

## Personality Profile of Individual Having Mental Health Problems (V): A Rorschach Investigation

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**ABSTRACT** The "object" of an instinct is the agent through which the instinctual aim is achieved and the agent is usually conceived as being another person. The present study is an attempt to explore the personality profile of V (having mental health problems) within the framework of object relations theory. V is a 26-year-old Indian female. She was going through marital separation at the time of testing. V gave a total of 26 responses on the Rorschach cards. The core character of Obsessive-Compulsive personality is clearly visible in her responses with sub-features of depressive and schizoid personality. Her thought organization features fragmented approach. V relates better with non-humans than humans. Her view of the world is reality tuned but she oscillates between withdrawal into fantasy and reality. Her internal self-object relations tend to be fluid and fused.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Object-Relations Theory

"Depressive anxieties are a part of everyone's normal development and that the guilt feelings which have developed are understood as part of the imagined harm done to a child's love object."

- Klein 1952.

Object-relations have occupied centre stage in psychoanalytic writing during recent years. Object relations mean interpersonal relations. The term object, a technical word originally coined by Freud, refers simply to that which will satisfy a need. More broadly, object refers to the significant person or thing that is the object or target of another's feelings or drives. In combination with relations, object refers to interpersonal relations and suggests the inner residues of past relationships that shape an individual's current interactions with people (Clair 1996).

Object relations theory addresses not just the intense relationship between the child and the care giver but also highlights how internalized objects have a carryover effect throughout life in one's relational world, thoughts, emotions and behavior. Fairbairn (1952, 1954) emphasized

the developmental sequence of relational modes, beginning from "infantile dependence" and culminating into "mature dependence". On a similar note, Mahler (1969) gave his three phase process of object relational maturation viz. autistic phase, symbiotic phase, finally, separation-individuation phase. Winnicott (1965) elaborated the process wherein through gradual frustration of the infants needing the mother, facilitates the child to progress from a stage of absolute dependence towards independence. Kernberg (1966) on similar note proposed the developmental progression from undifferentiated representation of self and other through representations split by affective valence to mature, "whole object" representations integrating both positive and negative attributes.

Melanie Klein's theoretical (Klein 1952a) position- the connection between the ego and the impulses, the drives and the body feelings and their relationship to the outside world (represented by the touch and feel of a parent's hands) serves as a base for creating meaningful object relations.

Cooper (1996) in this context contends that for every human being the outer world and its impact and the kind of experiences they live through, the objects they come into contact with are not only dealt with externally but are taken into the self to become part of their inner world. Introjection and projection, the two major concepts of Klein go into the psyche to become a part of the inner world. According to the psychoanalytic theorists, psychopathology often

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is a result of either developmental deficits or is due to the conflicts originating in specific developmental stages. The developmental level of a person's object relations during which the conflict has surfaced can be assessed with the help of the object relations theory. The object relational maturity and representations have both been researched (Urist 1980; Blat and Lerner 1983).

In this reference, the framework of object relation provides rich insight and understanding of human personality with equally rich projective test like Rorschach. Commenting on the appropriateness of the Rorschach, it is about an individual's object relations world with reference to prediction of psychological health and psychology. Mayman (1967) succinctly quotes "a person's most readily accessible object representations" elicited by the unstructured Rorschach "tell much about his inner world of objects and about the quality of relationships with these inner objects towards which he is predisposed". This was further empirically validated by Urist and Shill (1982) and Harder et al. (1984), the latter applying Urist scale to Rorschach data differentiating among levels of severity of psychopathology in a sample of individuals with histories of psychiatric hospitalizations. Stuart et.al (1990) also contend that traditional Rorschach scores often have been used to assess object relations. Empirical researches on object relation focus on object relations of antisocial personality (Gacono 1990), as well as in short-term dynamic psychotherapy (Piper and Duncan 1999), sexual abuse (Morrell et al. 2001), and psychopathy (Brody and Rosenfeld 2002).

A comprehensive study of the human response on the Rorschach utilizing the three dimensions of Blatt's concept of the Object Scale (accuracy, differentiation, content) demonstrates that a systematic assessment of object relations- of concepts of self and others- is an important core issue in personality development and useful in making distinctions among diagnostic groups (neurotics, outpatient borderlines, inpatient borderlines, schizophrenics) (Lerner 1984). Besides, object relations in borderline patients using Rorschach (Lerner and St. Peter 1984; Spear and Sugarman 1984; Gartner et al. 1987), cognitive and affective processes underlying interpersonal pathology of borderline patients (Stuart et al. 1990) extensively bring to the fore

the pathology in the object relations. Further, measures of object relations is applied to human figure responses from Rorschach protocol produced by diagnosed cases of borderlines, depressives and normals (Blatt et al. 1976). The present research paper also addresses the core dynamics and object relation of a patient referred here as V.

