

Freud Along the Ganges: Psychoanalytic Reflections on the People and Culture of India. Edited by Salman Akhtar. New York: Other Press, 2005; 421 pp. ISBN-13: 978-1-59051-090-2. \$27.00.

Salman Akhtar's passion for both India and psychoanalysis comes through in this collection of edited essays. Born in 1946 in Uttar Pradesh, Akhtar is an eloquent writer and currently Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. In addition, he is a psychiatrist at the Jefferson University Hospital as well as a Training and Supervising Analyst at the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia. This collection of varied but carefully selected studies aims at 'bringing the rich cultural traditions of India into a dialectical exchange with the multi-layered conceptualisations of psychoanalysis (p. xix).

It was quite fascinating to find the two words – Freud and Ganges – in the same sentence. This loving tribute is an expression of a 'profound attachment to India' (p. xix). Girindrashekar Bose, who introduced psychoanalysis in India, developed his ideas almost independently of Freud, and in 1921 published his thesis *The Concept of Repression*. Psychoanalysis is thus not completely a western concept. The book contains a total of fourteen essays, the first and the last being a prologue and an epilogue respectively. The remaining twelve essays are divided into three categories, namely Mind, Body and Spirit. Considering the significance of mind-body connection and its place in spirituality in India, this categorisation seems to be Akhtar's first step towards initiating a dialogue between India and psychoanalysis. The prologue, a collaborative effort by Akhtar and Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, prepares the reader for what follows by tracing the origin of psychoanalysis in India, describing the evolution of Bose and Freud's relationship, and evaluating the rise and fall of psychoanalysis in India with a focus on the reasons for the decline. The epilogue, by Prajna Paramita Prasher, stands strong as an independent essay but does very little to tie together what was discussed in the previous essays. Having said that, the part on Ganga's significance as a mother and a daughter does tie in well with how 'the Indian woman is revered as an idea and oppressed in reality' (p. 206). The Ganges is worshipped as a goddess, a mother, and a daughter, and yet one cannot help but notice the oppression and disrespect she is subjected to in the form of severe pollution. Moreover, people's transference requiring her to be a 'vessel for their sins' (p. 419), thereby helping them purify themselves is similar to how Bollywood helps them get rid of their deep-rooted desires, unacceptable in real life, by projecting them onto the big screen. Of the remaining twelve essays, many from the Mind and Body sections discussed how early experiences and 'culture (social unconscious) affect the deepest layers of the psyche' (p. 80)

and in turn influence a larger part of one's life. The essay on 'Rabindranath Tagore and Freudian Thought' by Santanu Biswas failed to connect with the culture and the common Indian (wo)man on the whole. Anyone familiar with opposing views on Gandhi's role in India's independence will find the glimpse into his development was quite interesting. Gandhi's early experiences seemed like an elaborate example of how mothering and the creation of a familial self affects people in India in their later stages of life. Alan Roland's chapter on Multiple Mothering and the Familial Self describes how central the Indian family's reputation is to self-esteem, and how deeply ingrained the association between the expression of anger and the loss of a nurturing relationship or even the fear of being ostracised. Moreover, Roland also notices the development of a highly private self in India, despite it being such a known close-knit culture. This highly private self is a reflection of a strong superego, in which sacrifice functions to express pure ideal love, respect, and admiration (as mentioned in Chapter 6 on 'Bollywood and the Unconscious'), and silence which is a sign of honour and a way to avoid distress – discussed by Jaswant Guzder and Meenakshi Krishna in Chapter 8 'Sita-Shakti @ Cultural Collision' – Akhtar and Choksi explain very well how Bollywood is one way in which this highly private self gets an outlet (Chapter 6). Everything that the subject rejects in life – sexuality, rage, rebellion to name a few – is enjoyed on the silver screen. Particularly interesting was the discussion of the different stages of transition in Indian culture and its development over the years, the common thread being the conflict between desire, raw emotions, and sexuality on one hand, and cultural conscience, societal structures, patriarchy and a strong superego on the other. In addition, Akhtar's essay on 'Hindu-Muslim Relations in India: Past, Present, and Future' (Chapter 5) threw some light on the unknown origins of Hindu-Muslim conflict, which is quite deeply rooted in the Indian unconscious. This appears to be a brave yet cautious attempt which concluded with a wise resolution – taking responsibility and letting others take their own responsibility – applicable not only to the Hindu-Muslim conflict, but also to conflicts between the societal structures that have existed for ages and the radical conscience of today's youth. In my opinion, Akhtar is successful in achieving his specific aim of reminding Indian readers of the remarkably early beginning of psychoanalysis in their nation. Moreover, this passionate collection of essays, comprising of a variety of themes ranging from family life, female subjectivity, and sexuality, to Bollywood extravaganza, homosexuality, and meditation, definitely has the potential to open the reader to new thoughts, ideas, and concepts in understanding psychoanalysis in the Indian context. Akhtar is right in stating that it is the broadening of psychoanalytic concepts that would be highly welcome in a culture like India. Perhaps the time is right for a revised edition with a further development of concepts such as the influence of multiple mothering and the familial

self on both genders, an analysis of goddess Kali to understand the source of strength and aggression in Indian women, a study of Bollywood movies post 2005, and a focus on the self and on responsibility as a main ingredient in the spiritual journey. This could help in the struggle that continues even today in stopping psychoanalysis from being further marginalised. However, there is hope that a small percentage of students and professionals in the field of mental health will continue to gain interest not only in the theory but also in the application of psychoanalytic principles in a wide range of therapeutic spaces.

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