CHAPTER 8 – ON THERAPISTS’ RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL BELIEFS: LOCATING THE SACRED WITHIN THE THERAPEUTIC LANDSCAPE

We find some people in the most unexpected ways. One of my calls to a psychoanalytic practitioner at an institute for psychoanalytic training happened to be answered by Ishrat. She was not the person whose name I had, but intuition told me to go on and tell her about my research. On hearing about the research, she expressed interest. She mentioned that she was an analyst herself and agreed to give me an interview. I did not know anything about her or her work, and I just went to meet her hoping I would obtain the perspective of a psychoanalytic therapist. Ishrat contributed tremendously to all aspects of this research, and her articulation of the integration of her religious and epistemic values was unparalleled. How psychoanalysis and Islam found unison in Ishrat’s mind has been presented here for the reader. Shared in an almost poetic way, Ishrat’s narrative was my reward for embracing the unexpected.

My main values as a person come from the teachings of Islam… The first thing that I learnt from my religion was about compassion and I think that is what has made me what I am… I think that is what made me choose this profession… Another thing that is common in both my work and my religion, and that is the reason why I chose to train in psychoanalysis, I think they both bring me closer to the truth and the reality. So I think if you are able to stay with the truth and help your patients to look at the truth so they don’t run away from the truth… that is the goal of psychoanalysis…

A practicing psychoanalyst for the last 15 years, Ishrat spoke about how her religion led her to train in psychoanalysis and the compassion, patience and truth that Islam taught her found parallel in her psychoanalytic practice.
So you get people to be aware of the truth; that is important, that you spread the knowledge of what is. And I think in analytic work it's very important, especially when you are running an institute and you’re training people and you’re running an outreach clinic, schools… I think it is so important that you spread the awareness of mental health, so that you get people to understand that emotional development is sometimes more important and that can come in the way of academics and everything. And also for people to know that there is truth in the illness and there is truth in the treatment as well. And the religion also teaches you to be closer to the truth.

*Ishrat brought in another dimension, when she mentioned that it was her practice of Islam that leant her clarity of intent. It was this clarity of intent that also helped her make sense of her therapist role. Deep acceptance of her own limitations as a human being and acknowledgment of the presence of a God, helped her organize her relationship with her client and make sense of the limits of her work.*

When you’re giving anything, your intentions are very, very important, which I think is very important for my work as well. Whether I am seeing a patient only for the sake of completing my training, only for the sake of writing my paper. Or I’m seeing my patient because I want to treat the patient. Because I want to give the patient something that is important to him… The intention needs to be very clean and clear in your mind. Islam has helped me to get my intentions very clear. With what purpose are you doing whatever you’re doing…

That you are human, you have your own limitations, but whatever you have it’s important that you stay with it. That you make the best out of it… you develop… and the belief in God I think is important…and belief in that one
God. Because I think it allows the faith… that you believe that there is somebody who is controlling… and that things are not all in your control. I think somewhere it helps you to be humble or it keeps you down to earth. And I think at some point you allow your patients to see the human side of you. You are not just a strict analyst who keeps a set boundary and not allowing contact. But there is something very, very personal which is a personal relationship that you develop. And as the process moves the patient also sees you are after all another human being. You are not some God or something. And I think it is important to allow that humility… that you stay with what you are and what you know. You don’t become absolutely superior or nor is the patients position any inferior.

Ishrat’s narrative seamlessly wove the religious/spiritual with the therapeutic. This chapter that addresses the objective of exploring the religious and spiritual beliefs of therapists and how they influence the therapist’s work with their clients builds from Ishrat’s narrative and moves to discuss other themes that emerged.

Over the last few decades, there is a growing movement within the mental health profession to understand and address issues about religion and spirituality within counseling and therapy. The development of the multicultural perspective as the fourth force has further highlighted the need to address aspects of spirituality in therapists. As Laungani (2005) puts it “No counsellor, therapist, psychoanalyst, psychologist, in fact, no scientist works in a social vacuum. Our ideas, approaches, techniques, values, methodologies are to a very large extent influenced by our culture and the dominant epistemology (or epistemologies) to which we subscribe. Even the problems we investigate and the methods we use are culture-related” (p.14). He goes
on to identify dimensions on which multicultural counseling needs to be based, and identifies spirituality as an essential pillar in understanding the Eastern world-view.

