

Relatedness, Integration and Reality: An Exploration in Counsellor's Chamber

Arpita De

Abstract: *This is an autobiographical paper which intends to explore relationship in the continuously changing world through our stories of life. I tried to explore some of my childhood experiences and some stories of my life in different times. Besides, I have included the case study of a 27 year-old-girl who consulted me seeking counselling help. Her stories, her relationships with her parents, friends and others along with her suffering from depressed mood, intense anger acting out, vacillating sexual involvement with others, tendency of self-injury, anxiety, lack of concentration, indecisiveness were explored in the counselling sessions. She urgently felt the need of professional help as it was becoming increasingly difficult for her to bear it alone. In this study I have tried to analyse our journey in the counselling chamber on a step-by-step basis to find out the aetiology of her symptoms from different theoretical perspectives. It led me not only to personal environment of the person but also to some structural issues. As a counsellor besides my conceptualization of the aetiology of the symptoms I also tried to reflect on my own role as a counsellor, how the sessions contributed to enriching my insight and my praxis as a professional.*

Keywords: Relationship, relatedness, counselling, the praxis of a professional, time-space.

The Background

'Relationship', for me, is a continuously changing concept; it is like a story - a story of the term relationship. All of us have stories of our own. All of us are heroes and heroines of our stories. Integrating numerous stories, we sometimes get a big story of our life. This integration is not always possible. The story starts when I am born. I am revolved around in a time space with my relatives, significant others, friends with whom I am related or not related, acquainted and sometimes not acquainted. They are not necessarily all human beings or living things. There can be many other objects and articles with which we can get related - there are non-human creatures also who take meaningful part in our stories.

My little pet dog, my most favourite childhood acquaintance whom I generally forget in the noisy everyday life, is alive in my dream. She plays with me in my dream, I wander here and there with her. I sometimes visit my house where we used to live in our childhood days, in my dream. Our dreams jumble up or pull materials from my conscious, unconscious, present and past - symbolizes my thoughts in a different way. But I am not interested to analyse dreams and interpret them. I am only interested to talk about different materials, articles, our languages we make relationship with. They also change in course of time. Even childhood games we used to play change over time.

I was born in early 60s. I can remember some childhood games - anyone from our generation and culture may relate to them. We used to put our thumbs together on the ground and utter - RASH, KASH, SINGARA, BULBULI MASTAK - a loud chorus was heard in rhythm. We didn't even know what it meant, why we were doing it. But we felt connected, happy in an envelope of childish joyfulness. All those moments I reminisce with happiness. I found it fascinating to investigate the meaning of those words. RASH means essence. It also can be the flavour of something which gives me pleasure. KASH is not an enjoyable thing, the touch of which makes me stained. SINGARA was an alluring and attractive thing for children then. BULBULI is a small and little bird who wanders here and there. Children resemble bulbuli. The last word MASTAK means head, the brain. The meaning of the words does not really seem to be simple. We have no idea how these words originated as a game. But what I understand is that we were in a different time and social space and we are continuously moving from one time-space to another.

The word Time-Space has a subjective connotation. I conceptualize it to be bounded by a person's mental periphery of his/her relatedness. In this journey of relatedness, we have numerous things - may be our conscious and unconscious thoughts, persons around, dominant habits, different discourses, beliefs and values in the family and also in the society, different articles around us, materials from our collective unconscious too.

The difference between two time-spaces lies in the difference in their practices, cultures, tit and bits of nurturance. This can easily be understood by a person who has experienced both. The relationships are continuously changing as the parameters are changing.

Relationship is situated in a time-space. In the last three decades the exceptional advancement of technology has brought notable changes in

our life. Ultimately, with a smart phone in hand the patterns of our stories have taken a new shift altogether. The smart phones are now inseparable articles in our everyday life where social network and virtual relationships are dominant new parameters in reshaping the relationships. Children and youngsters today visit the world in a single mouse click. They play on-line games. The games we used to play in childhood are not popular now. The new generation plays smart games. The audio-visual electronic smart virtual games are capturing the market. It is now possible to visit anywhere in the world too easily, getting information of anything immediately and even to enter the world of blues instantly where may be the blue whale is waiting to grab the mind of the children and adolescents.

I myself started my life with the light of hurricane lamp. My father used to work in Forest department and I incidentally was in an environment surrounded by forest in the first 7 years of my life. My father was transferred from Dooars of Jalpaiguri district to different district towns. I studied in three schools of three district towns and ultimately went to Kolkata to complete my graduation and post-graduation. I experienced changes. We all experience change but our generation got the opportunity to witness this havoc technological change which transformed us gradually from 'no-TV' life to 'smart phone-mandatory' life.

As a counsellor I get the opportunity to come close to different individuals, different perspectives and different lifestyles. How people live in a time-space, how they move from one time-space to another, what are the dominant things/stories/articles of a particular time-space as perceived by a particular person and how relationship is a situated concept in a time-space.

In the counselling chamber I came across with a 27-year-old girl who consulted me seeking counselling help. She calls herself a professional *macha* singer. The process of counselling led me to find out not only some personal environment of the person but also some structural issues in the aetiology of her symptoms which may be situated in her time-pace.

