

*Reflective Piece on Psychodrama Training*



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## Introduction to Psychodrama

I was extremely curious to know about psychodrama when I experienced the enthusiasm in Ma'm while she shared her experience of it. The spark in her eyes and the ease in her body movement was very magical and caught on to me. Something that has made such a huge difference in her was absolutely worth exploring and experiencing and I decided I would like to learn about it.

In my journey at the time I was already deeply into learning, understanding and absorbing the concept of codependency. Heavily influenced by that, I had also come upon the inner bonding therapy then, and my personal and professional world was mostly occupied with it.

So, when I attended the first workshop, my work on myself through inner bonding had already helped me in ways that I at that moment wasn't aware of. Though always interested to want to learn, my inner bonding work had helped me to open up to learning in a group where there was drama involved.

## My first exposure to Psychodrama

I met Sue in a different category the previous day of the workshop. It was a very soothing experience for me, it calmed my crazy anxiety and anticipation of things for the workshop. She came across as someone who is a healer from within, her calm, composed, energetic self. It reminded me instantly of the philosophy that qualities of a counselor/therapist/healer are not limited to the confines of the professional work, it is a way of life, and that is what she role modelled. Her calm vibes reached deep in me and soothed me, doubling the enthusiasm of the learner in me. And I slept without worries regarding group or drama that night. This was the first experience in my life of feeling safe before even I am exposed to any learning.

Even though, during the first workshop, I was skeptical and wary about what is going to unfold in these three days! Skeptical not because I had never experienced psychological dramas being played, on the contrary, they have been a huge part of my life, and a learning platform for me ever since my childhood! But skeptical because I had never seen a drama being played, that had authenticity and spontaneity in it. I have lived amongst performers – acting out being their way of life. So, my aversion towards “drama” has been very strong since childhood. The dramas I saw were of the games people played, of the interactions between the false and masked people, and the interplay of their fabricated and manipulative selves to live up to their images in the society. And I was wary because the word spontaneity was threatening for me ever since; a byproduct of being a victim of constant criticism and control and of being under the spotlight. To me life itself was a stage where the better I acted out to live up to their expectations, the safer I felt. How to hide and not come under the spot light, how to be the socially correct person and kill the natural self was the focus of life.

In short, I entered the world of psychodrama with both these emotions as my weapons and shields!

If I can explain how I was during the first workshop –

Through a peephole from behind my walls,  
I watched the dramas being played,  
I know not when the safety seeped in;  
And when it opened the door ajar,  
Letting it enter my world!

And within no time,  
A part of me walked out,  
Still closing the door behind,  
To yet keep my world hidden –

But bringing my self to psychodrama,  
Something changed deep within,  
It happened so quietly,  
That I welcomed it in my world,  
With a breath of huge relief!

During the three days, what I remember is how the flow seeped in me, in my body –

The naked truth being played out in the open  
Ridding the layers of inhibitions –  
The layers of fears, anxiety and apprehensions –  
And what was hidden beneath them –  
The scripts written by the narcissists' criticisms –  
Then emerged their pure beings!  
Not the actors with multiple masks acting out –  
But the souls that sought freedom –  
Their power unfolded thus  
With them being their spontaneous selves!  
With adrenaline rush and surge of profound emotions  
Their dormant selves finally warming up to life!!!

While I saw the dramas being unfolded, I saw how the intrapsychic world becomes more tangible and real for the protagonists and the others. Concretization of their world on the stage had a different flavor of empathy amongst all of us.

The moment the protagonist described the goal, proceeded further with setting of the stage, it felt as if the director and the audience was already walking into that world, into the times that the protagonist wanted to relive/recreate. It was interesting to see the auxiliaries – how they were chosen for the role, and how they naturally got into the role. The entire concept of tele and the fact that the auxiliaries becoming those roles in the time the drama was being played was a marvelous experience, giving a deeper understanding of empathy.

There were different areas of work that were taken up in during this workshop namely, working on specific emotional disturbance, on relational issues and on self growth. And what ran common through all of them

was the safety and security for all present there - the protagonist, the auxiliaries and the audience - during each drama. A future visualization drama made me realize the significance of this approach for those who lack in motivation for their future goals and for those who are fixed or frozen in their past experiences.

