

When the Epic Spoke



Paper towards Directorship

Submitted to Psychodrama in India (Pil) by Surbhi Tiwari

1. Preface

This paper emerges from lived practice rather than abstract theorising. It is an account of a psychodrama workshop series that engaged with the *Mahabharata* not as an Indian scripture, mythology, or moral instruction, but as a living psychological landscape—one that continues to hold relevance for contemporary inner life. At its core, this work represents an attempt to listen for Indian archetypes as they arise from within embodied experience, rather than importing or overlaying archetypal frameworks drawn primarily from Western mythological traditions.

The workshops described here were designed as experiential spaces where participants encountered figures such as *Vyasa*, *Draupadi*, and *Krishna* through role theory, enactment, and surplus reality. These figures were not treated as fixed characters or symbolic ideals, but as dynamic role clusters—positions shaped by duty, contradiction, power, restraint, voice, silence, and moral tension. What unfolded was not a retelling of the epic, but a process of recognising how these archetypal roles continue to live in ordinary lives: in therapists and witnesses, in daughters and mothers, in professionals, caregivers, rebels, and those who hold without intervening.

This paper documents the design, facilitation, and unfolding of these workshops in detail—not as a manual, but as a reflective practice narrative. It traces how archetypes were collectively defined, enacted, and recognised through the bodies and stories of participants, and how psychodrama provided a method capable of holding complexity without collapsing it into explanation or resolution. Particular attention is given to moments of enactment, tele, containment, and role emergence, allowing the reader to see how meaning arose through action rather than interpretation.

Underlying this work is a larger inquiry: what does it mean to work with archetypes that arise from this land, this cultural memory, this ethical inheritance? In an Indian context—where mythology, philosophy, poetry, and everyday life are deeply entangled—archetypes often resist clear categorisation. They carry paradox, ambiguity, and relational depth. This paper does not attempt to define a definitive Indian archetypal system. Instead, it offers one pathway—through psychodrama—by which such archetypes may be approached, embodied, and listened to with rigor, humility, and care. What follows is not a claim, but an exploration.

2.Acknowledgement

This work does not belong to me alone. It begins, as it must, with *Vyasa*—the original witness. The one who stayed with complexity without rushing it into answers. Wherever the *Mahabharata* is spoken, his presence is already there. This paper is written in his shadow, with gratitude.

I thank my father, *Shyam Tiwari*, who gave me the *Mahabharata* not as scripture, but as a way of thinking. Through his voice, the epic entered my life as moral inquiry rather than myth—alive, disputable, human. Long before I had language for ethics or role theory, I had his questions.

I thank my mother, *Radha Tiwari*, whose steadiness, resilience, and quiet moral clarity shaped my understanding of strength far more than words ever could. Much of what I recognise in the women of the epic, I have first known through her.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, *Roohdaar* aka *Meenakshi Kirtane*, whose presence held this work at moments when it felt too vast to contain. Her capacity to witness without directing, to challenge without collapsing poetry into technique, allowed this work to remain alive rather than correct.

I thank my therapist, *Anita*, for holding me through the personal crossings that inevitably accompany work of this nature. Without that parallel space of care, this paper would not have had the depth or steadiness it now carries.

I thank my friends *Karan* and *Darsh*, for being great support for me.

I am grateful to my manager, *Darren*, for offering time, trust, and professional space without obstruction. His support allowed me to hold this work alongside corporate responsibility without conflict or compromise.

I thank *Krishna*—not as doctrine, but as presence. As the voice that does not simplify, the guide who stays in dialogue rather than resolution.

And finally, I thank the many figures of the *Mahabharata*—those who speak, those who fail, those who remain silent, and those who refuse to be quiet. They continue to live not as characters, but as roles within us all. This work is an offering to that lineage.

3.Backdrop

The *Mahabharata* is among the oldest and most expansive epics known to the world, composed in the Indian subcontinent more than two millennia ago and carried forward through both oral and written traditions. On the surface, it narrates a dynastic struggle between two branches of a royal family, culminating in a catastrophic war. Yet to approach the *Mahabharata* only as mythology or legend is to miss its deeper intent.

The epic resists moral simplicity. It does not instruct through clear binaries of right and wrong, hero and villain. Instead, it places its characters inside situations where *dharma*, loyalty, love, power, fear, and conscience collide. Elders hesitate when action is demanded. Warriors lay down their weapons in despair. Those deemed righteous cause harm, while those condemned reveal tenderness. Acts that appear ethical in one moment become deeply questionable in another. The *Mahabharata* does not resolve these tensions; it stays with them.

Central to the epic is *dharma*, often translated as duty or righteousness. Yet within the *Mahabharata*, *dharma* is never fixed. It shifts with context, relationship, time, and consequence. What sustains order in one moment may become destructive in another. What is right for one character may devastate another. Rather than offering reassurance, the epic repeatedly asks unsettling questions: How does one act when every choice carries a cost? What happens when intention and consequence do not align?

Because of this, the *Mahabharata* has endured not merely as a religious text, but as a psychological and ethical mirror. Its figures are not distant ideals; they are deeply human—conflicted, striving, uncertain. Kings fail to see what is unfolding before them. Witnesses recognise injustice yet feel unable to intervene. Women question the moral foundations of entire kingdoms. The epic survives because the dilemmas it holds do not belong to a single era.

3.1 The *Mahabharata* I Inherited

My relationship with the *Mahabharata* did not begin as scholarly engagement. Like many Indian households, I grew up with the epic as something spoken rather than studied—returned to repeatedly through familiar voices and everyday conversations. In my own life, it was my father who carried the *Mahabharata* this way. He spoke of its characters not as mythological figures, but as lenses through which to think about ethics, relationships, responsibility, and the cost of action and inaction.

Through him, I encountered *Karna*'s loyalty and the dignity of his friendships, *Duryodhana*'s devotion alongside the dangers of wounded pride, and *Krishna*'s understanding of righteousness as something alive rather than rigid. *Dhritarashtra*'s blindness was never only physical; it was an inability to see what demanded to be seen. *Bhishma* and the elders were not admired uncritically—their silence during *Draupadi*'s humiliation was questioned deeply. *Draupadi* herself stood out as a figure who refused quiet acceptance, whose questions exposed the moral collapse of an entire court.

These were not abstract discussions. They shaped how I learned to think about courage and complicity, loyalty and responsibility, right action and fearful silence. Long before the *Mahabharata* became a conscious area of inquiry, it became a moral vocabulary.

After my father's passing in 2023, I found myself returning to these stories with a different intensity. In a time when certainty felt elusive, the epic became an anchor. Its characters no longer felt distant; they felt like companions in grief and reflection. *Krishna*, in particular, remained close—not as a deity to be worshipped, but as a presence holding paradox: tenderness alongside strategy, compassion alongside difficult truth.

Alongside this personal inheritance, my training and practice in psychodrama shaped how I engaged with the *Mahabharata*. Psychodrama, grounded in role theory, understands human experience as dynamic, relational, and context-based. From this lens, the epic revealed itself not as a linear story of events, but as a vast landscape of social roles—warriors, witnesses, strategists, mothers, kings, caretakers, dissenters, and those who remain silent. Often, these roles coexist within a single character as roles and role clusters, producing inner conflict rather than clarity.

This perspective felt particularly resonant within the Indian context. Our cultural fabric is dense with inherited roles, unspoken expectations, and moral contradictions. In 2025, we find ourselves navigating a time of fragmentation and transition—attempting to hold traditional ethical frameworks alongside rapidly shifting social realities. For my generation, this balancing act often feels overwhelming. I began to sense that the *Mahabharata*, approached through role theory, offers a language capable of holding complexity without flattening it.

I was also conscious that much archetypal work in psychology draws predominantly from Western mythologies. While valuable, these frameworks do not always speak fully to the Indian psyche. I felt a strong need to work with archetypes arising from this land—shaped by its metaphors, contradictions, poetry, and lived paradoxes, often transcending rigid religious boundaries. In India, meaning is carried as much through mysticism, ambiguity, and devotion as through scripture. The voices of *Sant Kabir*, the currents of *Sufism*, and figures such as *Fakir Sai Baba* gesture toward ways of knowing that resist categorisation.

The *Mahabharata* belongs to this lineage. It is not simply a religious text, but a cultural and psychological inheritance that continues to ask: How do we live with integrity when every choice carries consequence? How do we act when duty conflicts with compassion? How do we witness suffering without becoming complicit through silence?

From this convergence—of household storytelling, my father's voice, personal loss, psychodramatic pedagogy, and the ethical tensions of the present moment—my own integration of the *Mahabharata* and psychodrama took place.

3.2 How Psychodrama and the *Mahabharata* Meet Within Me

My connection with the *Mahabharata* at present, does not sit separately from my identity as a *psychodramatist*. Over time, the two have begun to speak to each other inside me in ways that feel natural rather than constructed. At the heart of *psychodrama* lies a deep concern with roles: how they emerge, how they are shaped by context, how they conflict, and how they evolve. When I look at the *Mahabharata* through this lens, what I see is not a set of fixed character types, but a vast, living map of roles in motion.

The figures of the epic are constantly negotiating competing demands. *Karna* is simultaneously a loyal friend, a wounded son, a warrior bound by honour, and a man shaped by exclusion. *Arjuna* is not only a hero, but a conflicted seeker, paralysed by relational responsibility. *Draupadi* carries the roles of queen, wife, daughter-in-law, and dissenter, refusing to collapse into silence when those roles are violated. *Dhritarashtra* embodies authority and helplessness at once, seeing clearly yet failing to act. These are not static archetypes. They are role constellations that shift with circumstance.

This is where *psychodrama* resonates with the epic for me, with unusual precision. Role theory makes it possible to understand human beings not as personalities frozen in traits, but as relational beings whose roles are shaped by history, culture, power, proximity, and context. The *Mahabharata* offers a cultural language for this understanding that feels indigenous, embodied, and familiar within the Indian psyche.

Within me, *psychodrama* has always been a way of bringing lived experience into dialogue with larger narratives. It privileges enactment over explanation, experience over interpretation. The *Mahabharata* moves similarly: it does not teach through doctrine. It unfolds through scenes, relationships, silences, and consequences. Meaning is not handed down through moral pronouncements, but revealed through what happens when people act, and through what happens when they do not.

Another place where these two worlds meet is their shared respect for complexity. *Psychodrama* does not rush to resolve conflict. It allows ambivalence to be expressed, contradictory roles to coexist, and emotion to surface without demanding immediate closure. The epic operates with the same refusal to simplify: it does not guarantee redemption, it does not protect the righteous from loss, and it does not soften consequence. It sits with the discomfort of human choice.

What *psychodrama* offers, then, is a way to meet these roles without mythologising them. It brings them into the present moment, into the body, and into relationship. What the *Mahabharata* offers is a deep cultural container that allows participants to recognise themselves without defensiveness. Together, they create a bridge between personal experience and collective memory.

This is how the *Mahabharata* and *psychodrama* are married within me, not as two disciplines stitched together, but as two ways of understanding human struggle that already speak the same language. One arrives through ancient narrative, the other through enactment and role reversal.

Both keep returning to the same essential question: when faced with conflict, who are you being, and what roles are you willing, or unwilling, to step into.

Through this meeting of the *Mahabharata* and psychodrama within me, the idea of designing psychodrama workshops based on the epic emerged. The workshops that eventually took shape were not conceived as a retelling of the epic, but as an invitation to enter it as a mirror—one that reflects not only who we are, but the roles we continue to inhabit, consciously or unconsciously.

