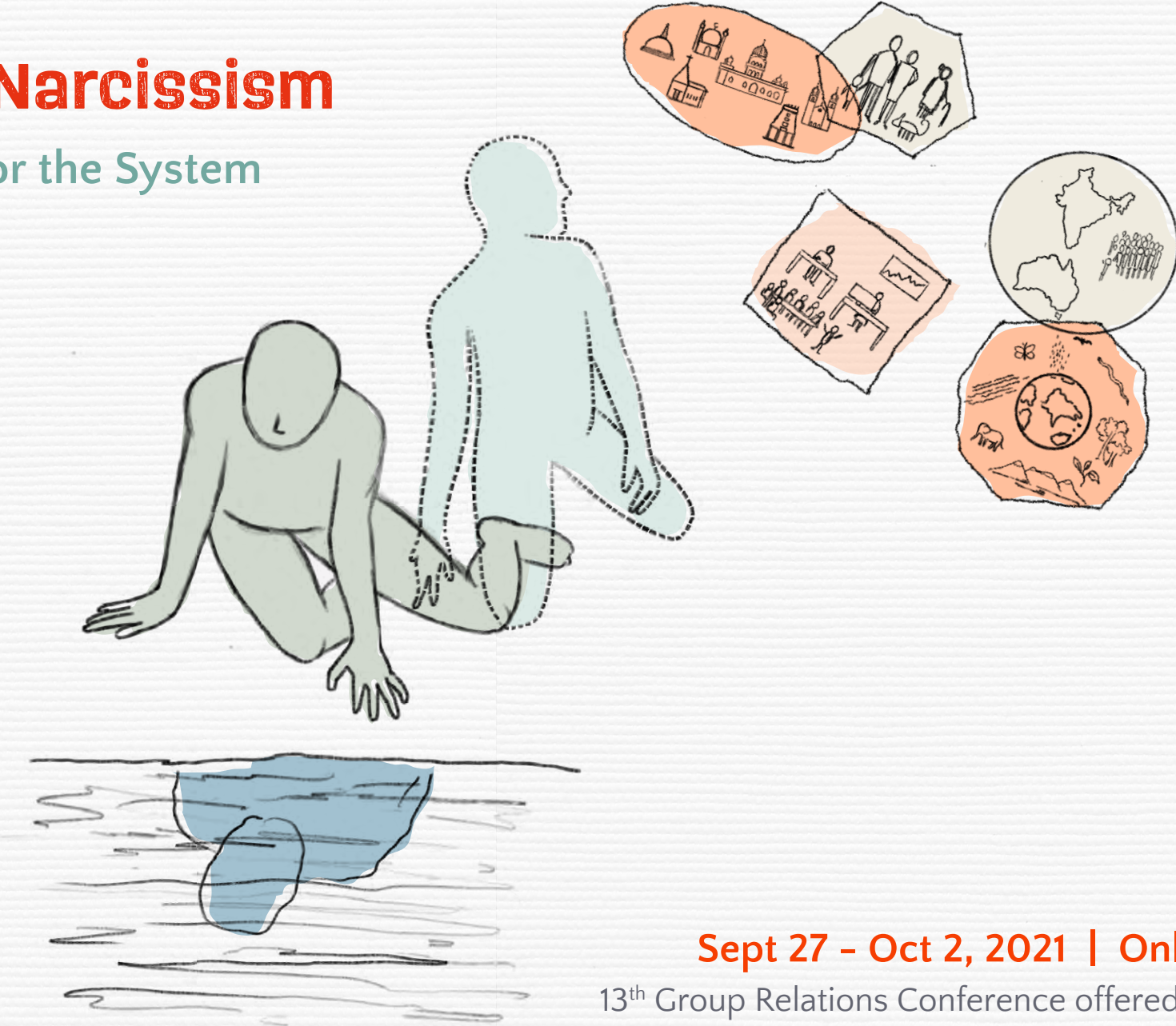


# Interrogating Narcissism

Towards Leadership for the System



**Sept 27 - Oct 2, 2021 | Online Conference**

13<sup>th</sup> Group Relations Conference offered by Group Relations India

## Dear prospective member

The interplay of the conscious and unconscious dynamics within us, as well as in the groups and systems outside of us, together influence almost everything about our leadership: what we do or don't do in our roles; what we see or not see about the system; who we see as 'with us' and 'against us' in the groups we're part of; and more. Narcissism belongs to the unconscious aspect within each of us, and as is common with anything about the unconscious, we may be reluctant to have it interrogated. But we see all around us that uninterrogated ideas and practices end up only preserving the status quo for our 'self' and by extension, for the systems that we're part of. Encountering the narcissist within us, and reckoning with its implications for our leadership can be anxiety-provoking no doubt, but can also open up the possibility of owning the disowned parts of ourselves, and discovering new ways of orienting our leadership towards the health of the systems that we're part of.

