

The TSTA journey – A conversation between Sai & Ragini

Sai: Welcome to this conversation. I'm Sai, and I'm a Transactional Analyst, a Psychotherapist and a Teacher. And I'm joined in this conversation by a colleague. Ragini, please introduce yourself.

Ragini: Yeah, Hi. I'm Ragini Rao. I'm also a Transactional Analyst, a Therapist, a Teacher and a Supervisor.

Sai: Alright. And, our colleagues from the Transactional Analysis community requested us to speak about our experience of going through a credential examination called the TSTA and so, that's what this conversation is about, to share our experience and to tell you a little bit about what it meant for us. For those of you who're listening and who don't know about Transactional Analysis, Transactional Analysis is a personality and a framework from psychology that talks about our personality, you know, origins of our problems, it's a very powerful and empowering framework to work with personal transformation. And within Transactional Analysis, as we study it and credential, you know, to become Transactional Analysts, there are different levels that people, you know go through of credentialing. The first is the Certified Transactional Analyst which is the practitioner level, which is called CTA and then we have the PTSTA which is the Provisional Teaching and Supervising Transactional Analyst so you're teaching and supervising but not yet done the final level of credentialing which is called TSTA – Teaching and Supervising Transactional Analyst, which is really the journey that Ragini and I have just taken and just got recently credentialed and that is what this conversation is about. So, Ragini since not everyone would know what TSTA is, perhaps we can begin by you know, introducing what the TSTA is, it's expansion, what it means and maybe even tell people about the fields in TA, you know, some context to this credential, also in India.

Ragini: Yeah. So, TSTA is basically Teaching and Supervising Transactional Analyst. Now, as Sai just said, we have 3 levels of credentialing in you know, accredited by the ITAA which is the International Transactional Analysis Association. This is the highest level of credentialing, for professional development and for training professionals in the different fields. Now, Transactional Analysis has 4 different fields. We have Psychotherapy, which is what Sai and I have specialized in. And we have Counselling, we have Education and we have Organisational. Now, you know, the TSTA basically is the Trainer and Supervisor who is responsible for building professionals and training professionals for their competencies in their respective fields. And interestingly enough, it's very relevant in India to also mention that we are only 9 TSTAs in India and really 8 of us who are really practicing and training very actively, compared to the UK where there are more than 60 TSTAs, or even more maybe. So, this is really what you know, the TSTA is, you know, it is a level of professional development. Yeah.

Sai: Yeah, I think I want to add there that basically as TSTAs, i.e., as Teachers and Supervisors in our fields, what we do is set up a curriculum, we run groups, you know, we hold a group, or a set of people till they want to give their exams and get credentialed, so we hold the process for their entire journey and we are responsible for their training as well as supervision. Some of us also offer just supervision, so we may run supervision groups, we may be supervising people within India, outside of India, and often in our own area of specialty. So, that's really at a practical level what we do as TSTAs, we are teachers in Transactional Analysis.

Alright, yeah, so, in this journey Ragini would you like to share what is your own TSTA story, yeah? What motivated you to be on this journey? Because the TSTA journey is a long one and a rigorous one, so maybe you want to share what this has been for you.

Ragini: Yeah. So, um, yeah, it's definitely been a very long one and very interesting also. I think my journey started right from the time when I took up psychology as my specialization in college, did Psychology (hons.) and Masters in Psychology from Delhi University and you know, went on to become a counsellor. And then it is, and I was using the Carl Rogers framework and it is really when I was working in that field, realized that I started searching for a more, you know, a framework that would really hold the structure and make it more profound, the work that I was doing, yeah? And to go into the deeper level of understanding of the human being, yeah? I think that is where my journey started. And the motivation of course was to, the moment, you know, it's like the man-eater, once the man-eater gets the taste of human flesh he wants more of it. So, it was like that. Once I got the taste of the TA framework, and I was just hungry and greedy for more. And, then you know, so, CTA happened and then of course, got excited about the training aspect of it and went on to do PTSTA. But I think, on a serious note, I think what really motivates me to continue on this journey and really embark on it was also the need in our country, yeah? There is such a dearth for professionals in mental health in our country. In fact, only yesterday I was talking to a colleague and he was saying that for a population of 9 million in Bangalore, we are just 8000 professionals, which includes psychiatrists, which includes other mental health workers, and so you know, even if you see the ratio, it's terrible, it's really sad, yeah? So, I think this is one of the very important reasons why I wanted to, you know which really motivated me to come up, you know, continue with this journey. And of course, you know, I think the professionalism that this whole training brings in, along with the, you know, ethics and everything, Sai I think you can add on more to it and say, yeah?

