# ASHIS NANDY AND SOME STRANGE & SUBLIME ENCOUNTERS OF THE OTHER KIND

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*"... we... trusted too much in the modern consciousness....(T)he great discoveries of applied science are paid for with an increasing diminution of theoretical awareness....On the road to modern science men renounce any claim to meaning."*

- Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno[1]

This paper attempts one particular reading of Ashis Nandy's oeuvre. Based on this particular reading of Nandy, it attempts other readings of some dominant cognitive and political categories of our age. It does not purport to place itself in any particular disciplinary field or tradition, but instead claims legitimacy from a dialectic of ontologies, of the kind that the politics of cultures has made inevitable in our times.

The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section I will present what in my reading forms the core of Nandy's general thesis. In the second section I will present, with the help of one specific example, the manner in which Nandy relocates and relativizes dominant knowledge forms and thus displays, and self-consciously articulates, a higher-order cognition and awareness. In the third section of this paper, I will try to examine what kinds of questions Nandy allows us to ask of some dominant contemporary modes of understanding the world. Finally, in the last section I will reflect on some of the implications of his position.

Before I begin one caveat. Since the first two sections of this paper are efforts at recapitulating what Nandy has already written, they will largely consist of summaries of some of his arguments. By refusing to presume my readers would know their Nandy and in choosing to write these two sections, I have erred on the side of caution. The motive for this refusal stems from my suspicion that not only do most of Nandy's detractors and critics not understand him too well, but also many of his admirers do not seem to appreciate the full implications of his position.

Also, one terminological clarification before I begin. Whenever I use the word 'western' before the word 'modernity,' I do so to emphasize modernity's provenance and do not intend to suggest that there is any such thing as a non-western modernity.

In my reading, the core of Nandy's general thesis may be found in his essay *Science, Authoritarianism and Culture: On the Scope and Limits of Isolation Outside the Clinic.*[2] At the heart of the essay is the idea of isolation and western modernity's singular and self-determining reliance on it. Isolation refers to the splitting of cognition from affect.

Freud described isolation as an ego defence, a psychological mechanism which helped the human mind to cope with unacceptable or ego-alien inner impulses and external threats. According to Freud, the individual sometimes isolated an event, idea or an act by cauterizing it emotionally and by preventing it from becoming a part of his significant experience. The event, idea or the act was not forgotten; it was reincorporated into consciousness after being deprived of its affect. This did not, Freud granted, really free ideas or actions from feelings. It merely replaced conscious associations by unconscious ones and displaced the affect to other ideas or events.[3]

Otto Fenichel, a second-generation psychoanalyst, had this to say about isolation:

> The most important special case of this defence mechanism is the isolation of an idea from the emotional cathexis (load of feelings) that originally was connected with it.... In discussing the most exciting events, the patient remains calm but may then develop at quite another point an incomprehensible emotion, without being aware of the fact that the emotion has been displaced...
>
> The normal prototype is the process of logical thinking, which actually consists of the continued elimination of affective associations in the interest of objectivity....Compulsion neurotics, in their isolation activities, behave like caricatures of normal thinkers... they always desire order, routine, system.[4]

As Nandy points out, "such a definition, however clinical or sterilized it may sound to its author, already verges on social criticism. It admits that order, routine and system are not absolute values, that an over-commitment to them could be an illness."[5] Nandy also gives a brief account of how isolation has been used and/or criticized (though rarely self-consciously) in the arts. One of the examples he presents is that of Bertolt Brecht's play *Mr. Puntilla.* This is the story of a businessman whose personality is split. He is a heartless calculating machine when sober; humane and lovable when drunk. When sober, pathological isolation is the main feature of his personality. When drunk, the feelings he dissociates from ideas and actions re-emerge uncensored and get reattached to his ideas and actions. That this happens only when he is drunk, is Brecht's final comment on the psychopathology of modern society.[6]

Erich Fromm's words are just as telling:

> Reason flows from the blending of rational thought and feeling. If the two functions are torn apart, thinking deteriorates into schizoid intellectual activity, and feeling deteriorates into neurotic life-damaging passions.
>
> The split between thought and affect leads to a sickness, to a low-grade chronic schizophrenia, from which the new man of the technotronic age begins to suffer.... There are low-grade chronic forms of psychoses which can be shared by millions of people.[7]

Thus, isolation is a mixed blessing. While purporting to facilitate objectivity and logical thinking, it must in that process necessarily promote objectification of the cosmos. In so far as isolation actually facilitates objectivity and logical thinking, it carries tremendous creative potential. But the concomitant objectification of the cosmos cannot, in the long run, be anything but pathological, for this objectification brings with it instrumentalism in the use of reason itself as it is applied to man's relationship with everything in his/her cosmos, not excluding even personal relationships.

