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“Are Psychoanalytic Concepts Relevant in a Globalizing World?”

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Thank you very much for inviting me to be here with you. I am experiencing a sense of my life having come ‘full circle’. When I was a Class X student I visited a school friend of mine. His father had a very well stocked library and I came across an introduction to psychoanalysis by Dr. Girindra Shekhar Bose which the family gifted to me as I showed great interest in it. Pouring over it I was fascinated by Freud’s concepts of the unconscious, personality structure and, in particular, dream analysis. It triggered off a life long passion for psychology which led me to doing my B.Sc. (Psy. Hons.) and an M.Sc. in Applied Psychology. Today, I am getting an opportunity to honour the man who started it all for me.

When I look back at the beginning of my work life as a teacher at St. Xavier’s College and a Counsellor at the Bureau of Vocational & Educational Counselling, Calcutta, I realize that the world was less complex and certainly less stressful. India was comparatively isolated from the rest of the world and though this had its downsides (we could not access the latest literature being published world wide), it also cocooned us from the pressures and surprises that are daily occurrences in a globalizing world.

Today we live in a world shrunken by the advances in science & technology. Thanks to T.V., people can actually see what is happening almost anywhere in the world. The internet has made information and knowledge instantly available world wide. Telephony has become cheaper and the mobile phone has become accessible to even the vegetable seller at the local market where I shop. Alongside this, commercial organizations have ‘globalized’. They buy raw materials and hire people, manufacture and sell anywhere in the world provided the price, quality and profits make sense. Sovereign national boundaries are not so ‘solid’ anymore. Intense competition is a hard reality and the customer truly is king.

In such a changed world, are the concepts and practices that originated with Freud towards the end of the 19th century and developed in the first half of the 20th century still relevant? For the rest of this lecture I intend to share evidence to show that as the world has changed so too have psychoanalytic concepts without losing their fundamental bases. They are being more widely applied than ever before.

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The Impact of Globalization on Individuals, Groups & Organizations.

I have had the good fortune of visiting countries to the East and West of India. Over the past decade or so, one notices a ‘homogenization’ of manifest culture. The shopping malls, restaurants, displays of food, the way people dress, the tunes of the music they listen to – all appear the same no matter if one is in Paris or Kuala Lumpur. Behind these manifest changes lie huge changes that are taking place in society. The extended family is disintegrating. Even nuclear families are losing their potential for providing emotional renewal. Each family member is too busy earning money or completing chores and youth are busy ‘hanging out’ with their peers. For adults, there is little time left to relax or to spend with friends.

Governments have moved away from being nurturant to becoming “business like”. Government departments have to financially justify their existences and citizens have to pay for services that were earlier subsidized.

At work, the psychological contract between the individual and the organization has changed. Organizations themselves are under severe competition not knowing when a new technology or a cheaper country will put them out of business. Their cultures, therefore, emphasise “deliver or perish”. It is an era of continuous downsizing and ‘re-engineering’ and individuals don’t know if the next week will bring them the dreaded ‘pink slip’. It gives rise to a stance of ‘every man* for himself’ which causes havoc in organizations where roles are by definition interdependent and where team working brings more productive results. One often hears managers say, “I’ve never been so rich in my life or so unhappy”.

In such a fast changing, complex world there are people who try to escape the anxiety of puzzling out effective responses by looking for, or offering, ‘quick-fix’ solutions. However, reality seems to be catching up and over the past few years there has been a resurgence of psychoanalytic concepts and methods that help individuals, groups and organizations make sense of what is happening to them and working out more effective responses. Though I will be covering each one separately in order to bring focus, in reality they are not separated. Individuals work in groups within organizational contexts.

** **Note:** I am referring to the male gender not out of a sense of discriminating against the female gender but for ease of reading,*

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Working with Individuals

For the past 5 years or so, my associates and I have been receiving requests to help managers deal with behaviours that were proving dysfunctional at the work place. Meetings with these individuals reveal that – in many cases – we had to work at levels much deeper than merely changing manifest behaviors. Given the pressures to ‘do well’ in highly anxiety provoking and lonely circumstances, managers often regress to earlier stages of their careers and try to respond in past ways to totally new situations. A number of them also get fixated and tightly hold onto behaviours that had seen them through so far but were not proving successful in current roles. We often had to help them redefine their self-concepts – pictures they held about themselves and what they could do and could not do – that were left over from earlier stages of life including childhood.

