

## **Transference Manifestations in a Hysterical Patient**

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In this paper I want to describe a woman patient, Asha, who came to me with three different problems. I want to demonstrate how these problems manifested themselves in the transference and how these apparently different problems were actually linked to each other. As I do this, I shall also try to show how they were finally resolved.

I shall first describe in detail, the consultation session I had with her. By doing so I will be able to show:

- 1) What her problems were
- 2) Her family background
- 3) The type of defence mechanism she was using then.

### **Consultation Session**

Asha began the session by saying that she was feeling very desperate and unhappy. Her life was getting out of hand and she feared that she might have a breakdown.

She was a professional who had given up her work to write a book. However, she found that after a while she just could not proceed further with this book. She would get terrified that something awful was going to happen to her – some sort of a disaster may fall upon her. This feeling had gradually increased and she was now frightened of handling even small household jobs.

She was also worried, she said, because recently she had become promiscuous. She was a thirty-six year old married woman. Barring occasional flirtations, she had

been faithful to her husband. Recently, however, she had had a string of affairs almost one after the other.

She then talked of the men she had affairs with in an utterly contemptuous tone. She said that it was so easy to get these men to admire her. All that she did was to talk to them smartly and they would fall at her feet. Most of them were riff-raff-uncivilised, moneymaking businessmen who found her sophisticated and brilliant. It was a pity that she had to have them

She then said rather sadly that there was something positively sick in all this. If she did not take some professional help she might have a breakdown. Her mother had a breakdown just before she died. She was a very hysterical woman. Asha dreaded that she might meet with her mother's fate. Lately, she too had been getting very hysterical. For quite petty reasons she would scream at her husband and beat him up.

Once again she became contemptuous here and said that of course, her mother was quite stupid. There was nothing surprising in her breaking down because she had been eccentric all her life. She often used to get violent and beat up Asha when she was a baby. The mother was quite sloppy, lazy and fat. Asha felt that her mother got what she deserved. She herself was not as bad as her mother but, she added, "One has to be a bit careful about such things, isn't it?"

She then said that she also had a minor physical problem. It was a bit inconvenient. She had this need to urinate at least eight to ten times in an hour. It did not bother her as long as she was near a toilet but it became embarrassing when she went out. She added bitterly that there were no proper public toilets for women. This perhaps, was one of the reasons why she could not work. But she knew that this was insignificant. She had sought medical help and again she said in a very superior tone, "of course", she could get the best treatment available. But, all the specialists had told her that it was purely psychosomatic. Once again she added that it was not at all important.

Here I said that I wondered if she noticed how she was presenting her problems to me. She had said that she was so afraid of a breakdown and had immediately added that it was not as bad as her mother's. Her urination problem prevented her from doing any work which worried her so much. Yet, she was insisting that it was insignificant.

Perhaps, she had to undermine the importance of her problems because they frightened her. She was now testing me out. Was I going to take them seriously or I was going to take her word for them and believe that they were not all that important?

Asha looked at me, very much surprised. After a brief pause, she said that she did have a lot of doubts about analysis. She did not know much about it except what she had read in American novels and that was not at all flattering. Psychoanalysts seemed to say such odd and weird things. Yet, it appeared to be the only scientific method available. She might as well give it a try.

I realized that her contemptuous attitude was now manifesting itself in the transference. In absence of other methods, she was reluctantly taking to analysis in which she had very little faith. As an analyst I was not really a useful person. She was rather condescendingly giving me a try.

I then asked her to tell me something about her family. She spoke of her mother in the same contemptuous manner, saying that she was stupid, crazy, hysterical and violent. Only when she talked about her death, did I see some sort of pain in Asha's voice.

Asha said that her mother died of grief when she was an adolescent. The mother had suspected the father to have had an affair with another woman. She was driven to desperation by this. The father had uniformly denied this insisting that she was imagining it. But the mother was certain and could not take the blow.

As it happened, she turned out to be quite right. The father did have an affair. In fact, he was so shameless, the patient said, that he married this woman soon after the mother's death. Asha hated him for this. She also hated her mother for dying for such a useless man.