At the dawn of the modern age the two faces of isolation (i.e. the creative and the pathological) presented new possibilities to Europe. The creative possibilities were realized through the creativity of the newly emergent scientific worldview that singularly (and ostensibly immanently) challenged all pre-modern traditions of knowing the world. The "projective" nature of science (as Nandy has suggested) which had characterized pre-modern Europe was progressively disavowed and altered beyond recognition by this new isolationist science. The possibilities of the other face of isolation, that of its pathology, were to be subsequently realized, most conspicuously in modern authoritarianism and totalitarianism, but also more insidiously as low-grade psycho-pathologies shared by millions dependent on the dehumanized and rational expertise of modern science, its technologies, and its professionals.[8] While this isolationist experience may have initially served as a corrective to an overly projective worldview, it has subsequently run amok and created its own systems of oppression.

The justification I offer for suggesting this paper as the core of Nandy's general thesis is as follows. Firstly, this paper provides a convenient conceptual framework that can accommodate virtually all the stories that Nandy narrates. The corpus of his writings that D. R. Nagaraj has identified as belonging to the Antigone mode[9] (thematically ranging from his attacks on the ideas of social evolutionism, progress & development, nationalism, nation-statism and secularism) and additionally, his writings on science, can clearly be seen to be based on, *inter alia*, the particular insight that the notion of isolation offers. Central to this set of writings is the role of pathological isolation as the very constitutive principle of western modernity. His other set of writings, the rich elaborations of the complex mutual transformations that take place in the encounter between western modernity and 'other' life-worlds (broadly those works that D. R. Nagaraj has identified as belonging to the Kipling-Ramanujan mode)[10] can be viewed in terms of a dichotomy between life-worlds in which the isolationist strand is the dominant cultural strand (i.e. western modernity), and life-worlds in which it is not (i.e. 'other' life-worlds).[11] Thus, the isolation paper offers a conceptual framework that can accommodate the range of Nandy's writings.

Secondly, it takes on directly the most powerful and seemingly immanent transformatory juggernaut to have ever been unleashed in the whole of human history, that of western modernity. Nandy does at least two things to modernity: (a) he identifies some of the inherent and constitutive pathological elements in modernity and (b) he domesticates western modernity's arrogance (and debunks its universalistic pretensions) by unearthing in its historical trajectories the specific cultural contexts that furnished the human subjectivities conducive to its own development.

While I present these arguments, I am also conscious of the fact that this paper of Nandy's is crucial as a modernist reading of modernity. This paper offers a critique of modernity using those categories of knowledge that modernity has developed for its own self-understanding. The implications of this modernist critique of modernity are explicitly spelt out in some of Nandy's other essays.[12] Taken together these other essays explore the theme of the recovery of human selfhood.

To conclude this section, I can do no better than to quote one of Nandy's most perceptive readers on one of the logical conclusions of Nandy's writings. D. R. Nagaraj, the Kannada literary theorist, in one of his last essays formulated what I have come to believe to be the central problem in our societies today: **the problem of the "internalization of the emancipatory vision of modernity."**[13]

In his essay *The Savage Freud: The First Non-Western Psychoanalyst and the Politics of Secret Selves in Colonial India*,[14] Nandy briefly examines two lives, that of Freud and of Girindrasekhar Bose (the latter being the first non-western psychoanalyst in the title of the essay). Further, he also examines the cultural baggage each of them carried and speculates on how their work came to carry certain features as a result of their cultural baggage.

