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**LEADERS, CELEBRITIES, AND THE HERO COMPLEX:
REMEMBERING SOUVIK RAYCHAUDHURI
by Brian D'Agostino**



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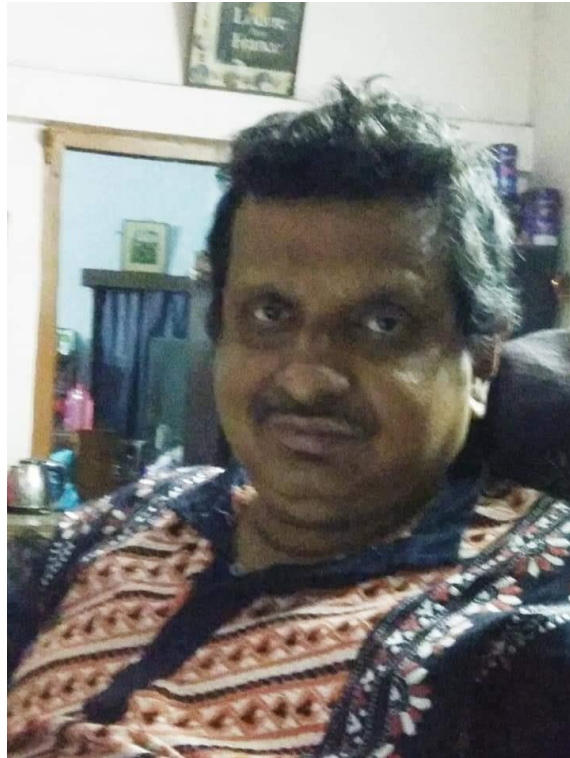
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LEADERS, CELEBRITIES, AND THE HERO COMPLEX: REMEMBERING SOUVIK RAYCHAUDHURI

by Brian D'Agostino

A dear Bengali friend of mine passed away on September 29th at the untimely age of 53, survived by his wife Keya, their six year old daughter Swachchhatoya, and a large extended family. Known affectionately as Rangan, Souvik Raychaudhuri was the son of Dr. Manas and Mrs. Sutapa Raychaudhuri, his father an eminent psychology professor and his mother a mathematics teacher in one of Kolkata's top secondary schools. His wife Keya Mukherjee is a graduate student in Environmental Science.



Bengali psychohistorian Souvik Raychaudhuri (1967-2020)

Souvik held a Ph.D. from the University of Calcutta, where he taught since 1998 in the Department of Psychology and mentored dozens of graduate students. His doctoral dissertation, published as *Partition Trauma, The Oedipal Rupture, Dreaming: The Cinematic Will of Ritwik Kumar Ghatak* (Papyrus, 2000), positioned him as a pioneer in the psychoanalytic exploration of Indian cinema. This work has much in common with the approach to film criticism later outlined by Trevor C. Pederson in *Psychoanalysis and Hidden Narrative in Film: Reading the Symptom* (2019).

Dr. Raychaudhuri published four articles in U.S. psychohistory venues:

- A Distant Mirror: Modi, Trump, and Pandemic Politics in an Authoritarian Age, *Clio's Psyche*, Vol. 27, No. 1 Fall 2020.
- Modi's "Digital India" and the Mother Goddess: Fantasy as Legitimation, *The Journal of Psychohistory* 46 (3) Winter 2019
- Fathering a Nation he Sacrificed his Sons, *Psychohistory News*, Winter 2016
- Modi's India: Authoritarianism or Democracy, *Psychohistory News*, Spring 2015

Reprints of these articles are available at <https://bdagostino.com/other-publications.php> and <https://www.psychohistory.us/archive.php> At the time of his death, Souvik was working on a book *Uttam Kumar: Psychobiography of a Matinee Icon*, which had been accepted for publication by Routledge. He asked me to write the preface, which I completed just one day before he died. In this current essay, I explore some of the psychohistorical themes that pervaded Dr. Raychaudhuri's work.