### **Purpose**

To explore the personality profile of V (having mental health problems), within the framework of object-relations theory.

### **Context**

V is a tall slim good looking 26 years of age married woman. She came for counseling on a once a week basis 2 years ago on her own. She, at that time was going through marital separation and was not under any treatment. She was living with her parents and two children and reported that since past four years she had been staying away from her spouse.

Presenting problem as reported by V was lethargy, general weakness and not having a will to do any household chores, or even looking after the needs of her children. She reported perpetual headache and negative thoughts.

V is the second daughter amongst three daughters of her parents. The other two sisters of V reportedly age 30 and 24 are married. Father is a doctor and mother is a housewife. The interview with V revealed that her parents had a stormy relationship with lots of arguments and fights which made V very uncomfortable and insecure. She reported being very scared of her father who was in her words "a very dominating and angry person".

V revealed that she had a turbulent relationship with her mother and felt rejected by her in the formative years. She had vivid memories of being beaten and locked up by the mother for 6 hours in a dark cellar at the age of 3-4 years on account of fighting with her sister. She said that she was always compared with her sisters. Belittling and humiliating sarcasm by her parents made her withdraw from people. She said she became a shy and quiet person in school and home though she stated that she preferred school to home. She had a lot of piled up anger and feelings of hostility for her mother who has discriminated her against her siblings.

She said she felt social inept and inadequate in life. Her husband's demanding work schedules and long hours of being away from home, while she was with a 6 years baby alone, left her with a feeling of being rejected by him, resulting into fights, arguments and a subsequent marital separation at a point of time while she was carrying the second child. At her parent's home she gave birth to a son but refused to go to her husband saying she will not be able to take care of two children with an uncaring and unsupported husband.

She also draws an analogy between her father and her husband saying "Such men should not get married for they have no time for family". Interestingly, she seems to be passing on the felt rejection of herself by mother to her two children aged 7 years (daughter) and 4 years (son). She complains of having headache when they make any demand or ask for anything. Her mother and a servant take care of the children. Psycho-diagnostic assessment was done with the help of Rorschach using Lerner's system is being presented here along with the protocol.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Protocol

#### Card I

**R<sub>1</sub>**, Bat (Whole)

*Bio mein animal mein aise figure ko banaya tha, flying bat ka look de raha hai* (In bio I made such figure like animal. It looks like a flying bat).

**W, Fo, A (Bat)**

**R<sub>2</sub>**, Spider (The Middle human like figure)

*Spider bhi aise hei banate the. Spider lag rahe hai shape se* ( Also made spider this way. This looks like spider from its shape)

**W, Fo, A (Spider)**

**R<sub>3</sub>**, Inkblot (Whole)

*Jab Chote the to inkblot bhi aise hi banate the. Ye fold lag raha hai, aisa lag raha hai ki isko daba kar khola gaya ho* (When we were small, the inkblot was made the same way. It seems as if it was folded after pressing it).

### Non-scorable

#### Card II

**R<sub>4</sub>**, *Ye petal lag rahe hai* (This looks like a petal) (red part lower bottom)

*Flower ki petal aise hi hoti hai. Jaise Gudhal ka Phool to woh aise hi to hota hai* (Petal of a flower is like this as if flower of Hibiscus).

**D, Fo, Bt.**

**R<sub>5</sub>**, *White portion flying bird ki tarah lag raha hai. Yeh beek hai, Yeh wings hai, ye tail hai* (White portion is looking like a flying bird. This is beek, this is wings and this is tail) (white space in center).

*Iska structure lag raha hai vaisa* (The structure is looking like that way).

**S, F-,A (bird)**

**R<sub>6</sub>**, *Ye clown hai doh. Ye unki cap hai, ye iska face hai aur ye haath hai* (These are 2 clowns. This is their cap, their face and this is hand). (Upper most red portion).

*Santa Claus type ke. Iska ye cap hai, ye naak hai, ye face bana hua hai* (Like Santa Claus. This is the cap, this is nose and this is face).

**D, Fo, Hd (Santa Claus).**

#### Card III

**R<sub>7</sub>**, *Flower vase type ka lag rahe hai* (This is looking like a flower vase). (Humanoid figures, along with bowl like part).

