

Aesthetics of Intimacy – What, why, and how: A metalab

Rema Kumar, Trustee, Aastha Foundation

Bhoomi College, 40 Sarjapur Road, Off Dodakannelli, Bengaluru 560035

Neharika Vohra, Facilitator, Aastha Foundation

Indian Institute of Management, Vastrapur, Ahmedabad 380 015

Brief profile:

Rema Kumar is currently Director, Bhoomi College, Bengaluru overseeing programmes on Holistic Education and Science and Management for Sustainable Living. She was earlier the Director of Prakriya, Green Wisdom School, Bengaluru. She has been facilitating Process Work programmes since 2003 and was the Executive Director, Governing Council of Aastha from 2013 to 2017.

Neharika Vohra is currently Professor of Organizational Behaviour at IIM Ahmedabad. She holds a PhD in Psychology and has been working as a faculty of OB since 1995. She has been exposed to process work since 2008. She has been part of Aastha since 2010.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge Ashutosh Bhuptakar and Minaxi Mathur for their comments on the versions of this paper and all the participants of the metalab for writing their reflections.

Aesthetics of Intimacy – What, why, and how: A metalab

Abstract

A metalab on the theme of '*Aesthetics of Intimacy*' under the auspices of Aastha Foundation for Human Learning and Growth held in March 2018 is described. A metalab is a process lab for people who have either completed internship in process work or have completed at least two phases of internship. The methodology comprises both interpersonal and intrapersonal exploration in the phenomenological mode and uncovering the conceptual basis of the theme.

The conceptual framework for intimacy was based on the cognitive and emotive dimensions of personal, social and cultural meanings of intimacy, sexuality and gender relations. These were explored using a mix of personal sharing, with the help of mythology, symbols, films and art forms like dance. Participants were invited to look at the whole journey of life from a perspective of intimacy. During the course of the five day metalab, participants revisited troublesome memories and also traversed the domain of human desire, fantasies, fears, hopes and dreams. The exploration of intimacy got participants in touch with the primal energy that lead to a feeling of rejuvenation.

The importance of the theme, conceptual basis of intimacy, design of the program, and responses of the participants is described in the paper.

Aesthetics of Intimacy - Why, What and How: A Metalab

Introduction

Process labs are marked by a lot of good feeling and euphoria towards the end. The lines from an old Hindi song could not apply better-“*kal tak jo anjane they janmon key meet hain*”. Both as a participant and a facilitator in a process lab we have all marvelled and wondered at the warmth that exudes from the participants at the end of the program. Even long standing couples or family members would envy the quality of interpersonal relationships that are formed after such a short interaction. One of the cornerstones of the emergence of such friendship is possibly the experience of emotional intimacy that participants feel during the course of the process lab.

Yet in the times we live, with an abundance of resources and technology we have made it possible to live alone. We can often take breaks and be by ourselves or we can live completely isolated. Safety need not be found in friends and family, alarms and remote sensing and connections to call rooms can make us physically safe. Owing to hectic schedules couples live together as strangers during weekdays. Children live unconnected to other siblings and parents within homes. Strangers and friends living far away seem to be people we are connecting with on an hourly basis. And these are people who can disconnect anytime they wish to and can put on any persona that they feel appropriate, giving the other infinite choices to do the same. Emotions need not be expressed and dealt with. Such interactions though rich in the number of transactions are bereft of closeness or intimacy. The current era we are living in makes it possible for our basic physical needs and wants to be met. It also allows for some psychological needs to be met especially the need for autonomy and control but does not provide for the need for affection and intimacy. It may not be untrue to say that there is large scale deprivation of involvement at both emotional openness and physical closeness in relationships.

The metalab on *Aesthetics of Intimacy* was designed to explore some of these questions.

