

Life doesn't have to be in 'either-or'.
There is always an 'and'.

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Acknowledgements

In an ideal scenario, I would write the name *Meenakshi Kirtane, aka Roohdaar or M*, in the largest font size that would fit on this sheet. The size would represent the scale of her contribution to my journey in Psychodrama, and, by extension, my life.

Through Psychodrama, we understand the importance of context in any given piece; we also understand that the context keeps changing in the here and now. Nothing works in a silo; it's all interconnected. Ergo, Roohdaar's contribution to my Psychodrama journey doesn't end there. As you read this paper, you might get a sense of how the years have unfolded since I began training, and see how each role emerged as a response to life situations. I owe her... well, I don't have the words to describe what I owe her. And neither, I think, do I have the resources to repay what I owe her for the role she has played in my life. She has embodied the roles of a consistent, solid double; an honest yet kind mirror; a generous giver; a loving mother.

I'd love to thank and give a big *jhappi* to Sarita, who has very kindly and calmly embodied, and continues to embody, the role of a solid double since that very first workshop. There are others whom I would like to thank for their contributions. While I wish some of the role relationships hadn't moved in the directions that they did, I would like to acknowledge their contributions to my journey from their *then* roles. I would like to thank Sue for the first workshop I attended. I believe she contributed to my love for the modality. I would like to thank Roma, who was kind enough to offer to be a double in the first Psychodrama open workshop I conducted.

This acknowledgement would be incomplete without expressing my gratitude to my Psychodrama group—Group Number 2. I used to joke during the first year of training that they'd spoiled me for the world. Now I expect the same warmth and kindness they consistently bring to our sessions. I don't think I've shared enough with the larger Psychodrama cohort just how grateful I am. I've received love in more ways than one as I worked through my dramas. While creating an environment of safety is primarily the role of the Director, we cannot ignore the contribution of the group in co-creating and maintaining that safety.

I would like to offer my gratitude to Tavishi, who stood strong beside me as I waded through some difficult years.

Another person I would like to acknowledge is Nina, who has been a constant presence in every workshop I've conducted—and a promoter, too, bringing in friends to participate.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. J.L. Moreno and Zerka for creating and nurturing this gem of a method into the world.

Preface

My purpose in writing this paper is to make sense of the quiet, persistent transformations that have shaped me over the last six years, to trace how something that began as a curiosity became a way of being, how Psychodrama moved from being a practice I attended to, into a philosophy that now attends to me. I write to give shape to a feeling: that I am no longer improvising my way through life out of survival, but out of awareness. I write to look back and see the roles I've inhabited, some chosen, some assigned, some shed, and some still becoming, and to recognise the thread that holds them together. I write to document because memory softens edges and distorts timelines, and this paper allows me to return to what was, so I may better understand what is. I write to offer something, however incomplete, to the people and processes that held me; not as a tribute, but as a conversation, an honest and unfinished one. And I write to listen, through writing, to the many me's within—and perhaps, through that, to hear the next version of myself coming into voice.

My Journey with Psychodrama

My introduction to Psychodrama was in 2019, through a short 3-day workshop in Ahmedabad. At the time, I had been in therapy for about three years, having begun in 2016. For about a year leading up to the workshop, I had been contemplating the idea of formally studying Psychology. I had been diagnosed with a psychological disorder when I was 19, back in 2007. This meant I already had a long-standing relationship with the world of mental health and psychological disorders. My journey with therapy had been an upward graph.

By the second day of the workshop, I was convinced that this was what I wanted to train in. The organisers announced they would soon be starting a training program. I attended another workshop in September of the same year.

Cut to 2020, when the training program was officially announced—a five-year program divided into three phases: one year, three years, and five years. At the time, my agenda was to explore how Psychodrama could support my personal growth and whether I could integrate it into my art practice. I enrolled and completed the admission interview process, and just as the sessions were about to begin, the country went into lockdown due to COVID-19.

We began our sessions online. Conducting training in Psychodrama, a modality where space and stage are among the five core elements, in an online format was unprecedented. Still, we adapted, grew, and evolved. It took me some time to fully come on board, and I was given that space by my mentor and cohort. I remember telling my group, “You have spoiled me for the world. Now I expect the same amount of care, empathy, and thoughtfulness that I receive here, from everyone outside this group.” I began to see Psychodrama as a tool for training my instincts.

