

GRIEF AND DHARMA: SUFFERING, EMPATHY AND MORAL IMAGINATIVE INTUITION

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INTRODUCTION¹

Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson once claimed that the philosophical literature of India, with its world-denying proclivity, professes a cultural version of “psychic fainting”, a flight from emotions and from emotional entanglement. Great value was placed in ancient India, alleges Masson, on the ability to withdraw oneself from all but minimal involvement with the external world of human relations (Masson 1981:3). Masson compares this to the trend towards *affectlessness* that psychiatry terms the “schizoid stance”. This masochistic tendency to detach oneself from others and to exalt the detachment into a philosophical principle of sublime proportions was pushed to its limits in ancient Hindu, Buddhist and Jain thought, Masson argues. Nevertheless, we can expect to find evidence, albeit veiled, of an original impulse which was so strong that it required this panicked flight (Masson 1981: 5; cited in Bilimoria 1995).

What might have been the “original impulse” from which the ancients sought to escape? Masson does not pause to answer this question directly. He hastily moves on to examine the presumed antecedent tradition of the solitary wanderer (*parivrājaka*), the person who renounces everything on account of the pervasiveness of pain or suffering (*duḥkha*). For example, Masson does grant in half-scathing tone, that the Buddha’s life reveals something about his concerns with emotions, insofar as the Buddha made *duḥkha* the cornerstone of his metaphysical and moral teaching. This is echoed in the *Mahābhārata* as well: ‘All living beings – be they superior, inferior or mediocre on account of their worldly deeds – are completely enmeshed in suffering. You must see this’ (*Mahābhārata* (MhB) XII – Peace [Śāntīparvan] or ‘The Book of Liberation’, 174.14). But it took a severe depression, or melancholia, for this distorted recognition to arise; in other words, the ‘Buddha was able to perceive a basic fact of human experience correctly,

even if he erred in seeking a direction for its provenance'. Hence the sharp diagnosis: Much within Buddhism is 'a manic defence against depression' (Masson 1981:7).

Whether Masson's evaluation can be generalised for much within the Indian tradition at large is a debatable issue, for it is not uncommon to find Indian texts making depression, in the form of despondency, *viṣāda*, a starting point for a protracted analysis of emotions and aligned human sensibilities. We can put Masson's analytic judgment to the test in the battlefield scenario in the book of the *Bhagavadgītā* (BhG), and elsewhere too in the MBh, moments before the unseemly war erupts and in its aftermath. But I shall argue here, within these enframing narratives, that we lose sight of the conceptual autonomy of emotions and a warrant for their philosophical and psychological sublime status inasmuch as emotions tend to be foregrounded if not in reason then certainly in a discourse of ethics, or concerns with moral turpitude, attachments, and the larger provenance of *dharma*. Could the bewildered blubbing *viṣāda*-stricken Arjuna have ended up on Freud's couch instead of being saddled in the chariot of the *dharma*-juggler Krishna? Or for that matter, the self-doubting, ever-grieving Yudhiṣṭhira, especially as the carnage of war hits him as it were in the guts. While the BhG approves of *bhaktibhāva* (devotional love) and the more commonplace affects (feelings of confusion, fear or joy) in making moral decisions, it appears to be dismissive of the harder emotions in the detached pursuit of duty. However, from a certain reading in the broader context of the epic, one might still argue that the epic MBh seeks to understand the phenomenological intricacies of emotion, its entanglement with propositional attitudes or judgments of the intellect, and its impact upon the person's action *or* inaction. The text exhorts that moral judgments be appropriately grounded in the visceral aspect of emotions. But in whose moral judgment? There is much at stake here. In other words, when Arjuna trembles from fear and is sickened with dread at the approaching battle, his charioteer does not discredit Arjuna's affects or judgments but, instead, appeals to Arjuna's imagination to invoke the fear of an even more painful sense of shame should he decide not to take up arms and engage in the ensuing battle. Not only in the opening scene of the BhG book, but also in the larger Mbh, especially after Arjuna returns with Krishna from a victorious day elsewhere in the battlefield only to discover that his only beloved son, Abhimanyu, prompted by Yudhiṣṭhira to break through the circular quay, *chakra-vyuha*, stood slaughtered by the scion of his

opposing cousin-brothers, Jayadaratha. One might surmise that the BhG's resolution is more sanguine, culturally-sensitive, and philosophically circumspect than appears from the traditional perspective of absolutist moralism on the one side and stoic asceticism on the other side.

Arjuna's viṣāda(despondency)

The text informs us that Arjuna is 'dejected, filled with strange pity' (1.28). Here a despondent Arjuna is wheeled up as the interlocutor, more like a patient, and seen to be presenting a first-hand account of his relative state of mind on the battlefield as he encounters the prospect of the impending death of his kith and kin: his body is overwhelmed with sensations of feelings, described as quivering, shivering, giddiness, nervousness, heaviness of breathing, weakness of limbs, hair standing on end, and swallowing. The 'physiology of affect' (Stolorow 2011) is striking. Arjuna relies on his physiological "affects" to determine what is right and what is wrong; his reference for the moral intuition he was come up with at this point in the narrative is his own body, thus:

*My limbs sink,
my mouth is parched,
my body trembles,
the hair bristles on my flesh.
the magic bow slips
from my hand, my skin burns,
I cannot stand still,
my mind reels.
I see omens of chaos,
Krishna; I see no good [*emphasis added]. . . (1.29-31b)*

This colloquy suggests that certain basic reactive emotions could be involuntary.

