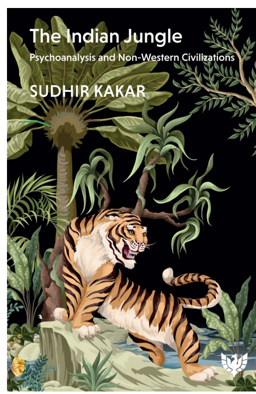

This short chapter was supplied by Sudhir Kakar on 19 December 2023 for possible inclusion as a final chapter in The Indian Jungle. *Together, we decided the chapters stood best as they were. However, it feels very fitting to share this unpublished chapter from Sudhir and we hope you enjoy reading these "final words."*

Final words

Sudhir Kakar

The cultural imagination—the mental representations of culture—has been a relatively unexplored territory in psychoanalytic discourse. The cultural imagination is disseminated through myths and legends, proverbs and metaphors, iconic artworks, the stories its members tell each other. It is enacted in rituals, conveyed through tales told to children, and given a modern veneer in movies; cultural imagination is equally glimpsed in admonitions of parents, in the future vistas they hold out to their children, Indeed even in the way its children are touched and fed and carried about.

Yet for more than a century, the cultural imagination of psychoanalysis has been assumed and largely continues to be assumed as being Western. Although the cultures of psychoanalysis in South America, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, and so on have distinct and important differences, they all share a strong family resemblance with their common origins in the Hellenic and Judeo-Christian cultures in which psychoanalysis too has its roots These origins distinguish them clearly from the cultural imaginations of Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Iranian, and other non-Western civilizations. Freud admits to this limitation when he writes to Romain Rolland, "I shall now try with your guidance to penetrate into the Indian jungle from which until now

an uncertain blending of Hellenic love of proportion, Jewish sobriety, and Philistine timidity have kept me away … It is not easy to overcome the limitations of one's nature."

Freud's world (as also Jung's) was still that of a colonial Europe, which regarded itself as the center of the world, culturally, intellectually, and politically. It was a world untouched by the globalization and decolonization of our times and it is unfair to expect that Freud should be an exception who transcends the rule of rootedness of thought in culture and history. With the rise of relativism in the human sciences and politically with the advent of decolonization in the second half of the twentieth century, human sciences took a sceptic turn, to which psychoanalysis has been long immune. Intellectually, the relativistic position owes much of its impetus to Foucault's argument on the rootedness of all thought in history and culture—and in the framework of power relations. Adherents of this perspective are not a priori willing to accept why psychoanalysis, a product of early twentieth-century European bourgeois family and social structure, should be an exception to the general rule on the incapacity of thought to transcend its roots. In the intellectual climate of our times, then, the cultural and historical transcendence of psychoanalytic theories can no longer be taken for granted.

The rise of the multicultural movement in many Western societies, has resulted in more and more calls from analysts of varying persuasions to re-examine the issue of culture in psychoanalysis. Yet, it is the cultures of *race and class* rather than that of a society or a civilization that continue to draw most psychoanalytic attention. This focus on race and class rather than society and civilization, of course, reflect the dominant social concerns of Western societies. Perhaps, it also has to do with most Western analytic theorists' ignorance of the cultural imaginations of non-Western civilizations.

For the analyst, cultural difference is perhaps most easily noticed in ego development. If the ego is a skin ego, dependent upon the physical body to find its mental representation, then the early life of skin—shaped after all by culture—impacts how ego gets constructed in different cultural contexts. In a recent essay on the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Freud's *The Ego and the Id* (Kakar & Narayanan, 2023), we wondered whether ego formation is different in India where

urban area breastfeeding continues for over a year for children of both genders, at a rate of 79%, compared to the United States where extended breastfeeding rates are around 6.2 % (UNICEF global database[1]).

From breastfeeding, the Indian child proceeds not to spoon-feeding but to hand-feeding, less frequently to strollers than being carried on the mother's side or back in skin-contact, and extended co-sleeping with parents or elder relatives. In this atmosphere of early life, conveyed by visible skin contact over a long period, it would be reasonable to expect that the accounts of mental life in infancy would not exactly hew to the reigning psychoanalytic theories derived from the Western experience during most of the twentieth century when most babies were left unprotected to experience what Winnicott called "environmental impingements" to which the infant must actively react.