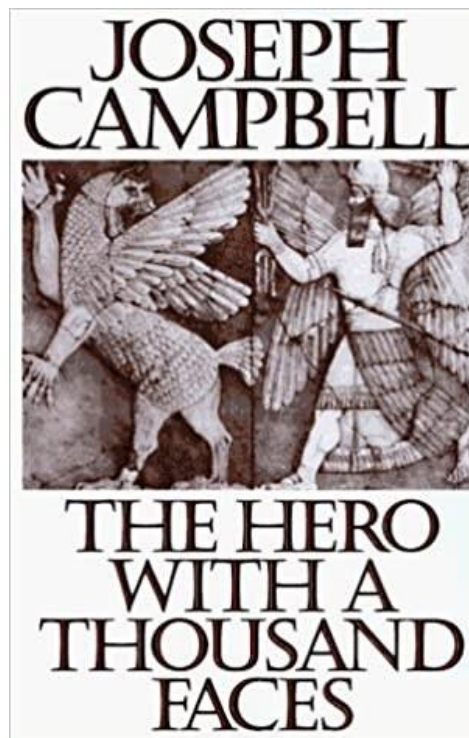
Combining politics and culture, Souvik's interests were rooted in the rich history of his native Kolkata and Bengal, home of Nobel Prize winners Rabindranath Tagore (1861—1941) and Amartya Sen (born 1933); legendary film director Satyajit Ray (1921—1992); physicist and polymath Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858—1937), and of numerous leaders of the Indian independence movement (1885-1947). Living in multicultural West Bengal, adjacent to Muslim Bangladesh and itself having a large Muslim minority, Dr. Raychaudhuri was keenly aware of recent persecution and scapegoating of Muslims and was an outspoken critic of Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist and authoritarian regime.

Souvik's writings in English listed above, which include an introduction to psychobiographical literature on Mohandas Gandhi and his sons, address the political side of his interests and research. I have provided links to these short articles and encourage anyone interested to read them for oneself. As for his interest in Bengali cinema, which he and his wife Keya shared, I hope Dr. Raychaudhuri's psychobiography of matinee idol Uttam Kumar was far enough along to be published posthumously. He was superbly qualified to undertake such a project—by his formidable knowledge of Bengali cinema, immersion in biographical sources on Uttam Kumar, and considerable reading in psychoanalytically informed cultural criticism.

The hero complex bridges Dr. Raychaudhuri's critique of authoritarian political leaders and his psychohistorical research on Uttam Kumar and other celebrities. Nationalist leaders today in Asia, Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the United States cultivate and receive the kind of adulation typically lavished on celebrities in entertainment and the performing arts. This phenomenon is in some ways a throw-back to an ancient cult, in which Cyrus, Alexander, and other charismatic rulers were revered as gods. Similar dynamics upheld the power of divinely ordained kings and queens throughout the world for centuries.

That said, the era of celebrity leaders really begins in earnest with radio, motion pictures, and other mass communications, which made figures as diverse as Mohandas Gandhi, Adolph Hitler and Margaret Thatcher household names for billions. Entertainment and the performing arts were simultaneously transformed by the new media, propelling the careers of Jean Gabin, Judy Garland, Uttam Kumar and many more. What light does psychohistory shed on this hero complex, past and present?

For purposes of this essay, let us define psychohistory broadly to include any research that examines the role of unconscious processes in history, society, and culture. Topics that bear especially on the hero complex include Jungian archetypes and large group trauma. Regarding the former, Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* and Eric Neumann's *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, both published in 1949, remain highly relevant. As for large group trauma, I have in mind the more recent work of Vamik Volkan, as well as research by Michael A. Milburn and Sheree D. Conrad, summarized in their 2016 book *Raised to Rage: The Politics of Anger and the Roots of Authoritarianism*. Also relevant here is early relational trauma, its intergenerational transmission, and its manifestation in adult systems of subjugation (Shaw, 2014).



