PREFACE

As a counsellor, I am instrumental in facilitating and effecting change in another person. Through bringing about different levels of awareness in my counsellees, not only do they gain a heightened perceptiveness of their self-definitions, but I too undergo a process of self-transformation. The experiences and happenings of one person are not very far removed from what others similarly go through. In my counselling interactions, various people have confided many of their experiences – of conflict, of pain, of grief, fears, anxieties, situations of being stuck, of relationships and issues of control and the lack of it – which largely also describe and are connected with the struggles and the strivings that most of us go through in life. While talking with the counsellees, the conversations begin with them narrating their ‘problem(s)’ and typically problems are externalized with someone or something other than themselves as the cause of the situation. However, eventually when conversations steer to a different degree of depth, people often come to a point when they realize that it is entirely not about another person but that they too are involved in the situation. The person is the critical focus from which all other issues radiate.

As I contemplated on presenting situations and interactions both in formal counselling settings as well as informal interactions with friends and family, I began to consider that it is the self of the person that needs to be addressed rather than merely tackling the overt symptoms of the situation. Gradually questions of what is the psychological self as we experience in our daily lives took a strong hold in my reflections. The self began to engage my attention, and the conceptions of growth and transformation of a person absorbed me, more than the causes and amelioration of pathological aspects. Rather than as a fixed and structured entity, I began to see the self as a process, flexible and pliant, retaining coherence while at the same time allowing for changes and transformations. I have been most influenced by Humanistic theories, especially Carl Rogers' Person-Centred theory. Rogers emphasizes on self-enhancement, the potentials that we are endowed with; the fulfillment of our potentialities and consequent transformation is an exciting experience.

The most intriguing and compelling idea for me, as a person and researcher, thus, is the nature of the self and the infinite potentials an individual has which empower her/him to express and live its manifold facets and possibilities. I consider
the self as a process which has unity and coherence. In everything that we do, we try
to protect and maintain this coherence while also attempting to move beyond limited
and fixed states. The movement and dynamic nature of the self toward fulfillment, is
positive and not stuck in rigid and limited cages. Another aspect that steadily grasped
me is that of the indigenous psychological thought tradition and what Indian culture
and wisdom says about the psycho-experiential self. My interest expanded in the
emerging domain of Indian psychology, and in understanding the self in our
experiences, especially with regard to how we grow and transform, and the
importance of self-growth and transformation in the counselling process.

A qualitative lens magnifies the role of the researcher who is most important
as an instrument of research. The focus is on the content of the person as a dynamic
evolving being and there is a co-evolving of both ourselves and the other person(s) –
the researcher also is a participant in the interaction and the researcher's involvement
is critical to the research and data that is gathered and interpreted. Another aspect is
the interpretation – the very act of interpreting puts the researcher in a key and critical
position.

Although I do not discard empirical methods and have in fact benefitted
greatly from them, I have found that the phenomenological approaches best suit my
personality and my values. Naturally, one cannot do large-number research or big data
with these approaches but they do give more depth and meaning and it is this search
for meaning and purpose, the inner urge to understand in depth the life experiences in
the narratives that have set me on this adventure of seeking fulfillment through the
study of the Mahābhārata. The combined interest in self, transformation, our strengths
and potentials, Indian psychology, qualitative approaches, and in counselling, have
stimulated and brought me to the present research undertaking.

The Mahābhārata has always pervaded me with its grandeur and magnificence
and mainly with its stories. From my childhood, I was fascinated with the different
characters and their stories. Kuntī, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Yudhiṣṭhira, Draupadī, Bhīṣma,
Arjuna, and the innumerable other characters stoked in me an enthusiastic passion to
know more about the characters who, in my imagination were like people around me.
Added to that were references and allusions in daily interactions to the epic's
characters especially to characterize other people with the cardinal qualities of the
epic characters. Although I did not have the technique or grasp when I was younger,
to draw out the saliences, the Mahābhārata continued to enchant me throughout and

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still does. What also sustain my persevering interest are the various perspectives of the complexities of the characters. Now, I have begun to gain deeper insights into the complexities of the depicted emotions, the subtleties of the characters and their narratives. Studying the characters of the Mahābhārata and their experiences has served to enhance my perspectives and to kindle a deeper interest in the self as a process. The Mahābhārata has also confirmed my belief that it is the experiential self, grasped phenomenologically that brings a deeper understanding to the nature of self and self-enhancement. I offer my most humble gratitude to the Mahābhārata and to Krṣṇa-Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, for the infinite wisdom, compassion, and for presenting the innate truths of human nature.

The Ph.D. process – an evolving, dynamic transforming one – has taken me beyond my comfort zones, and led me to confront several situations both academically and personally. Throughout the research period and while writing the thesis, I have been constantly challenged to think in different ways, as well as negotiate paths which have not been my wont. However, simply discovering worlds, methodologies, experiences apart from what was already known, has been a profound exploratory journey for me. The characters of the Mahābhārata, through the unfolding of their experiences, narratives, responses, and the very nature of their being have taken me on a participatory journey wherein I have discovered at least some aspects of my own hitherto sealed facets of self and discovered other horizons waiting to be fulfilled. I hope through my own experiences, as a person, as a researcher, as a counsellor, I can be instrumental in helping others too in transcending their conflicts, grief situations and desires, to heal, to open up to their positive potentials and psychological resources, and to 'become' and 'be' their holistic selves.