However, when Krishna takes the stand as it were, it is apparent that the didactic counsel given to Arjuna is predicated on the "emotional" values of dispassion and detachment as the only appropriate guide for moral decisions. But the reference frame for that moral judgment rests elsewhere in the normative memory. Krishna admonishes the warrior-hero for lamenting what is unlamentable, since the living will die in time while the *ātman* is

freed and remains undying. Elsewhere, I have related this to a voice in a dream sequence: 'It is natural (for one) in the physical state to mourn; but grief (*śocya*, grieving, lamentation) is for oneself not for the departed' (Bilimoria 2012a). Thus, Krishna counsels Arjuna, 'Great Warrior, kill the enemy menacing you in the form of desire!' (BhG3.43b). But why does Krishna deny Arjuna's own feelings about the menaces of war, when Arjuna might just have hit the moral target? Is there a necessary isomorphism between 'war'/'warrior' and 'desire', 'righteous kingdom' (on earth or, if failed, in heaven) and 'dharma'? Why does Krishna urge Arjuna by appealing to his sense of shame, and then argue for dispassion? Why, after decrying desire and arguing for dispassion and detachment, Krishna encourages the powerful emotions of devotion and *desire* for Krishna, while fighting for the kingdom (either) to the very end?

Arjuna has consulted his emotions, evaluated the situation according to his physiological affects and found the answer to his moral dilemma in these telling judgment: 'there is *no good* [to be had] in this battle: I shall not fight' (BhG 2.9). Furthermore, he asks how he can ever be happy if he kills his own cousins and kin for 'honour forbids it' (1.37). He is so overwhelmed by the powerful emotional state that he begins to weep (2.1). Arjuna has evaluated his situation according to his physiological affects and made his moral decision. But that is also the rhetorical move on which the text tricks the reader: if only Arjuna could be distracted from and be disabused of the instructive power of his own physiological response, his *in situ* subjective moral intuition - what I call 'situational imagination' -, if he could imagine victory ahead, he could be persuaded towards seeing the virtue of a normatively-informed transcendental argument. Hence Krishna responds with a smirk, a biting smile, in prosaic terms; '*...by golly you're good at vexing eloquence, dis fine rhetoric and sombre polemics; well, let me be telling you somethin': ye ain't gotta clue what's comin' for yu, mate.*' This same veiled though muted cloud-like rebuke I did hear also from my own beloved when I read out my second paper on emotions in Indian philosophy by her hospital bedside, graciously acknowledging that I was drawing on her work on empathy in psychotherapy (Bilimoria 2003; 2012a; Sharma1993, 2014).²

That politics and polemical diatribe on dharma, yoga, freedom, death, and the transcendental discourse that follow in the dialogue is not my concern here; what I wish to get a handle on is how do we understand Arjuna's over-wrought melancholy? I turn elsewhere

for a moment, to Freud (who of course is not commenting on our text, but has a general theory of some interest in this context).

General Theories of Grief and Melancholy

In his essay on ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, Freud begins by talking about the “affect of mourning”: ‘In the face of a death, the work of mourning brings with it a certain affective state... grief that accompanies it’ (1917; 1986: 239-260). Freud is really interested in melancholy for which grief serves as a contrasting foil for his theory, and much philosophical and psychoanalytic literature has been around on melancholy as a depressive syndrome – from Aristotle to Kristeva (Kristeva 1989; Radden 2000).

As Hamlet’s father’s ghost pointed out, it is unbecoming for someone to feel empathy and grieving for another to be a mere obligatory act, though obligation might apply to certain forms of public or political mourning. But the women at the unending end of the MBh war did not wander across to the corpse-strewn river of the bloodied battlefield out of any sense of obligation; they were there looking for their arraigned lovers who had left home that morning avowing to bring back slain heads of the enemy cousin-brothers (on both sides) and kings’ men as “trophies for *dharma*’s avenge” that they had each pledged in fulfilling their calling. The evidence from the ground, as it were, discloses a process much more impromptu, and even to an extent spontaneous, in its response, unself-consciously proceeding without much awareness or sign of it being a cognitive act, or even that it is as clearly intentional. I veer towards alternative theories that underscore “unthinking energetics” of feeling-states, that accord a minimalist intellectual content and allow the analogues from experiences of the aesthetic and erotic sublimines to find commonalities here. In constructing this argument to the best explanation I found myself drawing liberally from psychoanalysis, feminist continental thinkers, and Indian philosophy of aesthetics. And this kind of theorising I’ve found it difficult to locate in our own Indic tradition (as I will argue and demonstrate), while there is a rich descriptive content, we are short and poorer for that in terms of deeper theorising as has been the mainstay in certain Western disciplines, notably, psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, feminist thought.

Grief is not something that can be easily “talked through” and resolved intellectually in a matter of moments, as when parties come to understand that the anger and rage, or a flurry of accusations

based on jealousy, were actually a result of some gross misreading of signs or cues – displaced object-relations – or earlier interactions between them. There is no “ready-at-hand” tool or ‘*prāmāṇic-upāya*’ for it. And Krishna, I believe, gives a short shrift to Arjuna in this puzzling inner state he (the grief-stricken warrior) is overwhelmed by: ‘It’s unmanly, unbecoming of a warrior to feel so. Stand up to misery with an unvanquished heart (*hṛdayena aparājitah*, MhB, Śāntīparvan,174.39); sorrow is there only in the states between the extreme limits of consciousness (elliptically: *duḥkham madhyeṣu remire..sukham antyeṣu remire*)(MhB174.35).

