Fragrance of Narcissism – A Comparison Between Eastern and Western Concepts

Chatterjee Sraboni
Department of Psychology, Bijoy Krishna Girls’ College, Howrah

Email address:
bivash49@gmail.com

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Abstract: Love and life are the two sides of a coin. But the form of love is not same everywhere. It is manifested through different colours and connotations and as a result sometimes it comes as a sweet fragrance of a flower and sometimes its forms become destructive. Narcissism or self-love can be channelized in both ways. In this paper an attempt has been made to make a comparative analysis between the viewpoints of two cultures regarding their concepts of narcissism. In both cultures the colour of self-love are expressed in different ways. In western concepts it is regarded as the medium of rearing up process of self, while in eastern thought it is the meaning of life, hope and ways of releasing pent up feelings. To understand the different vibrations of narcissism in different cultures here the concepts of Jung and Rabindranath Tagore regarding narcissism and spiritual existence are taken into consideration. By searching the history and entering into the concepts of Jung, it is found that according to him narcissism is the primary energetic function of self-presentation or the key for development of stable self. In Tagore’s viewpoint it is the understanding one’s existence in this world is the source of one’s spiritual existence. By devoting the energy of self into others actually helps one to identify the pathway of own happiness.

Keywords: Narcissism, Self, Spirituality, Happiness

1. Introduction

Love is the eternal truth. The lives of human beings are illuminated with different shades and fragrance of love. Sometimes it touches our soul but in some instances its shadow becomes destructive. Within its small frame, love carries different vibration and narcissism is recognized one of them.

1.1. Concept and Traits of Narcissism

The term narcissism comes from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a handsome Greek youth who rejected the desperate advances of the nymph Echo. These advances eventually led Narcissus to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool of water. Unable to consummate his love, Narcissus "lay gazing enraptured into the pool, hour after hour," and finally changed into a flower that bears his name, the narcissus (Neville, 1993).

David (2012) in his popular book on power-hungry narcissists suggests that narcissists typically display most, and sometimes all, of the following traits:
- An obvious self-focus in interpersonal exchanges
- Problems in sustaining satisfying relationships
- A lack of psychological awareness
- Difficulty with empathy
- Problems distinguishing the self from others
- Hypersensitivity to any insults or imagined insults
- Vulnerability to shame rather than guilt
- Haughty body language
- Flattery towards people who admire and affirm them
- Detesting those who do not admire
- Using other people without considering the cost of doing so
- Pretending to be more important than they really are
- Bragging (subtly but persistently) and exaggerating their achievements
- Claiming to be an "expert" at many things
- Inability to view the world from the perspective of other people
- Denial of remorse and gratitude

Hotchkiss (2003) identified what she called the seven deadly sins of narcissism:
1. Shamelessness: Shame is the feeling that lurks beneath all unhealthy narcissism and the inability to process shame in healthy ways.
2. Magical thinking: Narcissists see themselves as perfect, using distortion and illusion known as magical thinking. They also use projection to dump shame onto others.

3. Arrogance: A narcissist who is feeling deflated may reinflate by diminishing, debasing, or degrading somebody else.

4. Envy: A narcissist may secure a sense of superiority in the face of another person's ability by using contempt to minimize the other person.

5. Entitlement: Narcissists hold unreasonable expectations of particularly favorable treatment and automatic compliance because they consider themselves special. Failure to comply is considered an attack on their superiority, and the perpetrator is considered an "awkward" or "difficult" person. Defiance of their will is a narcissistic injury that can trigger narcissistic rage.

6. Exploitation: Can take many forms but always involves the exploitation of others without regard for their feelings or interests. Often the other is in a subservient position where resistance would be difficult or even impossible. Sometimes the subservience is not so much real as assumed.

7. Bad boundaries: Narcissists do not recognize that they have boundaries and that others are separate and are not extensions of themselves. Others either exist to meet their needs or may as well not exist at all. Those who provide narcissistic supply to the narcissist are treated as if they are part of the narcissist and are expected to live up to those expectations. In the mind of a narcissist there is no boundary between self and other.