The need to beware of Executive Coaches who are not trained in dealing with such cases has begun appearing in management literature. The Harvard Business Review (June 2002) has a hard-hitting article by Steven Berglas titled “The Very Real Dangers of Executive Coaching”. He writes “I believe that in an alarming number of situations, executive coaches who lack rigorous psychological training do more harm than good. By dint of their backgrounds and biases, they downplay or simply ignore deep-seated psychological problems they don’t understand. Even more concerning, when an executive’s problems stem from undetected or ignored psychological difficulties, coaching can actually make a bad situation worse. In my view, the solution most often lies in addressing unconscious conflict when the symptoms plaguing an executive are stubborn or severe”. Having graphically illustrated actual cases where coaching had gone wrong and where he was called in to help, Berglas expands on the problems that occur when untrained people are let loose on an organization as Coaches. “The issue is

threefold. First, many executive coaches, especially those who draw their inspiration from sports, sell themselves as purveyors of simple answers and quick results. Second, even coaches who accept that an executive's problems may require time to address still tend to rely solely on behavioural solutions. Finally, executive coaches unschooled in the dynamics of psychotherapy often exploit the powerful hold they develop over their clients. Sadly, misguided coaching ignores – and even creates – deep-rooted psychological problems that often only psychotherapy can fix.”

Fortunately, this problem is being widely recognized and organizations like the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, London are holding

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courses to train those involved in Executive Coaching *. Participants are exposed to concepts, experiences and processes based on psychoanalysis. For example, extracts such as “Attachment, communication and the therapeutic process” from J. Bowlby's book ‘A Secure Base’ (1988) are required reading. In it Bowlby says, “A therapist applying attachment theory sees his role as being one of providing the conditions in which his patient can explore his representational models of himself and his attachment figures with a view to reappraising and restructuring them in the light of the new understanding he acquires and the new experiences he has in the therapeutic relationship.”(pg. 138). He then goes on to describe the therapist's role under five main heads and acknowledges that it is similar to “the principles described by other analytically trained psychotherapists who regard conflicts arising within interpersonal relationships as the key to an understanding of their patient's problems, who focus on the transference and who also give some weight, albeit of varying degrees, to a patient's earlier experience with his parents.” (pg. 139).

In this section, I would also like to focus on the entrepreneurial personality. Globalization has changed the rules by which businesses succeed and a number of individuals in India have become successful entrepreneurs. However, in a number of cases, I have been asked to consult with such enterprises, typically being told that “there's a problem at the top team level” or “we seem to be stuck and are not able to move forward”. In each of these cases, I have had to do intensive one-to-one work with the entrepreneur before the team or the organization could move forward. My own experiences have mirrored the findings of Kets de Vries (‘The Entrepreneurial personality’ in “Organizational Paradoxes”, 1988). He describes the entrepreneur as “that individual instrumental in the conception of the idea of the enterprise and the implementation of this idea.” (pg.113) who is required to fulfill three functions; innovation, management-coordination and risk-taking. It is in the discharging of the second function (viz. management-coordination) that the symptoms start appearing.

Because of certain typical childhood and teenage experiences which I shall not go into here, entrepreneurs have a “driving ambition [which] may be viewed as a need to contradict strong feelings of inferiority and helplessness. Hyperactivity becomes a way of covering up passive longings. Passivity changes into activity as a reaction against anxiety”. (pg.123). This reactive mode impacts the ‘management-coordination’

** I am grateful to Dr. Richard Mindel who acquainted me with some of the literature being used to train Coaches in the U.K.*

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function adversely. There is very little formal structuring or delegation with clearly defined roles. The entrepreneur's ‘hunch’ becomes the final conclusion. Vision or strategies are seen as ‘impractical’ (often experienced as ‘imprisoning’ at the unconscious level). Unless work is done with the entrepreneur himself deeply

examining his past and his real motivations, the top team begins to lose the best professional members and are replaced by 'yes' men. The enterprise lurches from one short-term gamble to another. Intervening through in-depth counselling can free the entrepreneur from his past and he can steer the enterprise to realistic success.

