Secularization Beyond Western Eyes: Ashis Nandy and the Defense of Innocence

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One of the primary critiques of the standard secularization thesis derived from Max Weber has been articulated by a widely published scholar based in India—Ashis Nandy—who, though Christian by parentage and early education, is deeply committed to the idea that the life and thought of Mohandas K. Gandhi provides the beginnings of an adequate, non-Western, and specifically Indian approach to the question of secularization.[1] In what follows, I focus on Nandy's forceful riposte to Weberian models and his reframing of the question of secularization along Gandhian lines. His writing demonstrates both the historical necessity of separating secularization in the Christian West from its appearance in the East and the difficulty of constructing a counter-narrative of secularization today outside the constraints of Western analysis.[2] It is important to examine Nandy's critique, for it elaborates an alternate history of secularization that most Western scholarship has been reluctant to embrace.

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It is impossible to comprehend Nandy's arguments about secularism, the West, and India unless one also grasps the enormously complex and deeply intertwined nature of the economic, social, political, and religious conflicts that have roiled India since its independence.[3] What Michel Foucault simply called 'governmentality' or what John Rawls referred to as 'political liberalism,' by which the secular nation-state comes to supersede the historically embedded 'comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines' of a population, has had a very different history in India than it has had in most

Western societies. The production of a political subject that is governable with a minimum of hard coercion is clearly one of the most impressive and undeniable achievements of Western civil society, whether or not one likes the results. France worked with single-minded determination to create this subject during the Third Republic (1871-1914) (see E. Weber 1976); Germany also did so in the years between Bismarck and WWI, and has tried to do so again after the Nazi debacle and the end of the subsequent cold-war division of the country; and, after the collapse of its inchoate national idea in the Civil War, the United States (like Germany and France and Great Britain at different tempos) relied heavily on public education, military conscription, widely circulated newsprint and magazine publication, increasingly powerful civil institutions such as professional associations, unions, and political parties, and an increasingly unified and uniform 'culture industry' in order to create a national subject that simply did not exist in ante-bellum America. One might add that the creation of an American national subject was still quite partial as late as 1964, when the passage of civil rights legislation ended what was essentially racial apartheid in the US. Much contemporary cultural conflict in America (as in France and Germany) is still about the degree of political 'governmentality' citizens are willing to accept. But however one demarcates the periods of this history, it is impossible to deny that something like Foucault's softly governable subject is the hallmark of liberal, constitutional, Western nation-states, and that this subject may be deeply connected to Christianity and to the modes of secularization that, as Weber noted, it both spawned and was overcome by. By the same token, it is difficult to deny that India, despite its obvious success at creating a

democratic nation in a Western mode, faces challenges in its attempt to produce a liberal political subject that are simply unimaginable in most of the West's democracies.[4]

Nandy's view of secularism is, first, intimately tied up with his sense that India's history, including both a variegated tradition of religious community and conflict and especially a powerful Hindu heritage, cannot produce, and should not be forced to produce, a political subjectivity that is alien to it. Second, his understanding of secularism is that it is inseparable from a 'muscular Christianity'—not the Christianity of Christ that became so important for Mohandas K. Gandhi—that was equally a stimulus to and an effect of imperial Catholicism and imperial Protestantism. While the perspective that defines the modern West by its 'managerial' societies can hardly be restricted to Foucault—Alasdair MacIntyre made this sort of argument from the conservative side of the political spectrum and he particularly blamed the Reformation for it (see MacIntyre 1984)—it is clear that Nandy's arguments about the unsuitability for India of the political subject managed by the institutions of Western civil society are quite different from anything either Foucault or MacIntyre has proposed.

The key to Nandy's approach is a complex array of issues raised by Gandhi (and to a lesser extent Rabindranath Tagore) in Gandhi's powerful and ultimately successful strategy of resistance to the British Raj, a strategy of non-violent non-cooperation that for Nandy draws on the most authentic parts of the Hindu heritage. This strategy did not include the creation of the liberal Indian nation-state under Jawaharlal Nehru, with its strong inclination toward Western European socialism. Nehru's state fostered a decidedly secular, democratic-socialist, non-aligned political structure that guided India for much of the later twentieth century under Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, and grandson, Rajiv

Gandhi. In turn, Nehru's politics invited an even more populist, neo-Marxian, anti-colonial critique, as promoted by the Subaltern Studies Group, which built on the writings of Antonio Gramsci and Ranajit Guha (see Gramsci 1989 and Guha 1963). In one sense, what Nandy has dedicated his life's work to questioning is not simply the relevance to India of the secular nation-state of the West, but its apparent teleological trajectory toward the sort of democratic socialism that after WWII seemed to be the future of Western Europe and perhaps of India too. In another sense, however, what Nandy began to develop in the early 1980s through his critique of both secularism and the liberal nation-state is a perspective that Subaltern Studies figures like Guha would eventually come to approach on their own terms (see Guha 1998).

Nandy's larger project rests on his perception that India's attempt to mimic the Western liberal state, the Western secular subject, and Western notions of governmentality has in fact *produced* communal violence. In his view, India's post-1947 acquiescence to the globally enforced economic demand for an autonomous, assertive, and even bellicose secular subject is what has caused the all the enmity in the first place. Hindu nationalism, Muslim resistance, Sikh defensiveness—all these are for Nandy the consequence of a kind of religious identity and subjective morality that has, in effect, been 'Christianized,' which is to say put on the path toward a secular society that is deeply at odds with the older religious traditions, primarily Hindu, that had guaranteed peaceful coexistence in India before the coming of the Raj. How Nandy gets to this conclusion, which is deeply counter-intuitive to the Western observer, is important.

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Perhaps Nandy's most significant work to date is one of his earlier books, <u>The Intimate Enemy</u>, and I want to focus on it at some length because I believe it provides Nandy's best account of the foundational categories of his thinking. I do this by elaborating five major themes that shape his views on secularization.

(a) <u>Gender</u>

The book's two long essays are remarkable for the way they interweave, especially in the first essay ('The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age, and Ideology in British India'), discursive categories—gender roles and religion in particular—that previous critiques of the consciousness of colonizer and colonized alike (such as those by Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, V. G. Kiernan, and Edward Said) rarely addressed with the same depth or insight. For Nandy, these earlier critiques too often defended 'a non-West which itself is a construction of the West' (Nandy 1983, p. xii), including its understanding of individual subjectivity. He argues that 'the homology between sexual and political domination' was 'not central' to the early phases of British rule in India (1757-1830), but developed only with the advent of evangelical and then secularizing impulses toward economic development in the nineteenth century (Nandy 1983, p. 4). These included an unconsciously 'collaborationist' response by Indian intellectuals that enabled the imperial project: an Indian reinterpretation of India's religious past, which in effect re-wrote India's Hindu heritage in order to make it seem more like (and hence more competitive with) the muscular Christianity of the British Raj (Nandy 1983, p. 7).

The re-writing of the religious past was accomplished 'most dramatically' for Nandy by Michael Madhusudan Dutt, whose Bengali epic <u>Meghnadvadh Kavya </u>(1861)

retells the story of the <u>Ramayana</u> (6th-2nd century BCE, a text of many complete and incomplete manuscripts and possible contributors, though attributed in the verses themselves and by tradition to Valmiki, who is celebrated as the 'first' poet of Sanskrit literature) by 'turning the traditionally sacred figures of Rāma and Laksmana into weak-kneed, passive-aggressive, feminine villains and the demons Rāvana and his son Meghnād into majestic, masculine, modern heroes' (Nandy 1983, p. 19). In Valmiki's tale, Prince Rama is virtuous and sinned against: he is the seventh avatar of the god Vishnu, who incarnates Rama specifically to do away with Ravana, king of Sri Lanka and an unrighteous demon or <u>rakshasa,</u> also known as a 'man-eater,' a figure blessed by Brahma with protection against other gods and demons following thousands of years of penance for earlier wrongs. When Rama's stepmother insists (based on an earlier promise by Rama's father) on installing her own son as heir and demands Rama's banishment, Rama insists on accepting his fate and goes willingly into exile with his wife Sita and his brother Lakshmana as hermits. Rama and Lakshmana successfully fend off a host of demons sent their way by Ravana. In revenge, Ravana kidnaps Sita. The monkey god Hanuman, in league with Rama, eventually discovers Sita imprisoned in Sri Lanka, where she not only remains faithful to Rama, but refuses contact with any male (even the would-be rescuer Hanuman) other than her husband. Led by Hanuman and his league of monkey warriors, Rama and his party make their way to Sri Lanka, kill Ravana, and reunite with Sita. A later (post-Valmiki) addition to the tale provides an account of various subsequent events: Rama crowned king at home, Sita banished on rumors of infidelity, the birth of Rama's two sons, Sita's successful request that her mother, the earth, swallow her up as proof of her innocence (Sita also means furrow, and she has

been compared to a goddess of agriculture), and Rama's ascension to his heavenly home as Vishnu (see Basham 1968, pp. 414-15). In many ways, the tale (like the Homeric epics) is thus an agon both divine (Vishnu versus Brahma) and human (virtuous Rama versus treacherous Ravana).

