An Immersion into the Mahabharata – Part 3

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What of dritarAshtra?

The scene the group sought to explore was the one where *duryOdhana* insists upon *vidura* taking the letter of invitation to the game of dice to *yudhishtra. gAndhAri* was the fourth protagonist.

A petulant *duryOdhana* demands that his father do his bidding. *dhritarAshtr*a demurs, and *gAndhAri* takes the side of *duryOdhana*. She holds *dhitarAshtra* ransom to her sacrifice and her having felt cheated. *duryOdhana* emboldened by his mother's indulgence and as blind to her motives as she is to reality, rants about his entitlement. *vidura* is called, and his sane argument is dismissed out of hand. He is reminded of his illegitimacy and dependency, and

finds no answer to the belligerence of *duryOdhana*. *dhritarAshtra* is tried to enter his dharma sankata deeply and establish his space as the creative possibility.

What struck the players and the group was the various types of indulgences that each of these archetypes represent. *duryOdhana* is entrenched in his sense of entitlement. No argument about what is just or what is deserving penetrates his deafness to all but his obsessive desires. Wise *vidura,* the anchor to the *dharma sankata* in *dritarAshtra's* mind, gives up his polarity. He cannot confront the challenge of *gAndhAri* as she insists on compensating for her own self- inflicted deprivation by indulging her son. Is she also hitting back at her husband, showing up his inadequacies and telling him that being a father who acquires power for his son is the only legitimate role, that all of *dritarAshtra's* arguments as a just king are invalid? His articulation of the *dharma sankata* is weak, almost an apology, and he is easily persuaded to give in to the tantrums of his son and wife rather than acting from the role of a king; a role that impacts the entire kingdom and not just his little family.

The first set of reflections that came from the group were around the role of *gAndhAri*. Why did she choose to blind herself? Was it not important for her to make up for her husband's incapacity and form a strong team? The role of a wife and a mother in creating a context that is nurturing, and at the same time dharmic and disciplined, became a point of enquiry. Also, the power of a child who demands impulsively became apparent. The will and the clarity that it takes for a parent to draw meaningful boundaries, and how important it is in helping the child mature, were examined in great detail. *duryOdhana* was seen as a monster created by the two parents- blind to everything except their own shattered dreams. *duryOdhana* was a proxy through which the father was living out his dream of being an uncontested king, and the mother of being a person who could assert her capabilities and stand her ground.

The tyranny of the idea of entitlement then took up the attention of the group. Are we like King Canute who tried to order the waves of the sea to obey him? And when the world pays scant regard to our dreams what do we do? The most common recourse seems to be of self-defeat and glorifying our loss through self-inflicted hurt. The other reaction seems to be to insist upon the fulfillment of our wishes by hook or by crook. Reordering our idea of the world and its ways, and finding a resilience within through which to find an honorable way of engaging with the emergent reality seems very difficult.

The weakness of *vidura* triggered a whole set of reflections. We often know what is right and just. We make some gestures to satisfy ourselves that we tried to influence the outcome, but stop when a real price has to be paid. How does this impact our society and our nation? Are we looking for a 'strong and wise leader' behind whom we can protect ourselves? As soon as he/ she does not give us what we want (based upon our own narrow and self centered

perspective) do we bring him/ her down by walking away? Acquiesing? Is democracy another name for demanding an indulgence towards our ill-considered demands? How do we uphold the fairness (*nyAya*) towards the whole before we take for ourselves?

The discussion then veered towards the global impacts that are the outcome of each of our indulgences, our need to consume, needs that are often not necessities, needs triggered by advertising that appeals to our vanity or our lust. The factories around the world do not produce green house impacts because they are unaware, they do so because we demand that our needs be satisfied and they make healthy(!) profits through supplying the good we demand (not by questioning if we really need them). Unhealthy foods do not proliferate because the fast food companies cheat us, it is because we cannot manage our appetites and the pull of taste overrides the knowledge of health impacts. The *dritarAshtra, gAndhAri, duryOdhana* combine is devastating the world.