3.3 Finding a Way to Hold the Mahabharata

Preparing this work proved more demanding than facilitating it. The question that returned repeatedly was both simple and impossible: how does one hold something as vast as the *Mahabharata* within a workshop space without reducing it to mythology, moral instruction, or religious performance? The epic is inseparable from public imagination and devotional life, yet what I was reaching for was a psychological and ethical entry—rooted in psychodrama and role theory, accessible without becoming sermon or spectacle.

I struggled with this for weeks. Each attempt at structuring the work raised further questions. How would participants locate themselves within such an expansive narrative while remaining emotionally safe? How could relevance be created without simplification? How could archetypes be engaged without fixing them into static personality types, when role theory insists on movement, relationship, and context?

During this phase, supervision with my supervisor became a vital part of my preparation—not merely as feedback, but as a held space in which thinking could unfold. Yet despite these conversations, I remained stuck. Conceptually, I understood the terrain. Creatively and emotionally, something essential was missing.

In my understanding, group processes and thematic convergences are not accidental. Around this time, I enrolled in a year-long astrology course, without consciously connecting it to the workshop. In the very first class, the figure introduced was *Vyasa*. Within the astrological tradition, *Vyasa* holds deep significance as the son of *Parashara* and as a transmitter of knowledge across generations.

What stayed with me was a sentence spoken early in that session: wherever the *Mahabharata* is spoken, the presence of *Vyasa* is already there.

That recognition shifted something fundamental. I realised that I had been working intensively with the *Mahabharata*—its dilemmas, its characters, its ethical tensions—without consciously inviting the role that frames the entire epic. In psychodramatic terms, I had entered the scene without acknowledging the role of the witness and chronicler.

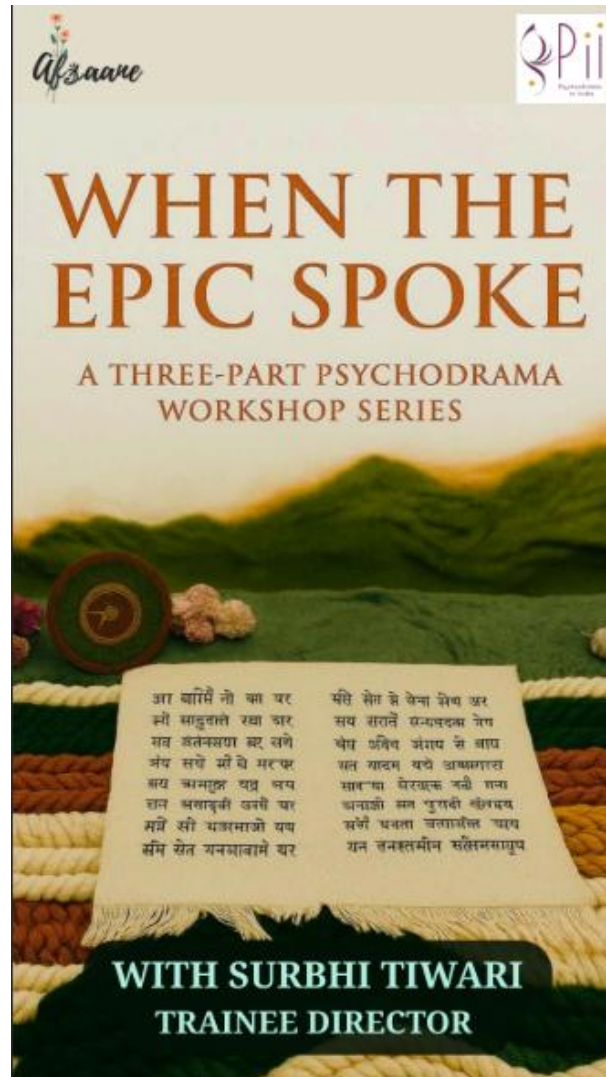
What followed was a series of autodramas exploring *Vyasa* not as a historical figure, but as a role. Through these dialogues, it became clear that the *Mahabharata* endures not because of its events alone, but because it holds shared humanity. The roles it contains—witness, warrior, strategist, caretaker, silent elder—continue to live within societies across time.

From this point, clarity began to emerge. I understood that this work could not begin with action or resolution. It had to begin with witnessing. With the one who listens before intervening. With the one who records without simplifying.

Recognising *Vyasa* did not introduce something new; it revealed something already present. The role of the witness, the one who stays with complexity without collapsing it into answers, was a position I had long occupied in my psychodramatic practice. *Vyasa* arrived not only as a thematic anchor, but as a living frame through which the epic and the method could speak to each other. From there, the structure began to form organically—not as an intellectual design, but as something aligned, coherent, and held.

4. From Inner Convergence to Outer Form

What emerged from my preparation based on this inner meeting of *psychodrama* and the *Mahabharata* was a three-part workshop series.

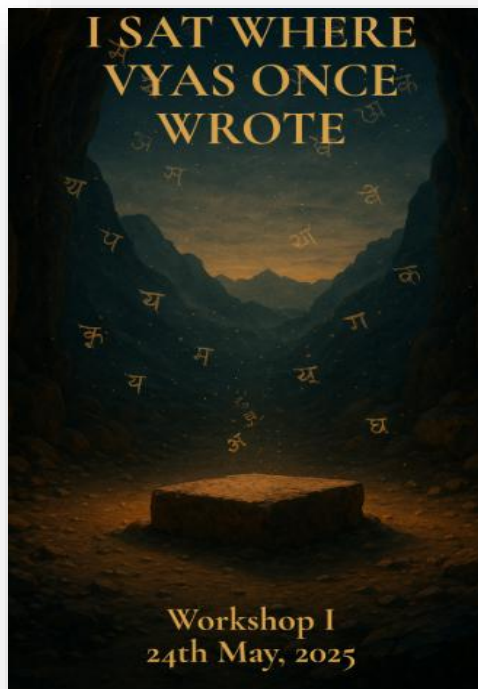


Each workshop was designed as a complete experiential space in itself, while remaining conceptually linked to the others. Participants could enter the work at any point, yet when experienced together, the workshops formed a larger psychological and archetypal journey through the *Mahabharata*. The arc moved through three distinct yet related positions: witnessing, engagement, and inner orientation.

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When the Epic Spoke: I Sat Where Vyasa Wrote



The first workshop was anchored in the role of Vyasa, positioned as writer and witness. Psychodramatically, the focus was on witnessing roles and the capacity to stay present with narratives that resist resolution. This workshop established the reflective stance that underpinned the series as a whole.

When the Epic Spoke: The Battlefield Within



The second workshop was anchored in the battlefield, not as a physical location, but as an inner and relational reality. Participants were invited to explore their internal battlefields through role theory, locating tensions between competing role clusters such as duty and desire, loyalty and truth, fear and courage. This phase moved the arc from witnessing into engagement.

When the Epic Spoke: O Paarth!



The third workshop was anchored in *Krishna*, focusing on the role of the inner guide. Psychodramatically, this phase-oriented participants toward contact with the higher self, inviting reflection on how values are enacted when no option is without cost. Within the arc, this workshop offered a movement inward, from conflict toward listening.

4.1 Crafting the Role Repository

Once the series was conceptually clarified, the focus shifted to designing a structure that could hold both depth and safety. Alongside the design, I created a Role Repository: a curated constellation of *Mahabharata* characters held as archetypal roles. Not encyclopedic, but intentional. The selection took days, spanning late-night journaling, meditative silence, and tears. There were mornings I woke thinking of *Kunti's* silence. There were afternoons rereading *Draupadi's* humiliation not for narrative, but to re-enter her heartbeat. These were not characters on a page. These were forces.

Bringing these roles together felt like composing a *raga* (a classical melodic framework, where structure holds emotion, and emotion shapes movement). I laid the names across my floor, sat before them like an altar, whispered to them, invited them in, not only for myself, but for a group I had not yet met.

After finalising, I took the repository into supervision. I was seeking witnessing as much as feedback. My supervisor listened page by page, suggested small shifts, affirmed the spirit, and helped hold the balance between poetry and psychology: cultural specificity without dogma, invitation without instruction. I refined slowly, printed a carryable version, and planned to share it a few days before we met, not as homework, but as warmth, a soft threshold. Please see the appendix to see this Role Repository.

4.2 When the Epic Didn't Gather at First

After the posters and repository, I did outreach. This was my sixth workshop in two years, and digital platforms had always been the bloodstream: Facebook, Instagram carousels, stories, paid ads. For me, outreach is resonance, not persuasion. I adapted visuals into reels and slides, scheduled archetype introductions, and boosted posts with the same targeting that had worked before.

And yet for *I Sat Where Vyasa Once Wrote*, registrations didn't come. It was May: summer, travel, academic calendars in flux. The silence was hollow. People viewed. Some messaged. No one committed. I watched metrics like a horizon: hopeful, tender, irrational. I refreshed the sheet twice a day. Tweaked language. Still nothing. When you've done it before and it has worked before, silence breaks rhythm more than ego, like a song that begins but never lands. I had even said in supervision: maybe this is too ambitious, maybe people aren't ready to enter through *Vyasa*. But when the quiet became real, it still hurt.

So I did what I do when something tender doesn't find a home: I wrote, lit a lamp, spoke in supervision, and returned to what *Vyasa* had already taught me. You don't write the story for it to be received. You write it because it must be told. Some stories don't begin in a room. Some begin in you.

4.3 Intended and Supervised Structure

Taking this inspiration and not allowing my warm up to get dimmed, I went ahead and created the detailed workshop design for the second workshop - "*The Mahabharata Within*" The workshop flow was developed in supervision, with attention to rhythm, pacing, and containment rather than rigid outcome. What emerged was a two-day structure that balanced ritual and action, individual experience and collective witnessing, allowing the work to remain responsive to the group while held within a clear frame.

Day One: Entering the Epic

Entry Ritual: Holding the Sacred Threshold

Participants will enter in silence with gentle Indian classical instrumental music. A central candle will be named as witness. Each participant will offer a wordless gesture, place a simple offering into a diffuser box, and set their diffuser in the room.

Colour Check-In

Participants will choose a colour representing their inner state and briefly share its associated emotion or bodily sensation.

A tea break will follow.

The Room Inside Me: Concretising the Safe Haven

Participants will concretise an inner safe space using props, movement, and spatial

placement, serving as grounding and as a possible entry point for individual psychodramatic work.

Post-Lunch: Role-In / Role-Out

Non-verbal walking and posture-based embodiments will explore transitions such as warrior, strategist, return, and waiting family, with emphasis on bodily experience rather than interpretation.

Archetypal Entry: Vyasa and Draupadi

The day will close with engagement with *Vyasa* as the Dutiful Witness and *Draupadi* as the Tragic Queen, followed by reflection and containment.

Day Two: Meeting the Battle Within

Re-entry and Grounding

The day will begin with guided free movement, diffuser ritual, collective breathing, and brief verbal check-in. *A tea break will follow.*

Edge of the Battlefield

Participants will engage in a periphery walk responding to prompts around postponed choices, withheld truths, and unspoken loyalties, holding the battlefield as an inner and relational space.

Animal Embodiment and Sound Mirroring

Instinctual gestures and sounds will be embodied and mirrored by the group, allowing non-verbal material to surface.

Collective Story Creation and Role Repository Exploration

A collective narrative will emerge organically, followed by engagement with the Role Repository to notice familiar, resisted, and emerging roles.

Closing Ritual

The workshop will conclude with collective humming, the return of diffusers to the centre, shared reflection, and a guided return to the safe haven.

