

**THE COMING OF PSYCHOANALYSIS IN  
COLONIAL INDIA:  
THE BENGALI WRITINGS OF  
DR. GIRINDRASEKHAR BOSE<sup>1</sup>**

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I have taken two risks in writing this paper. The first involves the use of the word 'colonial' in the title of my essay, which describes a fragment in the history of psychoanalysis from early twentieth century Calcutta. My second risk is to offer an interpretation which is not psychoanalytical in its approach, but engaged with the coming of psychoanalysis in India. Psychoanalysis did not just arrive; a young upper middle class Bengali doctor called Girindrasekhar Bose ushered it in. Before I start narrating my story about this great psychiatrist, who integrated psychoanalysis both in theory building and in the practice of mental health in India, I would like to say a few more words about my non-psychoanalytical prose.

Since the 1980s, cultural anthropologists and psychoanalysts have freely exchanged their interpretative tools. It was felt that the prestige of psychoanalysis as a clinical technique had declined, and it could now serve more as an interpretative method rather than a therapy. The key issue in this discourse was not to reduce psychoanalysis to merely cognitive psychology.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I treat psychoanalysis as an important discourse that played into the culture of the early twentieth century psychological science in colonial India.

The way psychoanalysis won recognition in this century among the 'scientific' community in Europe is very different from what happened in India. By the early twentieth century, colonialism had evoked a range of nationalist responses in India which influenced the formation of disciplines in the institutions of higher studies. These responses were prompted not simply by the will to fight racial discrimination in government institutions of modern scientific research. Works like Brojendra Nath Seal's *The Positive Sciences of Ancient Hindus* and Prafulla Chandra Ray's *A History of Hindu Chemistry*, to name a few works of the early part of twentieth century, were also prompted by a kind of nationalist desire.<sup>3</sup> Brojendranath Seal, who was George V Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy, made a syllabus for the new course in Experimental Psychology in 1905, after studying various course designs offered in the universities of Europe and America. But the first course on psychology in Calcutta University could only make a beginning in 1915, after the establishment of an experimental psychology laboratory.<sup>4</sup>

Medical science, by this time, had already taken a comfortable seat in Calcutta, with the first medical college functioning from 1835. Girindrasekhar Bose obtained his M.Sc. degree from this college in 1910, and topped the first batch of students in experimental psychology. In 1917, Bose scored the highest marks among all the M.Sc. students from Calcutta University.

When Girindrasekhar obtained the necessary disciplinary recognitions, he became the first trained psychiatrist to teach in a post graduate curriculum. It was his interest from his medical college days that took him to the reading of psychoanalysis, and the publication of popular science articles in English periodicals. Treatment for the mentally ill in Calcutta had already started in 1787 in what is now called the Institute of Psychiatry, but treatment was available only for Europeans. In 1802, the Court of Directors of the East India Company decided to build asylums for the 'native insane criminals' and wandering lunatics.<sup>5</sup> During 1917-18, when Bose entered the professional world of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, the first asylum had also undergone changes. Indian patients now outnumbered their European counterparts in seeking services.

The discipline of psychology in India, had from the very beginning, the intense urge to become 'scientific' and Dr. N. N. Sengupta, who later took charge of the department, was sent to Harvard for training. Psychoanalysis came a little later, when Bose, on becoming a lecturer of the department, introduced it as a course for all students of psychology. He also taught abnormal psychology. In the 1920s, only two other universities - Dhaka (1921) and Mysore (1924) - had set up separate departments of psychology. Most of the work done was of an experimental variety, trying out various tests which were in current use in the West, to assess intelligence and special abilities.<sup>6</sup>

Outside the university periphery, another institution came up in 1922 - the Indian Psychoanalytical Society - with Girindrasekhar as the founder president. During this time Bose had already established communication with Freud by sending him a copy of his D.Sc. thesis, 'The Concept of Repression'.<sup>7</sup> This society was given a member status by the International Psychoanalytical Association in the same year it was founded. Two out of the fifteen founding members were British, and one of them was Owen A. R. Berkeley-Hill who had already earned his name, making the Ranchi Mental Hospital one of the best in the region. The role of such societies was crucial for the development of psychoanalysis in India. Bose read many important papers in this society and started the first mental hospital (Lumbini Park) under this society in 1940. Gandhi too attended a meeting of this society in 1925, when Berkeley-Hill presented a psychoanalytical study on Hindu-Muslim tensions.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that Bose presented his papers in English in this society - whereas in Utkendra Samiti, which was formed earlier (an ensemble of Calcutta intellectuals), he deliberated mostly in Bengali. Many of

his Bengali books were supported for publication by Brojendranath Bandhopadhyaya, a member of Utkendra Samiti.