I will first deal briefly with what Nandy has to say about Freud. He suggests that there was

> ...a contradiction in the European culture of science which got telescoped into Freud's self-definition and which the late nineteenth-century Viennese medicine man was never able to reconcile in his life or work.... The contradiction was defined by a number of polarities, not all of them orthogonal: the metaphysical versus the applied or the narrowly empirical; the clinical versus the experimental; the intuitive and aesthetic versus the tough-minded and the objective; and, above all, between Freud the holistic healer and social critic inspired by the romantic tradition of science versus Freud the heroic, masculine scientist-engineer and pioneer of a new theoretical school, self-consciously speaking the language of hard-eyed positivism. Some of these polarities were to survive in a few of his followers and in the disciplinary culture they built, though they had to drive underground the culturally less acceptable ends of the polarities, for fear of the social and professional costs of their dissenting philosophy and politics.
>
> ...a word on Freud's self-definition as a scientist. Freud was the product of a culture of science within which German romanticism was not quite dead. For though he lived well into the twentieth century, he really belonged to the previous one. By his own admission, he decided to study medicine after reading Goethe's evocative essay on nature, and he was exposed through his friend Wilhelm Fliess to romantic medicine, many of the assumptions of which came from the naturphilosophie of Schelling. The exposure was deep enough for Robert Holt to trace to it one entire genre of Freud's work.[15]

However, the dominant strand in the culture of science that determined Freud's self-definition as a scientist was something more familiar to us moderns.

The culture of science that sustained Freud as a holistic scientist was, however, one into which the experimental method and the idiom of positivism had made heavy inroads.[16]

The basic contradiction in Freud, therefore, was between the inner logic of clinical work which demanded a set of categories that came from myths, fantasies, and self-analysis, and a philosophy of science which demanded a different language of self-expression. The conflict between his emotions and reason sharpened the contradiction. Billa Zanuso goes so far as to suggest that "there is not a single trait of his character, not a decision he made nor an incident in his life, that cannot be interpreted in two different ways" due to this conflict.

For an outsider to the western world, these fissures within Freud opened up immense possibilities, some of them invisible to those close to Freud culturally.[17]

It is these possibilities that Nandy seeks to unearth in the work of Girindrasekhar Bose, the first non-western psychoanalyst. He does this by presenting a story with which Girindrasekhar Bose begins his interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita.* He follows this story with speculations on what kinds of questions and issues that Bose might have consciously or unconsciously tried to raise.

Briefly, the story is as follows: Pundarika is the son of Sarvilaka, a powerful, pious, learned and highly respected Brahmin in ancient Magadha. On the night Pundarika turns sixteen, his father decides to initiate him into their family custom. Sarvilaka puts on a loin cloth, covers himself up in oil and picks up an axe, asking his son to do the same. The father then leads his son to the highway connecting Magadha with Varanasi and they position themselves below a Banyan tree in the dark. Soon, a rich merchant in a horse-drawn carriage with eight armed escorts comes along the highway. When the carriage is sufficiently close, Sarvilaka springs from behind the tree with a roar, scares all the armed escorts away (what with his attire!), decapitates the merchant with his axe, picks up the merchant's gold and comes back to where his son is standing. He then escorts his totally shaken, terrorized, and speechless son back home and locks him in a room. Once inside the room, Pundarika regains some of his composure, but his mind has now turned into a vortex of anger, disgust, contempt and hurt. In this state of high tension, he gradually falls asleep. The next morning, the usual and serene Sarvilaka is standing next to his bed as he wakes up. For a moment Pundarika cannot believe his memories of the events that had taken place the previous night, but the sight of his own loin cloth and oiled body confirms them and his intense contempt for his father returns immediately. The serene Sarvilaka promises to explain everything to his son later in the day. And that afternoon he does just that. In his long conversation with his son, Sarvilaka justifies every single act of their family custom in the terms of the sacred texts, particularly by the tenets of the *Gita*, for he feels that Pundarika's moral anxieties were similar to those of Arjuna before Kurukshetra. Pundarika, well versed in the sacred texts himself, is able to appreciate Sarvilaka's sophisticated argumentation and the doubts in his mind gradually dissolve. He then expresses his gratitude to his father for having made him see his point and pledges loyalty to the family custom.[18]

With this story of homicide, secret selves, a seductive 'immoral' father, his vulnerable 'moral' son, and their final Oedipal compact after an aborted rebellion, the world's first non-western psychoanalyst, Girindrasekhar Bose, begins in 1931 his interpretation of the *Gita* in the pages of *Pravasi*, the influential Bengali journal of the pre-Independence years.[19]

Bose's interpretation of this story, Nandy tells us, is more social-philosophical than psychoanalytic, and that though Bose claims to be motivated by psychological curiosity rather than religious faith, in many places psychology enters the interpretation almost inadvertently, even diffidently. Now we turn to Nandy's speculative questions regarding this story and the manner of its interpretation by Bose.

