

Symbolic Correlations between the Bhagavad Gita and the Individualization Process

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Abstract

This paper proposes a symbolic correlation between the Bhagavad Gita text and the individuation process proposed by Jung. It interprets the war between the Pandavas' guenos and the Káuravas as a symbolic process, as a result of which Arjuna (leader of the Pândavas) will be able to embody, in his psyche, the contents, symbolically represented and deposited in the group of the Káuravas, whether the characters dark, defensive, as well as creative or light ones. ■



Keywords
Bhagavad Gita,
process of
individuation,
dark and
illuminated
images.

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About the Bhagavad Gita

The Mahabharata text, or “The Great History of the Bharatas”, is considered the greatest epic of mankind. According to legend it was written by the sage Vyasa, containing around 200,000 verses. The text - the foundation of Hindu religiosity, portrays the history concerning the development of a mythical family that, over time, is divided into two opposing guenons: the Pândavas and the Káuravas who, despite very close kinship ties, fight for possession of the Kingdom. The war between the two groups takes place within the boundaries of the city of Kurukshetra (northern India), the name by which the battle became known. One of the component volumes of the great epic Mahabharata is the text “Bhagavad Gita”, considered a sacred book (KRIYANANDA, 2007).

The text Bhagavad Gita (VYASA, 2012), published and referred to as authored by Krishna, translated into Portuguese by Huberto Rohden, presents unique propositions that led me to weave symbolic correlations with the theme of the individuation process, proposed by Jung (1985a; 1985b; 1985c; 1985d).

In the introductory text of the Bhagavad Gita’s translation, Rohden (VYASA, 2012) proposes, in his formulations on the cosmic conception of Eastern philosophy, that every activity of profane man is tragic, permeated by guilt, since every action stems from an ego populated by negative illusions. If so, with any and all human activity, Rohden continues, the inevitable dilemma would involve acting and burdening oneself with guilt or not acting in order to preserve oneself from more karma. Continuing, Rhoden states that most Eastern philosophy would have opted for the alternative of not acting, keeping individuals in total inactivity, immersed in passive meditations, with the aim of not increasing the karmic debt.

However, according to Krishna’s speech (VYASA, 2012), the text of the Bhagavad Gita proposes a third path, acting without guilt, through an upright action, equidistant from false action and non-action.

According to Krishna (VYASA, 2012), the act that burdens human beings with guilt implies carrying out actions for the demands of the ego, that is, acting moved by vanity, secondary gain, applause or public recognition. On the other hand, acting without burdening oneself with guilt, implies the action of the so-called straight-acting, which is, acting for the demands and for the love of the greater Self, or Self, although doing is always carried out by the action of the ego. In this way, and only in this way, the activity would not result in guilt.

Correct action, out of love for the true Self (VYASA, 2012), does not create guilt, either in the present or in the future, but neutralizes the karma of false actions in the past, freeing man from his debts. Hence the supreme wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita. However, for man to be able to act out of love for the demands of the true Self, he must foresee his reality and, fundamentally, know the truth about his own nature.

This is, therefore, Krishna’s purpose: to convince Arjuna about the need for him to participate in the “combat” that will lead him to self-knowledge, making his actions viable through straight-acting. For Rhoden (VYASA, 2012), understanding Krishna’s propositions, the quintessence of the Gita is the feasibility of straight action. The soul of the Bhagavad Gita is the song of redemption that stems from self-realization arising from self-knowledge.

Proposition to symbolically understand the Bhagavad Gita

In my opinion, the self-knowledge arising from studying the Bhagavad Gita certainly implies a

symbolic reading of what the battle waged between the gueno components of the fight entails.

The fact that this sacred text, Bhagavad Gita, has inspired so many human spirits over the centuries, mainly comes from translating how the path of revelation of the encounter with oneself is made, or the understanding of the meaning of Life itself, the understanding of the reason for existence!

The symbolic reading of the Bhagavad Gita is an instruction manual on how to achieve the individuation process proposed by Jung!

Thus, I will try to explain how the ideas came to me to formulate this understanding!