By contrast, Madhusudan Dutt—who had earlier converted to the Church of England and rejected Hinduism—transforms the struggle between Rama and Ravana into a political allegory, now 'with morality on the side of the demons' (Nandy 1983, p. 19). Thus, while in Valmiki's Ramayana the exemplary and quasi-divine (but in no sense morally perfect) figure of Rama finally recovers Sita and triumphs over Ravana, thereby rightfully assuming the role as crown prince in Ayodhya that had been unjustly denied him, Madhusan's version of the tale presents Rama as corrupt even as he defeats and kills 'the courageous, proud, achievement-oriented, competitive, efficient, technologically superior, "sporting" demons symbolized by Meghnād [Ravana's son]' (Nandy 1983, p. 19). For Nandy, Madhusudan Dutt's alternative rendering of the tale becomes a primary exhibit in his indictment against forms of mid-nineteenth revisionism in Indian culture that perversely served to make Indian culture far more like Western, Christian culture than it had been earlier, and to purposes that for Nandy represent a sort of betrayal of India's essential nature, a betrayal vainly motivated by efforts to confront the Raj on its own terms.

Nandy does not claim that Madhusudan's is the first reinterpretation of the Ramayana—the tale is probably North Indian in character, and Rama is presented as a Prince of Ayodhya, just south of Nepal—since variants can be found in South India, Nepal, throughout Southeast Asia, and in Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh treatments.[5] And in

some of these alternative or dissenting versions, especially in the Puranic era (roughly 300-1200 CE), Ravana is given a more heroic character, and Rama is much less virtuous. But Nandy's point does not involve the originality of Dutt's revisionism. Rather, Nandy wants to emphasize the cultural and political role that Dutt's revisionism played in its time. For Nandy, the moral role-reversal effected in Madhusudan Dutt's version served a particular purpose in the context of the later Raj, allowing Madhusudan to use 'Rāma and his rabble' (Nandy traces the phrase to Madhusudan) as representative of childish, effeminate, ascetic, and politically impotent elements within Indian tradition that the more adult, masculine, possessive, and worldly forces represented by Ravana and especially his son Meghnad needed to overcome. Not incidentally, Nandy also sees the traditionally unrighteous Ravana as symbolic of the secular force of modernity in Madhusudan's retelling, and not simply as another side of the Ramayana myth. Madhusudan Dutt thus turns the Ramayana epic into a tragedy—which it is not, in Nandy's view—with a significance that was quite opposed to earlier (Puranic) understandings of tragedy as simply the inevitable transience of all things (the death of Krishna is Nandy's example). In doing so, Nandy suggests, Madhusudan introduced into the tale a modern sense of the tragic that derives from the death of a Promethean, and hence anti-theistic, hero at the hands of a backward and pastoral prince whose righteousness is a sham.

It is hard to find appropriate analogies in the West for the case of the Ramayana and the Meghnadvadh Kavya, at least as Nandy reads them. Homer's Iliad and Odyssey perform some of the same functions in the Western literary tradition as do the Ramayana and the Mahabarata in India. But the significance of Homer's version of the Trojan War,

which also involved wife-napping and less than perfect gods working out their antagonisms by means of the mortals they chose to assist, was revised (one could even say reversed) rather early on by Virgil's Aeneid. In any case, the coming of Christianity more or less evacuated Homer's epic of any religious significance for its later readers, something manifestly untrue of the Ramayana. One could perhaps point to William Blake's late eighteenth-century re-writing of Milton's Paradise Lost, or Nietzsche's subsequent 'transvaluation' of the entire Christian moral tradition, as parallels for Dutt's revision, since both Blake and Nietzsche surely elevated a formerly demonized Promethean man to a status he had not had before. But neither Blake nor Nietzsche, however blasphemous, revolutionary, and finally secular they were, could be taken as having contributed to the imperial domination of European civilization by a foreign, industrial-capitalist society bent on unremitting progress and transformation. Moreover, in a way contrary to what Nandy's perspective would suggest, many initially saw Blake and Nietzsche as traitors to the cause of Western civilization, and not just to its moral traditions, rather than as exemplars of it.

In the end, there may be no adequate Western analogy for the effect of Madhusudan Dutt's Meghnadvadh Kavya precisely because there is also nothing in the West, beyond the religiously obsolete Homer who is now just a cipher to most university students, to compare properly with the Ramayana. (James Joyce's Ulysses may today often be the odd introduction to Homer for modern university students, but then Joyce's text is finally far more a comic, Judeo-Christian homage than a reversal: Odysseus is still the admirable, wily hero, even if Penelope is now somewhat less than faithful to him.) Unlike Homer's epics, Valmiki's Ramayana continues to function within Indian

culture—and especially for Nandy—on many different levels. In the late 1980s, a televised rendition of the Ramayana, running to 78 episodes and by some accounts attracting in excess of 100 million viewers, was a phenomenon capable of rearranging the daily schedules of ordinary people. For the sake of comparison, the series finale of M*A*S*H on CBS also drew just over 100 million viewers in 1983, and that episode became the most popular drama in American television history.

Religiously, the Ramayana remains central to Hindu belief and practice as a tale of divine intervention in human affairs, one that continues to have a powerful resonance within Indian thought in ways that no one would claim for Homer within Western religious traditions. Rama, as the incarnated Vishnu, is still a very popular god and the object of pilgrimages in northern India, whose story has the power to guide the listener out of sin and toward perfection. A tradition dating back to the eighteenth-century holds that the site of the Islamic Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya, built in the early sixteenth century and destroyed by a mob of Hindutva kar sewaks (essentially, a religious defense force) in 1992, was originally, based on evidence in Valmiki's Ramayana, the birthplace of Lord Rama and thus a site holy to Hindus (see Narain 1993). Morally, the tale represents a multitude of noble virtues in Rama, including acceptance of one's fate, perseverance in the face of injustice, tribal loyalty, and violence only in self-defense. Politically, it is the story of a true, first-born prince eventually restored to his throne, having achieved the conquest of the kingdom of Lanka, and thus became a model for the art, architecture, and manners of Hindu court and temple up to the reign of the Moghul emperors. As literature, the epic has had an immense influence: it is a poem imitated by later poets across South and Southeast Asia, the centerpiece of extensive commentary,

and a drama performed in many staged versions to this day. Finally, at the level of gender roles, two issues are especially central for Nandy: Sita is the chaste and caring wife; and Rama in Valmiki's version is an approximation of an ideal of finely tempered, one might say passive and intellectual, masculinity that for Nandy has been lost in modern nationalist India.

Nandy sees Madhusudan Dutt's contribution as part of a larger trend in Hindu revisionism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India, one that—via the work of novelists such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee, who was of central significance to the first generation of Indian nationalists in Nandy's telling—reconstructed the Hindu religious past into a 'lost golden age' that was far closer in structure to Christianity and hence to the political power of the West. Krishna, for example, loses his child-like playfulness, androgyny, sensitivity and idealism, and becomes in Nandy's words 'a respectable, righteous, didactic, "hard" god, protecting the glories of Hinduism as a proper religion and preserving it as an internally consistent moral and cultural system. . . . a normal, non-pagan male god who would not humiliate his devotees in front of the progressive Westerners' (Nandy 1983, p. 24). These were the characteristics developed by Swami Dyanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda at the end of the nineteenth century into what was for Nandy a wholesale Christianization of Hindu thought that sought to have an Abrahamic Book (the Vedas and the Gita), a developmental history, a near-monotheistic theology, and a sense of asceticism that was closer to that of John Calvin than to the ancient texts themselves. By this means, the 'open, anarchic federation of sub-cultures and textual authorities' (Nandy 1983, p. 28) that Hinduism comprised was thus

rationalized and, for Nandy, given a progressive and masculine character that would serve the interests of a secular, capitalist state.[6]

Perhaps it would be appropriate to call Nandy's vision of this Christianization of Hinduism a neo-Weberian reformation-under-duress of religious and economic traditionalism. For Nandy, something equally damaging happened to many Western dissenters, among them Oscar Wilde, G. E. Moore, John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, Somerset Maugham, E. M. Forster, and W. H. Auden. All of these figures were opposed in varying degrees to empire, all of them were in varying degrees homosexual, and all of them were in Nandy's view ostracized 'living protests' against both dominant British culture and India's misguided attempts to emulate it (Nandy 1983, p. 42-43). It was only the vestiges of India's traditionally 'androgynous cosmology and style' that finally produced a 'transcultural protest' against the 'hyper-masculine' Raj in the form of Mohandas Gandhi (Nandy 1983, p. 48). Thus, Nandy finds an increased emphasis, especially after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, on the notion of Kshatriyahood in the Hindu past (Kshatriya designating the warrior, ruling caste in the ancient Vedic social order). In this turn toward a belligerent nationalism, the cerebral and ascetic elements of existence (Nandy calls them 'Apollonian') are overcome by the 'violent, "virile," active Ksatriya, the latter representing—however odd this may seem to the modern consciousness—the feminine principle in the cosmos,' which Nandy calls 'Dionysian' (Nandy 1983, p. 10).[7]