There exists a number of biographical writings on Bose, though none of them are sure about his year of birth (1886/87?). Tarun Chandra Sinha, one of the prominent early students of Bose, probably wrote the first biographical article after this death.<sup>9</sup> Another one, by Debajyoti Das, written in Bengali and published by Bangiya Sahitya Parisad in 1971, is comprehensive and provides a lot of information on Bose, including lists of his Bengali and English writings. Das lamented that, despite great feats in the colonial period, the post-colonial scholars in psychology have hardly attempted to discuss the writings of Girindrasekhar or expressed concern about preserving his works.<sup>10</sup> Chandak Sengupta, while writing a regional history of psychiatry of colonial Calcutta, concluded with a biographical sketch of Girindrasekhar.<sup>11</sup> The most recent and fascinating biographical account is that of Ashis Nandy, who sets up a critical psychoanalytical inquiry into Bose's life in continuation with his studies in the psychology of colonialism.<sup>12</sup>

In those early years of psychoanalysis in India, the subject was being channelised in certain directions by the discovery of the psyche of a 'savage' world. It is significant that, when the majority of psychologists confined themselves to preparing psychometric scales, Girindrasekhar emerged as the prime critic of the colonial stereotypes formulated by Berkeley-Hill, Daly, and later on C. G. Jung. Bose's psychoanalytical interpretations of the Indian mind were significantly different from those of Daly and Berkeley-Hill. Both these Europeans were trained by Ernest Jones and their colonial positions were evident in their prose. Christiane Hartnack, in her thesis titled, 'Psychoanalysis and Colonialism in British India', writes about how both Berkeley-Hill and Daly:

... failed to note any achievement or positive aspect of Indian culture...both men identified themselves fully with British colonialism. For them Indians were a source of threat and had thus to be combated and resistance has to be smashed not only had on a military but also on a cultural level. Unlike Orwell, who left colonial India in order not to cope with a dual identity of a colonial bureaucrat by day and a questioning and critical human being by night ... Berkeley-Hill and Daly worked to ... contribute to a properly functioning colonial world.<sup>13</sup>

It has been mentioned by some researchers including Nandy, that Girindrasekhar, while developing his psychoanalytical theory on the 'Concept of Repression', had not even read Freud's first English translation published by Brill! So the tenets which Bose formulated in his analysis of the mind, despite having Freudian traits, were notably different. This may have

made a strong impression on Freud, when he was presented a copy of this book, with the first letter from Bose saying: 'from a warm admirer of your theory and science'. This started a lengthy communication between Freud and Bose that lasted from 1921 to 1937.<sup>14</sup>

Bose's initial experience in psychiatric practice, and his deep involvement with Indian classical texts, had given this crucial turn to the new psychological frame he constructed. In one of his letters to Freud (11 April 1929), he expressed his difference on the Oedipus situation:

Of course I do not expect that you would accept off hand my reading of the Oedipus situation. I do not deny the importance of the castration threat in European cases; my argument is that the threat owes its efficiency to its connection with the wish to be female. The real struggle lies between the desire to be a male and its opposite, the desire to be a female. I have already referred to the fact that the castration threat is very common in Indian society but my Indian patients do not exhibit castration symptoms to such a marked degree as my European cases. The desire to be female is more easily unearthed in Indian male patients than in European ... The Oedipus mother is very often a combined parental image and this is a fact of great importance. I have reasons to believe that much of the motivation of the maternal deity is traceable to this source.<sup>15</sup>

Both Freud and his famous biographer Ernest Jones were impressed with Bose's intellectual power and knowledge about his own culture, though there was a visible discomfort with Bose's differing views. But they were more interested, as Ashis Nandy comments, 'to see psychoanalysis spread in India when it was still beleaguered in Europe and North America'.<sup>16</sup>

Like Freud, C. G. Jung (his first disciple who later left him) also had an interest in India. But his Eurocentrism was stronger than Freud's, as was evident after his first visit to India in 1938. He too (following Kipling and Berkeley-Hill) characterised the 'Hindu' as soft, passive, feminine, and the European as hard, active and masculine. He dismissed Indian thought as: "non-scientific, speculative and metaphysical". To quote from one of Jung's letters to an Indian correspondent,

I know it will be a special feature of Indian thought that unconscious is assumed to have a metaphysical and pre-human existence ... as far as my knowledge goes, however, we have no evidence in favour of the hypothesis that a pre-human and pre-conscious psyche is conscious to anybody and therefore a consciousness ... the Western mind has renowned metaphysical assertions which are *per definitionem* not verifiable, if only

recently so. In the middle ages up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we still believed in the possibility of metaphysical assumptions. Perhaps she is right, and perhaps she is not.<sup>17</sup>

What made Girindrasekhar's work on psychoanalysis different from his contemporaries, is not just underwritten in his difference with Freud and Jung. He was unique in transforming the introspective project of Indian philosophy into a new prose of liminal psychoanalysis. His Bengali writings, I think, serve as the gateway into the mental world of Indians as analysed by Bose. He wrote twenty-six articles in Bengali in different periodicals of repute, like *Pravasi*, *Bharatvarsa*, and *Sanibarar Chithi*, and the following books: *Swapna* (1928), *Lal-Kalo* (1930), *Puranapravesa* (1934), *BhagvadGita* (1948), *Manavidyar Parivasa* (1953) and *Pouraniki* (1956).<sup>18</sup> It is not a simple task to categorise Bose's Bengali writings into philosophical, psychological, or any other rigid disciplinary categories. For example, *Lal-Kalo*, if re-read, as Chatterjee had done with Sukumar Ray's *Ha-ja-ba-ra-la*, can bring forth the submerged political underpinnings in a package of 'children's stories'.<sup>19</sup> Nandy found that Girindrasekhar "wrote in Bengali voluminously and with enormous intellectual energy" but there was a relative lack of philosophical imagination and elegance in his English papers on psychoanalysis. But, according to Nandy, the most remarkable feature of these Bengali writings, particularly those on the epic, was the way they remained "unencumbered by disciplinary faith". Although Nandy did not consult more than one Bengali book and three articles by Bose, his arguments, built on a closing reading, relocate Girindrasekhar as a symbol of an internal critique of colonial psychiatry.<sup>20</sup>