It remains unexplained why Bose has nothing to say about the passive resolution of the Oedipal encounter that takes place in the story or about the inverted relationship between a weak son personifying his father's manifest moral self and a powerful father personifying moral seduction and the amoral rationality latent in the son. Was Bose's psychoanalysis a negation of Pundarika's weak, transient rebellion against a strong, amoral, parental authority? Did that defiance of defiance make Bose's cognitive venture an ethical statement? Why does Bose refuse to consider the possibility that Sarvilaka's secret self, the one that his son finally owns up, represents unmediated primitive impulses of the kind that psychoanalysis subsumes under the category of the id? Is it because there is in Sarvilaka a complex structure of rationalization, including an element of controlled, dispassionate violence that defies the conventional definition of the id and the primary process?

Nor does Bose explain why his partiality for Pundarika's early Oedipal dissent is justified not in the language of the ego but that of the super-ego, whereas Pundarika's moral seduction by Sarvilaka is cast not in the language of the super-ego but that of the ego. It was as if the triumph of the therapeutic in South Asia heralded not so much a new bridge-head of the ego in the realm of the id as an empowerment of the super-ego through an abridgement of the sphere of the unencumbered, psychopathic ego.

What Nandy is suggesting here is that Bose's inversion of the categories of western psychoanalysis serve him in very fundamental ways, ways which go far beyond the concerns of his own chosen modern discipline. They serve him in validating his ethical world, which he has inherited in his cultural context and carries with him even into the realms of his own chosen modern discipline.[20]

Through this and other essays, Nandy suggests that dominant modern modes of knowledge implicitly or explicitly endorse a certain version of the super-ego that not only validates but also promotes the use of pathological isolation as the ultimate arbiter of all of life's questions. As indicated earlier, this process involves the consolidation and institutionalization of isolation as a defence mechanism and leads to a progressively objectified and instrumentalized perception of the cosmos. Thus, modernity has, through its science, established an entire spectrum of professionals and experts who are expected to bring their objectivity, "profession

alism," and "expertise" to bear upon all aspects of life under modernity.

Meanwhile, some of the very practitioners of the modern disciplines, if they are culturally distant from the locus and sites of modernity (i.e. people of the non-west), evolve mechanisms of coping with the dialectic of their modern and non-modern selves. Thus, the psychoanalyst Girindrasekhar Bose's story (narrated above) is creatively and playfully subversive of western psychoanalytic categories. Nandy then extends this argument to cover entire peoples in the non-western world who have learnt to live with modernity and its constitutive ways of knowing the world, thereby shedding light on processes that lie hidden to most social scientists operating within modernist cognitive categories.

Nandy is not, of course, suggesting that the regimented isolation that has become the dominant cultural strand of the modern west is unique to the west alone. He has identified the Brahmanic tradition (of knowledge-seeking) as a hyper-masculine and, presumably, isolationist cultural strand in Indian civilization. But the crucial difference is that what came to be the dominant and self-determining strand in European culture at the dawn of the modern age remained one of a diversity of strands in Indian culture. Taking another cue from Nandy, it is also perhaps possible to see the isolationist strands in Indian civilization as revolving around self-knowledge whereas the isolationist strand in European culture came to be projected outwards, towards a knowledge of the world.[21]

The above is just one way of reading Nandy's general thesis. Nandy narrates so many stories that it is possible to reach the level of awareness he talks about from other perspectives as well. For instance, it is possible to reach the same level of awareness through a rigorous examination of the history, philosophy and sociology of science. However, whatever the mode adopted, it must ultimately involve a great deal of self-exploration on the part of the reader as many of the psychological processes involved are often inaccessible to the modern experience.

An indication of the capaciousness of Nandy's position is provided by Nandy himself. When Nandy dedicates his book *The Savage Freud* to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, D. D. Kosambi and to Nirad C. Chaudhuri–three people who (if they were ever to find themselves together in a single room), would probably go for one another's throats-he does so in slight irony but also, more importantly, with a profound sense of empathy for each of them. It is this very sense of empathy that allowed him to deliver one of his most important attacks on science, *Science, Authoritarianism and Culture* as a lecture in a series organized in memory of M. N. Roy, a man who in his later years exemplified the rational and scientific temper in India at its most humane.