For Nandy, the essential colonial opposition, one emulated by means of the Indian nationalist emphasis on Kshatryiahood above all other Hindu traditions, was not between masculine and feminine. Rather, in way curiously compatible with Eve Kosofksy

Sedgwick's later elaborations of 'homosociality' (that is, the intensification of hyper-masculine erotic bonding by means, and in the service, of the rigorous disavowal of homosexuality), Nandy argues that the central psychological opposition for the colonizer is the superior masculine versus the inferior 'feminine-in-the-masculine'—that is, hermaphroditism or androgyny, or, in Nandy's view, homosexuality (see Sedgwick 1985). Gandhi overturns this opposition, not only in the service of an embrace of androgyny, but also in the sense that the feminine, understood less as conjugal sexuality than as maternal care, becomes superior to the masculine, which is in turn superior to sheer cowardice (see Nandy 1983, p. 53). Gandhi's synthesis of Hindu and Christian beliefs is thus for Nandy a complete reversal of the Christianization of Hinduism synthesized by figures like Madhusudan Dutt and Bankimchandra Chatterjee. While the latter produce no more than colonial mimicry of the path toward a governable subject, via the reordering of an entire psycho-sexual worldview designed for the secular nation-state, Gandhi's project is an attempt to elicit a decentered psyche open to the anarchic, playful, childlike, androgynous and (above all) non-violent moral sensibility that Gandhi derived from the supposedly original Hindu and Christian conceptions of human being and divine ideals.

Nandy's views of gender are at the heart of his project and it would be fair to say that, more than any other facet of his work, his attempt to revise the gendering of politics that he finds imposed on India by the West is what most distinguishes his contribution to post-colonial thought. This is not, I should immediately add, the same as saying that Nandy is at all concerned with what are called 'gender politics' in the West—that is, with the actual relations between men and women, the inequities of economic and political

power between them, and the cultural distinctions between those roles that are deemed acceptable for men and those deemed acceptable for women. He is not. But his critique of masculinity has its own counterpart in Western thought, and deserves serious consideration. Nandy's account of the relationship between the masculine subject of the Western polity and the lure of empire in the last two hundred years will seem obvious enough to most of his Western readers in the present day.

What Nandy does not do, except for counter-intuitively parsing the meaning of sati in India, is connect his dismantling of masculinity to the rise of a socially assertive, economically self-interested, culturally ambitious and thoroughly modern woman (on sati, see Nandy 1995, pp. 32-52; and Nandy 2004, pp. 33-61). Wilde and Forster make it into his pantheon of anti-imperial men who question orthodox maleness. George Bernard Shaw, who wrote about saintly prostitutes (Mrs. Warren's Profession) and less than maternal female saints (Saint Joan), does not. Nor do the Brontës, George Eliot, or Jean Rhys. Virginia Woolf's quite relevant point, in A Room of One's Own, that conflict between the sexes was only increasing as women became more assertive—so that men seemed hyper-masculine in response—all of this is beyond Nandy's purview. If Nandy is correct when he writes approvingly that, for Gandhi, 'more central to this concept of womanhood was the traditional Indian belief in the primacy of maternity over conjugality in feminine identity,' and that 'this belief specified that woman as an object and source of sexuality was inferior to woman as source of motherliness and caritas,' then there is a bigger lacuna at the heart of Nandy's project than might at first appear (Nandy 1983, p. 54; Nandy's emphasis). What is missing, both from Gandhi's 'fear of sexuality' (Nandy

1983, p. 54) and Nandy's appropriation of the feminine as something to be incorporated within the masculine, is any place at all for modern female subjectivity.

This is not, I think, a simple sin of omission. It is fundamental to Nandy's project of 'critical traditionalism,' since what that project leaves out is precisely what the arrival of post-traditionalist ideas of enlightenment and modernity have come to mean in the widest sense of the terms: that is, what Hans Blumenberg designates as the 'creative subject' bearing a 'principle of self-assertion' that becomes rightfully available to all, rich and poor, Muslim and Hindu, men and women, whatever the ancient myths and moral codes might say (see Blumenberg 1985, p. 34). Nandy may designate this as a peculiarly Western deformation of Western tradition. But whether or not he thinks it is appropriate for India and can be derived from indigenous source texts, it is what is happening, even in India. In many cases, the state (even in the form of the local police) is being called to function as an arbiter. As Saritha Rai writes about young couples who end up working through marital discord in police stations in Bangalore, tensions produced by changes in the traditional roles of men and women—changes driven largely by women who want the same prerogatives as men—cannot be resolved by reference to primordial texts in which such challenges were largely unknown. 'A working woman in her early 30s recently walked into [a police commissioner's] office to complain that her husband was abusive and cruel. Her husband came later and complained that she smoked, drank and partied too much. He insisted that she be a "traditional wife." A few conversations later, Mr. Reddy [the commissioner] managed to persuade the couple to agree that they had been smoking, drinking and partying together for many months before marrying. "They needed to adjust to the marriage and to each other," he said' (Rai 2012, p. A9). Nandy does not

acknowledge that his central notion of the 'feminine-in-the-masculine' functions as if the traditional roles of women themselves can be preserved in some sort of time warp—there is nothing 'critical' on this score in his work, yet it would not be a mistake to say that, perhaps first among all the subaltern groups that resisted the hyper-masculinity of Western modernity, women (that is, half of the population) had the most to gain, and they knew it.

But the problem of putting all one's eggs in a basket called androgyny-for-men-only is not at all specific to India. Almost all religiously-based calls for a return to traditionalism, critical or otherwise, end up butting heads with the irreducible matter of a woman's right to be, like a man, an autonomous, self-determining subject in the full, Kantian sense of the term. The conflict is more than obvious when one looks to modern Christian fundamentalism and the many conservative strands of Islam. Nandy's 'critical traditionalism' circumvents Kant by insisting that, in the event, the creation of a Western 'masculine' (Kantian) man ended up depriving Indian men of the 'feminine-in-the-masculine' that had been as much their birthright as Kshatryahood. For Nandy, Kantian man became *less* than he could be by comparison to the all-sided-nature and sweep of the masculine within Indian tradition. Of this, I have no doubt—it is a point argued persuasively in the West by figures such as Foucault, whose dismantling of a hardened male subjectivity is as supportive of Nandy's as it is silent on the subjectivity of women. But in the case of women, it is not really a both-and proposition for Nandy—there is no discussion of a complementary 'masculine-in-the feminine,' no elaboration of an androgyny for women that can be derived as an alternative from the ancient Vedas and the Ramayana.[8]

The hyper-masculine subject of Kiplingesque empire building might well be corrected by learning Gandhi's lessons. But this will have no effect whatsoever on the larger question Nandy does not confront: what to do with what has in effect been a revolution in gender roles—and I mean roles assumed by real men and women—since the height of the Raj in Victorian Britain. The religious traditions that for Nandy remain open to constant critical re-interpretation seem stunningly silent, at least in his readings, on this point. And yet one could argue, following Virginia Woolf, that modernity itself, including the assumption of hyper-masculine stances by those most threatened, was in very large part driven by the assumption of autonomous subject positions by women no longer restricted to mother and caregiver, and open to the full panoply of polymorphously perverse sexualities that had traditionally been available, as Nandy admits, to men—that is, by women whose desire for autonomy did not seem at all like a Christian-inspired, Western-invented restriction of their capacities in any way. The politics Nandy constructs on the basis of his account of non-Western gender is thus a politics wearing blinders. It simply pretends that half of the causality behind the Western secularizing history he is criticizing does not exist.

(b) Freud

Nandy's use of Freud—which is profoundly opposed, in its own way, to Fanon's—is central to his perspective in ways that are completely different from most previous post-colonial criticism (see Nandy 1995). Where Fanon sees Freud (backed by Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness, Nietzsche's will to power, and Sartre's existential decisionism) as providing a path toward a robust, independent, post-Oedipal masculine

subjectivity for the black man—even to the rather absurd point of denying that 'homosexuality' ever existed in Martinique (Fanon 1967, p. 180n 44)—Nandy (a trained psychologist in his own right) attacks the 'masculinism' of the Western, imperializing subject directly. For Nandy, Freud is valuable precisely because his later investigations, which posited both a drive toward sexual fulfillment and a drive toward aggression, help us understand the hyper-masculinity of secular Western subjectivity, most evident in the character of the British colonizer. Nandy does not believe—and in this he would find some support in Freud, though few would say Freud's late Civilization and Its Discontents is particularly optimistic on this score—that the resolution of Oedipal conflict in the male child must necessarily reproduce a male adult who is fated to succumb as tragically as his forbears had to the aggressive instinct. Nandy's rationale for this claim, however, is particularly un-Freudian, for it involves finding in religion as well as in a host of pre-modern institutions the psychological ground for a sort of androgyny, which is to say, for an ideal of the 'feminine-in-the-masculine' subject that had been all but banished from the devices of 'governmentality' in the West.