However, after reading most of Bose's Bengali writings, one finds Nandy's essay limited in its scope, and not adequately representative of the wide ranging variety of Bose's secret 'selves'. There has been a recent trend of studying disciplinary constellations in colonial Bengal, particularly from the view point of how colonial knowledges were contested, accepted and modified to correspond with an emerging modernity of both a national and colonial type. To trace a similar momentous change of psychoanalysis during its inception in colonial India, I have chosen two Bengali books by Girindrasekhar - *Swapna* and *BhagvadGita*.

## II

*Swapna*<sup>21</sup> is written earlier than *BhagvadGita*<sup>22</sup> and in a more overtly psychoanalytical strain. The 'Freudian Bose' is more prominent here but not without contestations. This is also the first book that Girindrasekhar had published in Bengali. In *BhagvadGita*, published two decades later, Bose is noticeably non-psychoanalytical. Since it is the work of a more mature mind, many of Bose's theoretical ideas find expression here as does his mastery in dealing with one of the most revered classical texts of the Hindus. In the

following two sections, I will take up first *Swapna*, and then the *BhagvadGita* for discussion.

*Swapna* or 'Dreams' was first published in 1928. This edition was brought out by the Utkendra Samiti member, Brojendranath Bandopadhyay, who was also a friend of Girindrasekhar. He too was a known figure in the literary circles of Calcutta. This book ran into two more editions, both by the Bangiya Sahitya Parisad, in 1944 and 1950, while a fourth edition came out in 1980. There are no major changes in the second and third editions. One of the interesting features of the organisation of this book is that it is written in 148 numbered paragraphs (*anuccheda*), including the index and glossary. This glossary, which is a translation of 134 psychological terms into Bengali, later, became a major project of Bose, when he was awarded the Jagadish Chandra Bose Memorial Scholarship by Bangiya Sahitya Parisad. It was later published as *Manavidyar Parivasa* in March 1953, a few months before he died.

Written in those maiden days of psychoanalysis in India, *Swapna* has many distinct marks of the Freudian theory of dreams. Girindrasekhar is unequivocal about this:

In the discussion of the theory of dreams, we first have to mention the name of Prof. Freud. It would not be an over statement if we call him the pathfinder to the world of dreams. Freud's unique invention is the main driving force behind the contemporary discourse of scholars and psychologists. The way Freud developed his theory and devised his techniques has been written about in the preface and introduction (to this book).<sup>23</sup>

In the first 38 pages, while presenting a comprehensive discussion on Freud's theory of the interpretation of dreams, Girindrasekhar informed his readers that, he had also given his 'own views' other than Freud's.<sup>24</sup> The chapters are short but numerous (a total of 22), with titles giving the reader an idea of how his arguments were arranged. There are two major thrusts in this text. One is to popularise Freudian ideas among the Bengali intelligentsia and the other is to present Bose's new-found theory, already published as *Concept of Repression* in 1921. The first attempt to express his theoretical formulations in Bengali came with an article titled, 'Swapna' in *Bharatvarsa* in 1922. Did Bose already start nurturing his ideas of a new cultural version of psychoanalysis? Or did he just want to popularise Freud and place his parallel observations? I think both intentions were at work, because the way Bose invokes Freud and, at the same time, underwrites his differences with him is striking. For a better understanding, I would like to offer a brief discussion of Girindrasekhar's theory of opposite wishes in relation to Freudian psychoanalysis.

According to Freud, there exist many sexual and aggressive wishes in the human mind since childhood. The super-ego that develops in the child's mind through social customs, education, religions doctrines and other restraining influences pushes the sexual and anti-social wishes from the conscious to the unconscious. Freudian therapy tries to discover these repressed wishes in the patient's mind through psychoanalysis and helps them come to terms with it. But Bose did not want to give primary importance to influences like social customs and education in the repression of such wishes. He believed, every wish had its opposite wish in the mind. The wish to kill and get killed, the wish to donate and receive donations or the wish to oppress and be oppressed - there are many opposing wish-couples in our mind. If the intensity of these opposing wishes are equal, then they make each other inactive. On the other hand, if one wish is stronger in intensity than its opposite, then the second wish is driven to the unconscious by the first one. According to Bose, all influences from the external world - social or religious customs, education, culture - stimulate one or the other of the wishes from the opposing couple, and with the growing dominance of the stimulated wish, its opposite gets repressed in the unconscious. This repressed wish remains in the unconscious and is never destroyed. Sometimes these repressed wishes, under the guise of different symbols, are in search of fulfillment. At times, the repressed wish, gathering much strength, can appear in the conscious, causing the conscious wish to regress into the unconscious. Wish fulfillment gives birth to pleasure. Girindrasekhar believed that, with each fulfillment of a wish, the ego of the subject is divided into two, and a partial projection takes place on the object of the wish. Thus, with an empathy created between the object of the wish and a part of the subject's ego, the opposite of the original conscious wish too gets satisfied in the unconscious. For example, say Amal has a wish-couple of both oppressing Sujit and getting oppressed by him. While oppressing Sujit, Amal fulfils his first wish, and during this act partially empathises with Sujit. Now during this process of partial empathy, Amal's second wish is projected onto Sujit, and as a result Amal's wish to get oppressed is fulfilled with Sujit's oppression. Bose came to a conclusion that love and pleasure are the primordial feelings and each wish fulfillment creates pleasure.<sup>25</sup>