Her father, she said, was an artist of great talent, adding "at least in his own eyes". He was also fairly successful in other fields. He had all the right credentials having studied at several renowned institutions nevertheless; he was "a real bastard". He was a completely detached person who was not in the least bothered about, either his first wife or his three daughters with her. He was also rather foolish in money matters -

he had squandered away all the family fortunes on his whims. Asha found him totally unbearable.

Asha was the second of three daughters, born approximately two to three years apart. The eldest, R. was described as very vague and sloppy. R. was also “blatantly stuck on papa” to whom, whatever papa said was God’s truth. This was very sick. It had ruined her marriage. R. was now divorced and lived alone. However, she was very talented. She had a comfortable career and gave very popular public performances. She had, due to her sick attachment to the father, learnt a lot from him.

Her younger sister M. too was fairly successful and widely known. She too, was divorced once. Fortunately, being very clever, she had remarried- this time to a millionaire. M. also was quite sick. She frankly cheated on her second husband. She was money-minded and greedy. Asha remembered how, even as a child, M. would grab everything that belonged to her. She felt that M. needed analysis more than herself.

Since M. was the youngest and R. was vague, both the sisters were left in Asha’s care right from early childhood. Asha resented this enormously. To add to this, R. was the favorite of the father “for obvious reasons”, Asha added, and M., of the mother because she was so fair and beautiful. Asha herself was “left” more or less as an unwanted child.

She then said that she obviously stood out in such a gifted, talented, family. She had taken to academics and was highly qualified. She talked about her husband with a great deal of contempt. He too, was quite stupid and “foolishly” admired her. She had a step-brother who was several years her junior. She got along very well with him- but that was because he idealized her.

Here I said that she seemed to be feeling that practically all the members of her family were sick one way or another. She found herself to be a much better person than all of them. Yet, it was her life that was getting out of hand; it was she who had to seek analysis. Was this not something to think about?

Here too, Asha did not say anything but looked surprised. Since the hour was over, I ended the session after making arrangements of time and fees.

I will now sum up Asha's problems:

- 1) Inability to work
- 2) Promiscuity
- 3) Excessive urination

When one looked at the way she presented her background, one found that she did not have a single good word to say about anyone. I suggest that in doing this, she was using massively, the mechanism of projection. All that she thought was bad in herself, was quickly thrown out into her objects. If she felt promiscuous, she pushed it into M. who "frankly cheated on her husband". If she felt she was going mad, it was attributed to her mother who was "much worse" than herself. Her own feelinglessness was attributed to the detached father, while her oedipal attachment to him was seen in R. who was "sickly attached to papa". Her greed and jealousy were seen in M. who "grabbed everything".

As a consequence, she managed to get into herself a feeling that she was very superior and "above all such nonsense". This was evident in her treatment of men.

I suggest that by using the entire process viz. projecting bad parts into her family members, and conversely, identifying with her brilliant and talented parents, she had maintained her balance so far. At the time of seeking analysis this was crumbling down.

Asha began the next session by saying rather jokingly that she had seen me only once and she had managed to dream about myself. It must be lucky for me to have her as a patient. Being an analyst, I must be interested in dreams. How many patients would give me a dream so easily?

In the dream she was in my room, lying on the couch, when she realized that there was a hole in her head from which a lot of filth was coming out. It horrified her, but there was no way of stopping it. She felt that I would be terribly disgusted with her.

In association she said that the material that oozed out was just pure muck – the kind that comes out of open gutters. After a brief pause she said, that surprisingly,

yesterday she had felt very relieved after the session. She had thought over what I had said. She had felt that I was not the sort of person who would be taken in by her.

I interpreted that she had been very anxious that when we commence analysis (lying on the couch), a lot of her unpleasant feelings may come out of her head (like the muck from a gutter) which might disgust me. The fact that yesterday I had reacted by talking about how serious her problems were had relieved her. Instead of feeling grateful, she had reversed the situation by the manner in which she had presented the dream. It was I who had to feel relieved and grateful to her for her being such a good patient.