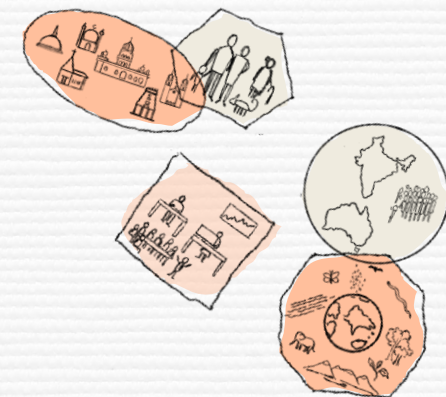
The key ideas in the Group Relations framework – unconscious, task, role, individual in the group, boundaries, system, context – all have a role to play in aiding our interrogation of narcissism

within and without us, and also have the potential to be used as resources to limit the ravage that uncontained narcissism can wreak upon the health of the self, the other, the group, and the system.

This online conference is offered as an opportunity for furthering your learning to those of you who have previously attended an in-person GRC, with the idea that you can put to use your previous experience of attending a conference to access your personal authority and offer your leadership to aid this collective interrogation. Reading the brochure, I hope, evokes for you the possibilities inherent in this conference opportunity.

I am keen to hear from you, and along with my staff colleagues, look forward to welcoming you to the conference!

Ganesh Anantharaman  
Conference Director



## The Theme as Context

In Greek mythology, Narcissus pays the ultimate price for his infatuation with his own image: of finally recognizing that his love for himself can never be reciprocated, and yet remaining fixated by his own image until death. Despite that early warning, curiously enough, the phenomenon of treating one's 'self' as the most important stakeholder in any context has become a preoccupation of our times across geographies and cultures. This conference is an opportunity for us to take note of this phenomenon and interrogate our own role in creating it; and its implications for the self and one's leadership on the one hand, as well as for the systems we belong to on the other.

### Psychoanalytic understanding

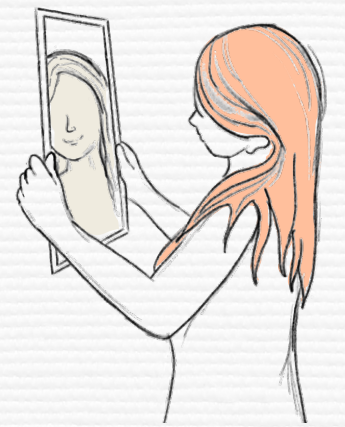
Narcissism is a psychoanalytic construct, and has been conceptualized variously by psychoanalysts: investment of libido in the ego as opposed to object-love (Freud); the erotic attraction to one's specular image in the mirror stage that entails a misrecognition of perfection (Lacan); perceived lack of empathy from parents leading to disintegration of self and grandiose omnipotence as a defense (Kohut); early childhood

experiences of cold, indifferent, or aggressive parental figures resulting in 'specialness' as a retreat on the child's part, leading to a grandiose self-structure in which conflict and aggression predominate (Kernberg) are some samples.

What seems common across the differences in psychoanalytical etiology of narcissism is the wounded psyche of the narcissist, characterized by feelings of low self-worth; emptiness and depression; lack of ability to feel sadness, guilt, and mourning and a reliance instead on shame, envy, and aggression. Contemporary psychoanalysis posits narcissism as a dynamic psychical structure that ranges from the normal to the pathological, a difference marked more by the pervasiveness of symptoms rather than a simplistic presence or absence of them.

### Buddhist perspective

All spiritual traditions emphasise moving away from the preoccupation with the self, and treat compassion as a virtue to be practiced towards the other. The practice of Buddhism, with its extensive work on the mind, supports the sustained dismantling of the conventional structure of the "self". The Buddha, in a sense, spoke to the myth of Narcissus when he pointed out that the image of the 'self' that we so fondly gaze at is but an illusion!