This is indeed noteworthy as Bose, accepting the id-ego-superego construct of Freud, gave a different meaning to its functions in his theory. The traditional Freudian metaphor of the mind as a jungle is replaced with a domain of wish fulfillment which is only related to a primordial feeling of love and pleasure. Bose too, like other post-Freudians, did not accept Freud's 'libido theory' but had a different view on the matter, based mainly on his theory of opposite wishes. He said that the word 'instinct' used by Freud should be kept away from the realm of psychology, because explaining mental activities by biological laws is bound to become faulty in many instances.<sup>26</sup>

Let me elaborate, with some passages from *Swapna*, on how Bose has argued his position in relation to Freud's theory. There are twelve such occasions in this book, where Girindrasekhar has directly mentioned his "own views" (*amar mate*) as differing from Freud's:

According to Freud, emotions like shame, hatred, and fear represses our wish and unconscious feelings like Love (*Bhalobasa*), Violence (*Hinsa*), Jealousy (*Dvesa*) can influence us without our knowledge ... but I think in the unconscious, only wishes exist; there is no need to accept the presence of anything other than wishes. The main element of what we call emotion is wish ... Only this wish has a dynamic character in our mind. In the absence of opposite wishes, a particular wish get repressed, not as a result of shame, hatred and fear. In fact, this shame and fear is the result of particular repressed wishes, they are not the cause of repression.<sup>27</sup>

While elaborating his critique, Bose has often used the phrases, "psychologists say", or "according to scholars of psychology". Here he included both Freud and neo-Freudians, against whom he expressed his own views. Thus, after giving a detailed example of a diabetic individual dealing with his opposite wishes on having and not having sugar in a chapter on the 'expression of the repressed wish', in the next chapter on 'expression of the unconscious wish', he formulates:

- (a) The wish which remains unconscious but tries to manifest itself through dreams or other means is known as the **unconscious** or **complex wish** (*avadamita ichha* or *gudhaisa*).
- (b) This repressed or unconscious wish faces an obstacle in being expressed, which is called the **resistance** (*badha* or *pratibandha*).
- (c) Those conscious and unconscious ideas in the mind that block the expression of the repressed wish are collectively called the **ensor** (*prahari*). I think [emphasis mine], this censor is principally the opposite wish of the repressed one. Other psychologists say [emphasis mine] that, the censor is evolved from our sense of religion, ethics, vice and virtues etc.<sup>28</sup>

In fact what Bose has done in *Swapna* is to apply of his theory of opposite wishes in analysing dreams, and place them parallel to Freudian observations. In relation to 'libido theory', he says:

There is no such resistance in the human mind which holds him back from having sexual feelings towards his relatives. That education makes him recognise such wishes as immoral is an inadequate explanation. I think, an opposite wish to our sexual wishes hold us back from being sexually attracted towards our relatives. I have said earlier that, if the resistance is only external, then our wishes wouldn't have remained unconscious. Because, external resistance cannot drive a wish from the conscious. To do that, we need another wish. So the main reason for not having a sexual wish towards our relatives, is having an opposite wish ... In most cases sexual feelings do not arise towards near relatives, it remains as the unconscious and repressed wish in our mind.<sup>29</sup>

Though Bose mentions the interpretation of dreams in the *Brihadaranyak Upanisada, Caraka and Vedanta*, he is skeptical about their validity as "scientific explanations". What he tries throughout the book is to frame his arguments within the borders of psychoanalysis and not allow his views on Indian classical texts to creep in. At the same time, he is lucid in his Bengali prose and relates to our social situation:

Psychologists have observed that, it is primarily the sexual instinct that gets repressed. But we do not observe how wishes related to hunger, thirst and other instincts are also repressed in the unconscious. If external social obstacles are the reasons for repression of wish fulfillment, then in many instances the wish for special dishes too, would get repressed. Leave alone the question of special dishes; in our country many people have to repress their wish for a plate of rice for days due to poverty. Death from hunger is a common thing in our country, but even among the poor people the wish to have food remains unrepressed. Like this, there are many other wishes we have to keep unfulfilled.<sup>30</sup>

