

Rabindranath Tagore and Freudian thought

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The paper draws our attention to the Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore's notion of psychoanalysis. Focusing on the period between 1926 and his death in 1941, during which Tagore had not only met Freud but had also spoken to several persons on psychoanalysis, the author has unearthed a mass of archival material, primarily in Bengali, and translated most of it into English for the first time, in order to show how Tagore's opinion regarding Freudian thought gradually changed from severe criticism and a near complete rejection to appreciation, especially of its good use in literature and literary criticism. The author has also identified a number of literary works, both prose and verse, from the final years of Tagore's life and tried to document the extent of influence of Freudian thought on their composition. In short, the author explores a significant interdisciplinary area that has not been looked into either in India or abroad.

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The most significant psychoanalytically inspired assessments of Rabindranath Tagore's works, or of his life and works, have come from Rangin Haldar (1924, 1928, 1931), Sarasi Lal Sarkar (1926, 1927, 1928, 1937, 1941), Amal Shankar Roy (1973) and Sitansu Ray (1979, 1996).¹ Although Roy and Ray have cited a few arbitrarily chosen remarks by Tagore on psychoanalysis in their respective works, it is fair to say that these scholars have not seriously attempted to unravel any part of Tagore's own notion of Freudian thought. Ratul Bandyopadhyay's book on Tagore (1994) on the other hand, which contains excerpts from several letters and articles by Tagore and others on psychoanalysis in one of its chapters, accounts for only one relatively less important strand of a larger story. In this article, which is archival rather than analytical in nature, I shall seek to narrate that untold story as closely and clearly as possible.

It is probable that Tagore had come to know of Freudian psychoanalysis as early as 1915. One of the comments Tagore made during his long meeting with Kalidas Nag in March that year, even without the mention of Freud, or of such terms as 'psychoanalysis' or the 'unconscious', seems to suggest that he was describing a finding associated with the name of Freud. One is not sure of the source of Tagore's knowledge of psychoanalysis, if any, at this

¹Haldar's paper of 1924 may not have been published. It has been referred to by Hartnack as follows: 'Rangin Chandra Haldar . . . read a paper in Bengali on the Oedipus Complex in Rabindranath Tagore's poetry' at the Indian Psychoanalytical Society on 1 November 1924 (Hartnack, 2001, p. 181). In January 1928, he presented a paper in English at the Indian Science Congress based on the same research. This paper may not have been published either, though an abstract of it may be found (Indian Science Congress Association, 1928, p. 346). A third version was read by Freud and subsequently published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in 1931 (Bose and Freud, 1964, p. 13). Similarly, Sarkar's paper dated 1926 is an early version of his research read at the Indian Science Congress (Indian Science Congress Association, 1926, p. 356). For the rest of the works, see 'References'.

stage, so the only noteworthy point in the text under consideration seems to be the indication of the time around which Tagore had made this new discovery. According to Nag, in reply to his question on the novel *Chaturanga* [Four parts] (1916), Tagore first ‘explained in detail the relationship between Sachis, Damini and Sribilas [three of the important characters]’ and then went on to say the following:

To the authors of yesteryears life meant desire and frustration, union and separation, birth and death, and certain other similarly imprecise events. Therefore, the play called life had to end either in a cherished and revered union, or with a scene devoted to death’s vast graveyard. *Since a few days now*, our impression of our life has been changing—it seems we were so long loitering about the entrance—after a long time we seem to have discovered the way to the inner chambers *for the first time*. We are awake at the outer side of our consciousness—there we are consciously fighting battles, striking others and are being struck by others. But within these strikes and counter strikes, these ups and downs, something is being created in our ignorance of it. The arena for that gigantic game of creation is our submerged consciousness [*magnachaitanyalo*]. *It is a new world, as if gradually coming into existence before us* (1986, pp. 183–4, my italics).²

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), as contemporaries, had obviously heard of one another. Moreover, they had common friends in Albert Einstein, Romain Rolland, Thomas Mann and possibly others. But neither Tagore nor Freud appears to have felt the urge to correspond with or to meet the other, not even when Tagore was in Vienna in 1920, and not until Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis and his wife Nirmal Kumari Mahalanobis, as Tagore’s companions during his tour in Europe in 1926, took the initiative to facilitate a meeting of the two men.

It was on 25 October 1926, the day before an indisposed Tagore was to leave Vienna for Hungary, that he invited Freud to tea. Freud responded to Tagore’s invitation and spent an afternoon in the poet’s company at Hotel Imperial in Vienna where Tagore had put up with his group. At the time of the meeting, there were at least four other persons present in the same suite. They were Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, an avid reader of Freud’s writings by his own admission and the one who took the only photograph of Tagore and Freud; Nirmal Kumari Mahalanobis, whose tour-account entitled *Kabir Sange Iyorohey* [In Europe with the poet] (1969) is one of the important sources of information on the meeting; Anna Freud, who possessed sufficient participatory curiosity in her father’s intellectual pursuits as to recognise the importance of the meeting; and Martha Freud, who did not follow English and hardly knew psychoanalysis. Since no one, Tagore and Freud included, had taken the initiative to record the text of their discourse, one is forced to depend on the reactions, primarily of Freud, in order to form an idea of the impressions they might have left on one another.

Freud’s only reactions were quick, brief and epistolary. In a letter written to Anna von Vest, dated 14 November 1926, Freud reported he was impressed by Tagore’s appearance:

Tagore invited us to pay him a visit on 25th October. We found him ailing and tired, but he is a wonderful sight, he really looks like we imagined the Lord God looks, but only about 10,000 years older than the way Michelangelo painted him in the Sistine (Goldman, 1985, p. 293).

In a separate letter to Sandor Ferenczi, dated 13 December 1926, Freud reported his meeting with Tagore, in terms of a less ambiguous final clause:

²Unless otherwise indicated, translations of the texts cited in the paper are mine.

I have had so little occasion to write to you that I don't know what I have already and what I haven't yet told you. Eg., that on October 25 I called upon Tagore about his request; that last week, another Indian, Dos Gupta,³ a philosopher from Calcutta, was with me—my quota of Indians has now been filled for quite a long time (Falzeder, 2000, pp. 289–90).