Case Vignette

Mili (not the real name) is a 27-year-old girl from a Kolkata suburb who stays with her parents. She is currently the only surviving child of her parents. She is continuing her MA in Bengali from Rabindra Bharati University in distance mode. She is a seasonal singer (Macha singer).

It was her decision to come to a counsellor as she was feeling lonely and depressed, could not concentrate properly, and was very much anxious and in a dilemma as to whether to be involved in a permanent relation or marriage with her current boyfriend. She had trust issues not only with her boyfriend but also with herself. She gets irritated and depressed over minor things. She informed me that she used to cry a lot and at times felt like killing herself though she never tried to do so. Every morning she awakened early with depressed moods and irritating thoughts. Thoughts which disturbed her were centered on her distress from interpersonal relationships (mainly peer group and special relationship), her guilt feeling from maladjustment and past events, and her chronic anxiety from fear of abandonment, loneliness, emptiness and worthlessness. She was unable to carry out her regular practice of music (rewaz) due to lack of concentration and turbulent thoughts.

Childhood

Mili was born in a hospital in Kolkata in a lower middle-class family. Her birth order was second. Her elder brother died of Thalassemia before she was born. She perceived her mother to be very depressed and emotionally unavailable when she was a child. Now she thinks this was due to the tragic death of her elder brother. About her relationship with her mother she said: 'there was no good bonding between us, but since the last 5/6 years our relationship has improved.'

Mili's father was a driver by profession. They were not well-off at that time. They had to face scarcity of money in her early years. She could remember her mother being always sad. But their economic condition gradually improved when her father got a job in Kolkata Corporation. They shifted from a suburb on the outskirts of Kolkata to a suburb closer to the city.

She got admitted in an English medium preschool. She had an incident of abuse at that time. The son of the house owner molested her. After that incident they left that house and the locality too. She got admitted in a Bengali medium school. When she was in class II, a shameful event occurred in school. She with one of her friends was caught in a washroom where they were showing their private parts to each other. News of the incident spread throughout the school and there was a guardian's call. Mother scolded her badly but did not inform her father. Her father was

very strict and had a punishing mentality. She remembered her teachers to be very rude with her after that incident. Mili doesn't feel comfortable to face anyone from that school even now.

Mili remembers herself to be very naughty in her school days. She used to tear her own hair over a problem, be in confrontation with her mother frequently and used to throw pieces of brick to others and got guardian calls. Her father used to beat her in a closed room with tremendous rage.

When she was in class I her mother conceived but had a miscarriage. Mili made herself responsible for that. It was her birthday and she had demanded that a party be held for the event. Her mother agreed but there was an accident in an auto rickshaw in which she was travelling and ultimately she had a miscarriage. Her mother herself blamed her for the incident once. Her self-blaming for the incident still haunts her.

High-School Life

Mili got admitted in a Bengali medium Higher Secondary school in class V from where she completed her Secondary and Higher Secondary degrees. She failed in class VIII once and ultimately passed her Secondary exam and Higher Secondary examinations. She stated that she never liked studies. She was an excellent singer from her very childhood. She used to perform in stages frequently. She took music lessons from various singers who had good connections with media. She got involved in her first relation when she was in class XII. It didn't last for more than two/three months.

College Life and University

Although Mili wanted to build a career in music she got admitted in a regular college (not with music) and in the very first year she started taking alcohol. She got herself gradually involved in multiple heterosexual relationships and most of the relationships evolved from Face book contacts or acquaintances of college friends. Most of the relationships were both developed and terminated very casually. She reported a great number of different sexual partners, spoke of her promiscuity and engagement in homosexual experiences. At present she is pursuing a Master's degree in Bengali in distance mode but she doesn't love studying.

Parents and Significant Others

Her mother was mostly sad, sick and used to cry a lot. Even now her mother cries a lot and blames her husband for her problems. Mili's mother sees her own life to be a lost case. Mili also conveyed that she finds her mother too interfering sometimes. She follows her whenever Mili is on the phone with her boyfriend. She feels that her mother disturbs her privacy.

Mili's father tries to control every aspect of her life. She was always very fearful as he used to beat her badly during her childhood. At the same time her father extends his help by accompanying her everywhere she goes to enhance her music career. But he is very harsh and criticizes her for being fat and not taking her singing practice seriously. He makes sarcastic comments about her voice saying that it is not like that of Lata Mangeskar. He never utters a single word of encouragement. Often, he uses abusive and sarcastic words against her and her mother and never uses a soft tone while talking to them. She and her mother would love to visit nearby places, to dine in a restaurant but her father never allows that. They never go anywhere together for refreshment. They have no happiness in their family life.

She used to love her aunt (mother's sister) very much but could not accept her aunt's closeness with her father. When she was in college she reacted about their closeness and it stopped. Since last 4/5 years she has been finding her mother to be closer and understanding.

Professional Life

Mili is a professional Macha singer (Machas are whole night programs, organized by clubs in different localities, performed on temporarily constructed stages). Mili earns money singing in Machas in winter months. It is a thing of pride for her that she has performed as a playback singer in a movie which has not been released yet. She knows that to be successful in this line a girl has to compromise her honour. She faced many negative experiences from persons whom she never thought would behave in that manner. She admitted that although she has a tendency to get involved in multiple relationships she cannot think of using her body in her profession. Sometimes she becomes depressed and feels like killing herself. She did some self-harm but never attempted suicide. The only person who understands her is her present boyfriend. Although he doesn't like the culture

of Macha, he encourages her to continue singing and plan to tutor others in future.