To present the findings on how therapist’s religious and spiritual beliefs are located within the therapeutic landscape, this chapter has been organized into the following sections:

- Moorings and leanings
- Religion and spirituality: Interface with the therapeutic landscape

**Moorings and Leanings**

**Religious Orientation and Identity**

To understand the influence of religious and spiritual beliefs of therapists on their therapeutic practice, the sample was purposively selected to include therapists with diverse religious orientations to be able to obtain rich and varied data. The questionnaire requested participants to fill in their religious orientation, where the therapists were given a choice between Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and any other. Through the filled questionnaires the data obtained on the religious orientations is presented here:
Table 9

Religious Orientation of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Religion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ameesh</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arindam</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deepak</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dirghayu</td>
<td>Secular</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father Joseph</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hina</td>
<td>Zoroastrian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ishrat</td>
<td>Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jiya</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keshav</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samira</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shabana</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheetal</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeba</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
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</table>

As seen in the table, six of the sixteen therapists shared their religious orientation as Hinduism, two as Islam, two as Christianity and one Zoroastrian. The other therapists identified themselves as secular, atheist, agnostic, spiritual and human, thereby not endorsing any organized religion.
The interview with the therapists focused on understanding their religious and spiritual beliefs and how they influenced their therapeutic practice. During the interview, two of the therapists, Ameesh and Sarah, did share that though they had endorsed a religious orientation in the questionnaire their views and beliefs on religion and spirituality were very fluid.

Ameesh mentioned in the interview how he believed in equality and advocated exposure to all religions, and his narrative threw light on how he had no crystallized religious identity.

I don’t follow religion… I am not a Hindu or a Muslim or anything. I am just a human being. I feel that very strongly. And I feel strongly that every human being should be made to follow a religion as soon as he is born, make him follow another religion after a couple of years, and then again another one after another 5 years. So then all human beings should follow all religions at point of time. Then we will come to know what is being said or done. Eventually we are all the same. We are not different. We can’t be different. No human being is different from the other. (Ameesh)

Sarah discussed in the interview her journey of being born in a Muslim family to discovering and practicing Buddhism, and went on to share how she was still negotiating her religious ideas actively.

There is a sense of nothingness as I don’t know if I am Buddhist or Muslim… I was in a typical household taught to say your prayers and ‘namaaz’ and fast… I would question, why this and why not that… and my father would ask me to shut up and then I would say I am not going to keep quiet… and they

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6 Urdu word for prayer
said that you have become ‘nastik’\(^7\) and you will be punished... Search went on… and for 5-7 years I did not pray, nothing at all I was not this side nor there… and then this Buddhist aspect came up… it did make sense to meditate… the philosophy… Vedanta and Buddhism… I do understand when they say that your attachment to pleasure is the reason why you come again and again, and Nirvana is moving away from this attachment… I can clearly see how enlightenment can happen... (Sarah)

Both Ameesh and Sarah’s narratives highlighted how religious identity is an ascribed identity, which one gets at birth, and the family religion is expected to be received and accepted unquestioningly, and over the lifetime there are some individuals who continue to negotiate it.

The questionnaire data and the interviews with therapists also revealed that religious orientations and their endorsements needed to be understood in the context of the person. As individuals, we may vary in our conviction and adoption of the religious orientation that we are born into, also depending on the life stage and life circumstance, religious orientations may be negotiated. The interview helped build off the questionnaire data to understand the religious and spiritual beliefs the therapists held that transcended their religious orientations and identities. The section that follows highlights these aspects.

**Religious and Spiritual Beliefs**

Through the interview the therapists shared their religious and spiritual beliefs and practice. The themes that emerged have been discussed below. The data has been organized according to the emergent themes rather than therapist religious orientations, as that was found to be very limiting in capturing the breadth of the data.

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\(^7\) Atheist
Belief in God. In discussing their religious and spiritual moorings, some therapists shared their belief in God. Sheetal, Hina and Barbara shared images of gods from the religion that they followed that determined the way they related to god.