What we have gathered from this reading of *Swapna* is Bose's unique way of developing a critique of psychoanalysis as received from the West. The text also reveals the ambivalence between Freudian theory and Bose's hypothesis. Bose asserts his own theories and rejects some of the basic tenets of psychoanalysis, yet continues to project Freud through a refracting glass. The world of dreams is made available for another explanation by a non-western psychoanalyst, whose interpretation makes the 'wish' a dialectical and dynamic category. We also notice with interest that this discourse is taking place in the vernacular, and outside the typical disciplinary boundary. Bose's project of spreading the message about the independent deliberations of a new science in Bengali is not devoid of a colonial critique. In the next twenty years, more would happen to the

discipline of psychoanalysis in India. *Swapna*, apparently, had nothing overtly Indian in its content. Though it tried to modify and redefine several of the basic concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis, Bose did not suggest anywhere that Freudian or post-Freudian psychoanalysis was suited mainly for European minds and that a different science was needed for India. His critique is internally pitched within the universal discipline of psychoanalysis. This position would significantly change when, twenty years later, he would write his interpretation of the *BhagvadGita*

### III

*BhagvadGita* was published by Girindrasekhar himself in 1948. By this time, he was over sixty years old and had published most of his Bengali works. This is also the most voluminous text (560 pages) by Bose and a small portion of it was published in different issues of *Pravasi*. The book starts with an introduction. After that, there are two small pieces titled 'Juddhakhetre Gita Avatarana Keno - (why is the *Gita* situated in the context of war?)' and 'Mahabharate Gita' (the *Gita* in the *Mahabharata*). Then follows eighteen chapters of the *Gita*, where original Sanskrit verses or *slokas* are accompanied by annotated explanatory paragraphs. This constitutes the bulk of the volume. But the most engrossing section is the appendix which carries Bose's in-depth interpretations in 85 pages. There is another section on *sloka* to *sloka* translations of 127 pages, and finally an index.

In the Preface, Girindrashekar acknowledges that there exists endless explanations of the *Gita*, but he felt most of them were biased in favour of a particular *marga* (Divine Path or Road to Salvation) the scholar followed. As he admitted, "a rationalist cannot welcome such explanations". In Bose's opinion, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was the first one to attempt an "unbiased" interpretation of the *Gita*, which he could not finish writing. Bose himself had engaged in this work, he said, "from the view point of a psychologist." He proceeds to explain his methods for arriving at a 'rational' explanation of different *slokas*. At the same time he studiously avoids psychological or psychoanalytical references, with the work clearly intended for a non-specialist readership.<sup>31</sup>

While the Preface explained the methodological premise, the Introduction posed the problem Bose wanted to deal with. This is done through the narration of an ancient tale: Sarvilaka was a rich *brahman* of ancient Magadha. He was famous for his knowledge and had many disciples. When his son Pundarika became sixteen years of age, Sarvilaka called him and asked him to confine himself in a room and fast for the day. At midnight, Sarvilaka entered his son's room, his body glistening with oil, only a loin cloth around his waist and carrying an axe in his hand. Trembling in fear, Pundarika listened to his father asking him to put on the same dress and oil, to carry an axe, and follow him through the city. Away from the margins of the city near a road, Sarvilaka attacked a rich old traveler, killed him and took

away all the valuables with him. Pundarika watched with speechless fear, and followed his father back home trembling severely. He could not sleep through the night. Next morning Sarvilaka came and asked his son to bathe and dress. He explained that what he has done the previous night was only a *kaulika pratha* (family tradition), which he was bound to follow. What he did by day was *lokachara* (customary practices) and what he did by night was *kulacara* (family practices). For this, Sarvilaka gave a detailed explanation borrowed from different *slokas* of the *Gita* to resolve Pundarika's conflict. After narrating this story, Girindrasekhar asks his readers:

Does the *Gita* really give us the same teaching as it has been interpreted in Sarvilaka's story? Can instigating Pundarika to kill a person be equated with Arjuna going into war? If Sarvilaka has interpreted the *Gita* correctly, then killers, thieves, cheats, debauches - all can quote the *Gita* in their support. Or if Sarvilaka is wrong, then where lies his fault? What are the real meanings of the *slokas* uttered by him? Without resolving such questions satisfactorily, no explanation of the *Gita* is acceptable. We have to interpret the *Gita* keeping Sarvilaka's story in our mind. I shall try to respond to these questions in the *Gita*.<sup>32</sup>

This introduction makes the reader sensitive to the issues that would be raised in his discourse on the *Gita*, and his main emphasis on the conflicts that complicate our psyche and their resolutions. Bose assumes that, if interpreted correctly, the *Gita* can resolve these conflicts. Nandy expressed surprise that Bose should restrain his psychoanalytical self and resist interpreting such a suitable narrative for an oedipal conflict!<sup>33</sup>

In 'Why is the *Gita* situated in the context of war?', Girindrasekhar has drawn a clear line between the Western and Indian ways of resolving internal grief (*atyantik dukkha*). He says:

All traditional sacred texts have as their main objective, the desire to resolve grief. Desire for *moksa* (ultimate liberation) is also driven by a wish to resolve grief or pain ... The ideology and means of resolving grief is quite different in the Orient and Occident. The West teaches: make yourself capable of struggling in society; while competing with others, see that your interest and autonomy is protected; gain knowledge to utilise nature for your comfort; in short change your surroundings according to your convenience. In this thorn-ridden society, try to uproot as many of them as you can. It is not that we do not have such impulses in the Orient, but the *sanatan* (age-old/traditional) ideology here teaches us something else: you will never be able to uproot all the thorns, so you must build yourself in a way that you are not hurt

by the thorns. It is better to wear a pair of shoes instead of attempting to sweep away all the stones and dust from the road. One ideology tries to overcome Nature; the other tries to overcome and discipline the Self ...