In this section I will be looking at what kinds of questions Nandy allows us to ask of some dominant contemporary modes of understanding the world. For my purposes, I have chosen to interrogate aspects of the work of two scholars, the historian Simon Schama and the Lacanian Marxist scholar Slavoj Zizek. I wish also to emphasize that this selection has been primarily arbitrary and secondarily based on considerations of variety and entertainment.

Simon Schama's widely acclaimed book *Landscape and Memory*, published in 1995, has lofty ambitions. In his introduction Schama sets them out thus:

> (What *Landscape and Memory* tries to be is) a way of looking; of rediscovering what we already have, but which somehow eludes our recognition and our appreciation. Instead of being yet another explanation of what we have lost, it is an exploration of what we may yet find.
>
> In offering this alternative way of looking, I am aware that more is at stake than an academic quibble. For if the entire history of landscape in the West is indeed just a mindless race toward a machine-driven universe, uncomplicated by myth, metaphor, and allegory, where measurement, not memory, is the absolute arbiter of value, where our ingenuity is our tragedy, then we are indeed trapped in the engine of our self-destruction.... Instead of assuming the mutually exclusive character of Western culture and nature, I want to suggest the strength of the links that have bound them together.[22]

I was drawn towards Schama's book because of my own interest in studies that purport to examine alternative cognitive categories. But fabulously entertaining as his book is, the mulish student of the enlightenment in Schama just cannot commit himself to anything which might blemish the sanctity of his tradition.

Chapter II of the first part of his book is a hugely entertaining and riveting account of the mythic memory of the primeval forest in the imagination and self–definition of the German people. In his narrative, Schama refers to the work of Wilhelm Riehl, the German Sociologist of "field and forest" in the late nineteenth century, and suggests that Riehl belongs to the tradition of Henry David Thoreau, John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, the very people that Nandy has identified in his own writings as representing the dissenting recessive strands in the history of the modern west. Yet, what survives Schama's account is not the manifestations of this dissenting recessive tradition, but a bogey that the dominant Enlightenment man in Schama must raise.

The second path took *Deutschtum*-Germanness-into darker and less innocent glades–though it would also be a mistake to assume that every forest tramper in *lederhosen* was a recruit for the Reich to come. The Wandervogel youth movement and the Ramblers who communed, Siegfried style, around bonfires on forested hills, attracted not just those who saw themselves as the new generation of *Hermannskinder*, but also some on the left, not least the young Walter Benjamin. Left and right, after all, shared the contempt for bourgeois urban materialism proclaimed by Riehl and were prepared to follow him in extolling nature, and especially the sublime German portion of it, as of transcendent value. The craving was for some idealized, immutable rural community that had not been prostituted by industrial modernity.

Ultimately, though there may have been some leftist stragglers on the way, the trail through the beechwoods led to terrible rehearsals of the Hermannsschlacht. This time the enemy was not just the legions of the hapless Varus but the entire Enlightenment tradition of humane liberalism.[23]

What Schama is doing here is to set up a genealogy of mid-twentieth century German fascism which has as its chief villain the memory of the primeval forest in the German imagination.

Nandy offers another genealogy of the inhumanity of mid-twentieth century German fascism. His references come from studies conducted from the vantage points of psychoanalysis and even Marxism. His references are people like Erich Fromm (his books like *Escape from Freedom*), studies of the authoritarian personality by Theodor Adorno and his associates of the Frankfurt School and Hannah Arendt's study of Adolf Eichmann.[24] The main distinguishing characteristic of the tradition that Nandy's genealogy invokes is the fact that it points to **the fascist as in some ways the ideal modern personality, as it is in the fascist that pathological isolation reaches its unencumbered zenith**.[25]

Between the geneologies offered by Schama and Nandy, my choice is clear; we may recall here Leni Riefenstahl's imagery of the Nazi era, of the centrality to her image the sense of order and routine and system. A couple of years ago in Bangalore, I saw a documentary film on Leni Riefenstahl that showed clippings which didn't make it to the final versions of her films. These clippings showed soldiers looking askance, not quite in order, with a slightly turned collar here and an out-of-step soldier there. This was, the older Riefenstahl's voice said in the background, the real Nuremberg rally. But her brief was to show the soldiers and their marches only in their order, only in their perfection.