### 1.2. Comparison Between Healthy and Destructive Narcissistic Traits

Lubit (2002) compared healthy and destructive narcissism in relation to their long-term impact on organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Healthy Narcissism</th>
<th>Destructive Narcissism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>High outward self-confidence in line with reality</td>
<td>An unrealistic sense of superiority (&quot;Grandiose&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for power, wealth and admiration</td>
<td>May enjoy power</td>
<td>Pursues power at all costs, lacks normal inhibitions in its pursuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Real concern for others and their ideas; does not exploit or devalue others</td>
<td>Concerns limited to expressing socially appropriate response when convenient; devaluates and exploits others without remorse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to follow a consistent path</td>
<td>Has values; follows through on plans</td>
<td>Lacks values; easily bored; often changes course</td>
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<td>Foundation</td>
<td>Healthy childhood with support for self-esteem and appropriate limits on behaviour towards others</td>
<td>Traumatic childhood undercutting true sense of self-esteem and/or learning that he/she doesn't need to be considerate of others</td>
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After explaining the concept of narcissism here an attempt is made to give emphasis on its expression through the light of different culture. In one culture narcissism is manifested may be in its destructive and crudest form and in other it is regarded as the fragrance of peace, joy, pleasure and then how human being nurture this trait within them becomes a key question. To get the answer of this question here a small effort is made.

### 2. Main Body

#### 2.1. Narcissism in Western Culture

In exploring the concept of narcissism an attempt has been made in this paper to make a comparison between eastern and western viewpoints. Starting from the history of narcissism it is our duty to make a glance on the contribution of Sigmund Freud. Freud defines narcissism as soothing of the self as a sexual object. Although narcissism can be seen as a perversion there is a general developmental narcissism which can be found in all human development. Freud establishes a primary narcissism as the original libido directing its energy into the ego, which then causes the ego to become "packed". Secondary narcissism is when the object-libido is returned inward after it had already been attached to an object and now became introverted into the ego. Later Jung's researches on narcissism focused on disruptions in the process by which a healthy and stable self is formed. But following his break from Freud, he turned his attention to the nature of, selfhood in later life, especially in creative, spiritually gifted (and tormented) individuals.

Jung elaborated a number of ideas seminal for his later psychological theory. But certain of his hypotheses turned out to be contradictory, and were later modified or dropped. First, in his *Jahrbuch* articles, Jung proposed a specific alteration in the psychoanalytic theory of libido, a proposal not to be found in later editions of the same work, or in his overall theory of later years. This is the notion of a "genetic" component to the libido (genetic in the biological sense). Jung described a primordial energy of primitive organisms that could be considered essentially sexual, i.e., the core chive of this organism was reproduction. In the course of evolution, however, other functions developed that were needed to maintain the organism in order that it might successfully reproduce. Thus, the original sexual energy had become genetically modified. Only a portion remained in the service of sexuality per se; the remainder had long since become fixed in maintenance functions which, having evolved, were now inherited. Second, Jung hypothesized a monistic, overall "psychic energy" (which he continued to call "libido"-a point of contention with Freud). Third, although he continued to assert the monism of psychic
energy, Jung's later (1921) conception of the psyche is
dualistic (though non-conflictual). Jung's world differed from
Freud's, both internally and externally, and this difference is
reflected in their respective points of view. To oversimplify,
Freud saw an essentially psychoneurotic world, Jung an
essentially "narcissistic-neurotic" or psychotic one.

Jung (1961) concluded that the "spirits" were themselves
"personalities." In general, he said, although they are
stereotyped and uncomplicated, they are not simply wishes,
thoughts, or images. Each "spirit" is an integrated, quasi-
person split off in its entirety from consciousness, and
accessible only in trance. In Jung's view, the personality like
character of these split-off portions of the psyche, with their
consequent will-like autonomy, is their most important
feature. Jung's theory of complexes is based on a different
kind of dissociation. In his view, the psyche maintains
emotion and image as a unit, but can split apart into multiple
such units. Consciousness usually remains identified with but
one, which Jung therefore called the "ego-complex," except
in unusual circumstances when it might adopt one of the
other complexes as its basis (Satinover, 1986).