Barbara shared her faith in Mother Mary, “I am very closely associated to her, she is the mother of God…” and Sheetal discussed the image of Ma Saraswati that she rested her faith in.

There is an idol of Saraswati that I have had for a long time. So whenever I can’t sleep, relaxation or something might or might not work, but one thing that makes me sleep like a baby… I just imagine Saraswati to be a big enough figure, in whose lap I settle myself and I fall asleep instantly, so in that sense, I feel very connected to something. (Sheetal)

Jiya and Keshav on the other hand shared that their belief in God was based on a personal relationship with a God beyond form. Jiya, in her interview, discussed this, “I have this image of god in my head and I have conversations with God, many a times when something bad happens… saying you have created this, you only give me a solution”. Keshav mentioned that he believed in a God, but not in a way most people did, and certainly not as an agent for change.

Ok. There possibly is a God… for me there has to be something, someone who runs the show. Beyond what science can explain. So that’s God to me… you do at times trouble him over things not being in a certain way and wanting things in a certain way. But unless you pull up your pants and do something, help is not going to come… and so people do ask me, do you believe in God? I say yeah I do, but not in probably the way you may. If you keep standing in line all day then God is not going to listen to you. You rather spend the day working, probably God will do something for you. (Keshav)
Ishrat mentioned her belief in Islam that spoke of one God, and how she believed it was important to believe that there was this one God who controlled everything, to be aware of our own limitations.

**Presence of a higher power/force.** Though some therapists specifically mentioned their belief in God, there were others who shared belief in a higher force or power. Sheetal, Dirghayu, Sarah and Ameesh in their narratives elaborated the idea of being spiritual in a way that they believed in a higher power or force. Dirghayu who mentioned he was secular in the questionnaire discussed how he was spiritual and believed in a higher power.

I am not a very religious person, and I don’t follow any rituals, I have always been like that… So religion does not have any place for me… spirituality yes… I do believe that there is some higher power, something that is above us. It is not necessary that we know about everything that exists, there are many things that we do not have answers to and we may not know about…

(dirghayu)

Sarah in the questionnaire selected Islam, and discussed how she did not subscribe to any organized religion. She shared in the interview about being influenced by Buddhist thought and practice, and spoke about how she had deep faith in the presence of a higher force that directed all people towards growth.

I do not subscribe to any organized religion. I am born in a Muslim family but I see problems with almost all organized religions. Spirituality is another matter and I am very spiritual. For me questions like what is God, who is God and what form is he in, whether he is there or not don’t really matter. What matters is that there is certainly a force of life which is larger, something bigger than me. I’m just a part – the force is inside me and so I grow, it is
inside everything (as in plants, and therefore they grow)... that force is everywhere around us. Ideas like God does things for all and punishes them I don’t believe in at all… (Sarah)

Ameesh reported following Hinduism; however, in the interview he talked about his rational and scientific self and discussed how he strongly believed in some larger power.

I am quite a rationalist myself, I am very scientific myself, though I might somewhere still believe in some power, something larger than me, something more spiritual in that sense… and there is something that is looking at me and helping me get what I want, helping with the directions, meeting the right people, now who is that? I don’t know… (Ameesh)

Across different religious orientations, therapists shared their stance as spiritual and expressed their belief in a higher power.

**Spirituality as connectedness and attunement.** Sheetal and Jiya discussed the idea of understanding spirituality as being connected and attuned to others and to the self.

It’s all about knowing yourself and I think spirituality is all about this, if you understand yourself, if you know yourself, if you are gentle on yourself… then you are close to being spiritual person… if a person can be attuned with self and the universe… that itself is spirituality. (Jiya)

Dirghayu, in his narrative, shared how he believed that spiritual experiences are different for different people and how spirituality for him was also oneness with music, “it is the feeling of oneness that I experience when I play music… I am just one with that note… For me that is a spiritual experience, for someone else it might be singing a bhajan or climbing mountains.”
Religious Practices

Among the participants, some also shared very personalized and personally meaningful religious practices that they engaged and participated in.

**Prayer.** Three participants: Hina, a practicing Parsi, and Father Joseph and Barbara, both practicing Christians, shared that they not only had faith in prayer but also prayed regularly. Hina shared a personal crisis during her life where praying helped.