Ernest Jones, commenting on the meeting in his biography of Freud, translated the last line of the excerpt as, 'My need of Indians is for the present fully satisfied', and concluded that Tagore 'did not seem to have made much of an impression on Freud' (1957, p. 128).

The following other factors appear to reinforce Jones's assessment of the meeting: that no one bothered to record the meeting, that Tagore never spoke about the meeting, that the *Neue Freie Presse* had described the meeting as 'futile', that Tagore had not visited Vienna during his subsequent tour of Europe in 1930, that Freud had not contributed to *The golden book of Tagore* in spite of being asked to by its editor Ramananda Chatterjee, twice, and, that neither before nor since had Freud and Tagore corresponded with each other. Nevertheless, Jones's assessment might be incomplete from one point of view. Notably, Freud's remarks on Tagore are consistently laconic but never neutral. Besides, Freud's comment about Indians, made nearly two months after meeting Tagore, was largely a reaction to his latest meeting with Dos Gupta. Moreover, Tagore's persona had evoked the image of God in Freud's mind. In the final analysis, therefore, Freud's impression of Tagore may have been one of ambivalence rather than of indifference. As for Tagore, he appears never to have written anything on this meeting, not even when he found himself involved in a debate on psychoanalysis shortly after his return to India.

Most probably Tagore spoke on a 'psychoanalytical' work for the first time in 1927, in reaction to a paper read by Sarasi Lal Sarkar at the Indian Science Congress in January 1926,⁴ although he seems to have learned about the paper after Sarkar had spoken to him about it in the presence of Anil Kumar Bose some time later.

According to Sarkar, a peculiar fact about a large number of poems and other writings by Tagore is that, a set of three images—concerning rhythm, song and movement—occurred exactly in that order in an amazing frequency. For example, the following stanza cited and translated by Sarkar:

Break, break, oh break the prison house,
Strike at it hard yet harder,
How sweet the bird sings,
How abundantly pour forth the rays of the sun today.

Sarkar explained these lines thus:

In this [stanza] the words 'Break, break, break' in the first line sound like the beat of a drum and convey the suggestion of a rhythm. The [line] 'How sweet the bird sings' has the association of a song, while the pouring forth of the sun's rays suggests the idea of a movement (1928, p. 241).

According to Sarkar, the origin of this structural peculiarity—peculiarity because the poet did not consciously intend it and yet it pervaded his works—must be looked for not in the 'conscious plane' of the poet's mind but in a 'more submerged plane' of it (p. 242). From this

³According to Sonu Shamdasani (1996, pp. xxi–xxii), this could refer to Surendranath Dasgupta, the famous Indian philosopher and author.

⁴Dr Sarasi Lal Sarkar was a founding member of the Indian Psychoanalytical Society in 1922 but became an associate member in 1934 for not undergoing a training analysis. His paper was published as Sarkar (1928).

premise Sarkar went on to equate the 'peculiarity' with the experience of the Indian mystics on the one hand and with dreams as Freud described them on the other, drawing upon the words of the mystics from the *Swetashvatara Upanishad* (pp. 257–60) and that of the Freudians from the works of Ernest Jones, William James, Charles Bandouin, Poul Bjrre and translations of selections from Freud's works by MD Eder, for the purpose (pp. 251–7). Sarkar believed he had found the explanation for this strange sequence in Tagore's deep dependence, conscious as well as unconscious, on the formula of the Godhead as given in the Upanishads; namely, *Santam, Sivam, Adwaitam*, or the being who is 'Harmony, Beneficence and without a second'. Sarkar explained the connection between the ternary imagery and the attributes of the Vedantic Godhead, thus: 'Rhythm is a very natural figure for representing the Principle of Harmony. The figure that all movements are proceeding towards the goal situated at the Infinity is a very natural way of representing the Eternal One without a second . . . The principle of Bliss is a complex idea', which Tagore represented in terms of the 'light of music' or the 'light of a song' (pp. 250–1).

Reacting to this paper in a letter to Kadambini Datta dated 29 May 1927, Tagore wrote:

Sarasibabu's method of evaluating poems cannot lead us to lively poetry. If I judge a friend physiologically I may grasp the principles of physiology but lose my friend. A poem is admired for the enjoyment it imparts; we derive enjoyment by savouring it and not by analyzing it. First rhythm, then songs and finally movement, poetry has no meaning at this level. Poetry includes everything at once and is indivisible. Looking at a flowing river we cannot describe it in parts and say that the waves came first, then came the water and finally the flow. It is all that at one and the same time (1960, 124–5).⁵

For an account of Tagore's views on psychoanalysis proper, however, we will have to depend on AK Bose's essay in which the text of Tagore's long meeting with Sarkar and Bose himself over Sarkar's paper is reproduced at length.

In AK Bose's essay, Tagore is extremely critical of Freud and the Freudians. He began by saying:

You have created great trouble for me by dragging me into the realm of Psycho-analysis [English in the original]; I am not able to understand any of it. That apart, why are you unable to use your own insight to see things? Why should you accept everything that Freud says? It cannot be denied that we have lost our ability to think independently (AK Bose, 1928, p. 341).

Tagore was also critical of the fundamental premise of psychoanalytical operations as he understood it, and asked at one point, 'How can the world created by an individual in his own mind be understood by another individual having a different mind?' (p. 341). In another important remark he affirmed that his 'main fight with the school of Freud' was on the question of the priority of the sex-instinct: 'I think sex-instinct does not come at the beginning; self-assertion comes before it. The instinct of self-assertion is older than sex-instinct, and the influence of the former inseparably pervades our life' (p. 341). Finally, Tagore questioned whether psychoanalysis was a science at all, thus: 'The main ingredient of psychoanalysis is dreams. Can this ingredient be measured in a definitive way as the ingredients of the other sciences can be?' (p. 342). Tagore may not have read Freud at this stage; all we know is that he had read the critical

⁵Whether or not Sarkar's findings are valuable as literary criticism or valid as psychoanalytical observations, the man himself remained extremely passionate about this one idea over a period of fifteen years. This is evident from the different publications on the same theme in 1927, 1928, 1937 and 1941.

writings on Freudian thought published in what he described in this meeting itself as the ‘Today and Tomorrow Series’. Could this possibly be Tagore’s first reaction to his recent meeting with Freud?