The first year ended in May 2021. I had to decide whether I wanted to continue with the second year of the program. The decision wasn't difficult. In the reflection piece we had to submit as part of the evaluation, I wrote:

“...through these classes of studying Psychodrama, practicing spontaneity, and consciously building intuition, had become an inherent behavioural change in the way I responded to situations, people, challenges...”

...Since March, this thought has slowly expanded, elaborating itself by reminding me of multiple scenarios where the reason I responded to a situation the way I did was the behavioural change subtly and subconsciously brought about by the 'once-a-month' Psychodrama classes.”

This was the first documented evidence that Psychodrama wasn't just a tool I utilise as and when required. It had become an inherent part of my being, guiding my response to any given context. This integration of the philosophy of Psychodrama within my person continues to this day, about 6 and a half years since my introduction to the modality. Today, directing a drama or conducting a workshop is something I can do without breaking a sweat. I am confirmed in my being about this.

A few milestones in this journey that will stay with me:

1. 2021 June - Directed my first drama. It was an online session, and the protagonist was my mentor, M, the founder of Pil. The drama was quite intense. Sue was present, and I remember her reaction when someone mentioned it was my first time directing: "First time!" she exclaimed. Sue isn't someone who exclaims often.
2. 2021 June - Completion of the first year, receiving the 'Auxiliary Ego Certificate'.
3. 2023 December - My first time designing and conducting a workshop — this one was for my group (Group 2).
4. 2024 February - My first time designing and conducting a public workshop. I experienced the thrill of being able to wield Psychodrama as a tool in the service of others.
5. 2024 May - Conducted a workshop for my senior group. It turned out to be the final session of their Psychodrama training. It was an honour.
6. 2025 January - Part of the core team that organised the first International Psychodrama Conference held in India. Here, the experience of my interaction with mentors and leaders from across the world, some directly trained under JL and Zerka Moreno, the connection that was built was the highlight. Another highlight was my congruent self being visible to the participants of the conference.

The inception of new roles and the expansion of existing ones...

I practice as an artist and an archivist as a parallel version of myself. Hence, the understanding of context, data, timeline, information is critically important in the work I do. I share below the highlights of the past 5 years, beginning with the introduction of Psychodrama in my life, and the **roles** that evolved as a response to the context of various situations/circumstances/events.

2020

- 2020 May - Enrolled in the first year of the five-year Psychodrama training program.
 - Still in the grips of the COVID-19 pandemic, navigating lockdowns.
 - 2020 August - T and I decide to begin a romantic relationship. Begin living together.

Self-Caretaker/Self-Preserver



This role emerged in two significant moments: the beginning of a new romantic relationship, during which I maintained clear boundaries and prioritised my own care; and the decision to enrol in a five-year Psychodrama training program, intending to explore my inner world through the modality.

2021

- 2021 June - Completion of the first year - Auxiliary Ego Certification.
- 2021 September/October - I decided to quit my full-time job at my then-workplace in Ahmedabad. I had been with them for seven and a half years by then.
 - Two reasons: 1. The work was not stimulating anymore and had become monotonous. 2. I was spending more time and resources managing my immediate senior, H, managing the manager in a way, than on actual work. We had had a very conflict-filled and tumultuous journey in the years that I worked there.
 - I decided to have a conversation with the Managing Trustee, V, with whom I have shared a relationship since I joined as an employee; he has also been my photography mentor. Regarding my decision to quit, I spontaneously decided to share that my manager was a reason, too. We end up venting about him together for the next hour or so. Exhilarating experience.

**Confident Decision Taker
Thoughtful Truth Teller
Honest Narrative Sharer**



I recognised the emergence of these roles only in retrospect. In the context of H's manipulative behaviour, I had developed a pattern of questioning my own decisions. This time, however, I was firm and assertive about both the decision to leave and its timeline.