4.4 A Quiet Beginning: Letting the Work Arrive Slowly

Between the no-responses and starting the campaigns again for the second workshop, “The *Mahabharata* Within”, something shifted in me. The reaching became quieter. The need for immediate validation softened into a steadier commitment to the work itself. I didn’t change the essence, but I changed my grip. The outreach continued, but the inside of me stopped bargaining with silence.

I ran the campaigns again. This time, seven people registered. My response wasn’t celebration, it was a steadying: enough bodies to hold the work, enough breath, enough listening.

A few days before, I created a WhatsApp group as an extension of the container. The work begins earlier: anticipation, images, quiet role warm-up. I named it as temporary, dissolving after the workshop. Not a community to perform into, but a threshold space. I offered gentle warm-ups: offerings, reflections, noticing what stirs with “battle,” without overloading. I shared the Role Repository with clear framing: not homework, not understanding, just a quiet companion. Roles would be met through breath, movement, moment.

When the Group Changed: Adjusting the Container

The night before, two participants dropped: illness and emergency. We were five, not seven. With five, intimacy deepens and anonymity reduces. Exercises designed for larger constellations needed adjustment. Doubt circled: will this still work?

I did an autodrama with an empty chair, placing the workshop itself there, and asking what it needed. Not redesign. Presence. Trust the smaller circle.

I adjusted quietly: loosened pair-based exercises, held more collective witnessing. Five meant fewer hiding places. Roles would echo more clearly. The workshop didn’t need to be bigger. It needed to be true.

5. The Final Threshold: The actual workshop

In the morning, I invited participants to let their eyes wander on the way, to notice what the world offers (leaf, twig, flower, pebble, or nothing). Orientation mattered more than objects.

I arrived an hour early, picked two flowers on the way without analysis. In the empty room, I lit a candle, sat in silence, then arranged chairs in a horseshoe, props without excess, space for movement and pause. I whispered a private invitation: *Vyasa*, come. Witness. Co-create. I shared a photo of the flowers in the WhatsApp group, letting them know the workshop had already begun in small ways.



Participants arrived: five. Four women and one man. Four first-timers to psychodrama. One with prior experience. I noticed the entry not as introductions, but as energies crossing the threshold.

I tracked them as roles that the participants walked in with:

The Observer (O): careful, assessing, mapping terrain, testing safety.

The Carrier (C): depleted but present, arriving with quiet weight.

The Listener (L): small contained movements, receptive, silence as familiar language.

The Spark (S): buoyant warmth that animated the room.

The Seeker (SE): deliberate entry, chosen intention, quiet readiness.

In the sharing of the workshop flow - I will be referring to the participants with the short Alphabet mentioned in brackets.

Warm Up 1: The Offering Ritual

The day began not with words, but with hands opening. I invited them to stand and enter the ritual simply: no introductions, no meanings. One by one, place an offering on the altar. No justification. I named consent clearly: anyone could opt out of candle/diffuser for any reason. Allergies were named. Choice was named. I informed them that work would move only as fast as safety allowed.

After offering, I invited them to let their body choose a corner, set a diffuser/candle there. Silence held the pace. (O) placed her offering and chose not to light anything. No apology. I acknowledged it as clarity.

(S) wanted the candle burning through the day. I had extra candles for this. Two others echoed the wish, and a shared role emerged: guardianship of the flame. People returned to seats at their own pace. Corners held quiet intentions. The altar carried a collective trace and was then moved out of the stage near the props. Without announcing it, the work had begun.

Small Group Sharing: I moved participants into small-group sharing before full-circle: one group of three, one group of two. Instruction: speak about what the ritual was like, not why.

Group 1 (O, S, L):

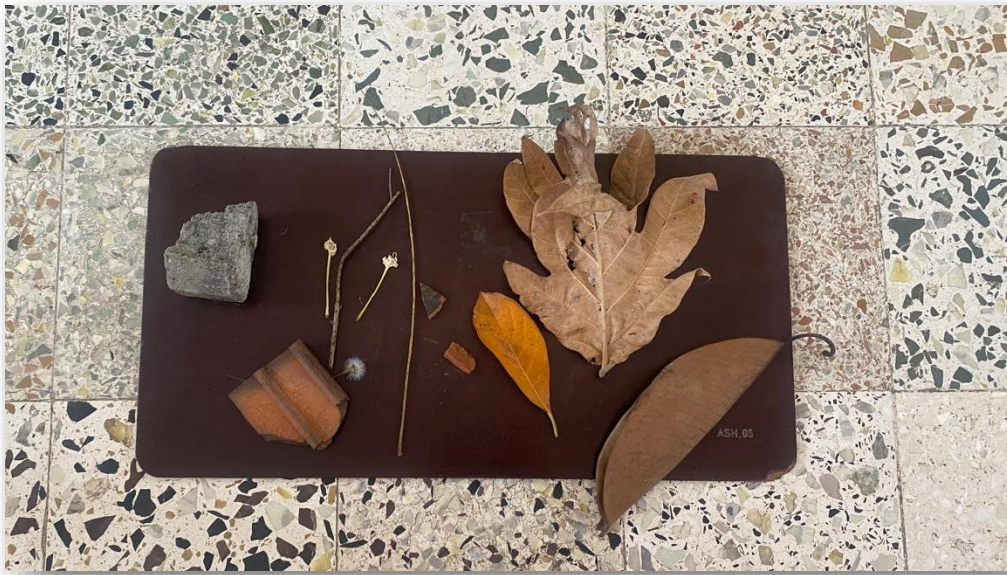
(L) found it grounding and anchoring, arriving somatically without performing.

(O) named initial scepticism; what shifted was permission to opt out without question, settling her nervous system.

(S) shared familiarity with flame/scent in daily life, but the relational context made it different.

Group 2 (SE, C):

(SE) noted strong sensory orientation to smell, found it natural and enlivening. (C) arrived with low energy and disconnection, was surprised by how calming the slowness felt, not energising but less fragmented.



Warm Up 2: Concretising Safety Through Colour and Space

I shifted back into action: I asked them to choose one coloured cloth instinctively to concretise safety. This was not symbolic analysis; it was a spontaneous choice and concretisation into surplus reality, with edges, texture, orientation.

(C) and (SE) moved quickly. (O), (S), (L) approached more cautiously, testing permission. Once spaces were formed, I invited the group to “walk the work,” witnessing each space. I framed boundaries: sharing was optional, silence valid. Witnessing reflections were to be felt experience, not advice or interpretation. The group would function as witnesses and auxiliary egos rooted in tele.

(O): structured boundary, muted cloth, pen as table, notebooks as beds, careful order. She named childhood room safety: predictability, being left alone to think. Witness reflections were: warmth, steadiness, protectiveness. (O) received without pressure.

(L): safety without walls, oriented to the window, blue cloth across shoulders, sky/air as constant. Witnesses felt relief and reframing: safety as a natural element accessible anytime, not ownership.

(S): layered, relational, safety in roles: office, daughter, boss, rhythm and competence. Witnesses described it as alive, steady, like a generator.

(C): warm-toned square boundary, matchboxes as relational anchors (children, partner, pets). Safety as being needed, proximity, care. Witnesses felt containment and stability.

(SE): chose not to share. I honoured it immediately, named silence as sharing. We witnessed without commentary. Her body communicated enough.

I invited everyone to return to their safe spaces as anchors for the day, and clarified their function: corners hold the nervous system, the stage holds the work. I named confidentiality explicitly, not as rule but care.

I then introduced key psychodrama concepts briefly: tele as intuitive relational movement beneath conscious choice; and sharing as resonance, not fixing. I marked how the group had already held this frame well.

By now, warm-up had done its work: individuals had become a working group. Safety was no longer an idea; it had been placed and witnessed. Trust formed because nothing was forced. The room learned how to listen.

By 11:30 AM, we went for morning tea and snack break and returned by 11:45 AM.

The First Psychodrama Piece: Returning to the Room That Still Lives

Once the warm-up phase had settled, I gently shifted the group's attention. Until now, we had worked through concretisation, tele, witnessing, and sharing—processes that helped the group arrive into the room, into their bodies, and into one another. I named this transition aloud, not as instruction but as orientation. These foundations matter, but the heart of psychodrama lies in enactment—when experience moves from description into lived action.

I invited the group to notice if anyone felt warmed enough to take that step.

There was a pause. Not resistance, but uncertainty. For most participants, this was their first encounter with psychodrama, and the idea of “doing a piece” was still abstract. I did not rush. I reminded them gently that they did not need to know what a piece would look like; if something inside felt ready, that was enough.

Two participants raised their hands: (O) and (S).

When I asked who would like to begin, (O) raised her hand. The gesture was tentative, testing whether the room would hold her. I acknowledged her choice and invited her into the centre.

As she walked in, I stayed slightly to the side, matching her pace. I have realised from my experience that this positioning matters in psychodrama. I was not leading or observing from outside, but accompanying—tracking breath, posture, micro-adjustments. My role was attunement, not planning.

I began with gentle role interviewing, letting the structure arise from her responses. When I asked what she wanted to work with, she said she wanted to *experience* the safe place we had been discussing—not remember or describe it.

I asked whether it was a house or a room. She answered immediately: a room. Where was it? Central India, where her family had lived for twelve years—parents and three

sisters, all sharing one room. As she spoke, her shoulders softened. That was the cue to move from conversation into action.

I invited her to set the scene in space. She identified the door; we concretised it with a chair, placed exactly where she indicated. She marked the room's boundaries with stoles—precise, aligned, equidistant. Even in memory, containment mattered. She showed where the window was; that boundary remained slightly open. Air, space.

We continued slowly and collaboratively. A table appeared, then three beds—two together, one slightly apart. A bookshelf emerged through paper and pen. As the room took shape, her movements softened; the memory was no longer only on the floor. It was alive in her body.

I invited her to step outside the scene and look at it. A small, unguarded smile appeared. I asked if she wanted to enter. After a brief bodily hesitation, she nodded.

Crossing the threshold, her presence shifted immediately—shoulders dropped, breath slowed, face softened. This was surplus reality: the past activated in the present through the body. She asked me to join her. I did, quietly, accompanying rather than intervening.

She placed her palm against the wall, grounding herself. She sat on one bed, then moved to the bookshelf and began to read an imaginary book.

That is when the tears arrived—slow, contained, unforced. Her breath deepened. I stayed beside her, silent and steady. This was not a moment for interpretation, but for companionship. When she looked uncertain, I reassured her gently: it was okay to let this be. The memory was alive now.

She smiled at me through tears—an intimate gesture of safety.

I asked whether she wished to continue or stop. She chose to stop inside the room and nodded when I asked if she felt complete. I invited her to dismantle the scene in her own time. When she was ready, we walked back together to the horseshoe. I thanked her.

As she sat down, the guarded, scanning quality she had arrived with, had softened noticeably. She said quietly that it had felt real—that she had truly been back in her childhood room.

She agreed to group sharing. I reminded the group: no advice, no analysis—only what had touched them.

(L) shared a sense of warmth and spoke about his love for books, imagining the gentleness of that childhood space. (C) shared that she too was one of three sisters who had shared a room for years. (S) then said the same: three sisters, one room. (SE) followed, surprised to recognise the same pattern in her own life.

Something unmistakable moved through the group. This was tele—recognition arising without effort, connection deepening organically. The protagonist smiled, almost disbelieving. Something in her had been met not only by memory, but by resonance.

I thanked those who shared and named briefly what had occurred. This was a psychodrama piece—without auxiliaries or role reversal—and yet experience had shifted from thought into body, from recollection into presence. The group no longer felt tentative.

