



Healing the Effect of Inadequate Mirroring in Childhood

A group session with Miniature Structure

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Acknowledgement

Psychodrama has been instrumental in developing my personal and professional roles. I sincerely thank Sue Daniel for introducing it to me, and being an amazing Psychodramatist, a teacher and a mentor.

I thank my Guru, M, for all her continuous support, encouragement, patience and most of all, for her adequate mirroring. Without that, I would not have been able to heal myself of the inadequate mirroring I received in my childhood. I thank her for being my mentor, teacher and supervisor for my psychodrama training. Her role modelling made it safe for me to explore and experiment with my journey as a Psychodramatist.

I thank Lethe Gaskin, my supervisor for this paper, for all her guidance, support and encouragement. Her warmth and patience were a safe container for me to write this paper.

All my clients in individual therapy put their faith in this process and in me as a Psychodramatist, and I will forever be grateful to them. I specially thank them for experimenting and exploring the use of the miniature structure and mirroring my work with them. It has been a huge encouragement for me to take my journey further in learning and using this method. I also thank all the psychodrama groups for their participation; it was a significant learning experience for me. And all those workshops and training programs that I attended, each one's drama and sharing has been a precious gift to me!

And lastly, a big thank you to Psychodrama in India – Pil, for the training program and my fellow trainees of this group for making this session possible. They were truly empathic and generous in their cooperation.

Healing the Effect of Inadequate Mirroring in Childhood

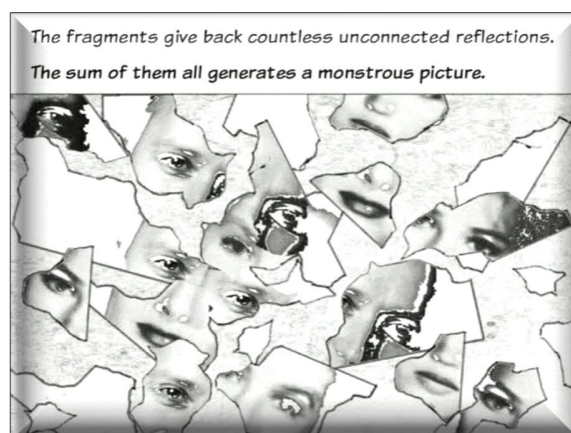
A group session with Miniature Structure

I Preface

MIRRORING has been a powerful part of my journey in psychodrama. It has assisted me when I came against my most fixed and difficult roles. Some of these took years of struggle for me. There was a moment when I took the mirror role in my drama, and for the first time I saw what my retrogressive role – the relentless harsh shaming, punitive critical judge - was doing to me....

**“I fiercely kept scrubbing,
The marks off my face...
It took me years to realise,
The stains were on my mirror...”**

Moreno talked about Mirroring as being a necessary part of child development, and it is my understanding that many of us have inadequate and/or inaccurate Mirroring as infants and children. We do not learn to see ourselves correctly. Our Mirrors are ‘skewed’ or ‘stained’ or ‘cracked’.



This realisation came to me over the years as my mentor kept providing adequate mirroring to me. This helped me to feel safe to question my monstrous critic role. I believe that was my warm up to a series of my dramas where I kept taking up mirror position. It helped me heal my relation with self and develop progressive roles, enhancing my spontaneity and creativity. I have since, experienced significant benefits of accurate mirrors in recent years.

Use of Mirroring with Miniatures

I am an enthusiastic creative designer of various modules. I have collected miniatures from far and wide, and use these in individual sessions with clients, allowing them to concretise aspects of their lives and relationships, and view themselves from the Mirror position. Having a bird's eye view of the stage with miniatures empowers the protagonist, allowing them to be clear seers of themselves and their relationships.

I encourage my clients to concretise aspects of their lives and their relationships - things they are experiencing now, or in the past, or things they wish to experience in the future. As the client 'looks in the mirror' I work with them as they develop feelings towards themselves in the situations they concretise. They may be able to develop new roles, more adequate roles, towards themselves and / or others. They may develop new understanding, come to new decisions, express things that need expressing that perhaps have never been expressed.

The Mirroring technique therefore, holds a central place in the use of miniatures in psychodrama. My work with my clients using this method has had significant impact on developing these progressive roles in them and specially healing their traumas and developing a healthy relation with themselves. I am passionately incorporating this technique into my work with clients at every opportunity.