*Ye flower vase ka shape hi hai aur ye upar design bana hua hai* (This is the shape of flower vase and design is made at the top).

**D, Fo, Obj (Flower vase)**

**R<sub>8</sub>**, *Doh log hain haath taap raha hai* (humanoid figure along with bowl like part). These are 2 people warming their hands).

*Aur ye doh aaadmeiyo ki figure hain. Ye haath hai aur ye lag raha hai aag jal rahi hai usei taap rahe hain* (And this is the figure of two men. This is their hand and this looks as if the fire is burning and they are warming their hands).

**D, Mo, H, Fab.**

**Card IV**

**R<sub>9</sub>.** *Monster type lag rahe hai* (This looks like a monster) (whole).

*Ye head hai, ye arms hai, ye bade bade pair hain* (This is his head, these are arms and these are huge feet).

**W, Fo, H (monster), Fab.**

**Card V**

**R<sub>10</sub>.** *Moth type ka lag raha hai* (This looks like a moth) (whole)

*Ye iska antenna hai, agar moth ko dhyan se dekhe toh usmein aise aise bifurcation hote hai ye uske paeir hai, ye wings hai* (This is his antenna. If we look at a moth carefully then it has bifurcation. This is his legs and this is wings).

**W, Fo, A (moth).**

**R<sub>11</sub>(v)** *Aisa lag raha hai koi human figure haath utha kar prayer kar rahi hai. Ye uske haath hai, ye sir hai, ye paeir hai* (This looks as if a human figure is prayer with hands up. This are hands, this is head and here are legs) (Whole).

**W, M-,H, Fab.**

**Card VI**

**R<sub>12</sub>.** *Animal skin* (Whole)

*Aise hi faili rahti hai. Museum mein dekha hai* (The spread is like this. I have seen in a museum).

**W, Fo, Ant (Animal skin).**

**Card VII**

**R<sub>13</sub>.** *Temple ka dome lag raha hai* (It is looking like a dome of a temple) (Whole).

*Ye shape, aisa sayad kabhi temple ka dome dekha hoga* (This is the shape, may be you have seen such dome of a temple).

**W, F-, Arch (Dome of a temple).**

**Card VIII**

*(Ye card achaa lag raha hai)* (This card looks nice).

**R<sub>14</sub>.** *Pattern hai aik bas* (Just a pattern. That's it) (Whole).

*Colour combination hai, vertical symmetry hai* (There is colour combination and vertical symmetry).

**Non-scorable**

**R<sub>15</sub>.** *Bahut natural lag raha hai. Sky water ka combination lag raha hai* (This looks very natural. It looks like a combination of sky and water) (Whole).

*Ye thoda dusky sky lag raha hai. Aur Ye samundra ka pani lag raha hai* (This looks somewhat like dusky sky. And this looks like the sea water).

**D, Ch.Fv, Na, Fab.**

**R<sub>16</sub>.** *Agar keval white portion ko dekh rahe hai toh statue type ka kuch lag raha hai* (If we are looking only at the white portion then it is looking like a statue).

*Bilkul abstract statue lag rahi hai* (It is looking like an abstract statue).

**Non-scorable.**

**R<sub>17</sub>.** *Ye animal ka head hai, tange hai, shayad wolf hai* (This is a head of an animal, these are his legs, probably it is a wolf). (Rodent like figures on sides).

*Aisa hi lag raha hai* (It looks like that).

**D, Fo, A (Wolf).**

**R<sub>18</sub>.** *Ye coat shape top hai, ye sleeves lag rahe hai. Ye aage ka portion hai* (This is a coat shape top. These look like sleeves and this is the front). (lower pink-orange, butterfly like area)

*Coat aise hi toh lag raha hai* (The coat looks like that).

**D, Fo, Cloth.**

**R<sub>19</sub>.** *Ye half pant lag rahi hai* (Looks like a half pant) (The dark, aqua, flag-like figure below mountain like figure on top)

*Bas shape se* (The shape is that way).

**D, Fo, Cloth.**

**Card IX**

**R<sub>20</sub> (v).** *toy elephant lag raha hai* (Looks like a toy elephant) (Whole).

*Ye iski aankhe hai, ye soond hai, ye kaan hai, ye isne green colour ka kuch pahan rakha hai wa ye orange colour ke trouser hai* (This is his eyes, this is trunk and ears. He has worn a dress of green colour and his trouser is of orange colour).