Religion is therefore not to be understood as the infantilizing 'mass psychosis' that in Freud's view merely reproduces the child's helpless dependence on a father's protection and therefore a father's approval. This is the Freud that was so important not only to Fanon but to generations of anti-imperialists after him, who came to see in religion an ideological reproduction and reinforcement of the colonial predicament, which placed the colonized male in the position of impotent child in relation to his colonizing master.[9] By contrast, Nandy sees in religion—especially in the Gandhian synthesis of Hindu and Christian beliefs—a powerful counter-hegemonic force opposed

to the secular masculinity of the individual subject and a means of rejecting the coercive reproduction of the patriarchal family's Oedipalizing cycle in the relations between old, tutelary Western states and new, politically pubescent colonized states. This element of Nandy's critique is aimed at dismantling both the pretensions of the colonizer to unquestioned authority and the desire of the colonized to inhabit the colonizer's secular (autonomous and strong) subjectivity as a way of competing with the imperialist psyche on its own, aggressively masculine grounds. Like Gramsci, in many ways, Nandy starts with the assumption that colonizer and colonized necessarily form a dyad that authorizes the hegemony of the colonizer's mentality from both sides of the equation. For Nandy, the colonized implicitly or explicitly comes to accept the colonizer's secular individualism, aggressive pursuit of material interests, and Weberian 'iron cage' of social relations devoted to purposive rationality as inherently superior to the value-rational consciousness of pre-modern communities, which are generally anchored by one or more religious traditions.[10] In this way, the colonized generally wind up granting a perverse sort of psychological approval to the forces that are oppressing them.

But for Nandy this also means that—as in Jean Rhys's critique of Charlotte Brontë's picture of empire in <u>Jane Eyre</u>, and to an extent in Brontë's own picture of disabled imperial masculinity—the colonizer is almost as damaged as the colonized. Nandy elsewhere cites Theodor Adorno's <u>Minima Moralia</u>, which is subtitled 'Reflections from Damaged Life.' Adorno's subtitle is an apt one for Nandy's view of the Western soul. This perspective, as unforgiving in Nandy as it is in Adorno, nevertheless can produce striking psychological insights. Nandy's brief account of Rudyard Kipling's 'moral blindness' is more penetrating and astute than any yet written.

Kipling distinguished between the victim who fights well and pays back the

tormentor in his own coin and the victim who is passive-aggressive, effeminate,

and fights back through non-cooperation, shirking, irresponsibility, malingering

and refusal to value face-to-face fights. The first was the 'ideal victim' Kipling

wished to be, the second was the victim's life young Kipling lived and hated

living. If he did not have any compassion for the victims of this world, he did not

have any compassion for a part of himself. (Nandy 1983, p. 69)

But what Nandy offers in response with his notion of 'unheroic but critical traditionalism'

which develops a sensitivity to new experiences of evil' (Nandy 1983, p. vvii) is finally

quite different from Adorno's tragic vision. Where Adorno ultimately—and rather

unconvincingly—placed his faith in the modernist work of art as the only remaining

reservoir of resistance to the administered society, Nandy's 'critical traditionalism'

imagines the possibility of recovering from religious tradition—again, primarily Hindu

tradition—the foundations of a new, post-nation-state political order by means of the

selective deployment of the analytical tools of modern thought, including Freud and

especially Freudian notions of introjection, the Heglian-Marxism of the Frankfurt School,

and the tools of post-colonial resistance developed by Fanon and those who followed.

Nandy's use of Freud and psychology in general is refreshing for anyone steeped

in the harsher existential truisms of post-colonial thought after Fanon. Homi Bhabha's

revisionary readings of Fanon and far more subtle use of psychoanalytic cultural critique

as derived from Jacques Lacan are in many ways prefigured in Nandy's work. But where

Bhabha tends to settle simply for a greater degree of complexity and perplexity in the

relations between colonizer and colonized than one finds in Fanon, Nandy's critique of

Western subjectivity is far more thorough, and it begins with his implicit rejection of the essential Freudian psycho-drama, Oedipalization. Indeed, Nandy seems to have in mind not only the recovery, via a selective recuperation of tradition, of a pre-modern sense of community. He also implies that he is in search of something like a pre-Oedipal notion of the ego. When he finds, not only in Gandhi the man, but in various versions of Hindu myth, a psyche that is anarchic, playful and childlike, that revels in its androgyny, and that displays resistance to authority by means of non-violent obstinacy, Nandy is also locating in the characteristics of Freud's pre-Oedipal child precisely those attributes that he claims have been repressed by Western masculinity, even as they persist (in various states of forgetfulness) in the Indian 'feminine-in-the-masculine.' Where previous anti-imperial and post-colonial critiques, especially those influenced by Marx and Freud, have insisted that the colonizer's Prospero-like treatment of the colonized as a primitive, childlike Caliban capable (at best) of careful mimicry must be overturned by insisting on the mature, even violently assertive, dignity of the colonized—Fanon, leaning heavily on Nietzsche and Sartre, insists 'I am my own foundation' (Fanon 1967, p. 231)—Nandy instead emphasizes the historical reality, cultural viability, and political efficacy of an anarchic pre-Oedipal psyche that the colonizers had treated, to their own regret in the case of Gandhi, with disdain and ridicule.

Nandy thus also refuses the narrative of Heglian coming to self-consciousness that lies behind Freud's use of Oedipus, and that was equally important to Fanon and W. E. B. Du Bois before him. In Fanon's terms:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been

effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed. (Fanon 1967, p. 217).

Nandy's response is to refuse both the desire to 'impose' the colonized's existence on the colonizer—a refusal of what is an obvious imitation of the colonizer's coercive enactment of the master-slave dialectic in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit—and to reject the idea that the 'human worth and reality' of the colonized depends in any way at all on recognition by the colonizer. Where Fanon's existential man is essentially alone, defined only via recognition by the other, Nandy's 'inviolable core of Indianness' has by contrast nothing to do with an individual thrown in Heideggerian fashion into an uncaring world and demanding recognition from the other, precisely because Nandy's 'core of Indianness' is itself a pluri-centric derivative of the religious, moral, and psychological foundations of the tradition, however much re-interpreted over time.[11] The Oedipal narrative, once inflated into its full cultural dimension in a text like Civilization and Its Discontents, is not then just about producing an adult male who has worked through his deadly, agonistic relationship to his father by agreeing to endure a certain amount of guilt in return for a certain amount of autonomy, self-assertiveness, and aim-inhibited pleasure in worldly achievement. It is also, for Nandy, about the story the West tells itself: it is about the production of the 'bourgeois' life-world, with its optimistically progressive sense of development and the separate peace it has made with its past and its patriarchs. Which is to say that Western culture has proven its willingness to live with the guilt of having abandoned, outgrown, or, as Nandy sees it, secularized the religious-ethical

meaning of its past and its patriarchs in order, as Matthew Arnold once noted, to embrace 'doing as one likes.' Where, as Nandy would be the first to admit, the anarchic, childlike, and androgynous Apollonian man of Hindu tradition is 'unselfconsciously' constrained by the myths and narratives of his tradition, the Dionysian, hyper-masculine subject of the liberal state is no more than a creature of the 'iron cage' of human relations that are thoroughly subordinated to the marketplace and the managerial administration of the liberal state.