Śocaty eva yathā bhavān: ‘Get over it, you shouldn’t be grieving for your lost sons, husbands, grandsons, brothers, fathers... because they died fighting to the end for the righteous kingdom while standing firmly in dharma’ (Sautpatika-parvan 11:12, & 18). ‘Our hero sons have been slain following the *kṣatriya dharma*’. As if this counsel could be of some consolation or solace, the interlocutor continues:

‘Draupadī: Fair lady, your sons and daughters have met their fair deaths, virtuously, in pursuit of dharma,

You, who understands dharma, should not grieve for them.’

One can hear the fading echo of dharma beseizing the entire terrains of Kurukṣetra reduced to a carnage of rubbles and river of blood, stench and tears; or, in another or contemporary context, hear Derrida (2001) sermonising at the news of the death of his colleague and friend, Jean-François Lyotard: ‘*There shall be no mourning.*’

Robert C. Solomon is right in emphasising that grief is not a fleeting emotion, and that therefore the phenomenological structure common to cognitive acts is not expansive enough to capture the protracted space in which grief “happens” and demands its process. Thus ‘the process of grieving is the process of coping with that impossible desire and intolerable loss’ (2004:85). And to that end there is an inexorable reflective, dedicatory, contemplative, introspective, introjective and even deeply meditative structure (if we have to continue to use cognitive language) to the process. But as I have been arguing, there is a deeply ‘affective’ element – the language of the body and the soul – that cannot be reductively captured within the bounds of the cognitive (mental) process – no more than love can be (for love is rooted in and predicated upon, as the saying go, in the language of the heart). The pathologically dissociative ‘cognitive’ theory of emotion for long excluded affect as an essential element of emotional experience which much more

satisfies grief's conditions of reciprocity, reparation, empathy, compassion, and *Sorge* [care] and is not limited merely to rational or intellectual movement (*e*-motion).

Importantly, as just noted, there is in this expression of grief a moral *reciprocity*, if not also the moral responsibility or blame (hence guilt) one is overcome with, the sense that somehow one is oneself implicated in the cause of the death, which in turn compounds the sentimentality of loss. Reciprocity entails that the onus is now on the part of the survivors to make good the loss, not theirs (as might be selfishly believed) but the short-circuited opportunities and eudemonic life-project of the other, the deceased, in which project the survivors failed by dint of their ignorance or helplessness in the face of the other's imminent or sudden passing. A kind of virtual trusteeship or covenant is established whereby the survivors (or mourners) each pledge in their own way within their capabilities to take care of the affairs as well as more vulnerable surviving kins (or animals), bring to completion unfinished work, and perpetuate the memory of the beloved deceased – for “s/he meant so much to me also”. They offer their selflessly unstinted attention: in regular prayers, meditation, visits to the gravesite, fasting, undertaking pilgrimage, and other vow-based observances, such as celibacy (in the case of the widow/er), a more spiritually-aligned life-style, and so on. These are intentionally directed toward the well-being of the faithfully departed's ‘soul’, whichever ‘other-worldly’ realm s/he may have gone onto, and beg for pardon, for *forgiveness*, for their shortcomings (hence the other side to the ‘river of tears’). Thus, a mortified Dhṛtrāshtra, overwrought with grief, rambles, confessing in his lamentation, or condescends to his grief saying: ‘Such insufferable loss... I did not heed to Bhīṣma's counsel, his warning so full of truth... against my better judgment; I did not act; now I am eaten away by crippling remorse, now I am broken: *‘tasya lāpā-pya-mānasya, bahu-śokam.*’ (Śāntīparvan177). To have the courage amidst this turmoil to be able to face the issue and stare deeply without even as much as a blink at the fathomless reach of death that has brought about this loss through the imagined (or real at the moment of the death) eyes of the beloved—not unlike the ceaseless gaze into a beloved's living eyes – this courage is considered to be a quasi-virtue (like valour in the face of tragic assault or aggression, as in the pursuit of the eloped Urvāṣī).

And yet this is an improbable imagination: not being able to think the other's pain may be as improbable an imagination as trying to think one's own death; or even more: *knowing one's death*; you

may and, I believe, you can know when you are dying (the dying say so, or show it), but can you know *nomologically* that and the moment upon which you are dead? In other words, is a first-person account possible of the “moment of death”, for then this via *reductio* would yield the contradiction of the person not having died, and what else is death but *that* (claims to NDE aside)? A putative paradox that seems without an easy solution.

The Phases of Grief

This divergence aside, I wish to take up each of the stages I discern in the welling up of this emotion, drawing from the Indian tradition. I have shown this with the BhG’s opening scene, despite Krishna’s clever attempt to, as it were, hijack the sentimentality expressed into a well-crafted normative discourse of the possibilities awaiting him were Arjuna to drop his emotional outrage and engage in the impending battle.

So consider, for example:

Vālmīki’s empathy for the sorrow (*śoka*) he felt in the mournful shriek of the female *krauñca* bird [egret] upon the sudden death, from a grievous hunter’s arrow, of its male partner-in-the-embrace-of-love. This emotional intensity which transforms Vālmīki, a mere by-stander at that point, evokes pathos in the melting mind of the “first poet” (*ādikavi*), who then writes the “first poem” (*ādikāvya*), which ensues in the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*; from *śoka* to *śloka* (the verse form of Sanskrit poetical creations) (Gerow 1984 :56).³

Somānanda, an exponent of Pratyābhijñā philosophy, comments in his *Śivadṛṣṭi* that, in grief also there is the same wondrous experience of delight, joy, *ānanda* (to those who have *khecarī-sāmya*). Whatever pleasure is derived from one’s wife and son, the pleasure which is animated by seminal energy, and which abides in the heart (*antarvyāvasthitam*), when contrary to all anticipation (*bhāva-asadṛśa*) there is an apprehension of the loss of the loved one aroused by tears and shrieks, that very pleasure becomes the cause of grief (*kṣobhātmakam*). When that grief reaches its climax (*vikāsam āpannam*) and one thinks that that pleasure will not be experienced any longer, then owing to despair (*nairapekṣya-vaśa*) the nature of that grief is suddenly turned into distinct joy (*camatkriyātma*) (owing to the expansion of the essential nature or *khecarī-sāmya*). So it has been said:

'Even in grief, by the expansion of the essential nature etc.'
(Ś.D. V.9. Vijnābhairava, stanza 118: 43-44).