Hindu ideology will say that it is possible to resolve grief. Disease, bereavement, pain, poverty, death, fear - all these troubles might be removed if you and I try to reach the state of not being affected by sufferings. Perhaps no one else ever said such a great thing.<sup>34</sup>

Bose's hint is clear, his interpretation of the *Gita* needs to be considered as an elaboration of a way of life which is different from that in the place of origin of psychoanalysis, the West. Bose commented:

If you have realised the teaching of the *Gita*, then you will have the ability to overcome any painful situation. This is interesting. Whether you are a beggar, a slave, an invalid, a rich man, or hedonist, and in whatever conditions you are, once you have realised the teachings of *Gita*, no sufferings can touch you. Even with partial realisation there is much benefit.<sup>35</sup>

Since the *Gita* teaches us how to overcome pain, the best elaboration of different types of suffering are drawn from a war situation. Bose said that the creator of the *Gita* understood this well, that if suffering from an event like war - which destabilises everything in society - could be resolved internally, then it is possible to overcome all other suffering. Girindrasekhar tried to frame the mental make-up of his reader, who was about to enter the main text of the *Gita*. His interpretation verges towards his thesis on the repressed wish, where the wish to resolve suffering is opposed by the wish to suffer and inflict suffering.

I have mentioned earlier that, the crucial chapter of this book is its appendix. As he described 21 different *margas*, he described a variety of practices offered by different schools to solve problems. The reader could choose from this vast repertoire of solutions. He also tried to show the interrelations between different theoretical elements in the *Gita* by designing a chart, which is reminiscent of a particular style in 'scientific' writings that had already come into vogue. Interpretation of these different solutions by Bose does not in anyway lead to analytical suggestions, but always creates a space where notions of physiology, psychology and health interplay. While explaining the sensory systems and their control by different *margas*, he makes a single opening comment to set the tone:

Nowadays, when we mention *Brahmacarya* or *indriya sanjam* (control of the senses), we understand this as the control of

sexual sensory perceptions, but in the *Gita* these words are not used in this narrow sense. In the whole *Gita*, there is no specific mentioned about controlling sexual impulses.<sup>37</sup>

Another instance could be the section on 'Kama & Krodha' which deals with the expression of anger. Here one sees Girindrasekhar drawing liberally from his theoretical postulations on repressed wishes. First he enumerates some situations which can provoke anger and then says:

Analysing all the examples cited above, we can see that in each case, our wish to grow angry has been blocked by some external things or by our own inability ... When we get angry with ourselves, the main reason lies in the blocking of some of our wish fulfillments. These wishes are either related to self respect or love. That is why, in this context, if I say that the wish is the main driving force rather than the anger, then I am not being unjust. Anger has no separate existence. Whenever a wish is blocked, anger develops. Anger is only a transformed wish ... Wish and anger are more or less the same. Our semantics also supports this, the word *raga* is used to express both anger and love. There is nothing wrong then, when the *Gita* says that *kama* and *krodha* are the same.<sup>37</sup>

While interpreting the section on 'Punarjanmavad' or the theory of rebirth, Bose is explicitly rationalistic and comments as a psychologist. He rejects the claim of rebirth being related to a person's deeds in the previous life. His views are very similar to a rational-secularist position:

We all agree that prevention is better than cure, but God, despite being powerful is not preventing the sinner. Rather, he is allowing him to sin, only to punish him in the next life. What could be more cruel than this? ... The faith of the disciple in God is difficult to explain with arguments, but for a scientist this faith has no value ... the theory of rebirth after death is a knowledge very difficult to accept by a modern rationalist. In *Kathopanishada* when Naciketa asked Yama whether the soul or *atman* exists after death or not, he too was warned not to ask questions on death, for it was not a simple thing to understand.<sup>38</sup>

Whether it is 'Sristitatva', 'Jnanendriya' or 'Satva, Raja, Tama', Bose brilliantly evolves his formulations on Indian ways of gaining access to the Self. Particularly in 'Satva, Raja, Tama', Girindrasekhar has classified natural attribute or *gunas* and explained its implications extensively. Speaking about

internally directed knowledge (*antarmukha jnan*) and externally directed knowledge (*bahirmukha jnan*), he exemplifies:

When we try to judge the difference in sound between a bell and flute, that is, when we try to determine the actual character of the sound emitting objects, it is only then that we get a true idea of their difference, and the knowledge gets internally directed. But when we determine the difference between the bell and the flute as external objects, then our mind is directed only towards the appearance of the sound emitting objects and our knowledge becomes externally directed.<sup>39</sup>

Describing these three fundamental tenets (*Satva, Raja, Tama*) in relation to many aspects of our everyday life, Girindrasekhar shows how through a sacral text different attributes for both living and non-living things could be drawn up. This, I interpret as Bose's expression of non-adherence to personality theories, and his advocacy instead of a new and dynamic theory of modern Indian personhood: one that could not be totally absorbed within the colonial (modern) disciplinary project.

