An Immersion into the Mahabharata – Part 5

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We present ourselves to the world through masks. The persona that we call the ‘actor’ is the mask, and this mask is energized by the other personas, namely the victim, the guardian, the judge, the beckoner, the fiend, and the dreamer. The *rasa anubhava* is closely linked with what is energized/ triggered. The exploration of the mask was disturbing. We are often unaware of the fact that we are presenting a mask. It is when we start drawing what is really the face inside the mask that we start to realize the connection! In presenting ourselves the way we do, we also reinforce our constructed self, and therefore clog our senses. We cannot hear, see, smell, taste or touch the emerging new reality.

So we come to *karNa*! The group chose to examine *karNa* through the encounter he has with his father *soorya* and the subsequent encounter with *indra,* disguised as a poor *brahmana.*

Being owned up by the father is a shock. It offers an opportunity to karNa to step out of the constructs which he has created for himself: one of a *sootaputra,* stigmatized and victimized for something beyond his control, another of being the epitome of generosity, the *kodaivallal,* and the third as duryOdhana's friend, eternally grateful for the gift of *angada desham.* As the actors entered these characters and struggled within, all of us were deeply touched by the poignancy of the situation. karNa could not step out of the one self construct that was truly of his making, the generosity personified. He gives away his *kavacha* and *kundala*, he cannot say no to indra!

karNa is a favourite among us Indians. Late Prof. Pulin K Garg (IIM A) used to say that the central issue for understanding the Indian psyche is to understand the nature and dynamics of denial, discrimination, and deprivation. *karNa* is the arch archetype of all three converging in one person. *karNa* has always known that he was worthy deep down in the recesses of his heart, but he was reminded of his unworthiness as a stigma of birth. The compensation he received from *duryOdhana,* who made him the *angada raja,* was after all a proxy identity that only reinforced the denial, discrimination, and deprivation. The desperate struggle to come to terms with a fresh new possibility, of being affirmed at a very deep level, a secret that *karNa* held to himself, was too scary. karNa held on to the one construct he had built, his bulwark of affirmation that he was worthy, one that he had acquired through his greatness of spirit. All the group reflections centered around these aspects.

How deeply each of us seek affirmation of our being, and how profound and secret are the wounds that we retain when this is not forth coming? And yet we know in our hearts the gifts we are born with. Perhaps the courage needed to affirm ourselves as we know we are and assert our being from that foundation is several times more than the effort required to hang on to compensations and proxy affirmations, how ever painful this effort may be.