

ADITI [ALIAS DR. LAVANYA SESHASAYEE] GETTING INTERVIEWED BY THE INSTITUTE OF THE BONKIE WONKIES [IOTBW]

We need to have a capabilities informed approach to mental health and this can only happen when you consider the individual in psychosocial distress to be the expert with experiential expertise. She can conceptualize her illness in much better ways than the doctor can because she is the direct sufferer-experiencer, so to say. Alternative non-medical approaches have a remarkable effect in helping the sufferer bounce back to recovery. They are non-invasive and holistic. We need better ways to conceptualize de-escalation, harm reduction and mediation. A solely medico-psycho-socio-model will not help. I'm not saying medicines aren't needed. I'm saying medicalize if the contours of a specific case call for medicalization but don't over-medicalise.

We need to find out what is happening to the individual from deep within and ask her what she thinks will be of help to her. If you are interested in the person's safety and well-being then this is better conceptualized via self-advocacy, user survivor models and a human rights paradigm. We should be having safety measures based on these paradigms.

When the IOTBW heard Aditi who made the very unique speech at the UNO-SIDE EVENT for the persons with psychosocial disabilities on National Radio they were very curious to meet her and interview her. Aditi who was thoroughly amazed that the very people who had called her a "medical failure" should now want to interview her consented to get interviewed by the IOTBW. And the interview went thus. The interviewing doctor who was a psychiatrist himself with a slightly bloated ego [as psychiatrists are wont to have] commenced his interview.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: we'd like to interview you Dr. Aditi because you were a person with Schizophrenia who did manage to become a doctor yourself. Could we please interview you?

ADITI: Yes, Sure.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Was there a very dire prognosis that the doctors gave you? Tell us about it!!!

ADITI: Talk about it!!! To this day the doctors at the IOTBW believe 'once a Schizophrenic is always a Schizophrenic.'

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Is that right or wrong?

ADITI: It's left to you to decide. You know I travel all around the world attending conferences and seminars sharing my story and model of recovery with all people from all sorts of backgrounds. I also run a whole lot of projects for NGOs. I treat

people with non-medical support systems which can sometimes be combined with medicines. I am functional to the core. So now You Decide.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Well Dr. Aditi there is nothing about you today that makes anybody think you were once a person with Schizophrenia.

ADITI: 'Person with Schizophrenia?' Sounds interesting!! – Thank you. For once you are learning to use decent language. You are now learning to fight stigma instead of contributing to it. For once.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: But Dr. Aditi you couldn't possibly call a person with Schizophrenia anything else. Don't you think so?

ADITI: Don't use labels. Use empowering words. Don't look at the label for heaven's sake. Look at the person behind the label.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Do you mean to say that a person with Schizophrenia doesn't exist at all? Why then do we require so many Psychiatrists?

ADITI: That's for you to decide!! Now that you people call yourselves the 'EXPERTS'.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: But We ARE EXPERTS. Don't you think so Dr. Aditi?

ADITI; I'm the expert too- an experiential expert---and a tough one at that. I'm a tough nut to crack.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: What did you say just now Dr. Aditi - did you just call yourself a crackpot?

ADITI: Not at all.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: But Dr. Aditi we just heard you referring to yourself as a crackpot!!

ADITI: Now who's having auditory hallucinations? Me or you - the self-professed expert?

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: DR.ADITI, leaving that aside, was there once a time when you suffered from Schizophrenia? Did you ever suffer from Schizophrenia?

ADITI: What is Schizophrenia according to you?

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Well Dr. Aditi, Schizophrenics stare right through people and hear voices and see visions you know!!!

ADITI: Well then, going by your own definition Mother Teresa must be labelled Schizophrenic since she heard Christ speaking to her- the voice of Christ calling her to serve the poorest of the poor. Now who's really crazy or crazier – Mother Teresa or the self-professed experts who have auditory hallucinations every time they interview the so-called Schizophrenics? By the way Schizophrenics see right through people – not stare.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: But Dr. Aditi don't you think Mother Teresa was exceedingly functional and therefore cannot be slotted as a 'person with Schizophrenia'?