In refusing Freud's secularizing narrative of Oedipal development and Oedipalized civilization, however, Nandy may be attempting to discard far more than he imagines. Those struggling for the means of bare subsistence as well as the more prosperous middle and upper classes in India may care little about retaining a certain notion of non-Western, pre-Oedipal subjectivity, even were they to be convinced by Nandy's arguments of its traditional importance. They may be driven much more by what Freud called Ananke—necessity—a part of Freud's thought that Nandy seems to have little use for. 'We can only be satisfied therefore,' Freud writes toward the end of Civilization and Its Discontents, 'if we assert that the process of civilization is a modification which the vital process experiences under the influence of a task set it by Eros and instigated by Ananke—by the exigencies of reality; and that this task is one of uniting separate individuals into a community bound together by libidinal ties' (Freud 1961, p. 104). Nandy may disagree with Freud on the value of the religious heritage, and to me at least this is an entirely reasonable point to make. As Freud himself noted, putatively quoting Theodor Fontane, 'We cannot do without auxiliary constructions'; and this is so because of Ananke, because 'life, as we find it, is too hard for us' and 'we

cannot dispense with palliative measures' (Freud, 1961, p. 23). Even Nandy's more robust defense of religious tradition as essential to some sort of 'core' identity is not, in my view, prima facie irrational. But as Bronislaw Malinowski once demonstrated, no pre-modern people, no matter how steeped in scientifically absurd magical beliefs, ever survived by ignoring the realities of nature when it came to planting and harvesting (see Malinowski 1948). Modern human societies are no different. Based on Nandy's own essays on science, technology, and culture, which are not the least Luddite in tone, I believe Nandy would agree with Freud on the irreducibility of Ananke. But what is missing in Nandy is any full appreciation of the consequences of Freud's Oedipalizing narrative about modern civilization's struggle with Ananke, both in the East and the West, a struggle that may entail precisely the assertive individual with his or her quota of aggression, repression, sublimation, and ambivalence, along with the restrictive compartmentalization of the anarchic play-instinct (to use Friedrich Schiller's term) that Nandy, not unlike Herbert Marcuse once upon a time, wants to rediscover. The result, I think, is every bit as utopian as Marcuse's Eros and Civilization was in its own era, and no less willing to underestimate the power of necessity, at least as Freud understood it.

(c) The Dialectic of Enlightenment

Nandy borrows heavily from the Frankfurt School for Social Research, especially from their critique of the 'authoritarian personality,' a critique based on research done during and after the Nazi ascendency in Europe, and from Herbert Marcuse's idea of the 'one-dimensional man' produced by modern, administered capitalism (see Adorno et al. 1960, and Marcuse 1964). For Nandy, the 'authoritarian personality' that made the Third

Reich work—that is, the willingness of those who carried out atrocities to do so without questioning the moral implications of their orders because their primary psychological motivation was the desire to follow orders in the first place, as Hannah Arendt would memorably put it in her account of Adolf Eichmann at his trial—is more or less indistinct from the masculine subjectivity required of empire building, as the anxiety to conform to the dictates of the fictional Chandrapore's military club in E. M. Forster's <u>A Passage to India</u> would suggest (see Arendt 2006 and Forster 1984). And both the Nazi and imperial personalities are finally extensions of the secular liberal individualism required by the modern nation-state, as in Adorno's later writings, in which the category of 'the individual' is itself emptied of meaning even as it is increasingly deployed by an administered society and its culture industry (see Adorno 1984, p. 63). While Adorno is drawing on research concerning the authoritarian personality, on his own notions of the culture industry, and on what he saw as the increasingly administered nature of society in the Cold War years, his remarks clearly look forward to Foucault's account of governmentality and even to MacIntyre's critique of the managerial society.

Frankfurt School theory plays a large role in Nandy's critique of scientific knowledge as the sign of the triumph of the unmoored, secular subject of Western modernity. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's understanding of a 'dialectic of enlightenment' is central here (see Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Modern science—not unlike the Kantian moral individual—has achieved so great a measure of autonomy from all notions of the communal good (which Hegel had called *sittlichkeit,* or ethics) that science and technology have come to represent forms of rationality that are no more than mythical in their own right. What a purely purposive-rational science and the

technological transformations that can be derived from it accomplishes, once unfettered from any value-rational system of thought, is in effect the myth of the modern age for Adorno and Horkeimer, and very much for Nandy too (see Nandy 1987, pp. 95-126).

But when Horkheimer on occasion wrote of the Western Christian religious tradition as a possible resource of resistance to an industrial-military complex (to borrow Dwight Eisenhower's phrase) that operated, as if 'value-free,' outside the boundaries of all existing moral traditions, he typically fell back on the argument that there remained historically available sources of rationality and moral value <u>within</u> the modern, secular, autonomous subject that emerged from Kant (see Horkheimer 1974, pp. 34-50). There was no suggestion of a 'critical traditionalism' in his work, and indeed the subsequent elaboration of Frankfurt School ideals by Jürgen Habermas has reduced even these historical remnants to what he calls 'semantic potentials' in the language of earlier moral and religious traditions that should not be hastily discarded (see Habermas 1983, p. 155). By contrast, Nandy remains wedded to the argument that the autonomous moral subjectivity generated by the West is simply inappropriate for the sorts of consciousness one finds in India, and that only a traditionalism that borrows critically—if selectively— from its past can serve to preserve that traditionalism. Where Habermas's subject is distinctly modern and consciously uses the 'semantic potentials' of its past to leaven the managerial goals of civil society, Nandy's 'critical traditionalism' is designed to resist the formation of the modern subject from the start. Nandy insists throughout his work that he has no desire to embrace a nostalgic, romantic, or purely spiritual alternative to the Western process of secularization—he does not wish to return India to the village-centered <u>Gemeinschaft</u> that Ferdinand Tönnies opposed to capitalism's anomic

Gesellschaft.[12] But this still leaves him ultimately confronting the same unattainable

utopian prospect that confronted Marcuse—a more or less total re-orientation of the

psychic life of a population that, whatever its various attachments to tradition, such a

population would find almost impossible to achieve.

(d) Myth versus History

Nandy has a most exceptional, though oddly Nietzschean and post-modern,

understanding of history. This stems, in part, from Nandy's preference for a perspective

that he finds in Gandhi, who 'rejected history and affirmed the primacy of myths over

historical chronicles' (Nandy 1983, p. 55). What this means, for both Gandhi and Nandy,

is that India and the West are to be seen as fundamentally distinct where understandings

of time consciousness are concerned. For the West—and here Nandy essentially agrees

with Carl Schmitt, who argued that the political history of the West after Hobbes was at

the same time a religious history, so that all political concepts of the state should be seen

as secularized religious concepts (Schmitt 1985, p. 37)—history is an inevitable progress

(as Marx, building on Hegelian Christianity, claimed) from primitive, pagan, and a-

historical communism, to a period of class struggle, including the religious ideologies this

struggle produces, to an end of history with the coming of a class-less scientific and

secular communism. For Nandy, drawing on Gandhi, the struggle is in the end all about

reconceiving the past, so that we move from a past that is just one version ('a special

case') of the present, to a 'fractured present' made up of 'competing pasts,' to a

'remaking' of the present, including the past, to a collective agreement on a 'new past'

(Nandy 1983, p. 57). What Nandy is saying is that no present can be authentically

conceived—or, at least, ought to be conceived, with or without imperial coercion—unless

the new present can be first discovered in the past of a particular civilization or culture.

One forms the new myths of the present by carving them out of displaced, forgotten, or

repressed alternative narratives recovered from the past. For Nandy, this is really not

merely one option among others for India. It is the only means of reconceiving the

present, just as the West (following progressive narratives such as the one Marx

proposed) operates in such a way that it can only imagine a future that is a more

enlightened, self-conscious, and secular form of its benighted beginnings, and can only

think of its present as a way of leaving the substance of that past behind. Western notions

of progress are thus inseparable for Nandy from this frankly Hegelian dialectic, where the

modern nation-state recovers a prelapsarian harmony, after much conflict and struggle,

on the grounds of mature, enlightened, and fully aware self-consciousness, whether that

telos is imagined in material (Marxian) or Christian (spiritual) forms (Nandy 1983, p. 58-

59).

Nandy's claim that the 'inviolable core of Indianness' depends far more on myth

than history is in many ways not at all foreign to Western sensibilities. This sort of claim

about the mythic identity of a Volk or people has a long and far-reaching history in

Western thought, beginning with the work of Montesquieu, Herder, Macpherson,

Rousseau, and Fichte. Nationalism in the West would be almost unthinkable without a

certain strain of such mythic identity running through it. France is equal parts Jean d'Arc

and French Revolution, and as goes France so goes innumerable modern nation-states

conceived in imitation of it.[13] Nandy's complementary idea—that it is only by re-

interpreting the foundational texts of a cultural tradition that one can remain true to, and

hence properly guided by, a cultural identity—is equally powerful in Western thought, from Edmund Burke to Alasdair MacIntyre. In so many ways, a powerful, related critique of bourgeois or Whiggish history runs throughout the twentieth century in the West, beginning with Nietzsche, elaborated in different ways by Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Karl Löwith, Siegfried Kracauer, Hayden White, and Michel Foucault, and extending into the present in the work of Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, and John Milbank. This critique has had a striking revisionary impact on the way 'progressive' history has come to be understood, especially in the wake of the demise of a viable socialist alternative to Western capitalism and the paradoxical rise of a post-secular understanding of religious history, in which the standard 'secularization thesis' has been called into question.