### Me as the protagonist

In the hours that I witnessed what happened on the stage,  
I don't know at which point my workings started shaping up,  
It was a slow process, while the safety seeped in  
Questions stopped popping of how does it work –  
I began the self talk of how shall I be, and how do I plunge in  
To see my intra-psyche being played out in the open  
And dealing with my most horrendous fears within  
But seeing others playing their dramas and challenging their fears  
They were being held so respectfully,  
Their spontaneity and authenticity unfolding had helped me  
To talk to myself - it is time to let go and let your self just be  
I have no words to explain, then the experience of me  
Being for the first time the protagonist of my world  
I retrogressed and collapsed to the past that haunted me  
And my biggest learning began then,  
Of choosing what and how I want to be!

I volunteered to become a protagonist in a smaller group and unfortunately, I froze in a regressed place just in the initial time of my drama. I remember the experience with a lot of shame and guilt for being a difficult protagonist and the anger I felt towards my self in having volunteered for the participation in the first place. ( sometime later I remember doing some inner bonding dialoguing to calm my self)

I think that was one of the most significant learning for me not only about psychodrama but about how my inner world operates and where do I need to work on my self. I remember the discussion and sharing post the drama, Sue mentioning that it is not necessary to revisit the traumatic moments if there is freezing/fixation due to the intensity and so much of regression, the focus may be then on positive visualization of the future and thus developing a healthy relation with the self.

My theoretical concepts were still in very initial stage of understanding of psychodrama but the whole experience helped me to begin to understand the fundamentals of what psychodrama is about.

By the end of this workshop, I had reached a place in my inner world where I not only decided to attend more of such workshops, but also to become protagonist with the willingness to work on my unresolved issues! The experience helped me to build my strength to work on areas that I have been procrastinating for a very long time.

### My experience of psychodrama with one on one session with M & Sue

Nearer the time of the next workshop, I requested a one on one session with Sue, having Ma'm as the auxiliary. With my resolve of the previous workshop to want to participate as a protagonist, I was wanting to experience it first in a one on one capacity as I was unsure what would unfold on the stage and not very

comfortable with others being around. My fear of others' presence and being judged or sympathized with would not have permitted me to totally plunge in.

My experience of this session was unparalleled to any other! Each time I would wish to work on my core issue of the childhood trauma, I would end up regressing to that time and I would be frozen in my mind and body. My body would feel rigid, as though it was dead for years together. The reason why I opted for Ma'm to be around was not for her to be just an auxiliary but more so because she is the only person who has made me feel safe and I knew that only in her presence would my system take a chance to even be in that regressed place if that was to happen.

My experience of that session was feeling safe and hand held by two very loving and caring people. Though I did begin to regress and was nearly reaching that frozen place when sue very aptly kept me connected to my adult self, an experience which is a profound break through in my journey.

It was a perfect blend of letting my wounded self express its grievances and for my adult self to understand how it needs to build patience to deal with the wounds and its healing process. The gentle nudging of letting the wounded self express its most disturbing experience not only of the past but the reminisce of it in the present, and being challenging with the adult who is stuck with fear of what to make of all these cycles that keep repeating between the two entities.

Though I constantly experienced shame and disgust within me during the whole trauma, and about my internal world, their unconditional love, their challenging my emotions by giving different perspective helped me to peel the layer of shame and disgust to see what was lying underneath it, the anger towards unfairness.

The body that had been that knotted tight ball, a heavy load of anger was let out in some form, experiencing a release and lightness that was never experienced earlier.

The seeds of psychodrama were sowed in me.

## Workshop 2

My willingness and openness to learn was extremely high when this workshop began. The journey I took in the past year was miraculously helping me to transform from being in a regressed place to move towards a progressive journey. I had gone even deeper in working on myself for healing through inner bonding and with the experience of the one on one session with Sue & Ma'm had put me in a top gear to want to experiment, experience and learn as much as I can from each moment of this work shop, and that is exactly what happened.

The workshop began with the warm up exercises, each of which gave me a lot of fodder to mull over how I have been so selective in my connect with the world at large – my city, my siblings, my family etc etc... that itself gave me a lot of material to want to work on in this three day workshop.

The amazing thing I experienced was that most of the pieces of other's drama, I could relate to either the issue or the event or the relation equation they lived with others. It helped me to see my equation with the experience with my frame of reference and gave me an insight into what needs to be worked up on

related to my issues. My understanding of how this is also a group therapy, where learning through experiencing other's world became deeper. Also, the areas where a few of us were reluctant to become the protagonists, we could connect with our selves with those issues and could develop an understanding of our internal mechanism through other similar issues taken up on the stage. Somewhere, the work of others was helping me to ready myself to plunge into my own issues and take them up on stage.