The room had crossed another threshold. The work was now ready to deepen.

The Second Psychodrama Piece: (S) Brings Her Safe Place Onto the Stage

When the group returned from (O)'s piece, the room felt altered. Not louder or performative, but softened—as if something essential had been learned: the stage does not demand drama, only truth arriving through action.

The next participant to step forward was (S). She appeared warmed in psychodramatic terms—spontaneity accessible, body less held, attention alive. I invited her into the centre as the next protagonist.

I began with slow role interviewing, allowing her previously concretised safe space to guide the structure. She said she was ready to bring it onto the stage. Her safe space contained multiple relational figures: her parents, her daughter, and her boss. I asked where she wished to begin—home or office—and how she wanted them to coexist without collapsing into each other. She chose to place the home toward the back of the stage.

She selected auxiliaries for her mother, father, and daughter. The choosing itself carried affection and decisiveness. I asked her to place them one by one.

She began with her father, describing him in the corner, lying on the bed with his arm positioned like a pillow—“like *Vishnu* in resting posture.” I asked her to demonstrate the position with her own body, then invited the auxiliary to take it exactly. Without props, the home came alive.

The mother was placed directly in front, and the daughter in front of the mother. The relational geometry alone established the scene.

I invited her to step out and view it. As she looked at the configuration, her expression softened into recognition and laughter. She described the scene warmly: her mother and daughter talking about food and watching *MasterChef*, her father listening, laughing, enjoying the banter. The home, she said, was bright, loving, full of everyday noise that became safety.

She agreed to enact the moment. I invited her into her own daughter's role. The role shift was immediate—posture, tone, softness. From this role she spoke lines such as, “Oh *nani* (granny), let's go and see *MasterChef*.”

To deepen surplus reality, I invited role reversal. The auxiliary took the daughter's role and repeated the line while the protagonist stepped out. Hearing her inner world spoken back, she burst into relieved, genuine laughter. She confirmed this was exactly how her daughter speaks.

When asked what the mother says, she stepped into the mother's role and replied, “Yes, yes, we should watch *MasterChef*... and this Sunday we should make something from it.” We replayed

the loop—daughter, mother—until the ritual settled. The laughter in her body functioned as regulation; warmth and safety became somatic.

I asked how she felt. She said warm, home felt happy, bright, full of love.

I then brought attention to the father. She asked to step into his place and embodied his ease. The scene replayed. From the father's role she added, laughing, "Yes, I'm waiting to eat everything you make."

I invited another role reversal. Watching the scene from outside this time, her laughter softened into tears. She held my hand. I stayed present, without interpretation, holding time open until the feeling completed.

When ready, we moved to the office. I kept the home intact as an anchor. She indicated the office on the opposite side of the stage and said no divider was needed; the separation already existed internally. She chose an auxiliary for her boss and placed him at the front of the office space.

When she looked at the boss, her body shifted immediately—warmth remained, but pride and professional confidence emerged. I asked what she wished to say. She said, "Thank you." In role reversal, she became the boss and responded, "You're very sharp. Just keep it up." Reversing again, she heard the words spoken back. Her chest widened, breath deepened, and she replied firmly, "Yes, I will."

I reflected gently that it appeared her boss was proud of her. She agreed.

I then invited her to look back at the home scene and then at the boss, asking her to take in both anchors: love and competence. She exhaled deeply—a full nervous-system settling. I noted her breathing and sensed completion. She confirmed it felt complete.

We closed the enactment. She sat beside me and shared that she felt happy and light. She agreed to group sharing. I reminded the group: no advice, no analysis—only what had been stirred.

(O) shared that the scene was sweet and heart-filling; the *MasterChef* banter resonated personally. (C)'s energy was low; she chose silence, which I respected. (L) said the interaction with the boss felt wholesome and named longing for such recognition in his own work. (SE) named the piece as warm, safe, and held by both love and acknowledgment.

I thanked the group and gently named the learning: this was a complete psychodrama piece—auxiliaries, role reversal, surplus reality, and tele.

By then it was around 1:00 p.m. I announced a ninety-minute lunch break and invited them to step out, reset, refuel, and return.

And we left the room.

Post-Lunch Re-entry: Pacing the Body

After lunch, we did not return straight to the room. In my style of working psychodramatically, I understand and take care that depth cannot be re-entered abruptly; the body needs movement before it can hold meaning again.

We went to the terrace adjacent to the workshop space. I introduced a simple theatre-based pacing exercise. Participants were asked to walk at a pace of one—slow, attentive, not in circles, not colliding. The focus was spatial awareness and presence.

Gradually, I called out five, then ten. With each shift, pace changed, energy rose, attention sharpened. We moved through these levels two to three times, allowing contrast and regulation.

To bring in relational warmth, I added one final layer: whenever participants crossed paths, they exchanged a high five. Laughter emerged, eye contact increased, group energy lifted naturally.

By the end, post-lunch heaviness had softened. Bodies were awake, breath fuller, and the group felt ready to re-enter.

Role-In, Role-Out: Letting the Epic Enter the Body

Before we began, something important happened without announcement.

As the group settled back into the room after lunch, (C) quietly moved to a corner, lay down, and closed her eyes. She said she wanted to rest. There was no apology, only honesty. I acknowledged her choice with a nod and let it stand. I realised that listening to the body's limits is also role clarity. Her non-participation was not withdrawal; it was an accurate reading of capacity. The group absorbed it without disturbance.

I invited everyone else to sit briefly and explained the next movement.

Participants began walking along the periphery of the stage, keeping awareness of space, each other, and my voice. This was structured warm-up into role-in / role-out, (a technique that I created as a combination theatre activity and psychodrama) allowing roles to be entered and exited cleanly.

“When I say role in, you step into the centre and allow a role to take over your body. When I say role out, you return to the periphery and let the role drop completely.”

I reminded them this was not about performing well; it was about allowing the body to respond before the mind organised meaning.

First Sequence: The Warrior Returning from War

As they walked the periphery, I named the first role: “a warrior returning from a battlefield.”

On role in, four bodies entered the stage, each carrying a different truth.

(L) stepped in first. Shoulders sloped forward, gaze unfocused, walk disoriented—searching. This was a warrior returning from a war that had taken something from him. The loss lived in his spine.

(O) entered next with a different physicality: chest lifted, steps firm and deliberate. This was a warrior returning after victory—contained pride and controlled steadiness.

(SE) entered with minimal expression, movements slowed—numbness rather than fatigue. A soldier who survived but had not arrived back into herself.

(S) dragged her feet, each step visibly heavy—exhaustion, as though the ground resisted her return.

(C) remained asleep in the corner, breathing steadily—quietly included.

On role out, the shift was immediate: shoulders lifted, breath reset, eyes refocused. The role was left behind on the stage. The clean exit mattered; it allowed them to feel how distinctly a role can be entered and exited without residue.

Second Sequence: Entering the World of the *Mahabharata*

We continued walking. This time, I invited them to imagine a scene from the *Mahabharata*—not a character yet, just a location, a moment in time.

On role in:

(O) embodied an eagle-eye view of *Kurukshetra*. Spine tall, gaze wide—hovering above the battlefield, witnessing everything without being inside it.

(S) entered a palace alive with movement—responding to invisible activity: servants rushing, fabrics swaying, food being prepared. Her body was alert, animated, relational.

(L) stepped into the dice hall just before *chaupar* (a dice game). His stillness was dense with anticipation—time slowed before something irreversible.

(SE) entered the battlefield at the moment *Karna* lifted the chariot wheel. Jaw clenched, weight forward, effort visible—strain, determination, urgency.

On role out, images dissolved; roles released.

Third Sequence: Archetypal Characters

For the final round, I invited explicit archetypal roles.

On role in:

(L) became *Arjuna*, bow raised, body focused on the eye of the fish. Breath tightened, movements precise—discipline and singular focus.

(O) lay down as *Bhishma Pitamah* on the bed of arrows—still, dignified, surrendered, authoritative even in stillness.

(SE) became a fallen soldier—body slackened, limbs heavy, breath shallow—the aftermath of war in posture.

(S) entered as *Krishna* just before war—alert, contained, watchful—readiness without agitation; intelligence quiet, internal.

(C) continued resting, uninterrupted.

On the final role out, everyone returned to the periphery and then to their seats.

Sharing: Naming What the Body Knew

We opened space for psychodramatic sharing.

(L) spoke of the warrior returning from a war that was not won. The heaviness arrived instantly, before thought—shoulders dropping, chest compressed, walk slowing without intention. What stayed with him was how unmistakably somatic the weight felt.

(SE) referred to the fallen soldier. The moment she entered the stage, her body lost energy. Limbs heavy, gaze dropped, strange stillness taking over. It was quiet, inert—recognised without instruction.

(O) reflected on role-out. The moment the cue was given, the role dropped—posture shifting, breath resetting, neutral returning almost immediately. The body's distinction between in-role and out-of-role felt striking.

(S) spoke of surprise and empowerment. She had always believed embodiment belonged to others. But during this exercise, she realised the capacity to enter roles was already inside her—not as performance, but as felt experience.

I acknowledged each sharing with a nod.

Defining the Archetype: Entering Vyasa

After pacing and role-in/role-out work, the group was sufficiently warmed—somatically, emotionally, relationally—to enter archetypal inquiry. I marked the transition clearly: from roles in motion to roles with lineage, from personal embodiment to mythic containment.

When invited to choose the first archetype, the group moved almost instinctively toward *Vyasa*.

I asked everyone to come into the centre and form a circle using stoles. This physical act mattered. It located *Vyasa* not as abstraction but as something collectively held—walked around, written into, spoken from. I placed chits and pens inside the circle and set the task: define the archetype through attributes, not explanation—words, tensions, contradictions.

What followed was live collective role construction. Someone spoke of *Vyasa* witnessing the collapse of his own lineage—not as distant historian, but as progenitor watching consequences unfold. This opened the central question: what does it mean to witness when the story is also yours?

Another voice introduced *niyog* (an ancient Indian social practice in which a childless wife or widow was permitted, under prescribed norms, to conceive a child with a designated man—often a close relative of her husband—to continue the family lineage; the child was regarded as the legitimate offspring of the husband and the act was undertaken as a duty for lineage rather than for personal desire) and the burden of duty shaping dynasties—creation without desire, responsibility without choice.

‘Dutiful Witness’ emerged first and stayed central—witnessing bound by obligation, containment without catharsis. ‘Detached’ followed and was debated: absence versus survival strategy, regulation rather than indifference. Competition arose through *Vyasa*’s dictation to *Ganesha*—demanding continuous writing while embedding complexity that forced pause. The group stayed with the tension: authorship and stewardship, protecting integrity without flattening meaning, with ego as shadow.

Vyasa crystallised as a complex role cluster: The Creator, The Dutiful Witness, The Detached One, The One Who Cannot Stop, The Assured One, The Arrogant One, The Competitive One, The One Who Stays

We named *Vyasa* as the conscious holder of complexity: creation without comfort, witnessing without interference, presence without resolution. In psychodramatic terms, a high-functioning role cluster where authority, detachment, spontaneity, and moral burden coexist without integration.

The group recognised this archetype immediately in contemporary life: therapists witnessing suffering without fixing, parents watching children make destructive choices, leaders holding systems beyond control, directors containing truths they cannot resolve.

I did not summarise or interpret. I named the process as collective role construction shaped by lived resonance. The group had not studied *Vyasa*; they had begun to inhabit him. The archetypal were open.

