

**Brown Skin, Brown Mask: Reading Masud Khan**

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*What outrage are you going to commit on me?  
That depends of how much you are going to provoke me.  
When Spring Comes (Khan, 1988)*

As I began to read of Mohammed MasudRaza Khan<sup>1</sup> (1924 – 1989), the Pakistani<sup>2</sup> psychoanalyst practicing in London, I was stumped by the enigma he presented. He came to Oxford to study English literature, but became an analyst instead, and finally a training psychoanalyst. He was supervised by the great analysts – Melanie Klein, Anna Freud, Donald Winnicott, Marion Milner, and Clifford Scott – and was deemed ready to practice, all at the young age of twenty-six! In turn, he supervised psychoanalysts like Christopher Bollas and Adam Phillips. On both sides, as a trainee and as a trainer, he seems to have been highly regarded. Here is a man who is part of the weave that makes the British Independent school what it is – a school of psychoanalysis that is characterized by the emphasis it places on ‘caring’, ‘holding’, and ‘relating’ to the patient. Could it be that this brilliant analyst became so caught up with the image of being brilliant that neither he, nor his analyst (Winnicott), could foresee what is reported as his downfall? Or did the death of Winnicott in 1971 affect Khan so much that he allowed himself to spiral down till he was cast out of the British Psycho-analytical Society as he battled alcoholism and cancer alone? It seemed to me that he lived his life hard; I imagine he rode his race horses hard as well. The question still remains - who was he?

A colonial subject born in pre-independence Pakistan who danced his way into the heart of London society?

A maverick who pushed the boundaries of psychoanalysis beyond what the stuffy British analytic scene could bear?

An arrogant émigré with aristocratic pretensions who cut an outrageous figure in an alien culture?

The editor and perhaps even co-author of some of the writings of his own analyst, Winnicott?

An insightful clinician who was reputed to take on cases that were considered untenable by the psychoanalytic establishment?

The persona, dramatic and seductive, that characterizes Khan has caught the imagination of the all his biographers (See Judy Cooper, 1993; Roger Willoughby, 2005; Linda Hopkins, 2006) as well as

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<sup>1</sup> For the genesis of this paper, I must thank Dr. Anurag Mishra who introduced Masud Khan to me, a confusing move, but a necessary one to shake me out of psychoanalytic certainties.

<sup>2</sup> Khan was born in Jhelum of the Punjab district in British India, that only in 1947 came to be known as Pakistan as an independent nation, by which time he had moved to England. His alignment to ‘Pakistan’ may have been tenuous, but this is not so of his ties to the cultures of what came to known as Pakistan.

the psychoanalytic reader or student. He becomes the case study of 'what should not be done'. Nonetheless, the fantastic portrayal is of the figure, the persona, the mystery behind the man. Is that all that is there to him? Two controversies, in print, dog the figure of Khan, without which any portrayal of Khan would necessarily be highly selective. One is an account by one of his patients Wynne Godley, titled '*Saving Masud Khan*' (2001). In detail, Godley narrates how from the beginning of his analysis Khan's psychoanalytic practice was bizarre since it did not keep to any of the professional ethics or etiquette the psychoanalytic community has forged for itself. The greatest 'sin' a psychoanalyst can do is to damage his own client – and that is exactly what Godley accuses Khan of doing. In his slashing piece on Khan he ends by stating strongly "[...] the deep, irreparable and wanton damage he wrought, from a position of exceptional privilege and against every canon of professional and moral obligation, on distressed and vulnerable people who came to him for help and paid him large sums of money to get it" (Godley, 2001).

The other controversy is about Khan's own last work titled '*When Spring Comes: Awakenings in Clinical Psychoanalysis*' (1988), a collection of essays consisting of different case materials of Khan. In certain passages from the essay titled '*A Dismaying Homosexual*' in *When Spring Comes*, Khan openly admits to being anti-Semitic: "Yes, I am anti-Semitic. You know why, Mr. Luis? Because I am an Aryan and had thought all of you Jews had perished when Jesus, from sheer dismay —and he was one of you — had flown up to Heaven, leaving you in the scorching care of Hitler, Himmler, and the crematoriums" (1988, p. 92-93). Reading such a statement fills me with not only revilement but also bewilderment since publishing such a passage is a bewildering move, almost suicidal in a professional and social sense (the book was published a year before his physical death).