This pattern repeated in the transference for a very long time. It transpired that in fact, she had read quite a lot of psychoanalytical literature, which she used to mock and laugh at analysis and me. At various times, analysis was seen a fad only for rich people, a useless activity in a poor country like India, a Western ideology with no notion of the Indian ethos. It bore resemblance to Existentialism, which was all a left-wing trash. Analysts never revealed anything about themselves because their own lives did not resemble what they preached.

About me, she would say that I was too serious for my age. I was obviously younger than her and she wondered if I understood her. I must only be a student and hence greatly relieved to find such a verbal patient. She felt that she was my best patient. I was seen as poor and struggling because I was using the room of a senior colleague. I must be badly in need of patients to build up my career. Often my interpretations were seen as coming straight from a textbook. She would laugh at them saying, "Ah, ah. So that is what Master Freud said about transference, did he? How interesting!"

During this phase of analysis I pointed out, that though she felt this way about analysis and me for a fact she continued to come to me. Obviously she required me to take "all this muck" that she felt herself to be. It must be unbearable for her to feel what she was trying to make me feel – inadequate, small, unwanted and helpless needing her to support me. She wanted me to contain these for her. It was as if, she was now urinating into me.

I will demonstrate this phase by quoting from sessions. On a Saturday night she dreamt that she was sitting in a garden on a cot clad in a sexy, knee-length nighty. A young boy of thirty was sitting at her feet. He seemed to be very eager to marry her but she was not interested. She knew that he was poor. He told her that he had two rooms in a slum area on the eastern side of the railway tracks. These rooms were very poorly and had a common toilet. She thought that if he wanted to marry her it was his bloody business. She did not comment upon his desire but walked away saying “excuse me’.

In association she said that she was puzzled at a thirty-year-old man being felt as a boy. She also said that it was a fact that properties in the eastern suburbs were quite worthless. She herself lived in a Western Suburb, which was very upper class. She offered no association to the two rooms with a common toilet etc. but the description was unmistakably close to my rooms. The office actually had two rooms with a common toilet. It was on the eastern side of the railway tracks almost touching them, though not in a slum area. Due to the seepage of rainwater it did look rather poorly. Also, she had always felt me to be thirty and had made snide remarks about my boyish looks.

I pointed out these facts to her and said that the dream represented our analytical situation in which she maintained that I was the one who eagerly wanted to analyse her, while she felt indifferent. For her, I was the young man a struggling, a student analyst who had to borrow such poorly quarters from a colleague, while she had her house in the upper-class Western suburbs.

A couple of months later, she said that she was extremely nervous and frightened. She had some very bad dreams about me. Having had no courage to describe them, she had avoided telling them to me for the last three sessions. But she had been feeling very guilty for withholding information and had finally decided to tell them today.

In this dream she was in my room getting analysed but in a very queer way. We were sitting on the floor. I came close to her till my mouth almost touched her cheek. She noticed that I had lowered my trousers and was persuading her that there was nothing wrong in all this. For a while she did not mind this but then she got afraid of what might happen to her analysis.

At this point a face appeared at the window and she was terrified. I told her that there was nothing to worry about. I proceeded to open her blouse and played with her breasts. There was a knock at the door and the colleague whose rooms I was using, entered. Both he and I behaved as if nothing wrong was going on. He picked up something from the table and went away.

I think that she had tried to achieve two things in this dream.

- 1) To project her need for the analytical mother's breasts into herself.
- 2) To degrade me and analysis.

I said therefore, that in actual fact, it was she who needed me to give her my breasts – my understanding – to develop. She had reversed this. In the dream, I needed her breasts.

Further, I said that she had made me out to be totally unethical and irresponsible. Other analysts also were the same (represented by the colleague). Thus, she had degraded both – analysis and me.

This messing up, I added, was in her mind, while she behaved as if I was messing up her analysis. In the dream it was she who was anxious about what might happen to her analysis while I was denying this danger. She had been terrified of reporting this dream because she knew who was really responsible.