ADITI: Precisely. You're the ones who are agreeing she wasn't a 'person with Schizophrenia' really. All people who hear voices need not be 'Schizophrenic'. The hearing voices network in fact conducted a study that demonstrated that at least half the population would have heard a voice sometime or the other. If we were to label them all, half the world needs to be put into mental hospitals. Do you see how futile it is to label people and medicine pump them?

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: But psychiatric medicines helped you a lot! Didn't they Dr. Aditi?

ADITI: They helped me focus on tasks to some extent- nothing beyond that!! In fact when I was given psychiatric medicines without a proper support system I went from bad to worse, developed a writer's cramp which rendered me incapable of taking notes in class and became highly non-functional. What helped me really was my mother implementing on me the support system I charted out for her to help me with after I enrolled at college.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Wasn't the doctor responsible for your recovery- we mean Dr. Sulochana?

ADITI: That was what she claimed and took credit for after my mother did all the helping, inspiring and motivating- after my mom stood by me and shared all of my joys, sorrows and dreams. Just because a doctor 'treated you' it doesn't become evident they were responsible for your recovery - does it? In fact if you've had a Writers' cramp and dropped out of college despite the treatment it means you've had a civil death already. It doesn't mean you recovered-does it?

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: What led to your recovery then?

ADITI: The Social-Constructivist model of support I came up with titled FSA-FEMINIST

SELF ADVOCACY to bring myself out of Schizophrenia via Feminist Empowerment. I came out of a highly patriarchal family wherein all uncles and aunts had 100% faith in practiced male chauvinism.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: But Dr. Aditi, it is one's genetic make-up that decides whether you acquire Schizophrenia or not – doesn't it?

ADITI: That genetic humbug has been discounted since generations by the Schizophrenia survivors - people who knew better and still do!!!

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: But you needed treatment- didn't you Dr. Aditi?

ADITI: How do you know?

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Because Dr. Aditi the doctor said you had Schizophrenia!

ADITI: How does she know?

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Because Dr. Aditi you heard voices and had hallucinations.

ADITI: Well, she had hallucinations worse than mine. So obviously the Doctor must have also been Schizophrenic.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Well, Dr. Aditi what sort of hallucinations did the doctor have?

ADITI: She had day dreams that told her I would never recover. She dreamt of not encouraging me to dream bigger. Because she visualized me taking away her power.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Dr. Aditi, did she also have Cognitive Distortions?

ADITI: She did.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: What sort?

ADITI: She hadn't conceptualized Schizophrenia very correctly. She told me I couldn't hit my therapist when I showed absolutely no indication of wanting to hit the brainless psychotherapist named Monali who she referred me to. Also, she thought I would never recover.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: But you did recover Dr. Aditi- didn't you?

ADITI: You can judge that for yourself.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Yes Dr. Aditi you did!!! It is very apparent from your behaviour and phenomenal achievements. We can see that!!!

ADITI: So who's the real 'Schizophrenic'?

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Sorry Dr. Aditi but such sensible answers can't be coming out of the mouth of a nutty person or an ex-nut.

ADITI: I told you that 20 years ago. I told your community long ago that Schizophrenia was just a metaphor. I told HER HIGHNESS that Schizophrenia was just a set of behaviours and not a biological illness. Nor is it a brain disease. It is no big deal!!! What have I been harping about since the past 20 years?? I told you genetic theories regarding Schizophrenia didn't have any real basis as far as I was concerned. I told HER HIGHNESS 20 years ago that I didn't believe in her crappy label.

'And that it was a social construct' - So Whispered Aditi gently even as she smiled an understanding smile. The interviewing doctor understood only too well. For he smiled back at her.

MR.PSYCHIATRIST: Sorry Dr. Aditi, but you never did have any Schizophrenia. Nobody has Schizophrenia. Or perhaps everybody who is human has Schizophrenia. Because you've shown us just now that we mustn't believe in that label at all. I've had a mind-shift myself after meeting you and conversing with you. You've deconstructed all of my faulty notions and negative thought patterns pertaining to

Schizophrenia. The negative thinking loops in my own brain pertaining to Schizophrenia are slowly getting disentangled. NOW I feel like I've personally undergone Cognitive Behaviour Therapy!!!

‘Exactly. That’s the whole point!!’ said Aditi.

THE END