Enacting *Vyasa* in the Contemporary World

After articulating the archetype, I did not extend discussion. Language had done enough. The archetype needed movement.

I gave a clear instruction and ten minutes: enact any contemporary role that carried the same role cluster. This was role equivalence, not role identity. I stepped back to allow spontaneity.

The group offered a mime: therapist, client, narrator.

“This is day one,” the narrator said.

The client’s distress appeared through gestures—collapsed shoulders, restless hands. The therapist sat opposite: grounded, attentive, offering presence without rescue or instruction.

“A few months later,” the narrator marked.

Bodies shifted. The client sat more upright. The therapist smiled quietly. The work felt complete without being declared complete. They embraced and separated—no morals, no explanation.

In reflection, the group named the therapist as contemporary *Vyasa*: witness without ownership of outcome, detachment without indifference, ethical boundary mirroring *Vyasa*’s dilemma—knowing deeply, not acting directly; seeing clearly, not rescuing; being central without claiming credit.

The role cluster aligned precisely: Dutiful Witness, Detached Holder, the One Who Cannot Interrupt the Story, the One Who Stays.

***Draupadi*: The Fire That Refuses to Dim**

When the group moved to *Draupadi*, the room’s energy shifted immediately. *Vyasa* had asked for stillness and restraint; *Draupadi* brought heat and moral urgency.

We did not begin with the dice hall. We began with her friendship with *Krishna*. Someone said quietly, “She was never alone.” That sentence became the doorway. We stayed with the bond as relational strength rather than divine rescue. *Krishna* did not intervene pre-emptively; he listened, responded, stood beside her without diminishing agency. *Draupadi* emerged as ‘The Good Friend’—choosing allies, sustaining herself through relationship without collapsing into dependence.

‘Fearless’ followed: refusal to shrink, speaking when silence would have been safer, questioning when obedience would preserve position. We stayed with the cost of this fearlessness—moral loneliness. ‘Arrogant’ entered next, and the room did not reject it. “Is it arrogance, or is it self-respect the world cannot tolerate?” We held the tension. In role-theory (Is this role theory or due to Indian cultural conserves) terms, high self-definition—especially in women—is often mislabelled as arrogance. We kept the word not as accusation, but as perception.

‘Strong and Righteous’ followed: strength as moral endurance, righteousness as insistence rather than purity. *Draupadi* insists on *dharma* even when structures fail her. The group also stayed with complexity—her marriage to five men—without collapsing into destiny or coercion. Whether chosen or imposed, she inhabited multiplicity without apology. Her life did not fit sanctioned roles.

‘Intelligent’ emerged next—her courtroom questions are precise, legal, devastating. She understands systems and exposes their breaches. Finally came ‘Angry at Injustice’—anger as moral intelligence, directional and clear, refusing displacement.

From this, *Draupadi* crystallised as a layered role cluster: The Fearless Truth-Speaker, The Loyal Friend, The Uncontainable Woman, The Moral Challenger, The Righteously Angry One, The Intellectually Armed

We named the archetype **Dignity in Defiance**: refusing harmony at the cost of truth, refusing safety over self-respect, refusing reconciliation without accountability. Someone said, “*Draupadi* does not ask to be liked. She asks to be seen.”

By the time we completed *Vyasa* and *Draupadi*, it was 4:30 p.m. We took an evening snack break and returned by 4:45.

Enacting *Draupadi*: The Grandmother as Archetype

As with *Vyasa*, I offered ten minutes to bring the archetype into lived or contemporary reality through spontaneous enactment. The group chose a mime: two actors and a narrator. The enactment centred on the (S)’s grandmother.

The narrator placed the scene: pre-independence era, illiterate, immersed in domestic labour. Through mime, the grandmother moved through cooking, cleaning, stitching—precise, habitual. In between, she repeatedly hid small coins in her purse. The gesture returned again and again—not fear, but foresight.

Another layer emerged: two daughters. Each time a threat entered the imagined space, her body moved instinctively into protection, placing herself between the world and children.

The narrator shifted time forward ten years. The same woman now stood differently—upright, authoritative. Through mime, she instructed others in stitching and work. Savings had become a business. Labour had transformed into leadership. What changed was not her inner strength, but her social position.

In reflection, the group named her as *Draupadi* without hesitation—not of the court, but of endurance. Fearlessness as strategy. Anger at injustice transformed into safeguarding and long-term vision. Intelligence lived in planning and persistence rather than speech.

What struck me was the group’s intuitive choice of silence. This *Draupadi* could not speak publicly. And yet, through action alone, the archetype stood fully formed: uncontainable woman, protector of lineage, builder who refuses erasure. The epic had found its way into the body of a grandmother.

(SE)’s Piece: Encountering the Bind

We settled back into our seats, letting the room exhale after the archetypal work. The atmosphere remained stirred and awake.

(SE) spoke. She said she felt ready to take a piece. The *Draupadi* exploration—anger at injustice, refusal to be diminished, insistence on dignity—had activated something inside her. I asked if she wanted to explore this psychodramatically. She said yes.

I invited her into the centre and stayed alongside her, tracking breath, posture, and micro-movements. Through role interviewing, she shared that she had long been in therapy spaces and came from a supportive, loving family. And yet, something binding remained—something that held her down even in care.

When I asked what image or person arose when she touched that feeling, she answered immediately: her husband.

She chose an auxiliary and placed him directly in front of her. I asked her to look at him. Her body reacted before words: breath shortened, hands folded tightly. She said quietly, “He’s not alone.” I invited her to show who else was there. She placed her in-laws behind him in a single line. As soon as the configuration settled, her eyes filled with tears.

I mirrored her folded hands to deepen her experience and asked what was happening in her body. She said she couldn’t breathe. This was a moment for containment, not interpretation. I asked what would make breathing easier. She said the husband and in-laws needed to move farther away. When they stepped back, her breath returned and shoulders dropped. I named the shift softly and asked if she wanted to speak.

She hesitated. I reminded her gently that these were not the real people in the outside world, but her lived experience of them. Speaking here was truth-telling to her inner world. She gathered herself and said to her husband, quietly and clearly: “You need to loosen your grip.”

I invited role reversal. As she stepped into the husband role, her physicality changed—stance wider, spine straightened, presence firmer. From that role she asked, “What do you mean by that?” We reversed again. Hearing those words from her own position, something broke open. She lowered to the floor and wept.

I stayed close, offering physical containment and minimal verbal support—affirming breath, allowing release, naming settling sighs. When the crying subsided, she stood. Her voice was steadier, grounded, and unapologetic. She spoke to her husband and in-laws:

“You need to stop haunting me. You need to stop keeping track of me all the time. It was okay when we were newly married. I didn’t know the world then. But it’s been seventeen years. I am a grown woman now. And I don’t appreciate this.”

I noted grounded feet and clarity. When I asked if this was the first time she had said this, she said yes. I acknowledged the courage of a newly emerged role—boundary-holder with firmness and respect. Another role reversal felt unnecessary. The role was complete enough to be witnessed. I checked with her; she agreed.

We ended the piece and de-rolled auxiliaries gently. (C) remained asleep in the corner, undisturbed.

I asked if she was open to sharing. She nodded. I reminded the group: no advice, no analysis, only what had been stirred while witnessing.

(O) spoke of the depth hidden beneath everyday interactions and thanked the protagonist for allowing that glimpse. (S) shared that the piece connected her to her own experience of suffocation within marriage, naming divorce and the difficulty and importance of witnessing this work. (L) and others remained silent, holding the moment.

I closed by naming what had occurred: not resolution or closure, but the arrival of a new role into consciousness. Some roles do not need to be pushed further. They need to be acknowledged and allowed to exist.

The room was quiet. Something essential had been spoken. The work had done what it needed to do.

Closing the Day: Returning What Was Held

By the time the piece came to rest, the clock had crossed 5:45 p.m. I checked in with the group: did this feel like a good place to pause for the day? There was a collective nod.

I invited everyone to return to their diffusers and lamps, to tend to them if they felt called, and then bring them back to the centre. The offering table was returned as well, placed again at the heart of the stage. One by one, participants moved at their own pace—some lingering, some relighting the flame, some standing quietly beside what they had placed earlier. Within a few minutes, everyone had gathered around the centre.

We formed a circle and held hands. I invited them to close their eyes and notice the breath, and then asked them to hum together. The sound rose softly, uneven at first, then settling into a shared rhythm. The room filled with vibration. Sandalwood lingered in the air. Hands warmed against hands. Breath moved not individually, but together.

When the humming ended, I spoke as director, offering containment. I named that psychodrama does not always announce its work loudly. Though it can feel deceptively simple, the inner movements are precise and deep. I offered an image I return to: psychodrama is like laparoscopy. From the outside there are few visible marks, yet something significant has taken place inside. The absence of obvious signs does not mean nothing has moved.

I invited them to keep the evening slow: eat well, rest, avoid overstimulation. I named what can follow deep psychodramatic work—fatigue, heaviness, even mild feverishness—not as pathology, but as integration. I reminded them clearly that they could reach out if anything felt confusing or overwhelming.

With that, we closed. People gathered their belongings slowly and left one by one.

After the room was empty, I stayed back. I returned the props, folded the stoles, reset the stage, and then sat alone for a brief meditation of gratitude. I thanked *Vyasa*. I thanked the room for what it had held and named quietly that we would return the next morning.

At home, I kept the pace gentle. I took a salt-water bath, ate simple food, and sat in a short, soothing meditation—not to analyse, but to arrive back into myself. Then I let the day end. The work, for now, had been placed safely back into the body.

Day Two: Holding the Container When the Numbers Shift

Day Two began before the body had fully caught up with the night. I was already preparing mentally for the day when my phone buzzed. A message from (C). She wouldn't be able to make it.

The words landed heavier than expected. Rationally, this wasn't new. The day before, post-lunch, her body had already chosen rest. She had slept through much of the afternoon, and I had respected that. Her process was unfolding quietly, internally. Still, her presence mattered. Even resting, she had held a place in the group.

Now the group would be four.

Something in me tightened. A familiar anxiety arose, not from incompetence but from care: Will the structure hold? Will spontaneity still arrive? Will the group feel sparse? I noticed it without trying to silence it and let it sit beside me.

I chose not to resolve this in my head. I went to space first.

I travelled to the venue, ate breakfast along the way, letting my body do something ordinary. At the community centre, I unlocked the room, opened the windows, let the morning air move through. I set the chairs in the familiar horseshoe, recreated the stage, returned the offering table to the centre, lit the lamp and diffuser, and sat down.

I meditated.

This time, when I invited *Vyasa*, I spoke honestly. I shared my anxiety about the reduced number, about holding momentum, about whether spontaneity would still arrive with only four people. I reminded myself that psychodrama does not work on numbers; it works on readiness. Still, I needed containment.

After setting the props, I stepped onto the terrace and called my supervisor. I named the anxiety clearly. Together we walked through the entire design of the day again, each beat, each flexibility built into the structure. She reminded me of something essential: even with two people, the work that needs to happen will happen. Psychodrama does not dilute with fewer bodies. Before returning inside, I took a sheet of paper and wrote down the role that had been activated in me, the critical, anticipatory voice scanning for problems. I folded it and placed it in my bag, promising myself I would not let this role run the day. I would meet it later.

With that, I stepped fully back into my role as director.

The space was ready. The container was held. I was ready to welcome whoever arrived, not as a compromised group, but as the exact group that needed to be there.