While no one is sure what happened to Khan in the last twenty years of his life, it seems that at some time his mask became his skin. This is, as if, the epidermalization of a person, when the act becomes fact, the mask becomes the face. What is the underlying truth? Nothing but 'the shameful livery put together by centuries of incomprehension' (Fanon, 2008: p. 5). At this moment though, it is Khan's writing that is incomprehensible. According to one of his biographers, Linda Hopkins, "Khan often referred to himself as a paradox and people who knew him well tend to agree. He was a living example of Winnicott's theory that when we get access to the deeper parts of a person's self, we find multiple selves which are incompatible with each other" (Hopkins, 2001). *When Spring Comes* (henceforth WSC)<sup>3</sup>, will shed light on the kind of psychoanalysis Khan was prepared to stand by. Not only was this publication destined to irreparably damage his reputation as a psychoanalyst but it was also completely different in tone and tenor from Khan's earlier writings. What if he read WSC not to analyze what Khan should not have done but rather to analyze what he was trying to do? What is Khan attempting in his last and contentious work?

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<sup>3</sup> All references in the format (p. xxx) shall hereafter signify that these are references from *When Spring Comes* (Khan, 1988).

It would seem that Khan respected, and in fact, encouraged a sense of privacy in his patients by asking them to be private with themselves first<sup>4</sup>. In the case of Benjamin in the essay '*Thoughts*' in WSC, when the patient wants to come clean and confess to Khan the thoughts he could not share with anyone, Khan stops him from handing over his privacy. He says, "You are not coming to a Roman Catholic confessional and as I have already said, I dislike the intimacy of instant and compulsive telling about himself by anyone, be he an acquaintance or a patient. If it is a feature of his illness that he cannot stay private with himself, it is my bias that I must stay private with myself and keep my distance" (p. 150). Khan thus lived up to the Deleuzian critique of psychoanalysis as a Christian confessional by demonstrating the distinction between *talking* to the analyst and *confessing* to him/her. Khan believed in keeping the ego integrity of the patient intact; it is not for the analyst to invade this integrity for the purpose of cure. In the essay '*Prisons*', he said that his long clinical experience taught him "to respect the self-protective and self-curative value of a patient's psychosexual pathology, no matter how exhausting, threatening (to both patient and analyst) and boring for the listener" (p. 9). In the *Privacy of the Self*, an earlier (and saner) work, Khan states that "I very strongly believe that each patient has a right of privacy to their own experiences, and the fact that something happens to the patient does not give us the complementary right to intrude upon him with what we know clinically and theoretically to be the meaning of that behavior" (Khan, 1974). In fact, he spoke against the Father of Psychoanalysis, by accusing Freud's demands on his patients as bound to impinge upon the privacy of the individual, "Lie down, do not touch with me with your eyes, demanded Professor Doctor Sigmund Freud. Use only words to tell of yourself. Do not seek to know me. The game is played one-sidedly. So the spaces of waiting start to emerge, expand, and swallow up the patient. You must tell me everything, Freud demanded. You have surrendered all rights to privacy. And I shall goad you with interpretations" (p. 196).

In WSC, we see Khan not only talking about his patients; he was speaking for himself, in fact speaking up for himself. In the essay '*Empty Chairs, Vast Spaces*' he claimed to be "starting on a new style, and scope, of clinical work with a patient/person and his/her total environment as was appropriate to the patient's needs, I was freeing myself of the rigid Yiddish shackles of the so-called psychoanalysis." (p. 62) His contention was that traditionally psychoanalysis has constrained the analysts' relating to the other in the clinic even though the psychoanalytic enterprise is built on this very relationship (through the use of transference and counter-transference). However, Khan said that the relation between analyst and analysand is much simpler than what it appears to be in analytic discourse, that the two must "enter into a relationship of mutual sharing, in which analyst and patient gradually establish a rapport whereupon they can begin to learn from each other and thrive" (p. 199). Khan, notorious for not respecting boundaries and disconcerting his peers even more than his patients, redefines the ethics of the analytic relation as one where boundaries are determined by the 'needs of the patient'; the analyst's role is to recognize what is the appropriate discourse that should be maintained. In the process Khan questioned and redefined the very idea of the 'setting' itself – an idea in psychoanalysis that more often than not clings to dogma. In narrating