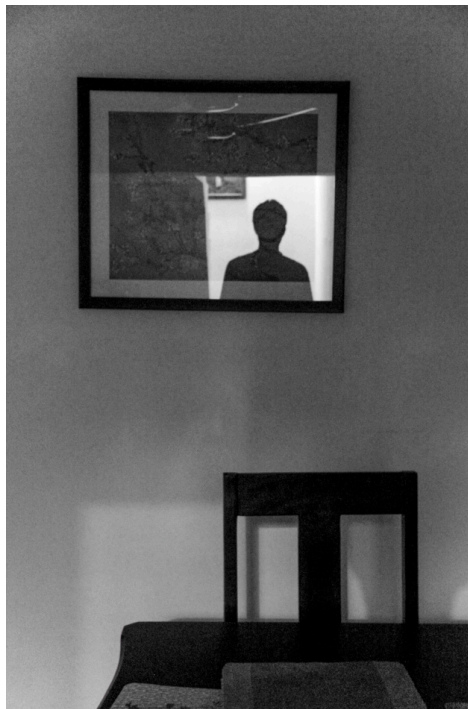
The roles of Thoughtful Truth Teller and Honest Narrative Sharer were affirmed in my conversation with V. I was grateful for all he had contributed to my life over the years, and resisted framing my leaving the job as a betrayal. I was thoughtful, articulate, and mindful in putting my narrative forth. There was grace in the way he received it. And I would like to believe the way I shared had a role to play in it.

- 2021 December - Last working month at the workplace.

2022

- 2022 January - T moves to Delhi.
- 2022 February onwards - Major financial anxiety. I had planned not to work for 2-3 months and had planned my savings accordingly. Personal financial anxiety merged with family financial anxiety. The plan was to find a solution to the generational debt issue of the family finances.
- 2022 February - Travel to Kolhapur to find a solution to the financial mess.
- 2022 March - Join a well-known Photo Biennale Foundation on a 'let's try it out' basis for 3 months.
- 2022 April - Travel to Delhi with the foundation for work. Had been struggling working with them. The work is not in alignment with my beliefs and philosophy of working in the arts.
- 2022 April - First big mess up in the relationship with T. My mistake.

Mistake & Guilt Acceptor



In past relationships, I had caused harm of similar intensity. This time, however, my response surprised me. I acknowledged the mistake, recognised the impact it had on T, apologised sincerely, and took steps to atone for the hurt I had caused.

- 2022 May - Personal therapy sessions fizzle out.
- 2022 May - Decide to quit working with the foundation at the end of three months. Have an honest conversation via email and phone call with S, one of the co-founders and the person I was directly working with.

Compassionate (Personal) Truth Teller



I had been carrying growing frustration and exhaustion in that role, to the point that it manifested physically. I couldn't make sense of why what was happening was happening. When I decided to leave, I expressed myself through a long and honest email sharing my truth, questioning the faults of the organisation, yet not criticising or challenging its actions in ways that would appear threatening to S. My agenda was to share MY reasons for leaving, which were born out of the dysfunction of the institution. I recognised the distinction between the fault of an individual and the ecosystem. This helped in sharing my truth with grace and without directly criticising the individual.

- 2022 August - Travel to Jakarta, Indonesia, for a photobook-making workshop at a photo festival I was selected for via a grant. Huge expense.

Giver of no Fucks



This role had been present but only recognised in hindsight. This workshop was being conducted by an internationally recognised and celebrated photobook artist. She would sit on juries of the world's largest photobook grants and festivals. I realised the other participants had been waiting for her to conduct a workshop for months. I had little idea until I got there. Yet the dummy I created felt entirely true to my work. I realised I no longer carried concerns about the opinions of "senior, celebrated artists" on my work, which had always been the case since always. I didn't give a damn!

- 2022 September onwards - Live in Delhi with T. She is in a horrible state due to her work.
- 2022 November - Begin consulting job at Cept Archives on a 6-month contract.

Allower of being Depressed



There were days when I struggled to remain functional—sometimes partially, sometimes entirely. Over time, I began allowing myself to respond to what my body was signalling. If I felt like staying in bed or watching television all night, I permitted it. I noticed that this approach often made me more functional later. Tasks that previously took two hours when I forced myself now took thirty minutes when I felt ready. The work on this role is ongoing.