The invitation for the metalab on Aesthetics of Intimacy read, *"The stories we don't tell, the questions we don't ask, hold in their silent depths the flowering of maturity and the beauty of the human spirit. Unpredictable as they are, they may bring up troublesome memories or remind us of those romantic sequences. The complex domain of human desire with all its fantasies, fears, hopes and dreams need to be explored in order to retain the inner vitality and soulfulness that intimacy can elicit in our lives. Here we experience life energy in its most vital and elemental form. This is central to our experience of care, affection, attraction and love."*

By design, a metalab is an invitation to uncover, to discover the philosophy of what it is to be human. In a metalab, a particular human process in the realm of inter or intra personal world is the central theme and participants engage in discovering deeper truths about that process by diving into their inner selves. While conceptual frameworks were used and formed the base in this metalab, the explorations had the threads of personal narratives, symbolic work through art, guided experiences, films, stories from myths, evocation through verse and dance, woven together. The use of the body, the heart and the mind simultaneously, enabled touching the depths and richness of both the emotive and the imaginative realm in our quest to deeply inquire into what it is to be human.

The paper is organized around five themes that emerged from the five days of the metalab. The themes helped us understand and get in touch with our authentic experience in the realm of intimacy. The exploration of feelings of fear, anger, pathos, happiness, love etc. was explored. In a group development journey, intimacy is experienced only after a group has normed and stormed and formed iteratively with risks taken in self disclosure, offering reflections/feedback, and experiencing interpersonal understanding and trust. The formation

of groups also is taken to the level of performance both as a result of development of emotional intimacy and also experience of warmth and intimacy as a consequence. The existing literature on intimacy either focuses on theories or sexual intimacy but very little is written on the evolution of emotional intimacy in the context of groups and relationships. And, this is what we - eight participants and two facilitators undertook, a journey into exploring the nuances of aesthetics of intimacy.

The tradition of process work practised at Aastha draws from phenomenology and existentialism. “At the core of this phenomenological paradigm lies the idea that it is important to understand the view or perspective of the human subject. The phenomenological inquirer attempts to make sense of the subject's 'lifeworld' how this subject experienced particularities in her 'lifeworld', how she felt about them, and how they conditioned a set response.”(1) Through the lab the exploration for each one was to dip into her/his ways of being vis-a vis intimacy, reflect on what she has accepted as given and ‘real’ and what she needed to re-examine to free the spirit and feel alive. Also to commit to her most fundamental human need of expressing and relating freely, which a space of intimacy offers. The role of facilitators was to facilitate and enable this reflexivity, keep the focus on the macro theme while exploration of the inner selves continued for the participants, and review design elements in resonance with what was emerging in the group. The facilitators joined in with their sharing and working with themselves, while keeping the thread of exploration going.

The theme descriptions are interspersed with the description of the concept, methodology used, and also the experiences of the participants.

Intimacy is interpersonal and/or intrapersonal.

The first theme that was explored was, what is intimacy? Intimacy is about feeling very close to another person. It is about being able to be fully vulnerable and knowing that the person

will not take advantage. To be intimate is to trust fully. When we are intimate with someone we are able to share fully the experiences of the other. Being intimate is allowing the other person to see what makes one happy, sad, angry, and scared. Being intimate with the other is to be fully accepted and understood. Intimacy allows us to see the other person for who they are beyond the masks and the labels. Intimacy is when someone fully “gets you”.

Erik Erikson in his theory of psychosocial development described intimate relationships as those characterized by closeness, honesty, and love.(2) Harry Reis, a social psychologist who works in the area of social intimacy, describes intimacy as "what most people want in their social life - it's what people search for". A wildlife reserve owner in South Africa shares in his book *Elephant Whisperer* how after months of calming wild elephants who he had adopted post their being treated badly by humans, the matriarch of the herd looked at him and raised her trunk and he felt that he had been seen, acknowledged, and accepted and they shared a moment of intimacy (3).

There were discussions of what intimacy is not. Intimacy is not with self. Even though to be intimate with the other, there is need for one to be comfortable with oneself and one's own beauty and foibles. By definition one can discover oneself, own oneself, love oneself but not be intimate with oneself. Intimacy requires the other. It is an emotional exchange. Several of the participants, being highly aware of the self, found this discussion enlightening. In the beginning there was the sense that intimacy can be with the self as well. Though there are overlaps between the universes of knowing oneself and sharing self with the other, they are also distinct. Erikson postulates that the preceding step to intimacy is love and acceptance of self. As individuals accept themselves more and more their ability to open themselves to another becomes easier. *“Through the Metalab, I acknowledged loss of self-assertion and validation. As soon as I acknowledged the loss, it revealed so many wishes and fears that*

were so far hidden. Within the first hour it became clear that the journey was mine with myself. It was going to be about 'Bringing Me back to Myself'.”

