

Where is your couch, Doc??

I was asked this question by a person coming to my clinic in early years of my practice. He had read about Psychoanalysis and about the closets in the unconscious mind (of course with the complete range of ghosts within) and was looking for the arena (that is the couch), which would bring them on surface.

He was surprised when I told him that my acquaintance with psychoanalysis was limited to the seventy odd pages written on it in the comprehensive textbook of psychiatry. I had read a bit about Freud, his biography and his works purely for my own academic (and literary) interests. This guy even expected me to carry a cigar in my hand, as some official photographs of Dr. Sigmund Freud depict. Anyway, with the confused look of a new consultant, I resembled Dr. Freud's clients rather than the master analyst.

Many of us do not know that Dr. Sigmund Freud was an astute clinician with a solid foundation of Neurology. His inclination towards MIND increased because he could not find satisfactory answers to some symptoms that some of his clients had. All along his career he drew generalizations from the clinical material that his patients provided him. In that sense, he was not a 'theory-master'. Based on the theoretical formulations about mind, he developed his way of therapy, which is called 'psychoanalysis'. Hence 'psychoanalysis' is PROPER NOUN and not a common name for psychiatric consultation, counseling and treatment.

This method of helping people get over their psychological symptoms was introduced when psychopharmacology that is treating symptoms with medicines was not borne, there was a dearth of effective treatment modalities, but Freud had predicted that, "there will come a time when riddles of the mind will be solved by molecules". Psychoanalysis involved a lot of time, energies (and money) and was never culturally close to the Indian soil. Barring a few centers and some specialists it did not spread itself on the subcontinent.

In the early years of twentieth century Pavlov and other Russian investigators focused on the resultant behavior (in contrast to Freud, and others who focused on the processes that initiated and sustained the behavior) and came up with strategies of Behavior Therapy.

Between these two poles of the great masters were significant early contributions of Jung regarding 'spiritual' influence, Adler regarding social processes and Eric Fromm with a creative, humanistic touch.

In the early thirties of that century Cognitive Behavior Therapy started a very significant attempt to synthesize these concepts. Almost all psychotherapies since then including Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Logotherapy, Reality Therapy, and many other different approaches aim to achieve synthesis within the framework laid down by the masters. This is not to understate their creativity and interpretative genius, but to show the range within which they operate. Yet, there have been two significant contributions of the changing times that all therapies had to internalize. The first is the emphasis on 'self development', and 'effective coping', in addition to 'treatment of symptoms and diseases'. This has contributed towards such methods gaining wide public acceptance; as influenced by the increase in the sheer pace of living.

People want to know, they want to learn. But their emphasis is on 'quick learning of some techniques of self help'. You cannot blame them entirely (since you are also part of them), but does it dilute the spirit of relentless pursuit of developing a deeper understanding of mind and its processes?... probably, this is a need for a chosen few and their number will not increase unless the mass base of exposure to various psychotherapies is not broadened. With additions of newer and newer variants of theories and therapies such as the forum, neuro-linguistic programming and others, the battle between popularizing and commercializing (thus trivializing) will have to be fought.

With the changes in family structure, support systems and communication patterns the severity of adaptive challenges has increased and the awareness to seek help from psychological streams is also showing upward swing. Religious fanaticism and ritualistic faith in demigods (i.e. the Gurus & Babas) is also a product of the same age. The boundaries get further blurred when such Gurus borrow indiscreetly from Psychology. Anything can become a cult; may it be Baba or Psychotherapy.

The issue is, what is the difference between information and knowledge?... A psychotherapist or a religious preacher, both can impart information. But they should also give the attitude of empowerment, which is the difference between, information and knowledge. The freedom to deal responsibly with information, improvise on it, is knowledge. Its repeated use makes us 'wise'.

The day when Gurus in Psychology, Philosophy, Spirituality and Religion make a firm resolve to help people, become 'WISE', we may reach a new synthesis.

Otherwise, our search for a warm and secure couch will never come to an end.