With conceptual tools drawn from this literature, we are equipped to tackle an obvious problem raised by my introductory sketch of the hero complex: does it really make sense to lump together Mohandas Gandhi and Adolph Hitler as “celebrity leaders?” Related to this question, does Uttam Kamar belong in the same category as John Wayne? Clearly, identifying someone as a celebrity with a cult following is only the beginning of an adequate typology. Celebrities vary greatly and we need to define further dimensions that characterize them.

Here the work of Vamik Volkan proves especially helpful (Castelloe, 2020; Hamburger, Volkan, and Hancheva, 2020; Volkan, 2013). Volkan probes the identities of large groups, such as ethnic, national, and religious communities. He examines the role of pivotal historical traumas in the construction of such identities, and the way that leaders either exacerbate the traumas and exploit them for their own purposes or contribute to the healing process. German defeat in World War I, for example, was a large group trauma that Hitler exploited to mobilize national sentiment for genocide and war. British colonialism created a comparable trauma for Hindus and Muslims alike, but the response of Mohandas Gandhi was to mobilize Indians around a non-violent movement of liberation, independence, and solidarity that could contribute to national healing.

These examples of Hitler and Gandhi illustrate the poles of a continuum along which all charismatic leaders can be arrayed. The two cases also illustrate a typical aspect of large group trauma: the psychology of humiliation (Chowdhury, et al, 2019; Lindner, 2006; 2009) and the divergent responses to it that leaders can provide. Souvik was interested in all of this, and also in the childhood relational trauma that animate individual and group psychopathology (Shaw, 2014; Milburn and Conrad, 2016). These topics merit in-depth discussion but can only be mentioned in this short essay.

Related to the typology of destructive and healing leaders is what Eric Neumann (1949/1990) called the Old and New Ethics. By “Old Ethic,” he meant the authoritarian cult, whether of a tribal shaman, a great religious seer such as Jesus or Muhammad, or a modern political dictator or would-be dictator. In such social systems, the leader’s personal experience of a higher reality and charismatic communication of that vision to his devotees form the basis of the community. The devotees’ own experience of the higher reality is mediated or validated by the leader, his teachings, and his duly authorized delegates. By contrast, the New Ethic is one in which the leader empowers his or her followers to experience the higher reality for themselves. Neumann viewed the psychoanalytic and depth psychology movements as exemplary of the New Ethic.

As in the case of destructive and healing leaders, Neumann’s Old and New Ethics are not a dichotomy but form a continuum. Some religious communities, for example, are more authoritarian than others. Gautama and Shankara, by teaching their devotees the practice of meditation, were arguably as much practitioners of the New Ethic as C.G. Jung, Neumann’s preferred exemplar of this type. The operative principle in the New Ethic is the extent to which charismatic leaders promote the individuation of their adherents, while the Old Ethic was predicated on the merging of the adherent’s subjectivity into that of the leader. This difference reaches the heart of Dr. Raychaudhuri’s understanding of Uttam Kamar; in his view, the Bengali celebrity can be described as a practitioner of the New Ethic. The contrast with John Wayne and many other matinee idols who thrive on and encourage the adulation of their fans could hardly be starker.

Neumann further distinguished the Old and New Ethics by reference to the archetype of the Self. For Neumann, following Jung, archetypes are recurring themes found in all the world's mythologies and in the dreams of individuals from all cultures. The archetype of the Self is the basis of the above-mentioned "higher reality," denoted variously as God, Brahman, Allah, or, in its modern scientific embodiment, the laws of nature that account for the order found in our observable universe.