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<sup>4</sup> I am aware this is at odds with Godley's account of his experience of being Khan's patient.

the clinical case material of Lucia, Khan agreed to work through a different type of analytic relation – a *'commune of three'* with Lucia's gynecologist constituting one of the three and together they would look after Lucia during the time of her pregnancy. Khan writes that he felt 'it would be fun to explore the possibilities of such an open situation. It was my first venture for such an unprogrammed and non-bounded relating with a patient, clinically, to help her find her own true limits and boundaries' (p. 62).

Khan's ethics were uncluttered by the demands of the discipline; he makes a break with technique for the purpose of care. Khan believed that maintaining the 'proper' analytic distance is neither necessary nor desirable. He stated emphatically,

'I do not subscribe to the traditional school of thought which regards anonymity on the part of the analyst – not being known to the patient – as the prerequisite for a productive analysis. [...] It is my experience that letting myself be known to my patients, in a certain measure neutralizes the situation in a positive way; whereas the assumed anonymity of most analysts can provoke unnecessary infantile attachments and attitudes in the patient which analysts then interpret as the patient's transference' (1988, 200).

Khan treated this particular tenet of psychoanalysis with easy disregard, suggesting that donning the analytic mask of anonymity provokes 'unnecessary infantile attachments and attitudes in the patient which analysts then interpret as the patient's transference'. Apart from this departure, he also did not put high premium on the time allotted to sessions, was agreeable with travelling far to meet patients when the need arose, and was flexible with fees. There are numerous examples of this in his writings in WSC. Khan wrote on and for Bill, a patient who had at the time recently passed away, as an act of mourning for this man, from whom he acknowledged that he had learnt a lot. He narrated that the care and analysis of such patients succeeds only if we do not imprison them in the *huis clos* of the fifty minutes of analytic time and space (p. 5). In another instance, Khan easily agreed to fly to Spain to meet the dying partner (Dave) of his patient (Mr. Luis) and provided 'therapeutic coverage' to both, saying poignantly, "Dave, let us make the end sing for you. You deserve it" (p. 97). In *'Thoughts'*, Khan recounts that to support Benjamin's bid for autonomy from his mother's over-care-taking maneuvers, Khan not only urged him to leave his house, but also did not charge him any fees in such a difficult situation; in the case of Aisha, in the essay *'The Long Wait'*, Khan reassured her as she lay in the hospital, "Aisha, don't think of that now. My father has left me enough money for six generations of friends. I shall pay if your father won't" (p. 185). His compassion for his patients comes through in all these anecdotes that he has jotted down; indeed it goes beyond the expectations placed on the analyst.

It is apparent in his words that Khan was unafraid to venture beyond the apparent Judeo-Christian horizons of his profession. It may be his very status as an outsider that allowed him to question the boundaries of this world. Khan was not unaware of his 'brown skin' in white London, that is, it was he *who is Other*. Even Godley, his analysand who despised him, describes him as having: '[...]a formidable and quick-acting intelligence, astonishing powers of observation and an unrivalled

ability straightaway to see deeply below the surface. He was impossible to worst. He knew how to exploit and defy the conventions which govern social intercourse in England, taking full advantage of the fact that the English saw him instinctively as inferior – as ‘a native’ – and tried to patronize him’ (Godley, 2001). Khan recounts his conversational strike against Winnicott as, “These foreigners, D.W.W.? I am one too, and I don’t ape. The trouble is, you English, D.W.W., don’t like foreigners conforming to your ways”. Winnicott genially replied, “No! No! That is not very democratic”, to which Khan responded, “But you do encourage them to ape you” (1988, 40). Khan was aware of being foreign; in his most notorious essay (*A Dismaying Homosexual*) he comes down on the head of his patient with “I don’t desire or need your “I can afford it”. You can’t seduce me as you have seduced everyone else. Not because I am better or more than them, but because I am *different*. And this *difference* matters most for me” (p. 91, italics in original). After living and working in London for many years, Khan felt this difference from his British counterparts and wanted to act on it.

