



# Projection: A Communally-Intuited Approach of Nepali People in Mitigating Anxiety

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## ABSTRACT

*This article focuses on the psychological aspect of Nepali people who are successful in managing psychogenic problems like anxiety and frustration. Anxiety and frustration are the product of disturbing emotions when they do not get proper outlet from the human psyche. As long as these two problems persist in a person, their daily behaviors deviate and impact personal as well as public affairs. These two problems are known as mental disorder and keeping them in control is quite necessary in this acquisitive society. However, these two disorders are not limited to covetousness, they are associated with the life-style of a person that is guided by the environment they are living in. The researcher, while conducting research on this topic, exerts 'psychoanalysis' as a theoretical framework and concerned theorist Sigmund Freud and psychological insights help in finalizing this work. Eventually, this work helps find answer to the question 'why Nepalese people are less prone to anxiety-based problems and emotional deviation in comparison to the people from industrialized and technocratic society'. Projection, though Nepali people do not know what it means, is helping them deal with psychogenic problems like anxiety, frustration, distress, despair, melancholy, and other emotional disorders. Since projection is a way for the ego of a person to defend itself against anxiety or internal conflict of emotions by expressing the source of distress, a person, through projection, unknowingly attributes their own unacceptable thoughts, feeling or impulses to someone else. In this process, the speaker sees him/her in others and consoles himself/herself as a good figure.*

**Key Words:** anxiety, catharsis, defense mechanism, projection, psychoanalysis

## INTRODUCTION

This article aims at bringing anxiety, frustration, and other emotional disorders in Nepali people into discussion by having the insight of psychoanalysis. Nepali people, though unemployed and destitute, look happy and less vulnerable to anxiety and frustration. Why

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do these people look happy and safe from neurotic problems in spite of having a lot of problems in their lives? The reason Nepali people evade anxiety in their lives is the adoption of projection that attributes guilty thoughts and attitudes to others as if they were the problems of others, not the speaker, and saves the speaker from being ashamed. Such kind of thought of the speaker helps to realize that the problems s/he is undergoing are universal, not personal.

It is pervasive that human beings are smeared with the dirty marks and emitting bad smells; however, they notice evils in others and find themselves immaculate. Such a nature of human beings seems common to all, be they rank and file or big brothers. On talking of the qualities of the prince, Machiavelli discusses the nature of human beings – that they have a fault-finding attitude and criticize others. Machiavelli (2008), on the quality of a prince, has observed that “. . . men love at their own pleasure and fear at the pleasure of the prince . . .” (p. 41). This observation of Machiavelli in terms of the prince entails the general tendency of human beings as they are political beings. The tendency of marking others with bad signs is higher in Nepali people, and though this sounds evil, it has helped keep the mental health of Nepali people sound. Nepali people, whether educated or uneducated, rich or poor, wise or naïve, ascribe their blameworthiness to others in order to get relieved from the deplorable thoughts and feelings they have. In this regard, this study binds the psychology of Nepali people with their cultural practices to enact defense mechanisms. Culture includes the complex network of habits and projections that have been the habit of Nepali people of all ages and sexes in all domains of life.

## Review of Literature

Psychoanalysis refers to a theory of mind focusing on the unconscious mind, early childhood experiences, and internal psychological conflicts that play a pivotal role in defining and shaping the behaviors and mental health of a person. It is also a method of therapy for disturbing emotions whose proper management needs to be accomplished in time, or else it causes damage to a person's individual as well as social life. In a nutshell, psychoanalysis is a theory of mind as well as a method of therapy that supports coping with internal conflicts and living a normal life without emotional disturbances.

The term ‘psychoanalysis’ was originally developed by Sigmund Freud to break the conventional assumption of psychology that human mind is limited to ‘consciousness.’ He subverts this concept of the limitation of mind with consciousness by publishing his pivotal work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1901. He means, in this book, to say that the ‘I’ does not entail the whole aspect of human psychology, but only a part of it. He connects human psychology with dreams and the dream with the ‘unconscious.’ Unconscious is “The notion that human beings are motivated, even driven, by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware . . .” (Tyson, 2006, p. 12). “Unconscious” does not refer to any part of the brain; rather, it is a concept that the brain functions in different ways. Different from the conventional assumption of consciousness, another aspect of human psychology is the ‘unconscious,’ about which we are not aware, but our whole life is driven or motivated by it.