However, the key question for a young adult in the psychosocial development stage is to answer - will I be loved or will I be alone? Being comfortable or uncomfortable with intimacy is impaired or helped by how we address/ resolve the above question.

A participant describes, *“I felt that my lack of INTIMACY with my own self was a huge barrier and that as we worked on creating an art work during the workshop the words that came up spontaneously were –transient, uplifting, beheading, ecstasy and flowing – all pointing towards a flow that I had stopped for myself.”*

Similarly, Meera’s love for Krishna also cannot be described as intimacy. It is not one-sided devotion. Intimacy is not complete surrender. It is not having spiritual connect with an image of the omnipresent. Intimacy calls for interpersonal reciprocation. Reis and his colleagues have developed a model of interpersonal intimacy that is dependent on iterative self-disclosure and partner responsiveness (4). One of the participants who in her personal space has been exploring spirituality later said, *“I now see that to be intimate is human and it is about sharing oneself with the other. Intimacy does not detract me from my journey on the spiritual path”*.

Learning about intimacy starts early and contributes to our approach or avoidance to it

Current perceptions of intimacy were uncovered through revisiting experiences of early childhood, relationships, experience of intimacy with the significant others in our life; our parents, siblings, and elders. We made explicit our experience/perception of the relationship between our parents in public and private. We reflected on how the pushes and pulls of all this, impacts us in the ‘here and now.’ According to Erikson, one’s early experience (or absence) of intimacy with parents, teachers, romantic relationships, and deep friendships help resolve the question in the positive (or negative). As one participant described *“while I was*

growing up, my experience with intimacy had been limited. Both my mother and father were very dedicated and loving parents but they were extremely non-physical in the demonstration of their love. Thus I grew up in a home that was very conservative in matters of the heart and relationships.”

Adults scolded by intimate encounters also teach their growing children to avoid intimacy. Also there is a belief that emotional intimacy has to be or will be accompanied with physical intimacy and thus most adults will warn growing children to avoid physical contact with others and in the process children both consciously and unconsciously grow to be non-trusting of others. Another participant noted, *“I also realised that to contain myself has become my habit over the years in response to the expectations from outside. While exploring my parent’s relationship, I was in touch with how I do not own aspects of my mother in me and disown aspects of my father. The wholeness of womanhood seemed to have been left too long back and too far away.”*

The link between the memories of display of intimacy among parents and the individual’s beliefs about intimacy were uncanny. An experience during childhood that remains unexamined becomes a blind belief. The exploration helped the participants to examine and question their assumptions and beliefs around intimacy. The facilitators in addition to sharing insights from their lives and experiences also guided the group to healing of the inner child. One participant remembered, *“It was good to put to rest some of the voices that kept telling me that it was wrong to feel attracted; even though I know cognitively that it is not wrong.”*

In addition we got in touch with and enacted three incidents from our adolescent years around sexuality and intimacy. For many of us there was shame attached to growing up. We were told to hide signs in our physical body of becoming adults. Any discussion or celebration of it was secretive and when found out lead to censorship.

One of the reasons why intimacy is seen as the forbidden fruit is because it is often thought to be akin to sexual intimacy. Unlike sexual intimacy which is physical, emotional intimacy is psychological. It is possible that sexual intimacy follows emotional intimacy but not necessarily. Being sexually intimate need not be accompanied with or be a result of emotional intimacy. Interpersonal intimacy is mutual experience of closeness and comfort with each other. Interpersonal intimacy may lead to want physical contact which may not always be sexual. One participant said, *“It opened up my understanding of intimacy, physical intimacy in particular. I shed inhibition in talking about it and exploring it further. The reflections I received ... have made me less judgmental of myself.”*

Watching the documentary *Venus Uncovered* through the lens of intimacy gave room and food for thought and reflection; of how the sacred and divine element of sensuality and sexuality has over time tended to be viewed through the lens of profanity. One significant insight that the group got in touch with after watching the film was to look at *desire as our ally and not as our undoing*.

