

SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

Psychotherapy: A Key to Self-discovery in *Dear Zindagi*

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Abstract

Though it is shameful to have tabooed psychological problems in Indian society, *Dear Zindagi* portrays the journey of a budding woman cinematographer who is unable to release her struggle with inner impulses, maladjustments, repressions of social environment, inhibition of emotions, anger outwardly, suffers from insomnia, neurosis and depression. In Kaira's quest for self-discovery, she seeks to discover herself in the social virus of patriarchy. This article will explore the nuances of mental blocks in the amygdala from the perspectives of Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Stekel, Otto Rank's concept of *Trauma of Birth* and Rank's concept of will. My article will examine the innovative and empathetic techniques of the conversational periods between the client and the counsellor from the four stages of Adlerian therapy. This article is meant to project the necessity of psychotherapy which facilitates a woman's self-actualization and unlocks her unique creative self as a film director embracing her life.

Keywords: Depression, Insomnia, Patriarchy, Psychotherapy, Repression, Self.

Introduction

Gouri Shinde's movie *Dear Zindagi* as Andy Webster calls it an “insightful movie” is an attempt to transmit mental health dialogue with the audience propagating about psychotherapy, counselling and its importance in life. It is shameful to have tabooed psychological problems, but this movie depicts psychotherapy as a normal day-to-day conversation and tries to normalize the so-called abnormalities and brings happiness, harmony and balance to life. The movie portrays the journey of a budding cinematographer, Kaira who shoots advertisements and wants to be an independent movie director, suffers from severe anxiety, and emotional issues which ultimately lead to insomnia and neurosis. In her quest for self-discovery, she decides to meet Dr. Jehangir Khan (Jug), a therapist, “dimaag ka doctor” whom she first encounters at a conference while shooting a restaurant promo who gears her up from her inner turmoil, fear and frustration and leads her to embrace her dream independently. The word “self” is a contradictory proliferation itself when it is applied to women as women are often “male-identified” and “her search for identity is less successful within the world of fiction”. But as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar find the “woman’s quest for self-definition” and Elaine Showalter sees “self-discovery”, “a search for identity” (Gardiner 347) as the main theme of writing by women since the nineteenth-century, Kaira in *Dear Zindagi* is such a woman who seeks to discover herself in the social system of patriarchy which is predicated upon social and cultural institutions where it has been very difficult for any young woman to know her unique and individual “self” in a personal and self-supporting way. This paper will introduce a woman firstly to herself, then to the whole world. She meets herself as a champion and lover of life, by embracing her *zindagi* she discovers her own success tagging herself the most content, most excited and the most delighted.

Dear Zindagi provides a very strong audio-visual medium to address the fear, anxiety, the nuances of mental blocks as well as to cohere the vision of strength and empathy of the present time. An individual in search of a positive way of life faces the struggle of inner impulses, pressures and repressions of the social environment which drive all the conflicts into the subconscious mind. Individual's maladjustments, unhappiness, depressed mood, inhibition of emotions, patterns of chronic anxiety and inability to discharge anger outwardly amalgamate into the amygdala¹. Any individual is unable to release and manifest the suppressed problems of the mind to anyone and suffers silently, it will cause the disease of insomnia and neurosis which become obstacles to utilizing the creative self and may predict the subsequent development of post-traumatic disorder and may also lead to suicidal attempts. Kaira who is the representative of the young generation, fortunately, contacts psychotherapist Doctor Khan who instead of using medications uses his step-by-step innovative methods of behavioural therapy in a relatively non-clichéd manner with his cognitive and empathetic skills. This paper will explore her psychological problems from the perspectives of Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Stekel, and Otto Rank. My paper will examine the conversational periods between the client and the counsellor from the four stages of Adlerian therapy. This paper is meant to provide the necessity of psychotherapy which will enable Kaira to dismantle her structure of fear and anxiety and discover her own self.