Of course, no individual is a caricature of her culture. A person is greatly modifiable but not infinitely so, with a mental life that is the end product of a complex interaction between the person's culture, family milieu, and his or her own needs and desire-based fantasies, each enriching, constraining, and shaping the others as they jointly evolve through the life cycle. None of these constituting inner worlds (mental representations of the body, family, and culture) are "primary" or "deeper"; all of them flow into the same river we call the psyche.

Psychoanalysis has resisted acknowledging the crucial role of cultural imagination in the constitution of the psyche due to the way it imagines itself. Psychoanalysis' self-understanding is as a unique "*depth*" psychology, in contrast to the more "superficial" psychologies that are oriented toward the cultural and social surround of the person. The self-reflexive uniqueness of psychoanalysis is in its capacity to access the instinctual forces operating in the depth of the human psyche, in the unconscious; these are forces of a person's biological nature that antecede culture. But what if this bedrock of psychoanalytic thought is susceptible to doubt? What kind of questions does the cultural imaginations of non-Western civilizations, especially Indian—and particularly Hindu—raise for psychoanalytic theories and models? In the rest of this short chapter, I will examine several areas in which the Indian imagination differs sharply from its Western counterpart: the culture's

[1] https://data.unicef.org/resources/dataset/infant-young-child-feeding/

view of nature, its attitude toward the separation drama, bisexuality, the phallus, and the mother.

Nature and human nature: the cultural view

How culturally specific and socially constructed our ideas of human nature are, are reflected in cultural differences in how nature itself—the non-human environment—is experienced by humans of the culture.

In the Indian imagination, nature is not cruel and hostile but is exemplified by the forest. The forest has dangers from wild beasts but essentially it is a place of calm and peace, longed for by Indian poets through the centuries. In the Hindu view of the life cycle, Vanaprastha, "retreat to the forest", is the stage of life where the older person, to complete the life cycle, is enjoined to detach themselves from the life of the "householder" and retreat to a forest hermitage to contemplate wider social and existential concerns.

The Indian vision of nature and of an unconscious id is thus of an essentially benign entity that nourishes human concerns and is indispensable in realizing the purpose of human life. It widens the classical psychoanalytic view of the dynamic unconscious as a repository of repressions and deprivations by also conceiving it as a fount of Eros.

When Freud (1940e) writes that the power of the id expresses the true purpose of the individual organism's life and this consists in the satisfaction of its innate needs, then the flow of Eros could be highlighted as an innate need of the unconscious, the analytic process removing the blockages and inhibitions, accumulated over the life cycle and especially during early childhood, to the flow of Eros. With the focus of much of contemporary psychoanalysis on attenuating psychic pain—fear, guilt, anxiety, depression, the sustained engagement with loss and mourning—we tend to forget that the feeling of aliveness in the full flow of Eros is the destination (if not always reached) of the analytic journey after the many sites of psychic pain have been negotiated.

Drawing from the Indian cultural imagination of nature expands the psychoanalytic model of the person. Psychoanalysis conceives of the person essentially as part of their bodily, psychic, and social interpersonal orders. Mental representations of bodily drives and processes and of experiences with one's social groups, beginning with the family,

and the interactions between the two as the person develops through the life cycle, constitute the core constituents of the psyche. From the Indian perspective, though, a person is also a part of the cosmic order. Cosmos, as I visualize it, has two aspects: one subtle, the other earthy. The subtle aspect of cosmos is the "spiritual" order, which has been variously conceptualized by different cultures at various times of history as animated by gods, ancestral spirits, demonic beings, or, in more sophisticated formulations, as God, Universal Spirit, or simply the Sacred. Excepting the Jungians, the spiritual aspect of the cosmos is alien to the sensibility of most Freudian analysts, even evoking a reflective antipathy in some, and I will confine myself to the material, earthy aspect of cosmos—our non-human environment.

The earthy aspect of cosmos is the environment—nature of terrain, quality of air, sunlight, birds, animals, trees and flowers, seasons and so on—in which we are born and live our lives. The neglect of cosmos, in its spiritual and especially its nonhuman dimension in the development of the psyche comes from a modern Western orientation that limits a person to being a soma, psyche, and polis, existing in the somatic, psychic, and social orders, but excludes the vital dimension of cosmic order. As an aside, I wonder whether the cosmos would have played a greater role in psychoanalytic theorizing if the setting of psychoanalytic therapy had not been a closed room, suitable for the central European climate, but took place out in the open, under a banyan tree that figures as the preferred setting of the guru–seeker interaction in the Indian traditions.

Bisexuality and the phallus

Psychic bisexuality, rather than binary gender, was alive in the Indian context (vide Freud–Bose correspondence of 1929) far before it was incorporated into Western psychoanalysis.