Likings

Mili loves to do needle work, loves to cook and likes to take photograph of nature. She respects her *gazal* teacher very much. She informed that her teacher is also in the middle of interpersonal complications which make her sad. She also loves to travel, to shop branded materials and dine in good restaurants. In later sessions she showed me some photographs in her phone most of them were pictures of flowers her boyfriend gifted her.

The Boyfriend

Mili perceives that the only person who understands her and tries to make her calm is her current boyfriend. She always refers to him as BF. Her current boyfriend did not approach her at first and initially she did not like him. One year ago, she got acquainted with him. Three months earlier her parents pressurized her to get married. They started the marriage negotiation to her disliking. Suddenly a thought came to her mind that she could propose to her current boyfriend who seemed to have become handsome. She proposed and he accepted. She perceives now that her current boyfriend loves her very much and tries to understand her and comfort her when she gets irritated or depressed with minor things. He is the person who suggested her to see a counsellor. Sometimes she feels that she is utilizing her boyfriend as she never loved him. The thought disturbs her. At times Mili becomes suspicious about him also. She is in a dilemma now.

Her boyfriend regularly calls her in the morning, before going to office, from the office, during lunch time, while coming back from office and after coming back. She cannot stand it if he is unavailable anytime and she becomes extremely angry and distressed. At that moments she behaves very rudely with her mother and her mother also starts crying and ultimately Mili feels guilty. She said: 'I cannot make anyone happy so I should die'.

The Sessions and my understanding

In the counselling sessions we explored many events of Mili's life, her extreme feelings, her extreme disgust for relationships, her thought and

action about becoming a lesbian. Sometimes she feels that others cheated her and sometimes she feels that she is responsible for everything.

I looked at her stories from different angles. I addressed her self-blaming tendency by explaining the societal peculiarities and norms related to gender. We also explored whether it is natural for a preschool child to have curiosity about her private parts and how it is important for a child to understand the difference between a 'good touch' and a 'bad touch'.

Regarding the bad touch and sexual abuse some incidents were coming to my mind. I could relate to my story of getting bad touch. One of my cousin brothers did it to me when I was a girl of class V. I could not remember a single friend of mine who has not experienced abuse/harassment or bad touch. Most of the times those were from persons from the very close circles. We now know this fact from 'Me too' movement. We were exploring these patriarchal power norms which are almost embedded in the structure of the society. In the back of my mind I was revisiting my coping mechanism to handle that person. I never told my mother about it and took the coping of avoidance. I tried to avoid being with him alone. It became easier for me because that person lived in a different city and we used to meet occasionally. But question that haunted me is why a person 'otherwise nice' behaves like this. Now I think that I was fortunate enough to get proper emotional support in my immediate environment like my family and school which helped me to deal with my problems in a mature way. But Mili perceived her immediate environment to be hostile. There was lack of proper emotional support and guidance from her parents.

We also talked about her guilt-feeling about her mother's miscarriage. We came to an understanding that it is very natural for a child of class V to ask for her birthday celebration. The accident had nothing to do with her desire to celebrate. We also explored many incidents of her having multiple relationships and came to a view that she may be hungry for emotional support and has developed a tendency to cling to whoever is available to her. Initially she used to cry while narrating her stories, but she told me that she is feeling relieved as she has been able to tell me her stories.

Rapport was established very quickly and it seemed to me that she needed someone to listen. I felt that she has numerous psychological wounds and she needs help. I could feel her pain, anger and irritation, observe her inconsistent thinking, irrational tendency to devalue and idealize the same person and herself to the extreme. I also recognized her leaning towards emotional blackmailing by manipulative self-injuries. It seems that her

disturbed and sometimes distorted self-image makes Mili feel lonely and empty. She oscillates between good and bad. I acknowledged Mili's inability to reconcile alternatives or opposite perceptions or feelings within the self or others (splitting). This phenomenon leads to view self or others as idealized (i.e. 'all good') or devalued (i.e. 'all bad'). Her reality testing is highly vulnerable. In the back of my mind I was trying to monitor her emotional feelings towards me and my feeling towards her. A boundary was automatically evolving as we were progressing from session to session. I never defined anything tightly but only informed her that she can call me up if she becomes suicidal.

In the first three sessions we were busy exploring her distressing, repetitive and extreme thoughts which she used to experience with intense levels of anxiety, depression and anger.

Mili asked: 'Can my BF be gay?' Or, 'I have a lesbian friend, she wanted to be physically close to me but I didn't like the idea'. Such queries could be an expression of her own thought and feeling onto her boyfriend.

She said: 'All boys are alike. They are cheaters. Is he like my father only?' 'Again, she said: 'He is ideal for me, he is the best' One can see idealization and devaluation at the same time: splitting, it can also be an example of black and white thinking.