2023

- 2023 Jan/Feb - T moves to Bangalore.
- 2023 February - The photo biennale foundation approaches to do some curatorial work for an exhibition at the Kochi Biennale. Moderate a panel discussion with the exhibiting artists from Wales and India at the biennale. The first ever moderation of my career.
- 2023 March - First big conflict with T. Realise that both of us are struggling in our independent lives and the relationship as well.

Believer in Relationship Strength



The conflict helped me see that she was equally—if not more—affected in the relationship. Over time, my intentions and actions shifted toward repairing and nurturing the relationship together.

- 2023 March/April - Part of the organising team - A Photo Festival at the Ahmedabad workplace. Going back to the place of work with old relationship patterns.
 - Moderate a panel discussion with exhibiting artists. Moderation is deeply appreciated by many people.

**Amazing Self-worth Appreciator
Self Truster**



My role in the organisation of the Photo Festival and the approach to working with a team with whom I had difficult relationships in the past played an important part in the evolution of these two roles. Additionally, the two panel discussions I moderated (My first at the Kochi Biennale in February 2023 and the one at the Photo Festival in Ahmedabad) acted as a massive reinforcement in the concretisation of these roles.

- 2023 April - Last month at CEPT Archives. Panic about where the next money will come from.
- 2023 May - Completion of the third year of the Psychodrama Training Program.

**Confident Psychodramatist
Provider of a Safe Space
Humble Winner of the World**



This marked the highest point in my Psychodrama training thus far. These roles belong to the kind that develop quietly in the background, evolving slowly, unnoticed by consciousness—until one day they emerge, as if they had always been there. Much like the sudden sprout of a bamboo plant.

- 2023 June - Begin couples therapy.
- 2023 June - Visit Kolhapur with another attempt to find a solution. My mind is in the worst possible state.
- 2023 July - Travel to Kutch with the family to try and sell the property there.

Perseverent Mover



This is not a role typically celebrated in general. We tend to acknowledge and celebrate the exit out of a difficult phase after we are out of the phase. Acknowledging the effort it takes to keep the movement going, persevering is a change I brought about here. While progressive, it carries the tone of having “survived a difficult time” rather than one of “achievement.” I believe this role has always existed within me, although I tend to recognise it only in moments of extreme adversity.

- 2023 August - Run to Bangalore on an impulse. Difficult to stay by myself in Ahmedabad.
- 2023 August - Begin personal therapy with P, a new therapist.

Self-protecting Caretaker



During therapy, I was made to realise I needed to separate my financial anxiety from my family's. This gradually evolved into the belief that I had done all I could. I had led the horse to water, but I could not force it to drink. In real terms, the only way to resolve the financial crisis would have been to single-handedly deal with the debt collectors and property buyers behind the back of the family. Recognising the need to detach myself from this entanglement was difficult, but necessary.

- 2023 September - Interview at the Museum of Art and Photography, Bangalore, for a couple of positions. The application process began in June/July 2023.
- 2023 October - Decision: done with the art world. No longer pursuing permanent jobs in this field. Too little money; work misaligned with my beliefs and philosophy of art-making.
- 2023 November - Decide to explore Psychology as a new career option.

Brave Decision Taker



The recognition that the decision to change my career path the second time by the age of 35 is brave came much after the decision was made. I followed a process similar to that of a student after high school: identifying my interests, researching institutions, speaking with professionals, managing finances, the actual admission process and the education/training aspect. With limited resources, I made a list of jobs I was willing to do—including driving for Uber and waiting tables—to fund my education. Today, I know that I could not have made a better choice.

- 2023 December - Join the PCT Program at Maanas.
- 2023 December - Conduct my first Psychodrama workshop.

2024

- 2024 January - Enrol in the MSc. Psychology program at Jain University, Bangalore.
- 2024 March - Another big conflict with T around her being injured (leg fractured) and my ESEED conference travel at the same time.
- 2024 Aprilish onwards - Very happy with the performance in the PCT Course.

Confident(Proud) Congruent Self-acceptor
Brave Go-getter
Humble Healer



This is about 5 months into the PCT program. This program worked like a book that would give meaning to my entire life lived so far. It gave me language to combine the various aspects of my being—the many traits, behaviours, beliefs and philosophies I have held over the years. It helped me feel congruent, confidently. This confidence nudged the adventurous role, pushing myself to get better.