Kaira, a young independent lady who is traumatic and restless but is constantly in search of her ambition of becoming a movie director, has eccentric nature of making her home disorderly, and the nature of buying costly childish objects online. During her depressive episode, she has the symptoms of sleeplessness, shifting moods, eating less and fast-talking. The way she shouts at home alone, and the way she behaves talking with herself, "What are you doing?" clearly reflect the imperceptible pressures of social condition, her estrangement being separated from everyone, anxiety, and fear of abandonment. This results in her as she is

shown to be encountering multiple non-committal relationships. Her anger and frustration that she has no dedicated romantic relationship are reflected by the way she is about to throw a stone at a young unknown couple in the park with whom she meets accidentally, she asserts “I hate couples” and often dances in “Let's break up”. When she learns her lover, Raghuvendra (Raghu) got engaged with Gautami, with both of whom her dream of shooting a film in the USA is associated, her fear of career and fear of relationship triggered her repressed childhood fears as William Faulkner said “Past is never dead in fact it's not even the past” (Dear Zindagi 00:29:44-48). Her act of chewing up green chilli, the act of breaking sauce jars named Raghu in a shopping mall, and the act of tearing up the photograph with Raghu indicate her ‘self’ destructive behaviour showing her anger, frustration and love for Raghu though she doesn't want to express it before camouflaging her inner pains. Kaira whose unsuccessful relationships with Raghu and Sid, her unsuccessful dream of shooting in New York and her family's force to get married cause her sleep deprivation, though she tries to sleep her nervous system becomes activated automatically, is representative of the young generation, seeks to take psychotherapy from Dr. Khan who could be seen as a replica of psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud.

Critical Analysis

Freud seems to have been the first man to attempt psychotherapy. Firstly, he distinguishes between neurosis and psychosis as well as discusses the possible reasons for neurosis which is indicative of personal emotional issues, confusion in self-realization, and conflict between self and social demands. In Kaira's case, patriarchy is not only represented by Landlord forces her to leave her room only because she is unmarried, but also represented by family, mostly by her mother which suspects her as a lesbian just because she doesn't want to settle with anyone, pressurizes her constructing to get married before the age of twenty-five to reduce the possibility of her divorce. Freud also saw the value of a frank and free relationship between the client and the counsellor as an indispensable means of disclosing the hidden unconscious. Dr

Khan's attitude of cutting jokes, and wearing jeans at a conference attracts Kaira to meet him for therapy. Though Kaira feels reluctant enough to narrate her own problems to Doctor Khan who asks about the reasons for shifting from Mumbai to Goa. But Doctor Khan's making of funny anecdote of Pyarelalji in their first counselling who wanted to climb Mount Everest without any preparation but was finally eaten up by a leopard, in her second phase of counselling Doctor Khan's metaphor of chair for choosing boyfriends, in the third phase of counselling Doctor Khan's unconventional technique of outdoor session at the beach playing "Kabaddi" with the waves and in the sixth stage of counselling their taking up cycling during their conversational period for muscle relaxation are the strategies to unlock Kaira's heart offering insight and find the final solution. Freud also emphasizes childhood as the beginning of neurotic development which is for the frustrating influences of parental discrimination against gender. Like a cognitive behavioural therapist, Doctor Khan notices that Kaira's depression results from her confusion and perverted negative thoughts who in a dysfunctional family has experienced her parental failure to cope with a girl child. According to cognitive behavioural therapy, depression comes mostly from negative ways of thinking and from the relationship between someone's negative thoughts generated from dysfunctional beliefs and someone's depressive symptoms. But Doctor Khan understands that her feeling of depression is not only for her negative thoughts on her interpersonal relations but also the lack of her self-evaluation.