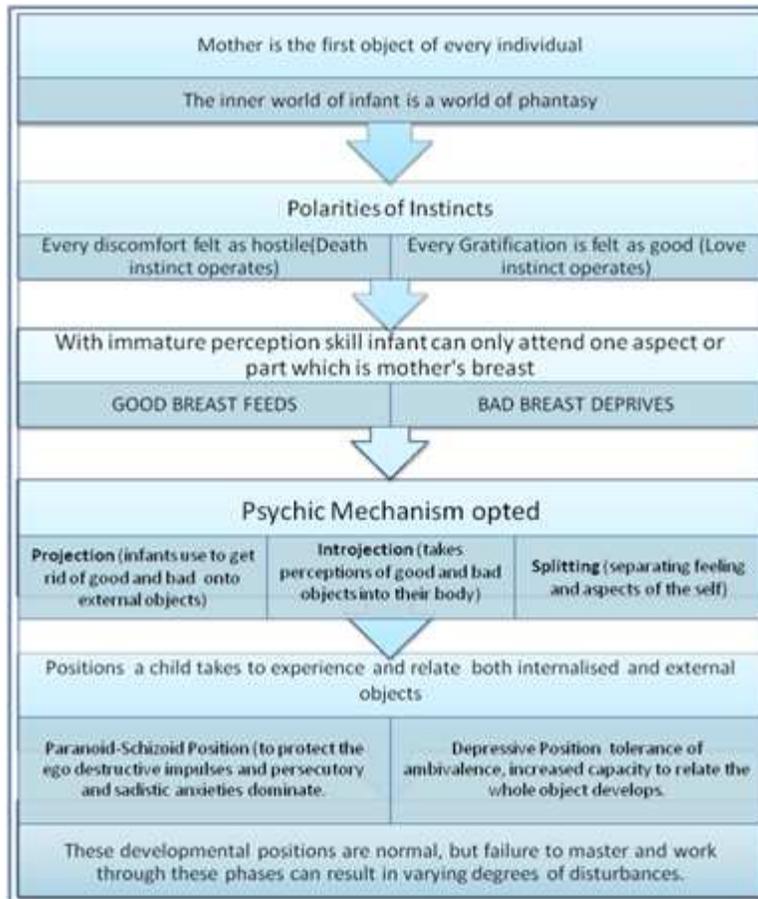
'Will I be able to make him happy? What if, there is a divorce?' This can be 'imagined abandonment'.

Mili asked: 'Will I be able to be honest with him? What will happen if I get attracted to a new boy?' 'Am I using him? I sometimes feel I don't love him.' Such conflicting thoughts may be an example of unstable and distorted self-image.

'Can I be infected with sexually transmitted diseases as I have multiple sexual involvements?' - An expression of intense fear without problem solving action.

She used to tell me 'I can't make anyone happy, I should die'. This can be an expression of a chronic feeling of emptiness.

Many theories were coming in my mind to explain Mili's case. Adlerian concept of birth order, trust vs mistrust stage put by Erik Erickson, Freudian stages of psychosexual development and mainly object relation theories born in the paradigm of Freudian analytical concepts but they differ from Freud in many ways.

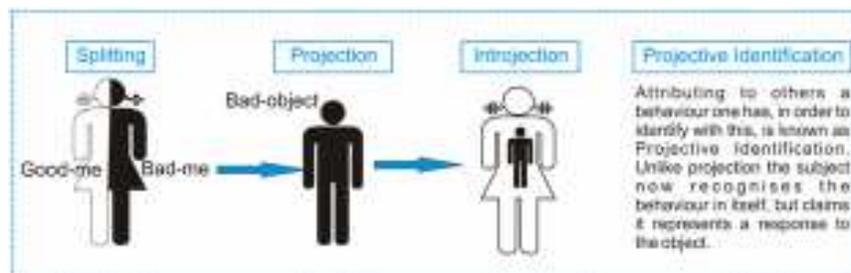


Object relation theories are essentially developmental theories that examine developmental processes and relationship prior to the oedipal period and put a greater weight to the influence of environment in the shaping of personality than other, more traditional psychoanalytic theorists.

According to Melanie Klein infants' inner world of phantasies face polarities of instincts with the cycles of gratification (love instinct) and frustration (death instinct). The breast gives or denies gratification and becomes, in the mind of the infant, either good or bad. The infant copes with the anxiety by projecting unmanageable destructive impulses onto external object. Other coping mechanisms are introjections and splitting. Introjections is opposite of projection. Here the infant phantasizes that their mother is always present inside their body. Therefore, relationships are maintained with parts of objects (e.g. breast rather than mother), and split between good and bad. Klein

mentioned about two development positions. One is Paranoid-schizoid position. It is dominated by destructive impulses, persecutory and sadistic anxieties, low tolerance of frustration, extremes emotional reactions of good and bad. Another is depressive position where recognition of the loved object as outside of the self takes place. In this position the child experiences guilt for previous aggression towards the loved object, desires to make reparation to the object for previous attack. Here ego becomes more integrated, the process of projection reduced, Depressive anxiety enables the capacity to establish and maintain a mature object relation. Tolerance of ambivalence develops. Oedipal desires intertwine with depressed anxieties as the infant struggles to integrate love and hate. Sexual impulses and phantasies emerge to repair the effects of aggression. This movement from part to whole relationship represents the movement from one position to the next.