The assumption that moves me, has already been understood by many others; from understanding the larger text “The Mahabharata” (2005–2011), of which the Bhagavad Gita is a part, and describes the intense suffering resulting from the conflicts experienced by Arjuna when he realizes the struggle that he and his guenos, of the Pandavas, will have to face against the guenos of the Kauravas. The great challenge for the reader is to understand that, ultimately, war is an inner struggle, subjective and symbolic in nature. Kurukshetra’s war is the possibility of overcoming the conflict against the dark realities of the psyche, moved by the desire to overcome its bitterness, frustrations, conflicts, heartaches, overcoming which are so necessary for the growth of every human being. It also configures understanding how much the demands moved to achieve success, to have the recognition of their merits, to be the winner in so many competitions, to win medals, to obtain power, to make spectacular discoveries, to accumulate highlights, to achieve fortunes, to be distinguished among the others, becoming a winner, will always imply a demand against the other!

According to Rhoden’s (VYASA, 2012) understanding and proposition, whenever action stems from the demands of vanity, revenge, fear, concupiscence, pride, avarice, etc., this action configures actions mobilized by love for the ego. They are, therefore, demands that need

the recognition or applause of the other or depend on the condition of the act causing suffering, contempt, humiliation, envy to the other or for the other.

These demands are present in all human beings, to a greater or lesser extent, and are the result of relational patterns under which humanity was forged. Acting as a result from demands of vanity, revenge, fear, concupiscence, pride, avarice, configuring actions mobilized by love for the ego, certainly translates patterns of behavior resulting from models conveyed by the human components of the surroundings, that surround us all; it is these models that interact with constitutional inferences present, to a greater or lesser extent, also in the nature of all of us.

During my years of professional activity (whether as a psychiatrist or a Jungian analyst) I came across the condition that many psyches are prematurely hurt, unloved, injured, offended, as well as disqualified psyches, accused of incompetence, repudiated and, in order to survive, they became submissive and obedient, symbolic doormats, as they were and are stepped on, continuously and constantly, by the others. On the other hand, there are many psyches that, faced with so many aggressions, have become explicitly revolted, aggressive, belligerent, who start to take revenge objectively, for the offenses received. Certainly, the symbolic doormats, the submissive ones, also carry the demands of revenge, but they are afraid to exercise them. One must certainly consider, among these many creatures, the possibility of recognizing the presence of psyches of people with psychopathologically inherited endowments!

We can conclude that from the interaction of these different ranges of psyches, with their constitutive attributes, with their parents, their caregivers, their instructors and with all the existential synchronicities, we are the result of this great mystery!

My understanding is that many of the demands attributed to the ego are, in reality, arising from the actions of “characters” belonging to

the psyche of all of us, characters that I previously called “dark doubles” as well as “illuminated doubles”, as images of creatures forged by the psyche, bearing a negatively defensive character or a positively creative character. However, due to a warning issued to me by Galias (CP, 2022), these dark or enlightened doubles, which I qualified as such, have the same characteristics as the concept formulated by Jung, which he called *Imagos* (JUNG, 1989, par. 296; v.9/1 par. 122) and/or compounds.

And, of course, if we don’t have a well-structured psyche, with an established reflective character, with each demand under which the ego finds itself mobilized, we will not be able to know if this demand really stems from the ego itself or from some of its dark or enlightened *imagos*. The demands of dark *imagos* are often justified as arise from the actions of enemies, as well as the demands of enlightened *imagos* will be attributed to the well-liked figures that inhabit us!

These imagery structures, of which we are all carriers and possessors, and under which we live subjected, are forged as mnemonic strongholds, *imagos*, resulting from the interactions suffered between our inherited predispositions and relational experiences, which we had, with all real or imaginary beings, that occurred throughout our lives, from our conception.

Proposition about the Archetypal Impairment in all of us

The development or formation of human beings, over time, demanded the humanization of the inherent archetypal contingents and components of the structures of the primordial egg, resulting from the meeting of an ovum originating from a human female ovary and a spermatozoon originating from a testicle of a human male.

It should be noted, remembering only as a quote, as described by Charon (1977, p. 49), the specific processes that occur during the formation of the human egg: singular “choices” happen, permeating the forge of the hereditary structure of the new gestated being; when then,

different chromosomal selections coming from the maternal grandfather, as well as from the paternal grandfather, are “elected” to form the egg cell that will give rise to the new being. Remembering, too, that a similar process of singular choices occurs in the forging of the fertilizing spermatozoon. Alongside this spectacle of singularities, nature, tireless in creativity, “deliberates” on which sperm, among the thousands, if not millions of “candidates”, will be elected to fertilize the only egg and make a new human being happen! What’s more, when the egg cell is forged as much as the sperm cell is forged, the future generative cells of the future human being will have only 23 chromosomes in their composition, not the 46 that all other cells normally carry. Each egg will carry only one X chromosome and the sperm will carry only one X or one Y chromosome.