The drama of one of the protagonist who had a conversation with his grandfather touched my cord the most during this workshop. It was an intense need in me after the warming up exercise to want to have a conversation with my great grandfather to seek his forgiveness for not appreciating his contribution to our family, our community and to our city/society. The need was so intense that I actually drew the drama on a piece of paper, how it would unfold and who I would like to choose as auxiliaries! Through his drama I had realized for the first time how I had been so ashamed of my family that my relation with it was limited to that, never having a broader perception of my family lineage. Seeing his great grandfather on stage had made me look within and had helped me to connect for the first time, with the greatness of my great grandfather. The learning thus being, one of the significance of auxiliary in psychodrama.

The next exciting experience was that I volunteered to be a director in small group work. While I directed the piece, I realized how my experience as a talk therapist helped and at the same time it created difficulty in being the director. I felt stuck beyond a point as I could see that I was lacking confidence as the director and though I did suggest the next step, I sought Sue's help as I feared goofing up and worrying I would cause damage to the protagonist. My learning was that I can go with my intuitive feeling and even if messing up, something would come out of it. Sue's motivation without critical judgement softened the critic in me, the shame and guilt being further worked upon.

I also volunteered to be a protagonist after that to work on my confidence, to bring the critical voice out and challenge it with my present experiences to work on my esteem and confidence level. It helped me to make my inner world more realistic and to strengthen my resolve to be more confident.

In the other piece where I became the protagonist, I chose to meet my great grandfather, to bow down to him, paying respect to the man he was, and to show how proud I feel to be his great granddaughter! I cannot put it in words what I experienced then! The stage I set up was of my having a conversation with my brothers, thanking them for being in my life and playing such a significant role in my survival in our childhood. Then I laid a path with a piece of dupatta representing the road that is named after my grandfather in our city. As I walked on that road to reach our ancestral place to meet my great grandfather, I felt as if all my energies were reaching my feet, connecting warmly with my great grandfather. As I silently bowed to my him, I felt very acknowledged by him, one of the most profound experiences of my life! It felt as though he was understanding every bit of what I was feeling and am wanting to say to him and he was so naturally accepting of me! The concept in psychodrama there is no past, no future, no time boundary is something I experienced in that piece of work.

The three day work shop was held in a place which had very nice vibrations and felt as if it was providing warmth to each of us. The group was very open to learning and participation, as though all of us were fellow passengers, in a journey destined towards reaching a healthy growth.

This workshop helped me to do my individual work being amongst the group, it helped me further to experience the effect of psychodrama on the intrapsychic world and how the group process benefits individual work. An attempt at directing a piece in group was a new beginning for me.

### The training program with Ma'm

This program with Ma'm as a trainer began from March 19.

My experience of the workshops had already turned me into an eager learner of psychodrama. Ma'm being a true teacher and a Guru, I looked forward to these training sessions. During this time, with Sue's assurance and encouragement, I had already started implementing psychodrama with my individual clients in their one on one sessions. My writing notes and also taking supervision from Sue and Ma'm had constantly helped me in my learning process.

Ever since childhood, academics was a challenge to me, especially when I perceived any part of it which meant performance, evaluation or gave any one visibility of what I am doing or understanding. Supervision meant all of them. I was petrified of it, and one of the silent but intense journey I have been taking since the inner bonding work and the learning of psychodrama is to remain an adult or to remain in the here and now while I am presenting something to others. The safe experience with both of them, their accepting of my goof ups and still encouraging me to carry on has been the most supportive and healing experience for the student in me.

While being the director for one on one drama with my clients or the auxiliary and even as the audience in our training group, most of the dramas were very relating to my own issues or events. Sometimes it would bring a new awareness, sometimes, they were known to me where I had procrastinated my work and some were already in process. But each of them gave me so to say, a bird's eye view of what my reality is and how and what needs to be worked upon. As if they became my tools to work on myself.