Role Awareness as Warm-Up: Beginning the Second Day

I invited the group into the first warm-up of Day Two through a deceptively simple yet psychodramatically precise task. Participants were asked to identify two roles: one that had emerged for them the previous day and that they wished to carry consciously into the day, and one role from their life outside the room—shaped by responsibility or habit—that they wished to park for the duration of the workshop.

I was deliberate in my language. I did not ask them to reject or eliminate any role, only to locate it. As I have understood psychodrama, containment is not suppression; it is conscious placement. Participants used the space around them—bags, pockets, chairs—as auxiliary containers, allowing the body to decide where closeness or distance felt right.

I then opened the space for sharing.

(S) spoke first. She named the role she wished to carry as the Acceptor, a Self capable of receiving and softening without resistance. She described this as unfamiliar territory and wanted to stay close to it. I invited her to place it somewhere physically near. She chose her pocket, nodding slightly as if sealing an agreement.

The role she wished to park was the Worrying Mother. Her four-year-old son was alone with his father for the first time. She spoke of how worry had followed her home the previous evening, while also noticing that life had held. I invited her to place this role in her bag, away from her body. She did so deliberately, exhaling as she zipped it closed. Her shoulders dropped.

(L) followed. The role he wished to carry was the Speaker. The previous day had surprised him; his words had arrived and stayed in the room. He wanted to protect this opening. I invited him to keep the role close to his chest. He placed it in his pocket, touching it briefly.

The role he wished to park was the Critical Judge, the inner voice that edits and silences him before speech can form. He named it clearly and placed it outside, with care and familiarity. His body shifted noticeably once it was set down.

(O) spoke next. She named the role she wished to carry as the Thinker. The previous day had slowed her enough to notice insights, contrasting sharply with a life dominated by doing and responding. Thinking felt almost luxurious. I invited her to keep this role close to her body, somewhere it could be felt.

The role she wished to park was the Doer—not because it was wrong, but because it was dominant. She placed it away with a half-smile, as if assuring it she would return.

(SE) spoke last. The role that had emerged for her was the Explorer. The previous day had revealed parts of herself still unvisited and available. This role carried curiosity rather than certainty, and she kept it close instinctively.

The role she wished to park was Being Available to the World. She named her responsibilities clearly: an unwell mother-in-law, leadership duties, children at home. Arriving had required negotiation. For the next eight hours, she wanted to belong only to the work. I acknowledged the weight of this and invited her to place the role somewhere distant. She set it aside with visible relief.

As director, I tracked not only what was spoken, but how it lived in the body—breath deepening, spines settling, hands unclenching. This was warm-up through role awareness rather than cognition. I named this gently: what we had just done was role placement, a way of making the it visible and workable. Roles can be picked up and set down. Nothing disappears; it only moves.

When the sharing settled, the room felt quieter and more gathered. The group had arrived—not only in body, but in role. With that, the first warm-up of Day Two was complete.

Waking the Body: A Spontaneous Somatic Warm-Up

As director, I sensed the group had arrived, but only partially. Minds were present and reflective; the emotions were open. Bodies, however, lagged behind, still carrying the weight of morning logistics, traffic, sleep, and residue from the previous day. Not resistant. Just slow. In psychodrama experience, this moment was familiar: cognition and affect have entered the room, but spontaneity has not yet dropped fully into the muscles.

I chose not to explain this. I chose to move it.

Without naming it as an exercise, I invited the group onto the stage. What followed was a spontaneous somatic warm-up, aimed at activating higher levels of energy and re-establishing group attunement through mirroring.

Sound as Entry: Three Rounds of Collective Echo

One person at a time was invited to step into the centre and make a sound—any sound—without thinking about meaning, performance, or aesthetics. The group's task was simple: to echo the sound exactly as offered, without embellishment or interpretation.

(L) stepped in first. He hesitated, then released a low, tentative hum, like an engine trying to start. When the group mirrored it, his shoulders dropped. He offered the sound again, this time fuller, with more breath and volume.

(O) followed. Her sound was sharp and clipped—a brief exhale followed by a short vocal note. It felt controlled, contained. When the group echoed it, she smiled visibly, recognition meeting precision without question.

(S) went next. Her sound was playful and melodic, rising and falling. The group followed easily, laughter breaking through as the sound layered back. The energy in the room lifted.

Finally, (SE) stepped in. Her sound surprised even her—a deep, resonant call emerging from the belly. When the group mirrored it, the room vibrated. She stood taller, as if hearing her sound reflected back gave it legitimacy.

The cycle was repeated three times. With each round, hesitation softened. Sounds grew fuller, less cautious. Bodies arrived more completely.

This was mirroring in its most elemental form—not cognitive reflection, but somatic recognition.

Animal Embodiment: Instinct Takes the Stage

Without breaking rhythm, I shifted the invitation. Each person was asked to notice which animal they felt like in that moment—not one they admired or found symbolic, but the one that felt true in the body right now. No thinking. Only noticing.

One by one, they entered the stage, embodying both movement and sound. The group mirrored each offering.

(O) moved like a cat—measured, alert, eyes scanning before each step. Her sound was a soft, controlled breath. When mirrored, her movement loosened slightly, as if permission had been granted to inhabit both caution and grace.

(L) embodied a deer—light steps, head tilting, ears imagined as constantly listening. His sound was a gentle, rhythmic exhale. As the group mirrored him, his grounding deepened; his feet pressed more firmly into the floor.

(S) arrived as a bird—arms wide, quick movements, a sharp, joyful call. The mirroring amplified her energy while settling it into rhythm rather than scatter.

(SE) became a bear—slow, heavy steps, a low, guttural sound. Weight and presence entered her body in a way that had not been there earlier. When the group mirrored her, the room slowed collectively, breath syncing without instruction.

I tracked the shifts quietly—changes in breath, softening joints, eye contact re-emerging naturally. This was not performance. It was role training at a primal level, the psyche warming through the body.

I did not interpret or analyse. I let the activity complete itself.

By the time we returned to our seats, the difference was unmistakable. The room felt awake. The group felt coherent. Spontaneity had entered the system.

Only then did I know we were ready to continue the deeper work of the day.

Joy Without an Audience: (O)'s Piece

After the movement work, the room settled into a quieter readiness.

(O) spoke. She felt warmed enough to take a piece. What had followed her home overnight was not thought but sensation, leading her to reflect on joy—specifically how joy did not arrive freely in her life.

She described joy as effortful, not physically but psychically. Pleasure was rarely allowed to exist without output. Reading was never just reading; it immediately demanded reflection, articulation, usefulness. Joy came bound to performance.

She wanted to explore this.

I checked the group. No one else was ready. There was a quiet collective agreement. The tele was present.

I invited **(O)** into the centre and stayed beside her, working through attunement. Through gentle role interviewing, two roles crystallised:

- **Joy**—intrinsic pleasure, alive for its own sake
- **Outcome / Performance Expectation**—the part that immediately demands visibility and usefulness

She agreed to externalise them. She placed Joy directly in front of her. When asked where Outcome-Based Expectation stood in relation to Joy, she said quietly, “It’s holding joy. Very tightly,” and positioned the auxiliary restraining Joy.

The image landed immediately. Her body responded before language—eyes softening, breath shortening. I asked only, “What do you see?”

“This is very sad,” she said.

I mirrored it. “Yes. This is sad.”

Sadness moved through her body. She felt unable to move, caught between recognition and paralysis. I introduced mirroring. She stepped into mirror position and watched an auxiliary speak her words back, naming the sadness.

Then insight arrived clearly: “Why is that part holding joy? It doesn’t need to. They can be side by side, but it doesn’t have to choke it.”

I affirmed it and asked if she wanted Joy to have space. She said yes.

Re-entering the scene, she asked Outcome-Based Expectation to release Joy. When asked where that role should go, she placed it in the far corner—present but no longer central.

Stepping out again, she looked at the new configuration. A long, involuntary sigh left her body—somatic relief, not cognitive. A long, involuntary sigh left her body—somatic relief rather than cognition. I chose not to move her into the role of Outcome-Based Expectation or assess readiness for further action. her body had already indicated completion: breath had settled, posture had softened, and tension had released. At this point, decoupling was enough, as per my reading of the protagonist.

When ready, she spoke to herself:

“You don’t need to do this. You’re allowed to feel joy without explaining it. You don’t owe anyone proof.”

Through role reversal, she heard the words spoken back. Her posture shifted—chin lifted, chest broadened, quiet authority settling.

Looking again at the stage—Joy free, Expectation at a distance—she described the feeling as “spacious, free, like a bird.”

I asked what nourished Joy. She placed reading, art, craft, and time alone around it. Then added, shyly, “Horse riding. I haven’t done it yet, but I want to,” and placed that too.

She took in the scene with grounded pride. When complete, she dismantled it slowly. I thanked the auxiliaries and thanked her for allowing joy to exist without witnesses.

In sharing, **(L)** spoke of the pain and familiarity of joy held hostage by expectation, and the bodily relief when it was released. **(S)** spoke of confusing productivity with worth and the tenderness of witnessing joy freed from performance. **(SE)** spoke of how the image helped her see how often she postponed joy until it could be justified.

I named what had occurred: a full psychodrama piece with auxiliaries, mirroring, role reversal, and surplus reality—not a solution, but a meeting. Something had loosened.

The room felt steadier afterward, as though joy—having been unbound once—now knew where to stand.

By then, it was lunch. We took a one-and-a-half-hour break.

Post-Lunch Re-entry: Rhythm Before Words

After lunch, we returned to the body before returning to words.

For re-entry, I used a familiar warm-up: pacing with high-five movement. We stepped into the open space and began walking—no circles, no fixed paths—only awareness. I called out numbers, and with each call the pace shifted, beginning slowly and gradually becoming quicker

and more alert. The instruction remained simple: stay present, avoid collision, keep sensing the room.

As energy rose, playfulness was added. Each time participants crossed another person, they exchanged a high five and brief eye contact before moving on. Laughter emerged easily. The body recognised the exercise. Movement felt coordinated and relaxed.

The warm-up did what it needed to do: it brought the group back into shared rhythm, back into mutual presence, back into the room.

Only then did we return to our seats, ready to continue the work.

Re-energising the Room Through Play and Story

By this point in the day, I could feel the room's energy beginning to slow. Nothing was wrong. No one was disengaged. But attention had shifted—bodies heavier, minds full, the group turning inward again, almost too contained. This was a familiar moment for me in long psychodrama days: the work has landed, but spontaneity needs oxygen.

As director, I knew this was not the time for another reflective or emotionally intense piece. What was needed was movement without meaning, creativity without pressure—something that could lift the group out of effort and back into aliveness. I introduced a play-based task. One person would begin a story with a single line. The next would repeat it and add one more. The third would repeat the first two and add a third. The story would move around the circle like this. Only one instruction mattered: do not plan, do not edit, and let the story become as absurd or illogical as it wants.

The story began simply. A girl appeared. Very quickly it escalated—another planet, aliens, conflict. She was fighting something larger than herself. A partner joined her, standing beside her through the battles. Then, without warning, the partner died. The loss was sudden and unplanned, and it altered the direction of the story entirely. From there, it spiralled. The girl acquired new powers, questioned whether to continue fighting or return home. Chaos entered: abrupt shifts in location, strange creatures appearing and disappearing. A monkey-like figure emerged—part helper, part trickster, part guide. The narrative moved between planets, battles, grief, strength, and transformation, without pausing to justify itself.

I gently asked, “Do you want to see what happens if you put this on the stage?”

We stood. Roles were taken up intuitively. Someone became the girl. Someone embodied the partner. Another stepped into the monkey-like figure. A loose narrator role emerged to move the story forward. There was no script. Whatever had been spoken in the circle now lived in the body.