Nandy fits squarely within this revisionist post-secular tradition, through which, as Grace Davie has put it, 'an alternative suggestion is increasingly gaining ground: the possibility that secularization is not a universal process, but belongs instead to a relatively short and particular period of European history which still assumed (amongst other things) that whatever characterized Europe's religious life today would characterize everyone else's tomorrow' (Davie 2000, p. 1). This has been, mutatis mutandis, Nandy's position for several decades now, and it is the most compelling argument he has to make. The fact that the Arab Spring of 2012 has produced in Egypt an aftermath in which the overthrow of a tyrannical secularist has generated not only the election of a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood as prime minister but increased intolerance for minority Coptic Christians and the increasing irrelevance of the secular students who initiated the uprising speaks directly to Davie's point. There is no reason to believe that

Nandy's critique of a thorough going secularism for India is any less cogent than Davie's diagnosis that European history may not prove to be a universal template. But like that of some other Western sociologists of religion, Davie's concern is with the meaning that the memory of a Christian religious tradition retains in the midst of declining practice in Western Europe. She certainly makes no claim that a return to traditionalist or religious modes of governance at some variance to the development of the European nation-state is desirable. Nandy's critique is something far more: it is the assertion of an 'inviolable core of Indianness' that can be preserved in the face of a globalizing modernity, without resort to Hindutva nationalism, abstract spirituality, or romantic community, and in stark opposition to the nation-state that since Nehru had governed India, by using only the playful, anarchic, and non-violent hermeneutic tools of the reinterpretation of the Hindu epics. Nandy's problem is that it is not simply a question of a personal, intellectual, and highly educated preference for myth over history. It is instead a question of turning myth, however re-interpreted, into history. The likelihood that Nandy, or anyone else for that matter, would be able to produce popular agreement about which myths, and which new interpretations of them, would be suitable for resolving the conflicts in a place as crisscrossed as is India by multiple and competing narratives of cultural identity is miniscule at best.

(e) Anti-Nationalism

The ultimate political question raised by Nandy's perspective, as I have already implied, concerns the unsuitability of the nation-state for India, a question that in turn has implications for Nandy's larger and wholesale rejection of nationalism. On the one hand,

Nandy ends the second essay in *The Intimate Enemy* ("The Uncolonized Mind: A Post-Colonial View of India and the West") with the claim that he has no wish "to reverse the standard stereotypes to create a neo-romantic ideology of the irrational, the mythic or the renunciatory" (Nandy 1983, p. 113). Elsewhere in the book, he specifically criticizes the false alternative of *either* a mystical spiritualism based on a dreamy vision of the past *or* the harder realities of westernized India. Instead, he wants to emphasize cultural ambiguity and fluidity, both 'within India and within the West' (Nandy 1983, p. 74; Nandy's emphasis): the opposition between Dionysian masculinism and Apollonian androgyny—or the 'feminine-in-the-masculine'—exists in both societies. And yet India is nevertheless distinct on this score, and not simply because of its history of colonization. 'Probably the uniqueness of Indian culture lies not so much in a unique ideology as in the society's traditional ability to live with cultural ambiguities and to use them to build psychological and even metaphysical defenses against cultural invasions' (Nandy 1983, p. 107). This means that 'in order to truly live, the inviolable core of Indianness seems to affirm, it might be sometimes better to be dead in somebody else's eyes, so as to be alive for one's own self' (Nandy 1983, p. 111). The openness of Indianness to 'cultural ambiguity,' one might then say, is ultimately always in the defense of some 'core of Indianness,' which, again, it is impossible not to see as deriving in very large part from its Hindu heritage. Nandy saves some of his strongest condemnations in the course of his work for Hindu nationalism (Hindutva). As he puts it in a later essay, 'Speaking pessimistically, Hindutva will be the end of Hinduism' (Nandy 2004, p. 126). Yet it is also true for Nandy that there is some 'core' of Indian consciousness, rooted in the common people, the rural, the folk, and in the complexities of multiple ethnic and

religious sects that have come to make it up, that needs to be preserved. In one of his more remarkable statements on what he means by a core that is defended through ambiguity, Nandy writes: 'The alternative to Hindu nationalism is the peculiar mix of classical and folk Hinduism and the unselfconscious Hinduism by which most Indians, Hindus and non-Hindus, live' (Nandy 1983, p. 104).

But then, what sort of polity can achieve this preservation-of-core-identity-within cultural-ambiguity that is Nandy's vision for India? Nandy refers approvingly, for example, to Freud's analysis of the nation-state (a citation is not given), at a point where Freud seems to be reproducing some of the central insights of Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, and more recently Giorgio Agamben. 'Many years ago, at the time of World War I, a person as manifestly apolitical as Sigmund Freud claimed that the state had forbidden to the individual the practice of "wrong-doing" not because of a desire to abolish it but because of a desire to monopolize it' (Nandy 2004, p. 233). While it is unclear what, exactly, Nandy means by implying that he is against the state's Hobbesian monopoly on violence—that is, at what levels of society he believes both the general prohibition against violence and the sanction for the legitimate use of violence in self-defense should be located—he does provide one clue. Declaring that 'South Asian societies are woven not around the state, but around their plural cultures and pluri-cultural identities,' he predicts that these societies will again discover 'the grandeur of the humble, everyday life of their peoples and their little cultures'—though he also predicts he will not live to see that day (Nandy 2004, p. 247).

Nandy's critique of nationalism is perhaps the most familiar of all for the Western intellectual, who has for at least the past century often found himself or herself at odds

with what can only be called the insupportable myth of national identity. It would be no exaggeration to say that for liberal and cosmopolitan Western intellectuals since the time of the treaty of Versailles and Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, no political dilemma has been more persistent or more intractable than the task of separating the seemingly irreducible fact of national affiliation from the heightened emotional and often mythic consciousness of nationalism. Ernest Renan's powerfully demystifying metaphor comparing the modern nation to a 'daily plebiscite,' rather than to some inborn substance comprising history, language, race, and religion, is perfectly cogent and salutary (Renan 2001, p. 175). But no nation on earth ever actually functioned according to such a principle. Where the objective behavior of the major Western nation-states is concerned, it makes little difference whether one follows theoretical modernists such as Elie Kedourie (Kedourie 1996) and Ernest Gellner (Gellner 1983) or primordialists such as Clifford Geertz (Geertz 1963) and Anthony D. Smith (Smith 1991). Renan's insight notwithstanding, the demands for social stability and 'governmentality' are almost impossible to meet without some recourse to the mythical dimensions of nationalism and exceptionalism, even from leaders who could be expected to know better (Barack Obama comes to mind). Hence Nandy's suspicion of the nation-state as a political structure, and especially his suspicion of the masculinist trope of nationalism, will find much support among Western intellectuals, for whom the difficulty of living with a politics that constantly veers toward the lowest and most vulgar forms of aggressive fantasy is the intractable political dilemma facing every responsible individual.

At the same time, Nandy's solution to the problems posed by hyper-masculinist nationalism depends not merely on increased skepticism toward the myth of the nation-

state but also increased credulity toward the myth of the common people, or what in German might be called the Volk. In Western thought outside Germany, this embrace of the Volk has been more commonly known as populism, and it has taken both distinctly left-wing (as in early twentieth-century American progressivism) and distinctly right-wing (as in the American Tea Party today) paths, that is, either vaguely socialist or vaguely communal-anarchist trajectories. To Western intellectuals after Hitler, the preference for myth over history, and for the re-functioning of mythic thought to serve modern needs, may imply a very disturbing underside. It is obvious that Nandy, to his credit, has no interest in the racial arguments that made the Nazi appropriation of völkisch thought far more powerful and devastating than any previous use of myth to buttress collective coherence. But it is important to recognize that there were also modern German intellectuals who, like Nandy, opposed the modern nation-state as a political entity, had little if any interest in biological understandings of race, and embraced instead the mythic structure of a civilization's consciousness, which they believed could be traced back to the middle ages.

As I have argued elsewhere, even the accomplished Viennese historian Otto Brunner elaborated in detail why the modern, secular, liberal nation-state that had become the norm in Western Europe, and that appeared in German only between the rise of Bismarck and the disorder of the Weimar Republic, was completely unsuitable for the German mind (Pecora 2012). What Brunner believed, however naively, was that the Third Reich would return Germany to something like the constitutional mentality of medieval Austria, where the state had not yet claimed a Hobbesian monopoly on violence; where the 'little cultures' of the pre-nation-state Volk settled their disputes

internally, via feuds; where <u>Macht</u> and <u>Recht</u> (might and right/law) were more or less synonymous; and where a mélange of Germanic lands and peoples were integrated in an extensive federation of separate territories unified only by their consciousness of a divinely grounded <u>Recht</u>—which Brunner called 'the good old law,' rooted in Old Testament narratives of primordial peoples and their lands—and by their deep awareness of belonging to something called the <u>Reich</u> (empire) which was imprinted on them as the inviolable core of their Germanness (see Brunner 1943). No matter how sympathetic <u>bien-pensant</u> post-Hitler Western intellectuals might be toward Nandy's suspicions about the nation-state, especially about the nation-state in full imperialist ardor, they will wind up singularly unimpressed by Nandy's recourse to myth and its reinterpretation as a viable political response. For them—for me—the world desperately needs less myth and more history, not the reverse.