Beyond Bose's twentieth-century, male psychoanalytic patients, an easy access of the wish to be female is ubiquitous in Indian cultural imagination. Bisexuality flows freely in individual narratives and in popular myths, both of which are more closely interwoven in Indian culture than is the case in the modern West. Myths in India are not part of a bygone era. They are not "retained fragments from the infantile psychic life of the race" as Karl Abraham called them or "vestiges of

the infantile fantasies of whole nations, secular dreams of youthful humanity" in Freud's words. Vibrantly alive, their symbolic power intact, Indian myths constitute a cultural idiom which aids the individual in the construction and integration of his inner world.

We find evidence of a shared cultural friendliness toward psychic bisexuality when Mahatma Gandhi (1943) publicly proclaimed that he had mentally become a woman and quite unaware of Karen Horney and other deviants from the orthodox analytic position of the time, he also spoke of man's envy of the woman's procreative capacities, saying, "There is as much reason for a man to wish that he was born a woman as for woman to do otherwise" (Harijan, 24–2–40, 13.) Gandhi's confidence in making these statements reflects a shared cultural imagination—a sympathetic and receptive audience brought up on Hindu-Indian myths of bisexuality.

One of these myths of bisexuality is of Mahadeva: the "Great God", Shiva, iconically represented as *ardhanarishwara*, half man and half woman, often encountered in street and popular dance performances. Even more ubiquitous is another iconic representation of Shiva: the lingam. Sculpted in stone and worshipped in countless homes, roadsides, temples, the phallus in the lingam is always represented as arising out of the yoni, the symbol of female creative energy. The lingam symbolizes the unity of the male and female and the cosmic energy generated by this union. In the ritual worship of the lingam in temples and homes, cups of cold milk are poured on the lingam to cool the heat of the energy rising from the union of psychic opposites.

Combining both male and female sexual organs and energies, the lingam might be a better model for the aniconic psychoanalytic phallus, described, after Lacan, as the site of (illusory) autonomy, wholeness, and total fulfilment (Benton, 1995; Birksted-Breen, 1996). Unlike the phallus, the lingam is not an abstraction: it has been in iconic existence for centuries and has a wealth of myths around it. It better symbolizes the fantasized bisexual wholeness, vitality, total fulfilment, and victory over death. But I suspect that however apposite to illustrate or name psychic phenomena, it would take some time before the myths of other civilizations find place in a psychoanalysis fed since its infancy on the diet of Greek myths.

The separation drama and culture

Turning to separation–individuation, in the Indian-Hindu cultural imagination, separation from the family is not looked upon in the same way as in north European and north-American cultures. A thoughtful Indian may agree with Freud's opening sentence in "Family romances" (1909c): "The separation of the individual as he grows up, from the authority of the parents, is one of the most necessary achievements of his development, yet at the same time one of the most painful," as long as the words "is one of the most necessary achievements" were omitted.

Likewise, consider here the Punjabi proverb about death: "It is like being shifted from one breast of the mother to the other. The child feels lost for that instant, but not for long." What stands out in this proverb is that it is the continuation of breastfeeding rather than the aspirations of weaning and the independence implicit in weaning that dominates the Indian imagination.

In clinical psychoanalytic work with male Hindu-Indian patients, one often comes across the existence of what I have called "maternal enthrallment": the wish to get away from the mother together with the dread of separation, the wish to destroy the engulfing mother who also ensures the child's survival, and, finally, incestuous desire coexisting with the terror inspired by an overwhelming female sexuality. Maternal enthrallment is the largely unconscious underside of the overt and ubiquitous idealization of the mother by the Hindu son, which will influence his later relationships and unconscious attitudes toward women.

Maternal enthrallment is not peculiarly Indian but to a lesser or greater degree a universal part of the male psyche. What makes it worthy of exploration in the Indian context is it being the dominant narrative of male psychological development in contrast, say, to the father–son conflicts around generational ascendancy that was long emphasized in Western psychoanalytic writings.

The psychic import of maternal enthrallment in the formation of subjectivity has compelling cultural components, such as an Indian infant's prolonged contact with the mother's breast and body described earlier. Of course, it is not my intention to deny or underestimate the

importance of the powerful mother in Western psychoanalysis. All I seek to suggest is that certain forms of the maternal–feminine are more central in Indian myths and psyche than in their Western counterparts.