In July 1927, Tagore made two other significant remarks on ‘psychoanalysis’ in ‘The principle of literature’. He stated that, in spite of any practical utility or intellectual value that psychoanalysis might possess, it had ‘no part to play in literature’; and that, even if its findings were ‘true’, its employment in art was ‘inappropriate’ and therefore unacceptable (1927a, pp. 9, 11–2). These remarks were made by Tagore in the context of a different debate, however; one that concerned the effects of the use of ‘realism’—in the form of the representations of poverty presumably qua Marx and the representations of the body and of sex presumably qua Freud—in modern Bengali literature, especially those that were published in the literary journals *Kallol* [The roaring wave], *Kali Kalam* [Pen and ink], *Pragati* [Progress] and the like.

Girindrasekhar Bose, President of the Indian Psychoanalytical Society, replied to many of Tagore’s explicit and implicit allegations against psychoanalysis as reported by AK Bose, in a long letter published in the July–August 1928 issue of *Prabasi* [The sojourner]. According to Bose, the reported conversation of Sarkar and Tagore had no relation at all to psychoanalysis because it contained no verifiable discourse on the unconscious.

Psychoanalysis discusses only those matters that take place in the unconscious mind . . . In terms of a special process, psychoanalysis ascertains the existence of all those things that happen . . . in the unconscious mind. Since there is no direct way of knowing what happens in the unconscious, the psychoanalyst determines it in terms of a thorough study of such matters as the thoughts that come to an individual’s conscious mind, all that he witnesses in his dreams, his behaviour with regards to everyday matters, his errors and slips, the irrational concepts nurtured by him, and all those emotions that arise in his mind against his own wish . . . I have already said, no proof pertaining to the activities of the unconscious can be of the nature of direct evidence. No sooner a certain activity is perceived than it ceases to remain unrecognized, and hence falls outside the purview of psychoanalysis. It is not that direct evidence is the only form of evidence. In the courts of law, a convict may even be hanged on the strength of indirect evidence; moreover, there is a place for speculation in all the sciences. It is only when an indirect evidence has all those qualities for which a scientist or lawyer would have considered it to be as valuable as direct evidence in his field, that it is accepted by the psychoanalyst, otherwise not . . . No one has the right to deny the claims of the psychoanalyst without having carried out a thorough discussion on the evidence on which these claims are based. The objections of Tagore to psychoanalysis as reported had been raised many years back in the West. Only those who have explored the unconscious, and no one else, can state as to what does or does not exist in it . . . A scientist cannot reject a system of thought merely because it would hurt someone’s self-respect or religious faith. A scientist cannot decide in advance as to what may or may not exist [in the unconscious]. One is obliged to accept what is revealed by the investigation . . . The affairs of man are inspired by sexual instincts, the ego and so on. Man is often driven by his sexual instincts in the unconscious; therefore, it is impossible to state without having studied the unconscious first hand as to the ratio in which the instincts of self-assertion and sexuality had determined a particular act [of an individual]. In the essay referred to, both Tagore and Sarkar have spoken in oblivion of the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious; hence, their opinion on psychoanalysis is not acceptable . . . The opinion of poets, philosophers and others is not always scientific in nature. The psychoanalyst never claims that only sex regulates man’s life. Neither does the psychoanalyst claim that he alone has found the origin of all the mental faculties. A psychoanalyst only investigates the extent to which man is driven by his unrecognized mind. He has seen that a large part of the unconscious is occupied by sexual instincts. No psychoanalyst will ever accept the words of others without having conducted an investigation himself; therefore, it is unfair to call him a victim of slave mentality (pp. 583–4).

Sarkar must have read Bose's letter. Whether because of that or not, in none of his subsequent publications on the same 'peculiarity' (1937, 1941) did Sarkar explicitly mention Freud or psychoanalysis. One must mention, however, that Sarkar always retained the section on the latent and the manifest layers of dreams and of poetry from the previous versions of his paper where it had been avowedly derived from the writings of Freud. He even added a section on the ego and the superego, without the mention of Freud, in his publication of 1941 based on the same research.

Tagore, too, must have read Bose's reply to his objections to psychoanalysis—*Prabasi* being the journal it was published in—and, probably for that reason, when he once again remarked on the subject in the section entitled 'Sahitya Bichar' [The evaluation of literature] in the book *Sahityer Pathey* [literally, Along the literary path] in October–November 1929 (1989, pp. 435–561), he temporarily refrained from voicing many of his earlier doubts. Instead, he only asked whether 'the analytical technique was worthy of respect in the task of evaluating literature'. Tagore's own reply to the question is based on the understanding that a literary work as a whole was greater than the sum of all its constituent parts, with the excess being a 'mystery that underlies all creation'. Tagore wrote: 'In every creative work it is this that is unique, that which is diffused in the components but cannot be measured in terms of the components . . . Therefore, literature ought to be viewed in its totality'. The problem with psychoanalysis for Tagore was that 'many people'—implying Sarkar in particular—with a fondness for 'psycho-analytical jargon' displayed 'the mentality to diminish the glory of the un-analyzable totality of creation' (1989, pp. 496–7).⁶

With reference to one of Tagore's comments on mysticism reported in AK Bose's article (1928), Sarkar sought Tagore's clarification in a letter to Amiya Chakravarty dated 10 October 1931. Tagore replied to this letter not directly addressed to him, in October itself; and the same was published in the issue of *Bichitra* for December 1931 under the title 'Psycho-Analysis'. In this letter Tagore stated that he did not remember the reported remark on mysticism, but he resumed his denunciation of psychoanalysis in terms of the following critical comment on the discipline:

I have read your letter to Amiya. I do not want to enter into the realm of psychoanalysis without having the right to do so. This field of science is still in an embryonic stage, which is why it provides the best opportunity to say anything one wishes to. Such opportunity to term the bitterness of one's own mind a science and circulate it in the form of slander, is truly hard to come by. In this so-called division of science anyone can assume the role of a scientist, there is no need to go through any rigorous examination in order to be selected. Another road to insulting the individual has been opened in Bengal. Those who revel in slander will be delighted (1931b, p. 717).