Our fear for intimacy may also be traced to the fact that intimacy involves putting our guards down. As humans we are keyed to avoid pain. Any painful/negative experience takes up more cognitive space in our minds. We thus tend to focus more on the downsides of intimacy than the upsides. Downsides of being open and allowing closeness (being intimate) is making oneself vulnerable - what if the other hurts, what if the other judges negatively, what if the other takes advantage, what if the other rejects, what if we become dependent on the other. Upsides of intimacy include having the opportunity to enhance the feeling of being alive, becoming aware of the ability to care unselfishly for the other, to experience tenderness in oneself, to be able to relax at a deeper level because there is another who is interested in you, to be able to fulfil a deeply embedded need to be seen by another and accepted unconditionally.

Explorations in the lab revealed the irrationality of the fear as one participant said, *“During this exploration I realised that I was dwelling only on the aspect of disappointment and rejection vis-a-vis my sibling and therefore experiencing loss of intimacy...”* There is a yin and yang of intimacy - allowing “someone in” is making one open to violation and/or making one open to being held fully by another. One participant wrote, *“I also discovered that we can ‘make desire our ally and not our undoing’ and in that intimacy as a ‘sumptuous togetherness’ can be absolutely delightful – something I crave for too, however, whether I would make that my strength or my undoing was in my hands and I chose to rise, not fall, in my search of more love, more intimacy and more passion.”*

As part of growing up we have many joyous experiences of intimacy and a few painful instances as well. However, quite often it is the painful instances that we remember most and we create mechanisms to save ourselves from the possible consequences. And in this attempt we make ourselves closed to the possibility of the positive aspects of intimacy. In effect we throw the “baby with the bathwater”. *“By withholding my emotions I had completely missed out on seeing myself as a perpetrator. The revelation was potent with possibilities of how and what I could do to change things”.*

The fear and discomfort with intimacy (of significant adults in our lives), society’s debasing of intimacy (example, *Venus Uncovered*), our own experiences held back from teenage years lead to residual unexamined feelings which play out in our expression in our relationships. The exercises in the metalab helped uncover our own and also made us become aware of the similarity of residues held by others and collectively cognize the need to let go of some of the residues. One participant strikingly puts it - *“In my early childhood I sensed equality in relationships, respect and dignity between men and women at home between my great grandparents, grandparents and my parents. Whereas I picked up inequality and disrespect between genders in the surroundings outside of home. As a result of an over*

protective and an over normative ambience, even though women were respected and girls were precious, women's sexuality was hidden, held in shame."

We also explored the universes of pathos of intimacy - loss, rejection, betrayal and violation. Through the discussion the group got in touch with dissipation of energy and vitality as they engaged with these universes. This helped the group look at the two sides of any phenomenon. We reflected on the truth that there are no guarantees in life and just because one makes an investment or takes a risk it will pay off is a false tenet to hold on to. *"The understanding of the intimacy-pathos, the push and pull, relooking at the early experiences that shaped this dynamics was amazing, exciting and awe-inspiring".*

The revisiting of the negatives also brought starkly to light for us that we had all experienced highs and lows of intimacy. The negative was so powerful that it dampened the energy of the group for the whole evening despite the joy the group had felt in the previous two and a half days. We transitioned to discussing the power of the negative and to sift through its overpowering nature and consciously focus on the positives of intimacy. It also helped us to get in touch with the resilience of human beings. *"Intimacy is no longer a bad word, it encapsulates life in its myriad hues and the bounties that being fearless can bring. As I 'Unselfed the Self' the adventure expanded and the more I touched base with my angst, my immense loneliness and my need for more love, I also got in touch with my own resilience – a trait that was part of me but had never been acknowledged".*

The yo-yo of emotions while being intimate; Is it worth it?