Thus the news about the death of a beloved person that evokes grief (*śoka*), like the great joy of an aesthetic experience, may give access to a wondrous, at least momentarily, contact with the divinely sublime consciousness underlying these experiences. This is, of course, Abhinavagupta's thinking as well, that all the *sthāyībhāvas* (basic durable emotions) and their corresponding *rasa*-s (aesthetic relishes) ultimately lead to or culminate in *śāntarasa*, literally, "peace-mood", 'the imaginative experience of tranquillity', that one experiences when the realisation dawns about the futility (*nirveda*) of contingent existence, which then arouses the full-blown consciousness of *ātman* (authenticity of Da-Sein) in the zoon of liberation (*mokṣa*) (Masson and Patwardhan, 1969: 35). Whether this occurs with each *sthāyībhāva* in turn, or via a convergence of all the *sthāyībhāva* into one dominant (prima-donna) *bhāva*, or in differential relations, or in sublation or cancellation of each in an ascending leap, etc., has been a matter of much scholastic dispute since Abhinavagupta elevated *śāntarasa* as the crowning aesthetic sentiment - something we cannot go into here (See Masson & Patwardhana 1969; Gerow; Gerow and Aklujkar 1972).

But I must confess that this *ānanda* or ultimate bliss-state fully escaped me in my own moment of extreme *viśāda*; it seems, I missed that boat somewhere. Only in the deeper metaphysical intuition of the possibility of the ultimate state being none other than *Nothingness*, as when one looks over at the never-ending expanse of the Venus Bay ocean receding into the borderless horizon, have I found myself overwhelmed with a sense of joy (Bilimoria 2012b). But Abhinavagupta may want to retort that there is indeed a formal isomorphism between the aesthetic and the philosophical, even as 'he proceeds to treat dramatic aesthetics as a prolegomenon to the true conquest of the nature of things (*saṃsāra*)' (Gerow 1984 :57). The only difference from philosophy is that the universality is still emotional – grounded in the diversity of the human realm rather than in the unity [or emptiness] of the cosmic. [I]t is the capacity to feel that distinguishes us from the universe and gives us hope of salvation' (ibid). Abhinava's metaphysical commitment was to *advaita* (non-dualist ontology) of Brahmanism, so the preeminent *rasa* tied to the realisation of its truth would understandably be *ānanda*; but if counterfactually the best metaphysical explanation turns out to be its rival, equally non-dualist but empty of all ontology, or to use

Heidegger's term, *onto-theo-logos*, i.e. Nothingness, barring traces of suffering as specks scattered over the Void, then the universality of *śāntarasa* is not at all compelling. Rather, one could argue, it might just be the case (as indeed Buddhist aestheticians like Bhāmaha, Dignāna elsewhere, have maintained) the affect-filled sublime of *karuṇa*, pathos, empathy, or the universality of compassion, is the proper candidate for the climax of all aesthetic experiences. In the *Naṭyaśāstra* too *karuṇa* is said to be the *sthāyībhāva* properly of grief, brought about by the loss of a dear one, or by calamity, killing, misery, pain and tragic frustration; the shock ensues in tears, dejection, or a 'total' (collapse) and so on. *Karuṇarasa* as compassion or empathy is evoked when one experiences someone dear to them die (or is killed) and by hearing unpleasant things. There may indeed be a tinge of "delight" (*rasoi*) in this introjective transference, for after all this is not a *bhāva* as such, maybe a *bhāvana* (sentiment), but clearly a *rasa*, with the same measured distance that Abhivanagupta noted between the bereft, wailing lovebird and the poet Vālmīki. Philosophers are after all transcendental or metaphysical poets, and that is why they are drawn to prosaic poets (Yudhiṣṭhira to Krishna; Heidegger to Hölderlin, Rielke; Gandhi to Tagore.)

Jumping to the contemporary representation, I am told that Gajendranath Tagore, a nephew of Rabindranath Tagore, and a poet and critic in his own right, interpreted many of the heart-wrenching poems and later experimental (quasi-impressionist) paintings of the Noble Laureate precisely in this light: that through his suffering, as the four walls collapsed around him, there was still a *rasa* or delight or *jouissance* being enjoyed by someone in the transcendental planes, namely, an otherwise benevolent God.

I am not so sure; one so afflicted may have to stretch their credulity to a limit to invite the possibly non-existent supernatural – at a moment when oneself along with the one lost is in the jaws of Yāma, and doubt and disbelief overpowers his/her intellectual faculty – to indeed think of partaking of any joy, even the curious compounding in the aesthetic of *karuṇa*, compassion, empathy, (even in self-pity) and *rasa*, that might be believed by all but the sufferer to present itself.