> For me, my religion has been my anchor, my spirituality has been my anchor, and so I believe in it really strongly… I remember there was a really tough time… the only thing that kept me going at that time was… prayer. I would just get up and pray every day. So prayer has really taken me through some really tough times. (Hina)

Father Joseph, with his parallel role as a priest, not just believed in prayer, he also led prayer services, and Barbara mentioned praying regularly every morning.

**Reading religious texts.** Barbara shared in the interview how she regularly read religious texts and followed the messages in them to direct her on her path to God.

> I read the Daily Flash⁸, that is my inspiration… and here is a prayer for Mother Mary… then this is a book of the divine word… I take out about three cards… I ponder over these…This is the small version of the Bhagvad Gita… I just open any page and read what is written… For me all religions are equal in the eyes of God… I feel they are all ways to go to God… (Barbara)

**Religious rituals/ festivals.** Hina and Jiya shared how they celebrated festivals and observed some rituals that were related to their faith in God. They shared

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⁸ Compilation of cards for daily bible reading
how they celebrated festivals that were personally meaningful to them. Hina mentioned how despite being a Parsi she celebrated Hindu festivals like Diwali and brought the Ganpati home. Jiya similarly shared:

I am a Hindu by birth, a Brahmin but never followed that Brahmin like thing… twice in a year during Navratri⁹, I do the Kanjke¹⁰, because I believe in it … so then I go to the temple, make the Prasad and I tell them to distribute it to who so ever comes over, and I feel very satisfied… so then for me that is how I relate to god. (Jiya)

Amongst the participants, were therapists, who also mentioned that they do not practice any religious rituals, worship, prayer or any religious practices. They shared how they believed in and trusted their own selves, and their actions leading to change and future. Keshav mentioned, “I don’t pray, I don’t go to the temple, I know that how much ever you go to temple, etc., in the end what will work is your action… there can’t be anything else that can change your life”. Deepak mentioned that he was tolerant of others beliefs and participated in rituals if it was meaningful to those who were close to him, however, he did not believe in god.

While some therapists believed in religious practices and rituals and some believed in conventional images of god, most of them found themselves rooted in spirituality and a personalized relationship with a higher power or personalized spiritual practices or experiences, with only one exception of Deepak. The next section presents how this faith interfaced with the therapeutic practice for those who shared engagement with religion and spirituality.

⁹ Navratri is one of the Hindu festivals where people across the country worship the different avatars of Goddess Durga for nine days.
¹⁰ Praying to young girls during the festival of Navratri as forms of Goddess Durga on the eighth of ninth day
Interface with the Therapeutic Landscape

What emerged from the personal narratives of therapists is that their religious and spiritual beliefs significantly influenced aspects of the therapeutic landscape: from the therapeutic orientation, approach and techniques, to even the meaning making process that they undertook. In no way can this be said to be uniform or universal, and only highlights through personal stories how religious and spiritual beliefs interweaved into psychotherapy.

The Dialectic Between the Personal and the Epistemic

Ishrat’s narrative drew parallels between Islam and psychoanalysis and how their blend culminated in her therapeutic practice. Ameesh, on the other hand, shared how his spiritual reading met his psychoanalytic understanding of the human mind.

I have read about this ‘Sahej marg’\(^{11}\) … I liked the openness, I liked the fact that there are no directions, you are just a person, that is also similar to my psychoanalytic system, no differentiation with regard to poor-rich, religion, nations, castes… It’s about knowing the mind, whether you know it through Freud or through a spiritual master, you have to know the mind. If you read S. Radhakrishan, he says the same thing that Freud says. It is not that only psychology knows the human mind, so I have explored spirituality and tried to understand the human mind.

Similar to findings in the study by Bilgrave and Deluty (1998), Blair (2015) also noted that participants’ theoretical orientation and spirituality were related and often mutually influenced each other. The narratives that Blair (2015) obtained, detailed the parallels between Christianity and Quaker spirituality and theoretical orientations of the participants, while in the present study parallels were seen between

\(^{11}\) Sahaj Marg, meaning the Natural Path, is a refined and simplified form of raja yoga that includes the elements of meditation, cleaning and prayer to facilitate inner transformation.
psychoanalysis and Islam, as well as Sahej Marg in the Hindu tradition, thus,
indicating that irrespective of theoretical orientation and religious/spiritual system
adopted, the integration and mutual influence of the personal beliefs and professional
beliefs seemed to occur.

