

Defense Mechanisms in the form of Vanchaka Dharma

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In Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory, 'Defense Mechanisms' are unconscious responses that attempt to deal with life stressors and conflicts. It is normal to use different Defenses once in a while, however, frequent use throughout the life may result in distorting a person's reality. Psychoanalytic theory is based on the concepts of Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) an Austrian neurologist who is commonly known as the father of Psychoanalysis. Freud conceptualized that; behavior is mostly determined by forces derived from unconscious mental processes. Therefore, Psychoanalysis and related therapies are based on this concept. To explain his ideas Freud has developed the topographic and structural models of mind.

Sigmund Freud used Topographic model in his early psychology. According to the Topographic theory the human mind is a collection of three layers called Consciousness, Sub-consciousness, and Un-consciousness. Further he explained that the human beings have very powerful urges which must be gratified. All newly born infants are strengthened and are driven by two kinds of drives called Eros and Thanatos.

Eros or Life Instinct promotes survival of the beings by directing life sustaining activities like breathing, eating, sexual pleasure, and the gaining of all the bodily needs. Thanatos or Death Instinct was explained as the destructive forces present in all human beings that are likely to expressed through behaviours such as sadistic aggression,

murder, and even through the behaviours of self-harm. All these types of drives are called Primitive Drives and the unconscious mind has been formed with them. The unconscious mind contains repressed thoughts and feelings which are very rarely available to conscious mind, and uses primary process thinking – the type of thinking associated with primitive drives, wish fulfillment, and pleasure seeking and has no logic or concept of time.¹ Sometimes through the dreams people can uncover these primitive desires according to Freud's teachings.

The Pre-conscious mind is contained with memories that are not immediately available but can be easily accessed and the Conscious mind contains thoughts that a person is currently aware of. The Conscious mind operates in close conjunction with the Preconscious mind but does not have complete access to the Unconscious mind. The conscious mind uses secondary process thinking (logical, mature, and time-oriented) and is capable of delaying gratification.²

According to the Structural Model, the human mind consists of three parts: the **Id**, **Ego** and **Superego** and this is the later theory of Freud. According to his analysis Id contains instinctive sexual and aggressive drives. It is controlled by primary thinking processes that do not consider external realities. Id also represents again the unconscious part of human mind.³ Ego begins to develop immediately after birth and it tries to control the expression of the Id to adapt to the requirements of the external world primarily by the use of defense mechanisms. Ego also helps to sustain satisfactory interpersonal relationships and always consider the reality.⁴ According to Freud's teachings Superego starts to develop by about six years of age. It associate with moral values and conscience and controls the urges of Id.⁵

The concept of ‘Defense Mechanisms’ is one of teachings of Freud's among all the explanations of the nature of human mind. Defense mechanisms are the primary tool utilized by the Ego to manage the internal conflicts between demands of Id and the restrictions of the Superego. They are the means by which the Ego wards off anxiety and

¹ Fadem, Barbara., Behavioural Science, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, London, p.47

² . – do – p. 48

³ . – d0 – p. 48

⁴ . Feldman, S. Robert., *Understanding Psychology*, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, New Delhi,

p. 465

⁵ . McConnell, V. James., *Understanding Human Behavior*, Rinehart and Winston Inc., USA, p. 410

control instinctive urges and unpleasant affects. All defenses are unconscious and to some extent all these mechanisms have an impact on human behavior.

Repression, pushing unacceptable emotions into the unconscious, is the basic defense mechanism on which all others are based. But all the defense mechanisms mainly can be divided into four clusters:

- Narcissistic (Used by children and some adults) such as Projection, Denial, and Splitting
- Immature (Used by adolescents, depressive, obsessive and compulsive individuals) like Blocking, Regression, Somatization, and Identification.
- Neurotic (Seen in adults under stress) i.e. Displacement, Repression, Isolation of affect, Intellectualization, Acting out, Rationalization, Reaction Formation, Undoing, Passive Aggressive, and Dissociation.
- Mature (Used by normal adults) like Altruism, Humor, Sublimation, and Suppression⁶

The important factor to be emphasized is that all these defenses unconsciously reflect on human behaviour. Some defenses are liable to change over the time while some of them are adaptive and some may become pathologic.⁷

"Why do we use defense mechanisms?" is the major question. When we behave according to the impulses of Id the society automatically will reject us as abnormal or anti-social personalities. No one likes this label. Therefore, the mind uses various defenses with the purpose of protecting the self from the negative feedback from the society while facilitating the gratification of mental desires in an acceptable manner.

Projection is one of the major defense mechanisms that come under the cluster of Narcissistic category.⁸ When one uses Projection as a defense he/she attributes his or her own wishes, desires, thoughts, or emotions as if it's coming from someone else. Internal states are perceived as a part of someone else or of the world in general.⁹ For example, a man with unconscious homosexual impulses begins to think that his boss is homosexual

⁶ . Daugherty, R. Steven., *Behavioural Science*, Kalpan Inc. USA, p. 83

⁷ . - do - p. 83

⁸ . - do - p. 83

⁹ . Daugherty, R. Steven., *Behavioural Science*, Kalpan Inc. USA, p.84

or when a student failed the examination he/she may blame their teachers or the evaluating panel for the outcome.