We may reflect on the fact that the concentration camp was not a Nazi invention but was used by 'liberal' Britain as early as in 1898, in the Boer war. Much the same camps were used by the US to isolate Japanese communities living in the US during the Second World War.

And we may reflect on the fact that eugenics was not a Nazi aberration but was at one time a robust modern science which was pursued by 'model' countries like Sweden where women were sterilized under state-sponsored eugenics programmes as recently as in the late '60s.

Schama, for all his political correctness, is aware of the proximity of the mythic to human feeling and the not-so-holy status of reason in human life. But his tradition forces him (one gets the feeling, despite himself) to correct for any perception that he has been seduced by his visions. So he goes out of the way to correct for this. Thus, the last 20% of his chapter is devoted to good old-fashioned liberal moralizing based on the paintings of the German painter Anselm Keifer.

What we get finally is some rather forgettable condescension:

> So how much myth is good for us? And how can we measure the dosage? Should we avoid the stuff altogether for fear of contamination or dismiss it out of hand as sinister and irrational esoterica that belong only in the unsavory margins of 'real' (to wit, our own) history? Or do we have to ensure that a *cordon sanitaire* of protective irony is always securely in place when discussing such matters? Should certifications of ideological purity be published attesting under oath that we are not doing dirty business with the Devil under the pretense of learned work?...[26]

In a sense, Schama's mode of reasoning falls into what Slavoj Zizek calls, in another context, the "impossible" position of enunciation. Zizek's examples of this "impossible" position of enunciation are:

> "Officer Krupke" the song (in West Side Story) in which the delinquents provide the amazed policeman with the socio-psychological explanation of their attitude; they are victims of disadvantageous social circumstances and unfavourable family relations... When asked about the reasons for their violence against foreigners, neo-Nazi skinheads in Germany tend to give the same answers: they suddenly start to talk like social workers, sociologists and social psychologists, quoting diminished social mobility, rising insecurity, the disintegration of paternal authority, etc.

What the skinheads assert is a lie even if, or rather precisely in so far as, it is factually true-their assertions are belied by their very position of enunciation, i.e. by the neutral, disengaged position from which the victim is able to tell the objective truth about itself.[27]

Schama, by villainizing the mythic and by implicitly valourizing pathological isolation (to adapt another of Zizek's descriptions again) pretends to assume the standpoint of universality from which "pathological" isolation as a contingent "pathological" feature, as such is not to be taken into consideration.

Now I will move on to a brief consideration of Zizek himself. Slavoj Zizek, the Slovenian Lacanian Marxist has been an active leader of the democratic movement in Slovenia. He is today perhaps one of the most sophisticated, influential and yes, entertaining, Marxist scholars around. Now a brief presentation of his basic analytical field before I raise some questions.

Zizek, unlike many Marxists who are still plotting the revolution, is a happy Marxist. He manages to get an indefinite extension on the lease of the Marxian normative vision by re-interpreting Hegel's dialectics:

> ...far from being a story of its progressive overcoming, dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts– 'absolute knowledge' denotes a subjective position which finally accepts 'contradiction' as an internal condition of every identity.[28]

In Zizek's theory the primary tool that enables people to live is "the symptom." Zizek's definition of the symptom runs as follows:

> Marx 'invented the symptom' (Lacan) by means of detecting a certain fissure, an asymmetry, a certain 'pathological' imbalance which belies the universalism of the bourgeois 'rights and duties.' This imbalance, far from announcing the 'imperfect realization' of these universal principles–that is, an insufficiency to be abolished by further development –functions as their constitutive moment: the 'symptom' is, strictly speaking, a particular element which subverts its own universal foundation, a species subverting its own genus... (The symptom) consists in detecting a point of breakdown *heterogenous* to a given ideological field and at the same time *necessary* for that field to achieve its closure, its accomplished form.