After a few days she brought another dream. In this she was sleeping on a cot when she saw a “young man” drying her hair with a strange looking hair-dryer. This was a “small black thing” so totally different from what she herself had. Hers was a big red one. She thought that it was pointless to use this dryer.

This reminded her of her dream of the muck. She said rather sheepishly “well, the muck seems to have stopped.” I said “let us see how it had stopped.” Ever since we had begun analysis she had continuously belittled me and mocked at analysis. By doing so she had put all her muck into me. In this dream, while she admitted that the muck had stopped she was reluctant to grant that it was due to my equipment-analysis - with which I treated her head. She was suggesting that analysis was this “small black thing”



which was quite inadequate. For her, the muck had stopped because she had this brilliant intelligence – her big red hair-dryer.

Here Asha very reluctantly and timidly said that her urination problem had disappeared since last three months. It had been a miracle. She had been immensely relieved. She could not bring herself about to tell me this right away because she feared that I might get “a swollen head”. Today, while I interpreted the dream she had a sudden need to tell me. After having admitted it, she was feeling very nervous and frightened.

I said that admitting it meant that she accepted that analysis and me were not so useless as she had made out. It implied that she had made concerted efforts to mess-up a good thing. She felt frightened and nervous because she dreaded that I would get “a swollen head” just like her and humiliate her. It also meant that she would feel terribly guilty for what she had been doing.

She agreed to this and for the first time spoke to me in a warm, gentle manner. She said that she had felt so much better that she had decided to travel when I took my next holidays. It was such a joy after years of being tied down to her house.

I think that since I had been able to endure her massive degradation without rejecting or retaliating, I was firmly established as an analytical toilet in her mind. Hence she no longer needed to urinate physically.

After this insight was gained, we had a new conflict in analysis. On the one hand, she wanted me badly as a toilet while on the other; she feared my getting fed-up with her. Yet, as she said, she could not stop “bitching” about me. It was as if, words just poured out of her mouth over which she had no control. She began to be afraid of a series of things in analysis. I will list a few of them here. She got terrified if –

i) I saw her using my toilet ii) she had any dreams about me iii) she forgot to report any life event or a dream iv) she delayed my payments even by a day) she was late for the session by half a minute and vi) she smoked in the room.

Gradually this conflict became so intense that she began to consider termination. She despaired that her muck would never stop and finally I was bound to “get rid of her”. She often wished that there were some methods other than analysis. I was now

able to show her that she was planning to be promiscuous with me – leave me to find someone else.

During this phase a definite pattern emerged in the session. She would have terrible fights with her husband H. during the weekends. She would get hysterical and beat him up usually pulling his hair violently. Finding him totally unbearable, she would go out with another man. I shall demonstrate this by giving some material.

On a Monday she began the session by saying in a regretful voice that she had been hysterical with H. over the weekend. H's brother N. had come from USA for a holiday. H had given him Rs. 10,000/- to spend in India without informing her. She had found this out on Saturday and had got mad with rage. She had then asked him why he had done this. He had explained that N would spend on them when they went to USA. Asha did not accept this. She got more and more furious. All his excuses she said were eyewash. He was a punk and did not care for her. She had tolerated his giving large sums to his parents but giving money to N was the limit.

She had accused him that he did such things to prove his superiority. For the same reason he took so many free clients and forgot to send the rich ones, their bills. He did not consider that she would be left with nothing if he died suddenly. He did not love her and wanted "to leave her in the lurch".

She admitted that he had been very patient with her, but the more he tried to explain, the more annoyed she felt. Finally, getting hysterical, she had begun to fist hit him on his head and to pull at his hair. Threatening to leave him right away she phoned one of her boyfriends P. telling him that she was coming over to his house. P realizing that something serious was taking place, tried to pacify her which made her all the more furious. She then told P that he too, was a punk and had banged the phone down.

However, she had met P. on Sunday. By then she was calmer and had talked reasonably. P. then mentioned his girlfriend C. though he had said nothing about her earlier. She then told P. that their affair had to stop because she was getting involved with another man called A.

