by Christine Hartnack

Freud experienced life in two cultures: the one that he came from as a Moravian Jew, and the one into which he assimilated as an urban Viennese intellectual. Through his formulation of transculturally valid laws and universal-applicable truths, Freud could, at least ideologically, overcome the feeling of belonging to a minority.

The Bhadralok also lived under conditions of cultural hybridity. They functioned in a British colonial world during the workday, and were Bengali the rest of the time. Unlike Freud, they belonged to a majority. Bose never gave up wearing traditional Bengali clothes or following Hindu Bengali customs and proudly wrote in Bengali asserting that his British colleagues should learn Bengali if they were interested in these texts. In addition, he openly criticized Freud for running the International Psychoanalytical Movement ‘like a church’, and emphasized that his Bengali patients differed from Europeans.

Bose replaced Freud’s emblematic couch with a deck chair. I assume that he did this because an upholstered chaise-longue would not have stood the humidity in Bengal.

There is a certain irony in this choice though. By choosing a colonial piece of furniture, Bose ‘went West’. By covering his couch with an oriental rug, Freud, on the other hand, ‘went East’.

Shaped by the intellectual currents of the late nineteenth century, Freud – like Karl Marx and Charles Darwin – adhered to chronological-, causal-, and progress-oriented concepts. Freud emphasized the importance of individual history, and compared his psychoanalytic work with that of an archaeologist who uncovers hidden layers.

Bose, on the other hand, identified himself with an engineer who fixes circuits. His ‘theory of opposite wishes’ and the application of a ‘ver-saw-mechanism’ reveal that his theoretical and practical work was based on the assumption of an essential bipolarity. However, in opposition to the subject-object dichotomies that play an important role in European cultures, his philosophical understanding was that of principal unity.

Both men realized that their philosophical views and psychoanalytic methods differed considerably, as is evident in their correspondence, which spans the period from 1921 to 1937. In a letter dated 1 January 1933, Freud, for example, expressed his view on one of Bose’s revisions: ‘the theory of opposite wishes strikes me as something less dynamic than morphological...’ (Sinha 1966:43).

“The man Moses’ facing Hindu gods and goddesses”

Freud took an androcentric monotheism for granted. He was more than puzzled by the Hindu pantheon, and expressed openly how bored he was by Indian visitors, such as the author Rabindranath Tagore, a philosopher, Sanskrit doctor of philosophy, and guru of the Indian Psychoanalytical Society, whom he called it in his letter of thanks to Bose, developed cracks, and stood and the ivory of his ‘trophy of conquest’, as he had written in a letter to Romain Rolland, written in 1930, Freud commented on this writer’s enchantment with Indian culture: ‘I shall now try with your guidance to penetrate into the Indian jungle from which until now an uncertain blending of Helenic love of proportion, Jewish sobriety, and philistine timidity have kept me away’ (Hartnack 2001:138).

In his correspondence, Freud explicitly pointed to the importance of the maternal deities in his culture. Other Indian psychoanalysts even criticized classical Freudian psychoanalysis for being a product of a ‘Father religion or Son religion’. This is especially ironic, since Freud had deconstructed the rule of religion, and was – unlike his Indian colleagues – rather secular.

Freud derived his insights primarily from his therapies with highly educated upper-middle-class Viennese women patients who lived in patriarchically structured family networks. These women often envied their brothers and other men for being able to make use of their education and for enjoying social freedoms. Freud’s notion of penis envy thus also reflects the social situation of his women patients in early twentieth century Vienna.

Bose, on the other hand, treated mostly upper-middle-class westernized Bengali Hindu men. Among them he had discovered ‘a wish to be female’. He wrote to Freud in 1929: ‘The desire to be a female is more easily unearthed in Indian male patients than in European’ (Sinha 1966:43).

In analogy, Freud’s women patients in Vienna, these Bengali men were also hindered in their development – in their case by the realities of colonialism. It is likely that they envied Bengali women who were only indirectly affected by British domination. Moreover, feminine identities were represented by powerful goddesses and therefore associated with desirable traits.

In Bengali family settings, in the early part of the twentieth century, the biological father was only one of several patriarchal figures, and the biological mother just one of several maternal authorities, resulting in multiple sources of affection and emotional bonds as well as ‘hydrolak’ (Kakar 1982:420) confrontations with authorities. The direction of aggression, too, differed in European and Indian texts and folkloric traditions. As A.K. Ramanujan (1983, p.252) pointed out, in Indian literature the aggressor is often the father and not the son, as in the classical Oedipus tale, because the father is jealous of his wife’s devotion to her son.

It is therefore not surprising that Bose rejected Freud’s view of the transcultural universality of the Oedipus complex. In 1929, he sent him thirteen of his psychoanalytical articles, noting: ‘I would draw your particular attention to my paper on the Oedipus wish where I have ventured to differ from you in some respects.’ Bose claimed, for example, that its resolution is not achieved by fighting and overcoming the father’s authority, and not by a submission to it: ‘I do not agree with Freud when he says that the Oedipus wishes ultimately to succumb to the authority of the super-ego. Quite the reverse is the case according to the Hindu.Chief Goddess.

The Oedipus [conflict] is resolved not by the threat of castigation, but by the ability to castrate.’ (Hartnack 2001:148)

The politics of psychoanalysis: imperial versus colonial conditions

Until 1947, India was a British colony. This implied that the Indian Psychoanalytical Society had not only Indian, but also British members. For example, Lieutenant Owen Berkeley-Hill, a psychiatrist in the British army, used psychoanalysis to help British patients in the European Men- tal Hospital in Ranchi to adjust – or re-adjust – to life in a colonial setting. He deconstructed the role of religion, and was – unlike his colleagues – rather secular.

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