**W, F-C, Obj (Toy elephant), Fab.**

**R<sub>21</sub>.** *Guitar lag raha hai* (Looks like a guitar) (White portion on top).

*Ye jaise guitar ki body hote hai, peeche ye back portion hota hai* (This is like the body of a guitar, and this is the back portion).

**S, Fo, Obj (Guitar).**

**R<sub>22</sub>.** *Ye talwar lag rahi hai* (This looks like a sword) (Middle portion below white space area).

*Talwar ka shape aise hi hota hai. Neeche se sharp hai, slim hai* (Shape is that of a sword. It is sharp and slim from the bottom).

**D, Fo, Obj (Sword).**

**R<sub>23</sub>.** *Ye tree lag raha hai* (Looks like a tree) (Two bison like green figures).

*Ye peid ka top lag raha hai. Ye pura portion peid hai* (This is the top of the tree and the whole portion is tree).

**D, Fo, Pl (Tree).**

**Card X**

**R<sub>24</sub>.** *Ek stuffed toy lag raha hai. White colour ka hai* (Looks like a stuffed toy which is of white colour) (White portion at the top between two pole like parts).

*Ye head hai, ye paeir hai* (This is head and this are legs).

**S, F-Obj(Stuffed toy).**

**R<sub>25</sub>.** *Baki colour bikhare hai* (The colours are scattered around) (Whole).

*Aise hi faile huai hai* (They are just scattered).

**W, C-Fv, Colours.**

**R<sub>26</sub>.** *Yaha par chote se bhagvan dikh rahe hai* (A small God can be seen). (Centre portion, between caterpillar-like, green figure, at the bottom).

*Jaise mythological Hindu Bhagvan hote hai waise ye chote se bhagvan hai, dhyan se dekhne par dikhte hai ye mukut hai, ye baal hai, ye khade hai* (Like mythological Hindu God here is a small God. If you look at it carefully you can see him. This is his crown, his hair and he is standing).

**D, Fo, H (God), Fab.**

Lerner's method (Lerner 1991) was used for analyzing the protocol in object relations perspective. The protocol clearly shows that V's internal world comprised of animals and non-living objects particularly those indicating primary process like toys, moth, animal skin. Human content is nearly absent. There are 4 responses out of 26 and that too are comprised of superhumans like God and monster. So, unable to create meaningful object relation with humans, she relates better with non-humans. Blatt et al. (1976), Blatt and Lerner (1983) and Blatt and Berman (1984) have also empirically added to the understanding of Rorschach responses in this reference that number and type of responses of human or quasi-human content serve as a base for inference about the object relational capacity of the person taking the test. However, the form level of 16 responses out of 26 is good which shows that V's view of world is reality tuned most of the time. She tends to see things as others do, though at times her perception acquires a flavor of subjectivity and she dresses up the percepts to make them more tolerable.

The kind of content which emerges is also important for understanding as Acklin (1992) and Weiner (2000) have succinctly pointed out the importance of integrated approach taking both the coding and qualitative aspect of the Rorschach. In terms of content, the internal psyche of V continues moving in the primary process most of the time where there is a percept of flying bird, spider, wolf. Moreover, there seems to be certain regressive shifts into fantasy imagining herself to be clown or God. However, there is an internal turbulence from living form to inanimate object like flower vase, dome of a temple, sword and toy. Contact with humans is



painful and she reverts back to primary process again and again.

Self is experienced as oscillating between majestic percepts (monster, God, dome of a temple) and fragile and delicate percepts (like flying bird, moth, flower petal). Her internal self object relations tend to be fluid and fused. Objects seem to be missing at places and ambiguous. For example, sky-water combination, human figures doing prayer. Thus, a kind of struggle is continuously going on to relate with objects but when she fails to do so, the resultant anxiety and feeling of hurt are must and then she represents self to be very strong and powerful.

V's kinesthesia (flying, doing prayer, warming hands) clearly indicates preference for withdrawal. Her thought organization features fragmented approach. She tends to view the whole picture but mainly relates to the world around her in bits and pieces.

Repression seems to be high as most of the responses are form based. Even in the wake of poor impulse control and high anxiety the responses find a sublimated socially desirable expression. For example, two people are warming their hands, human figure is doing prayer with her hands up.

At this juncture Bowlby's contention holds ground for V's present status. Bowlby (1979) while elaborating on typical patterns of pathogenic parenting contends "..... persistent threats by parents not to love a child, used as a means of controlling him,..... threats by parents to abandon the family used either as a method of disciplining the child ..... fights or threats by one parent to either desert or kill self....." People exposed to such parenting tend to develop neurotic symptoms or phobia.