**Religion in Therapeutic Practice**

Instances of religious and spiritual beliefs permeating into therapeutic
techniques were discussed by many therapists, beginning with communicating an
openness to the client to discuss spiritual issues, saying prayers with clients, blessing
the clients, teaching them yoga and meditation, using religious ideas like the karmic
theory, using stories from mythology, and so on. The therapists mentioned how they
used their discretion in using these techniques and brought them into therapy only
when they were aligning with the clients’ faith, beliefs and practices.

**Chanting and prayer.** Prayer was one of the most commonly used religious
practices with clients. Father Joseph shared, “And there are people who are open to
spirituality… I might say a prayer for goodness.” Barbara too emphasized the power
of prayer:

Yes, in my counseling…the most famous thing I tell everyone, whether
Punjabi, or Gujarati, or Marwari or Catholic, that prayer does not change God,
but changes the one who prays… then I also tell the Catholics, tell 3 Hail
Mary’s at 9 in the morning, 3 at 3 in the afternoon, that is the time Jesus died
on the cross, and before you go to bed say 3 Hail Mary’s… just close your
eyes, and be at peace, say them and think of your intentions and see the
miracles, and the non-Catholics, I tell them to do it in their own way… I
believe a lot in prayer.
Hina discussed how she used chanting and prayer for her clients who would dissociate. She referred to many readings on EMDR and spirituality, mentioning how the Gayatri Mantra or other prayers could help the clients stay present and keep themselves together.

On the other hand, Zeba discussed the use of simple religious rituals with children in her ABT groups, such as chanting Om, or if clients were very disturbed lighting a lamp or incense stick, as she believed in it and it would do the clients no harm.

**Meditation and visualization.** Therapists relied on the use of meditation and visualization techniques to help clients who believed or practiced them. Dirghayu mentioned, “for someone who is religious, I would use techniques which are more amenable, such as mindfulness techniques or meditation, that the person can relate to or can follow easily”. Hina reiterated the role of using client beliefs in therapy, and how visualizations of God could be used therapeutically.

Many clients have gone through really tough problems through that one resource that they have, so they can imagine Buddha, they can imagine God... I would ask them to imagine a symbol of Ganpati… So God and spirituality can be a big anchor, but the belief has to come from the client, if they don’t believe they don’t believe.

Arindam, a practicing hypnotherapist during the interview shared in detail how with one of his clients he worked through hypnosis with her belief in Lord Buddha.

There was this Parsi lady that I was seeing, and she was diagnosed with breast cancer and she came for hypnosis… so I told her we can try hypnosis for pain management… so although she was a Parsi, she believed in Pancham
Mahabuddha… she was so weak, she was carried in… I used trance with her and used Pancham Mahabuddha in the visualizations… and then I used suggestions for the pain… she felt good, but after 3 days she came back, she said that for the first time I could sleep at night… and after four months she passed away, and then her husband called and told me, that she was coming to you and you gave her a cassette, so she wanted to tell you that her last days were quite peaceful… so I used her faith, so what the person believes is important, I am not important… I made use of her resources… the thoughts of the person and the beliefs of the person are also resources… (Arindam)

**Stories from religious texts.** A few of the therapists shared how they used religious stories in the sessions, to discuss value conflicts or drive home a point with their clients, as these were stories that their clients could relate to. Jiya, Hina and Keshav strongly emphasized the resource in them. Samira elaborated on how she used stories from the Mahabharat, an epic also mentioned by the others for furthering discussion on life issues with her clients.

Research confirms that therapists’ personal religious and spiritual attitudes and beliefs have an effect on how they practice (Bilgrave & Deluty, 1998; Shafranske, 2000; Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984; Shafranske & Malony, 1990). Bilgrave and Deluty (1998) found that 72 percent of therapists reported that their religious and spiritual beliefs played a significant role in their therapeutic practice.