One participant shared, "I vicariously experienced the highs and lows of intimacy that my friends went through. Their experiences also scared me off intimacy; I believed I was better of being a quiet rational person. The belief I carry about myself is that I can be caring, nurturing, loving but not really intimate".

Intimacy is accompanied with a rich palette of emotions. Emotional intimacy requires openness, trust and emotional maturity. The lack of emotional maturity comes in the way of building intimacy. Many adults are emotionally unaware, that is they are unable to feel what they feel in real time. They are either gripped by the emotion and feel stupid because of how the emotion got expressed (outbursts), or are gripped with thoughts about the emotion thus not responding to the situation but to the story of the situation that they have built in their mind. Emotional maturity means acceptance of my or others' emotions without trying to hide it, displace it, ignore it, or control it. It means allowing oneself to fully feel the feeling. Emotional maturity is expressing ones emotions such that it helps to maximize the relationship and responding to others' emotions without discounting self and/or the other. Emotions may seem scary, may sometimes make us look stupid but could we live a life in our head and with our thoughts only? Learning to feel emotions and making a choice to express them maybe a better choice than what we may have unconsciously internalized about emotions. The metalab helped each participant inhabit and work with the personal internal emotional world accompanied by intimacy.

“*Notebook*” a Hollywood movie that we watched together during the lab had several interpretations. The fact that the mother in the movie finally relents and shares the letters that the daughter's lover had written each day to her daughter; the fact that at the end it is the expression of one's desire which opens up the possibility of understanding; the revelation that status or security are fine but what does it take to live a life of fulfilment, was something the participants reflected upon.

One participant mentioned, “*Looking at life with a romanticized vision had allowed me to be hopeful but I had still refrained from the actual romance. I realized if a delusional romance could bring optimism and hope, imagine what a real truly passionate engagement and*

romance with life could unfold. The possibilities were tremendous, the openings plenty, paths diverse”.

Another wrote, “I gnaw a lot less at myself for expressing sensitivity, sensuality and sexuality. As soon as I acknowledged and owned up the underlying intent, I breathed so much easier and my experience of intimacy became joyous.”

Intimacy is expressed in multiple ways

We explored the different universes of intimacy and love - parent, friend, spouse, mentor and lover. Through tuning into what it is to experience intimacy and love in each universe and sharing our personal location in our life the many shades of intimacy were explored and experienced. Through this exploration we were able to feel into the meanings given and discover the layers, the knots and the pressure points which colour and influence our experience of intimacy. The twin realization that intimacy is experienced in various universes and it finds its expression in verbal and non verbal ways was meaningful in taking the understanding of intimacy to a deeper level-

“It was so wonderful exploring these 5 universes (Mentor, Friend, Parent, Spouse, Lover), This made me look at intimacy through a different filter. Looking at the intimate relations with mentor, friend and parent was new. And as we explored this it was wonderful to see how intimacy gets translated/ expressed in various ways.”

The discussion on stages of intimacy included - I like you (“*Sarputa*”); I feel safe with you (“*Samipta*”); I want something that you have (“*Salokta*”); I in you and you in me are inseparable (“*Sayujyata*”). Interpersonal relationships deepen with emotional intimacy and can be expressed with verbal and non-verbal communication. It develops through conversations and spending time with each other. The time spent talking and slowly leading to disclosure of the deepest self which in turn triggers a similar response from the other builds intimacy.

Sharing oneself authentically with another allows emotional intimacy to develop. The intensity of emotional intimacy is not constant over time and relationships. In the beginning of an intimate relationship there is trepidation but over repeated encounters the feelings of anxiety diminish as the positives of intimacy start to be experienced. The choice of words, the congruent expression of feelings in the moment builds trust and deeper intimacy. The group experienced this in their engagement with each other and the free flow that gradually emerged over informal sessions.

To aid deeper exploration at the subconscious level how each one of us held intimacy we were invited to express intimacy through drawings and symbols. The symbolic work, the sharing that followed and reflections opened up more possibilities to engage with our beliefs and led us to untouched and unexplored facets within ourselves.