Undeniably, nature does not support copies!

It is essential to recognize that every being conceived is unique, unprecedented!

We are and will always be unique beings!

In addition to the shortcomings, we are also unprecedented in that we bring together inheritances from hundreds of thousands, if not millions or billions of ancestors, as well as the archaic “mnemonic images” that have been transmitted to us over these countless centuries, millennia or billions of years; however, common legacies will be present in all of us, even knowing that they are the result of unprecedented combinations!

These archaic heritages that we carry, of mineral, vegetable and animal ancestral origin, and of which we are human expressions, have been certainly forged in this way, sources of what Jung called our archetypal contingent (JUNG, 1989, par. 954). This primitive material, archaic by nature, stems from ancestors from a time when there was no language, but which, somehow, archived images and emotions. According to Teilhard de Chardin (1997) we are bearers of heritage patterns of mineral, plant and animal consciousness, for we are a “product” of these

billions of years, we are and carry the memory of prehistoric times.

Myths, also as expressions of our primordial archetypal inheritances, possibly portray our “memories”, our ancestral history, which are updated in the countless imagos we carry, and which are a result of experiences embedded in our unconscious.

What are imagos?

According to Jung (1989, par. 944), we archive, in our psyche, the memory of all the images arising from pleasant or unpleasant, loving or impactful, simple or frightening, warm or terrifying affective experiences and many other representations and meanings. These images, representations and emotional meanings are archived as mnemonic realities deposited in our specific archetypal locus, inherited over billions of years, and which are encysted in our unconscious (2011, § 197, vol 17). These loci, in my opinion, are specific to store experiences that are also specific and exclusive of a good mother, terrible mother, good father, terrible father, brother, friend, lover, traitor, master, enemy, that is, countless locus consistent with the countless felt, suffered, experienced realities, with all the beings and realities with which we had contacts and interactions (human and non-human), with all the phenomena we experience (pleasure, well-being, suffering, pain, threats, illnesses, feelings, etc.) throughout Life. These loci, expressions of archetypal instances, configure sources of pleasure when evoked or a source of suffering, anguish, threat, etc., even when we are unaware of their origins and/or triggering factors.

And, these mnemonic images, conscious or not, called by Jung as imagos, manifest themselves in dreams, in spontaneous drawings, in faulty acts, in literary texts, in fairy tales, in relational clashes and, explicitly, in myths.

I attribute to them the characteristics of doubles for constituting themselves, because, as archetypal locus, when evoked, they present themselves to the psyche as similar profiles of

the mother, friend, father, traitor, abandoner, that is, an archived double of countless pleasant experiences or unpleasant experiences felt throughout existence. It must always be stressed that the imagos are imagery doubles of people or situations suffered, loved or hated, desired or execrated, admired or abhorred, divine or demonic, dark or enlightened! However, these imagos, which populate all of us, are doubles and not people we love or hate; they are archived images, components of our experiences and memories! They are creations of the psyche itself and of archetypal legacies, resulting from experiences and clashes between oneself and the world!

The mythical doubles or imagos!

In my understanding mythical doubles or imagos represent profoundly interesting symbolic realities, because they portray phenomena always populated by the demand that these imagos be incorporated, or better, be recognized as parts or instances belonging to the nature of the creature that expresses them. What’s more, by being recognized as doubles or imagoes of oneself, they demand to be incorporated into the field of consciousness, as manifestations of one’s own identity. The mythical moment closes when the incorporation of the double (or the imago) takes place.

In Greek myth, one of the most significant expressions of a divine entity, demanding the integration of its double or its imago, we find in the mythical account of the goddess Athena, when the first court of Juri was instituted (ALVARENGA, 2012). This mythical theme was masterfully described in the *Oresteia* trilogy, by Aeschylus (ÉSQUILO, 1991), more explicitly in the third play “The Eumenides”. This is a solemn moment because it portrays the goddess Athena using her great persuasive endowment to convince the Erinyes to remain in the city, that is, symbolically in the field of conscience (ALVARENGA, 2012), without which Justice would not be able to be performed satisfactorily. Certain-

ly, the greatest mythical symbol of Justice, Athena, would only be completely updated if she were “incorporated” of her doubles, or her imagos, her Erinyes, in the field of consciousness (ALVARENGA, 2012).