Western literature has been extensively documenting how religious and spiritual techniques are helpful (Post & Wade, 2009) and how therapists are using religious accommodated therapy (E. L. Worthington & Aten, 2009). A study conducted by Richards and Potts (1995) with 300 randomly selected psychotherapists to understand the use of spiritual intervention in psychotherapy, indicated that
therapists used a wide variety of spiritual interventions when dealing with clients. These included praying silently for clients, teaching spiritual concepts, encouraging forgiveness and using the religious community as a support.

The use of anecdotes and stories from the ancient mythology and religious texts and their use in psychotherapy to highlight psychiatric symptoms, psychological principles, unconscious conflicts, defense mechanisms, automatic thoughts, and cognitive errors have been documented (Balodhi & Keshavan, 2011; Shamasundar, 1993). Jacob (2013) emphasizes that religious texts can be meaningfully utilized to bring in examples to increase insight or suggest alternate coping and meaning making in therapy as the clients are familiar with them and they are jargon free.

A study conducted by Al-Krenawi and Graham (2000), highlighted aspects of Islam such as theology, prayers, namaz, fasting and hajj as important to social work practice. These highlighted tenets of Islam cover natural forms of social support, familial and marital mediation, conflict resolution, group cohesion and support, individual catharsis and psychological relief and self-actualization (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

However, some therapists also noted that they kept religion and spirituality out of the therapeutic space, like Ameesh, who believed in being true to psychoanalysis:

So if someone will come with a lot of religious beliefs I will look for some kind of escapist attitude… We have seen our fellow beings, better we work with each other, we don’t need a third guy, we haven’t seen him. No, I don’t get into that at all… I am very professional there. I don’t wear religion, I don’t tell stories, I don’t ask my clients to read books. I have seen some of my friends do that, try dance therapy, yoga, somatic therapy…but I don’t mind knowing about things, but I am clear that I don’t want to mix ten orientations.
I know that there is already so much in the psychoanalysis, so much to learn, I
better be pure.

Others like Deepak, Rita and Shabana also shared not bringing religious and
spiritual discussions into the therapeutic space. Sarah elaborated that she might be a
spiritual person, but therapy needed to be handled differently.

Not really, as I want to keep therapy empathetic but in a scientific space, so I
see meditation as a way of training the mind to stay in the present. I see it as a
process of working with the mind, but I don’t get Karma, birth cycles, or
enlightenment into my work… I don’t take it that far… unless the client
himself is coming up with a lot of understanding of spirituality and he wants
to discuss… I give my thoughts and my understanding of the process, but I
don’t work with it. (Sarah)

Making Meaning of the Therapist Role

The constructivist paradigm assumes that individuals actively make meaning
of their experiences, and for therapists this meaning making process is critical in
facilitating professional growth and development and continued self-care to prevent
burn out. Therapists across diverse religious backgrounds shared a religious or
spiritual dimension in making meaning of their role as a therapist. This included
various aspects such as accepting their limitations, beliefs about the role of external
spiritual factors in therapeutic outcome, and so on.

Acknowledging the divine architect. Ishrat believed there was one God and
he controlled the working of the world, and that belief allowed her to stay humble and
accept her limitations as a therapist. Rita shared that there was a higher power or
universal wisdom that directs human endeavor and not everything is in the hands of
the therapist.
At the same time knowing that there is a universal wisdom, that beyond the human endeavor there is something that makes it or breaks it… that whatever you do, it is not always in your hands, something else will always affect it and the sooner you accept it the better it is. (Rita)

**Trusting God to show the way.** Barbara discussed the role of divine guidance in her counseling work. She believed that god would guide her and give her the strength to deal with the issues and concerns that clients brought to her.

See, now a person comes for counseling, I don’t know the topic they are going to talk to me about, so whatever the words I am going to talk to them, whatever thoughts I have that I am going to portray to them, and give them solutions to the problem, God is my strength, I don’t get tired and I think that is because I have the inner spiritual health in me… Because I pray to god and that helps me to be close to him. (Barbara)

Rita mentioned that it was this power that helped keep faith, and believe that everyone had the ability to change.