After describing all this to me she said that she felt awful. It was so tragic because she really admired H. and his family for being so close and loving. In fact, while shouting at him, inside her mind she had felt very warm towards him and had wanted to snuggle into his arms. But she could not control her rage. She could not understand what was happening to her. H's concern for his family was nothing new. Why had it suddenly begun to make her so furious?

I interpreted that her real anger was that I had "left her in the lurch" during the weekend spending my time with my family. She had now begun to need me so much that she feared what might happen to her if I died. She felt that I had been insensitive to her fears. This had made her feel extremely jealous of my family.

I added that no doubt, she also felt jealous of H's family but, as she said, that was nothing new. What made her feel so furious now, was this new jealousy. She could not tolerate it. Hence she had to make H. jealous by phoning P. When P. talked about C., she had to make him jealous by talking about A.

It was now evident that Asha's promiscuity was a way to handle her unbearable jealousy. For the following few months we worked on this problem. At first she could not even believe that she could have any such feeling but, when she saw that her fights with H. took place on every weekend with unflinching regularity, she began to accept my interpretation. She then began to exercise some self-control before "letting the steam out on H", or "going out with any old idiot".

Her jealousy towards my family came out in the open. What bothered her most was my having been so patient with her. If I was so patient with her, I must be much more so with my children. I probably never got angry with them or beat them up. Being an analyst I might understand my wife's needs much better than other husbands. She felt very depressed about this, but was able to tell me all this. Her problem now was to manage the long summer holidays. She dreaded that her self-control might not last that long. But in fact, barring a few lapses, she was able to contain her rage reasonably well. This gave her a lot of confidence. After the holidays she could report with justifiable pride that she had not once shouted at H. but had missed analysis sorely. She could also say that she had felt nostalgic about some good sessions we had before I left.

After this experience with me she began to feel nostalgic about her childhood. A surprisingly new picture of her parents emerged now. In one session, (just after a long holiday) she spoke of her mother with a great deal of love. She told me that recently she had been feeling that perhaps she had given me a partial picture of her mother. Ma certainly had been violent and hysterical-but that was a later development. In the early formative years she had been quite different, Asha added. Asha now remembered that her mother was quite a special person. She was truly modern. In those old days when women were tied down to their homes she had taught herself four modern languages. She was quite a learned person in other ways too. She could discuss arts and poetry on par with her husband. She wanted her children to take to new Western methods of education. Asha now recalled that Ma used to be very beautiful. She would sit on the swing in their drawing room looking very pretty, with her long, black hair, singing songs.

She then said that it was so strange that one forgot so many good things as one grew up. She remembered that Papa too, was so different then. He used to be so gentle to her. When she was three years old she had been very ill. She used to vomit a lot. She had to defecate and urinate in the bed. Papa would clean her without showing the slightest irritation. When he had realized that Asha did not share his likings but loved literature, he would take immense trouble to bring her new publications – no matter what they cost. He also used to discuss with her new trends in literature. He was a very hard working and single-minded person. He would go on working relentlessly for days non-stop till he felt satisfied. She remembered that she used to boast to her little friends that she had the best parents in the world.

She again said that she wondered how all this had changed. After a pause she said that she had certainly been very disturbed when papa had remarried. Nothing was the same again between them. She could not understand, however, how she had begun to feel that her mother was so horrible. Certainly, she did beat her but she did that with her sisters too. They did not remember it.

Asha then said that she had always had this horrible belief that Ma wanted to abort when Asha was conceived. Papa had prevented this saying that one should not kill

a child. She had absolutely no proof of this. Her parents had never said a word about it. Asha had surmised this from an aunts' conversation which she had overheard. But she continued to believe this. After a pause she added sadly that, in that case Ma did not seem to mind having M.

I said here that it was likely that the picture of good parents had altered due to jealousy. If ever-so-lovely Ma could have M., it meant that Asha was "left in the lurch". Also, if Papa was so kind and creative it was he who gave Ma the baby. This had produced a sense of rejection and jealousy in her. We had seen the same process in analysis. I had, like Papa, been patient with her, cleaning her "muck" without getting irritated. But then I went to my family during weekends and holidays. This, we had seen, had produced such immense jealousy in her. Perhaps the only way out of this jealousy was to degrade both the parents. If she believed that the parents were useless she need not feel any pain at their having had an intercourse and producing a baby.