While borrowing the assumption of the unconscious from Freud, the unconscious originates when we begin to desire and realize what we have attained and missed in our life. We have experiences in a plethora of loss and gain in our lives, and all these experiences remain in the unconscious and guide our behaviors and attitudes. To overview the position and function of the unconscious, "The unconscious is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them" (Tyson, 2008, p. 12). The unconscious mind acts as a reservoir of desires, thoughts, and memories of which we are outside of conscious awareness, and these phenomena often influence our activities as core issues. In other words, the unconscious entails the hidden mental processes, desires, fears, and memories that do not approach the conscious mind, but these elements hold a unique position in shaping the behavior of a person. What we do, say, or feel in our everyday life has a connection with the contents of the unconscious, though we are unaware of its business. In regard to the role of the unconscious, we do not know what is dormant in our psyche, but we always perform our deeds and show our thoughts and attitude according to the matters contained in our unconscious.

Moreover, psychoanalysis is concerned with the painful experiences that bring problems in human behavior. Freud developed the concept of psychoanalysis in the therapeutic domain as "a treatment in which a patient talks to an analyst about dreams, childhood, and relationships with parents and authority figures" (Dobie, 2002, p. 49). A person's life is full of woes and weal that begin from childhood. The formation of psychology begins from the time a child is born and brought up in a family that is connected to the social, political, economic, and cultural domain of life. In terms of a child's upbringing in an environment, lack generates desire, and what a child desires is what s/he is taught to desire in the socio-economic context. The dreams that a person sees are the phenomena of our daily survival, be they personal, familial, professional, or academic. Pleasant experiences do not trouble us, so they are not the concern of psychoanalysis, but the painful experiences recurrently traumatize us in our everyday behaviors and haunt us in dreams. Furthermore, "A psychoanalytic reading might attend to such themes as loss and separation, anxieties about boundaries or fusion with others, and the struggle to form a coherent self out of a traumatic personal history" (Ryan, 2007, p. 101). Since psychoanalysis is therapeutic and salutary, psychoanalysis does not spare to discuss the dark part of life that is connected with loss and separation, lack and anxiety, and these aspects of life remain latent and guide our life.

The latent contents of the unconscious do not remain in slumber for good; they abruptly have access to the conscious mind and shape our performances. The activation of painful experiences, dreams, and behaviors, for Freud, is the operation of the unconscious. The activation of painful experiences causes mood swings, and a happy mood a bit earlier begins to react otherwise with anxiety and frustration. Suffering is the condition of human life; no one can redeem them from cares and anxiety. However, living an easy and comfortable life is the essence of human beings, and to accomplish such a spirit of life, we need to work out to protect ourselves from the aching knowledge releasing from the unconscious. Freud

talks about defense mechanisms that help us cope with these disturbing experiences and emotions. In Freudian theory, "Defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies that people use to reduce anxiety by concealing its source from themselves and others" (Feldman, 2011, p. 443). Defense mechanisms are inherent, though we are unaware of them, and we exert them to some degree to save us from the disturbing contents of the unconscious. We do not know when the contents of the unconscious come out; as they come out, they disturb us, and unconsciously, we handle them. In the handling of the contents of the unconscious, defense mechanisms function as a method of healing emotions by suppressing or expressing.