He writes in WSC that at the age of fifty he was learning to be his own person, which also meant embracing his Muslim roots since ‘the faith one is born to, one can rarely shed’ (p. iv). In his later years he took to donning the Djellaba at home, a purposeful action towards orient(aliz)ing himself to what he believed his true roots to be. His writing, especially WSC, reflects this moving away from Western psychoanalysis:

‘My endeavour to communicate with an invisible and non-present other frees me from using conceptual clichés from our meta-psychology, and allows me to employ language as near to its ordinary usage as possible. For me, the analytic *écriture* does not constitute a hermeneutic mystique, and belongs to a very different order from the oral mutuality of shared converse, which is both more and less than discourse. *None of us can ever shed his beginnings*. I was reared in a non-literate, oral culture, hence my bias for sharing experiences, speech-wise, rather than through predetermined and ordained conceptual *écriture*.’

(1988, 147, italics in original)

In the writings collected in WSC, the description of clinical material takes center-stage while the interpretative gesture is kept to a minimum. We are allowed to listen in on the drama for ourselves; we can almost hear the patients in their own words... needs, desires, and demands. However, at the end of the ride, there is a sense of confusion. This makes his writing, marked by a self-proclaimed cultural difference – of the “oral mutuality of shared converse” as against “predetermined and ordained conceptual *écriture*” – ordinary though he calls it, tough to decipher. There are two questions that the reader can take up: one is to decipher what he means as he speaks on psychoanalysis. The other is to decipher what he means as he speaks on cultures.

In the first case, Khan was making a claim on what the psychoanalytic clinical method was, cultural interloper though he felt he was. He was writing of a psychoanalysis that would blossom in another cultural landscape, seemingly unperturbed by the fact that this transplant would require uprooting

and replanting. Khan admitted that his way of writing may render the material less conceptual but justifies this move by saying that, 'I am intent upon stating candidly my role vis-à-vis a particular patient and my own experience of the clinical relationship, than in any of the histories narrated previously' (p. iii). Here, I feel, is the significance of the subtitle to the book: '*Awakenings in Clinical Psychoanalysis*'; it was his own awakening to the true self he was speaking of when he said that '[t]he primary task of any psychotherapeutic venture undertaken by two persons is to enable the one seeking help to awaken to the hidden or repressed forces in his or her nature, and their correlates in human conduct. Only through such an awakening, which can often be extremely painful, can a self become its own true person and function as such in the total matrix of his social environment' (p. iii). Khan's brutal honesty that he, in aristocratic style, casually flung onto his readers did come at a high personal cost to him and he paid it in homage to his 'true self'<sup>5</sup>. The word 'true' lends itself to imagine a self that is 'white'. 'Whiteness, Fanon asserts, has become a symbol of purity, of *Justice, Truth, Virginity*. It defines what it means to be civilized, modern and human' says ZiuiddinSarkar in the Foreward to *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 2008: p. xiii). However, that kind of truthful, virtuous, and just self would be bathed in 'the eternal sunshine of the spotless mind'<sup>6</sup>. Psychoanalysis reminds us that there is no spotless mind; always the shadow, always the stain. How could the true self be white then? Khan let it be known that his wasn't; his anger and hurt, his prejudices and complexes are on display in his writing. But Khan had grown into his mask with the passage of time and the man who had cut a dramatic figure in British psychoanalytic circles died as a lonely and pathetic figure in London – a brown man who was really brown at the end of it all; the world was caught by surprise! He was berated, not celebrated since after all, there was no emancipation from his condition and while he could be diagnosed with being mentally ill, he could also be diagnosed with being brown... brown skin and brown mask.