*Bhagvadgita*, undoubtedly, bears this tension between modernity and tradition at different levels. But this tension is not dichotomous, neither is it shown to be in sharp contradiction. There is always a solution, a space for the new science to get modified through a rationalist interpretation of the classical text, and for the text to be read, as if psychology was always 'there'. In this way, Bose opened up great possibilities for this new science to be shaped according to Indian culture, myth and tradition. I also think that Girindrasekhar's aim in this project was to present a narrative structure which could incorporate his theory of opposite wishes in a convincing manner without contradicting our understanding of a classical text.

#### IV

Both *Swapna* and *Bhagvadgita* show how the formulation of the first psychoanalytical approaches by a non-western writer could serve the double purpose of opening a critique of the new science, while informing the modern Bengali intelligentsia about the power of this science. The elaborate and well structured arguments of these two Bengali texts by Girindrasekhar Bose allowed psychoanalysis to be modified and revised in a non-western situation, facilitating its own theory building.

Unlike the strait-jacketed nationalist projects which saw the colonial demon everywhere, the discipline of psychology provided a more flexible and nuanced space for consent and contest. In this endeavour, no 'Hindu-psychoanalysis' like the 'Hindu alchemy' was born. These two books, written within a span of twenty years, mark a significant shift in approaches. *Swapna* dealt with psychoanalysis per se and evolved certain formulations

which came through Bose's newly formed theory. Thereafter, he kept searching for the relevance of his thesis in the sacred texts. But finally, when he arrived at certain conclusions through the *Bhagavadgita*, we see that it stimulated possibilities of developing an internal critique of the colonial discipline in a broader canvas.

To reveal the complexities of the relationship between colonialism and psychoanalysis or psychiatry, this kind of a particularistic approach is useful. The issue of colonial power and hegemony surfaces in a close reading between the lines, making us aware of its various inflections and modifications. This is very different from constructing a critique of colonialism, which only picks up the obvious external symbols of a colonial order. Ashis Nandy has rightly chosen Girindrasekhar as a focal point, specially emphasising his vernacular texts. But he did not examine the bulk of the Bengali texts by Bose. Neither did he delve into any of his works, excepting *Puranpravesa*, in great detail. This led him to an interpretation which has not done full justice to Girindrasekhar's thought. A versatile intellectual like him, who has made contributions in mythology, history, philosophy and psychology, is difficult to map and interpret through only a psychoanalytical framework. It is perhaps more difficult to develop a substantial and sensitive critique of colonialism out of this.

There are many areas that remain unexplored in Girindrasekhar's life and career. He was a member of the Calcutta University Senate for fifteen years. He was also a member of the Faculty of Science and Medical Education for the same period. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Council for Post Graduate Teaching in Arts and remained President for some time of the Board of Higher Studies in Psychology. Within such a powerful institutional milieu, how did Bose envision the higher education of psychiatry in India? This could be an interesting question for a researcher wishing to explore the interrelations between disciplinary formation and colonial power. Bose was also a renowned psychiatrist and set up the first out-door clinic at the Carmichael College in 1933, investing his own money till government funding was available. Exploring this area may reveal how psychiatric intervention was forming the elements of diagnostic categorisation of the Indian mind. Who were the patients? How did they respond and with what kinds of oral testimonies of mental suffering? What constituted the 'therapeutic' interventions? Answers to these questions may give us crucial clues in rewriting the history of Indian psychiatry.

One important question comes out of this reading. Why did Bose's attempt to locate his new discipline outside colonial progressive discourse fail? Both Nandy and Kakar have searched for an answer. Nandy says:

In his own professional life, there were signs that the culture of Indian psychology was being integrated within the dominant global culture of psychology, its 'fangs' safely removed. By the

time Bose died in 1953, he was already being seen both in India and abroad as a pioneer whose days were past.<sup>40</sup>

Kakar thinks:

... even in traditional Calcutta on the eastern sea coast, any critical engagement with received theory has by now almost disappeared ... it seems that when India entered the world market in a truly large scale after independence, the Western colonisation of the Indian mind paradoxically became greater than was the case when the country was still a British colony.<sup>41</sup>

These two quotations can lead to another question: was the universal project of psychology ever complete in India? Was its domination so powerful that it silenced all criticism and dissent? Have we accepted the narrative of a progressive science in India unquestioningly and invested all our emotions into it? In a way, both Nandy and Kakar have made us to look beyond the established science and examine its historical narratives and their strategies. It is not just the contestations that created the outlines of an Indian psychiatry. I think, it is the more complex process of consent and participation which made room for various significant twists and (sub)versions in the shaping of psychiatric knowledge in India.