Freud suggests some measures of defense mechanisms, which include selective perception, selective memory, projection, sublimation, repression, avoidance, and displacement. These mechanisms help keep the unpleasant information in the unconscious and relieve suffering. Selective perception and selective memory make the subject particular to events that do not create trouble in thought and behavior. Likewise, sublimation helps to transform socially unacceptable impulses into socially acceptable activities. In the same manner, repression reduces anxiety and internal conflicts by blocking disturbing thoughts, memories, or desires from entering conscious awareness. Avoidance keeps a person free from anxiety, discomfort, or distress by remaining away from people, places, thoughts, or situations prone to disturb thought and behavior. To overview the measures of the defense mechanism:

Defenses are the process by which the contents of our unconscious are kept in the unconscious. In other words, they are the processes by which we keep repressed in order to avoid knowing what we feel we can't handle knowing. (Tyson, 2006, p. 15)

Defense mechanisms are innate, but the activation of these measures varies from one situation to another on the basis of the nature of people, places, thoughts, or situations. These mechanisms are helpful in the treatment of psychological disorders, which prevents us from being easygoing. Here, the researcher's concern in this work is to employ 'projection,' a defense mechanism that Nepali people exert unconsciously in order to keep them happy by avoiding anxiety. Projection is all-pervasive in Nepali people, be it in town or village, within or without the country; it is the common feature of Nepali people to ascribe one's fault to others.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This article examines the behavior of Nepali people in coping with anxiety by imputing their faults to others. This practice of lessening their cares and worries incurred by everyday activities of Nepali people adopts a psychoanalytical approach, especially the defense mechanism of having the insight of Sigmund Freud to explore why Nepali people having numerous problems seem to be happy keeping their anxiety at bay. The way Nepali people talk and act supports activating defense mechanisms, especially projection, in releasing evil personal thoughts and wishes from the psyche and attributing them to others. In curing the psyche of an individual through expression, Alan Bleakley (2024) manifests:

One of Freud's clinical insights was that whatever is actively repressed in the psyche and then goes unconscious can return in a distorted form. A repressed memory from childhood of a traumatic incident, for example, can return as a neurosis—a persistent anxiety, a phobia, or fear. (p. 49)

Repressing disturbing thoughts and feelings by an individual for a long time can be pernicious. Expression of such thoughts and feelings can function as a safety valve, and for this purpose projection, as an approach of expression, has been a life force to Nepali people in ascribing personal bad that society takes as a disgrace to others. This article espouses Freud's concept of psychoanalysis, defense mechanism, and projection to explore how projection has been an instinct of Nepali people in managing anxiety by using qualitative methodology that explores the text on the basis of analysis, interpretation, criticism, and clarification.

### **Repression and Expression of Internal Conflicts: A Nepali Heritage**

Nepali people are cultural groups who have their own social, cultural, and economic values. They have grown up in a particular practice and share certain kinds of norms and values, and these values have made them different from other people in the world. "A culture can be viewed as a collection of values and assumptions that go together to shape the way a group of people perceives and relates to the world around them" (Althen, 2005, p. 5). When people are born, they are similar to each other, having vacuum minds, though there are differences in appearance. They become different in thought and behavior when they are brought up with particular habits or culture. In this sense, human beings are one, but they are different in their values and assumptions. Nepali people are different from other people not because of their appearance but because of their social and cultural values. On the magnitude of cultural values, Larry Neal (1971), quoting Ron Karenga, argues the significance of culture that "Culture is the basis of all ideas, images, and actions. To move is to move culturally, i.e., by a set of values given to you by your culture" (p. 262). Cultural values are seminal in shaping the psychology of an individual, and for this reason Nepali people have their own ways of perceiving and dealing with the world. Nepali people, communal in nature, are successful in handling anxiety in their own cultural way that is rare in other people. Nepali people have inherited some measures of managing anxiety by a set of values given to them as culture.

An anxiety is an emotional or cognitive domain of psychology in which a person worries or fears that something wrong is going to take place in their life. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2010a) defines anxiety as "the state of feeling nervous or worried that something bad is going to happen" (p. 56). It is a kind of psychological state that causes emotional and physiological as well as cognitive discomfort. When anxiety persists, it causes a kind of illness that hinders the proper functioning of mind and body, and such malfunctioning of mind and body in a person may become the personal identity. Feldman (2011), on the effect of anxiety in a person, observes that "the occurrence of anxiety without an obvious external cause that affects daily functioning" (p. 513). When we find ourselves in a situation that is adverse to us, we have a kind of feeling of apprehension and fear that