The wish to be a woman is one particular solution to the discord that threatens the breaking up of the son's fantasized connection to the mother, a solution whose access to awareness is facilitated by the culture's views on sexual differentiation and the permeability of gender boundaries. In most myths and legends, though, the rivalry between father and son centers on the father's attempt to defy generational barriers rather than the son's wishes for sexual union with the mother. These myths have the son's self-castration that sacrifices to the father the son's right to sexual activity and generational ascendancy. The son does so in order to deflect the father's envy and his primal fear of annihilation at the father's hands while keeping the bond of love between father and son intact.

Like the myth on Ganesha's beheading, these myths form part of a plethora of Indian narratives that invert the psychoanalytically postulated causality between the fantasies of parricide and filicide. They are charged with the fear of filicide rather than the oedipal guilt of parricide. They stress the father's envy and thus the son's persecution anxiety as primary motivation in Hindu-Indian culture.

With exceptions (e.g., Levy, 2011; Ross, 1982), psychoanalysis has seriously underestimated the father's envy and rivalry with the son (as of the mother with the daughter). The Indian legends show how formidable an oedipal rival the son remains to the father, a rival who, in the Indian cultural imagination, has never been fully conquered or is even experienced as the victor in the oedipal struggle. If Indian cultural imagination is at pains to emphasise the "good father," the Eros between father and son, as in the following vignettes, then it is partly also to deflect from the father's destructive envy of the son.

In the son, if there is anger against the father then it is due to his distance and failure in not fulfilling the little boy's need for an oedipal alliance, that is for the father's firm support, solidarity, and emotional availability at a stage of life where the dangers of maternal enthrallment were at their peak.

In contrast to the son, the maternal enthrallment of the daughter is given short shrift in Indian cultural imagination. Myths, legends, and

other popular narratives generally ignore the mother–daughter dyad. As observed earlier:

> in a patriarchal culture myths are inevitably man-made and man-oriented. Addressing as they do the unconscious wishes and fears of men, it is the parent–son rather than the parent–daughter relationships which become charged with symbolic significance. (Kakar, 1978, p. 57)

With one exception: the mother–daughter rivalry and the daughter's fears of retribution. Given the massive idealisation of mothers in the culture, the envious mother, A. K. Ramanujan (1999) reminds us, is always costumed as a mother-in-law. Narratives of barren Queen mothers who fight with their young daughters-in-law are plentiful in folk tales all over India, and these altercations are, Ramanujan asserts "blatantly for sexual success with the king" (p. 391). In a rare example of a clear mother–daughter rivalry, one Kannada folk tale speaks of a mother so rivalrous of her daughter's beauty that she puts a clay-mask over the young girl's face (ibid., p. 361). In the clinic, the daughter's fantasy of maternal envy and retribution is always partially in disguise: it shows up as women's sexual self-suppression (Narayanan, 2013, 2018, 2023), the counterpart of a son's renouncing of sexual agency as in the Bhishma and Yayati myths. It also comes into view in the clinic, the psychoanalyst Honey Oberoi (2019) tells us, in extended, even excessive, periods of mourning for mothers' erotic losses that must be lived out before a girl's erotic life can begin. Oberoi also argues that a preoccupation with the mother, what I call maternal enthrallment, is as much the lot of girls as of boys. If we accept Oberoi's clinical testimony, then the psychoanalytic focus on the bad-mother, and maternal ambivalence, while necessary, represses mother-love—including the homosexual dimension of mother-love.

And the father? Within the atmosphere of general avoidance of close contact with men as a consequence of the segregation of the sexes that takes place in both urban and rural areas after the girl crosses the ages of eight or nine, there is one poignant statistic: the little time a daughter spends with her father and especially the culturally enjoined cessation of any physical contact between the father and the daughter as she enters puberty. I imagine that this prohibition of physical contact

between father and daughter also has a source in the cultural imagination where myths that narrate the father's desire for his daughter are easily found in ancient Indian texts. Prajapati—elsewhere identified as Brahma, the Creator—is described in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa as casting his eyes upon his own daughter and saying "May I pair with her?" (Ramanujan, 1999, p. 388). When he consummates his desire, Prajapati is punished by the other gods: his body is pierced through. Numerous versions of this myth reflected in ancient myths as well as folktales narrate the untrustworthy nature of the father's desire and the need for forces outside the family to step in to protect the daughter from the father's lust. The mother is never the protective force—that role is reserved for other men—but it is worth wondering that as much as the son requires an oedipal alliance to protect him from overwhelming femaleness, the daughter too requires an oedipal alliance with the mother to protect from the overwhelming nature of her father's desire.