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Nandy's post-secular argument, or rather, his argument for a specifically Indian version of secularism, can be reduced to two basic claims. First, in contrast to the 'hard' Cartesian-Christian subject of the West, whose relatively fixed ego usually demands a sharp ideological boundary distinguishing the religion of the self from the religion of the other, and hence, in a secular regime, a third super-ego position, occupied by the state and outside all religious ideologies whatsoever, the 'non-Western meaning of secularism revolves around equal respect for all religions.'

Less crudely, this idea of secularism implies that while public life may or may not be kept free of religion, it must have a space for a continuous dialogue among religious traditions and between the religious and the secular. That is, in the final

analysis, each major faith in the region includes <u>within</u> it an in-house version of

the other faiths both as an internal criticism and as a reminder of the diversity of

the theory of transcendence. (Nandy 2002, p. 68)

Where the Western subject and the Westernized Indian subject produce only an inflexible

religious 'ideology' that reinforces inflexible ego boundaries, the authentically Indian

subject produces religious 'faith.' 'By faith,' Nandy writes, 'I mean religion as a way of

life, a tradition which is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural' (Nandy

2002, p. 62). The Indian subject of a religious faith is thus fluid, dynamic, and multi-

centric, with a psyche akin to what Mikhail Bakhtin called the 'heteroglossic' and

'dialogic' voice of a novel's character or narrator (see Bakhtin 1981).

Nandy's second major claim is that India has available to it a ' "patrimony" in the

matter of inter-religious or inter-ethnic understanding,' which is 'acknowledged, self-

consciously or unwittingly' (Nandy 2002, 116). Nandy refers to this understanding of

patrimony as the 'third model' available to India for dealing with communal conflict, a

model that is superior both to the centralized French republican model of secularism

imitated through much of the developing world and favored by the South Asian

intelligentsia, and especially popular in socialist regimes; and the dominant model now

practiced in India that is based on pragmatic accommodation, compromise, and tactical

conflict-management. Instead, he argues for a 'participatory democracy' in which

'citizens will employ categories and interpretive frames in the public sphere known to

them through their heritage in turn transmitted through religious, community and family

traditions. The deployment of such categories and frames is not usually a well-thought-

out cognitive choice; most people using them live in a world defined by these categories'

(Nandy 2002, p. 117). It is a strategy, Nandy believes, that has never really been tried out in India, though it remains the most significant part of Gandhi's legacy.

Here, I think, we come to some crucial assumptions on Nandy's part, assumptions that few in the West or India will find very convincing. The idea that there is an Indian subjectivity that is simply and fundamentally different from the subjectivity of what he likes to call 'Western man' is fraught with problems. Can he in fact be arguing that a commonplace Indian subjectivity has remained more or less the same for thousands of years of Indian history? That what Blumenberg calls the 'self-assertion' accompanying the Copernican Revolution, which has come to be considered a democratic and inalienable right in the West, has no legitimate purchase or place in India? That however multi-cultural India has long been, there remains some 'core of Indianness' derivable ultimately from ancient Hindu narratives? That the specifically Indian conception of gender he outlines has not been disturbed, and perhaps even fundamentally overturned, by the increasing presence of women in economic, social, and cultural life in India, women whose own 'feminine' subjectivity is unlikely to be appropriately defined in Nandy's terms as maternal care-giver, no matter what their affiliations to their patrimony might imply?

But these issues are minor, I think, compared to the ones raised by Nandy's second basic claim that true religious faith is embodied by a 'way of life' that can remain unconscious or unwitting for those who are motivated by it—that is, distinct from any 'well-thought-out cognitive choice'—and that it is only by relying on the uniquely heteroglossic nature of these unconscious ways of life, which Pierre Bourdieu would perhaps call lived 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 78-83), guided by 'community leadership'

(Nandy 2002, p. 118), that India can find an appropriate model of inter-religious harmony. This model assumes something that most serious scholarship on 'participatory democracy,' of whatever stripe, would firmly reject: the assumption that people who now putatively exist for the most part unconsciously enclosed in their 'way of life,' beyond 'cognitive' choices, and who speak for themselves by drawing for the most part 'unwittingly' upon their family's and community's traditions and leaders, will <u>remain</u> for the foreseeable future in this unselfconscious, non-cognitive, and largely uncritical relationship with their traditions and their communities. Nandy once noted that his writing is designed 'to justify and defend the innocence which confronted modern Western colonialism' (Nandy 1983, p. ix). But no nation, whatever its history and however marred by or innocent of imperial conquest, has been able to embrace 'participatory democracy' and <u>not</u> endure a process by which unconscious faith becomes conscious, by which the modest self-assertion presumably enjoyed by all does <u>not</u> often lead to sharp criticism and even a complete break with family, community, and tradition. This process is on the one hand precisely what Tönnies describes in <u>Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft</u>, and even Tönnies, with his obvious nostalgia, knew it was a one-way street. It is also the process at the heart of that post-epic genre called 'the novel,' and especially the <u>Bildungsroman</u>, which displays both the inevitable drive toward full self-consciousness (to borrow from Hegel) as well as the inevitability of the ration of loneliness and anomie that attends increased autonomy. In short, it is a process with outlines in the West as old as the Fall of Man and as recent as Freud's <u>Civilization and Its Discontents</u>.

Nandy would no doubt object that Indian tradition has no story of the Fall and that his own use of Freud excises Freud's tragic pessimism. But what is for me an insurmountable problem in his 'third model' is Nandy's sense that India can preserve from historical change its traditions, families, communities, and above all its 'inviolable core of Indianness' as an unconscious 'way of life' (as long as the re-interpretation of these entities can be discovered always only <u>within</u> the traditions themselves), even as it fully embraces at the same time 'participatory democracy' and rejects the notion of a more or less secular public sphere. There is no earthly nation I know of that would fit this description, because from almost any logic, Indian or Western, the internal contradictions are too great. Turkey has rediscovered its Islamic traditions, but it has done so (up to this point) within the constraints of a fairly long tradition of French-style secular government inherited from Kamal Ataturk. Lebanon is perhaps closer to Nandy's ideal, but even here, one finds a secular republican state shaped by the pragmatic compromises of Nandy's second model of secularism, with a Maronite Christian President, a Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, and a Shi'ite Muslim Speaker of Parliament—and Lebanon, one might add, has never been a good model of political stability. In this sense, the currents of secularization that have run so thoroughly, though with diverse consequences, throughout the West cannot be kept at bay, like the North Sea from Holland, by the dikes of Indian subjectivity. Nandy writes, oddly, as a thoroughly modern and cosmopolitan intellectual who imagines that majoritarian segments of India will (and should) remain over time in precisely the same innocent life-world, unconsciously affiliated to family, community and religious tradition, no matter how rapidly or slowly, peacefully or violently, the world both within India and outside of it alters. It is almost as if Nandy's vision of India

has been designed for a museum—a museum with lots of internal dissension among the curators, lots of disagreement among the members, a wide array of doctrines and styles and movements on display, and an overarching commitment to the health of the institution itself—but a museum all the same. Neither nations nor cultures are museums, however, and it is only the most quixotic of intellectual enterprises that would try to make them so.

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Notes

[1] As Weber observed in the very first line of his introduction to The Protestant Ethic and
the Spirit of Capitalism, with a sly irony rarely reproduced by those who followed his
lead: 'A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal
history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be
attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural
phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having
universal significance and value' (Weber 2005, p. xxvii; Weber's emphasis). Current
revisionism concerning secularization is aimed directly at Weber's assumption, even if
that revisionism generally ignores the equivocal nature of Weber's language. For a wide-
ranging account of what the secularization thesis has meant, see Bruce 1992.

[2] For a good account of the difficulty I invoke here, see the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakraberty argues that for 'history' itself, as a discipline practiced in universities (whether in the West or in India), Europe 'remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories. . . . In this sense, "Indian" history itself is in a a position of subalternity. . . .' (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 27). While Chakrabarty's goal is 'provincializing Europe,' he also admits that 'political modernity' is 'impossible to <u>think</u> of anywhere in the world without invoking categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe' (Chakrabarty 2000a, p. 4). For Chakrabarty's critical discussion of Nandy, see Chakrabarty 2000b. For a complementary account how the discipline of history in China became a narrative about the rise of the Western-style nation-state, see Duara 1995.