something evil is going to happen. Such a feeling in a particular situation creates a hurdle in daily activities by keeping our control over the situation at bay. In this sense, anxiety is a reaction to a situation that we think is hostile. However, some people experience anxiety for which there is not any ostensible reason. Without any logical reason, they get haunted by a feeling that something adverse is going to take place. So, "When anxiety occurs without external justification and begins to affect people's daily functioning, mental health professionals consider it a psychological problem known as **anxiety disorder**" (Feldman, 2011, p. 513). Anxiety disorder is not conducive to us performing our daily tasks effectively, and it, moreover, causes somatic problems like heart palpitations, dizziness, muscle tension, headaches, nausea, sweating, confusion, or insomnia. These problems remain unknown in laboratory tests as our problems in the body, but they persist in the body and cause damaging effects on personal performances and behaviors.

Anxiety, though incurable, can be controlled because anxiety occurs when the repressed contents release from the unconscious. The unconscious mind is dormant in determining the lifestyle of an individual for whom that individual seems ignorant. As long as the unconscious guides our life, so long as anxiety occurs in our life because "... anxiety always involves the return of the repressed: I am anxious because something I repressed – is resurfacing, and I want to keep it repressed" (Tyson, 2006, p. 17). The re-emergence of frightening experiences results in anxiety, and it defines our entity in an essential way. The return of the repressed, instantly by changing the mood of an individual, causes change in their behavior some moments ago and now. An individual is vulnerable in changing mood and behavior as the repressed desires and drives impel them to act accordingly.

In this regard, what we feel, say, or do in a day is the result of anxiety. We perform any task on the basis of our attitude, and this attitude remains as a core issue that remains with us through our life, and if it is not handled properly, it may damage our being. Freud, in order to cope with anxiety, has suggested the defense mechanism – projection, which has effective functioning in terms of Nepali people. The reason that projection is helpful in managing anxiety of Nepali people is that "In projection, we assign to others feelings or thoughts in ourselves that are unacceptable. Having lost an argument, we might accuse someone of being stupid" (Ryan, 2007, p. 95). Projection helps us alienate from our weaknesses, lacks, failures or guilty desires by indicating the negative qualities of others. Projection encourages us to point out others' guilt and conceal ours. On hiding the weaknesses of the speaker, Tyson clarifies more on projection that it is an act of "ascribing our fear, problems, or guilty desire to someone else and then condemning him or her for it, in order to deny that we have it ourselves" (p. 15). It is a psychological thing that we feel happy when we attribute our wrongs to others. The act of projection takes place knowingly or unknowingly but its impact upon our life is positive. Moreover, projection is compatible to Nepali way of thinking or acting, and Nepali people, though have tons of problems, seem less vulnerable to anxiety and destructive behaviors because they come up with projection.

Nepali people are traditional in thoughts and actions. They have small needs and demands. However, they are not far from the effects of materialism and the influence of

the Western life-style. Western life-style is comfortable but satisfaction is like a mirage because of their individualistic life pattern. Nepali people are collective and they cannot live a meaningful life by keeping their community aside. When they live in a community bound society they are always in contact with their kith and kin and they are concerned over their affairs as well. Getting connected to the affairs of others and being the part of their ups and downs has become Nepali culture. "... culture is a celebration ... to be distinctly 'human': it keeps us sane and safe and also allows us to express and project our bodies in many directions and dimensions" (Pope, 2013, p. 97). Culture is such kind of phenomenon that cooperates human beings to handle situations in sane and safe way; otherwise, human values may be dominated by primitive drives and desires. It is a basis of actions, images, and ideas. The thoughts and actions of Nepali people, in particular situation, are generated and regulated by culture- the total way of life.