V reported having repeated headaches whenever people, particularly her children made demands on her. Klein (1952) proposed that loss of parents in any form leads to a primary separation anxiety giving rise to mourning and grieving. In a similar context, V also reported during the course of therapy that she was reminded of the rejection of her mother in childhood, and the loss of her mother to her sisters. She felt when she was unwell, her mother came to take care of her and her children or when she got angry with the children, it brought her mother closer to her.

It seemed that V was reliving her childhood with her helplessness and state of mind with

headaches and palpitation and the reassurance of her mother reinforced her reliving of the formative dependence.

There are sharp shifts between regressive and progressive levels of psychic functioning. The sequence of her responses tends to alternate between themes of fragile delicacy (moth, flower petal) to themes of sublime power (monster, wolf). Keeping in line with the contention of Stuart et al. (1990) and confirming the correspondence between pathology and developmental arrest with lower sores on differentiation, articulation and integration in Rorschach, the present findings also show low differentiation, lesser articulation and lower integration of object and action.

Apparent in her emotions is a sense of contradictions. Clear cut aggression is not seen in her responses but helplessness can be frequently noticed. Anxiety seems to be rather high. In her verbalizations primary process are clearly evident. A kind of struggle is continuously going on to relate with objects but when she fails to do so the resultant anxiety and feeling of hurt are inevitable.

Mayman (1968) proposed that "A person's adult character structure is organized around object relational themes which intrude projectively into the structure and content of his early memories just as they occur repetitively in his relations with significant persons in his life."

The protocol of V reflects the core character of obsessive-compulsive in her personality with sub-features of schizoid and depressive personality. The level of her personality organization is apparently at lower level in all the areas of instinctual development, ego weaknesses, defensive organization, internalized object relations, superego development and ego-identity.

Her Rorschach protocol (using Lerner's system of coding (Lerner 1912)) seems to reflect the core character of obsessive compulsive personality with sub-features of depressive and schizoid personality. McWilliams (1994) contends that obsessive compulsive psychopathology is a result of not only parental lack of empathy but setting high standards for their children. Besides, they are deeply concerned with heavy control issues and moral rectitude during development which seems to have long range effect on the person's self-esteem and formation of self-image. There is marked evidence of

repetition of themes and rigidity in thought process in V which clearly portrays the features of obsessive compulsive mode of relating with world. Further, the perception of the world in bits and pieces (D responses=11) dominate the whole responses.

Depressive character structure focuses upon vulnerability to loss of love and hypercritical attitude towards self which is being supported by V's protocol. Phenomenologically V experiences self primarily as a vulnerable and helpless victim. Kahn's (1975) study also reports that depressive character structure is characterized by sense of helplessness, dependent object relations, self directed aggression, guilt and perpetual and unsuccessful efforts to maintain self esteem

V also seems to possess the sub features of schizoid personality. V is not comfortable in relating with human beings as is being shown by small percentage of human content (15.38%) in the protocol. Little satisfaction is derived from relationships and this could be contributing to the feature of aloofness. More so, Klein (1995) saw the schizoid as a slave attached to a master or as a self-in-exile fearful of a sadistic object.

The near absence of human beings also indicates the major conflict area of V as interpersonal relations. She is not comfortable in relating with others and therefore relates more easily with the world of animals (19.23%) and non-living beings (50%).

Radical acceptance, creating meaningful relations with the self and emotional regulation in DBT framework has facilitated V to establish meaningful relations with her spouse and children.

### CONCLUSION

The basic premise of object relations states that it is the satisfaction of relationship needs rather than the physical needs in infancy which is detrimental for one's mental health or later pathology. In the present paper, the turbulent relationship of V with the primary care giver, that is, mother in infancy (which led to faulty structuring of the self-object unit and relationship conflicts) have been taken up. V's discordant relationship with her mother impels her to pass on this rejection to her children.

With reference to affect organization, V's protocol shows a relatively small number of

colour responses (7.69%). The expression of impulse is delayed and controlled which is being reflected through the dominance of F responses (88.46%). Emotions are strongly experienced by her but she is not able to handle it and use fabulizations (19.23%) to dress up the reality. Predominance of form based responses and small number of colour responses in V's protocol indicates repression as one of the major defenses of V.

V seems to have somewhat fair hold on reality (Fo=61.54%). Her internalized self-object relations are fused. Depression and anxiety are experienced more frequently by her than happiness.

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