Working with Groups

We have long known that individual behaviour is not really *individual* behaviour. Man is a social animal and for his very existence needs to be in groups. Through the processes of projection – introjecting – acting out, individuals display behaviours that do not really belong to them. I became aware of this experientially some 25 years ago whilst working with so-called “problem children”. Their only problem was that they were introjecting the unarticulated problems between their parents and/or other family members. The child became “well” after I had got the family members to articulate and resolve the issues that rightfully were theirs to solve.

Whilst the above group phenomenon has helped me to work as a consultant to organizations, in this section I would like to dwell on another group process. There are very many situations where the **whole** group slips into an unconscious state. I am referring to the insights provided by that pioneering thinker Wilfred Bion (“Experiences in Groups”, 1961). He hypothesized that when members of a group are actually working on the task for which they have met, they willingly cooperate, test their ideas in a ‘scientific’ way, manage themselves in their roles as members, are aware that their group is part of a larger system, etc. Bion termed this type of sophisticated and mature group as the W (work) group.

But Bion also observed that very often groups regressed to a more primitive stage where the members all behaved as if they unconsciously shared the same primitive assumption. He hypothesized 3 types of basic assumption groups.

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1. Basic assumption Dependency (ba D): The group behaves as if one member is all-powerful and all-knowing. Members feel that he alone can solve the group's problems and feel a sense of being **secure and protected** by him. Individual members become unskilled and contribute less and less as they feel their leader ‘already knows’.
2. Basic assumption Pairing (ba P): Here the group behaviour centres around supporting two members (of any sex) as if they will produce the Saviour (Messiah?) – either a person or an idea that will solve their problem. The group feeling is one of **hope in the here and now** to the extent that it blocks off any real work that might refer to the future.
3. Basic assumption Fight/Flight (ba F/F): The group's behaviour is as if they have met for **action** – to fight against someone or something or to run away from it. Since the mode is action, intellectual or reflective behaviours are absent or glossed over.

Around the mid '70's Pierre Turquet postulated a fourth basis assumption Oneness (ba O), a mentality in which “members seek to join in a powerful union with an omnipotent force, unobtainably high, to surrender self for passive participation and thereby feel

existence, well-being and wholeness. The members feel they will be saved by being part of a 'Salvationist inclusion'". ("Leadership: The individual and the group". In Gibbard, G.S. et al, eds 'The Large Group: Therapy and Dynamics'. Josey-Bass, 1974). Whilst this behaviour can often be seen in religious movements, it can also operate in a commercial organization whose very existence is under severe threat. M. Quinn ("Deep Change: The Leadership Within") writes of the 'legions of the walking dead' – members of an organization whose market is rapidly shrinking who band together and work harder and harder doing the same (non-productive) things in the hope that they will be acquired by a 'saviour' organization or saved by a benign change in government policy neither of which is likely to happen.

As societies continued to change rapidly and globalization intensified, W. Gordon Lawrence, Alastair Bain and Laurence Gould published a paper titled "The Fifth Basic Assumption" (Free Associations 1996, Vol. 6 Part I No.37, pp: 28-55). They called it basic assumption Me-ness (ba M). Here members "act as if the group had no existence because if it did exist it would be the source of persecuting experiences. The idea of

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'group' is contaminating, taboo, impure, and, in sum, all that is negative. The people behave as if the group has no reality, and cannot ever have reality, because the only reality to be considered and taken account of is that of the individual. It is a culture of selfishness in which individuals appear to be only conscious of their own personal boundaries, which they believe have to be protected from any incursion by others. The nature of the transactions is instrumental, for there is no room for affect which could be dangerous because one would not know to where feelings might lead." (pg. 4).

As globalization spreads in India, I come across many 'teams' where there is no sense of a mutual interdependence, and "the 'me' is starving and deprived, to be sure, but the unconscious assumption is that it will likely be fed only by its own self-reliant efforts". (pg 6). A consultant has to work at the deeper unconscious levels. No amount of surface-level team working exercises and concepts will get the members to work interdependently.