Between 1927 and 1938, barring the remarks already mentioned, Tagore had very little to state on psychoanalysis. Only a few comments appeared in his essays on literature and art—such as, in the article 'Sahitya Dharma' [The religion of literature] published in *Bichitra* [The various] (1927b)—which were written with the aim of combating contemporary literary realism not on ethical but on artistic grounds. Otherwise, a stray comment or two on psychoanalysis or on Girindrasekhar Bose were reported in *Shanibarar Chithi* [literally, Saturday's letter], a literary journal edited by the conservative young poet Sajanikanta Das, who supported and instigated the conservative predisposition of Tagore for a long time. Apparently, Das was extremely critical of Marxian and Freudian thought for what he considered their

⁶Tagore reiterated the same point in an allusion to psychoanalysis in one of the Hibbert Lectures—entitled 'The music maker'—delivered in Oxford in May 1930, and published later on as *The religion of man* (1931a, p. 71).

bad effects on contemporary Bengali literature; and he often appealed to Tagore for words in support of his viewpoint. It would be wrong to assume from this, however, that Das was opposed to psychoanalysis *per se*. He was only but thoroughly opposed to much of what some of the poets of his time wrote. This explains why Das at once condemned psychoanalysis for vulgarising modern Bengali literature, and invited Rangin Haldar in 1928 to explain in *Shanibarar Chithi* why modern Bengali literature, especially in its vulgarity, was not psychoanalytical at all! (1928a). The decade-long Tagore–Das dialogue on these issues that lingered on until Tagore's death, therefore, is far more problematic than it looks, especially when set against the hint of a favourable transformation in Das himself around 1940, as suggested both in his autobiography (1977) and in Jagadish Bhattacharya's *Rabindranath O Sajanikanta* (1973).

Tagore had started to read the works of Freud sometime around 1938–9, doing so, most probably, in order to understand a subject that Amiya Chakravarty, whom Tagore loved and admired a great deal all his life, refused to ignore as a poet. Tagore and Chakravarty shared a very strong bond that was initiated around 1917, when Chakravarty was 16 and Tagore 56, and continued until the death of Tagore. Deeply disturbed by the suicide of his bright elder brother Arun, young Chakravarty had sought solace from Tagore, who had gone through a similar experience himself at the age of 23 when Kadambari Devi, his favourite sister-in-law, had committed suicide. Between 1921 and 1933, Tagore assigned important responsibilities to young Chakravarty at Visva Bharati, the newly founded university, made him his literary Secretary, and they toured large parts of the world together. Tagore wrote at least five poems on the young man; and the two poets exchanged over 200 letters between them. The pain felt by both when Chakravarty left for Oxford to study for his Ph.D. in 1933 is a powerful indicator of the dynamics of the bonding in question.

During his stay in Oxford, Chakravarty started to write a new type of poetry under the strong influence of Spender and Auden who, as we know, had been influenced by Marx and Freud since the nineteen twenties. Notably, Chakravarty had met both the English poets more than once. As for Tagore, he could, albeit problematically, relate to modern European literature as a reader even in 1927. In his article 'Sahitya Dharma' for instance, Tagore both condemned modern European literature for 'outraging the modesty of the Muse' and for producing a 'confused uproar', and condoned these flaws in view of the general respect for science in Europe and the horrid experiences of war to which the Europeans were subjected. It is perhaps noteworthy that he described the same elements in contemporary Bengali literature as 'borrowed and artificial shamelessness' and 'inexplicable/irrational confusion' (1927b, pp. 174–5). By 1933, however, Tagore had estranged himself almost completely from 'post-war' European literature, ostensibly owing to its obscurity. One of Chakravarty's major achievements is that, between 1933 and 1937, he painstakingly made copies of poems and other works available to Tagore from Oxford, familiarised him with the works of Havelock Ellis, Eliot, Joyce, Masfield, Yeats, Spender, Huxley, Auden, Day Lewis, MacNeice and others, raised questions and evoked new ideas in Tagore through his letters, and thus helped Tagore to change his opinion on 'modern' European literature. In 1938, soon after his return to India, Chakravarty published many of his 'Freudian' and 'Marxian' poems in *Khasda* [Draft].

It is obvious that Chakravarty took certain Freudian and Marxian principles seriously as a poet. More to the point is that, around this time and possibly for the first time, Tagore considered it necessary to read the primary texts by Freud, Jung and Adler. Nanda Gopal Sengupta, who had joined Visva Bharati university as a professor and who also worked as editor of Tagore's works, both on Tagore's request, and who, moreover, had become private tutor in the Tagore household a little later, was able to observe Tagore from close quarters

between 1937 and early 1939. In his book, Sengupta described Tagore's involvement with psychoanalysis as he saw it as follows:

Towards the end of his life Tagore's interest was mainly centred on studying science. He also read a great deal on experimental psychology. I saw him reading and marking the works of Freud, Adler and Jung! He was also keen to write something on psychoanalytical theory—which he could not manage to do in the end. He had entrusted Professor Benoy Gopal Ray of Visva Bharati university [later, after Sengupta had joined *Yugantar*] to write on the subject in a simple language, just as he had entrusted Rathindranath to write on life science. The excellent essay by Rathindranath has recently appeared in the form of a book. I published Benoy Ray's work serially in [the newspaper] *Yugantar* [New Epoch], perhaps it has not been published in book form (1958, p. 44).

The withering away of Tagore's resistance to psychoanalysis and the process leading to his recognition of its worth is a complicated matter. It roughly started to take shape when Tagore was in Mongpu between 12 September and the second week of November 1939. One day Tagore picked up a poem by Chakravarty called 'Chetan Shyakra' [Consciousness, the Goldsmith] that he had already read in the past. This time, Tagore not only liked the poem very much and wrote a long letter to the poet to let him know of his reaction, but he also felt compelled to begin to revise his opinion of Freudian thought. He elaborately explained in this letter to Chakravarty dated 22 October 1939, why repressed material from the author's unconscious could be used in literature if it served a special artistic purpose. Most probably, his reading of Freud had sensitised him to react in the way he did to this poem.⁷ Here is an excerpt from Tagore's letter:

This poem of yours is an excellent example of modern poetry. The kind of poetry that appears simple owing to the poet's whimsical relaxation is worthless stuff, but that which is truly simple is often the hardest to accomplish. In this poem of yours that impossible simplicity has appeared in the form of an effortless realization.