As a psychiatrist, Jung was observing severely disturbed
individuals. But he was also examining himself. Many of the
phenomena he observed in patients were also features of his
own psychology (Ticho, 1982). Jung's psychopathology was
not neurotic—it was narcissistic (Homans, 1979), trans-
neurotic" (Wolf, 1984), or schizophrenic (Stern, 1976), or
childhood-schizophrenic (Winnicott, 1964)—that is, in general
terms, it involved "early and deep fragmentations of one's self" (Ticho, 1982).

In brief analytical terms it can be commented that there is
an innate, unconscious, conflict-free sphere of the ego. One
of its primary functions is self-representation. The energy of
this function is narcissism. In severe regression, this energy
flows back to its source, whose features constitute the
"archaic inheritance." This inheritance, the primordial
structure of the ego (ego nuclei) is the true reservoir of
narcissistic libido. Regression of the ego thus leads to a
fragmentation of the psyche as this primordial structure re-
emerges in the form of psychotic ideation and primitive
object relations. This re-emergence is part of a homeostatic
process by which, tinder an innate maturational pressure, a
more integrated self-representation is sought (Satinover,
1986).

2.2. Narcissism and Its Reflection in Eastern Culture

Now changing the glance from western spectrum and
looking forward into our own spiritual aspects it was found
out that our philosophy is glorified by the contribution of
several remarkable persons and Rabindranath Tagore is one
of them. To him, the happiness, love and freedom we
experience in intimate relationships with other people have
their analogues in the experience of nature. His soul seems to have settled com-
fortably, as he says in a letter to his niece Indira Devi, in the arms of
nature, without missing a particle of its light, its air, its
scenery and its song. He speaks of his harmony with the
music of nature, with the melodies coming from the murmur
of rushing water, from the songs of birds, from the rustling of
leaves. He expresses an eagerness to enter deep into the great
festival of nature, to see and hear nature in a consummately
significant way:

"I have had many invitations to the world's festival, and
thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen, and my
ears have heard. It was my part at this feast to play upon my
instruments, and I have done all I could" (taken from the
article The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore by Kalyan
Sen Gupta).

It was found that Tagore constantly extolling the beauty
and splendors of nature. His songs are always there, 'where
the least of a bird's note if never missed, where the stream's
babbling finds its full wisdom'. Here are some examples:

"There comes the morning with the golden basket in her
right hand bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to cross the
earth. And there comes the evening over the lonely meadows
deserted by the herds, through trackless paths, carrying cool
draughts of peace in her golden pitcher from the western
ocean of rest" (taken from the article The Philosophy of
Rabindranath Tagore by Kalyan Sen Gupta).

It is the serene of stirring beauty of nature that constantly
figures in Tagore's dreams, and he wants to paint it 'ever with
love longing'. Indeed, he longs for spiritual companionship
with nature itself, for a more complete sense of identity with
it. With the help of the above cited quotes we encounter that
dimension of Tagore's conception of spirituality which
consists in the realization and extension of one's being in the
open panorama of nature. He talks about nature as 'the most
sacred place for pilgrimage', and expresses his own profound
sense of intimacy with it. 'This world,' he writes, 'was living
to me, intimately close to my life, permeated by a subtle
touch of kinship which enhanced the value of my being”’ (Gupta, 2005).

3. Conclusion

The truth behind narcissism exists in same form everywhere, only thoughts for reaching the pathway are different. Fragrance of happiness one can get by projecting the smell of love into others but if the total energy strength is directed towards self can’t be channelize then self destruction is the obvious production. At the end it can be said that respect love in others and it will help to love you.

References