Mili had to compete with a ghost child as her brother died before she was born. She had an emotionally unavailable mother, a strict punitive father and a history of abuse. Mili remembers her father as a cold and aggressive person who has not been changed over time. Her father used to lock her in a room and beat her for any mischief. Her mother used to report Mili's disobedience and misbehaviour to him. Mili remembers her mother to be very passive and sad. When she was in preschool (2-3 years) she experienced sexual abuse. This was approximately the beginning of her oedipal period. As she was advancing from pre oedipal to oedipal period the incidence of guardian's call happened as she was caught with her friend in washroom showing their private parts. In class I (5-6 years) incidence of miscarriage of her mother makes her guilty as she demanded a celebration of her birthday. She was not a well-balanced child loved by her parents as she perceives. Her immediate environment was not at all congenial. It may be the case that the social environment and pressures made herself unable to complete the journey from paranoid-schizoid state to depressive state. It becomes more evident when we try to analyse her defenses.



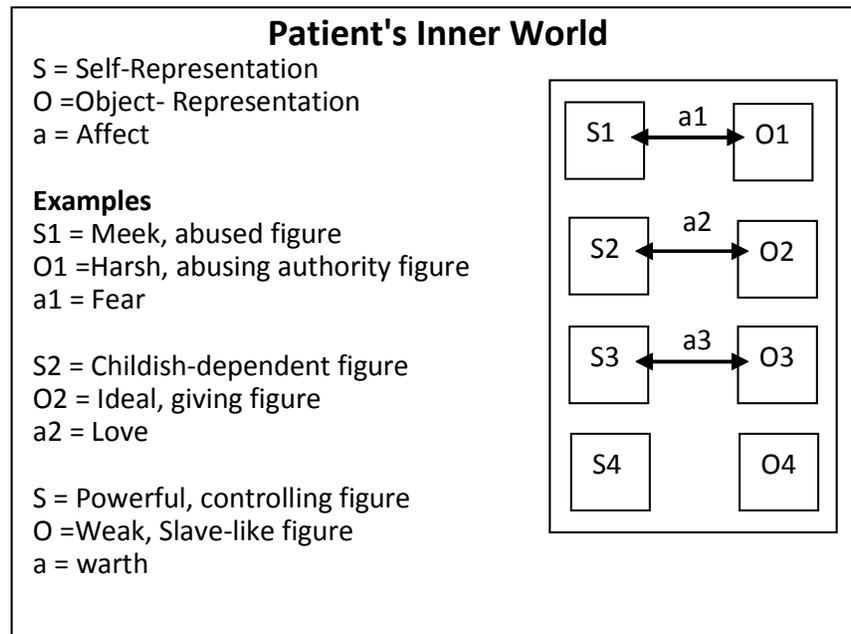
She uses projection, introjections and splitting as her main defenses. She has developed a pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships. She oscillates between extremes of idealization and devaluation. These developmental positions are normal, but failure to master and work through these phases can result in varying degrees of disturbances.

According to Margaret Mahler, there are three development stages. Normal Autism, Symbiosis and separation-individuation, which are organized and integrated in the emergence of self. During the symbiotic period, the child experiences a sense of omnipotence from the psychological fusion of mother. Gradually, the child differentiates self from the psychological fusion with mother. Gradually, the child differentiates self from the mother and moves through a sense of grandiosity to establish a more realistic sense and separateness during the separation-individuation period. Two important sub phases of separation-individuation, namely, practicing and rapprochement seem to be especially vulnerable periods in the formation of self and serious developmental arrest can occur here.

We find Mili's deficits occurring in the developmental phases. Mili perceives that her mother is uncomfortable and passive in her own environment. It may have evoked anxieties in Mili. Traumas (may be experience of various abuses) and disturbances of development processes may have induced borderline symptoms in case of Mili. In her Normal Symbiosis phase, absence of good care from passive mothering may have failed the infant to pull from the tendency towards negative regression to an increased sensory awareness of the environment. (Mahler 1968:10). As a result, Mili may have failed to establish basic trust in relationships, tolerating anxiety and frustration, and differentiating oneself from the others. Naturally Mili has failed to resolve rapprochement crisis leading to great ambivalence and the splitting of objects into 'good' and 'bad'. Some children like Mili grow up to be adults who have tenuous Object Constancy and as a result fails to begin to develop a stable individuality.

Otto Kernberg introduced the term Borderline Personality Disorders between Neurotic organization and Psychotic organization. Clinically he suggested that they are people with a non-specific ego weakness, disturbed interpersonal problems with commitment to work and love, some pathology in sexual relation and superego (Yeomans et al. 2002). He also emphasized that those who have a history of extreme frustration and intense aggression during the first few years of life can develop borderline personalities. These personalities may exhibit signs of ego weakness like chronic diffuse anxiety and lack of impulse control. Irrational fears and obsessive-compulsive

thoughts and feelings can also be there. According to Kernberg, if a child at preoedipal level struggles with intense aggression and hate, it influences the instinctual struggle of the child. The presence of early aggression prompts the premature emergence of oedipal phase of heterosexual striving as an attempted solution. But this solution usually fails and the compromise solution usually involves disturbed sexual patterns and poor interpersonal relationships. This might have happened in case of Mili.