Though having worked with groups as a Psychodrama Director, I had not worked with them using the miniature structure. I got an opportunity to do so when, as part of our psychodrama training, M, our trainer, asked us to take a session on any concept related

to psychodrama. Being passionate about both, the mirror position technique and the use of miniatures, I chose both of these for the session I was to conduct as part of the psychodrama training course of Psychodrama in India (Pil).

This paper brings to you, my experience of the three hour session I took on 'The Significance of Mirror Position in Psychodrama.'

I hope my sharing is a gift to all.

Thanking you,

Sarita Shah

II Introduction

This paper is about a journey of three hours with a group of seven participants, using the miniature structure in psychodrama to develop an experiential understanding of the significance of mirror position technique. The session involved first a warm up for use of the miniatures, followed by dramas using mirror position. The module is specifically designed to bring awareness in them about

- 1) A role in themselves that they like and one they would like to change,
- 2) The kind of mirroring they received in their childhood,
- 3) The impact of that on their present self and
- 4) The mirroring they would want now.

During the session I directed one drama and then split them into pairs to do dramas with each other to experience being in mirror position and working with miniatures.

This paper will bring you my experience of group work, of the drama I directed and some of the insights I developed. I have attempted to write this in the form of the three important levels/stages/aspects of psychodrama - warm up, drama and sharing.

I welcome you to the tour of my journey of this session.

My Warm Up

I have been very keen, prior to this group, to bring my creativity and my miniatures through my ideas where participants experience the potential of Mirroring technique. I am excited.

As I begin to pen my experience of running this workshop, (a session on Mirror Technique in Psychodrama in our psychodrama training course run by **Psychodrama in India – Pil**) I am overcome with fear. I choose to do an auto drama in my mind.

Bringing the Mirror to My Auto Drama

I have myself on the stage. I look at her, as in the mirror. From here, I see a fearful frozen creature, nervous, fumbling for articulation; a fearful attempter at writing a paper, groping

for words. How do I feel towards her? I feel compassion. I have some ideas for her. She could begin by concretising her timeline from the time she chose to work with this group, when she first warmed up to the idea, and through all the stages of her journey with them she has taken so far. I also have an idea about her making sure she has some supervision with someone whom she trusts and feels safe with, as she goes forward writing this paper. She could also revisit her experience of writing the previous paper and her reader's feedback on it.

In gently speaking to myself, giving ideas and reassuring myself, I find I have already begun my journey of 'Healing the Effect of Inadequate Mirroring'. I have faced the old attacking roles that left me criticised and battered, fearful and afraid.

With the mirror and with Role Reversal with myself, I no longer feel so anxious, frozen or afraid.

I am now a warm companion to myself.

III Session on 'Healing the Effect of Inadequate Mirroring in Childhood'

Warming Up by Preparing the Room for the Session – Setting the Stage

The morning of the session I am a nervous early riser, a prayerful seeker for a smooth session through most of my routine activities. I reach Maanas early, the Centre where the Group is to be held.

After setting up the chairs in a semicircle, I choose one small bench, place it on the side near one of the walls close to the chairs, where I display some multi coloured bright scarves. They are to be used to define the stage for each of the participants. Next, I clear three desks of all objects to use them as stage for the participants, arranging a chair on each side of the tables. I chose these desks to optimise the experience of the miniature method - one of its advantages is that psychodrama can be possible in very small place. Each table will have two participants concretising their stage. I use ribbons to partition the

desks into two halves, each one to use as a stage. I set up a long low table in the centre of the room to display all the miniature figurines and some props. I make several different clusters of them. For example, a cluster with sets of babushka dolls, another of wooden adult male and female figurines, along with figurines of small children. I also display a cluster of animal toys. A separate cluster of other objects like masks, weapons, cute keychains and a small Lord Ganesha.



Warming Up to the Group

We are to start our session at 10 am and finish at 1 pm. Being content with the setup, while I await for the members to arrive, let me share something about them. I have been warming up to each person as they signed up to participate.

The Group

They are all my fellow trainees in psychodrama course run by Psychodrama in India (PiI).

One: The Queen I experience the first participant of this group as an elegant Queen of her people, a graceful lady. She is a curious learner, and I am enlivened by her excitement to learn many approaches. As she walks in today and sees there are still others to come, with a sheepish smile, she requests if she could eat something. I am warmed by her presence.