This idea of 'no-self' or the 'emptiness of self' in Buddhism refers to the fact that the way the "self" exists in reality is very different from the way we instinctively and perhaps unconsciously hold it. Our attachment to the idea of the self as an entity that is both solid and independent is the cause of much misery in ourselves and in the systems that we are part of. A rather radical conceptualization of happiness was provided as early as in the 8th Century CE by the Buddhist scholar-practitioner Shantideva, who declared:

*"All the happiness there is in this world comes from thinking about others, and all the suffering comes from preoccupation with yourself."*

### Implications for leadership

Studies on leadership from the psychoanalytic and systems-psychodynamic orientations differentiate between normal and pathological narcissism. The difference between the two kinds is in the degree and pervasiveness of the symptoms. Normal narcissistic manifestations are part of the gratifications of any position of responsibility and leadership, gratifications that may be the source of increased effectiveness in leadership as well as a compensation for its frustrations. Striving for a position of leadership may be the result of an intertwining of normal narcissism, idealism, and altruism. Normal narcissism in leaders lends itself to containment through increased self-

awareness, and through a system of checks and balances in the system, which the leaders accept.

Pathological narcissism in leaders poses a grave danger to the health of the systems they lead. Caught in their needs for power, prestige, and adoration from their followers, these leaders disown commitment to the task or purpose. Conflating criticism with rejection, they marginalize all dissent and end up fostering a culture of sycophancy within their systems. Their chronic envy of others undermines the leadership potential in the system. Pathological narcissism radically interferes with the leadership function of helping the system differentiate between the expedient and the important. The system substitutes maintaining the leader's image as its primary task, compromising the real task and all boundaries in the process.

We are all on a spectrum of narcissism: captivated by our constructed self-image, hanging on to an idea of self-sufficiency, and resisting any reminder of our own interdependence on others or of our interconnectedness with everything around us. The extent of our (very likely unconscious) narcissism will determine whether the systems we are part of are nurtured or depleted.

## About this conference



This conference is offered on the premise that interrogating our own narcissism and its consequences for ourselves and for the systems we're part of may help us find appropriate ways of managing our unmet needs, find our roles in systems where excessive narcissism is rampant, and thus deploy our leadership in ways that are sustainable for the self and for the system.

### The conference primary task

To study the phenomenon of narcissism as it unfolds in the conference, and interrogate its implications on the culture and effectiveness of the conference as a system within its context.

Working on this primary task is an opportunity to explore these dynamics at various levels: the individual, group, organisation, and wider social systems, recognising that these are interdependent fractals, constantly shaping and co-creating one another.

## The conference events

The conference events provide a range of opportunities to discover how much one's experience of the 'here and now' is influenced by fantasy (beliefs that are more linked to one's valences and untested assumptions), thereby helping one to recognize and work with both individual and systemic unconscious processes.



## Who can apply for membership?

This conference is offered as a "furthering conference". All those who have previously attended an in-person GRC are eligible to apply for membership of this conference. You will need to provide us the details of your prior GRC experience in the application form.

This conference can accommodate 24 members. Applications will be accepted on a first come first served basis, with some consideration given to making the conference opportunity available for members from India, as well as from outside of India.

## Conference Management and Staff

Conference Director:  
Ganesh Anantharaman

Conference Administrator:  
Chandan Shamnani

The Conference Director and Administrator form the Directorate of the Conference.

Consultant staff will be drawn from:  
Ganesh Anantharaman | Gunjan Zutshi |  
Lubna Khalid | Rosemary Viswanath |  
Vartika Jaini | Yash Kaul

## Staff Profiles

**Chandan Shamnani** is a post graduate in HR and OD from Delhi University and has worked with the corporate sector for 15 years across industries and geographies. He is the founder of WeExplore OD Consulting and currently working as an organization development consultant.

An associate member of GRI, he has participated in GRCs since 2017. His experiences with unconscious processes in self and systems have encouraged his attempts to apply Group Relations in different facets of life.

**Ganesh Anantharaman**, M. Phil. (Mumbai University); Associate Member, Group Relations India; Professional Member, Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Science (ISABS). Ganesh consults to corporate organizations on Leadership Development. He has staffed several conferences in various roles since 2003, including that of Co-Director in the 2019 GRI Conference. He is also an analyst in training in the Lacanian orientation.

**Gunjan Zutshi**, (MBA), co-founder - AgileSattva Consulting LLP. Accredited Organisation Development and Change Practitioner (ODCP) from Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Science (ISABS), Certified coach (ACC) from International Coaching Federation (ICF) and Certified

Transactional Analyst - Psychotherapy (CTA-P). Associate member Group Relations India (GRI) and involved in GR work for last 10 years.