Source: *Yeomans et al. (2002).*

Kernberg understands the object as human object, conceptualized affectively charged relational units as the basic building blocks of psychic structure. The self-other-affect units are termed as object-relation dyad. It is a partial representation of the self, linked by an affect to ascertain representation of the object as it was experienced at a certain point in the early years of life. The vehemence of the affect in the earliest relationships – for example of a strong need to avoid pain – is appropriate to the infant's primitive defense mechanism. Characteristics of borderline personality organization is that primitive defense mechanism are still in use.

In case of Mili, we find lack of integration or splitting into segment with idealized images and a segment with negative images of the relationship.

Maybe her memory structure is charged with affect and forging influence the internalization of all good or rewarding, object relations or aversive, or all-bad, object relation.

In relation to the concept of dyad, at the one end there is an idealized image of a dyad with a perfectly nurturing other and a completely satisfied self and at the other end, influenced by frustrating experiences, there is a completely negative dyad of the hostile and threatening other and a need, helpless self. Mili has developed this pattern.

From the fourth session she used to give names to her problems, such as GHURNI (the repetitive thoughts), CHINTAJWALA (a burning sensation from her thought, in her language thinking error), NIRBHOR (too much dependence on her BF), BANDHBHANGA (the impulsive reaction of extreme anger, distress or irritation which lead her towards self-injury) and tried to analyse each thought and how she came out of that. I applied this technique of narrative therapy to externalize the problem from the person. The sessions used to accommodate events from the past and plans of the future.

In the fifth session, Mili entered the chamber with a perturbed mood about NIRBHOR (which means dependent in Bengali). She felt that she was thinking of getting rid of NIRBHOR by amputating the relationship itself. But when she thought of it, it was giving her immense pain at the same time. She had a dream about the relationship involving marriage, a baby and a sweet future. Her mother also talks to her about such events and also showed up in the dream about their marriage. So, it was very painful for Mili to think about breaking up the relationship. It reminded her of many tender moments with her boyfriend. But at the same time, she wanted to be free. She feels that she doesn't love him. She has many questions. Can she live together with him? How will the relationship be impacted if she get a job? Her stormy impulsivity prompted her to do self-harm but she controlled.

We explored some questions like what independence is. Can one be in a position of independence while in a relationship with someone? What is a society? What does she understand by a 'live in' relationship? How to get a job? What is a career? Is it important to do career planning? What is her idea about herself? We explored these questions from many perspectives. I was observing that she has a poor reality testing capability.

In another later session, she came in a highly distressful mood. Her boyfriend is from a district town and he went home. But he did not call her or message her as he usually does. Mili was very disturbed and on the verge of such extreme negative emotions she tried to make a wound in her hand with her ring and sent the picture to her boyfriend immediately (Mili's mother also joined her in grieving and blaming, as Mili reported.) There were devastating floods in her boyfriend's home town. We explored the context and I tried to validate her feelings at the same time. A session started with her extreme thought about her friends. No one loves her, all of her friends are jealous with her beautiful voice. We explored on it – what friendship it – a single incident with her friend which makes her happy – how does she judge her voice and that of others. She came to a conclusion that there are many others who are friendly and have a good voice too but the world is so competitive that people behave peculiarly sometimes.

Once I requested both of her parents to come. We talked about her problem, how they perceive the problem, is it possible to give her support, to make a tie, to make a family trip etc. I tried to impart some psycho education without taking any technical term. They informed me that it will be better if the gap between the sessions can increased from the point of view of economic affordability. I talked with Mili and decided on the schedule. I became flexible on the issue and Mili told me that she will inform me whenever she feels comfortable to increase the schedule from once in 7 days to once in 10 days. We also decided that gradually we will make it once in 15 days.

I was observing the pattern of her behaviour and Mili also was becoming aware of it from the explorations we made in different sessions. Sessions were going on with exploration of her dissociative behaviour and current issues that may lead to such a behaviour. She used to refer the problems by the names she gave and informed me that her problems are residing with her but the intensities of which have been decreased.

In another session we tried to explore some of the good moments she cherished. It was about her experience of her performance in a Macha. Her performance was so good that the audience fanatically cheered her. Her father was also present there and he also become very happy. We explored singing as a profession and she informed me that she loves to sing but she doesn't love to practice. She becomes bored easily. Her BF loves her singing but does not want her to be a Macha singer. He encourages her to learn more and tutor others. She conveyed me that her BF also wants her to become thin as her father also desires likewise. Mili's boyfriend, as

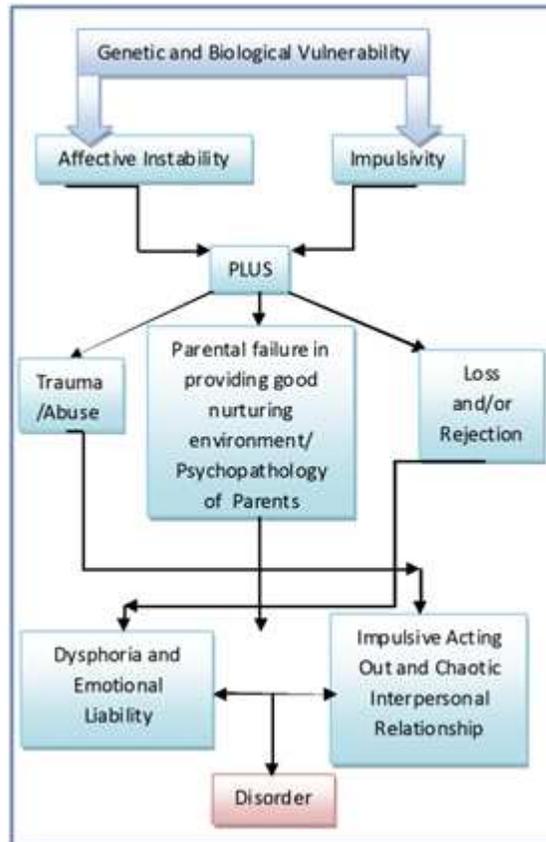
Mili informed, has not disclosed their relationship in his family. We also explored the reality of making career in the media-oriented world. She wanted to learn some deep breathing exercise which we did.