“My artwork revealed my deeply held need to relook at my definitiveness and the sense of security it gives me, to explore the nebulous world of vulnerabilities. Somehow I feel ready to engage with it and that is energising!”

Joseph Campbell, had emphasized, “mythological images are the images by which consciousness is put in touch with the unconsciousness” (5). Exploring intimacy through the filters of Indian mythology was an interesting and innovative element of the design. Through three stories from Rigveda and Mahabharata; Arjuna and Ulupi, Agastaya and Lopamudra, and Yama and Yami, we explored more subtleties in intimate relations and the complexity that exists. The fact that these three stories are layered allowed for intense discussions and multiple and differing perspectives. Questioning of norms by the protagonists in the myths led to further questions about the norm of appropriateness in intimacy. The engagement with the symbolic in the form of drawings, symbols, stories lead to moments of deep reflectivity, and deep dive into the truths we hold for ourselves, and the norms which needed to be re examined.

Another innovative element of exploration was the experience of the *Shringara rasa* through a performance by one of the participants (on the request of the facilitators). Emotions are called *Rasa* in Sanskrit which means essence, nectar or flavour; something that has to be savoured, enjoyed and which touches a chord deep within. The *Navarasa* are intrinsic to Indian Art forms be it music, dance, poetry, theatre or sculpture “and were (and are) the strength of character of Indian aesthetics ever since they were symbolized in the *Natyasastra* (written sometime in 200 BC-300 AD)”. (6)

The performance was through the finely nuanced story telling tradition of *Mohiniattam*. Through the *nayika*'s tale of pining and yearning to be one with her beloved and experiencing the pain of unfulfilled desire we touched and embraced the Mohini, the enchantress within us. The actual experiencing of *Shringara rasa* which is love/beauty in all its expansiveness was stirring. It helped participants be in touch with transformative/ healing power of the emotion and possibilities thus held in deep intimacy.

A participant wrote a couplet stirred by the performance

Magical Mohini

You beckon, you invite, you inspire, you stir

To touch and live out my unique and ordinary story

When with you feel a resonance, a connect inexplicable

A kinship, a bond indefinable

Play on in my life!

Intimacy is also accompanied with the experience of sensuality - which is the way in which we are intimate with our own feeling selves. Sensuality is not to be confused with sexuality. “Sensuality is the moment to moment relish of who we are and our willingness to show ourselves to this world” (definition shared by Minaxi who did not know the source). Intimacy arouses sensuality in self which in turn arouses sensuality for the other. Two sensual persons

create magic by being authentic and alive. The group explored the universe of sensuality through a delightful exercise which required each participant to feel into this universe through any medium they chose and share what and how they experienced sensuality.

One such expression was -

□□□□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□ □□□□ □□□□
 □□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□
 □□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□ □□□□□□□□ □□ □□□□□□ □□
 □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□ □□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□
 □□□□ □□□ □□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□ □□□□□ □□
 □□□□ □□ □□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□ □□
 □□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□□□□□ □□□ □□ □□□□ □□ □□□□ □□
 □□□ □□□ □□ □□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□ □□ □□□□ □□□□ □□

The emergence of wholeness and joyfulness in the experience of intimacy

Erwin Raphael McManus in his book *Soul Cravings*, writes, "we are most alive when we find it (intimacy and love), most devastated when we lose it, most empty when we give up on it, most inhuman when we betray it, and most passionate when we pursue it." (7). One of the themes that emerged was what the experience of intimacy does to the human being. The experience of intimacy helps retrieve our wholeness and joyfulness which in turn leads to appreciation of the beauty around us. It puts us in touch with some larger, deeper, richer whole which goes beyond our limitations or limitedness and brings in new perspectives. It is to have a sense of something beyond, something more. As one participant put it, "*throughout the span of the metalab, I was in touch with the elements of mystery and sacred ingrained in intimacy.*"

