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Religious Imagery, Spiritual Practices, and Personal Destiny in Psychoanalytical Therapy with Hindu Women

It is only in recent decades that religious god images and spiritual practices have become acceptable subjects to be investigated in the Freudian psychoanalytic literature, in contrast to the neo-Freudian and Jungian literature. Freudian psychoanalytic writers such as Meissner, Rizzuto, and Symington have written books about the former; Coltart, Cooper, Eigen, Finn, Rubin, and Roland, among others, have written about the latter. To my knowledge, however, no one has written about patients where both god images and meditative or other spiritual practices are in clear evidence in the therapy. Perhaps this is due to most of the writers being Buddhist practitioners with patients similarly inclined where god images are usually not present in the Zen and Vipassana traditions.

If religious imagery and spiritual practices have gained credence in Freudian psychoanalysis only recently in its history, then personal destiny tied in to reincarnation, astrology, palmistry, and such have remained unwanted stepchildren in the psychoanalytic field. Yet, in six highly educated, professional Hindu women patients with advanced degrees, the issue of personal destiny, reincarnation, and the magic-cosmic world of astrology and such play a central role in their psychological makeup.

I shall use case vignettes from these Hindu women patients to discuss how god imagery, serious meditative and other spiritual practices, and personal destiny play important roles in the psychoanalytic therapy with them. I shall delineate the relationship of these to intense emotional conflicts that they have tried to resolve in the psychoanalytic work and to the transferences.

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