As a counsellor, I was also observing myself and Mili using the collaborative method. Once on my entry into the hospital lounge I found her waiting for me. Entering the chamber, she asked me that one of her friends has come with her who is waiting outside. She started talking about her friend's negative comment about me. 'How can a lady with shoes and short hair be a good counsellor? She herself looks like restless!' It was the comment of her friend. Mili and I started exploring the concept of 'ideal'. Gradually we reached to the concept of 'brand'. She talked about the importance of branded gifts among their relationship. She informed that her friends asked her about the brand and price of the gift she is receiving from her BF or giving to her BF and perhaps Mili herself also puts much importance on what other people are saying.

Mili loves to do needle work, loves to cook and likes to take photograph of nature, loves to shop branded materials and dine in good restaurants. In later sessions she started exploring her creativity and showed me some photographs in her phone. They were beautiful pictures of flowers, sky and plants. She used to post pictures of her creative works in the mobile phone as status. Initially I used to reply her and gradually I stopped responding. It reminded me the concept of Transitional Object as put by Winnicott.

Donald Winnicott in 1960 defined development in terms of the child's relationship with the environment. The child develops within the environment of good-enough mothering, progressing from an original un-integrated state to a structured integration, with the capacity for object relationship and 'living with' that is, relationships with whole, external objects (Winnicott 1960). The infant journeys from absolute dependence, through relative dependence, to independence, and these three kinds of dependence correlate roughly with the three overlapping stages of parental care: 'holding', 'mother and infant living together' and finally 'mother, infant, and father living together' (Winnicott 1960). The healthy child uses the transitional object as the illusion of the mother. His concept of the transitional object is not a replacement for the mother, but rather a representation of the mother during her absence. The child uses various objects, such as thumb, a blanket, or a toy, as transitional objects that symbolically represent the link between the child and the mother. The therapist creates a holding environment for the

person and works as a transitional object that helps the patient whom we know as borderline.



After the Durga Puja festival in 2017, she came to me in a relaxed mood. She was happy that she would be performing some programs in areas located on the outskirts of Kolkata. She has started doing *rewaz* again. She enjoyed a lot with her BF during the festival. Now her boyfriend has gone to his home town. The session includes exploration of types of relationships young people share today. She informed that there are very few relationships in her friends' circle which

last. I also explored different possibilities of her current relationship and her future. She informed me that she had started doing Yoga and was maintaining a diet chart to become slim. Mili also talked about some bad dreams she was having and sometimes they were about the death of her mother and father. She narrated that she saw herself crying frantically in those dreams. She also dreams about her marriage but with a different person, not with her current boyfriend. Another dream, which Mili termed 'shameful', was about her sexual intimacy with a person who is just a friend. She conveyed that she never thought of having sex with that person. All those dreams make her sad and guilty. These may be her prohibited unconscious wish censored by the ego for repression. Her dreams about her parents' death and a crying self may be symbolic representation of

Mili's ambivalence towards them. The situation reminds me of what Freud has said about dreams: We dream of what we have seen, said, desired or done (Freud 1900).

Multidimensional Diathesis-Stress Theory of Borderline Personality Disorder. Source: Paris 1999

Mili's situation can also be understood in terms of Paris's multidimensional theory (Paris 1999). Research suggests that genetic factors play a significant role in the development of these symptoms. Personality traits such as impulsivity and affective vulnerability are very prominent in borderline symptoms. He proposes that persons who have high levels of two normal personality traits – impulsivity and emotional instability – may have a diathesis to develop this disorder, but only in the presence of some psychological risk factors such as trauma, abuse and parental failure.

Mili, as she pointed out was very naughty in her school days, used to tear her own hair over a problem, be in confrontation with her mother frequently. She perceived the rage of her father to be fearful. As the theory suggests, it can be a possibility that her impulsive and emotionally unstable nature along with the psychological risk factors like child abuse, trauma and parental failure has helped to develop these symptoms.

Social Context: Some Structural Aspects

All the above-mentioned theories emphasized mainly a good enough supportive holding environment and a capacity of structured integrations of parts into a whole in object relationship.

But what about Mili's family, the socio-cultural context where they belong to? It reminds me of the concept of 'other'.

Simon De Beauvoir's work on the nature of man and woman introduced the concept of "other" in feminist theory in early 1950s. Otherness can be seen as a process of alienation to place a labelled person at the margin of the society. It can also be a political exclusion by state or persons with socio-political [power](#). I was trying to analyse Mili and Mili's case in the light of this concept.