[3] As I write, India is once again going through a period of what has been routinely called 'communal violence' ever since the partition of 1947 that created Pakistan in response to a Hindi-Muslim civil war that erupted when India won its independence from Great Britain (see Yardly 2012a). In 2003, the Indian government allocated almost half of Assam, in its northwest, to the Bodo (pronounced Bo-ro) people, who number about 5% of Assam's population. The Bodo are an indigenous tribe that settled in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam perhaps as early as the second millennium B.C.E., that was 'Hinduized' by Aryan migrations in the seventh and again in the sixteenth centuries, conquered by the Ahoms in the thirteenth century, and are now overwhelmingly (perhaps 90%) Hindu, the rest being either Christian or adherents of a primordial, animist, totemic, and ancestor-worshipping belief called Bathou (see Devi 2004, 4-14). The second largest community after the Bodos in Bodoland is Muslim, made up of both a native Muslim population and

(beginning in the 1960s) increasingly of Muslim immigrants from what was, at the time of Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971, a truly destitute place, and what is still one of the most densely populated regions on earth. In consequence, the right of Muslims in Bodoland to land ownership is carefully restricted as a means of guaranteeing Bodo supremacy in their autonomous region, which just happens to share its southwest border with Muslim Bangladesh (see Yardly 2012b). While the Bodos claim illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are seizing vacant land in the district, the Muslims of Assam and Bodoland see this claim as no more than a cover story to hide what is in effect 'ethnic cleansing'—an effort, spearheaded by nationalists, not only to rid Bodoland of Muslims altogether but to expand the boundaries of Bodoland itself by changing the facts on the ground in the other direction. The most recent consequence, as two startling New York Times stories recount, is that 78 people have been confirmed killed in Assam, 14,000 homes have been burned, and 300,000 people have ended up in refugee camps. As Jim Yardly astutely observes, had the same turmoil and refugee situation occurred in sub-Saharan Africa, many Western nations would have declared a humanitarian crisis. In India, by contrast, such an event has perhaps come to seem all too expected.

[4] Whether the current influx of Muslim immigrants in France, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, and elsewhere in Europe will substantially alter this situation is open to debate—but that is fodder for a different essay.

[5] Nandy's attitude to the originality of Valmiki's Ramayana is somewhat ambiguous. In a footnote to a 1997 essay ('A Report on the Present State of Health of the Gods and Godesses in South Asia'), for example, Nandy refers to Valmiki's text as both the 'original' and his 'grandmother's conventional version' of the Ramayana. But the

difference may not matter that much to him, since Nandy also acknowledges in the essay that in the end neither Madhusudan Dutt's version nor earlier revisions of Valmiki's text are—and perhaps cannot be, given the complexity of Indian tradition—truly rebellious: in the cosmic order of things, even the fate of Ravana, 'the fearsome Brahmarakshasa, the worst kind of rakshasa, is intertwined with Rama': that is, 'by dying at the hands of Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu, Ravana reaches his personal god, Vishnu.' It is precisely this sort of complexity that Nandy claims was lost in the 'hero-worship' that Bengalis showed to Dutt after the Meghnadvadh Kavya was published (see Nandy 2004, p. 144 n14 and p. 144).

[6] Nandy's claim about the Christianization of Hindu beliefs in modern times is also partially borne out in the case of the god Vishnu, who often appears in Western accounts as if he were a member of a trinity of gods including Brahma and Shiva, with Vishnu as 'preserver,' Brahma as 'creator,' and Shiva as 'transformer.' This Western account is not in fact devoid of evidence in the Hindu texts; it is simply far too limited. Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu do appear at times in the Puranic era as part of an attempt at a synthesis of older, separate Vedic traditions. (In the earlier Ramayana, for example, Vishnu and Brahma are clearly rivals, not unlike Homer's gods.) The Puranic attempt at synthesis resulted in the concept of the Trimurti, that is, a tri-partite manifestation of the supreme god. 'But the attempt cannot be regarded as a great success, for Brahmā never gained an ascendency comparable' to that of Shiva or Vishnu, 'and the different sects often conceived the Trimūrti as really the three manifestations of their own sectarian god, whom they regarded as Brahman or Absolute' (Majumdar 1956, vol. IV, p. 49). Indeed, Hindu practice remains largely composed of different strains that tend to consider one or

the other of Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma supreme—no actual trinity can be said to exist. Nevertheless, 'early Western students of Hinduism were impressed by the parallel between the Hindu trinity and that of Christianity. In fact the parallel is not very close, and the Hindu trinity, unlike the Holy Trinity of Christianity, never really "caught on." All Hindu trinitarianism tended to favor one god of the three; thus, from the context it is clear that Kālidāsa's hymn to the Trimūrti is really addressed to Brahmā, here looked on as the high god. The Trimūrti was in fact an artificial growth, and had little real influence' (Basham 1968, p. 313). In this sense, Nandy's political-theological account of the Christianization of Hinduism under the Raj, given the pressure on Indian intellectuals to adopt a Christianized nationalist consciousness, gains some support. It is not so much that nineteenth-century accounts of a Hindu 'trinity' were completely fabricated. Rather, they extracted a thin thread of religious ideation from a far more complicated and contradictory tradition, and then presented it as if it were the whole, or at least dominant, truth.

[7] Nandy does not note it, but his use of these terms is oddly closer—though the terminology is reversed—to their original meanings in J. J. Bachofen than in Nietzsche. In Bachofen's influential mid-nineteenth-century writing on mother-right, religion, and myth, exemplified in Das Mutterrecht, the Dionysian and Apollonian represent two masculine phases in the development of the patriarchy. The earlier phase, which represents the fecundating principle of the male in conjunction with the female, Bachofen calls Dionysian. The subsequent phase, which is completely spiritual and leads to a self-generating patriarchy that transcends woman altogether, he calls the Apollonian. Bachofen is the likely source of the terms for Nietzsche, who emphasized in The Birth of

Tragedy what in Bachofen had only been partial, that is, the opposition between the two forces. Nietzsche's Dionysus, however, does retain the aggression and violence that Nandy associates with the figure, though Nietzsche's Dionysus is also a god of intoxicated laughter and play—characteristics Nandy associates with the 'female-within-the-male' Apollonian and with the pre-Christianized residues of Hindu belief, and certainly *not* with the Raj (see Bachofen 1975).

[8] In Egypt today, for example, the problem of the assertive woman is not at all merely a theoretical or academic issue. As Osama Abou Salama, described in a New York Times feature as a 'professor of botany at Cairo University and member of the Muslim Brotherhood,' tells young men and women in his premarital counseling class: 'a woman . . . takes pleasure in being a follower and finds ease in obeying a husband who loves her' (El-Naggar 2012, p. A1). What is most astonishing to the author of the story, Mona El-Naggar, is that no one in the class, neither the men nor the women, finds anything objectionable in the message. Presumably this is not exactly what Nandy has in mind when he extols 'critical traditionalism.' But it is hard not to come to the conclusion that almost any sort of religious traditionalism would share many of the beliefs that Mr. Abou Salama is sharing with his class. Truly traditional, Opus Dei Catholicism might not, after all, teach lessons very different from this one in its own pre-marital counseling. Hence the sort of issues El-Naggar describes highlight for me an intractable problem for Nandy's entire project.

[9] Octave Mannoni would find something similar in the relation of Shakespeare's Prospero and Caliban, which became an allegory for the pre-Oedipal underdevelopment of the colonized male's psychological situation in relation to the colonizer (see Mannoni 1964.)

[10] Weber outlines four primary types of social action: (a) instrumentally rational, by which our expectations about the behavior of others are mere means to the achievement of our goals; (b) value rational, by which our belief in moral, aesthetic, or religious values determines our actions independently of their likelihood of success; (c) affective, by which our behavior is determined by our emotional responses; and (d) traditional, by which our behavior is determined by 'ingrained habituation,' that is, something closer to what Bourdieu (referring to social class) means by a 'habitus' of learned dispositions and their improvisational variations (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 78-83)—which Weber calls 'a matter of almost automatic reaction to habitual stimuli,' and which is thus close to what Nandy often means by unselfconscious tradition—rather than a tradition in the sense of past ideas that one preserves consciously and of past ideals to which one aspires, as in Edmund Burke (Weber, 1978, p. 24-26). The last three of these primary types of social action then lead to corresponding types of legitimate social order, including types of legality and political administration. Instrumental rationality, the closest to mere self-interest and to the secular 'iron cage' of the marketplace, was and continues to be variously constrained by other forms of social action, even as it manifests increased resistance to them.

[11] Fanon does admit he would have great interest in having contact with 'a Negro literature or architecture of the third century before Christ,' but 'absolutely cannot see how this fact would change anything in the lives of eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadaloupe' (Fanon 1967, p. 230).

[12] As Nandy may be aware, one of the original exemplifications of Gemeinschaft or community for Tönnies comes from H. S. Maine's Ancient Law, which isolates the

traditional family, clan, and village life of India as representative of 'stationary societies' (Maine 1986, p. 257; see also Pecora 1997, 201-203).

[13] We should recall, for example, that Rousseau, despite his fame as promulgator of a 'social contract,' also wrote a tract called 'Considerations on the Government of Poland,' in which his recommendations are directly focused on the need to preserve an inviolable core of Polishness (see Rousseau 1972).