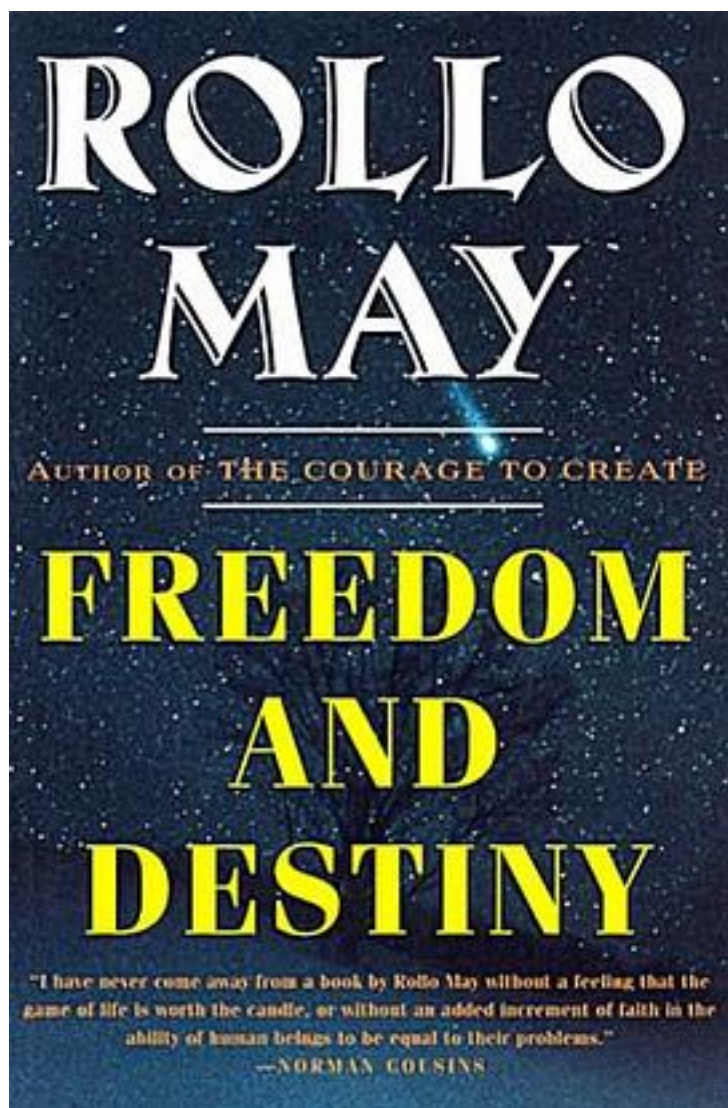


Freedom and Destiny



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This volume of seven essays on themes of family and gender in Indian popular culture seeks to commend popular culture as an important resource for sociological insights into contemporary social issues and processes. Drawing its material from three popular media - 'calendar art' (popular chromolithography), commercial 'Bollywood' cinema, and magazine romance fiction-the essays bring a gender-sensitive perspective to bear on the representation of the family, of childhood, of courtship and conjugality, of arranged and love marriage, of femininity and masculinity, and of sexuality within and outside marriage, as well as on the wider dilemmas and dynamics of Indian modernity and nation-building. While much has been written on the figure of the woman as icon of the national society and on the Hindu pantheon as a template for visualizing gender roles and relationships, the author also takes up here the iconicization of the child and the family in the national imaginary, illustrating her arguments with stunning visuals from her personal collection of Indian calendar art. Freedom and Destiny explores the contradictions in the moral economy of Indian family life as these are projected in the contemporary popular media. Particularly salient is the tension between the expression of female desire and culturally normative expectations of feminine deportment. But the book also addresses the insistent challenges of modernity in the domain of private life whereby, for men and women alike, the ideals of individual autonomy and freedom of choice and action are seen to be constrained by a social ethic that privileges the value structure of the joint family over the individual needs and desires of its members and the lure of romance. Written over the last dozen years since the institutionalization of policies of economic liberalization in the early 1990s, and revised in the present context, some of these pioneering essays have now become classics in their own right. By bringing them together, the author underlines their essential thematic unity across several distinct genres of popular culture. The effort has been to achieve accessibility and to avoid sociological jargon, without sacrificing either disciplinary rigor or, for that matter, the underlying feminist standpoint.

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