I am Hindu, so a lot of my beliefs are from the Vedanta philosophy, There is a power greater than us, and there are things that we can do to stay connected with that power…It could be a simple meditation, a simple acknowledging that there is a power greater than you, it could be rituals, forms of worship, so it could be just any of those that help you to hook in, I use all of them. It works in the sense that I feel more connected with God and that helps me to connect with the people around me…. It has helped me tremendously in my work… it helps me keep faith in human nature… All of us have the capacity to change irrespective of what is happening, so being optimistic, being hopeful about my clients… (Rita)
Father Joseph, who trained at the Parish for 13 years before he trained to become a therapist, mentioned how he believed he was only an instrument for reflecting goodness.

**Doing the best.** Ameesh shared, “As in I believe in Gita… if I have worked the best I can that in itself is such a beautiful reward that money is a byproduct. It will come. We don’t need to look for that”. This belief from the Bhagavad Gita became a source for his inspiration to focus on his therapeutic work.

**Privilege to help others.** Samira mentioned that she made meaning of her therapist role by seeing this as a karmic duty, as understood in the Indian philosophy.

Sometimes I believe it is ‘Karma’, we are all sent to this world to do something, and this is my way of connecting to the powers and help some people feel better, do better and live a more meaningful life. So I almost see it like my privilege, my ‘Karma’, something that has been given to me, you go and do this. (Samira)

**Awareness of Intent.** Ishrat brought in another dimension, when she mentioned that it was her practice of Islam that leant her clarity of intent\(^\text{12}\). It was this clarity of intent that also helps her make sense of her therapist role.

**Personal Growth**

Therapists also worked on their spiritual growth through reading religious and spiritual texts, meditating and praying, to facilitate personal growth so they could be more available to their clients.

Sarah mentioned, “I have so much more compassion for people as I am not caught up with myself”. Her practice of Buddhism and how that helped her deal with

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\(^{12}\) Intention (niyyah or niyyat) in Islam refers to the spirit of doing deeds through which they may become religiously valid. Sincere intention turns permissible deeds into acts of worship. The ultimate worth of actions in Islam is determined by intent and sincerity.
personal challenges in her life made her feel more available for her clients. Zeba also
drew links on how self-work through spirituality spilled over to her therapeutic work.

Through spirituality I have come across simple things, giving time to myself,
meditation, doing nothing… I could not do it and I never agreed with it.
Today, I have reached a stage it has helped me a lot in my internal
processes… My work is also like that, I do what makes sense, this is how it
has generalized it to my work. (Zeba)

**Ending comments**

Trends in therapist narratives clearly suggested that therapists’ religious and
spiritual beliefs interfaced with the therapeutic landscape, indicating a need to provide
space for the religious and the spiritual in self-reflective practice. Not only did
religion/spirituality help make meaning of the therapist role but also helped in self-
care of the therapists.

Participants in the study conducted by Blair (2015) also drew connections on
how spirituality synthesized and integrated their identity and enriched their
therapeutic work through facilitating their personal well-being. Elwafi (2011) through
narratives of music therapists gleaned the role of religion/spirituality in their music
therapy practice. The discoveries were similar to the present research findings. One
of the music therapists in Elwafi’s (2011) study, who had converted to Islam
mentioned:

Two things I hold close to my heart is my Islam and my work as a music
therapist. These are both things that I have prayed about and opened myself up
spiritually to find the answer. I feel that I have been divinely inspired to follow
both of these paths. In Islam, we believe that people who are mentally disabled
or mentally ill are innocent, so my job takes on another level of spiritual
significance. My spiritual practice and clinical work are very connected for me. God is working on me. God is allowing me to work with people with special needs. The Persian poet, Jalāl ad-Dīn Rumi, is a revered saint in Sufism. He has many analogies and metaphors for spiritual practice, and one of them is being the chickpea cooking in the pot. God’s cooking me right now. I’m not done yet, but someday I’ll be really good soup! (p.176)

Religious and spiritual beliefs lie at the core of how individuals define their identity, and may be critical in the meaning making process. The personal spiritual journey, for those who subscribe to or practice any form of religion or spirituality may intertwine with the professional growth trajectory. An invitation for open dialogue on intersections is recommended.