Sai: Yeah. Sure. Sure. Yeah, I think my whole motivation also to be in this journey is so similar to yours Ragini, and it has been a 16-year journey till the end of this credential for me, so you know, it's unquestionably a journey of great commitment if one has to stay for so many years in a journey of learning. I think very much like you Ragini, I think my own journey was the same – I love the framework, I found that it deepened my work as a practitioner and therapist, I just found that I was able to work very differently, very powerfully and with a very high standard of you know, of competence with clients, and this was really the beginning of the journey, and like you very well have put it, you know the context of functioning in India, where there isn't a proper framework for mental health, there isn't a licensing system, you know, there isn't a body that holds standards, yeah? So, given this kind of loose structure, I think I really valued as a psychotherapist what I got from TA and from the way the credentialing system worked and so, I was very happy to belong to the teacher community and to say that this is something that I may like to do because of the rigour that is involved in the credentialing system, yeah? Because of the professionalism, you know, and the standard that is maintained for those who are coming out with this credential and then practicing. So, I think there is a big need for us to develop such professionals and to add to the pool of a very small existing pool, it is very important to add to this. So, I think that has really been my motivation. Also, I think TA as a framework is so empowering and expansive. And my other motivation was to also begin to take Transactional Analysis into spaces where it didn't exist. It didn't exist within the corporate world, it didn't exist too much in the space of education, it didn't exist in many, you know, smaller towns. Sometimes you know, Ragini and I have both even worked in a village with Transactional Analysis, with schools, you know, with rural kind of population, and the

access that any of these people have to, let alone to mental health, but even to a framework that is empowering. So, I think the motivation has also been to take Transactional Analysis which is so powerful, which has changed my life in so many ways, to begin to take it to these places which have no access. And, I think Ragini has also done the same and has really taken Transactional Analysis to many far flung places.

Ragini: I think in our own small ways, I think we are looking at how can we expand, how can we make TA visible, because it is such a beautiful framework, and I think you know, we ourselves are good examples of how it has impacted our lives and how things have changed for us, within our inner circle itself, and we want to now expand it to our outer circle too.

Sai: Ragini, will you share what was your biggest challenge, you know, in this credentialing journey? Maybe you want to speak both, about your challenges as well as the joys of this journey.

Ragini: Yeah. Yeah, I think the challenge definitely is of course, the commitment and the time involved in this whole preparation for the exam and the number of hours, you know. This TSTA exam actually has a very high number of hours of teaching, and supervision and training hours that need to be put in by the PTSTA, and so therefore I think that definitely is a challenge and especially when one is moving towards the exam, for instance the last 7-8 months have been really exhausting, putting aside everything else and focusing on this. So that's been a challenge. I think the other bigger challenge which is more specific to the kind of exam it is, is really about how to really think about things – the thinking of the thinking that is invited, and that is encouraged in this system of education, in this system of the course involves that. And that is so against our you know, culturally and given our education system which is so much more remote, which doesn't really encourage this kind of thinking, yeah? So, at every point, to step back and say "Ok, Why am I doing what I'm doing?", "How is it impacting my student?", "How is it impacting my supervisee?", you know, "What makes me ask these questions?", yeah?, "Why do I ask?", "How is it impacting me?", "How am I challenging my student when I'm asking these things?". So, whether it is my training and supervision work or whether I'm critiquing a theory in my subject, yeah? So, all these things were actually quite a challenge because one is not used to, in our cultural system, in our education system to, you know, study like that. But I think you know, the challenge also then becomes the joy because when you realize that it is so powerful, it is so empowering when we start doing that and one starts reflecting on the answers that one gets from within about "Why?", even the question of "Why do I want to train?", "Why is it so important?", "Why am I investing so much of my time", yeah? All these questions were you know, these were the challenges and the joy for me in this journey. Yeah.

