



Befriending the Other: Psychoanalytic Perspectives

Victor Ferrao
Rachol Seminary, Goa

The respect for otherness is diminishing in our country. It appears that hatred and intolerance is driving us into a mode of self destruction even though we proudly say we belong to the twenty first century India. Why are some of us so angry today? We seem to be slipping into chaotic order of the savage era. We appear to be thinking that we are climbing the ladder of progress while in the same breathe we seem to have stepped down the moral slope. We kill to uphold our food habits. We keep our sentiments above our reason. We put the cruelty to animals above to cruelty to humans. The axis of our moral tenor is ruptured and displaced. The exile, oppression and expulsion of the other is deemed necessary to save the purity of the ourselves that is unfortunately thought through the prism of sameness. How are we to come to a self realization of what is ailing our society? The answer is not simple but involved in a web of complexity. But we need to raise this unavoidable and equally disconcerting question. We cannot dodge it.

May be psychoanalysis might open a widow on the condition of our society. Psychoanalysis is discomforting and obscene. When the rules of thinking are not level, a mere unreasonable shout can shut many genuinely insightful voices. But Psychoanalysis can boldly force us to look at ourselves in the mirror and come face to face with our vulnerabilities and broken selves and demonstrate how we risk incivility in the very name of civility. Psychoanalytical critic may become a siren that can derail the innociantization of our death

instinct or false beliefs which thinks that to save ourselves we have to destroy all otherness, silence every dissent or kill every other.

The British member of Indian Psychoanalytic society founded by Girindrasekhar Bose in 1922, Owen A. R. Berkley-Hill applied

The pleasure that one takes in the expulsion of the faeces becomes projected in the attitude of intolerance and expulsion of difference and otherness and the narcissistic love of sameness.

psychoanalysis to us Indians in the early twentieth century, particularly the upper caste Hindus. He uses the obscene concept of anal eroticism of Sigmund Freud to understand the behaviour of the upper caste Indians in his analysis. He seems to point out the love for order, conservatism, miserliness and tendency to tyranny (violence and intolerance) has its foundation in anal eroticism. The pleasure that one takes in the expulsion of the faeces becomes projected in the attitude of intolerance and expulsion of difference and otherness and the narcissistic love of sameness. Berkley-Hill located the cultural pathology and moral depravity reigning in our society in anal eroticism. Perhaps, what Berkley-Hill theorized in the obscene terms of anal eroticism may be discomfiting yet might open horizons to understand rising heat of intolerance in our country. One might see how a casteist worldview of purity/ pollution principle is based in what psychoanalysis describes as anal eroticism in the context of an infant's passage to adulthood. It puts the hard truth on the table that our increasingly intolerant society is fixated in what Freud describes as the anal stage of development of an infant.

Ashish Nandy in more recent times, tells us that Girindraskhar Bose, world first non-western psychoanalyst was preoccupied with the narrative of Sarvilaka, a rich Brahman from ancient Kingdom of Magada. Sarvilaka teaches sacred

A mere analysis of our collective self (*atmsaksatkari*) will tell us that we are in no way reflecting the highest ideal enshrined in the sacred traditions of our country (*bramasaksatkari*).

texts in the day (*lokcara* or customary practice) and performs *kulakara* (family practice) in the night. His *kulakara* was to murder and rob the vulnerable travellers in the night. When he tried to introduce his son in the *kulakara*, his son was overcome with shock at the hypocrisy and moral depravity of his father. Sarvilaka dissolves the doubts of his son regarding the morality of *kulacara* with the doctrine of *niskama karma* (action without the desire of its fruit) taught by Gita. Bose raises the question of the correctness of the Sarvilaka's interpretation that justifies his murder and theft. But surprisingly, Bose did not subsume the secret self of Sarvilaka which his son finally owns up in familiar psychoanalytical terms as Id. This may be so because there is a complex structure or reason which brings about a dispassionate action that defies the conventional sense of the controlling id. He seems to read *niskama karma* as repression of guilt that permits us to become agents of moral depravity without taking any responsibility for the same. This means, we can mask our evil intent in what is more sublime and void of all egoistic interest. It appears that the dialogue between self and the imperative of detachment has broken and what we seem to have in our society is a monologue that has narcissism (inordinate self-love) written all over it.

Perhaps, the two pioneers of psychoanalysis in India that we have discussed are opening our horizons to the fact why we have become people who have lost our sleep over several insignificant things like what is being cooked in our neighbours kitchen. We need

to stay calm and cool in our waking hours and work to bring peace and tranquillity in our society. Bose, like several other scholars, interprets the three *gunas* theory as manifestation of our complex personality. The *sattva* is associated with the blissful inner self. The *rajas* deal with external active self while *tamah* deals with the unconscious of the self. The fact that we have let loose *tamah* (the powerful forces of the unconscious) in our social sphere is beyond any doubt. A mere analysis of our collective self (*atmsaksatkari*) will tell us that we are in no way reflecting the highest ideal enshrined in the sacred traditions of our country (*bramasaksatkari*).

This means that our society is restless and is far from *Samadhi* (tranquillity). How can our *sattvic* vegetarian food, yogic meditative practices and pride in a cultural nationalism make us so *tamasic*? Thus, following *Kausitkai Upanisad* we say: if we do not listen to the hate speech but give our ears to the speaker (hate monger) or if we keep our focus away from the deed (Karma) and concentrate it on the doer (*Karmi*), we can clearly see the violent self in our society along with those who drive us into this mode of aggression. This examination of our collective self demonstrates that those who fuel hate, intolerance and violence in our society are the real enemies of our country. To rediscover compassion, non-violence, love and peace, we will have to find a therapy for our anal eroticism and deceptive repression of our guilt under the cover of sublime texts like Gita. Only then can we tame these *tamasic* forces and become friendly with the other, affirming and respecting their differences. Only then can we befriend the other in their otherness. ❀