> This procedure thus implies a certain logic of exception: every ideological Universal–for example freedom, equality–is 'false' in so far as it necessarily includes a specific case which breaks its unity, lays open its falsity. Freedom, for example: a universal notion comprising a number of species (freedom of speech and press, freedom of consciousness, freedom of commerce, political freedom, and so on) but also, by means of a structural necessity, a specific freedom (that of the worker to sell freely his own labour on the market) which subverts this universal notion. That is to say, this freedom is the very opposite of effective freedom: by selling his labour 'freely,' the worker *loses* his freedom–the real content of this free act of sale is the worker's enslavement to capital. The crucial point is, of course, that it is precisely this paradoxical freedom, the form of its opposite, which closes the circle of 'bourgeois freedoms.'[29]

The normative order and the energy for political action is provided by utopian socialism:

> (In) the Marxian perspective, *utopian* socialism consists in the very belief that a society is possible in which the relations of exchange are universalized and production for the market predominates, but workers themselves none the less remain proprietors of their means of production and are therefore not exploited–in short, 'utopian' conveys a belief in the possibility of a *universality without its symptom,* without the point of exception functioning as its internal negation.[30]

This then is Zizek's basic analytical field. Let us examine one such symptom that he identifies. In a recent essay on the nature of the super-ego in late capitalism, Zizek writes:

> (There is a) tension between rights and prohibitions (that) determines heterosexual seduction in our politically correct times. Or, to put it differently, there is no seduction which cannot at some point be construed as intrusion or harassment because there will always be a point when one has to expose oneself and 'make a pass.' But, of course, seduction does not involve incorrect harassment throughout. When you make a pass, you expose yourself to the Other (the potential partner), and her reaction will determine whether what you just did was harassment or a successful act of seduction. There is no way to tell in advance what her response will be (which is why assertive women often despise 'weak' men, who fear to take the necessary risk). This holds even more in our times: the pc prohibitions are rules which, in one way or another, are to be violated in the seduction process.[31]

Now let us refer back to Zizek's cure for the presence of the symptom in the body, Marxian utopian socialism. The question that one may wish to ask of Zizek is this: how is Marxian socialism going to rid the body of this particular symptom? Will Marxian socialism so overhaul the process of seduction that there will be no trace of the tension he talks about? Or will Marxian socialism totally dissolve the seduction process altogether? Zizek leaves us with assertions of such intriguing possibilities! Or is it possible that all that he really has to offer here is his injunction 'Enjoy!'?

This particular example of Zizek's unwittingly points to the fact that **the fundamental issues of our time are as much cultural as anything else.**

In his very useful essay *Cultural Frames for Social Transformation: A Credo,*[32] Nandy indicates the broad contours along which emancipation in our age can be sought. The principal issue is this: what cultural frame do we adopt for social transformation? Should we continue to adopt modern science and all its positivist social baggage as a key to our future? Or can our minds be liberated from this oppression to enable us to more fully and sensitively address the issue of our futures? Such sensitivity can be ensured only if our visions adopt our own cultural life and traditions as framing references. In this context, Nandy has suggested that we should promote three specific languages: the language of continuity, the language of the spirit and the language of the self.[33] These three languages will help bring personal morality into the public realm. In our societies, political discourse has for too long been dominated by an impersonal modernist frame of reference thus cutting it off from questions of personal morality and accountability. Suffice it here to note one important point: as Gandhi held, institutions can never be designed so perfectly or scientifically that they would obviate the need for individuals to be good.[34]

In the long run, the struggle against modern oppression has to be fought on all fronts. The language of the self allows us to replace the modernity-tradition binary with the notion of loss and recovery. It is in keeping with this notion that Nandy constantly emphasizes the need to unearth the dissenting recessive strands in the modern west as a necessary component of our struggle against modern oppression. This is merely an indication of the diverse grounds on which this struggle has to take place. Nandy himself continues to critically analyse our contemporary condition and to explore possibilities. This is also an elaboration of the world-view of an alternative universalism. In this task of elaboration he is joined by others like Shiv Visvanathan. Nandy's interventions in the debate on secularism have shown how effective and influential such elaborations can be. Some essays by Visvanathan have also been very effective interventions.

It is pointless for me to try and make an inventory of all the ramifications of Nandy's general thesis. It is perhaps far more important to emphasize the distinct apperception that Nandy induces in us, his readers. In this respect the power, range and idiosyncratic story narratives of Nandy's own writings will be, I am sure, far more effective and convincing than any derivative summary thereof. Here, I will restrict myself to a few words on some aspects of that apperception that Nandy induces in us. Nandy makes us aware of the fundamental cultural disjunctions in western modernity; between the male and the female, between the young and the old, between man and nature, between man and society, between man and his knowledge and between man and himself. To be sure, every culture adopts these disjunctions in their rituals of grappling with life's perennial and existential questions, which are common to all ages and cultures. But by adopting the language of a positivist science, rationality, and social evolutionism, western modernity ostensibly strives to underplay or deny these cultural disjunctions, although in the process it is nevertheless implicitly making universalistic claims for its own versions of these disjunctions. As a result, the political stratarchies western modernity sets up are homologous to its own versions of these disjunctions; thus against

the self-definition of the dominant west as modern, scientific, masculine, civilized and adult, the oppressed 'other' cultures are designated as primitive, unscientific, feminine, savage, and childish.