Sai: Yeah. Very similar challenges uh, because we journeyed together, so I think you know, there's such a parallel to what you're saying and my own experience. I think the challenge really was to commit to the rigour that is involved. The rigour to prepare, you know, to study theory, the rigour to think about training and teaching and what is my philosophy towards it, what is my thinking about it, and why I do what I do. Similarly to prepare for supervision and to get the hours that are needed, run so many groups, all of it is very time-consuming, energy-consuming. So, to commit to that, I think I took my time you know, to say a full yes, and to you know, to really just move on that journey. So, I think that was difficult because it did mean that I would have to put away a little, you know of the other exciting things that I wanted to do in life in order to dedicate and make time for this. So I think that was the challenge, to say yes to that, which is what I needed to do to have a

sense of immersion in this preparation. So, I think that was really the challenge and I really loved what you said about you know, how it took your own, I would say, your own competence as a teacher to another level because we have been teaching and supervising now for many years but this process sort of really you know, sharpens your edges, and really gets you to think and articulate in a way that you may have never done before. And I think the process really got me to knowing what it means to face challenge from a colleague, really knowing how to you know, hold your process during such a challenge and to really learn how to be conversational about whether it is theory or about thinking or about the context of your work. I think that was really a challenge because like you rightly said, our educational system is a bit more traditional and doesn't prepare us to dialogue and to meet eye-to-eye in this way. And I think this was certainly you know, a very valuable outcome of the process that one learnt to hold oneself with confidence and to develop that presence I think as a teacher and a supervisor. So, I think that was the challenge. And, rightly also I think you very beautifully said that the opposite of the challenge was the joy. So, I think the joy really was to see oneself month after month transforming in how one was thinking and articulating, you know "Who I am and what I do?" I think that was really interesting to see the metamorphosis over the months and I think the other joy for me in the preparation was, the spirit of community that I experienced. We've always known that Transactional Analysis is a worldwide community. But I think this journey allowed me to experience the care, the support, the challenge and the richness of this community because I received hell of a lot from the Indian community. I was held, you know, by my sponsor, by my closest colleagues who've journeyed for so many years, with so much of care, and so much of dedication to my exam. And I received the same kind of support also from the international community – from teachers and supervisors in other parts of the world who gave generously of their time and with such a spirit of encouragement that I think, that was a big, big joy to be able to receive and have people walk this journey you know, and to really feel that one belongs in such a huge you know, community of practitioners, teachers and supervisors. So, I think that for me was another high point of this journey.

Ragini: Yeah. I fully agree with you on that Sai. I think, that was, you know, that was my experience too.

Sai: Yeah. So I'm just wondering if it'll be nice now in this conversation Ragini to share how should someone become a TSTA. So, maybe even, you know, is there a message that we want to share with those who're listening? You know, maybe some of them know TA and some of them don't, and maybe there are some who're trainees and in the Transactional Analysis journey already. So, what message would we want to give them about you know, why would someone embark on a credentialing journey like this one?

Ragini: Yeah. I think definitely, Transactional Analysis, the way the whole training and the certification process has been structured, is really one of the best professional, structured courses I have come across and I think it's relevance is definitely more in India because we don't have too many courses that are available, you know, which are structured so well, in terms of the training, in terms of the ethical guidelines. So it really brings the professionalism to a different level. So, my invitation to those who're already training in Transactional Analysis is "Hey, you're at the right place and just be at it and go for it." And this is the only way we can really expand the TA community in India and also that it's not just about becoming professionals for teaching, but I think in so many

ways we're touching lives, whether as a practitioner, as a trainer, or a supervisor. It's a ripple effect, so you know, the more we do it, the better and larger the ripple effect, yeah?

Sai: Yeah. You said it very beautifully. I think my own message would be more different, yeah? I think it, I would say embark on this journey because the journey itself is the richness. It's not just in getting the title. I think the journey itself is the richness. And I have had people saying you know, one doesn't have to do it and you can just study Transactional Analysis and practice. Sure, there is an option. I think what my own journey has told me and informs me is that I think when you commit to a process where you're being assessed and you're being credentialed, I think it really takes you to your edge and at that edge often lies sometimes, something beautiful. It's like sometimes you have to, you know, you go to a hilltop, it's like an edge, you go to a summit, it's like an edge. And most people at the summit speak, they're speechless often at what lies at that summit. Because it's really, something else that's presented to you when you're at an edge. I think that's the only analogy that I'm able to make even to this process. So, I think, don't be worried to go to your edge, especially if you're a TA learner, you belong in a community that has wonderful structures, wonderful support systems, you know, you're held with a lot of care and competence. So, it's good to embark on this journey because at that edge lies something that you wouldn't imagine and a richness that you would be really happy to have found at the end of your credentialing journey. So that's really my, my invitation and my encouragement.

So, yeah, it's just been wonderful sharing and talking and Ragini wonderful that we could re-live our experience through this conversation, and...

Ragini: Absolutely! Absolutely! Yeah. I enjoyed it thoroughly.

Sai: Alright. So, thanks a lot for joining and being in this conversation and hope this has been a good conversation even for those of you who're listening like it has been for us, accounting for our journey. Bye, bye for now!

Ragini: Yeah. Bbye!