Her family is a nuclear family of three members. The father plays the dominant role in taking any decision and the mother, as Mili mentioned,

continues to be in a passive position. Mili and her mother are 'others' in the family beside her father who is a powerful, dominating, strict and patriarchal male member.

Patriarchal culture gives the woman as mother a double bind message she cannot escape.

The first message is that a married woman's value lies in motherhood. This is a cultural taboo but also a culturally powerful aspect of our collective unconscious.

The second message relates to the gender code which infers that masculinity is dominant and femininity is subordinate (Leria and Krips 1993).

So, what I realized is to rediscover the other truths of life too considering the aetiology of symptoms in Mili. The concept of Masculine Dominance came into my mind.

As far as the history of the origin of masculine dominance is concerned, we must point out that this phenomenon does not occur naturally. The fact is born by the large body of legislation that is necessary to guarantee male domination (Adler 1921).

I was thinking of another double bind message. Her father being a driver cannot be placed in the category of the conventional educated and elite class. Since from a socioeconomic and cultural perspective the family is marginalized, the members are the 'others' in society. So Mili cannot escape another double bind message too. She is the 'other' in the family and the family is also 'other' in the society. Otherness is hindering the person to develop proper self-esteem and understand the need of autonomy.

I was observing a new generation, a new life through Mili's narratives, the lifestyle of this new era, the patterns of relationships they are experiencing. The area where she lives is situated in a remote suburb of Kolkata. Mili conveyed to me that the locality where they live is not up to the mark. Her neighbours are very curious about their family and Mili and her family do not reveal her profession to them. She has a different name as a Macha singer with a prefix 'Miss'. It appeared to me that Mili suffers from inferiority complex. Her locality, her profession makes her feel inferior. She cannot respect herself living in a locality like that and being in a profession like that. I could relate to Adler's (1870-1937) concept of inferiority/superiority complex. It is a complex of emotionally toned ideas arising from repressed

fear and resentment associated with real or imagined inferiority. People develop an inferiority complex if they are overwhelmed by the forces of the people around them holding them in contempt. It becomes a psychological problem. People can respond to inferiority by developing a superiority complex. A superiority complex involves covering up one's inferiority by pretending to be superior. Mili with her fragile self-esteem is too sensitive to psychosocial and interpersonal stressors and often seeks to support her sense of self by borrowing a stable identity from another, usually an idealized, person. Mili knows that to be successful in her music career she has to please the men in power to get a chance. According to Mili, it is a game of money and many other things. There are many small pockets of authorities for people like Mili. Still she sometimes (her split self) impulsively thinks of going to Mumbai (for good) and becoming something. Everyone will cheer her – she will become a renowned singer! Her father wanted her to pursue an academic career and become a teacher. He wanted her to control always - sometimes with a stick in his hand and sometimes as a judgmental authority figure deciding what is good and what is bad for her.

Two of her important problems are non-integrated self and emotionally charged impulsivity. It occurred to me to analyse the lifestyle of people like her with respect to her context, the group in which she belongs. In today's lifestyle smart phone, social network, the world of profile pictures, status update, emojis, likes and dislikes are playing a very dominant role. This may be true for most of the people. Through her narratives I could visualize how strongly they play a part in their interpersonal relationships. Their ideal life, concept of freedom and individual autonomy may have merged with these articles. The world of brands and shopping malls has a beckoning influence on all of us. People from socioeconomic backgrounds such as Mili's are prey to the consumer culture without the proper knowledge of how to balance this inner demand with their budget. Compulsive tendency to buy can be said to be an addiction facilitated by social conditions with the rise of globalization and consumer culture. Without knowing what to buy (brand culture) and how to buy, young people today only know that they have to buy to keep up with their friends. To me this resembles a social split where people like Mili are too vulnerable. In a different sense objectification of a human subject is taking place. Michel Foucault viewed all discourse which argues for the supremacy of one idea as a discourse of social control. Human subjects are objectified through systematic practices of discourse of social control which includes inseparability of power and knowledge. Interestingly objectification analyses the ways in which human beings turn themselves into subjects; i.e., people monitor and conduct

themselves according to their interpretations of set cultural norms. For example, certain specific body weights for women have shaped society's perception of good or bad. I could feel the social reality which reinforcing Mili's symptoms.

A new question was coming to my mind. In the last 3 decades, the technological revolution along with our unconscious attachment with some gazettes, our dependence on information banks like WhatsApp and Facebook etc. - are the structural issues becoming more important for all? People, especially the youngsters, are continuously engaged in accessing information. This very practice may be holding them back to think, analyse and integrate.

All the above-mentioned things were going in my minds which were enhancing my insight. I started to understand Mili's problem from both personal and structural perspective. I felt we cannot take anything as final since every human being is situated in a context and the truth – the reality – the ethics – all are situated. I was reflecting about my role as a counsellor and felt it immediately that response of the person who is sitting in front me in the chamber is most important for me. It is a journey of togetherness where I am learning a lot.

I initiated with a Time-Space of 'ikirmikirchamchikir' to a new time-space of 'emojis' with Mili.

To conclude, the journey of life and relations continue. I remember one line of Tagore from one of his songs

(Free translation: who brings a new perspective in our vision)

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