Since I am staying in the mountains, a simile pertaining to the mountains is crossing my mind. The tinge of blueness above the far-away mountain peaks reveals a bright white fountain making its journey towards the earth. It is clean, it is clear. Its scarf has been weaved by the subtle play of light and shadow. The music of the flowing water cannot be heard from afar but the unheard joy of its rushing forth reaches the mind. Here I find in the form of a symbol the far off, ancient mode of our own compositions. I have savoured its offerings for a long time, I have also offered some myself, do not ignore it. For, if the religion of poetry is to impart aesthetic enjoyment to the readers, then one must accept the validity of this form of aesthetic enjoyment too. But then, it must not end there. The same fountain descends upon the plain lands and becomes colourful after mixing with a bizarre catalogue of things. So many broken, distorted and detached things it picks up and carries along with it in the course of its flow; so many noises combine themselves with its murmur, with no regard for similarity of tone, perhaps even the washerman's donkey lets out a loud bray standing on its bank . . . It incorporates everything while flowing on. Nothing resists it totally; triviality mocks it but does not oppose it . . . In this muddy deluge, sprinkling muddy water towards the sky, let the verse of the new poets dance effortlessly like an unclothed child. Footnote: I would like to say something on the modern situation; if I get the time for it I will (1974, pp. 364–6).

Albeit along an oblique path, Tagore had allowed his own poetry to be informed by psychoanalysis a month or so later. Towards the end of his stay at Mongpu, possibly in November 1939, Tagore, encouraged by Das, started to experiment with a kind of poetry that flowed from his

⁷Notably, Tagore's letter to Chakravarty in question was written within a month of Freud's death on 23 September 1939.

mind more or less uninhibited by any restriction or effort. These poems usually consisted of short and absurd lines worked out backwards from the rhyming words in terms of a metre. Initially Tagore ostensibly considered these a kind of madness and did not appear to take any of it seriously. In a similar vein, on 21 November 1939, Tagore drew a cartoon of a four-legged animal standing on two legs atop the head of an unconcerned bird, as a gift for Sajanikanta Das. He called it '*Sahitye Abachetan Chitter Srishti*' [Creation of the unconscious mind in literature] and promised Das a satirical poem that would similarly bring out the absurdity of all such works. Das published the cartoon together with one of Tagore's 'meaningless' verses in his journal in November 1939. By early 1940, however, Tagore regarded these very poems as extremely special in his lecture to the students at Visva Bharati (2000, pp. 474–5). No wonder, he had continued to compose them throughout the 1940s, and, instead of discarding them, published most of them in his last collection of poems, *Chhada* [Verse] (1941).

Whereas Das was ecstatic about the cartoon, Chakravarty was strongly displeased with both the pieces. He disagreed with Tagore on the manner in which the latter had criticised the misuse of psychoanalytical principles in literature and asked if he could dedicate his forthcoming collection of poems containing pieces concerning the unconscious mind, to him:

In *Shanibarar Chithi* you have laughed at the excessive excitement over the unconscious mind in your poem. How enjoyable the poem has been is difficult to say, but if someone claims citing it that you have meant to say that there was no place for this new type of poetry painted by the colours of the unconscious mind, I will never accept it. That is because you have liked many modern English poems in which aspects of the colourfully glowing submerged consciousness have partly made themselves manifest in unique forms. What appears asymmetrical to the superficial glance has, under the spell of a deep impulse, or, captured by the environ of a strange experience, led us to a deeper symmetry in your own collection [of short prose-pieces] *Lipika* [Sketches] and in other works. In a number of your songs and paintings, the play of a consciousness beyond emancipation is evident, whose manners transcend the confines of rule-abiding art and thus produce a special flavour. Experiments with it have been going on in many forms but due to the lack of an inner symmetry, the results have often been laughable, which is what you have pointed at in this issue's sketch and verse. The outsiders are misunderstanding it (Guha, 1995, pp. 275–6).

This letter helped Tagore overcome his last hindrance of habit. On 27 November, he replied:

There is no reason to feel abashed about dedicating your new book of poems to me. Behind every creation there is the interplay of consciousness and the unconscious. While painting a picture I find the shape of a line suddenly emerging from the depths of the un-thought—the thinking mind thereafter takes possession of it. I am trying to understand the mystery of the expression of poetry in the modern mind—if its appearance is not artificial then we will have to accept it—it would be a mistake to regard the hindrance of habit as insurmountable (1974, p. 324).

Most probably in late 1939 itself, Tagore had entrusted Ray, the young lecturer in Philosophy at Visva Bharati, to write on psychoanalysis as mentioned by Sengupta. Tagore himself had even corrected Ray's manuscripts. But, above all, in 1940, Tagore wrote his most comprehensive final essay on modern Bengali poetry, entitled '*Nabajuger Kabya*' [The poetry of the new age]. In this essay, Tagore explained what he meant by 'modern poetry' in detail, almost exclusively in terms of elaborate comments on what part psychoanalysis should and did play in it, and illustrated his observations with selections from the two collections by Chakravarty entitled *Khasda* and *Ekmatho* [A fistful]. Tagore's final assessment of psychoanalysis must have evolved gradually in course of late 1939 and early 1940, for we know that he had intended to write on psychoanalytical theory sometime in late 1939, had expressed his wish to write on the 'modern

situation' in October, had shown interest in 'the mystery of the expression of poetry in the modern mind' in November, and, had completed 'Nabajuger Kabya' in March–April the following year. This also explains why Tagore never had the reason at any point thereafter to change his views on the matter. In 'Nabajuger Kabya', he wrote:

I have heard that today's poetry is based on the theory of the unconscious. The games played by the unconscious mind are incoherent and disjointed. The part of the mind that makes our expressions meaningful is largely inactive there. Meaningfulness brings universal recognition, but where the ties of meaning have been snapped the mind of each individual travels along an eccentric path of his own, the road maps of which are likely to be confusing.

But since art is not science, its essence is earnestly unique. In order to derive enjoyment from it, one has to make the special effort to go to its premises. It does not subscribe to any general theory, as does science.

This specialness of the poet or the artist, which in English is termed uniqueness, is undoubtedly founded upon the unconscious mind. Founded upon, yes; but if everything is regarded as products of unconscious activities then we are left with nothing but dreams.

However, a dream is not an entirely fuzzy thing either. Dreams are like heads of scattered landmasses projecting upwards in a flooded field. One of the proofs that all those unexpected dream-scenes do haunt the mind in a special way is the nursery rhyme. Outliving much of the laboured literature, these have survived still. They are made up of fantastic dreams and yet they provide enjoyment—or else human babies would not have responded to them.