## Notes

1. This paper was first written during my research training programme at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) in 1997. I enjoyed my inter/trans-disciplinary interaction with my supervisor, Professor Partha Chatterjee. My colleagues, both at the CSSSC, and participants at the Cultural Studies Workshop (Bhopal, January 1998), encouraged my effort by providing insightful comments and critiques. I enjoyed their supportive attitude, particularly that of Professor Ashis Nandy, who could empathise with my ambivalent 'secret-self'. Samikasan (an NGO formed by late Dr. T. C. Sinha, a student of Girindrasekhar) has helped me by providing the original texts of Bose, and other related material. Bose's nephew, Dr. Bijoyketu Bose, had been open and warm during a long interview with him. Staff at CSSSC and National Library energetically fished out relevant books and journal articles for me. I thank them all for their support.  
[A Bengali version of this paper is published in *Baromas*, April 1998].
2. See Ronald Littlewood, 'Science, Shamanism and Hermeneutics', *Anthropology Today*, vol. V, no. 1, 1989: 5-11, for a reasonably detailed literature on this. Also see J. Morss, *Growing Critical: Alternative to Development Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1996), for an elaborate argument positioning Freud and Lacan as 'non-developmental psychology' projects.
3. Partha Chatterjee, 'The Disciplines in Colonial Bengal', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Texts of Power* (Calcutta: Samya, 1996).
4. Durganand Sinha, *Psychology in a Third World Country: The Indian Experience* (New Delhi: Sage, 1986): 13-14.
5. Waltraud Ernst, 'The Establishment of "Native Lunatic Asylums"', in *Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century British India*, in G. Jan Meulenbeld *et al* (eds.), *Studies in Indian Medical History* (1987). For social histories of institutions in colonial India, also see by the same author, 'Racial, Social & Cultural Factors in the Development of a Colonial Institution: The Bombay Lunatic Asylum 1670-1858', *Internationales Asien Forum*, vol. XX, nos. 3-4, 1991; 'Under the Influence of British India: James Esdailes Mesmeric Hospital in India', *Psychological Medicine*, vol. XXV, 1995; and 'Idioms of Madness and Colonial Boundaries: The Case of the European and "Native" Mentally Ill in Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century British India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. XXXIX, no. 1, 1997.
6. Durganand Sinha, *Psychology in a Third World Country*: 15.
7. Girindrasekhar Bose, *Concept of Repression* (Calcutta: Sri Gouranga Press, 1921).
8. Sudhir Kakar, *Culture and Psyche* ((Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997): 21.
9. T. C. Sinha, 'A Short Life Sketch of Girindrasekhar Bose', *Samiksa*, Bose Special Number, 1955: 62-74.
10. Debajyoti Das, 'Girindrasekhar Basu', *Sahitya Sadhak Charitmalā*, vol. 108 (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parisad, 1971).
11. Chandak Sengupta, 'Manachikitsa: Anchalik Itihaser Ek Adhyay', *Eskhan*, Annual Number, vol. XVIII, nos.1-2, 1987.
12. Ashis Nandy, 'The Savage Freud: The First Non-Western Psychoanalyst and the Politics of Secret Selves in Colonial India', in *The Savage Freud and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
13. *ibid*: 100.
14. An anthology of this correspondence contains thirteen letters from Freud and eleven letters from Bose. However, on Anna's request in 1963, the original letters of Freud were given back to be preserved at the Sigmund Freud Archives in New York. See *Bose-Freud Correspondence* (Calcutta: Indian Psychoanalytical Society, 1964).
15. As quoted in T.C. Sinha, *Psychoanalysis in India* (Calcutta: Lumbini Park Silver Jubilee Souvenir, 1966): 66.
16. Ashis Nandy, 'The Savage Freud': 114.
17. C.G. Jung, *Letters*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953): 254-55. as quoted in Sudhir Kakar, *Culture and Psyche*: 28-42.
18. Debajyoti Das, 'Girindrasekhar Basu': 61-79.
19. See Partha Chattopadhyay, 'Ajker Hajabarala', *Baromas*, Annual No. 1995: 41-66; also see Arun Nag, 'Galpa O Tar Garu', *Visvabharati Patrika: Navaparjay*, vol. I, no. 1, 1994, for a detailed analysis of the narrative structure of 'unreal' tales.
20. See Girindrasekhar Bose, *Puranapravesa* (1934); 'Manuser Mana', *Pravasi* 1930, Part 1(3): 359-63; 'Satva Raja Tama', *Pravasi* 1930, Part 2(1): 1-5; and 'Gita', *Pravasi* 1931, Part 2(1): 9-19.
21. Girindrasekhar Basu, *Swapna* (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parisad, 1980; fourth edn.).
22. Girindrasekhar Basu, *Bhagvadgita*, published by the author from 14, Parsibagan Lane, Calcutta, 1948..

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23. *Swapna*: 1.
24. *ibid*: 3.
25. *Concept of Repression*: 32-100.
26. Mrinal Kumar Barua, 'Manasamiksar Vivartan O Bharatiya Manastatya', Chitta, Sravana, 1969.
27. *Swapna*: 23-4.
28. *ibid*: 74.
29. *ibid*: 88.
30. *ibid*: 31.
31. *Bhagvadgita*: Preface.
32. *ibid*: 1-9.
33. Ashis Nandy, 'The Savage Freud': 84-8.
34. *Bhagvadgita*: 10-11.
35. *ibid*: 12.
36. *ibid*: 373.
37. *ibid*: 386.
38. *ibid*: 393-94;399-400.
39. *ibid*: 421.
40. Ashis Nandy, 'The Savage Freud': 139.
41. Sudhir Kakar, *Culture and Psyche*: 25.