What struck me was how little direction was needed. The group stayed with the flow, listened to one another, adjusted instinctively. Even on the first attempt, the enactment had coherence—not because it was polished, but because it was honest.

After the play ended, we sat and moved into sharing.

(L) spoke first. What stayed with him was courage—not heroic or performative, but quiet and persistent. The girl stepped into battle without certainty or applause. She fought not for glory, but because something had to be faced. As he spoke, his hand moved unconsciously to his chest, as if registering that this kind of courage lived in the body, not the head.

(S) spoke next about innocence and play. Despite war, loss, and danger, the story never collapsed into heaviness. There was humour, exaggeration, movement. Even the monkey-like figure brought lightness into moments that could have turned dark. Strength, she said, doesn't always arrive as seriousness. Sometimes it arrives laughing, jumping, refusing to collapse.

(O) reflected on partnership and grief. What stayed with her was the abrupt loss of the partner and how it was neither sentimentalised nor bypassed. Grief altered the girl but did not end her. The strength that followed was different—less naïve, more grounded. Grief did not weaken the protagonist; it reorganised her.

(SE) spoke last, surprised by her own reflection. This war did not feel political or ideological, but existential. The girl was fighting something alien and unfamiliar, threatening the fabric of her world. The strength felt raw, bodily, almost animal. Not strategic. Not moralised. Just necessary.

As they spoke, I tracked not only their words, but what was absent. No one spoke about cleverness, intelligence, strategy, righteousness, or morality. They spoke about endurance—showing up, taking hits, continuing, protecting. Strength that does not negotiate.

As this layered in the room, something began to take shape. The tele shifted. The group was circling something collectively, arriving from different entry points. Then (O) said it aloud, almost hesitantly: “This feels like... *Bheem*.”

The room went quiet—not in surprise, but in recognition.

Until now, the work had been deliberate. Archetypes had been named, entered consciously, left with clarity. *Vyasa* had been constructed. *Draupadi* articulated. This was different. No one had set out to explore *Bheem*. No instruction had named him. No reference had been planned. And yet, through an unplanned, absurd, playful story, *Bheem* had walked onto the stage.

This moment matters deeply in psychodrama. It shows how the psyche moves ahead of cognition. Roles do not always arrive because we summon them. They arrive because the body recognises they are needed.

We stayed with it. The group began to articulate what kind of *Bheem* had appeared.

(S) noted that *Bheem* is often remembered only for strength, rarely for the emotional labour he carries without being asked if he wants to. (O) added that his innocence is often mistaken for simplicity, when it is actually clarity. He knows where he stands. He does not overcomplicate loyalty.

I remained mostly silent. My role was not to teach *Bheem*, but to hold the emergence—to let the group trust what had arrived organically, and to resist over-structuring something alive.

Eventually, the group named the role cluster together:

The *Bheem* Role Cluster (as it emerged in the room) The Protector, The Enduring One, The Innocent-Strong, The Loyal Companion, The One Who Carries the Load: emotionally and physically without asking for recognition

***Bheem*: The Archetype of Relentless Strength**

Bheem emerges as the archetype of strength that does not seek meaning, permission, or praise. His power is instinctive, bodily, and fully present. He acts because something must be done, not because it will be remembered. Psychodramatically, *Bheem* is a primary, high-energy role cluster rooted in survival, protection, and loyalty. He carries grief without collapsing, absorbs violence without becoming cruel, and moves through war without romanticising it. His innocence is clarity, not naïveté; his anger is directional, not chaotic. He does not over-deliberate. He knows where he stands, who he stands for, and what must be defended.

This archetype often lives in those who become pillars early in life—whose bodies learn endurance before language, and whose emotional labour goes unnamed because it appears effortless. *Bheem* is embodied courage: strength that is not symbolic or strategic, but necessary. He reminds us that some heroism is not reflective. It simply shows up and refuses to leave.

By the time this exploration ended, it was lunchtime.

Futurescape:

After lunch, before words returned, we re-gathered through the body. I brought the group into a familiar warm-up: pacing with high-five movement. We walked without fixed paths, guided by awareness. I called out numbers, shifting pace from slow to alert. The instructions were simple: stay present, don't collide, sense the room. As energy rose, playfulness entered. Each crossing brought a high-five—brief eye contact, recognition, movement on. Laughter came easily. Bodies remembered. The group re-entered shared rhythm and presence. Only then did we return to our seats.

By this point, the group had crossed a threshold. The earlier work had softened defences, clarified roles, and restored trust in the body's intelligence. I sensed readiness to move forward, not backward into story, but into possibility. I offered a future scape.

I named it clearly: this was not fantasy and not goal-setting. In psychodrama terms, it was future projection—rehearsing roles not yet fully lived, but already emerging. Each piece would be short and focused, one future role at a time. The structure remained consistent: the protagonist entered the centre; a brief role interview; concretising the future scene; allowing the body to enter it; closing with sharing. No fixing. No advice. Only witnessing and resonance.

All four participants chose to work.

(SE): Beginning to Write, Letting Ideas Land

(SE) volunteered first. She spoke of a future self who had begun writing in flow, not fragments. Ideas arrived often but stayed abstract. I invited her to place this future self on stage. She entered the scene carrying books and notebooks from the props and sat at the centre, holding them to her chest, identifying these props as all her future ideas.

As she entered the role, her posture softened and lengthened, breath deepened. She described excitement without rush, the sense that ideas were no longer chasing her but choosing to stay. When complete, she returned to the circle.

In sharing, (L) spoke of calm urgency, like arriving at the right platform. (O) noted the devotional way how she held the books. (SE) absorbed this quietly, shoulders relaxed, gaze steady.

(O): Returning to Knitting and Craftsmanship

The (O) followed, describing a future self-returned to knitting and craftsmanship, not for output but rhythm. She placed the scene at the far end of the stage, arranged small items as knitting tools, and sat down.

Entering the role, her hands moved slowly, then easily. Her body swayed slightly. A private smile appeared. I stayed silent as the role sustained itself. When asked what this future self knew, she said, "That time doesn't have to be earned."

In sharing, (S) named the joy of watching something that needed no justification. (SE) felt regulated simply observing the movement. I noted the shift in (O)'s body: more inhabited, less guarded.

(L): Becoming Healthier with a Companion

(L) spoke next, naming a future self becoming healthier through companionship rather than discipline alone. On stage, he placed improvised dumbbells and a stoles, naming it his gym buddy.

As he entered the role, his posture lifted. Movements grew more confident. He glanced at the stoles and nodded, as if understood. He said the presence made effort feel shared, less lonely.

In sharing, (O) noted the importance of closeness without intrusion. (S) observed how his breathing shifted. I acknowledged how auxiliary presence, even symbolically, can transform a role.

(S): Learning to Say No

The final piece belonged to (S). She spoke of a future self able to say no calmly, without apology. She chose to stand upright at the centre. No props. Her body became the concretisation.

As she entered the role, stillness arrived. When invited to speak, she said, “I’m not available for this.” That was enough.

In sharing, (L) named the power of simplicity. (SE) recognised how much energy she spends cushioning boundaries. I noted how little movement was required for the role to feel complete. Clarity had done the work.

Closing the Future Work

After the final sharing, I named what we had just done. These were not affirmations. These were rehearsals. The body had now known these roles, even briefly. And once a role has been embodied, it is no longer imaginary. It becomes available.

I thanked the group for their precision, their restraint, and their trust in the process. The future, for a moment, had been allowed to stand in the room.

After the future scapes, we took a short evening break: fifteen minutes to step out, stretch, let the nervous system settle. When we returned, the room felt quieter, not empty but settled, like a lake after a stone has sunk.

I didn’t rush us into speech. I invited everyone to journal for fifteen minutes, not to summarise or make sense, but to let the hand move if it wanted. Fragments, sensations, half-thoughts, resistances, gratitude, anything that had arrived over the two days. The writing was private. There would be no sharing. Some things need to stay with the self long enough before becoming relational.

The room filled with pages turning, pens moving, pauses. Some wrote continuously. Some stared out of the window for long stretches before writing a single line. I walked slowly around the space, attentive but unobtrusive, holding the container without entering it.

When the writing felt complete, I invited the group back into movement. I asked them to return to their diffusers and the offering table, to acknowledge the space that had held them. Some relit their lamps. Some stood quietly. There was no instruction beyond presence. Each took the time they needed.

When everyone felt ready, we gathered once more in a circle. We held hands. I invited them to close their eyes, feel the contact of skin, the steadiness of the circle, the echo of what had been done together. Then I asked them to share one word, just one, naming their experience of the two days.

(L) spoke first: “Grounded.”

(O) followed: “Spacious.”

(S) smiled and said: “Alive.”

(SE) paused the longest, then softly: “Braver.”

When the Epic Spoke

Submitted to Psychodrama in India (Pii) by Surbhi Tiwari

I received each word with a nod and thanked them plainly, for courage, restraint, and their willingness to stay with discomfort without demanding resolution. I thanked them for trusting me and trusting the process. I reminded them again of confidentiality, that what had been seen here were intimate inner landscapes and deserved protection.

I also shifted briefly into my role as caretaker. I reminded them that psychodrama often works beneath the surface. It can feel deceptively gentle and still create deep, cellular shifts. I used the metaphor I return to: psychodrama is like laparoscopy. There may be no visible scars, but that does not mean the body hasn't undergone surgery. I urged them to go slow, eat simply, rest, avoid over-stimulation, treat themselves as after a long journey. I named that fatigue, emotional tenderness, even mild feverishness can sometimes arise, not as pathology but as integration. I told them clearly they could reach out if anything felt confusing or overwhelming.

With that, we closed the circle. People gathered belongings quietly. No dramatic goodbyes, just soft smiles, gentle eye contact, a few hugs. One by one they left.

After everyone had gone, I stayed back. I returned the props, folded the cloth, blew out the lamp. When the room was empty, I sat at the centre of the stage where so many stories had stood. I closed my eyes and thanked Vyasa, not as an idea but as a presence. I thanked the *Mahabharata* for its complexity, its refusal to simplify, its willingness to hold contradiction without moral shortcuts. I thanked the space for its walls, floor, and silence. Then I locked the room and left.



The rest of the evening, I kept slow. I went home, took a salt-water bath, ate simple food, sat quietly. There was tiredness, yes, but also deep, steady gratitude. The work had been done. And it had been enough.

6. Director's Observational Notes

Somatic, Role-Based, and Group Movements Across the Workshop

What follows is a processing, director-level articulation of the movements I observed across the five participants, situated within psychodramatic role theory, somatic attunement, and group dynamics. This section intentionally shifts away from narrative description toward reflective, practice-based analysis, naming what shifted, how, and through which psychodramatic mechanisms.



6.1 Group-as-a-Whole: Evolution of the Group Dynamics

From a group psychodrama perspective, the most significant movement occurred at the level of the group itself. At arrival, the group existed primarily as: individuals co-present but internally oriented, cautious, operating largely from familiar role repertoires (Observer, Listener, Seeker, Carrier, Spark).

Across Day One, particularly through the offering ritual, the concretisation of safety, and the first two psychodrama pieces, the group moved into roles, where affect, recognition, and resonance

began circulating laterally. This was visible in shared recognitions (for example, “three sisters, one room”), spontaneous laughter, and the group’s capacity to stay with silence without anxiety.