Two: The Panda The second participant, a cute panda, always a happy receiver of attention from the others, has a child-like presence. She is a humorous sharer of her

experiences. I feel concerned with her arrival today. She looks a bit under the weather, is low on energy. As I greet her with a warm hug, I experience her relaxing a bit.

Three: The Owl My supporter and motivator, is a warm safe steady container for this group. A continuous learner of life, a quiet and silent wise owl, she keeps observing and absorbing all that happens during the sessions. Very precise and accurate, each of her words bring valuable insights to the group. I am eagerly waiting for her to join the group today.

Four: The Cat The fourth participant, a self-guarder, and a careful watcher of the psychodrama process is a fun lover and a peppiness bringer to the group. She activates the spontaneous mischievous role in me. I experience her as an enthusiastic member in today's session.

Five: The Rabbit The youngest trainee, a slow warmer to the technique, is now an open experimenter and a relation builder with psychodrama. She reminds me of a soft rabbit that is focused on finding her way throughout the day. Today she is a silent listener of others' conversations, participating judiciously as she finds fit.

Six: The Flower The sixth one, is a solo traveller, a curious learner and a silent observer of the group. She is self-protective, revealing her experiences only on rare occasions. I see her as a blooming white flower, slowly opening one petal at a time.

Seven: The Banyan M, our trainer, has chosen to be a participant today. I experience her like a banyan tree, a solid anchor for all. Today, she is a live wire, an enthusiastic mischievous spontaneous participant. She looks forward to being a fully enjoying free floater and a curious activity doer. She has also agreed to be a quick role changer into a supervisor role for me as and when required.

Warm up Continues

As I am warmed up for the session, waiting for all to arrive, three participants inform me about their late joining. So I contract with those present there to start when the first person arrives.

I notice my own roles: continuing from my active sociometrist role going towards organising as planned, allowing my anxiety to diminish. Moving towards the group with a new time contract allows me to do this, and my confidence builds.

All participants appear to be warmly engaged with each other during this half hour, and I am pleased with their connections with each other. I am an active sociometrist, noticing warm-ups and conversations.

The confident instructor in me quickly starts explaining how to use the miniature structure as soon as my buddy traveller arrives. I first show them the three clear desks with a partition in the centre. I share that each desk will have two participants. They can choose their partner and the desk they would be comfortable working with. Next, showing them the scarves, I ask them to choose one and define the boundary of their stage. One pair use a scarf, and the others define their stage with the partition and the edge of the table as their stage. This is important for safety, as always when we use the stage in Psychodrama. I then take them to the display of the figurines, asking them to choose something to represent themselves of today and concretise it on their stage. I remain a curious observer of them choosing the figurines. Some come across as deep thinkers, some show their interest and curiously look at the miniature figurines. They choose what would represent themselves today most accurately. A number of them begin concretising more than one figurine to represent themselves. This excites me.

I realise the activity is panning out differently from what I had designed. I realise the instruction I have given to the group is more open than I had intended. I take a deep breath, and remember something our trainer, Sue, had said: 'Messy is Beautiful'; it makes me smile! From here on, I begin warming the group up to the specific questions I want them to focus on:

- 1) What is a Role that you like in yourself? And
- 2) What is a Role that you would like to Change?

Once I see that they have concretised these Roles, I ask them to briefly share with their partner.

I am pleased to see that there is good energy and the warm-up is high in the group. Maintaining their warm up, I ask the group to concretise all those things/people/events/places/experiences that have influenced them in developing both these roles from childhood till now. I give them 30 minutes to do this. I can see it is taking them longer to think and choose their figurines this time. They are silent, some nervous contemplators. Some are thoughtful choosers. I also observe that they are quicker in concretising their role that they wish they can change than the ones that they like in themselves. (A big task for some, I am sure.)

Observing some of the group being tired, I ask all if they would like a 10 minute break before going further and they all agree. I tell them that once we regroup, I could direct a drama if any of them would be warmed up to it. This would give them time to think about it during the break time, again, maintaining their warm up. During the break, Cat says to me she is very warmed up to do her drama, but only if I direct her. I am happy to hear this, for two reasons; one, someone is warmed up for a drama and two; she finds me safe to direct her! In that moment, I am mirrored as a competent, safe Director, and it is as though the sun came out for me.