There are further suggestive material in literary and aesthetic works, and particularly in the *Mahābhārata* and Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* that open up certain vistas and hermeneutical possibilities at least. And that I have found in the wide-ranging dilation on the *bhāvas*, states of emotion. These, and especially the corresponding sentiments (*rasa*, aesthetic relish, metaphor for the

literal sense of “flavour”) in the audience, are triggered by *vibhāvas*, causes or stimulants and their consequent inner experience (*anubhāvas*), e.g., the actual shedding of tears, pallor, facial grimace, drooping limbs, sighing, absent-mindedness; accompanied by the *vyabhicārībhāvas* of disgust, exhaustion, anxiety, impatience, delusion, confusion, fear, regret, helplessness, forgetfulness, languor, stunned, breaking down, collapse, etc (NS:59). This aesthetic view is originally articulated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (NS), where the term *rasa* is first used in a properly theoretical sense. (Gerow 1984:36). This is an affect conveyed through language, and use of kinaesthetics (performatives) to enact empathetic modes of responses (in drama) to events witnessed on the stage (theatre), as if in real life. Drama is a metaphor for creation of diversity from an unstable base of unity; and lyrical poetry a metaphor for the cosmos striving for unity that would survive ruptures in the currents of life. As we noted earlier, Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* is said to have been born in such a moment of emotional transference triggered by the moral improbity being witnessed, and ‘the manifest form of language is here an inspiration that is emotional yet already reflective, to which it uniquely gives voice’ (Gerow, 1984: 57). It is, as Edwin Gerow continues, ‘no accident that in later *rasa* theory, *śoka* is counted as the emotional ground of one of the eight *rasas*, the pathetic (*karuṇa*), now understood as the message of Vālmīki’s grief’ (ibid).

What I understand as ‘grief’ as a felt-state and ‘mourning’ as an act, appear under the *sthāyībhavas* or ‘basic durable emotions’, some people call ‘permanent’ or ‘dominant emotions’; the *Nāṭyaśāstra* lists eight *bhāvas* with eight corresponding *rasas*:

- *rati* (love); *ṣṛṅgāra* (erotic love)
- *hāsya* (mirth); laughter
- *śoka* (sorrow); grief
- *krodha*(anger); indignation
- *utsaha* (energy); excitement
- *bhaya* (dread); fear
- *jugupsā* (disgust); bībhatsa
- *viśmaya* (astonishment); arresting.

And these may be accentuated by accessory elements, sensibilities, *vyabhicārībhāvas*, or *sañcārībhāvas* such as anxiety, affliction, delusion (*moha*), *viśāda* (dejection), *amarṣa* (the insufferable), even *unmāda* (insanity). These are further accompanied by changes in physical (read also, physiological, physiogenic) symptoms, *anubhāvas*,

feelings, such as *ásru*, shrieking with tears, confusion, trembling, hair-standing on its ends, weakness of the knees, other gestures such as loosing grip on things in one's hands, collapsing, and so on – verily these are Arjuna's symptoms in the beginning chapter of the BhG. And very little, I might add, one gets out of theorising on *rasa*, except in a counterfactual way of what aesthetic sense one might have after melting deeply into the state that would be the other's *antarbhāva* (1st-person feelings); thus, *karuṇarasa* (compassion or empathy) corresponding to the *bāhirabhāva* (external, transference) in all its visceral modality of *śoka* (sorrow), *vilāpa*; the former is in the *rasika*, aesthete or spectator, the latter is not. In fact, *antarbhāvas* (that are internal to the feeler; subjectively experienced) cannot be re-enacted as such, but for certain constitutive elements expressed in *bāhirabhāva*.

While there can be 10 or more states of *kāma* (desire's love, cupid's arrows), there aren't variations given in the case of *sthāyībhāva* of *śoka/lāpa*. Curiously, what is interesting is that the ensuing reactive emotions, *duḥkhas*, from the frustration or petrification of states of *kāma* (desire), border very much on the *vibhāvas* of *śoka*, particularly, *abhilāṣā* (longing), *arthacintā* (anxiety of loosing), *anusmṛti* (recollections), *udvega* (distress), *vilāpa* (lamentation), *krodha* (indignation), *vyādhi* (fever), and many more such constituents are covered. In fact, the loss of the loved object or the beloved in death is permanent and irrecoverable, irreparable, while the loss, say, in romantic split-ups, mis-firings, or travels to distant lands by the beloved is seen as being transient, recoverable, reconcilable: Sītā's separation from Rāma begins as the hopeful latter but ends up as the former; their re-union in the heavens after death counts for naught (*nirapekṣa*): there never is a possibility of return to the innocence of the shared love-state (*vipralambha-śṛṅgāra* as in *ratī*); the deeper the love, the deeper the grief; and that is what is underscored in empathic sorrow that registers grief. But the *hṛdaya-samvāda* (empathy) as in Vālmīki's *rasapratīti*, even though it is marked with a profound sense of sorrow, is really not the *bhāva*, originary *duḥkha*, that the surviving krauñca-bird bereft of it's beloved partner, might feel and goes on feeling thereon: the motif for the plot in the finalé of the epic...hence the mortalising sorrow of Sītā at her total chastisement and banishment by Rāma. A poem pegged on grief, from beginning to the end, symbolised in the separation of the lovebird from its mate.