This session was very fruitful to our understanding of what had been taking place thus far in the transference. She had sought analysis because it was "the only scientific method available". I represented the father who was "wedded" to this process. She needed us both. Now it was clear why both had to be degraded. Working on this phase helped us to understand her inability to work.

By now Asha had gained sufficient confidence to accept two different offers of independent work in her field of specialization. It was a tremendous struggle for her now.

She could not open a newspaper fearing that there would be hundreds of letters to the Editor complaining about how "shitty" her work was. She would dread picking up the phone fearing some disgusted caller might lash out at her. Her worst fear was that I might come across her works- I was bound to find them abominable.

During this time she reported two very revealing dreams. In the first dream she was told by a friend that S. (who was her very respected teacher's wife) was pregnant. Asha was extremely surprised because the couple was Gandhian. They could not have

made love. She felt very irritated. Then she “realized” that S. had conceived, not because of an intercourse but because she had been given an injection by a doctor in a toilet.

The second dream was clearly oedipal. She was in a swimming pool with an elderly man. She was very excited by him. She went up to him and they made love. She wanted to go on and on but there was a little girl in the pool. Asha wondered what this girl would feel watching them, since she was the man’s daughter. She then came out of the pool and went into the house that stood nearby. There in the kitchen, she met a woman who was cooking something very nice. This woman gave Asha a friendly look at first but when she realized what had taken place she became very stern. Asha felt frightened and walked away.

I was now able to show her that she was so surprised that her parents could make love and that her mother (respected teacher’s wife) could get pregnant. This must have caused her “uncontrollable rage” with which she had degraded their intercourse by saying that the mother was impregnated by an injection i.e. the parents did not have a loving relationship. She had then put both of them in a toilet making shit out of them.

Also it was clear that it was she who got excited by this older man (papa) and wanted to have intercourse with him. She had then changed places with her mother (in the pool) leaving her own despairing self into the little daughter of the man. She then dreaded that when her nice mother (cooking lovely food) discovered this, she would be stern with her.

I suggested then that to do work meant to produce new ideas, new babies, as it were. It was her creativity. But, feeling that she had made shit out of her parents’ intercourse she constantly dreaded that her own “produce” would be shitty; hence the dread of the public complaining. To work also meant to her, that she was taking the place of her mother. Naturally, she felt that her lovely, feeding mother would be hurt and attack her in turn. This was why she felt so terrified that I would consider her work as totally abominable.

Naturally, Asha showed a great reluctance to these interpretations, but in actual practice, her terror and dread reduced a great deal. She continued working on both her jobs with increasing confidence and success.

## Conclusions

I have tried to show how Asha's problems crept up into the transference and how they were linked with each other. I will now summarize how they were resolved in analysis.

Asha basically felt her parents to be quite good and creative. This produced

- i) Envy of their intercourse, which produced M
- ii) Oedipal jealousy.

Urination: this stood for

- i) Spoiling the parental intercourse
- ii) Getting rid of her envy and jealousy. It stopped when I became the emotional – analytical toilet

Promiscuity: New fears emerged towards the toilet object. It may get fed up with her and leave her. It was therefore necessary to constantly find newer objects which meant being promiscuous. Since I did neither, this need could be given up.

Inability to work: The parents whose intercourse was messed up may retaliate. Her mother whose husband was snatched away may get stern and attack her own creativity. The fear of work was this dread of the parents' fury because working meant

- i) producing new babies herself
- ii) taking the place of the mother.

Due to analytical experience it was possible for Asha to see that none of her objects really retaliated. Her actual parents never left her. Her husband remained with her for nineteen years. I still analyzed her. This made it possible for her to realize that the attacks came from her internal parents – her conscience. When she was able to feel this conscience instead of throwing it out, she was finally able to work.

In this paper I have been able to describe only one cycle of our experience. Needless to say that in order to consolidate this experience such cycles had to be repeated. We could terminate analysis after repeated working through such cycles.