Nandy helps the non-western imagination to become aware of dimensions of our human selfhood that modernity only partly understands. Nandy helps us acquire a fuller, richer, ontological awareness in which modernity is only a constituent part. Thus we begin to inhabit an alternative universalism. Unfortunately, and perhaps inevitably, many of the psychological processes involved in this realization are inaccessible to the modern experience.

Nandy makes us aware of the oneness of human oppression and suffering. Along with this awareness comes a re-affirmation of the ancient wisdom that what one does to others, one does not just to oneself but also to one's very cognitive abilities. Or as Nandy puts it towards the end of *The Intimate Enemy*, "knowledge without ethics is not so much bad ethics as inferior knowledge."

I would be failing in my duty here if I were not to record my gratitude to Nandy on behalf of a generation whose search for the political articulation of their personal ethical universe will be, thanks to his work, so much less burdensome than it was for him and his generation. His immense courage and perseverance in unearthing processes and experiences that have remained shut to most people of his own generation in the face of near-insurmountable political, institutional and cultural odds has left us deeply indebted to him.

## Notes

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1. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, [1944] 1998), p.xi and p.5.
2. In Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 95-126.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 97
4. Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), p. 156 quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 97.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-8.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
7. Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward A Humanized Technology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 42-3 quoted in *Ibid.*, p.107-108.
8. As the two faces of isolation are inseperable and because I wish to emphasize the pathological face, I will henceforth use the prefix 'pathological' before the word 'isolation' in this paper.
9. D.R.Nagaraj, Introduction to Ashis Nandy, *Exiled at Home*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.xii
10. *Id.*
11. I am aware that the schema and methodology of this set of Nandy's writings can be attempted on any instance of a clash of cultures and colonization in history. However, it is also clear that both Nandy's politics and his own elaborations of the culture of colonialism in our age have grown out of our experience of, and militate against, western modernity.
12. See, for instance, the essays, especially the prefatory essays, in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987) and the essay "Cultural Frames for Social Transformation: A Credo" in Fred Dallmayr and G.N. Devy (eds.), *Between Tradition and Modernity*, (New Delhi: Sage, 1998), pp. 251-264.
13. D.R. Nagaraj, Review of Shiv Visvanathan, A Carnival for Science, in *Seminar 460*, December 1997, p.65.
14. Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 81-144.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-3.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
17. Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud*, pp.135-6.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-86.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
20. See also Nandy's reading of Indian popular cinema in An Intelligent Critic's Guide to Indian Cinema, *The Savage Freud*, pp.196-236.
21. For a slightly different sense of the contrast between the psychological worlds of the Indian and a person in the west, see Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner*
22. *World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), particularly pp. 104-112. Even someone like Stanley J. Tambiah has recognised that "Kakar lacks the assurance to defend the subordinated orientation (of the Indian) as in fact mature and worthy of equal valuation." See Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.101.
23. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (London: Fontana Press, 1996), p. 14.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
25. Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias*, pp. 100-101.
26. Those readers who may still be inclined to pursue the nationalist roots of Nazism, and fascism in general, need also to be aware of Nandy's own position on nationalism as elaborated in *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) and *Creating a Nationality* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
27. *Ibid.*, p.134.
28. Slavoj Zizek, *From Joyce-the-Symptom to the Symptom of Power*, www.plexus.org/lacink/lacink11/zizek.html
29. Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), p. 6.
30. *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.
31. *Ibid.*, p.23.
32. Slavoj Zizek, 'You May!', *The London Review of Books*, vol. 21, No. 6, 18 March 1999, pp.3-6 at p.5.
33. In Fred Dallmayr and G.N. Devy (eds.), *Between Tradition and Modernity*, (New Delhi: Sage, 1998), pp. 251-264.
34. *Id.*
35. Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias*, p.135.
Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p. 113.

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