In consultation with Freud, the Viennese psychologist Wilhelm Stekel incurs the pressures of a career as the reason for occupational neurosis. In this movie, Kaira has been constantly pressurized by her family which forcefully asserts that every individual should work in a respectful office negating the value of individuality. Kaira is also haunted by her sky-kissing dream of shooting in New York with Raghuvendra, but Doctor Khan clarifies to her that every individual tries to pressurize himself or herself by undertaking a difficult path instead

of taking a simple path in life. In the essay, *Psychoanalytic Studies of Physical Importance*, Stekel claims that neurosis is only based on psychic conflicts. But Freud who has elaborated that every neurotic “has a peculiar form of sexual gratification”, contests that actual neurosis is due to purely sexual disturbance. In Kaira's case, her sexual intimacy with Raghuvendra who calls her “hot” as her only talent is impacted upon her psyche, but unlike the fourth wave of feminism, she does not initiate any *Me Too*² movement. Nevertheless, Stekel views neurosis by rejecting the real sexual causes but as accepting the repression of psychic conflicts.

In *Trauma of Birth* Otto Rank emphasizes the act of mother-child separation which has not only impacted the physical body but also the psychic state of the child, is a hostile act. Kaira's trauma of birth has been intensified by her childhood memories when her parents left her in her maternal house and even did not feel to reply to any of her letters when she wanted them most. Her stress, anger and trauma burst out in the party arranged by her family not only for Kiddo's homecoming but also for her match-making. Her family is such a repressive system which prioritizes all of Kiddo's achievements but not anything of her. The injustice by her family results in her lack of self-realization and impacts her career development in forming her *real-self*, what Karen Horney calls neurosis in her *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Towards Self-Realisation*. But Rank's development of the concept of will has been manifested by the patience of the patient during psychoanalysis, as Kaira in her self-discovery remembers the message of Dr. Khan: “Genius is not one who has the answers to all the questions but the one who has the patience to reach the answers” (translated mine).

Research Methodology

Dr. Khan's series of cognitive and empathetic therapy can be identified with four-phase of Adlerian therapy: forming a relationship, investigating, interpreting and reorientation, to

identify the obstacles and overcome her feeling of inferiority in life. Kaira realizes her feeling of weakness is not due to the loss of the self but due to the misuse of her self-realization.

In the Adlerian first phase of counselling, crucial importance is given to cooperative, collaborative, motivational, egalitarian, and encouraging interpersonal relationships between the counsellor and the client. In *Dear Zindagi* Doctor Khan's counselling is seen as an empathetic learning process to know Kaira's self. Doctor Khan's funny nature of cracking jokes, his eye contact and nonverbal communication with Kaira, his playful nature, and his offering water to Kaira are the instruments to peep into the untold voices of the inner psyche of Kaira who feels shy to share her emotions hinted out by her facial expressions, body language, childish nature, stammering, humming a song, shaking of legs, telling her own story in the name of her friend, Doctor Khan's understanding of Kaira's feelings, thoughts and problems frees Kaira letting him know her problems who feels sigh of relief and finally falls in love with him at the end. In the second phase, Doctor Khan investigates Kaira's position in her family. Her lack of incongruity with her mother as she does not want to receive the phone call of her mother is fulfilled by her maid Alka even shown when she does not enlist her mother as one of her closest human beings. Doctor Khan gives her homework of talking with her parents and suggests looking at her parents differently but he summarizes the entire family as a repressive system which does not allow any child to express anger, fear, stress, not even love. After the cry of Kaira in front of Doctor Khan releasing her anger and frustration with childhood memories. Doctor Khan explains her repressed childhood fear of living with people and fear of being alone are reflecting on her present relationships and on her self-perception as Doctor Khan philosophies her, "Don't let your past blackmail your present to ruin a beautiful future" (*Dear Zindagi* 02:04:39-46). As in the Adlerian third stage of counselling, Doctor Khan intelligently instrumentalizes the hypothesis of interpretation. Using the *push button*³ technique, Dr Khan interrupts Kaira's dream of falling down from a constructed building as he

