

**Paras:** Today I'm gonna talk to you about capitalism and its effects on mental health. So this one's titled 'It's not you, it's capitalism'. Before we go ahead I want to talk to you a little bit about psychology as a discipline and how it evolved and why it is relevant to mental health, to begin with.

### *Capitalism and Psychology*

So, psychology isn't a very old discipline, it's probably just a few centuries old. It really rose to prominence during the second world war and it developed in the United States of America, wherein it rose to prominence, thanks to IQ testing.

IQ testing at that time was primarily done from the point of view of recruiting soldiers into the army to fight these wars. So why I'm mentioning this to you is that this discipline emerged as a way of finding people who would be the right fit to serve a certain purpose, a certain capitalist purpose.

One thing we need to remember is that this is a trend that has continued to counseling therapies, that gradually developed in the 1930s and 1940s, and really rose to prominence in the 1960s where there were people like Rodgers, Ellis, Aaron Beck and then all the post modern therapies emerging in the 80s and 90s; and today we have thousands of therapies.

Now one thing you would notice about most counseling therapies—*most* not all—is that the focus is on the individual and it is quite decontextualized. When I say it's quite decontextualized, what I'm saying is that one of the first things that you are taught in counseling, as a counselor in training, is to be objective and neutral. So non-judgementality and neutrality are two of the so-called benchmarks or hallmarks of a good counselor.

What that often means is that you are told not to engage politically with your client or with therapy. You are told to engage with what you can do with the individual. Which is what I mean by decontextualization of the concern being faced by the individual and, to a great extent, individuation of the concern faced by the individual.

A simple example of that is what I do for a living—I see this on an everyday basis. So one big source of my clients right now are from corporate organizations and often these are employees who get referred by their companies for counseling because they aren't meeting their expectations, their goals, their targets and the company or the management feels that they need to do something about this, they need to get this employee to start performing better, being more punctual or more regular. So, they are referred to counseling to fine tune them, bring them back into the 'okay' parameters for performance—and that's the idea.

So quite often as a counselor, you would be encouraged to look at the employee alone and not look at the sociopolitical context of why the employee isn't feeling motivated to work, why the employee isn't coming regularly to work. And of course, you are going to not be asked to challenge the environment of the workplace at all, because the workplace or the management is supposed to be your client rather than the employee.

### *Internalization of Capitalism*

So this is just one of the ways in which psychology or counseling therapy as a discipline aids capitalism. Now coming to the other side, how does capitalism get internalized? Now I am gonna borrow here from Michelle Foucault. One of the things he talks about in his work is a disciplinary regime.

A disciplinary regime, just to break it down for you, is just a system that is oppressive, which continues to monitor you all the time, to the point in which you don't really have to monitor the person anymore—the person begins to monitor themselves. So, capitalism is a classic example of a disciplinary regime. It monitors you, it makes you feel like you are being watched all the time; whether it's your organization, your society, culture, big brother, whatever you'd want to call it.

So you develop these self-surveillance mechanisms. You watch whether you are doing a good enough job, you keep time of whether you are reaching work on time, and hard-work, punctuality, flexibility, working weekends, not taking a vacation for over a year, are all considered a benchmark of being a good working or being a productive worker.

So, one of the ways in which capitalism influences mental health is by telling you that good self-care, good work-life balance, getting adequate sleep or getting adequate time to eat, eating healthy, demanding a fair wage, demanding a fair leave policy are not the ideals that you are supposed to pursue. But hustle, being on the job all the time, being available, working across time zones, working across the weekend, working on a holiday, sacrificing family members' birthdays, anniversaries or even their medical struggles, is what is considered as being the hallmark of being a dedicated employee.

It works by a simple reward-punishment mechanism at the start but later on, it gets idealized. So, so much of working culture, so much of even the start-up culture for that matter is filled with these toxic ideas of what it means to be productive and whenever you try to break away from this mainstream there's always going to be three things which are going to be unleashed or thrown at you, as a way of getting you back into the capitalist, disciplinary regime.

And those three things are: fear, shame and guilt. And you'll notice that any oppressive regime—whether it's oppressive culture, whether it's patriarchy, whether it's heteronormativity or capitalism for that matter—is going to use fear, shame and guilt to get people to stay within the system.

Fear: "If you don't work a full-time job you will go into financial ruin."

Shame: "You're not able to do it, you are not a good enough employee."

Guilt: you may feel like "My family member had so many aspirations of me. If I wanted to, I could push myself but I am prioritizing self-care and self-preservation, whereas I should be actually going out there and working."

So this is how capitalism works to screw up our self-concepts and really feed us into this.

### *Role of the Mental Health Professional*

The third thing I wanted to talk about also was how mental health professionals also contribute to this. So one of the ways in which our country and the health-care system in itself is fostering that is, there isn't much public health-care in the area of mental health to speak of. There is *some*; it's appallingly inadequate.

So most of the mental health services which are there in India, in terms of psychiatry or counselling psychology, are given by private professionals. I, myself am a private professional, so I'm not saying that I am free from the blame of it, but the idea is that most of the mental health care is provided at a private basis.

So, what happens is that, because it is private health care, it is obviously going to be paid and because it's paid, you don't make a living, you don't make a salary until someone comes and sees you. So, this is not like the police or a public hospital or the fire department wherein you get paid even on a day when there isn't a crime or a casualty or when there isn't a fire. The state has deemed these things to be necessary even when there isn't somebody who needs to be availing these services.

Not so in terms of mental health. In terms of mental health, the idea is only when you get a gig is when you are going to get paid. So as a result, what happens is that:

One— I'm going to charge people a premium to access me; and two is that I am going to try and ensure that I can see as many people as I want. So that's also leading to overmedicalization and also extremely high prices for counselling therapy, clinical psychology and psychiatry.

So, that's in a nutshell how capitalism is intertwined with mental health. What we can do is definitely, is realize that this is not the natural way of being. When I say the natural way of being—there isn't just one way of looking at productivity, looking at functionality, looking at self-worth, there are other ways of looking at it. Second is realizing that is a disciplinary regime, it is an oppressive regime and it operates like that. And three is, if you are a mental health professional, try and find ways in which you can—if not completely go away from capitalist—then at least find some flexibility, find some ways to subvert it.

The way I do it is that I have dedicated a certain number of my consulting hours, my counselling hours as 'pay-what-you-want'. This means that somebody, who can't afford my full charges, is allowed to come back and say that they are not able to do that and still access my counselling therapy. Same quality, same amount of time, same amount of effort, at a price which is affordable to them. So that is how I'm going to do my bit about it.

But at a larger level, at the public health level, I think there's a great amount of advocacy, great amount of change that needs to come in before we are able to make mental health care a reality and make it a viable profession choice for people. Because right now the availability of services is bad and the remuneration of being a mental health professional also is bad, and I would say that in both situations capitalism is the one to blame.

So this was my short conversation with you on capitalism and mental health. Do let me know your thoughts about this, do let me know your comments, feedback. And until next time, here's me signing off. Goodbye, and thank you so much.