A fascinating awareness was that I felt more comfortable being a director than an auxiliary or the protagonist. I realized that being a therapist helped in being a director, because with all my inhibitions and fears also, when I would be in the clients' world I would just be absorbed in the here and now, not remaining in touch with my discomfort of being on the stage. I had started directing dramas in small groups when my individual client requested for having our team members as auxiliary. But my biggest achievement or if I may say so a breakthrough in my fear of authority happened when I volunteered to direct a piece during our training with Ma'm supervising it. I suppose that was the test of all the inner bonding work and the evolution through psychodrama training and experience till now. To my delight, I could continue being with the protagonist through out her drama, being nearly oblivious to the fact that Ma'm was supervising. I remember vividly how the first time I registered her presence during the drama and it was just registering it, no more than that, and I had continued the work, being in the flow! Another significant breakthrough during that drama was that I could remain very open to her teaching me during the drama, my earlier format had always been that of being defensive and giving explanations for my mistakes, my core shame being felt immediately as I was given any feedback or guidance.

As a director, through all my goof ups and observing others as directors, my learning is to be more proactive than the person centered philosophy. It made me realise that I could double the protagonist with being my natural self in times that required catharsis or healing, but I found it difficult in the places

where the protagonist required support to be assertive and firm and confront the auxiliary. I believe that was a reflection of my difficulties with confrontations.

My relation with my body has been the most affected and unresolved part of my issues. And though there is a lot of work that has happened at the emotional and cognitive level, it is my body that I have yet not been able to stop being destructive with. I have neglected my bodily needs since years. I am aware of how the traumas are still stored in my body and how it requires healing and yet I have not been able to make that choice of working on it in a proactive way. So, if I look at my body, it is like a storage house of traumas, that has been neglected and badgered in each moment of difficult times. My body, under the spot light feels like it is in a straight jacket that is made of knotted barbed wires, as if each movement of mine makes the wounds raw and constantly fearing what and where will it cause them to bleed.

I realize that I find it difficult to take up auxiliary roles with positive, lively or energetic aspects. Years of being under spot light has inhibited my spontaneous positive energy to be expressed in a group as I have been criticized or controlled in overt or covert manner. Being in tune with my self and listening to my intuitions helps while being on the stage but my body is at times not as empathetic in its expressions as I experience within me. Though I am able to experience within me the intuitive role, I become conscious in expressing it, often seeking permission from the director to do so. The three folded fear inhibits me; one, harming the protagonist or breaking the flow if I am wrong, two, my fear of being spontaneous and thus being vulnerable in front of others to their judgements and criticism, and three, facing my guilt and shame if I goofed up. The feedback of how I am still not my natural self as an auxiliary has helped me to work on it and yet while I take up the role, the awareness that I still need to work on myself inhibits me further. Though Sue has multiple times shared that even if the auxiliary is not concretizing the protagonist's experience, the protagonist will express that, my fears prevent me from being my spontaneous self.

With so much in the inside, my taking up auxiliary roles and being in front of others in itself has been extremely challenging and a huge progress. With such realization, I have begun to make a choice to want to change this. I challenge my retrogressive state of fears, shame and embarrassment each time I go for the training session, willing my adult to be in place and in the here and now. Even now when I am participating, the voice echoes, "I hope I am not chosen to be a role in anyone's drama today, I hope I am not being seen here at all!" and I counter it by focusing on the activities on the stage, and the voice eventually becomes a faint background noise. I believe there is a change in me as an auxiliary from the time when I began, but only Ma'm and Sue will be able to say about it.

### The insight

### My personal journey

- Insight that my inner child developed: though the adult wasn't present in those years to protect her, the child realized that it was a developmental stage and my adult could not have existed.
- The anger for her not being there was dealt with by being destructive towards self since being angry with others was not permitted then, and there was no permission to be angry with others till date.



- Insight that the Adult developed: though the child hated her for not being there and kept expressing disgust towards her, it is a process that takes time to heal and it would eventually help the child to trust her and see her as her well wisher.
- My delightful experience of how my connect with my family of origin changed. One, it helped me to experience the gratitude I feel towards having my brothers in my life. Two, it helped me to experience a direct connect with my great grand father and feel the pride instead of constantly being ashamed of the rest of the family members. And three, my relation with some of my family members I am being able to live more authentic than earlier, however it may be experienced by them or others as I am an irresponsible, insensitive or as a selfish member of the family.
- I have become more positive oriented than remaining stuck in my regressed self or fixated in my issues or patterns.