Not all *śoka* or state of grief, of course, are felt as a result of departure, death or loss of the beloved or close ones; other events

could bring these about as well, such as abduction, injury, abandonment, separation, the other falling into untoward habits/disposition (such as addiction to liquor, drugs, infidelity, and so on.) As the legendary Bhīṣma narratives in the MBh's 'Book of Peace': People are overwhelmed by the mental sorrow caused by the destruction of their kinsmen and wealth, or else the separation from them, as well as by other sufferings caused by decrepitude and death (190.13). The symptoms could be the same though: tears, weeping, drying of the palate, change of colour and contour of the face, even throughout the body, lethargy, loss of memory, numbness, perturbations, modulation in the voice, even muteness, loss of confidence or sense of forbearance, ...the extremes of anxiety and panic attack, as we might call it in modern parlance. Associated with the gloom of grief is a series of unsettling sensations and feelings: not least, an arresting sense of hopelessness, loss, fear, anxiety, wrath, if not indignant anger, a 'collapsing of the house of cards', a throbbing of the heart in deep pain, swallowing, tightness in the chest, and perhaps also in the stomach that has all but lost its usual appetite, and insomnia. Because of the intensity and insufferable 'jabofred-hot memory' whence all this "common-sense" vanishes like an ant in the mouth of a furnace (C.S. Lewis, 1976), there follows doubts about what one is actually feeling, sometimes denying the obvious only to be hit with wave upon wave of discomfiture, tears and inexplicable sensations in various parts and organs of the body; thus it is that grief is often said to be the most negative of 'negative' or 'hard' emotions.

The Mahābhārata's Grief Writ Large

In light of the foregoing ruminations, let me turn now to some representative passages from the narrative ethics of the epic MBh to examine how theoretically deep the thinking there is in respect of the 'hard emotions' in question.

Grief had struck the Pāṇḍavas whence – tricked into the game of dice by the arch-rival Duryodhana, which they lost by a certain sleight-of-hand – they were robbed of their share of the kingdom, their possessions, and technically even the wife of the five heir-brothers – Draupudī. The entire kingdom (City of Elephants) is said to have been smitten by inconsolable grief. (MBh, 'The Forest Teachings', Book III (29) 1.15-18: 221). A wise Brahmin, Śaunaka, steeped in the ontology of Sāṃkhya-Yoga, wishing to help Yudhiṣṭhira understand this moment of grief in the post-partum, self-exile,

condition, spoke thus, with a tinge of object-relation psychotherapy thrown in as well: ‘Thousands of occasions of sorrow and hundreds of occasions of fear beset day after day the foolish, but not the wise... (2.15) This world is tyrannized by two kinds of sorrows that arise either in the body or in the mind... disease, labour, meeting with the unloved, and parting with the loved – these are four causes from which bodily grief arises. The pain of the body and the pain of the mind, is relieved by rapid counter measures and by steadily ignoring it: these are two courses of action. For sensible physicians first relieve a man’s mental anguish by pleasing talk and delightful presents; *for mental ills affect the body*, as a hot iron ball affects the water in a pitcher. Thus one should appease the ailment of the mind with insight, as one appeases fire with water; when the mental ailment is achieved the body calms down. Love, it is known, is the root of mental pain, for love makes a man attached, and thus he comes to grief. Grief roots in love and fear springs from love. From love is born the motivating passion that seeks out its object. Both passion and its object run counter to well-being, but the former is held to be the graver wrong. Just as fire in the hollow of a tree will burn down the tree to its roots, so even a small fault of passion destroys a man who wishes for Law [Dharma]’ (2.20-34). Śaunaka then links passion with desire, the longing from which springs thirst, which ‘deranges man, fearsome, pregnant of Unlaw [adharmā], and giving rise to evil’ (2.35). It is interesting to note that bodily (read, physiological) perturbations are linked directly to mental anguish as the basis of grief, and that relief from grief involves calming the body through ‘talk’ therapy in tandem with healing of the body, care of self. It is for this reason that some mental health and neurosciences institutions in India have begun to (re-)introduce Āyurveda treatment and a regime of yoga, meditation with regular chanting (at an adjacent shrine to Gaṇeśa), *in situ*. However illuminating as this brief discourse on grief is, there is still no follow-up or attempt at a more rigorous treatment of the malaise in the passages and Books that follow, until we get some moving episodic snippets towards the end of epic – to which I now turn.

The suggestive passages I choose are from the Strīparvan: ‘The Book of Women’ (after the carnage in the ‘Dead of Night’), at the start of the eleventh canto of the *Mahābhārata*. There is definitely here an account of a deeply moving mood of grief, the grief of failure, of lost status and of the dire loss of loved ones. The grief that the women have been overcome with is so palpable that it is

difficult to express except through imagining the grief of others and grieving on another's account. The moving instance of this is Gāndhārī's expression of grief to Krishna, in which she surveys the blighted battlefield with divinely given-sight or extra-ordinary intuition (*divyena cakṣuṣā*). 'The description she paints of the innocent wives of the deceased warriors confronted by the mangled corpses of their men is a masterpiece of horror and pathos'. (Clay Edition, 2009a: 281) *Amor fati!* The warrior's former invincibility is juxtaposed with the women, Pañchala and Kuru alike, reminiscing the virtues (*smarantyo bhartṛjān guṇān*), and the joys they had with their now lifeless husbands, being mauled by the hungry vultures, hyenas, dogs and goblins in an act of total annihilation of the hitherto virility, macho-manliness and identity : 'That was my man!' Grief robbed them of their demeanour (*śoka karṣita dr̥ṣtvā*) at the sight of the draped corpses of Karṇa, Abhimanyu, Droṇa, Drupada, Jayadaratha, Duhshāsana, Bāhlika, Duryodhana, among other; tigers of men snuffed out like fading flames, most by Bhīma's missiles, lie with maces still in their hands, as if raised boastfully toward their beloved women (16.38).⁴ Gāndhārī bewails, beginning with a much-telling directive: *kṛpaṇaṃ eti śokārtā vilalāp|ākulendriyā, sugūḍha jatru vipulum, siñcantī śoka tapitā* (17.4; 18.5-9): 'Look at the array of widows, bewildered daughters-in-law, newly-betrothed brides running hither and thither, with their braided hair down, soaking in the blood of their loved ones, some also looking for the heads severed from their now wooded bodies of their fallen husbands. The jackals are out in daylight indifferent to this human noise, gnawing at every limb which only a few moon-nights before in deep conjugal embrace triggered many a pleasurable sensation to their beloved now distraught wives, screeching to the winds: How could this be – this pitiful slaughter? *Whose dharma, whose justice?*'⁵ So there are, as Solomon rightly observed, deeply reflective and dedicatory qualities of grief, meaning that the surge of feelings (sensations, emoting) is marked by a deep sense of care, gratitude, reverence, honouring, dedicating, commemorating, reciprocating, celebrating; but there still remains an unrequited longing, a resilient desire for it to be otherwise than the loss so deeply felt.