The little boy went fishing along the bank of the river of cheese
The frog took away his fishing rod, the kite snatched his fish.

It is not easy to construct a dream-image such as this. All the images in it are absurd, but images they truly are. Perhaps their striking brightness is owing to their very meaningfulness. The support of meaning is not required here . . . A little boy is fishing in a river, and in this occupation he is unlawfully obstructed by two creatures—I can clearly see it, it is in terms of this that it imparts enjoyment.

The disjointed structure of unconscious thoughts may be employed in poetry if its employment is appropriate; if the process helps create a special picture, or imparts a special form of enjoyment. Such speciality in poetry cannot be overlooked.

Following the spread of Freudian psychology, the Western world seems to have discovered a mine [of knowledge]. Literature can no longer help being influenced by it. These unexpressed materials lying buried have been used for different kinds of expressions. It is not that unconscious imagination had no part to play in poetry written before, but that it played its part as if from the background. Now it has appeared manifestly on the stage. One must assume that such manifestation has a particular purpose, a particular contribution to make, otherwise one must regard it as a nuisance; I do not have the courage to level an allegation of that magnitude against the present age (1974, Appendix, pp. 361–3).

'Contrary to the usual course of development', wrote Jawaharlal Nehru on Tagore in *The discovery of India*, 'as he grew older he became more radical in his outlook and views'. Tagore's admiration for the Russian Revolution, his rejection of narrow nationalism and his general concern for broader humanitarian issues are cited in support of the argument ([1946] 1982, p. 340). Though not touched upon by Nehru, Freudian thought, too, is a case in point. Around the time 'Nabajuger Kabya' was written, on 27 and 28 March to be precise, Tagore wrote at least two poems in which references to certain fundamental aspects of psychoanalysis seem to be pa-

tent. These are 'Aspashta' [Unclear] and 'Rater Gadi' [literally, The night car], both published in April–May 1940 in the collection entitled *Nabajatak* [The new born]. It seems Tagore had already started to regard psychoanalysis as an activity that lent expression to and thus empowered the weak, mute and crippled thoughts imprisoned in the unconscious. Here are a few lines from the poem 'Aspashta' to give us an idea:

The pains that sway within the blood
 Beyond clear awareness
 Bubbles they are in the flow of thought
 Lacking fixed identity.
 The morning light that fills the sky
 Will wipe this picture out,
 Its mockery will nullify
 The deception of being unconscious.
 Whatever survives within the net
 Of the conscious mind,
 In this vast denseness, Creation
 Will sign and certify.
 Yet some obsessions, some mistakes
 Of their waking author
 Will stain the fabric of his life
 Colouring line on line.
 In life therefore the night's bequest
 Enfolds the works of day
 And in the gaps of labouring thought
 Are scattered everywhere.
 What intelligence mocks as false
 That is the root of truth
 The sap it secretly impels
 Flows into flower and fruit.
 Beyond sense, the senseless
 Casts its coloured shade—
 Reality forges shackles,
 Illusion makes our toys
 (1983, pp. 702–3).

In April–May itself, Tagore wrote the Preface to *Chokher Bali* [literally, Eye sore] (1902) on the occasion of its publication as part of his complete works. Therein he described the technique he had adopted for the novel as 'analytical', both in material and in method:

The story constituting *Chokher Bali* has been made intense by the jolt it is given from within by a mother's jealousy. This jealousy allowed Mahendra's [the son's] vice to expose its tooth and claw in a way that a normal situation would not have allowed it to. As if the doors of the cages had been opened, and out came the ferocious events without any restraint. The method followed in literature of the new era is not one of providing a chronological description of events, but of revealing the innermost story to the reader with the help of analysis. This procedure made itself manifest in *Chokher Bali* (1985, p. 193).

This is the first of Tagore's retrospective descriptions of some of his major earlier works as 'analytical' or 'psychoanalytical'.

On 13 November, Tagore wrote poem 9 for the collection *Rogshajjaye* [On the sick-bed], in which he wished to see repressed material freed from the unconscious and thus rendered complete and proper; and, significantly, the mystery of nature revealed to man in the process:

O ancient dark
 Today in the gloom pervading my illness
 I view in my mind
 In the endless darkness of the first hour
 You sit in creative meditation
 How terribly alone,
 Mute and blind.
 I witnessed today in the eternal sky
 The effort of laboured composition in a sick body.
 The cripple cries from the depths of sleep:
 The craving for self-expression flames secretly
 From the molten iron womb, in tongues of fire
 Your fingers, unconscious
 Weave the illusion of an indistinct art;
 From the primordial womb of the ocean
 Huge masses of dreams
 Deformed, incomplete
 Rise suddenly in swelling motion.
 They wait in the dark
 To receive from time's right hand
 A finished body.
 Hateful ugliness will take harmonious form
 In the new light of the sun.
 The idol-maker shall chant the invocation
 The Almighty's secret purpose shall gradually be revealed
 (1983, pp. 794–5).

In November–December, Tagore wrote the Preface to *Nouka Dubi* [The wreck] (1906), describing its technique of narration as ‘*manobikalanmulak*’, or ‘psychoanalytical’, going by Tagore’s own translation of the word (1936, p. 403; see also Devi, 1943, p. 79). The Prefaces to *Chokher Bali* and *Nouka Dubi* together reiterate Tagore’s point regarding the prevalent demand on literary composition:

The demand of the times has changed. These days the curiosity about stories has become psychoanalytical [*manobikalanmulak*]. The weaving of incidents has become redundant. Therefore, in order to explore the mystery of the mind in an unusual state, a grave mistake was allowed to inflate the lives of the hero and the heroine—extremely cruel, and yet evoking our curiosity. The ultimate psychological question associated with it is, does the root of the faith of our women in the everlastingness of her relationship with her husband lie deep enough for her to disdainfully tear apart the net of her first love based on unconsciousness? But such questions do not have a universal answer (1985, p. 347).

Notably, the fact that there was no one answer to the question did not deter Tagore from creating and exploring an instance in which the answer was a categorical ‘Yes’.