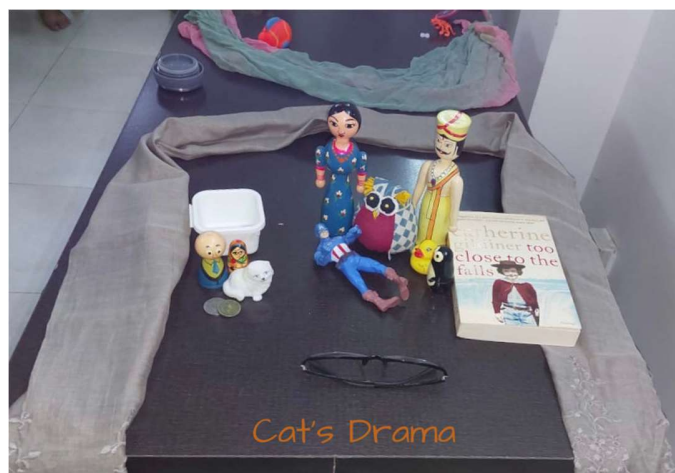
I set about directing this person when we return after the break.

Drama

I ask Cat to take a seat moving her chair in a place that would be comfortable for her to do the drama. Next I ask her where would she want me to be and after sitting there, I ask the others to form a semi-circle near the stage in a way where they are able to see the drama and I can see them comfortably. I introduce the use of the miniature figurines in psychodrama. There is no human auxiliary ego chosen, instead the protagonist starts from the mirror role, observing their concretisation and chooses to do their drama from there. They continue the drama with choosing the roles they wish to take (by either touching that figurine or taking it in their hands and holding it so that they can completely emerge in the role) and start their work from there. Once this is done, the protagonist

returns to the mirror position, shares with the director what she sees and experiences and chooses what to do next.

I exhibit this to them with an example.



The drama begins with my asking the protagonist to share her concretisation with us. She shares her Deep Wisdom role which she likes and the Harsh Critic role as well as the Over-Responsible Burden role which she wishes to change. As soon as I ask her what she sees there from the mirror role, her shoulders droop, and her body looks like a log. Her eyes are staring at the Harsh Critic role on the stage and there is a distant look in them, as if she has travelled far back in her experiences - I experience her now as a petrified child unable to move. I am now an anxious director, getting nervous (Perhaps I mirrored her). I had not expected this. M quickly gets into her supervisor role and she shares with me to ask her to choose another mirror position. With a huge relief and much gratitude for her guidance, I ask my protagonist to shift to another place. As if in a daze, she looks around meekly, and slowly moves to a stool that is available near the desk and sits there. I ask her to breathe and relax. She nods very slightly. I see her focusing on breathing, putting her hand on her chest and slowly returning to the present, more colour on her face now.

I find I am also breathing more freely now, I am now fully present with Cat. I am doubling her as I direct her. I see the gaze fading off from her stare and her focus is returning, her

body seems more alive. She takes a few more deep breaths and nods, as if now fully being herself in the present. She looks at me with that readiness to proceed and I am breathing, the confident and feeling director is present with her. I once again ask her what she sees there. She sees how her Harsh Critic overpowers her and prevents her from being herself. She also sees her Over Responsible Burden. She knows it is mostly due to her present circumstances (both her parents are keeping ill health) and she is okay at this moment to see her responsibility-taker; she feels less burdened as she looks at this mirror.

I ask Cat what she is experiencing. She says she is feeling extremely angry but is unable to express. I ask her to choose something for her anger. She chooses a toy gun from the props and holds it close to her. Her body is more erect now and I see her empowered as if to wage a war with that Harsh Critic. I ask her what is the anger about and she says she is angry about the fact that her Harsh Critic comes from her father. She is angry with it because it blocks Cat from the Deep Wisdom, or in fact any positive roles in her. She points at the owl that she has concretised on the stage for those roles. Her eyes move to the Over Responsible Burden, and she shares that though understanding and accepting the role at the present, she is angry with the fact that she had to develop that role since her early childhood. I see her gripping her anger more firmly as she proceeds by choosing to explore the ways to diminish her Harsh Critic. I see her nodding again, as if a thought struck her. She gets up now, moves closer to the stage, and looks at me saying she would like to bring in her Warm Companions there and have them next to her Deep Wisdom. Delighted to see her so active, I say enthusiastically, "go ahead then!" As she chooses the miniature figurine, I look at the audience. They are very focused on this drama. Cat concretises three of her Warm Companions (her friends/colleagues/fellow trainees in psychodrama – all of them happen to be present here today) and resumes her Mirror Position. She shares with us that she would like Cat to ask them to keep mirroring to her periodically what they experience of her. She further shares that she has not had adequate mirroring in her childhood, and so whenever that Harsh Critic pounces on her, she has been unable to access her positive roles to counter it since she is not aware of them; no one has mirrored them to her. I, now, an excited director, quickly tell her,"