By Day Two, especially after role-in/role-out work and archetype exploration, the group demonstrated a rich positive tele: participants responded to one another’s pieces with embodied resonance rather than cognitive commentary; silence was tolerated and protective; boundaries were respected without withdrawal. Notably, the absence of the Carrier on Day Two did not collapse the group work. Instead, the interpersonal dynamics deepened. The group reorganised itself with fewer bodies but greater affective density.

6.2 Participant-Specific Role Movements

A. The Observer

Primary role shift: Cognitive Witness/Evaluator → Embodied Experiencer with Agency

Somatic indicators: early upright posture, controlled movement, minimal facial affect; during childhood-room piece shoulders dropped, breath slowed, tears emerged without verbal prompting; during “Joy vs Outcome” visible chest expansion, chin lifting, deep involuntary sigh after spatial reorganisation.

Role analysis: The Observer entered with a dominant Observer-Evaluator role: adaptive and protective, but limiting spontaneity. Two psychodramatic mechanisms enabled movement: surplus reality without interpersonal demand (first piece used no auxiliaries, reducing relational pressure and allowing regression into memory without role threat) and externalisation of role conflict (joy versus outcome-driven performance was concretised spatially, allowing role decoupling rather than internal negotiation). By the end of Day Two, she demonstrated expanded role repertoire: ability to experience joy without audience, capacity to hold pleasure without converting it into productivity, increased tolerance for affect without intellectual mediation. Importantly, she experienced role re-alignment and became aware of it.

B. The Spark

Primary role shift: Energetic Doer/Relational Anchor → Conscious Role Chooser

Somatic indicators: animated posture, fluid gestures, ease in role entry; laughter and warmth regulating self and group; later reflective pauses, slower speech, quieter presence.

Role analysis: The Spark arrived with a highly functional Doer-Connector role: relationally skilled, affectively expressive, energetically stabilising. This carried strength but risked over-functioning. Her work revealed differentiation between being supportive and being smothering, energy as habit and energy as choice. Through her safe-space piece and later role awareness work, she identified and consciously parked the Worrying Mother/Doer role, allowing access to the Thinker, the Receiver, and the One Who Does Not Have to Act. This showed somatically as stillness, delayed response, reflective speech. Spontaneity did not diminish; it became selective rather than automatic.

C. The Listener

Primary role shift: Peripheral Listener → Embodied Speaker with Authority

Somatic indicators: initial inward posture, minimal eye contact, quiet speech; during role-in/role-out strong precision in *Arjuna* role with disciplined breath; increasing vocal confidence in sharing, clearer stance.

Role analysis: The Listener began with a dominant Receptive-Peripheral role: high empathy, low visibility. While adaptive, it restricted assertive presence. Two mechanisms supported movement: role-in/role-out training (clean entry and exit from archetypal roles strengthening ego boundaries) and embodied mastery through *Arjuna* (precision-based archetypal work accessing focused authority without aggression). His explicit naming of wanting to hold the Speaker role on Day Two marked a shift from unconscious limitation to conscious role ownership, visible somatically in firmer grounding, more sustained eye contact, reduced self-editing.

D. The Seeker

Primary role shift: Bound-Relational Self → Boundary-Setting Adult Self

Somatic indicators: early tightness (folded hands, shallow breath); acute breath constriction when relational bind was staged; significant postural strengthening after boundary articulation.

Role analysis: The Seeker's central conflict existed between relational loyalty and autonomous adulthood. Suffocation was not abstract but somatically precise and responsive to spatial shifts. Key directorial interventions included spatial modification for regulation (moving auxiliaries back) and selective non-use of role reversal after a new boundary-defender role emerged, preventing premature dilution. The moment she articulated her boundary without apology marked the birth of a new role rather than resolution of an old one. Ending the piece there supported consolidation rather than over-processing it.

E. The Carrier

Primary role movement: Group Holder → Self-Honouring Body

Somatic indicators: low energy from outset; progressive withdrawal from action without dissociation; choosing rest openly, sleeping during group work.

Role analysis: The Carrier's most significant movement was non-participatory yet deeply psychodramatic. Her decision to rest functioned as a counter-role intervention: disrupting the expectation that contribution must be verbal or active; modelling somatic truth as against her overdeveloped role of obligation to participate. The group's ability to continue without anxiety, and my choice not to "activate" or interpret her rest, allowed withdrawal to function as honouring the clarity of her body rather than resistance.

6.3 Director's Learning and Internal Role Movement

A Reflection on What Shifted in Me

What unfolded across these two days did not only reorganise participants' role systems. It reorganised mine. This section names the learning and movement that occurred in me as

director, using psychodramatic theory, role analysis, and group dynamics, while staying grounded in lived, embodied experience

1. From “Director Who Designs” to “Director Who Trusts the Process”

At the start, my dominant director roles were the Planner-Director (arc, pacing, structure, transitions), the Responsible Holder (monitoring safety, readiness, containment), and the Anticipatory Manager (scanning for what could go wrong, especially around group size, energy dips, first-time participants). While these roles are very significant in the beginning stages of a group, they can very easily slide into over-functioning and subtly interfere with spontaneity.

The moment that crystallised this learning, was when the Carrier (C) messaged on Day Two saying she would not be present. Psychodramatically, it activated an excess anxiety role, arriving from internalised expectations of “how a workshop should look.” The anxiety was not about competence. It was about control.

The learning was precise: psychodrama does not require optimal conditions. It requires adequate readiness. When I externalised my critical, anticipatory voice (writing it down, folding it, placing it in my bag), I was not suppressing it. I was role-reversing with it: acknowledging its protective function but refusing to let it dominate the stage. This was live role containment in the director. What grew instead was the Trusting Director: a role that understands that when the group dynamics is coherent, numbers do not matter.

2. Deepening My Relationship with the Vyasa Archetype as Director

I have invited *Vyasa* into many spaces before, but this workshop altered how I inhabit the archetype. Initially, *Vyasa* appeared primarily as the Witness, the one who sees without intervening, the holder of narrative without resolution. Across these two days, *Vyasa* evolved into something more specific and demanding.

Through the work, especially the Seeker’s piece and the Observer’s joy piece, I repeatedly resisted the impulse to either push for insight or extend a scene for “completion,” or facilitate catharsis where a new role merely needed to be seen. Psychodramatically, this was the movement from Director-as-Interpreter to Director-as-Regulator of Time and Threshold.

Vyasa, in this context, became the archetype of staying with the incomplete, allowing emergence without forcing integration, recognising when a role is too young to be tested further. The deepest learning was clear: not every psychodrama piece needs resolution. Some emerging roles need recognition and protection. Ending the Seeker’s piece at the moment a new boundary-defender role emerged, without role reversal and without testing it against the husband’s voice again, was a conscious clinical choice rooted in the understanding that premature confrontation can collapse a nascent role. This sharpened my capacity for clinical restraint, as essential as action direction.

3. Relearning the Body as the Primary Diagnostic Tool

While I have always worked somatically, this group sharpened my listening. My most accurate directorial decisions came not from cognition or technique, but from micro-somatic cues: breath shortening before words arrived, shoulders dropping after spatial reorganisation, the quality of sighs (release versus collapse), the difference between present stillness and dissociative stillness.

Specific learnings: in the Observer's childhood-room piece, precision in placement signalled safety, not rigidity; in the joy piece, the deep involuntary sigh after releasing joy from expectation signalled completion more clearly than verbal insight; in the Carrier's need for rest, withdrawal revealed itself as the adequacy of a role, not avoidance.

This reinforced a foundational psychodramatic principle: the body enters the scene before language. The director must follow it, not lead it. My growth here was not about learning new techniques, but about trusting silence, pauses, and non-action as valid interventions.

4. Redefining "Participation" in Group Psychodrama

One of my most important learnings came through the Carrier, particularly through her sleeping. In many groups, non-participation triggers facilitator anxiety and gets read as resistance or disengagement. This workshop asked me to stay longer with a different hypothesis.

The Carrier's body made a clear choice: not to enact, not to witness actively, but to rest. And the group process held. There was no collapse of energy and no loss of depth. Her absence on Day Two further concentrated the work. The learning was visceral: participation is not defined by visibility. Honouring her rest without interpretation strengthened the group's permission to listen to their limits, and refined my own tolerance for non-doing in the director role.

5. Shifting My Relationship with Authority

Another internal movement occurred around authority. Across the archetype work, particularly with *Vyasa* and *Draupadi*, I became aware of how often facilitators might unconsciously align with moral clarity, righteous anger, or resolution-seeking. This group required something different.

Holding *Vyasa* demanded that I stay with moral ambiguity, irresolution, and ethical tension without commentary. Holding *Draupadi* demanded that I not soften her, not domesticate her anger into palatable insight. This sharpened my relationship with ethical authority as director.

Authority, here, did not mean explaining, concluding, or guiding participants toward a "right" understanding. It meant protecting complexity, refusing simplification, and allowing contradiction to stand without being resolved prematurely. In psychodramatic terms, this is the authority of the container, not interpretation.

6. Integration: What Grew in Me

By the end of the workshop, the shifts were clear: stronger trust in spontaneity over structure; deeper tolerance for incompleteness; a more embodied sense of when to stop rather than continue; greater respect for rest, silence, and withdrawal as valid somatic and psychological processes; a clarified identification with the Witness-Director archetype rather than the Expert-Director.

Most importantly, something softened. I felt less responsible for outcomes and more responsible for conditions.

7. Conclusion

Writing this paper has not brought me to a sense of completion; it has brought me to a quieter, more honest understanding of where I stand in relation to this work. What began as a workshop design, and then as a methodological inquiry, has revealed itself as something ongoing—alive in my practice, in my questions, and in the way I now listen for roles before I name them.

What has settled most deeply in me is the recognition that these archetypes are not behind us, nor are they abstract psychological constructs waiting to be decoded. They are already present—in the bodies of participants, in the silences they carry, in the conflicts they hesitate to voice, and in the roles they are called upon to inhabit every day. Figures like *Vyasa* and *Draupadi* did not arrive in the workshop as distant epic characters. They arrived as positions: the one who witnesses without intervening, the one who refuses erasure, the one who holds contradiction without relief. Psychodrama did not give these archetypes meaning; it gave them space to be recognised without simplification.

This work has also clarified something essential about my own directorial stance. I am increasingly drawn not toward resolution, catharsis, or dramatic movement, but toward containment—toward staying with complexity without rushing it into coherence. The role of the witness, so central to *Vyasa*, is no longer only an archetype I work with; it is a position I inhabit more consciously now. Holding space without collapsing tension, allowing roles to arrive and settle without forcing transformation, has become both a clinical and ethical commitment.

O Paarth! (the 3rd workshop conceptualised for the series) remains alive in me as an unfinished question rather than a completed offering. If the battlefield exposes fragmentation and *Vyasa* teaches us how to witness, *Krishna* gestures toward discernment—toward guidance that does not erase consequence. I feel no urgency to finalise this work. It wants time, listening, and further embodiment. I know it will return, not as repetition, but as evolution—shaped by future groups, different contexts, and my own continued ripening as a practitioner.

If this paper offers anything, it is not a framework to be adopted, but a way of approaching archetypal work that honours both cultural specificity and psychological depth. It affirms for me that psychodrama, when practiced with care, is capable of holding the Indian epic imagination without reducing it to metaphor or myth. And it confirms something I now trust more fully: that the work does not end when the room empties. It continues—quietly, insistently—in the roles

When the Epic Spoke

Submitted to Psychodrama in India (PII) by Surbhi Tiwari

we recognise, the silences we respect, and the questions we are willing to carry forward without answers.

8. Appendix

- Workshop Posters and PDF - [Click Here to See](#)
- Role Repository - [Click Here to See](#)