and bind them together.

- *Non-difference of word and reality*. The Name is held to be non-different from the Named (Section 4), the retelling carries the presence of the epic (Section 7), and Rama is held to be the ground of what is (Section 8).
- *Disinterested action*. Surrender of outcomes in chanting (Section 4), unpaid service (Section 5) and the volunteer ethic of the proposed initiative (Section 9) express the same teaching on action without attachment to its fruits.
- *Dharma as one order governing inner and public life*. The disciplined mind of the devotee and the accountable institution are two expressions of one ordering principle (Sections 8 and 9).

10.2. Contribution

The essay makes four contributions. It offers a framework that connects six dimensions of Rama devotion that are usually studied separately. It separates scriptural, traditional and reflective claims throughout. It develops an account of the relationships among Brahman, Purushottama, Rama and dharma, and identifies the tradition adopted as a bhakti-oriented Vedanta centred on Rama. And it shows how the ethical principles of a Rama Rajya initiative could be translated into accountable institutional arrangements, while acknowledging the contested legacy of the ideal.

10.3. Authorship, Responsibility and the Role of AI

Formal authorship of this article rests with the human author, who is responsible for its content. Earlier versions of the manuscript listed Lord Rama and an artificial-intelligence system as symbolic co-authors. Because AI tools cannot take responsibility for a work and so cannot meet the requirements for authorship [32], and because the journal's guidelines state that AI tools may not be listed as authors [31], they are not listed as authors here. Lord Rama appears in the article as the object of devotion and, in the devotional idiom of inspiration, as its dedicatee; this is a devotional trope and not a claim of formal authorship. The role of AI in drafting and revision is disclosed in the AI Usage Disclosure at the end of the article.

10.4. Limitations and Future Directions

The study has limits. It is the work of a single author writing from within one tradition, and it is interpretive and not empirical. It relies on English translations, and a fuller treatment would engage the Sanskrit and

vernacular texts directly. The Rama story is told differently in Jain, Buddhist and regional traditions, and these are not treated. Future work could compare Rama-centred and Krishna-centred devotional communities, study Name-centred practice empirically through the reported experience of practitioners, and evaluate any implementation of the institutional arrangements in Table 4 under appropriate ethical oversight.

11. Conclusion

This essay has offered six reflections on Shri Rama as stages of one devotional vision that moves from the personal to the public. Its principal contribution is a framework that connects the Name, service, community, the epic, ultimate reality and just rule, and that keeps scriptural, traditional and reflective claims distinct. Read together, the reflections suggest that the Name, the narrative, the metaphysics and the public ethics of the tradition support one another: the Name gives access to the one whom the epic narrates and the metaphysics identifies, and the disposition of service the Name cultivates reappears as the accountable conduct of a just community.

The essay does not claim that the divinity of Rama can be demonstrated, nor that chanting produces particular worldly results. It claims only that the tradition's own teachings can be set out coherently, with their sources and their limits made visible. Future work should test the claims about practice empirically, extend the comparison to other traditions, and examine any implementation of the proposed institutional arrangements.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial conflict of interest. As non-financial interests, the author is a devotee of Shri Rama writing from a devotional standpoint, and is the proponent of the community and public-welfare initiatives discussed in Sections 6 and 9. These are presented as concepts, and the article makes no claims about any organisation.

Data Availability Statement

This study did not generate, collect, or analyze any datasets; therefore, data availability is not applicable.

AI Usage Disclosure

Generative AI tools were used in preparing this manuscript. The first draft of the text was generated with the assistance of a generative AI tool [Claude (Anthropic; model Claude Sonnet 5.5)] under the direction of Satish Gajawada. This revised version, prepared in response to peer-review comments, was developed with the assistance of Claude (Anthropic; model Claude Sonnet 5.5), which was used to restructure the argument,

draft revised text and suggest scholarly sources. AI tools are not listed as authors. The author reviewed the content, including the cited sources, and takes full responsibility for it.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, S.G.; methodology, S.G.; investigation, S.G.; writing — original draft, S.G. (with generative AI assistance, as described in the AI Usage Disclosure); writing — review & editing, S.G. The author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Appendix A. Original Mission, Vision and Taglines of the Proposed Initiative

The following formulations are reproduced from the initiative's original statement for transparency. They are aspirational statements and are not evidence of any activity.

A.1 Meaning. A public movement inspired by Shri Rama Rajyam, dedicated to unlimited public welfare through dharma, truth, justice, compassion, service and good governance.

A.2 Mission. To serve society by promoting the values of dharma, truth, justice, compassion, integrity, education and selfless service, while working toward the welfare, dignity and prosperity of every person.

A.3 Vision. To build a society inspired by Shri Rama Rajyam, where righteousness guides action, justice protects all, compassion connects people, knowledge empowers everyone, and public welfare remains the highest priority.

A.4 Taglines.

- Inspired by Rama. Dedicated to Humanity.
- Dharma, Service, Welfare.
- For the Welfare of All.
- Rama's Values, Humanity's Welfare.
- Truth. Dharma. Service. Welfare.
- Towards Shri Rama Rajyam, For Everyone.
- Where Dharma Becomes Public Service.
- Unlimited Service. Universal Welfare.