Excellent idea!" I ask her to take up Cat's role and talk to her Warm Companions. She touches the miniature figurine and talks to them. I ask her which one of them would she like to hear from, and choosing one of them she responds to Cat that they will surely do that! And says further that we wish you would acknowledge and register that in you. Reversing the role, coming back in Cat's role, she nods and says thank you to her taking a deep breath. With her body now responding to the warmth, she takes several more breaths of relief and resumes her Mirror Position. Looking at the stage, she shifts the Harsh Critic a little, keeping it at a distance from Cat and makes a cluster of her wise self and her warm companions closer to her. While she continues to look at the stage, I experience the drama coming to an end. She smiles with gratitude and relief. I ask her if it is a good place to stop. She nods and hugs me. I thank her while we stay in a warm silent hug for a while and then turn to the others. They all look content.

Sharing

Sharing of the Drama I Directed

We resume the session with sharing of the drama post a short break. Some of the participants share their relatability with the Over Responsible Burden and the Harsh Critic role. One person shares that she may not have been able to be as courageous in showing herself in this way, and she is moved by the drama. The sharing allows Cat to connect with the group, and allows the group to connect with each other.

We then move on to doing some more action work.

Sharing of My Protagonist:

"It was not only a wonderful introduction to Miniature work, but also gave me a clarity that I feel will help me significantly in my journey, so I am grateful for this experience."

Further Dramas in Pairs

We are in the last part of the session and I want them to practice directing using the miniature structure and the mirror position technique. I ask them to pair up in a way where

one is warmed up to direct and the other is warmed up to be a protagonist. I move amongst the group, assisting and being present.

I focus firstly on the drama of Rabbit who is directed by Flower. The protagonist has shared her concretisation with her director and the audience and now is sharing what she sees on the stage. She is sitting in front of the self she has concretised. The protagonist looks fearful being unsure of what will unfold in the drama. The director, however, doubling her, speaks softly. Her warmth reaches the protagonist, Rabbit, encouraging her to continue. I see the drama developing and deepening as comfort builds in their relationship. At times where needed, I get into the guider role and remind the director to ask the protagonist to take the miniature figurine in her hand as she enacts the chosen role. As soon as she does that, her body posture changes, helping her get into the roles that she is enacting. She becomes more connected with herself and full of feelings. She experiences the difference it makes and the impact of it. The Director acknowledges this difference too. Rabbit has a wonder look on her face.

Banyan has an auto drama using the concretisation she set out earlier. I see a focused Banyan totally engrossed with the drama. A light feet bright eyed enthusiastic peppy concretiser is now a sombre protagonist. I ask her how is she doing and she shares her realisation of what this drama brings her. She says that in her intimate relations, she is too trustful of the other and has inadequate boundaries. This is a reflection of her own childhood where boundaries were inadequate and inappropriate. She shares a firm determination to change things.

I am then called by Owl who is directing Queen, saying they feel stuck in the drama. She is struggling to direct Queen. I prompt her to continue, coaching her to go further. I experience the protagonist feeling stuck with conflicting warm up for the roles she wishes to change. She both, likes and does not like her roles. I think the director is mirroring her stuckness. It was an intense drama and the use of miniatures for the first time was affecting the warm up of both, the director and her protagonist. I coach by directing and teaching the Director for the rest of the drama. Owl is a keen observer and a learner of the method. She is smiling to see the way that Queen completes her drama in her

progressive role of clear seer. Queen is more settled as she concludes her drama in a role of a clear seer.