Moreover, Nepali people are poor and unemployed. They have enough leisure time to be together and talk about their affairs and experiences in terms of their personal, familial, and societal activities. They talk about their own problems and the problems of others. Nepali people are defining their being as they are acting on the basis of script given by the society they live in. The script of Nepali society are the values ingrained in their minds and they think and act accordingly. All in all, the position of human beings is changing according to the surroundings and the models they are living in. In this sense, "People are human becoming not simply human beings" (Pope, 2013, p. 100). Our thoughts and actions are no longer fixed, they are always on the process and so culture changes our beings. Gossip mongering is Nepali entity and in this respect they scavenge the scandals spread in the community, and though they have the same kind of allegation and situation, they ascribe their condition to others and release their disturbing emotions and feel relaxed. Such kind of behavior of Nepali people help them come out of anxiety. While putting their problems upon others as if it were none of theirs, an individual feels jettisoning his problems to others and positions himself better than others in the society. Nepali people, exerting projection, are able to avoid anxiety and look happy. This Nepali way of imposing guilty desires upon the community members has made it much easier for Nepalese people to save them from anxiety.

Furthermore, Nepali calendar is crowded with festivals. Gathering, celebrating and dispersing are the common features of fiestas. When, in Nepal, people gather during festivals, they start their moments by talking the bygone days of themselves and others. They do not hesitate to share their problems and listen to others. And, moreover, at the same time they begin to mark the weaknesses of their neighbors and acquaintances. They adopt good values, as the society assumes, as their own and the negative values as others. If the parents are gathering, the subject of their conversation are their children and they allege the children from another family immoral and asocial while their own children are involved in such activities. The same nature is found in students. They talk about their study, and to release them from the anxiety of their weak performances in the examinations and bad results, they chat on their friends' failure in the subject(s).

The series of projection prevails in all nook and cranny of Nepali lifestyle. Farmers

allege the weather, entrepreneurs blame government policies, doctors indict patients and patients allege doctors that they did not listen to them properly and prescribed wrong medicine whereas they are blind to their own life-style. Political leaders accuse people that they lack awareness and people blame leaders being selfish. In the same manner, students blame teachers and teachers allege students that they spend scant time with their text books. Employers indict employees lacking soft skills and employees charge employers being finicky and low payers. Regarding the characteristic of projection, Gaarder (1991) clarifies:

When we project, we transfer the characteristics we are trying to repress in ourselves onto other people. A person who is very miserly, for example, will characterize others as penny-pinchers. And someone who will not admit to being preoccupied with sex can be the first to be incensed at other people's self-fixation. (p. 438)

Such series of assigning guilty characters to others is quite common in Nepali people and such activities, though they sound amoral and asocial, have become the medium of anxiety management. The series of projection is affluent in all Nepali families, the basic unit of society, too where one sibling reflects his/her faults in another sibling and such incident persists in all families. The family character, later, becomes strategy in making their worries and anxieties light and benign.

There are a lot of psychogenic problems caused by anxiety and the proper handling of anxiety makes life easy, emotionally and physically. Revealing the repressed functions as a method of curing the psychological illness. Projection involves in the purification of disturbing emotions, be they fears, guilty desires, problems, repressed for a long time and results in catharsis. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2010b) defines Catharsis as "the process of releasing strong feelings, for example through plays or other artistic activities, as a way of providing relief from anger, suffering, etc." (p. 230). The word 'catharsis' was first used by Aristotle to mention the effect of tragedy in audience, but this word has been included in psychology as an emotional relief in the patients. Catharsis, via any medium, is the purgation of emotions that are prone to cause psychological disorder in a person. Projection is helpful in arousing catharsis in Nepali people and so Nepali people, be they poor, unemployed, deprived, helpless, are resilient and have happiness in their faces in comparison to the people of affluent communities.

## CONCLUSION

This article finds out that Nepali people manage anxiety and apprehension as they inhere projection and enact it in their everyday activities. Projection, as a defense mechanism, has eased the anxiety of Nepali people and created an ambience of mutual sharing of cares and worries. When Nepali people catch up each other, their social intercourse commences with the backbiting of others and this helps them to forget their faults and weaknesses imputing others. Psychoanalysis, in terms of Nepali people, has been a domain of analyzing the patterns of thoughts and actions generated by scarcity. Poverty and deprivation have caused



emotional as well as cognitive disturbances in Nepali people and their attempts to cope up with the problems psychologically are the steps of keeping them happy. To overview the treatment of anxiety of Nepali people, projection, a latent measure of handling anxiety, is significant and has saved them from emotional, physical, and cognitive deviation.

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