

**SUDHIR KAKAR. THE INNER WORLD: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY  
OF CHILDHOOD AND SOCIETY IN INDIA.  
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Sudhir Kakar is one of the foremost psychoanalysts and an eminent scholar of twenty first century. His path-breaking text- *The Inner World*, widely upheld as the finest piece of psycho-mythological studies, is an avant-garde approach to comprehend the complex Indian ethos in a multilayered Indian society. As the author himself asserts, this scholarly text is a 'journey into Indian childhood to discover the sources of Indian Hindu identity' which itself was a major enterprise. The quality of amazement of this text lies in fact that it is written by an Indian analyst whose intimate knowledge of Western psycho-analytic systems and his close examination and lived experience of Indian anthropology, mythology, folk tales, sociological studies and clinical observations form the primary part of it. This study lays greater emphasis on role of culture in the shaping of collective idea of personality. Hence, the author himself admits that this text interacts with a person's 'feelings, impulses, wishes and fantasies ... the dynamic content of the inner world . . . occupying the deepest reaches of the psyche'. ("Introduction" to *The Inner World*: 9)

Speaking about its formative aspects, it begins with an astounding introductory remark by the analyst following beautifully written chapter entitled as the "Hindu World Image." It is a deeply reasoned examination of a subject

full of pitfalls, since it seeks to interpret (but does so remarkably and successfully) concepts like *moksha*, *vidya* and *avidya*, *maya*, *chitta*, etc., in modern scientific terms. The interpretation of these terms in terms of modern (Western) psychoanalysis turns this work into an important bridge between cultures and a source of clearer understanding of concepts and attitudes which have so far been obscure. For instance, a passage on the presence of the guru to guide and monitor in terms of Indian philosophy of 'know the I' is noteworthy. Here, the analyst clarifies that the guru's function is not to help his disciple strengthen one's ego's autonomy or to enlarge its domain through insights into the hidden reaches of the mind. Rather, given the goal of calming "*chitta*" and the gradual merging of the ego and the (transformed) id, the guru's role in *pratyahara* is to sanction and facilitate this process of integration along with keeping a watchful eye on the seeker's ego lest it be prematurely engulfed. The presence of the guru provides the necessary support against the danger of psychotic breakdown. Unlike the alert, sanctioning support conveyed in words in most Western psycho-therapies, the guru's support is given through "look, touch and silence-the language of the *chitta*". This is an 'intimate and personal approach.' (*The Inner World*: 31)

This deeply personalized relationship between guru and seeker is in a certain sense a mother-child dependence role as an adult transference syndrome, which is examined in great detail later in the book. The guru represents the power to transcend 'self'. To the reviewer this would appear to be a better protection against breakdown than the Freudian analysis which seeks to discover the roots of psychosis, a process which in many patients, causes weakening of the ego, without the countervailing support needed to assume a stronger identity.

According to the experts, fear in psychoanalysis is determined by two inescapable facts of life: human imagination and dependence. However, it is required to note that in the Western world, the adulthood gets shaped by myriad and diversified influences while in India, with caste, clan and joint family, the influences are highly structured and categorized. Hindu culture, as the author asserts, has consistently emphasized that as long as a person stays true to one's ground plan of life and fulfils what society and one's family social obligation imposes on one's own special life work, s/he is on the right path for ultimate release represented in the goal of attaining *moksha*. To find the right path being difficult, Hindu ethic is sufficiently flexible to recognize that a right action for the individual depends upon the culture in which s/he is born on one's own efforts in previous lives. These provide the individual with an innate 'psycho-biological' heritage.

The 'examination of early childhood influences' occupies the major part of the next two chapters in which two observations are of

paramount importance: the dominant role of motherhood in India and the bleak transition from mother protection to responsible adult male life for boys. A basic postulate of this part is based on its diverse yet inflexible structure which is deeply etched on the Hindu psyche. The analyst explains here that the basis of *ashrama dharma* is the clear-cut and widely understood stages of a life-cycle. He, further, clarifies that this does not influence all people born into Hinduism, in the collective subconscious of Indian psyche, these stages are considered desirable from childhood's lenient, permissive disciplines, an adolescent's obedience to solemnity of purpose and strict moral codes of behavior and, from a young adult householder's material responsibilities, to the final abandonment of the world and worldly cares in old age. The withdrawal from the world of material requirements and duties is supposed to take place gradually leading to total renunciation to the point of real *samnyas* and wandering in search of the Ultimate. But the seeds of this wisdom get sown by the precept and the rituals which Hindu life is interlarded from earliest infancy. Interestingly enough, none of this is imparted by trained preceptors, so much as by women's unique role as progenitors. The impact of such a strongly structured society upon the individual mind is manifest to Indian psycho-therapists in the ready acceptance of many patients of the force of their specific *samskaras* (their inherited dispositions) as they are believed to be of many previous lives.

In the concluding chapters, the analyst attempts to unfold the spiritual layers of Indian psyche and explains the importance of religion in the identity formation of Hindu consciousness

with subtle references to the advent of modern sensitivity. The psychological cultural confrontation and neo-challenges are the core sub-theme of this part. The problem of analyst here however remains visible in his attempts of understanding the cultural aspects of Indian personality as the spectacle of modern Psychology transgresses its limit and

inadvertently enters into the domain of sociology.

Though, the book is charged as the “too brief for too much”, it is nicely written and can be considered as the first step to look into the deeper recesses of Indian psyche with a modern approach of psychoanalysis.