claims opprobriously that a beautiful woman must have many romantic relationships. Consequently, Kaira irrationally figures out the dream that the stereotyped system represented by the newly married women with traditional looks laughed at her and labelled her as “cheap” and “dirty” which makes her bathe at four a.m. to clean herself. Doctor Khan also interprets her feeling of unhappiness, and dependence on Raghuvendra, which she does not feel with Kiddo, Fatty, Alka and Jackie. This process of psychotherapy enables the client to find their own answers with the help of the therapist. In the reorientation phase, Doctor Khan uses insightful and deep thoughts to reorient and open up Kaira's pattern of emotions. She learns to revive her broken pieces of parental bond in the puzzle called life and also learns to “repair” and “recycle” herself as she fell down from the cycle of life realising the blind spots. Doctor Khan who widens her perspectives of personal freedom uses the phrases like, “We are our own teachers in the school of life.”, “har tooti hui chiz jodi ja sakti hai” (*Dear Zindagi* 01:37:33-36). She finally embraces her doctor who indoctrinates how to embrace her life and sings “Jo dil se lage use keh do hi hi.../...Love you zindagi/ Love me zindagi” (*Dear Zindagi* 02:05:03-02:07:58) and she ends up “being the godmother of Fatty's baby girl” (Sumati 76). Like a true therapist Doctor Khan teaches her self-help strategy to control her own symptoms by making relationships with supportive people, meditating, sleeping right and eating enough, even Kaira who previously does not like to take food from her mother gives a list of her favourite foods to her mother at the end.

Conclusion

Dear Zindagi is not just about a young lady's psychological agitation who seeks to have multiple romantic relationships and wants to create her own identity in the social system of patriarchy. But it is about Rounak's problems who wants to tell himself that he is a gay, about the child's problems who goes to Doctor Khan to repair his cycle, even also about the therapist's

own problems who is not happy in his marital life. So, this film shows implying the fact that every individual faces the battle between the constructed self which is imposed by the society and individual's own inner self. Such abnormalities occur because on the one hand, the environment will not allow any individual to bloom independently, and on the other the individual cannot immediately cope with or “adopt the pressures of the external environment” as pointed out by a scholar Bernard. So, patriarchy is such an infectious virus which not only spreads openly by the father figure but also is extended by the silent role of a mother figure in an Indian family. To diagnose the virus of patriarchy Doctor Khan prescribes Kaira to love and embrace her life freeing herself from her fears as the only vaccine for this virus.

Dear Zindagi is the projection of the importance of multi-layered dynamics of psychotherapy which facilitates in Kaira's self-actualization and self-disclosure. This film validates Dr. Khan's counseling which unlocks Kaira's creative self as a film director. Kaira's film on a female warrior named *Dona Maria*⁴ echoed her own journey which freed her from the ghost of imposed identity, it is as if Kaira is the present successful warrior in the battle of life who wins in her quest for self-discovery tapping positive strength and energy within, by understanding the soul, “Ae zindagi gale la gale...”.

Notes

1. Amygdala is derived from a Latin word as it is of an almond-like shape. Amygdala is very sensitive region of the human brain which is not only the centre of the emotional organization but also generates extreme fear in the human mind.

2. Me Too is a social movement against sexual harassment and abuse by powerful men of society. In this movement, the victim of women share their events of sexual harassment on social media by putting hashtag before Me Too (#Me Too). This movement is meant to create an awareness in a society where men use their power to satisfy their sexual gratification. The allegations of women have become a global concern in this movement.

3. Push button technique is a strategy in Adlerian four stages of therapy where the counsellor asks the client to remember some incidents of happy moments and then an unhappy and unpleasant event of the past. This technique is designed to interrupt and interpret the depression of the client so that he/she can control his or her own feelings.

4. Dona Maria (1734-1816) was the queen of Portuguese and the first undisputed female monarch of Portugal. In *Dear Zindagi*, *Dona Maria* is a movie within a movie where Dona Maria is also a Portugal queen who fights for the country disguised herself as a male Soldier. But in the end when she fights as a woman soldier uncovering her imposed identity as a male warrior, she becomes a successful female warrior.

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