

# Swimming Into & Out of Our Archetypal Energies

Posted on April 19, 2021 by Hariprasad Varma

## Reflections from Mahabharata Exploration Online 5

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The fifth edition of Mahabharata Exploration Online (MEO) ended this week on an inspiring and evocative note. Ritambhara launched MEO as an offering at a time when the world went into a lockdown in March 2020. Since then each cohort of MEO had a powerful personal journey through the archetypes of Mahabharata over the course of the ten weeks exploration. The fifth batch of MEO shared many touching, memorable and vulnerable moments during this journey. Read on for reflections from this journey.

Over the course of the ten weeks we explored the major archetypes from Mahabharata – Yudhishtira, Bheema, Nakula, Sahadeva, Arjuna, Karna and Draupadi – within each of us. It was fascinating to revisit this ancient epic and see it come alive the inner drama of each of us. The exploration truly brought alive the import of *purāna* as something that is ancient yet nascent as we held the space for each other in the unfolding of our inner drama as we journeyed through these archetypes. We explored the heroic and shadow sides of each archetype within us.

In the story on 'Jealousy' that delved into the envy of Duryodhana for Bheema's strength, many of us got in touch with the judgement with which we held the feeling of being jealous to another person in our lives. In the empathy for Duryodhana, our exploration led us to an underlying aspiration and acknowledgement of our inherent potential during those moments of jealousy for another. There was a shift in the energy of this jealousy as one stayed in touch with this recognition of one's own potential. Bheema bullying Kauravas as a child evoked in participants memories of instances of being at the receiving end of the misuse of power by the others. Many sensed an irritation and discomfort at the glorification of the 'bully' and this led us to an exploration of how abuse often leads the victim to become an abuser perpetuating a chain of violence.

Exploration of the Yudhishtira archetype led to a contemplative dialogue on how very often

we feel disconnected from our emotions and feelings as we go about actions in life as if everything is laid out in a rule book. Many participants got in touch with the tension and resistance they experience to change when they get entrenched in the rigid rules and structures of a context. We explored the dilemma of whether it is really possible to be spontaneous and expressive even as one act in a way that is Dharmic. Bheema exploration was an intense session where many got in touch with how they expressiveness and spontaneity is often caged by the rigid rules of the context they are in at the moment. Many also shared how being in touch with one's feelings sometimes put them in a vulnerable position where others can manipulate the emotional impulsivity to their advantage. There was an exploration of the dilemma of how can one retain this expressiveness and spontaneity in a way that helps one feel alive and whole.

Nakula exploration brought forth the dilemma of how to hold compassion and empathy for others without being sacrificing one's own needs and desires. Many shared how they feel a pull to nurture the gifts of the Nakula archetype in themselves and serve others but without being taken advantage of or feeling burn out. Sahadeva exploration was a fascinating journey through the different ways in which each of us sought knowledge and pursued our curiosity towards different things in our lives.

Arjuna exploration helped many participants touch the space of *śāntam* in themselves. There was an interesting exploration of the different double binds we get into and how stepping back and asking the quintessential question 'In Doing What I Am Doing, What Am I Really Doing?' helps one to explore possibilities that are beyond the ones that we see when we are entrenched in the compulsivity of one dominant archetypal energy that is playing out in our lives. When it came to Karna, we were able to get in touch the parts of ourselves that seek love and legitimacy. Many got in touch with the parts of themselves that experienced a sense of victimhood in contexts that questioned their legitimacy to something despite their merit. Draupadi revealed vulnerability as the core of ourselves, and the power and possibilities of staying with the vulnerable core as a key transformative fire.

Having connected with how these energies are present in each of us, session with Raghu helped the participants understand the process of working with this itihAsa-purAna as a mirror to oneself. The art of listening - to ourselves and the context from a quiet space - is the skill that is central to this process.

### **Facilitator Experience**

"For me as a facilitator, it felt like a very privileged opportunity to listen as participants get deeper in touch with different parts of themselves. The process unfolding of seeing how the

archetypes are playing out for myself, and staying with the energy of each during the session, was revelatory about aspects of myself that I am yearning to strengthen as well as some ingrained ones that I would like to loosen!”

- Radhika Rammohan

“I thoroughly enjoyed being a co-traveller in this Mahabharata Exploration with a keen and vibrant group. It made me realise the importance of listening with compassion and quietness. I also discovered how authentic and deep sharing is a way to bring alive *maitri* (friendliness) in these turbulent times. It helped me connect with my co-facilitator and participants at a humane level inspite of all the apparent differences.” - Hariprasad Varma

### **Participant Experience:**

- Started analysing less, and feeling more. Able to hear my inner voice more clearly. It is liberating for me.
- journey of pausing and questioning “ Who am I being today?”
- Entering an experience and coming out clean, without residue was a beautiful idea.
- Looking at myself from observer space has been very helpful... I am able to look at the other side also and choose my response.
- ME was a very practical experience for me, not intellectual / passive.
- Surprisingly I was relating to archetypes that I never thought I would be evoked by.
- I was not aware of the whole / fluid energy that I can move in and out of. Getting acquainted with each of these parts is like a fitting together, as me.
- I am in touch with myself / my feelings.
- Stay with the tension and find the centre in the middle of the pull and push.