

# Fragrance of Narcissism – A Comparison Between Eastern and Western Concepts

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**To cite this article:**

Chatterjee Sraboni. Fragrance of Narcissism – A Comparison Between Eastern and Western Concepts. *Social Sciences*. Special Issue: Literature & Psychology. Vol. 4, No. 6-1, 2015, pp. 1-4. doi: 10.11648/j.ss.s.2015040601.11

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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

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## 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 1.2.1. Chief Personality Features of Healthy versus Destructive Narcissists.*

Characteristics	Healthy Narcissism	Destructive Narcissism
Self-confidence	High outward self-confidence in line with reality	An unrealistic sense of superiority ("Grandiose")
Desire for power, wealth and admiration	May enjoy power	Pursues power at all costs, lacks normal inhibitions in its pursuit
Relationships	Real concern for others and their ideas; does not exploit or devalue others	Concerns limited to expressing socially appropriate response when convenient; devalues and exploits others without remorse
Ability to follow a consistent path	Has values; follows through on plans	Lacks values; easily bored; often changes course
Foundation	Healthy childhood with support for self-esteem and appropriate limits on behaviour towards others	Traumatic childhood undercutting true sense of self-esteem and/or learning that he/she doesn't need to be considerate of others

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, under 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. Tagore's is a mind extremely responsive and sensitive to nature.

Here the solidarity and community of human being was the prime focus but the concept is meaningless unless the

kinship between man and environment is considered. From his infancy Tagore said that, 'I had a keen sensitiveness which kept my mind tingling with consciousness of the world around me—nature and man.' Referring to this kinship, he often invokes his analogy between spiritual harmony and music.

*The grand orchestra of the universe has filled my heart in many a quiet moment in my imagination. The inaccessible snow-clad mountain peaks in their Infinite solitude of blue have sent to my heart many an invitation* (taken from the article The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore by Kalyan Sen Gupta).

Nature actually illuminates life and movement. The above mentioned song is an expression of beauty. The natural beauty broadens the existence of one's being. The parameter of life can be extended if we understand the kinship and feel this eternal truth internally Tagore actually wants to mention this concept by his songs (Gupta, 2005).

Throughout his poems, songs or dramas, we meet bright sunshine, mellow evening, calm night and many other aspects of nature. His soul seems to have settled comfortably, 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 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.

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