- 2024 - August/September - T and I decide to take a pause and space for a month to figure out the relationship in a couples therapy session.
- 2024 September onwards - worst state. My last anchor in these last 3 years was gone. The plan from one day at a time had been reduced to one task at a time.
- 2024 October - MSc. first sem exams. Horrible state. Pondered whether I should take the exams. Decided to travel to Bangalore as a first step. Attempted the first paper. Didn't end up attempting the others.
- 2024 October - Travel to Kolhapur.
- 2024 November - Wedding in the family in Ahmedabad. Horrible state.
- 2024 November - On a photography assignment, travelling to 8 cities in 8 days. Helpful for the state of the mind.
- 2024 December 10th - T decides to end the relationship.
- 2024 December - Prep for Photo Festival - edition 2025 and Psychodrama Conference, both in January 2025.

2025

- 2025 January - The Photo Festival goes well. Some revisiting of the old roles.
- 2025 January - Aadi, India's first International Psychodrama Conference. It couldn't have gone any better, personally.

Extremely grateful for the timing of both the conference and the Photo Festival mentioned below. Not only did they act as distractions from the personal relationship issues, but each was engaging and stimulating independently.

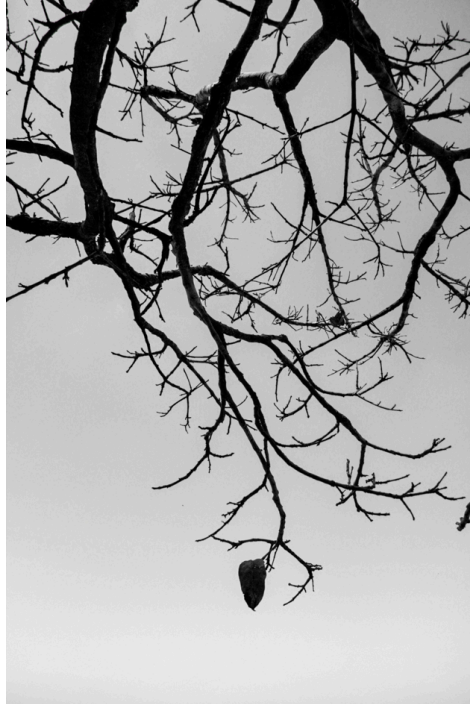
Spontaneity Practicer



This role manifested in two ways. First, at the Psychodrama conference, I felt free and spontaneous—and, importantly, others experienced me that way as well. Second, my therapist reflected on something I had shared: although I sometimes feel anxious before leading workshops or walks, I trust that the actual experience will go well for me, the participants, and the organisers. And it consistently does.

- 2025 February - Conducted a month-long photography workshop as part of a Heritage Festival, led a heritage walk, and hosted a community circle.
- 2025 March - Conducted a photography workshop at an architecture school in Hyderabad. A psychodrama workshop in Ahmedabad

Proud & Warm Knowledge Sharer



After conducting a series of photography and psychodrama workshops over the past three months, I have discovered genuine joy in mentoring. The pride comes from self-respect; the warmth, from how I am received by participants.

...a shift from many me's to many, many me's.

In conclusion, the contribution of the philosophy/modality of Psychodrama in my life, if I were to put it in the simplest terms, is that, it has catalysed the creation of a coherent personal atom of the many me's—both existing and newly evolved.

Psychodrama has helped open up new ways and lenses of approaching life. It has provided me with a tangible way to recognise my purpose in life and offered a path through which I can move to practice that purpose.

I would like to share a few lines to end my paper. These came to me during a psychodrama workshop I was attending,

Life doesn't have to be in 'either-or'. There is always an 'and'.

We don't embody roles that are binary. We don't live in a world of 'either-or's. We have many me's; many, many me's within us, and the many are bound to require things that contrast with each other.

There are no strengths and weaknesses. Some strengths are weaknesses in certain situations, and vice versa.

There are no situations that have an easy solution and a hard solution. There are no two roads, a road more travelled and a road less travelled (Sorry, Robert).

There are no two ways out, the "easy" way or the "right" way.

*We live in a world of the here and now.
Which road is less travelled, here, now?*