So, while I do find some very interesting accounts – and, the theorising on the *bhāvas* more generally and grief as a *bhāva* more particularly – instructive, that in some ways also reinforces my fight with the reductive cognitivist accounts (emotions as evaluative judgments or beliefs), my own philosophical lament here (*vilāpa*) is that one has to go through the aesthetic, abstract and *alaukika*

(other-worldly) texts rather than be given direct analysis, as it were from the side of the crypt – my own abstractions that evolved over nine years notwithstanding.

Concluding Remarks

I will conclude here with some remarks from my reflective insights on the comparative front. Two years back I published a paper, now also a chapter in a collection on the late modern-day philosopher of passions and emotions, Robert C Solomon (Higgins and Sherman 2012), that was written in the aftermath of a deeply personal experience of loss; I had not then delved much into primary literature outside of the Western contexts, except for passing references to the inclusion of grief as a ‘basic, albeit negative emotion’ in the epics and before that in Buddhist literature as well. I will consider some instances and contemplate on what exactly is the understanding given beyond a descriptive contour that any career-psychologist might offer to her bereaved patient as well.

A Buddhist monk and Indian sadhu might well identify grief with sentiment or *vedanā*; but grief is not all about sentimentality either (de Silva, 2012). It is more a *moral episteme* entangled with a deeper emotional response than might be thought (this is borne out to some extent in the lamentations of the women in the moving passages in the Strīparvan of the *Mahābhārata* we’ve just looked at). It may even be more, as one moves to consider variations to this theme cross-culturally (e.g. Keinman, 1985), and in psychoanalytic wisdom.

The Sanskrit term *duḥkha* and Pali *dukkha* are not specific enough to cover the deep sense of loss, *kampāva* and pain of mind (*sanvegāya*), and sorrow, *kālakīrīma* – from *kāla* and *kriyā* (‘terminal agency of time’) (Obeyesekere 1985). Or, in Mbh’s words, *so’yam pacati kālo mām*: Time has cooked me (227.85). Time and suffering are inextricably connected; which resonates with Heidegger reminder us that *being* and *time* are intimately and metaphysically intertwined. Dhṛṣṭrāṣṭra did not act in time; Duryodhana did not heed the far-sighted Bhīma (himself the arch-patron of the Kuru brothers) and the reconciler Krishna (favourably disposed to the rival group) to make peace with his cousin-brothers instead of taking recourse to war, and ended up walking with the entire clan into the jaws of time. When it is all too late, *being* has been metamorphosed into *non-being* (non-existence, which may well be its observe side) *time* delivers nothing but loss, carnage, suffering, a

decrepit end, and the consequent *bhāva* of grief. The ethical project is thwarted.

But there is a certain degree of universalism and essentialism presupposed in much of the discussion about grief; and if I am seen to be questioning this in the context of Western theorising I cannot by the same token afford to be mute or aridly complacent in the context of Indic theorising. What seems missing is a proper attention to the *sui generis* substantive nature, *apekṣatva*, of the affective state, the unconscious processes, and the bodily impact before and without predicating the feelings to some loss of moral balance or quest for ethical guidance in one's decision making, to rid oneself of desire and thirst, or even embrace a certain peculiar sense of joy (*rasa*, as in *karunarasa*, let alone a trace of divine bliss *śāntarasa*, *ātmāsneha*). Are Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira really asking 'What should I do?' 'How should I think?' – or is it more of, 'How should I be *feeling* if this is what I am feeling, indeed?' This is a common error in all theories that tie emotions too closely to the cognitive or intellectual, albeit pre-linguistic, phenomenological structure which in turn is spelt out in meta-ethical analysis as a response treating of an inherent moral dilemma or a challenge to the normative given in the situation, i.e. to the norms the individual and the larger social group are privileged to: thus, anger is seen as a response to the sense of my being morally slighted by another or treated unjustly in respect of my dues, or lament is said to arise owing to the petrification of desire, and separation from an object one is attached to, etc.

Some have tended to analyse emotion as an 'evaluative (or normative) judgment, a judgment about my situation and/or about all other people' (Solomon 1976: 186; Nussbaum 1997). If one interprets cognitive content of emotion as being evaluative, as Solomon did in his early views, then this is what marks the emotion of grief as well. The intense evaluative judgment or 'appraisal' element here would include increasing references to an agent's desires and goals—or rather their frustration, petrification. Other researchers have insisted on the bodily disturbances—"unthinking energies"—and perturbations of non-intellectual mentation processes in the agent so that experiences such as trembling, blushing, perspiring, pangs, throbs, tingles, burning and other sensations, adrenalin secretions, increase in heart and respiratory rates, alterations of blood flow, changes in blood pressure, digestive processes and other neurological symptoms are significant constituents; indeed, these would be fundamental structural

registers of emotional response. And this is evidenced not just in human beings with their quaint sentimentality, but also in animals. This gives warrant to the idea that grief involves a much larger metaphysical tapestry than, say, the more short-fused emotions such as anger or even moral indignation do.