**Lubna Khalid** is a practitioner consultant living in Toronto. She coordinates women's leadership and empowerment training program in a not-for-profit organization. She is an active member of Insight for Community Impact that offers training opportunities based on the group relations method to learn about the nature and emergence of difference, leadership, and authority in groups.

**Rosemary Viswanath**, B.Sc. (Hons) Mathematics (Delhi University), P.G.D.M. (IIM, Bengaluru), Founder & Managing Trustee, Group Relations India. Has consulted in and directed Group Relations Conferences in India and internationally since 1987. Consults on developing leadership, organizational strategy and change processes primarily with social development, social justice, and human

and environmental rights organisations and movements, but also in the development aid and corporate spaces.

**Vartika Jaini**, B.A (Hons) Economics (Delhi University), PGDRM (Institute of Rural Management Anand) is a rural development professional and a group relations practitioner. She runs a startup focused on accelerating impact in tribal pockets of central India. She has been in roles of member and staff in group relations conferences since 2010. Vartika is an Associate of Group Relations India.

**Yash Kaul**, BITS Pilani - Pilani and IIM Kozhikode alumni. Twenty-four years' experience in pharmaceutical and medical device industry. Currently working as Vice President - South APAC with Smiths Medical. Associated with Group Relations in various roles since 2014. Been on staff on GRCs and Workshops offered by GRI. Passionate about practicing GR as a way of life in organizations, especially in corporates.

# Administrative Details

## Dates and time slots

September 27 to October 2, 2021. The conference begins with a short session for welcoming members at 1630 IST on Monday, September 27, followed by the opening plenary starting at 1700. It closes at 2200 IST on Saturday, October 2. Conference events happen between 1700 and 2200 IST on all 6 days. The detailed schedule and description of events would be sent to members of the conference.

## Platform

This conference will happen on Zoom. The link to join the conference will be sent to members closer to the date.

## Conference fee

The conference fee is INR 30,000 plus 18% GST (totals INR 35,400/-). For international members (those participating from outside of India) it is USD 500.

## Bursaries

GRI is committed to ensuring that group relations work is accessible to a wide membership, which has enabled people from a range of economic and work sectors and representing many other important diversities to attend. We believe that this diversity in membership contributes to the opportunities for learning for all members. We are particularly committed to make group relations opportunities available to those in the social justice and development sectors, such as small, under-resourced NGOs, community-based organisations, and movements.

Those seeking bursary are required to write to us at the time of applying giving the reason for, and the amount of bursary they seek. We will revert to you on the amount we can offer based on the total number of requests made, the relative merits of the case, and the number of full-paying applicants we get. It would help us to decide on all bursary requests if those seeking a bursary write to us by Wednesday, September 1, 2021.

We also offer the option of paying the fee in two instalments for those members who would like to avail this option, citing their reasons for doing so.

## How to Apply

To apply for membership of the conference, you will need to fill in the online application form on the given link. Kindly note that invoicing and GST details

in the application form are required by us to fulfil statutory compliances.

Once your application is accepted by us, we'll separately initiate with you on email the process for your fee transfer. Your place in the conference will be confirmed by us in writing once we receive the fee and the payment details.

[APPLY HERE](#)

## Refund Policy

Refund after deducting 25% towards administrative expenses will be made to those who withdraw on or before September 10, 2021. For withdrawals after that, refunds will not be possible, but we do consider the option of holding a part of your fee towards participation in a future GRI event.



## Speak to us!

For further discussions, and to assist your decision about the conference, we would be happy to speak to you. Message Chandan (+91 9923005526) or Ganesh (+91 9886406806) to set up a time for a conversation. Or email us at: [grc@grouprelationsindia.org](mailto:grc@grouprelationsindia.org).

If you are living through particular personal difficulties, we suggest you consider postponing your participation, as the conference is designed as a learning environment and is not a substitute for personal psychotherapy or counselling.



## About GRI

Group Relations India (GRI) was founded in 2013 with the vision of an institution that is committed exclusively to group relations methodology, and of making the potential of this methodology available to members from a wide section of Indian society, having different representations and interests.

It is conceived of as a 'home for GR' in India.

For more information, please visit [www.grouprelationsindia.org](http://www.grouprelationsindia.org)