### My journey as a therapist

- Directing a piece on future related goals are more challenging than working on past related pieces for me. Though this awareness has helped me to progress in it.
- Being a person centered therapist, I find it difficult to be in the director's role at times and show the firmness required. Supervision with Sue helped tremendous and I have progressed there.
- I have been able to improve my focus from being in conversation to putting it in act and concretizing it out there.
- The difference between inner bonding therapy and psychodrama as I realise is that inner bonding focuses on dialoguing between the three entities, where as in psychodrama there is more body movement involved as well as it brings out as many entities within those entities that need to be concretized.
- The drama is not focused on resolving the issue, but to concretize the intrapsychic world so that the client can then chose what would s/he like to change.
- The drama can be stopped at the pre-decided time, even if it feels incomplete.
- Even with a goof up by the director, the drama will still unfold something for the protagonist.
- As a director, the focus on the comfort of the auxiliary and the audience is equally important.
- It is important to create a safe container for the drama before beginning the work.
- It is extremely important to warm up the participants at the beginning of the session. The entire premises of tele and the spontaneity that psychodrama operates on, warm up helps to bring out the theme that the participants are ready to work with, and it also helps to warm up to the auxiliary role. In my personal experience, all the warm up activity that Sue did with us in the second workshop that I attended, I not only got warmed up to becoming an auxiliary, it also helped me to look beyond my grievances I have had towards my family of origin and connect with my great grandfather, something that has significantly affected my identity connected in my atom of family!
- Blending of letting the client express freely his/her emotions, challenging their unhealthy interpretation or perspective of the event/themselves/others and how to keep their adult accessible while dealing with their regressed self.

- Though the client may have brought the goal to work on an unresolved issue, there comes a time where the session naturally comes to an end, where both the client/protagonist and the director mutually sense it.
- One of the most significant learning for me was to understand the difference between when the protagonist is in the fixed retrogressive place and when it is in the cathartic but progressive, developing place and still willing to work on it. (I am finding it difficult to word it properly.)
- Creating a safe place and the role of a double. My experience as a director was that in dramas where the protagonists created safe place for themselves at the beginning were not so needed to visit it. This may be a pure coincidence, but very fact that they had created a safe place for themselves may have made them challenge their fears of vulnerability or helped them staying in their progressive roles. But this is pure hypothesis.
- Role reversal helps the protagonist to bring out that which is hidden in their unconscious. It also by thus doing so creates a new neural pathway for integration of different aspects of self.
- The drama can unfold with bringing out as many aspects of the protagonist related to the issue in their intrapsychic world.
- Taking the protagonist in a mirror position is one of the most effective ways to help the client get a bird's eye perspective and help them with developing role. While the protagonist goes into the retrogressive state, a fixed or a frozen one, mirror position may serve several purposes. One, the body movement and change of place or the action may help the protagonist to come out of the state and into the progressive role. The mirror position may help with awareness of the stuckness, with catharsis and with understanding of what the protagonist would like to do further. And, taking the protagonist in the mirror position helps when there is stagnancy in the interaction between the auxiliary and the protagonist.
- Soliloquy is equivalent to addressing the higher energy in inner bonding work. It can have a major break through for the protagonist to experience their desire to bring changes.
- Psychodrama is an experiential journey not only for the protagonist but also for the audience and the auxiliary, as they are being able to relate to the drama, connecting it with their own issues, and are being able to see the other perspective of the aspects through the auxiliary.
- The self of an individual is a whole of the experience of its social and cultural atom. There for while working with a protagonist needs to be keeping the whole of the person with its social and cultural context in mind.
- Role mapping of the protagonist helps in understanding influence of the drama in their growth and development.

The beauty of psychodrama as I experience is, it peels the layers that are developed while dealing with conflicts since years and the authentic self begins to emerge. Seeing what these layers are helps to make a choice if one wants to change anything and if so, how. This means that as a protagonist, you allow your self to become totally vulnerable to the participants and like how a patient takes a risk of the surgeon putting a cut on the body, allow the director to cut the layer to enter the intrapsychic world. It is extremely healing and helping but to make that choice of becoming vulnerable and letting the others witness what lies within is sort of a trauma for me around the traumas of my past. It brought to my awareness the significance of group therapy during the psychodrama training as though reluctance towards being a protagonist, the dramas that I witnessed either as audience or as the auxiliary helped me to peel some of

my own layers. I am working on this to want to become a protagonist in our small trainers' group as I would feel much safer there.

This reflective piece it self is a reflection on how psychodrama has helped me. Writing at length, as a submission for my training would earlier have been an impossibility. I still have a lot more that can be penned but these are the ones that I have absorbed so far. Others are work in progress....