Denial is another defense mechanism that comes under the same category and it doesn't allow reality to be perceived. Here one may assert that an otherwise clear feature of external reality is just not true and thereby avoid becoming aware of this aspect.¹⁰ For an example, an alcoholic fails to acknowledge that he is addicted to alcohol or a mother prepares lunch for his son who is expecting to come home, even though he has died a few months ago.

Displacement comes under the Neurotic or Anxiety cluster of the defenses. When people use displacement normally they change the target of an emotion or drive while the person having the feeling remaining the same.¹¹ For an example a husband who is angry with his wife hits to the desk rather than telling his wife what he really feels.

All defense mechanisms are used in different ways to cope with wishes, desires and drives of human beings. In that case they deviate from their proper mentalities and try to give some consolation or gratification to their mind. It helps them to reduce their mental stresses or sometime help them to control their feelings. But these are not outcomes based in reality.

When we consider the deceitful thoughts which were introduced by Most Ven. Rerukane Chandawimala Thero, it is possible to determine similarities between 'Deceitful Thoughts' and 'Defense Mechanisms'. In case of Deceitful Thoughts, similar to Defense Mechanisms, when people cannot satisfy their desires they use numerous unrealistic mechanisms to gratify their feelings. He named all these thoughts as Vanchaka Dharma – deceitful thoughts. According to his explanation all these deceitful thoughts can be used to gratify human desires.

In the Sinhala book written by him is named *Vanchanika Dharma and Chittopaklesha* and he has used the Abhidhamma as the main source of explanation. He has clearly mentioned that people can mislead their mind by precisely using Deceitful Thoughts. We humans, when led by unwholesome thoughts that are unacceptable and overwhelming, are tempted to utilize Deceitful Thoughts. Greed, lust or desire, hatred,

¹⁰. – do – p. 84

¹¹. – do – p. 85

jealousy, conceit, apathy, fury and worry¹² are some of these unwholesome thoughts which a human being may attempt to hide. Ven. Chandawimala Thero has documented over 35 deceitful thoughts and has mentioned that there can be more of such thoughts.

The purpose to use such kind of deceitful thoughts is to gratify the unacceptable mental desires in an acceptable way. These kinds of mechanism help people to preserve their good self image in the society similar to the explanation provided by Freud. Ven. Chandawimala Thero has further explained that behaviours and actions that are a result of deceitful thoughts are more acceptable but their root is not based in reality. Thus, People are deceived by themselves to convert an unwholesome deed to a more acceptable one.¹³

If greed is taken as an example, greed can manifest in different ways. For an example, greed can be appeared as altruism (*paratthakamata*).¹⁴ Altruism is good. When someone practices altruism he will be respected and appreciated by the society. When someone else observes this positive reinforcement then he also will try to follow the former- not for the sake of altruism but for secular benefits. In that case, according to Most Ven. Chandawimala Thero, he tries to cheat his mind that he is charitable and helpful figure in the society.

Paying gratitude is a good deed and everybody appreciates such qualities. Sometimes people want to gain much benefit from others and therefore they practice such good qualities.¹⁵ In that case too their intention is something else and they practice something else. That also is a way that people cheat their mind. A greedy may want to suppress greed and show him to be charitable with the intention of gaining social appreciation. That is also a way that people cheat their mind.

There are number of deceitful thoughts such as charity or generosity, loving kindness, faith, compassion, equality, non-violence, and tolerance etc. When we do an in depth analysis of all these behaviours comparing with defense mechanisms conceptualized by Freud, similarities can be distinguished. The main purpose of doing such deceitful behaviours and defense mechanisms is to give some consolation to the human mind and also to create a good personal image in the face of the society.

¹² . Ven. Chandawimala Thero, Rerukane, *Vanchaka Dharma ha Chittopaklesha*, Thilak Printers Pvt. p.xiv

¹³ . – do – p. xvi

¹⁴ . – do – p. 3

¹⁵ . Ven. Chandawimala Thero, Rerukane, *Vanchaka Dharma ha Chittopaklesha*, Thilak Printers Pvt. p. 5

There is an unconscious base for all these deceitful thoughts and defense mechanisms. For an example, if one has an inappropriate lust towards somebody, then he/she will try to engage with that person as a friend instead. The person appears to practice loving kindness, however the root behind loving kindness is lust. The inability to accept the existence of lust, unconsciously deceives an individual's mind to portray loving kindness as a means of coming to terms with his/her emotions and to function in a socially acceptable manner.

In conclusion, it can be clearly mentioned that the Defense Mechanisms which were introduced by Sigmund Freud can draw adequate parallels with the concept of *Vanchanika Dharma* propounded by Most Ven. Rerukane Chandawimala Thero in his book of *Vanchanika Dharma and Chittopaklesha*.

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