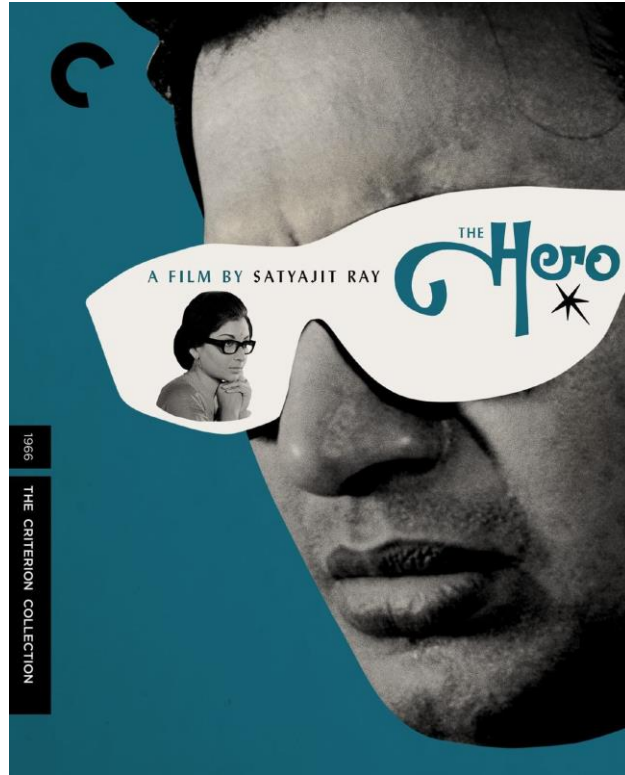
Like all Jungian archetypes, the Self appears to be a structuring principle innate to the human mind, a view confirmed by recent investigations in neuroscience (Becker and Neuberg, 2019). When it remains unconscious for the individual, the archetype of the Self is projected onto outer reality, like all unconscious complexes. God, the gods, or other supreme principles of cosmic order are then encountered as external entities existing over and above human beings. The withdrawal of these projections and the recognition of the archetypes as constitutive features of one's own mind, according to Neumann, is the process that supports individuation and psychological integration. Projection of the archetypes is thus associated with the Old Ethic, while individuation and withdrawal of the projection is associated with the New Ethic.

Closely related to the Self, according to Joseph Campbell (1949/2008), is the archetype of the Hero. When the latter is projected, it is encountered externally as the pantheon of "great men" (and increasingly, great women), in every field from politics, to academia, to mass culture. Such projection holds back individual development, either sapping the person of their energy or inflating them with manic archetypal dynamics. Every person, depending on their culture, has an inner Muhammad, inner Einstein, or inner Uttam Kumar. To the extent that the archetype of the Hero is projected (c.f. Neumann's Old Ethic), the individual relates to this part of him/herself on the level of fantasy, rather than living out and actualizing the potentialities that his/her hero represents.

Campbell goes further and conceptualizes the typical narrative of the hero's adventures and accomplishments as a symbol of the individuation process. The hero is the aspect of the self that courageously confronts his or her unconscious fears, humiliations, rage, and desires. Only by entering consciously into this dark and chaotic realm and coming to terms with monsters encountered there can the individual eventually re-emerge with the power, creativity, and unique mission needed to actualize his or her full potential in the outer world. Only by living this hero's journey in one's own life, rather than projecting it onto external heroes, can a person become all they are capable of becoming. Consistent with Neumann's typology, leaders and celebrities can either promote such development or thwart it.

Dr. Raychaudhuri's research on the life and work of Uttam Kumar sheds light on these big questions and reverberates well beyond its immediate subject matter. This Bengali celebrity was someone who pushed back against the adulation and archetypal projections of his fans. Kumar challenged his fans, on the one hand, to take responsibility for what C. G. Jung called the "shadow" side of their psyches, and on the other to discover the inner riches and energies that

transformation of these shadow elements could unlock. This is nowhere more evident than in Satyajit Ray's 1966 masterpiece *Nayak* (the Hero), featuring one of Kumar's most autobiographically revealing performances; see <https://www.criterion.com/films/28449-the-hero>



Satyajit Ray's 1966 classic film starring Uttam Kumar

There is, of course, a great deal more that ought to be said about Dr. Raychaudhuri's far-ranging interests and contributions; any reader who wants to learn more should not hesitate to contact me. For now, with Rangan's relatives, friends, and academic colleagues and students, I mourn his loss and celebrate in this essay his unique and refreshing legacy.

Brian D'Agostino, Ph.D. is President of the International Psychohistorical Association. He is the author of peer reviewed research in political psychology and of The Middle Class Fights Back: How Progressive Movements Can Restore Democracy in America. Visit his website at <https://bdagostino.com>

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