On 5 January 1941, Tagore wrote the untitled introductory verse for the collection *Chhada*, an excerpt from which is as follows:

From the outside I view
 A rule-enclosed meaning
 What mystery lies within it
 No one knows a thing.
 What are these in fancy's flow
 Sinking and rising
 What they were they answered not
 From whence they were arriving
 ([1941] 1983, pp. 873–4).

Finally, on 4 February, a few months before his death on 7 August 1941, Tagore wrote the following poem for the collection entitled *Aragya* [Recovery], which contains his final assessment of Freudian thought in the form of a tribute to its less valued offerings to literature:

The metrical web I have learnt to weave in speech
 That web entraps
 What had remained elusive,
 Evading conscious awareness
 Hidden in mind's depths.
 I want to bind it with a name, but it refuses
 The name's identity
 If it has a value
 That value is revealed through use
 Day by day.
 Though sudden recognition may beguile
 Its wonder, it has no place
 In human habitation: for a while it remains
 Scattered on the shores of the mind
 Nourished in secret, yet passing into the sand each day
 At the insult of exposure.
 Insignificant in the marketplace, this unwanted withered indigence
 From time to time has offered the gift of the unfamous
 To literature's great island of language
 Like a lifeless coral
 ([1941] 1983, p. 837).

Having arrived at the end of the survey, we must now address the most important question, namely, did Freud's works influence Tagore the author in any way? With regard to *Chaturanga*, or parts of it, until the source of Tagore's supposed knowledge of psychoanalysis evident in his discussion with Nag is known, nothing definitive can be said one way or the other. As for *Chokher Bali* and *Nouka Dubi*, in spite of Tagore's description of these novels as 'analytical' and 'psychoanalytical' respectively, Freudian thought could not have influenced their composition at all. There are two main reasons for this. First, in the several letters that Tagore wrote to different persons about these novels during or shortly after their composition, there is no mention of the term '*manobikalanmulak*', nor any statement warranting that description.⁸ Notably, Tagore had probably coined the term '*manobikalan*' in 1927, but certainly not before the mid-1920s.⁹ And second, *Binodini* [Name of the heroine], or ur-*Chokher Bali*, had been completed way back in 1899, the year Freud's first psychoanalytical work, *Die Traumdeutung* [The interpretation of dreams], which sold a meager 351 copies in the first six years, was published.

⁸These letters, written to Pramatha Nath Sen and others, may be found in Prasanta Kumar Pal (1988, 1990), and in Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay (1936).

⁹From Haldar's article (1928a) we know that the word *manobikalan* had become reasonably well known in Calcutta by 1928; also that the word 'psychoanalysis' used to be translated most generally as '*manobishleshan*' until Girindrasekhar Bose, with the help of Jogesh Chandra Roy, translated the word as '*Manobyakaran*'. Later on, Bose changed it to '*manosamikshan*' (see also Biswas, 1971). As for the time of the coinage, one may argue as follows: from his book *Bangla Shabdattwa* [Bengali linguistics] it appears that whenever Tagore had to use a foreign word, he preferred to coin a Bengali equivalent of it instead of using the word untranslated, or an unsuitable translation that was available (1936, 1974). Since Tagore appears to have used the word 'psychoanalysis' (in English) in a Bengali discourse for the first time when he spoke to Sarkar in 1926, it seems likely that Tagore had started to look for a Bengali equivalent around that time, and found it sometime around 1928. But the more interesting fact is that he almost never used the word *manobikalan* right up to late 1931, preferring the word 'psychoanalysis' itself in his Bengali discourses. However, from 1938, that is to say more than a decade after he had actually coined the term, Tagore started to use it with amazing frequency. This gives us the impression that Tagore's acceptance of this particular coinage of his was at once delayed and drastic, which is but a reflection of his changing notion of psychoanalysis itself.

Nonetheless, the use of the equivalent term for 'psychoanalytical' in this case brings out the influence of Freud on the manner in which Tagore read some of his own evidently non-psychoanalytical literary works around this time. Moreover, the introductory verse to *Chhada* indicates that Tagore's sudden and excessive penchant for rhyme was partly due to his preoccupation with his own 'preconscious' mind. In addition to that, Tagore did write in favour of releasing, empowering or realising certain types of repressed material in some of the poems written, in sickness or in health, in the final years of his life, including a glowing tribute to the unconscious mind in one of his very last poems. With regard to the contents of these poems in particular, especially against the corresponding backdrop of his revised opinion of psychoanalysis, it seems likely that Tagore was actively concerned with, if not inspired by, Freudian thought.

By the end of August 1940, Tagore had completed one of his last short stories entitled 'Laboretori' [The laboratory], for the collection *Teen Sangi* [The three companions] (December 1940). The story is about the construction of a huge state-of-the-art laboratory, single-handedly, by a scientist and businessman named Nandakishore, and especially the manner in which his radically dutiful widow, Sohini, deals with the threats to the survival of this symbol of her late husband's ideals from fraudulent relatives, cunning people, and her beautiful and promiscuous daughter Nilima. But the immediate problem in the story concerns a brilliant young doctor of science named Rebati, who is chosen by Sohini to be the director of the laboratory, and who does not have the courage to resist being manipulated by his dangerously pragmatic boss, her seductive and self-seeking daughter, and his orthodox, superstitious, old paternal aunt, all at once. It is irreverently established in terms of the ending of the story that, of these three women, each of whom had radically different expectations of Rebati, it was his aunt he feared and who influenced his decisions the most. In the penultimate line of the story the readers are told that her shadow fell on the wall and the words, 'Rebi, come away', were heard. Rebati, responding like a timid schoolboy, at once follows his aunt out of Sohini's premises presumably forever.