'Every colonized people — in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality — finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country.'  
(Fanon, 2008 [1967]: 9)

In the second case, there is the question of what was Khan trying to say about cultures – the one he was born into and the one he died in? He claims he was speaking in a cultural idiom that is different from the mystical conceptual écriture that marks Western psychoanalysis. And if he is talking in another idiom, the question that follows is whether we have the resources at hand to read a culturally-marked text? It is not easy to decipher this message when one begins to speak a language

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<sup>5</sup> Linda Hopkins's detailed biography on Khan is titled "False Self: The Life of Masud Khan" (New York: Other Press, 2006), and is a symptomatic reading of his life.

<sup>6</sup> The movie *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* was released in 2004, the title of which was taken from Alexander Pope's poem *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717). In Pope's poem, lines 207-211 go, "How happy is the blameless vestal's lot!/ The world forgetting, by the world forgot./ Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!/ Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd"

unknown to the Christian West, which is bundled up in metaphysical assumptions about language via a Biblical notion of 'the Word of God'. That is the challenge of Masud Khan, even to one of his own kind<sup>7</sup>. His words turn out to be as enigmatic this side of the Mediterranean as it apparently was that side! And we, afraid as we are of owning up to our insoluble difference, do not have even the facility of a private language to communicate with one of our own, let alone one in which a culturally nuanced psychoanalysis can take root and flourish. His writing foretells the struggle of psychoanalysis to cross-over and pollinate the East. And the doubt remains in me if Khan should be read in his last work as speaking on psychoanalysis through the prism of culture or on culture through the angle of psychoanalysis.

## POSTSCRIPT

At the end of the paper, I am haunted by what I have been unable to finish because there is one more set of questions that reading WSC throws up, which are beyond the ambit of this paper. Why does Khan want to be so very vehemently brown? WSC could have been read to open up two kinds of routes. What it would have been to inquire what he means - which has been the predominant tendency in the present paper. The other would have been to inquire what it means, to gesture towards a cultural-self-representation? What does Khan's retreat into a cultural idiom late in life signify? We must keep in mind that he is located in a specific time and space. What did such self-representation mean then, before post-colonial studies became a disciplinary location in its own right in the 1990s? Was Khan engaged in a process of decolonization? Was he participating in the rise of anti-coloniality as an epistemological position? Had he accessed an avowedly post-colonial scholarship? Or was WSC a one-off instance of almost post-colonial consciousness, without a strict consciousness of being so? What *if* it was conscious? What then is at stake in such cultural-self-representation made in English to an English-speaking audience? This is especially pertinent here, for by attributing post-coloniality too quickly to Khan, we make invisible the complicity of his position as a privileged British-trained psychoanalyst. Gayatri Spivak in a piece pertinently titled 'Who claims alterity?'<sup>8</sup> inserts a moment of caution by insisting that we must be:

[...] attending to provisional resolutions of oppositions as between secular and nonsecular, national and subaltern, national and international, cultural and socio-political by teasing out their complicity. Such a strategy of strategies must speak "from within" the emancipatory master narratives even while taking a distance from them. It must resolutely hold back from offering phantasmic, hegemonic, nativist counter-narratives that implicitly honor the historical withholding of the "permission to narrate". The new culturalist alibi, working

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<sup>7</sup> Are we of one kind? Of course, I wonder about my identification with Khan. He is Pakistani, I am Indian and never may we get along, especially since it is fatal for an Indian Muslim to identify with a Pakistani! It, as if, betrays the Indian Muslim's lack of patriotism, reveals the secret desire for the real homeland *sarhadpaar*! However he is a mad brown man practicing white psychoanalysis; a red flag, and not a green one! Perhaps I too fear for my sanity in this field? But then fear has many shades and many colours, so who knows?

<sup>8</sup> This work was brought to my notice by Dr. Anup Dhar to once again shake me out of cultural (un)certainties.

within a basically elitist culture industry, insisting in the continuity of a native tradition untouched by a Westernization whose failures it can help to cover, legitimizes the very thing it claims to combat.'  
(Spivak, 2013: 66).

Therefore, a further reading of Khan's work is necessary, if the questions surrounding situating it in either psychoanalysis or cultural studies have to be done any justice. Now that his life has been scrubbed, scrutinized, and psychoanalysed, Masud Khan's writing is a text that has yet to be explored.

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