The absent father at this stage of a growing girl's life has been called "one of the great tragedies of Indian family life" (Anandalakshmi, 1994).

The guru and its impact on psychoanalysis in India

Lastly, I would like to turn a psychic quality associated with the guru in Indian culture—the surrender of the self that the guru demands of the disciple in the guru–disciple relationship—and examine what bearing it has on the psychoanalytic relationship in India.

Religious traditions of the world, give an importance to the surrender of the self. William James (1902) called it regeneration by relaxing and letting go, a process characterized by giving one's private convulsive self a rest and finding the availability of a greater self with a resultant surge in optimism (p. 107). Calling self-surrender "the vital turning point of religious life," James writes that "One may say the whole development of Christianity in inwardness has consisted in little more than greater and greater emphasis attached to this crisis of self-surrender" (ibid., p. 195).

In Sufism, too, surrender to the master is a necessary prerequisite for the state of *fana fil-shaykh* or annihilation of oneself in the master. Of the *iradah*, the relationship between the Sufi master and his disciple, the Sufi poet says:

> O heart, if thou wanted the Beloved to be happy with thee, then thou must do and say what he commands. If he says, "Weep blood!" do not ask "Why?"; if He says, "Die!" do not say "How is that fitting?" (Nurbakhsh, 1978, p. 208)

Psychoanalysts generally subscribe to the values of secular humanism and Western individualism in emphasizing personal agency and autonomy, a tradition that equates surrender with submission, defeat (Ghent, 1990). However, there has also been a "minor" line of psychoanalytic thought (Balint, 1979; Khan, 1963; Kohut, 1977; Winnicott, 1965) extending back to Sándor Ferenczi (1933) in which dependency is not viewed negatively but considered an important constituent of the psyche. This "minor" line of thought in psychoanalysis is a major theme in some non-Western civilizations. In contrast to the West, *amae*, the desire to depend on the care of authority figures and the expectation of receiving it, is encouraged in Japanese child-rearing practices (Doi, 1973). (This is also true of childrearing in India (Kakar, 1978).)

Psychoanalytic observations on surrender (e.g., Ghent, 1990; Maroda, 1999; Safran, 2016) have raised questions whether a disregard of the uncontrollable aspects of life and a devaluation of the power of the unconscious in determining the events of one's life promote "an inflated sense of personal agency" and whether this "inflation goes hand in hand with a type of grandiosity that fails to recognize the fundamental otherness or alterity of life" (Safran, 2016, p. 58). The mystical guru's view of surrender brings the "otherness" of life to the forefront: "When you realize that you are not in control of your life, but life is governed by some supreme law, then surrender happens" (Shankar, n.d.).[2] Surrender is also not a process that is voluntary (Ghent, 1990) but "happens spontaneously with the knowledge that you are not in control of anything—not even your thoughts or feelings." (Shankar, n.d.).

Here, a well-regarded contemporary mystic, Ravishankar, will agree with Bollas and Ghent that surrender is a transformative process in which the self is radically changed, that "Surrender is not an act, it is a state of your being." Another mystic (Muktananda, 1983) describes the experience of surrender in relation to the guru thus:

[2] See also Ravishankar's YouTube videos (2016) *Meaning of Surrender* and *Significance of Surrender* and Sadhguru's (2012), *What is Surrender?*.

> When you surrender to the guru, you become like a valley, a vacuum, an abyss, a bottomless pit. You acquire depth, not height. This surrender can be felt in many ways. The guru begins to manifest in you; his energy begins to flow into you. The guru's energy is continuously flowing, but in order to receive it, you have to become a womb, a receptacle. (p. 35)

In his professional work, if not in his life, an Indian analyst who shares a cultural imagination with the mystic guru would be constantly seeking a balance in the dialectic between the psychoanalytical emphasis on strengthening the sense of personal agency and the process of surrender. Aware of what I have called the "guru fantasy" of his clients that seeks to experience him or her as a guru rather than a doctor and pushes toward surrender, the analyst needs to be aware that the process of surrender can also immeasurably enhance the receptivity of the patient in the analytic situation, of what is being received from the analyst.

To close, I will only say that as the globalization of ideas picks up pace, we cannot afford to lose the lens through which cultural imaginations of major civilizations view the fundamental questions of human existence, the human mind, and the quest for psychic truth. These cultural imaginations are an invaluable resource for the reinvigoration of a discipline that we all cherish and which continues to nourish us.

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