Some of the important threads of the story seem to have rich psychoanalytical implications or resonances. The story of Nilima, for instance, hinges on her suspension throughout the narrative in a state of ironic ignorance as to who her biological father was. Unlike in Sophocles, Nilima's oedipal situation is extended to the readers as well. The irony is diffused by Sohini, towards the very end, with the revelation that Nandakishore was not Nilima's biological father! The most important character from our point of view, however, is Professor Chowdhury, who is interested in several branches of science—such as chemistry, botany, engineering, physics and mathematics—as well as in poetry and psychology. In course of his discussions with Sohini, one of the topics often taken up is Rebati's fear of his aunt and his fear of other women as a consequence. Chowdhury describes it as a 'matriarchy' that exists not in society but in the 'pulse of Indian men'. He reiterates this concept several times in the story and consistently speaks of or alludes to Rebati as a grown-up infant. Chowdhury's concept of 'matriarchy' with regard to Rebati in particular is strongly reminiscent of the mother-complexes encountered in psychoanalysis; and, as such, Chowdhury begins to resemble the figure of an analyst. Extremely significant, too, is the form of Chowdhury's lengthy discussions with Sohini that make up more than half of this long short story. The two of them are, almost always, engaged in long *one-on-one* discussions somewhat akin to the discourse of the analysand and the analyst. Notably, Sohini, whose own character represents the partial sublimation of erotic and destructive impulses, regards these discussions as a unique space that enable her to express the truth about herself freely and fearlessly. For example, in reply to Chowdhury's remark: 'Bravo! What courage you have to tell the truth', Sohini replies: 'It is easy to speak the truth to

someone who enables the truth to come out of you. You are so simple, so true.’ The same point is reiterated in course of a subsequent session: ‘Look, Professor, you are that special friend of mine to whom I can speak without any hesitation about the wickedness that smears my character. When the mind gets a clear outlet to reveal the tarnished side of the character, it gives a sigh of relief.’ To this Chowdhury replies: ‘For those who can see the complete picture, there is no need to suppress the truth. Only half-truth is a shameful thing. It is in our nature to see things in their totality. We are scientists’ (Tagore, 1988, p. 771). Written four months after the completion of ‘Nabajuger Kabya’ and three months before the composition of poem 9 of *Rogshajjaye*, part of the form and almost every important constituent of the content of this story may have been influenced by the clinical discourses and the Oedipus complex described by Freud.

Translations of summary

Rabindranath Tagore und Freudianisches Denken. Der Autor dieses Artikels lenkt unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf den Begriff der Psychoanalyse des indischen Dichters und Philosophens Rabindranath Tagore. Der Autor konzentriert sich auf die Zeit zwischen 1926 und seinem Tod 1941, in der Tagore nicht nur Freud getroffen hat, sondern auch zu mehreren Personen über Psychoanalyse gesprochen hat. Er hat eine Reihe von Archivmaterial ausgegraben, hauptsächlich in bengalisch, und das meiste davon zum ersten Mal ins englische übersetzt, um zu zeigen, wie sich Tagores Meinung allmählich von starker Kritik und einer fast völligen Ablehnung zu Anerkennung vor allem in ihrem Gebrauch in Literatur und Literaturkritik veränderte. Der Autor identifizierte auch eine Reihe von literarischen Arbeiten, sowohl Prosa als auch Poesie aus den letzten Lebensjahren Tagores und versuchte, das Ausmass des Einfluss von Freudianischen Denken auf die Komposition dieser zu dokumentieren. Kurz gefasst, der Autor befasste sich mit einem bedeutenden interdisziplinären Bereich, der weder in Indien noch im Ausland betrachtet worden war.

Rabindranath Tagore y el pensamiento freudiano. El autor de este documento nos invita a considerar la noción del psicoanálisis del poeta y filósofo de la India, Rabindranath Tagore. Concentrándose en el período entre 1926 y la muerte de Tagore en 1941, intervalo en el que no sólo conoció a Freud sino que le habló a varias personas del psicoanálisis, el autor ha desenterrado gran cantidad de material de archivo, casi todo en bengalí, y ha traducido la mayor parte de éste al inglés por primera vez, para mostrar cómo cambio gradualmente la opinión de Tagore sobre el pensamiento freudiano, yendo de una crítica severa y un casi total rechazo, al aprecio, en especial relativo a su buena utilización en la literatura y la crítica literaria. El autor también identificó un número de obras literarias, tanto de prosa como de verso, de los últimos años de la vida de Tagore, e intentó documentar qué tanta influencia tuvo el pensamiento freudiano en su composición. En resumen, el autor se ha ocupado de un área interdisciplinaria significativa, que no había sido considerada ni en la India ni el extranjero.

Rabindranath Tagore et la pensée freudienne. L'article se propose de présenter la conception de la psychanalyse du poète et philosophe indien Rabindranath Tagore. La période étudiée est celle entre 1926 et 1941, année de sa mort, période au cours de laquelle Tagore non seulement a rencontré Freud, mais s'est également entretenu avec diverses personnes à propos de la psychanalyse. L'auteur a eu accès à de nombreux documents d'archives, essentiellement à Bengale, et en a traduit la plupart pour la première fois en anglais, afin de montrer la façon dont l'opinion de Tagore sur la pensée freudienne a progressivement évolué d'une position très critique, proche du rejet total, vers une certaine appréciation, en particulier pour son utilité en littérature et en critique littéraire. Par ailleurs, l'auteur examine un certain nombre d'oeuvres littéraires, aussi bien en prose qu'en vers, appartenant à la dernière période de la vie de Tagore, et essaie d'y repérer d'extension de l'influence de la pensée freudienne dans leur composition. Au total, le travail de l'auteur se situe essentiellement à un niveau interdisciplinaire, qui n'avait pas encore été étudié en Inde ou à l'étranger.

Rabindranath Tagore e il pensiero freudiano. L'autore dell'articolo sottopone alla nostra attenzione l'idea che il poeta e filosofo indiano Rabindranath Tagore aveva della psicanalisi. Concentrandosi sugli anni che vanno dal 1926 al 1941, quello della sua morte, un periodo nel quale Tagore non solo incontrò Freud, ma parlò anche di psicoanalisi con molti suoi interlocutori, l'autore ha riportato alla luce una quantità di materiali d'archivio, scritti soprattutto in bengali, e per la prima volta ne ha tradotta la maggior parte in inglese. Questo per dimostrare come l'opinione di Tagore sul pensiero freudiano si sia gradualmente trasformata dalla critica

severa e dal quasi totale rifiuto al giudizio positivo, specialmente sul buon uso fattone nei campi della letteratura e della critica letteraria. L'autore ha inoltre individuato una quantità di opere in prosa e in poesia degli ultimi anni di Tagore mediante le quali egli cerca di documentare l'entità dell'influsso del pensiero freudiano sulla loro composizione. In breve, egli ha affrontato una significativa area interdisciplinare mai precedentemente esplorata né in India né altrove.

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