On the other hand, Athena, as the goddess who protects heroes, depends on the intercession of Perseus to incorporate her double Medusa. According to the myth (BRANDÃO, 1987, p. 73-89) Medusa was a priestess of the temple of the goddess, that is, symbolically a hypostasis of Athena. Medusa would have been lovingly harassed by Poseidon and, yielding to the charms of the divine, lay down with him in the temple of the goddess. Before that, Athena, taken by fury, turned her priestess’s hair into serpents and her face into a horrible countenance with a look capable of turning all who looked at her into stone, meeting her eyes with hers. Symbolically, Medusa represents one of Athena’s doubles or imagoes, an expression of the goddess’ anger or resentment, expressed in several other mythologems of her.

The demand for the images to be integrated stems from the condition that we have for these characters, images of our psyche, feelings of love and hate, anger and continence, acceptance and revenge, admiration and repudiation. And, once incorporated, they will cease to be shadow instances, as well as strongholds of memories of characters, which I called enlightened ones, to become and integrate consciousness as an assumed expression of the totality that each one of us needs to be. And so, and only so, when all “doubles” cease to be imagos and become embodied as attributes of the creature, the greater Self, the process of individuation takes place.

Our worst and our best imagos

It is my understanding that the worst, or most harmful, of our imagos are a result of traumatic affective experiences, while our best imagos are a result of creative, pleasant, affectionate affective experiences that we have with all the people and situations that permeate our lives.

- a. With a bad mother and/or with all the people and situations that were felt as sources of helplessness, loneliness, sadness, lack, difficulties in expressing affection, being continent, welcoming, we forge dark images.
- b. Experiences with the good mother and/or with all the people and situations that permeated our lives as sources of welcome, love, warmth, salute, lap, hug, affection and that the Ego identifies as the good mother, we forge enlightened images.
- c. The greater I (or Self) demands awareness of how much the archetypal predispositions mobilized by terrible or pleasant experiences managed to update themselves as imagos of the self, starting to occupy spaces and make the Ego conduct itself by the values of the incorporated imagos, who are not the Self, but my imagos acting autonomously. Both the enlightened or good imago and the unpleasant, dark one will need to be evaluated and, according to a reflexive elaboration process, transformed into I am (or am not) by choice this imago. That is, stop being the product of a good father/mother or a terrible father/mother to become an individual. Choosing oneself in this way implies assuming oneself through straight action.

The countless (double) imagos of each one of us!

As I see it, the countless imagos that we carry result from experiences in which primordial archetypal structures were triggered by pleasant emotional mobilizations or those that caused suffering. The child in the lap of the mother (or surrogate) welcomed in a continent as if it were a “reconfigured womb” (ALVARENGA, 2020) certainly experiences feelings of protection, welcome, lull, well-being, protected. The re-edition of these experiences, plus affection, breastfeeding, massages and many other demonstrations of loving care, should contribute to the forging

of mental images of the “good mother”. On the other hand, when the relationship between the mother (or surrogate) is permeated by threats, painful physical aggression and many other demonstrations of repudiation, rejection and/or abandonment, these attitudes also contribute to the forging of an imago, or doubles of the “terrible mother” in the psyche of those who experienced suffering.

And thus, the forging of subjective images, pleasant or unpleasant, is made; and all creatures are peopled with images of father, mother, brothers, friends, teachers, competitors, police, neighbors, strangers, intimidators and aggressive people; abusers and violent, corrupt and persecuting, merciful and unhappy, sarcastic and so many other faces of doubles or imagoes that inhabit us.

And, while we are not aware of the reality of these imagos or these doubles, we will act as if we were, without realizing that we act in this way as a result of our own imagos, which are “creatures” of our psyche, conscious or not. When these imagos remain, only as members of our shadow, many times we project onto the other the responsibility for triggering unusual behaviors in us. Making the other responsible for the behavior of one’s own shadow (I imagine that it is also an instance of oneself and of which one is not aware), exempting us from responsibility. But, in the depths of each one, an instance of himself knows that he is part of himself acting. And so, people become authoritarian or submissive, aggressive or offended, miserable, guilty, depending on the conjunction forged by the partnership with concrete others and symbolic others, and who are our imagos.

Only when we can understand how much our symbolic others (our imagos) are really responsible for many of our attitudes and actions; only when we can pay attention to how much our attitudes result from the interaction of our imagos with concrete others, without our Egos realizing that they are under the demands of these interactions; only then will we

be able to understand the magnitude of the importance of dedicating ourselves to the reflective process, explained in the Bhagavad Gita, which symbolically portrays the imperative of carrying out the combat, that is, to incorporate myself from all my doubles, my dark imagos as much as from the lit!