I liken Gandhi, especially as he faces the near-collapse of the Indian subcontinent as it is being rent apart with communal violence on the eve of its Independence, to the doyen of morality in the *Mahābhārata*— Yudhiṣṭhira – particularly the disenchantments of the entire clan that he bore witness to along with the carnage of the war as it drew to an unending end, and the constant rebuke he faced from Draupadī for wandering the earth with his dog without finding a stable foundation for *Dharma* or grounding it in firm absolutes. Gandhi's theory of morality called for scant theorising, but rather much sensitivity toward social variations and alterations and reliance on sheer inner moral strength and 'conscience', as he put it. Thus he appealed to situational imagination; as he remarked, truth in moral matters has no absolutes; rather, it is left to the individual by virtue of her character and imaginative engagement to resolve upon a decision and act accordingly. Non-violence for him is one such truth (*satya*), it is the mainstay of his entire pragmatic and political ethics (*Satyāgraha*); however, it would be far from being set in creeds or absolutes of any kind. Instead, there are numerous modal possibilities and outcomes that one can anticipate (or perhaps not anticipate given the gravity and hidden vectors in any conflict encounter). He confessed to Martin Buber in their correspondence that he didn't know how he could deal with Hitler and the Holocaust visited upon them by the Nazis; with the British at least one could appeal to their innate conscience; perhaps with the Americans too as he counselled visiting African American delegates. However, one chooses the best course on a par with the argument to the best explanation, from among these, and since nonviolence (*ahimsā*) is a law on a par with natural and scientific laws (again not in any absolutist but indeed in tolerably relativist or contingent sense), it works its way through the universe. The best course to the best cause. This small insightful, one might say, imaginative moral vignette, has had a positively shattering effect in world politics and transformed us from mere subservient or argumentative colonials (colonial subjects) to postcolonial beneficiaries and theorists.

This is illustrated with an ecological canvas portraying nature's grief on the faces of the six species of animals surviving the ruthless, irrational act of burning down the Khāṇḍava forest by some playful

instinct that overcame Krishna and Arjuna while frolicking the outskirts of the forest in what seemed like a pass-time ('The Burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest', Book I, 216: 25-30). Perhaps this cavalier act is indicative of the non-absoluteness of nonviolence vis-à-vis Jain and Buddhist ethics by the time of the epics; *ahiṃsā* or non-injury as a virtue is catalogued but only as a prudential imperative, i.e. if it serves a purpose. Sacrifice is condemned where animals are used, but animals are used as vehicles and killed by the thousands, close to a million, in the battlefield; the *āśvamedha* (horse-sacrifice) is performed when installing Yudhiṣṭhira to the royal crown, and as just mentioned the Khāṇḍava forest with all its inhabiting animals are smitten. It wasn't until Gandhi, and to an extent Tagore, that *ahiṃsā* as non injury is transformed into the positive virtue of nonviolence and put back on the ethical high-ground, i.e. given a moral ontological prerogative all its own. But even Gandhi did not rule out an implicative element of coercion in the powerful resistant act; indeed, when it came to defending oneself and one's family, he did not rule out recourse to some form of violence, self-sacrifice aside. An ailing animal that may have no chance to recover its health could be put to sleep out of mercy for its undignified existence.

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NOTES

1. Two distinct sequential versions, or parts derived from a larger work-in-progress, were presented respectively at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, during my short visiting scholar tenure in 2012, at a symposium on Emotions in Indian Thought convened by Dr Aleksandra Wenta, and for the EPOCH seminar, at the kind invitation of Prof Arindam Chakrabarti, in the Department of Philosophy, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, May 2014. I am grateful to many who attended and for their helpful and critical comments, while pointing me also to further sources which this version begins to do justice to. Some theoretical contours of this paper are based on my earlier studies on emotions and grief (1995, 2003, 2012a), inspired by (the late) Renuka Sharma (1993, re-issued with a new Preface, 2014; and an unpublished thesis outline: 'Philosophy of emotions'). The present paper is reciprocally dedicated to her memory, to cousin-brother Shantilal, Australian mentor Max Charlesworth, and to the canine kinds, Devi, more recently, Rasa.
2. It only dawned on me months later, that the coveted message was that I showed no empathy or any of the 'hard emotions' towards her terminal plight, or what was coming, that I in my scholastic stupor was so determined to deny and escape from. And indeed I had frequently escaped overseas attending conferences and collecting research resources seeing family, but never once sharing the condition of the beloved. It took some years of therapy in New York and San Francisco to work through this unconsciousness emotional narcissism.
3. Abhinavagupta reverses the gender status of the birds from Vālmīki's narrative, with a streak of candid scepticism of the inherent symbolism at stake – wasn't it Sītā the *satī* who really is pushed to her death; while Rāma, the supposed sternly un-feeling paragon of epic morality, is immortalised in the text? Besides, the grief reported on happens to be Vālmīki's, but can he really speak for another's immense and irreparable *duḥkha*? Abhinava contends that even if a by-stander is able to feel via the 'melting of the mind' another's grief, a certain distance is necessary for the artist to be able to produce a literary work on that traumatising experience. *Locana* 1.5L (See Gerow 1984, 1994.)
4. cf. Alf Hiltebeitel, 2011.
5. I am citing from the Clay Sanskrit Edition here (Strīparvan: 281).