In addition to being taught and cajoled and warned against intimacy directly and indirectly in our early years we are lead to believe that intimacy is something that just

happens to us. Just like we are erroneously told to believe that love cannot be found, love has to find us, we possibly falsely assume that intimacy cannot be sought or built over time it has to simply happen. The possibility of intimacy growing as one invests in oneself and the other became apparent as the lab progressed and the participants reflected on it. One participant eloquently stated, *“as the days of the Metalab progressed, I slowly moved to what I hoped to receive from others. It also made visible what I bring to a relationship. I expect authenticity from another like I bring it to them. It can be overwhelming and an uneasy process for another. I just needed to recognize that!”* Another wrote, *“the distance and the distinction between ‘I need’ that comes from self belief and affirmation vs ‘I am needy’ seemed to be filling up as I owned up my need to myself.”*

In process labs one has often noticed when the group becomes open, feels safe, and accepting, and able to express emotions without drama and learn to be empathetic to others emotional intimacy develops in the group. The metalab provided the opportunity to explore the same through conscious exploration with awareness. *“The sharing of our sense of wonder and the slow peeling of deeply buried layers of deadness...”* and showed in the resolve participants had even three months later, *“I wish and hope to continue ... the enormous gift of Faith that I received from the Metalab”*.

The Ubuntu tribe of Africa have a greeting which is an invocation spoken in two parts. One part is *Sikhona*, which means “I am here to be seen”; and the other part is *Sawubona*, which means “I see you.”(8). Intimacy is about seeing and understanding a person as the person is in all her/his complexity and not holding a simplified, static image of them. It is about respecting the others’ dynamism. The group lived out a precious space of intimacy during the metalab in ‘willing to be seen and seeing the other’!

The co-anchors of the metalab, Minaxi Mathur and Ashutosh Bhupatkar, summed the metalab in the following verse-

Moving closer to ourselves and each other

Fears faced inhibitions fell

Touched the deep sense of it all

Song broke out with a spring in the step

Hope in the eyes, arms in arms

Slowly the fragrance filled the air.

Minaxi in her sensual, expansive, and fully feeling being, and Ashutosh in his witty, poetic, cognitive and reserved ways, and both with their raw and alive selves complimented each other beautifully as facilitators. The differences of the facilitators helped show that there is no one way of being and doing and working with deep difficult and sensitive themes such as intimacy.

Conclusion

As process workers it is meaningful and enriching to have engaged with intimacy at the personal level. It enables co-creating spaces where mutual trust, understanding and acceptance are deeply experienced. Additionally it allows greater insight and ease of facilitating those struggling with intimacy in a group. Exploration of self during process work is furthered with interventions made at the group level and many times there may be covert unconscious stuckness because of intimacy felt but repelled by some members of the group or because of pushes/pulls felt for wanting to be close to somebody and/or shame felt because of the need for intimacy. We believe that when process workers themselves engage deeply with intimacy they would be able to offer more of their raw, alive selves, their humanness and be more nimble in helping the group work with it in enriching ways. Also at a meta level when a group of people work together on difficult but very basic human issues it changes something at the collective unconscious level. Lifting the misconceptions, myths, taboo and shame

around intimacy, we hope, will make human beings free to express and liberate themselves and experience, "*intimacy as sumptuous togetherness...*".

NOTES

Work that was created by the participants during the lab and reflection written by participants three months after the lab has been used to substantiate the themes with the permission of the participants.

References

- (1) https://ebrary.net/2079/sociology/key_ideas_perspectives_phenomenology
- (2) McLeod, S. A. (2018, May 03). *Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development*. Retrieved from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html> on August 24, 2018.
- (3) Anthony Lawrence and Graham Spence (2010) *Elephant whisperer: Learning about life loyalty and freedom from a remarkable herd of elephants*. Pan Books, London UK.
- (4) Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 367- 389). Chichester, England: Wiley.
- (5) Campbell, J. (2008). *Mythology and Personal Transformation*. Read How You Want Series.
- (6) <https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/9rasas-as-9-emotions-in-human-beings>
<http://drvidyahattangadi.com/the-navrasa-of-life/>
- (7) McManus, R. E. (2006). *Soul Cravings: An exploration of the human spirit*. Quote Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/43346-soul-cravings> on August 21, 2018
- (8) Holden, R (2011). I see you. Retrieved from 2018<https://www.healyourlife.com/i-see-you> on August 24, 2018.