This is the biggest war we need to face!

The Bhagavad Gita and the Symbolic Embodiment of Dark and Light Imagos

When Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita text, insists that Arjuna lead the war against the Kauravas, who are his relatives, as well as among them his own mother, uncle, aunt, cousins, friends, masters to whom he owes his knowledge and techniques of struggles, it seems to me that the grandiosity of the text is fundamentally found in the symbolic reading of the many struggles that demand to be waged with all the dark imagos and with the enlightened ones so that they become instances of the individuality itself, whose unique challenge to be elaborated is purposefully part of the analysis process.

The symbolic reading of the Bhagavad Gita as a process of elaboration of dark realities that inhabit and confuse us, also led me to pay attention to how much the imagos or doubles of all the others, friends, masters, examples of virtues, present in all of us, as if they were others, are in reality our instances; so that each one of us really becomes individuated, without splits, without deposits in the other, without schizoid dismemberments, without dissociations, it is fundamental that they are, symbolically, killed so that they are reborn in us, transforming themselves into the totality of everything we live, suffer, we despise, we envy, we desire, we admire, we hate, we love! That is, the totality of who I AM!

The incorporation of dark imagos as well as the incorporation of enlightened imagos is a huge war, a maddening challenge, a work of years of analysis, a mythical confrontation, the challenge of Life!

Krishna as manifestation of wisdom intentional unconscious

Von Franz (2011), in his text *Dreams* says: “It seems that there is a superior intelligence in us that we could call an inner guide or divine center that produces dreams, whose objective seems to make the individual’s life the best possible”. Making use of his words and fully agreeing with them, it seems to me that the proposition of a superior intelligence qualified by Von Franz as an inner guide or divine center, I submit that: this divine manifestation makes itself explicit in many other human settings, in addition to dreams, or those of a psychic nature such as intuitions, insights, as well as in texts considered sacred, such as the presence of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In chapter III, item 43 of the *Bhagavad Gita* text (VYASA, 2012) we find the following quote, followed by Rhoden’s observation:

43 – Once you have known the Supreme Self, overcome the senses, the mind and the emotions, by the power of who I AM. Defeat your enemies, who, in various forms, present themselves to you.

23. In these last words, the symbolic meaning of the struggle that Arjuna is

facing appears clearly: the enemies who have usurped the throne of the soul are the senses, the mind and the emotions, which must be overcome so that the prince Spirit (soul) can occupy the throne which belongs to him, and to proclaim the kingdom of God...

Undeniably, both Krishna’s quote: “Defeat your enemies, who, in various forms, present themselves to you”, and the symbolic amplifications proposed by Rhoden are explicit in presenting the psyche’s imagos as dark realities that, imperiously, demand by integrating the instance of the Higher Self or Self. However, at no time is he explicitly concerned with the need for the enlightened imagos (and not just the dark ones) to also undergo the same process, without which there is no way to experience individuation!

Krishna is the manifestation of the sacred that we find related in the most varied expressions of the “divine” reality as Von Franz speaks, quoted above, and that I understand as the wisdom of the unconscious present in Arjuna’s individuation process. ■

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Resumo

Correlações simbólicas entre o Bhagavad Gita e o processo de individuação

O artigo propõe uma correlação simbólica entre o texto do Bhagavad Gita e o processo de individuação proposto por Jung. Interpreta a guerra entre os guerreiros dos Pândavas e dos Káuravas como um processo simbólico, em função do qual, Arjuna

(personagem líder dos Pândavas) poderá incorporar, em sua psique, os conteúdos, simbolicamente representados e depositados no grupo dos Káuravas, sejam as características sombrias, defensivas, bem como as criativas ou iluminadas. ■

Palavras-chave: Bhagavad Gita, processo de individuação, imagens sombrias e iluminadas

Resumen

Correlaciones Simbólicas entre el Bhagavad Gita y el Proceso de Individuación

El artículo propone una correlación simbólica entre el texto del Bhagavad Gita y el proceso de individuación propuesto por Jung. Interpreta la guerra entre los guerreros de los Pándavas y de los Káuravas como un proceso simbólico, en función del

cuál, Arjuna (personaje líder de los Pándavas) podrá incorporar en su psique los contenidos, simbólicamente representados y depositados en el grupo de los Káuravas, sean las características oscuras, defensivas, así como las creativas o iluminadas. ■

Palabras clave: Bhagavad Gita, proceso de individuación, imágenes sombrías e iluminadas

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