Working at the Organizational Level

Last month I was lucky enough to be gifted a very interesting book titled "Organization in the Mind: Psychoanalysis, Group Relations, and Organizational Consultancy". It is a collection of writings by David Armstrong (Edited by Robert French, The Tavistock Clinic Series, 2005). In the first chapter "Organization in the Mind: an introduction", Armstrong concisely explains what organizational consultants refer to as "the Tavistock tradition". "This 'tradition' seeks to bring together insights from psychoanalysis, group relations, and open systems theory, to understand and address organizational dilemmas, challenges, and discontents, as presented by individual role-holders, teams, or whole organizations. Recently, it has come to be referred to as 'systems psychodynamics'" (pg 2). He also clearly articulates the dilemma confronting the consultant. "In psychoanalytic practice [the] evidence is immediate and in some sense transparent: disclosed within the evolution of transference and counter-transference processes. The 'object', as it were, is there in the room. But in working with, say, an individual executive during a role consultation, in what sense is the 'object' there; or, to put this another way, just what is the 'object' you are seeking to work with? Or again, suppose you are aware of a particular emotional undertow in that exchange, within what boundary is this undertow to be located?" (pg 2 & pg 3). Armstrong says that in

this type of work it is important not only to uncover what individuals and groups might be

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projecting onto the organization because of their own past experiences but also what might be getting “elicited **by** the organizational field”.(Pg 5).

He lists 17 “propositions on the proper object of a psychoanalytic approach to working with organizations” which I am very briefly summarizing below.

Armstrong reminds us that the consultant must pay attention to and interpret the emotional experience between himself and the client – who could be an individual, a group or the total organizational membership. This experience always contains a factor of how the client emotionally experiences the organization and what the organization puts into the client. This emotional experience is a “function of the inter-relations between task, structure, culture and context (or environment)” and the position and role taken by each member. “The aim of a psychoanalytic approach to working with organizations is to introduce the client to this world-within-a-world” which helps to work out what kinds of interventions will benefit the organization most. There are no interpretations of the (personal) inner world of the client. The focus is on the “organization-in-the-mind”, on the “relatedness of a person-in-role to a system”.

There is yet another exciting area that has recently evolved – Social Dreaming. W. Gordon Lawrence (“Experiences in Social Dreaming”, Karnac, London, 2003) has drawn attention to the fact that dreams not only contain an individual’s unconscious material but also what is being picked up from the social context in which he lives. If one sees it in the light of what Armstrong says about organizations contributing to the emotional experiences of its members, it is easy to understand how dreams can become a rich source of understanding what is **really** happening in an organization. Alastair Bain has elucidated this in a fascinating paper “The Organization Containing and being Contained by Dreams : The Organization as a Container of Dreams (1)”.

The methodology consists of ‘teaching’ organizational members how to remember and record their dreams. Next morning, when an individual is sharing his dream, other members are not allowed to analyze it but to free associate to it (or parts of it). This continues for sometime and then the members are encouraged to work out for themselves what themes and patterns have emerged. This can be a very powerful diagnostic intervention as the ‘truth’ that has been repressed emerges.

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Conclusion

In India, Dr. Gouranga P Chattopadhyay was the first to offer Working Conferences based on the Tavistock tradition. He began in 1973 whilst at the IIM Calcutta and continued for two decades. After his return from Australia in 1999, he again began offering them but the response was mixed. In 2004, he invited me to jointly direct an International Group Relations Conference (new term for Working Conference) titled “Managing Transformation of Self and Organization in a Globalized Economy” to be held in February 2005. Four months before the GRC, **all** 48 places were booked. In

February 2006, Rosemary Viswanath and I are jointly directing another GRC with the same focus. We have started receiving nominations from India and abroad even before the brochure has been published.

The title of this lecture is “Are Psychoanalytic Concepts Relevant in a Globalizing World?” I hope I have been able to present enough evidence that they certainly are. As the world has become more complex and inter-related, practitioners of psychoanalytic concepts **have** been able to develop and appropriately contextualize the concepts so that their applications are growing and providing new meanings and resolutions to individuals, groups and organizations.

Once again, thank you for inviting me to present this lecture and having the opportunity of honouring Dr. Girindra Sekhar Bose the pioneer of psychoanalysis in India.

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