IV Some Sharing of The Director's Learning

An important learning came to me in the beginning of the drama that I had directed. As soon as my protagonist saw her concretisation from the mirror role, she went into a frozen fearful role. This was an old, retrogressive role for her. I believe that could have been affected by her seeing her concretisation from an eye level position (she was sitting on a chair that brought the stage at her eye level). One of the advantages of using miniatures is that the protagonist feels empowered in the mirror position due to the stage being set at a lower level, giving them a bird's eye view of the stage. (Moreno used higher levels on his stage, where the role of God was being enacted from balcony around the stage) I realised this when I was analysing my work as a director in the break time and was quick in revising my instructions at the time of the other dramas – I asked them to stand and do the drama or shift the stage on the floor in the open space so that they have a bird's eye view of their stage.

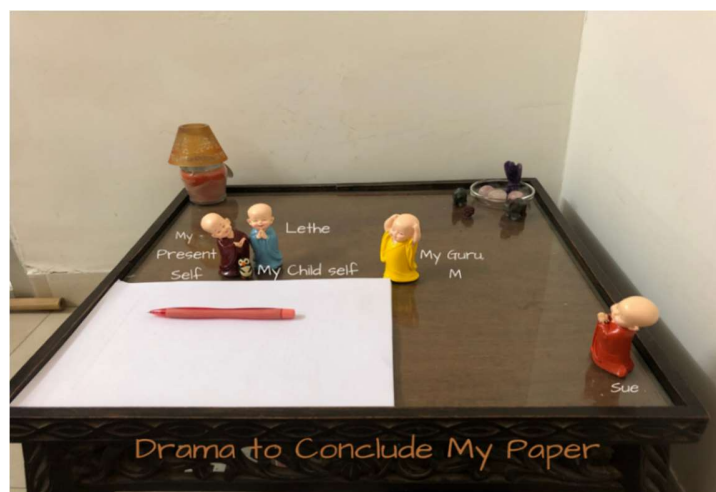
Extending this further, the learning was about how the protagonist takes up different roles while using the miniature forms. In the psychodrama with the auxiliary ego chosen from the audience, during the role reversal, the protagonist physically shifts to that role which helps them to come completely into that specific role. In miniature structure, there is no physical shift, so it is important for the protagonist to hold the specific miniature figurine in their hands to fully take up that role. At times more role interview is necessary to help the protagonist fully warm up to the chosen role. In the dramas directed by others in this session, I observed the protagonist finding it difficult to completely immerse in the role when they were not holding or touching the miniature figurine during enacting that role.

V Conclusion

Use of The Mirror position is a significant tool in psychodrama. From this session, I see that the mirror position is a useful technique for healing the effect of inadequate mirroring. It helped my protagonist, Cat, to see from the present, the effect of mirroring she received. Developing a clear seer role, her mirror role aided her self-awareness process and empowered her to make further choices. I was happy and contented to see my protagonist develop a few significant progressive roles, such as angry expresser, clear seer, warm companion to self, creative analyser and an empowered decision maker. The Mirror position in Banyan's auto drama also helped her to become a clear seer of the effect of mirroring she had received and to develop her progressive roles such as boundary builder and vigilant companion to herself in navigating her intimate relationships.

This session has intensified the passionate learner of psychodrama and the user of mirror technique in me. It has encouraged me to learn more about the use of miniature structure in group work.

Drama to Conclude the Paper



To conclude this journey, I enact a drama in a supervision session. I concretise my present self on the stage. I see her very closely connected with her child self. I concretise her in front of my present self. I see the child self as the motivator and enthusiast who enabled writing this paper. I see a joyous child, playful with selecting photographs, editing

them and nudging the present self to go through the various rounds of editing work. My heart fills. I further concretise Lethe, her supervisor, very close to her side, and her Guru M and Sue on the stage.

From here, I see myself filled and contented, Lethe, happily smiling with warmth and M celebrating this paper with feeling pride for me. Sue, always present in my world of psychodrama, is smiling confidently, witnessing my growth.

I experience overwhelm as I see this. I tell Sarita, "You have been very courageous! And I am glad to see your connection with the little one! Never abandon her! None of this would have been possible without her! Keep going and do things you wish to do! You are very warmly held by all of these people!"

I take her and the little one in my hands warmly, and with a gentle kiss on their forehead, I caress them softly. I close my eyes with a huge sigh of relief, tears flowing silently; the drama ends with immense Gratitude...!!!

Deep gratitude for Dr J L Moreno, for Sue Daniel, for Lethe Gaskin...

For my Guru & mentor, M for continuously being my safe and adequate mirror...

For all my group members...

Finally, for all of you readers!